



Community Listening Highlights

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This material comes primarily from the work of [Heidi Unruh](#), author of [Churches That Make a Difference](#).

- The goal of community listening is to create mutual community ministry
- What is “mutual community ministry”?
 - Relational: do ministry with people, not to people
 - Asset based: build on strengths and dreams, beyond just meeting needs
 - Holistic: seek *shalom* (wholeness) across all dimensions of life
 - Collaborative: connect with others working for *shalom*
 - Spiritually rooted: seek God’s empowerment and guidance
- Why listen to your community to develop mutual community ministry?
 - Helps ministry to be more strategic, effective and sustainable
 - Builds enduring relationships and shared vision
 - Helps a congregation confront its blind spots
 - Was modeled by Jesus
 - Creates space to listen to God
- Costs of community Listening
 - Time
 - Energy
 - Willingness to set aside your agenda
 - Openness to uncomfortable realities
- Three goals
 - Head: Get an accurate picture of the community via demographic study
 - Heart: Build a relational connection with the community
 - Hands: Lay concrete groundwork for hands-on collaboration
- Questions to guide your listening:
 - **Who** are the people in this community? (demographics)
 - **What** is their situation like? (assets + needs)
 - **Where** do people in the community connect and interact? (key places)
 - **When** has significant change occurred? (history)
 - **Why** do people do what they do? (culture, values, beliefs)

- **How** is this community impacted by social, economic, and political issues? (social context)
- Strategies
 - **Data:** gathering statistical information
 - **Conversations:** networking and neighbor chats
 - **Observations:** being intentionally present and aware (prayer walking, spiritual lurking, community participation)
- Prepare a listening plan
- Talk to:
 - Leaders: political/civic, organizational, religious, business, non-profit, gatekeepers
 - Insiders: long-time residents, service professionals, experts, influencers
 - Folks on the margins
- Observe
 - Where people hang out, intersect, and interact
 - Where life happens
 - Where decisions are made
 - Where others say to avoid
- Keep track of your observations and learnings
- Show up! Go to community events already happening: school board meetings, county fairs, block parties, high school basketball games, etc.
- Listen for:
 - **What assets, gifts, and signs of *shalom* are in the community?** What do people appreciate and value about the community? How is God at work here, and who is participating in this work?
 - **What needs or problems diminish *shalom* in the community?** What do people most worry about or want to see changed? What obstacles hold back good things from happening here?
 - **What are possibilities for *shalom* in this community?** What are people's ideas, dreams, or goals for the future? What energizes and motivates people? What does hope look like here?
 - **How could our congregation strengthen relationships with the community to work together toward *shalom*?** What are the opportunities and barriers for community connections?

If you'd like to build out your congregation's community listening strategies, please be in touch with The Rev. Canon Whitney Rice, Canon for Evangelism & Discipleship Development at wrice@diocesemo.org. Happy ministry!