

Redemptive Placemaking

A Toolkit for Discerning
Your Church's Mission in
the Built Environment

Sara Joy Proppe and Edward Dunar



About Proximity Project

Proximity Project seeks to empower churches to connect their mission and their story to their physical place in the neighborhood. Our resources and services guide churches to embody their mission and leverage their property assets for connecting with neighbors and promoting the flourishing of the local neighborhood. We provide:

- Educational resources, like this toolkit.
- Presentations on the intersections of theology, human flourishing, and design for dignity.
- Placemaking workshops and guided neighborhood walking tours.
- Church property and community assessments.
- Assistance rethinking church property – its use, its design, and its impact for the common good.
- Advising on vision and design for new development or redevelopment of church property in the local context.

Reach out to us at info@proximityprojectinc.com for more information and to schedule a free initial vision session.

Visit our website www.proximityprojectinc.com to sign up for our newsletter and learn more about the resources and services we offer as well as access free content for inspiring your next project.

Acknowledgements

Written and Edited By: Sara Joy Proppe and Edward Dunar

Graphic Design By: Chrissy Lee Design

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Website: www.proximityprojectinc.com

Email: Info@proximityprojectinc.com

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*But seek the welfare of the city where
I have sent you into exile, and pray to
the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare
you will find your welfare.*

Jeremiah 29:7



Shaping the physical path to your church doorstep is a significant opportunity to foster human flourishing for the good of both your church body and your neighbors. Your place in the neighborhood matters and your property is an integral thread within the fabric of the whole community. Therefore, we invite you to cultivate your property to radiate the truth, beauty, and goodness of Jesus Christ to all those living, working, and playing in proximity to you.

In this toolkit, we introduce you to the theological and design principles that inform our approach. We discuss why your place matters, why your church community should pay attention to its surroundings, and how attentiveness to your neighborhood and city can further your commitment to the gospel. The remainder of the toolkit includes activities and worksheets for discerning and carrying out a redemptive placemaking project in your context.

Introduction

Your Place Matters

What if your greatest mission field as a church literally encompasses the physical sidewalks right outside the front door of your church building? What if your church parking lot is a venue for engaging the community as the hands and feet of Jesus? What if your church yard is a canvas for publicly displaying the lavish goodness of God? These are the types of questions we hope you wrestle with as you delve into this toolkit.

We challenge you to broaden and deepen your understanding of your mission field to include your physical church property and its place within the larger neighborhood. The physical design and use of your property has implications for whether those living in your community thrive as God intends. Your place in the community matters and your property has the power to be a life-giving presence to all who encounter it, even those simply walking by on a weekday afternoon. We want to help you cast a vision for this truth and unlock the potential your property has to display the redemptive love of Jesus to the world around you. In so doing, you will be acting in obedience and faithfulness to the biblical mission of the church. In his book, *Happy City*, Charles Montgomery writes, "...every park, plaza, and architectural façade sends messages about who we are."¹ So, we ask:

What message does your church property send to your community?



Places Convey Values Have you thought about what your church property communicates to the world around you? This church in Saint Paul, Minnesota regularly brings its messages to the sidewalk through sidewalk chalk and creative art at its threshold archway.

¹ Montgomery, Charles. *Happy City*. New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014.

Sacred Space as Public Space

Evaluating the message your church property sends to your neighborhood might require you to reorient your thinking in a couple of ways. First, while we spend much time designing our property to support the needs of the people who meet there, we often do not think about how our property affects the neighborhood around it. Engaging with how your property is perceived, experienced, and valued by those outside of your congregation requires you to venture outside your own walls and take a street view. This new orientation will help you begin to ask new questions, such as:

Would someone walking by our property experience an invitation to health, goodness, and delight?

How does this property serve those living in our neighborhood, even those who may never darken the church door?

Second, almost every church property has publicly accessible spaces, such as parking lots, front and side yards, sidewalks, and possibly alleyways and playgrounds. In the context of this toolkit, we acknowledge these spaces as “sacred” simply for the reason that they are part of the church property and therefore in service of the church’s mission. And, while these spaces are technically private property owned by either the church or a landlord, we encourage you to regard them as public because these are the visible places that communicate (often inadvertently) with the neighborhood around your church. These public spaces represent opportunities to share and reflect the goodness of God with the neighbor journeying by on her way home from work, the bus rider walking to his stop, or the mom and dad on an evening stroll with kids in tow. Recognizing these spaces as public can help you think more critically and creatively about how they can be shared with and delighted in by those around you.



Sharing Sacred Space This church in Winfield, Kansas created a small park within their parking lot that is open to the public. The park has a playful balance beam, slide, tunnel, chalkboard, and Little Free Library along with seating and flowers for community enjoyment.

Understanding Redemptive Placemaking

We want to guide you in discerning the missional opportunities that exist in your context with your physical church property, giving you the framework and tools to develop shared places that visibly promote the welfare of your neighborhood. To do so, this toolkit is rooted in a placemaking approach.

Project For Public Spaces defines placemaking as:

“ *A hands-on approach for improving a neighborhood... Placemaking inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community. Strengthening the connection between people and the places they share, placemaking refers to a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value.*”²

The projects are often small-scale and iterative, allowing the community to pilot ideas and adapt physical improvements in their neighborhoods in response to their discoveries around the particular needs and desires that are present. Through placemaking, community stakeholders work together to shape their spaces in ways that promote cultural, social, and physical flourishing in their context. We hope this toolkit provides you with concrete steps to assess opportunities for placemaking with your property and working collaboratively with neighbors and stakeholders to develop vibrant shared spaces. Because we seek to do this work through the biblical lens of God’s redeeming work in our cities and places, we use the term **redemptive placemaking**.



Placemaking

Placemaking invites community participation in developing vibrant shared spaces, such as this one in Dallas, Texas, to foster neighborly interaction and belonging. This neglected alleyway was transformed into a community plaza for a few weeks in the summer. Simple, inexpensive materials such as wooden pallets, painted PVC pipes, astroturf, milk crates, potted plants, and CDs strung from wires provided dynamic seating areas, games, and whimsy. Low-cost, temporary projects like this are a way to pilot ideas and test what works best in the local context, ensuring that future long-term investments are truly valuable for the neighborhood.

² “What Is Placemaking?” Project for Public Spaces, 2007. www.pps.org/article/what-is-placemaking

The Context of Your Place

We recognize that not everyone who picks up this toolkit will have the same context for their church property. Some may own a traditional, historic church building located in a dense urban setting or a well-established, walkable neighborhood. Others might own a modern church property located on the edge of town, separated from networks of neighborhoods and businesses by greenfields, roads and even highways. Some may have expansive parking lots while others have no parking lots at all. Furthermore, many may not even own your church property but be meeting in a school gymnasium or a vacant space in a commercial strip mall. No matter your specific context, there are creative things you can do with your property to extend an invitation to those around you to experience the truth, beauty, and goodness of Jesus Christ. These invitations will simply take different shapes and require you to engage different types of neighbors or community partners in the process.

By embarking on a redemptive placemaking project with your church, you can accomplish many different aims. For example, such a project might help you:

- **Increase your visibility** in your neighborhood so that others are more aware of your presence and work.
- **Reinforce relationships** by making your property more accessible and helpful to members of your congregation, people who benefit from your ministries, and neighbors.
- **Identify low-risk and low-cost ways of expanding the mission** work that you are already doing.
- **Gain a deeper understanding of local issues** related to human flourishing in your neighborhood, town, or city.

How to use this toolkit:

Part One defines the key terms we use that set the stage for this toolkit and its intended use. These terms include: built environment, church, mission, and discernment.

Part Two develops a biblical framework for understanding redemptive placemaking as an important component of church mission, drawing significant connections between human flourishing and the physical context of our neighborhoods.

Part Three provides activities to help you tap into your local context and discern your capacity for implementing a redemptive placemaking project for the good of your church community and neighbors.



Personal Reflection invites you to apply concepts and make connections to your own context through guided questions and journaling space.



Key Ideas highlight the important terms that provide the foundation for engaging this toolkit.



Activities consist of worksheets and exercises to guide a team through the process of discerning a redemptive placemaking project to implement in your particular context.

Part 1: Defining the Mission

What does “discerning your church’s mission in the built environment” mean?

As we begin, it is useful to develop several definitions. Many of these terms are probably familiar to you through the practice of ministry or the life of faith, but defining what we mean by them will help clarify the purpose of this toolkit and provide you with a framework for its effective use. Also, by thinking about your church’s relationship to its surrounding area through the lens of these terms, you might discover fresh insights within familiar ideas.



Think of a place in your neighborhood, town or city that brings you joy. Take a moment to imagine it. What do you like best about it? What characteristics make it a joyful place? Can you name some tangible attributes that you appreciate? Places to sit, things to see and do, paths to walk?

Built Environment

In this toolkit, you will begin to discern your mission in the built environment. The **built environment** is anything created and shaped by human hands. This can take the form of buildings, sidewalks, streets, parks, and gardens. It is where we live, work, play, and rest. The built environment is sometimes contrasted with the natural environment, but they overlap and interact with one another. We can even think about the built environment as a dynamic part of a larger ecosystem. It is our human habitat, and it has impacts (for good and for ill) on the natural world.

Because it is our habitat, the built environment affects our health, relationships, and spiritual life. To understand what we mean by this, imagine a lively and friendly neighborhood. Consider what features contribute to this setting. The sidewalks are easy to navigate and well-maintained, so you are able to go on enjoyable walks. Your neighbors spend time on their porches or work in their gardens, so you chat with them along the way. There are several small shops nearby where you can walk to get a cup of coffee or run errands. Perhaps you can even drop into a local church to say a quick prayer. Or maybe you can rest on a public bench and enjoy watching the activities and street life of the area. Because of the fabric of the neighborhood's built environment, you get to know your surroundings and your neighbors, and you take joy in being part of a vibrant place.

Because we interact with the built environment constantly, we often overlook the characteristics of our settings that help us thrive or alienate us, but intuitively we sense what works and what does not. You do not have to be a design professional to recognize a place that makes you feel good. It is our hope that through the process of discerning investments in your own property, you become more acquainted with what makes places healthy and engaging so that you can advocate for



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more improvements to your neighborhood and city as a whole. For example, if you improve your property by installing a useful bike rack or planting a rain garden, you shouldn't stop there! You can use the lessons from the experience to further reflect on your church's place in the built environment and discern where other opportunities exist for promoting human flourishing in the broader neighborhood.

The Church

Within the built environment, we assemble as **the church**. The church is the community of Jesus' disciples that gathers in particular places. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit working within each of us, God guides redeemed people into relationship to "encourage one another and build one another up" (1 Thessalonians 5, ESV; all further biblical quotations are from this translation).

Moreover, as the body of Christ, the people of the church collaborate in worshipping God, proclaiming the good news of the gospel, and bearing witness to Jesus Christ through mission in and to the world at-large (1 Corinthians 12:12-30). This two-fold dynamic is often described as the "gathered" and "scattered" church. The work of the church is not limited to the ministry that happens among those gathered within the four walls of a church on a Sunday, but also encompasses the work of church members who are scattered in various vocations throughout the work week. In fact, much of the ministry of the church happens through the hands and feet of believers who carry the truth of Jesus to the streets of their cities via workplaces, local schools, neighborhood gathering spots, and other places.



The **church** is the community of Jesus' disciples that gathers in particular places.



Photo credit: Trinity City Church, Saint Paul, MN

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It is striking how many scriptural metaphors for the life of ministry and the church use imagery from the built environment. Jesus encouraged his followers to let their light shine before others like a city on the hill (Matthew 5:14). He praised Peter's faith as the rock upon which the church is built (Matthew 16:18). Paul described the church as "God's field, God's building" (1 Corinthians 3:9) to emphasize God's invitation for us to be co-workers with the work of the Holy Spirit in the world. He also referred to "the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth" (Timothy 3:15). Such images draw attention to the fact that as God's community, the church lives and works in physical places across creation.

In ministry, we frequently say that church is "more than just a building" to remind ourselves that what really matters in church life is the worship and mission of the community. While it is important to preserve this insight, we should not lose sight of the fact that the church meets and works in physical spaces. When we remember that "church is not a building," we do not mean that we should ignore our church buildings and property, but instead that we need to serve as faithful stewards by putting our decisions about buildings and resources into alignment with our mission.



How would you describe the unique mission of your own church community? If somebody asked for the elevator speech about your church's work, what would you say? Is there a particular gift or ministry that you have to offer?



When people passing by glance at the exterior of your church, what message do they receive about your ministry or vision for the community? How does this ministry or vision relate to your surrounding neighborhood and city?

The Mission

Mission is the practice of discipleship, informed by Jesus' call to serve others and "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). In practicing mission, we follow the example of Jesus Christ, the Word who became flesh in a particular place and time to teach and redeem the world.

A crucial part of Jesus' mission involves reconciliation. Paul reminds us that "in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross." (Colossians 1:19-20). As disciples, we seek to become reconciled with God, creation, and one another. We also need to be reconciled with the places from which we have become alienated. Modern life prizes mobility over local commitment and belonging. Our culture emphasizes self-definition and self-direction at the expense of attachments and relationships, which drives fragmentation and disconnection. The end result is intensifying loneliness and polarization, harkening to an even deeper need for reconciliation within our communities and our places.

We have also lost the identity that comes with local memory and lore. How many of us are familiar with the history of the place where we live? How often do we talk to our neighbors about what our places mean and how they came to be? We have become alienated from our local surroundings, and the quality of our neighborhoods and cities has suffered as a result.

The church is a community of memory. We remember the difficulties, struggles, joys, and graces that show the work of God and the journey of God's people across the entire range of human experience. Part of our mission is to pass on the stories of our tradition—deliverance from Egypt, the fidelity of God during the exile of the Israelites in Babylon, the redemption offered by the teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the witness of holy men and women throughout history. In



Mission is the practice of discipleship, informed by Jesus' call to serve others and "make disciples of all nations." (Matthew 28:19)



Photo credit: Trinity City Church, Saint Paul, MN

a rootless culture, one of the great treasures that the church has to offer is a deep memory that we can use as a foundation for understanding our personal and shared stories. As the psalmist writes, "I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your wonders of old" (Psalm 77:11) The church knows how to tell the stories that matter. Your church property can play a role in this reconciling mission!



Where are the broken places on your church property or in the surrounding neighborhood? Are there cracked sidewalks, vacant garden beds, fading signs, or other reflections of the decay of our world? How do these reflections of decay affect the health, relationships, or happiness of your neighbor? What would reconciliation in your built environment look like?



How does your church property reflect memory? Are there aspects of your land that refer to the history of your community? How does your community tell the stories of the work of God in the places around you? How does your community tell the stories of struggle or suffering in the places around you?

Discernment

This toolkit is intended to help you determine how to engage in such mission by making your church an agent of God's reconciliation in your neighborhood through discernment. **Discernment** is a practice of reflectively choosing your path in dialogue with God. It involves mindful attention to the movement of the Holy Spirit and God's call to mission where we are. Scripture describes discernment and the cultivation of wisdom as a practice of listening. Through prayer, contemplation, and study of scripture, we listen to God's word and reflect on what it means in our time and place. Through conversation with others and active observation of our surroundings, we listen to our neighbors and our places. Through attentiveness to our experiences and the results of our work, we notice the needs of the community that are bound up in a place, as well as the practices that bring joy or pain. As the figure of Wisdom declares, "Blessed is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors" (Proverbs 8:34).

We need to avoid two frequent misunderstandings about discernment. First, it is not an individual pursuit. Although we need to practice discernment in our personal lives, it is a fundamentally social activity. A wisdom writer reminds us, "without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed" (Proverbs 15:22). Paul teaches that the Holy Spirit gives us various gifts and that we need one another as part of one body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12). We need the perspectives and wisdom of others to keep us accountable to our shared values and to



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help us continue to learn that which we do not know. Furthermore, our decisions affect the people around us, so we need to be mindful of the ways in which we are responsible for others. We are called to “bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2).

Second, discernment is not only about pivotal questions or decisions, like career and marriage choices. Discernment is an ongoing, habitual process. By continually keeping our hearts and minds open to the Holy Spirit and remaining faithful to God in ordinary acts of discipleship, we can witness the growing and redemptive power of the gospel. Jesus’ parable of the mustard seed reminds us of this reality. The mustard seed starts as the smallest of seeds, but it grows into a mighty tree that “becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade” (Mark 4:32). Notice that even this parable relates to the built environment – the smallest of seed grows into a shelter for the birds!

When we practice discernment, we become less anxious about the possibility of failure. We become comfortable with taking small risks on behalf of the gospel because we discover that if we fall, we learn from the experience and become better disciples of Jesus. The practice of discernment helps us discover new pathways of mission as we see God’s abundant grace in the lives of our communities and the places where they unfold.



How do you practice discernment in your life and ministry? What processes does your church have for mutual discernment? How does your community listen to its members, its neighbors, and its surroundings?

Part 2: Heading the Mission

Why should your church pay attention to the built environment?

We are physical creatures in particular places.

God created us as embodied people who inhabit tangible places. Our capacities to touch, taste, see, smell, and hear the world around us are means of witnessing God's power and goodness and delighting in creation. Repeatedly in Scripture, God invites us to see his beauty and creativity and trust his magnificent power through beholding natural wonders such as skies, mountains, and river valleys (Psalm 19:1; 95:3-4; 104:5-9). These physical attributes of the world are demonstrations of the character of God, and we ought to find ways to highlight and enhance them to reflect his goodness in our own built environment.

Furthermore, recognizing the particularity of our built environment underscores the biblical calling to seek the good of those around us to the fullest extent. As human beings, we have palpable needs, such as food, water, and shelter. As followers of Christ, God explicitly calls us to meet the physical needs of our neighbors and those underserved in our communities (Leviticus 19:9-10; Isaiah 58:7-8). There is a strong connection between the design of the built environment and our ability to thrive as human beings, and not every place is designed equally. For example, many low-income neighborhoods have no full-service grocery store, severely limiting residents' access to fresh fruits and vegetables and other healthy food options. These geographic areas have been termed food deserts, and studies have found higher rates of diabetes and heart disease within them. Another example is the relationship between public transit and affordable housing. When

people do not have affordable housing options near jobs, they are forced to find housing further from their work, and in places where public transit is limited or non-existent, people must purchase and maintain a car in order to get to work. For many the cost of a car adds another layer of financial strain on an already limited budget, which can ultimately lead to sacrificing good personal choices to make ends meet. The flourishing of those in our communities can be directly linked to critical design features such as access to jobs, affordable housing, and reliable public transit.



We are relational creatures in particular places.

Not only are we physical beings, but we are deeply relational as well. From the biblical beginning in Genesis, God stated that it is not good for man to be alone (Genesis 2:18). As members of the church, we are called to work together in community; to care for and serve one another. In 1 Corinthians Paul notes that as believers we are to live as members of one body, rejoicing and suffering together (1 Corinthians 12:12-26). Jesus also tells us that the world will know we serve him by our love for one another (John 13:35). Pastor Jonathan Brooks explains, “recognizing that while we are part of a greater body, we also have a specific role informed not only by the Word of God but also by geographic, socioeconomic, and cultural factors as well.”³ We are called to love and serve those in proximity to us. Moses exhorts the Israelites to “open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and

to the poor, in your land” (Deuteronomy 15:11). Likewise, Paul reminds us that bearing one another’s burdens is a fulfillment of the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2). Only through relationships do we recognize needs and burdens, and only through relationships are we able to encourage and spur others to discover the hope that is found through being reconciled with Christ. Thus, relationships with each other and with our neighbors are pivotal for bringing the reconciling love of Jesus to bear light in the world around us. The built environment has implications for our ability to develop relationships with our neighbors.

A simple example of this reality is the design of residential garages. Most modern homes have attached garages, which allow residents to simply drive up to the home, push the automatic garage door opener, and drive into the confines of their private space; never allowing for neighborly interaction. In contrast, historic homes tend to have detached garages along alleyways. This requires walking between the garage and one’s home. Some urban areas have no garages at all, requiring residents to park along the street. In these settings, the simple walk between car and home allows for communication with neighbors. Consequently, a design feature as basic as a garage has the power to create or negate space for neighborly interaction. Research has shown that places with more shared spaces have increased social networks and trust among neighbors. As followers of Christ, we are to be ambassadors of reconciliation and neighborly love. Therefore, we are wise to include the design of the built environment in our particular place as a necessary component of engaging in this good work.

³ Brooks, Jonathan. *Church Forsaken: Practicing Presence in Neglected Neighborhoods*. Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2018.



Salvation happens in particular places.

Though infinite and unconfined, God invites human beings into relationship in time and space. God's outreach to humanity unfolds in specific places, a strategy that the church is called to imitate as a sign of God's grace in the world. The narratives and commands found in Scripture attest to this redeeming work of God and the church in our physical world.

For example, after God leads the people of Israel out of slavery in the land of Egypt, he guides them to a promised land, a spacious place that heralds their freedom. The forty-year period between the liberation of the Israelites and their arrival home to the promised land shows us the unfolding of God's work in particular places. Because they are on the move, the Israelites are called to set physical markers as sacred places to ground them in their covenant with God during their journey. At the end of Exodus, the narrative moves to a detailed account of the construction of the tabernacle as the dwelling place of the Lord, even sharing the measurements of various components (Exodus 35-40). We also learn the specific names of the artisans who craft these structures. These meticulous details call our attention to how God's liberating and redemptive work plays out in cooperation with human labor in particular places.



Imagine your own church building. Do you know or remember the names of the contractors and laborers who created your space? In all likelihood, these workers are now anonymous, but the work of their hands brought about the sacred place where your community gathers, shares the Word, and discerns its part in God's mission.

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The scriptural attentiveness to place persists through the difficult history of Israel. After the destruction of the first temple and the exile in Babylon, the Israelites yearn for Jerusalem, describing God's promises in terms of a redeemed city. Isaiah pronounces God's intention to reunite his people in one place (Isaiah 40). Zechariah offers a lively vision of life in this restored city: "Thus says the Lord of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of great age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets. Thus says the Lord of hosts: If it is marvelous in the sight of the remnant of this people in those days, should it also be marvelous in my sight, declares the Lord of hosts?" (Zechariah 8:4-6).

The New Testament develops this theme in radically new ways. God becomes a human being through Jesus of Nazareth, a person from a particular town whose ministry took seriously the well-being of place. One possible translation of John 1:14 is "The Word became flesh and pitched its tent among us." God chooses to seek deeper relationship with us by sharing space with us.

From its very beginning in Jesus, the mission of the church has unfolded in particular places. When he first "began to send them out two by two," Jesus gives his disciples specific instructions about where to stay and how to respond to the places where they preached and performed healings (Mark 6:7-14). At Pentecost, the disciples gather in an upper room when they received the Holy Spirit, and their mission began in public squares of Jerusalem where people of many languages were gathered on pilgrimage (Acts 2:1-13). The apostles and missionaries like Paul later build networks and established missions in particular houses in specific cities.

Pastor and theologian Eric Jacobsen points out that the trajectory of God's salvific work in the Bible involves a journey from the garden to the city. We tend to interpret the construction of cities as a result of human exile from the Garden of Eden, but Jacobsen argues that this is an incomplete understanding. He writes, "A closer look shows not only humans but also God at work in adapting the natural environment."⁴ In the vision of Jesus' coming reign in the Book of Revelation, the image of restored society between humanity and God is not that of a reconstructed garden, but instead a beautiful city (Revelation 21:9-27). God's plan for humanity involves community in flourishing places that are both the work of human hands and divine grace.



How do your church's ministry and grounds reflect God's own strategy of engaging people where they are? How does your understanding of the incarnation of Jesus affect your decision-making about managing your resources?

Attentiveness to place is part of our call to stewardship.

God calls human beings—made in his image—to be co-creators. In the Garden of Eden, God created human beings to “have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” (Genesis 1:26). Such dominion implies a responsibility to cultivate creation in pursuit of the well-being of all and in line with God’s intentions. As Paul teaches, “We are God’s fellow workers. You are God’s field, God’s building” (1 Corinthians 3:9).

In exercising this responsibility, we need to remember that we are part of creation. Our own welfare is inseparable from the integrity of nature and the healthfulness of the built places around us. In his encyclical *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis describes the concerns of ecology as extending beyond the natural world and into human culture and economics. He points out that human responsibility toward creation entails careful attention to our built environment. “Authentic development includes efforts to bring about an integral improvement in the quality of human life, and this entails considering the setting in which people live their lives.”⁵ He goes on to challenge those who shape and design the cities and neighborhoods that make up our human habitat to recognize shared values and seek the common good. He writes, “Interventions which affect the urban or rural landscape should take into account how various elements combine to form a whole which is perceived by its inhabitants as a coherent and meaningful framework for their lives.” Part of our biblical call to stewardship must involve wise cultivation of the streets, buildings, and gardens around us.

Scripture likewise includes a call to seek the good of our cities. Writing to the people of Israel in exile, the prophet Jeremiah exhorts, “Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare” (Jeremiah 29:7). A common theme in the Bible’s wisdom books is that the wise person finds security not in private resources, but instead in the well-being of the community. “A rich man’s wealth is his strong city” (Proverbs 18:11).

Placemaking is a way to tell of God’s faithfulness.

Placemaking plays a significant role in shaping the venues for sharing stories of God’s faithfulness and redemption with both our neighbors and future generations. By way of placemaking, we can create space for stories and establish signposts that serve as visual reminders of God’s faithfulness to us. Building places that cultivate stories and harbor memories is an act of faithfulness in our own lives because by it we share the good news of Jesus Christ as we tell stories and point to particular places where salvation has occurred. Churches should keep this truth at the forefront as they think about developing meaningful places on their own properties and in their own neighborhoods.

⁴ Jacobsen, Eric O. *The Space Between: A Christian Engagement with the Built Environment*. Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2012.

⁵ Francis. *Laudato Si*. 2015. www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

The Road Ahead: Using this Toolkit

This toolkit will guide you in discerning creative ways to express the love of Jesus with your physical church property. Just as you would thoughtfully design a home for the health and comfort of those you love, we encourage you to design your church property for your community and neighbors with the same mindset!

The following activities help you think strategically about your property and your neighborhood in order to discern opportunities for redemptive placemaking projects. The framework comes from our own experiences in guiding communities through brainstorming and placemaking project selection, but you know your church and community best, so we encourage you to trust your own judgment, intuition, and historical knowledge to modify as needed.



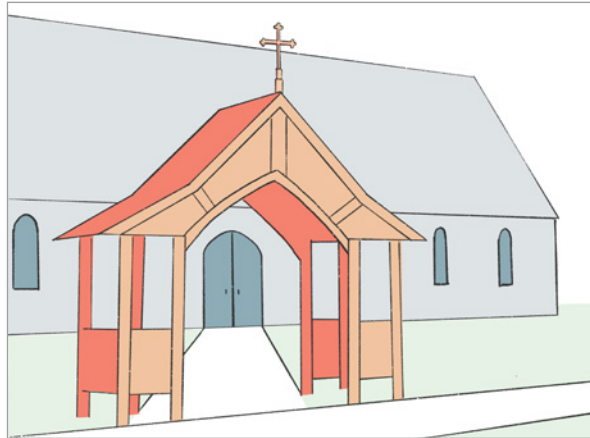
Placemaking Ideas

As you begin the process of discerning your mission in the built environment, we want to give some redemptive placemaking examples to spark your imagination for your own context. This section includes several ideas and a couple of case studies to give you a taste of the possibilities and get your creative juices flowing.

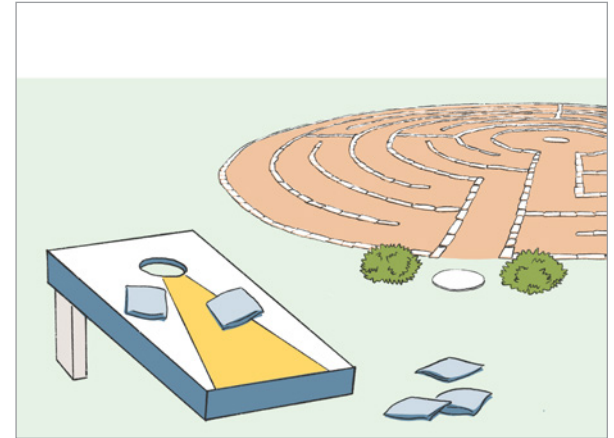
- Five Easy Placemaking Ideas
- More Placemaking Ideas
- Trinity City Church: A Redemptive Placemaking Plan
- Colonial Church: A Redemptive Placemaking Project



FIVE EASY PLACE-MAKING IDEAS



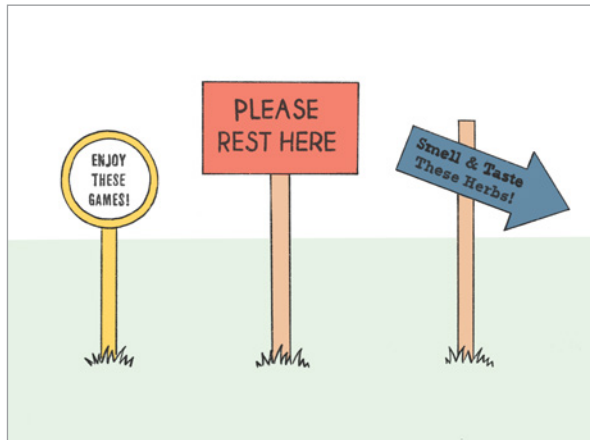
Thresholds connect the inside and outside of a place. A threshold extends the front door of your church to the outside and offers a visible welcome and space for a friendly “handshake” interaction with those encountering your property without requiring them to step inside.



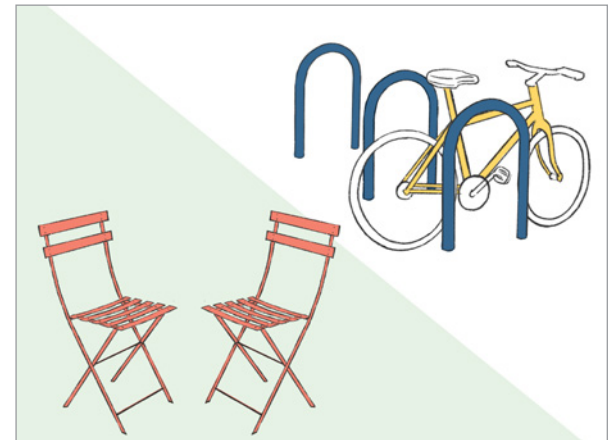
Activities add sociability to a place. Having things to do or ways to interact gives people a reason to be there and breaks the ice between people and places. Activities might include things such as bird feeders, libraries, lawn games, or prayer labyrinths.



Beauty contributes to the aesthetic value of a place and stimulates curiosity. Incorporating gardens and public art are easy ways to enhance the character of your property and invite others to experience the goodness and creativity of God’s creation.



Wayfinding helps people orient themselves and directs their engagement with a place. Displaying clear signage can encourage them to explore a place and make them freer to interact with elements such as gardens and games.



Places to rest allow people to linger and enjoy a place. Consider pockets of seating (moveable is best!), a low sit wall, or rest stops for those using other modes of transit. Provide a shelter for bus riders or install a bike rack to enable riders to stop and appreciate the area.

More Placemaking Ideas



Paint an interactive community mural that adds color and curiosity to a blank wall.



Plant a community garden with creative signs to invite neighborhood participation.



Open your playground for the community to use throughout the week.



Host a local food truck on your parking lot and invite neighbors to lunch.



Build a small outdoor patio or park for neighborly gathering



Plan a bike to church day to encourage congregants to explore the neighborhood by bike. Photo credit: Frontline Church, Oklahoma City, OK

Does your property have empty concrete sidings, walls, or utility boxes? Paint a community mural or art piece to liven it up and feature an aspect of the history or culture of your neighborhood. Alternatively, create an outdoor chalkboard where passersby can answer a question of the week or add to a drawing.

Do you have open lawn space? Make a fun lawn game available as a simple way to invite children and families to play on your church lawn. Add some seating to encourage people to enjoy the property and games. You could also institute a public WIFI spot that makes it possible for people to work at tables outside.

Do you have a large parking lot? If your parking lot is mostly empty outside of service times, consider using it for neighborhood recreational events such as bike rodeos, field days, bonfires, basketball & foursquare tournaments, outdoor movie nights, or seasonal festivals and farmers markets. Or, hire a food truck and host community conversation tables for neighbors to eat together.

Do you have a playground? Open it for the community to use. You can implement public play hours for neighbors to use the space during the week.

Is your property dark at night? Hang some white twinkle lights in your trees or get creative with outdoor “chandeliers.” Adding warm spotlights or glow to your property can make it feel more hospitable while also curbing opportunities for crime and feelings of unsafety in a community.

What are your landscaping practices? Consider adapting portions of your land for more natural uses, such as native plantings and rain gardens that help preserve water quality and biodiversity. Feed the monarch butterfly population by maintaining a milkweed garden, help wild bees by planting native wildflowers, or build birdhouses using designs that are well suited for the species in your area. Local ecologists or master gardeners can guide you on ways your property can promote conservation and biodiversity.

Are you adjacent to a bus line? Build a bus shelter on your property. Add seating so that passengers can wait for their bus more comfortably or include a roof to keep people dry in the rain or covered in the sun. Add activities or signage to make it even more inviting!

Is there trash often littering your sidewalks and yard? Put in some whimsical and artistic public trash receptacles along the edge of your property.

Do your neighbors struggle with food security? Plant a community garden that contributes fresh produce to local ministries, or install a Free Little Pantry (www.littlefreepantry.org) stocked with non-perishable food items.

Are there difficult or challenging parts of your neighborhood’s history? Build a simple memorial or informational plaque as part of your church’s wrestling with these stories and their ongoing impacts on the neighborhood. Develop a neighborhood tour with local residents that shares the stories and gives people a better understanding of the local history.

Trinity City Church: A Redemptive Placemaking Plan

Trinity City Church purchased a new (old) church building and wanted a plan to add some neighborhood placemaking components to the property. The first step involved assessing their neighborhood context and identifying particular stakeholders in proximity to their property. An initial exploration of the church context showed several potential opportunities to connect with unique stakeholders, including library patrons, bus riders, and bicyclists. Deeper research revealed that the particular bus stop on their corner serves one of the most highly used bus routes between St. Paul and Minneapolis. Additionally, the bike lane that goes by the property services a high volume of bicyclists. And, the church, itself, has a high percentage of congregants who live close to the property and would potentially bike to church. These observations contributed to a desire to consider options for enhancing the bus stop and bicycling accessories.



Neighborhood Stakeholders:

- Library Patrons
- Bike Commuters
- Bus Stop Users



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An initial plan outlined creative ideas to address each identified stakeholder. Next, the church sought additional information from the transit agency and other stakeholders and vendors about options and/or constraints that might exist for partnering and implementing some of these projects on the property. Depending on their budget, capacity, and interest related to these ideas, they are now actively pursuing concrete next steps to reimagine their church “front yard.”

1. Outdoor Shared Seating with Library

- Place 3-4 bistro tables and chairs on west lawn.
- Utilize concrete “patio” to share with library users.
- Choose a bright color for the furniture.
- Use creative labeling for the furniture (e.g. Trinity City Church invites you to sit here!).
- Adhere custom stickers or spray paint and stencil.

2. Bike Racks & Repair Station

- Install bike racks in rock bed.
- Place repair station in rock bed or near southwest corner sidewalk.
- Make it publicly visible- signage near boulevard to invite public use.
- Add an outdoor light for night use.

3. Better Bus Stop Seating / Covering

- Add shade umbrella.
- Place bench or bistro table(s).
- Add signage inviting riders to “relax and wait.”
- Provide some softening materials – potted plants, kids toys, etc.



Colonial Church: A Redemptive Placemaking Project

Before you begin considering a project of your own, we want to share a story of a church using our process to reach out to its surrounding neighborhood using redemptive placemaking.

We were contracted by Colonial Church in Edina, Minnesota, a western suburb of Minneapolis. The church borders a residential neighborhood, a busy public park, and the grounds for a senior living center. The congregation hoped to connect with these neighbors and further develop their property for the flourishing of the surrounding community.

During our first walk around the land, we learned that Colonial Church already used its property in creative ways. For example, the congregation keeps bees and bottles honey from the hives. They restore native plants on the edges of their stormwater pond and track a growing number of monarchs and birds each season. They maintain a Memorial Garden with flowers and benches for those who want to enjoy quiet moments of meditation, prayer, and reflection. However,



members of the congregation and surrounding neighbors did not know that they were welcome to enjoy these features of the property. Few people were able to appreciate the creative effort already being invested in the church grounds.

In response, the team began to imagine what it might look like to create a welcoming and inviting walking path to enjoy these places of beauty and rest. Rather than plan a large investment upfront, we emphasized the value of low-cost, low-risk experiments to gauge the viability of the project. To do this, we set up a temporary path with inexpensive signage about creation care and the church's unique history. This experiment was a team effort. We worked with a few church staff members to create signs for the pathway. A graphic designer volunteered to develop a simple map for inclusion in the worship bulletin. The church property team mowed and mulched the pathway, and the placemaking team set up the signs on a Saturday morning. Then, we invited the congregation to take a walk after

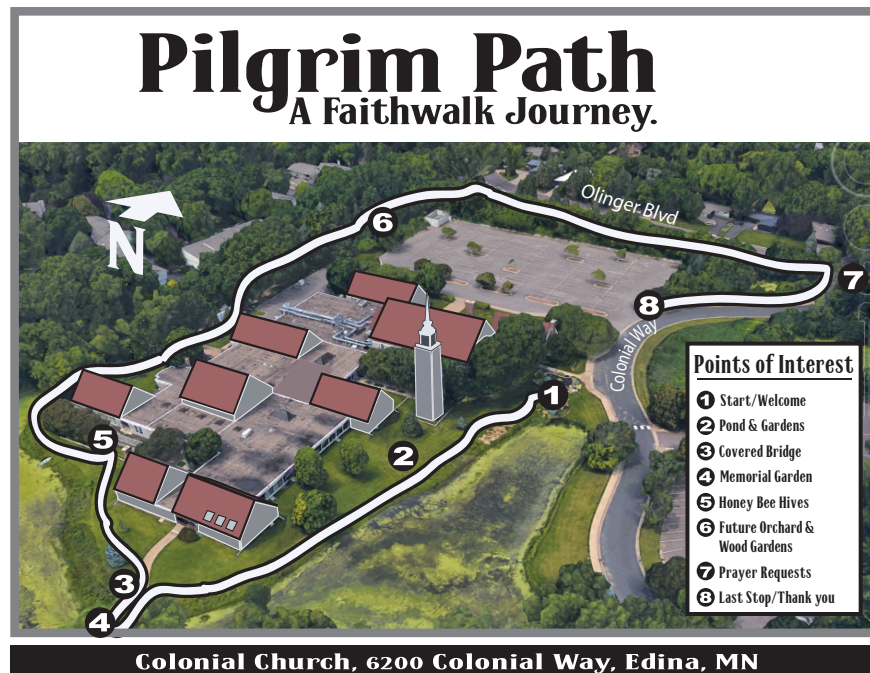


church. All of this was carried out by a team of about seven people and an investment of \$800, which mostly included the cost of cookies we handed out to make the walk festive for kids! When the team conducted a survey of people who walked the pilot path, an overwhelming majority of respondents reported learning something new, feeling freer to explore, and feeling more connected to the life and vision of the church after walking the path.

Even before unveiling the paths, the church began to see benefits from its work. A representative from the placemaking team attended a meeting of the neighborhood homeowner's association and remarked afterwards that he wished he would have made the connection years ago. The homeowner's association began brainstorming how future partnerships could be developed for watershed grants to provide restoration to the creek that borders both properties.

Neighbors noticed and appreciated the work being done. One afternoon when the associate pastor was outside shoveling some mulch for the walking path, he noticed a woman walk up and watch him for several minutes. He paused to talk with her, thinking perhaps he was being disruptive. She introduced herself as a neighbor who was curious about what he was doing. When he shared the church's plan for putting in a public walking path, she asked to shake his hand. He was bewildered but obliged. She then stated, "I've never known a pastor who would be willing to do work like shoveling mulch for the good of the community, so I wanted to shake your hand."

This is the value of redemptive placemaking -- building relationships while pursuing a vision of the common good. As Christians we are called to witness to visions of truth, beauty, and goodness during our earthly pilgrimage. Redemptive placemaking offers a method of doing so.



Placemaking Pilot Project Colonial Church piloted a walking path activity with their congregation on a Sunday to inspire excitement around future plans to develop this placemaking asset for the neighborhood. This festive event included cookies, stickers, pink flamingos, and some unexpected snow!

Part 3: Discerning a Redemptive Placemaking Project

Part 3 is divided into five steps with corresponding meetings and a suggested activity structure for each to successfully lead your team through the discernment process. Each step begins with a prayer to encourage your team to bring every endeavor before the Lord, asking for his wisdom, direction, and revelation in this process. We firmly believe in the power of prayer to reveal new ideas and creative opportunities to those who humbly seek God's guidance.

Don't worry if you need to meet more than five times to accomplish things. However, keep in mind that shorter, more frequent meetings will harness energy and maintain momentum better than long meetings that occur with extended gaps of time in between.



Step One: Initiate

A Prayer for Discernment

Our Father and Creator,

Throughout time you called people from all nations to be your own, to serve you, and to bring your light to every place and space.

You offered a covenant to Abram when he welcomed your messengers in hospitality.

May we also find your presence in our midst as we encounter the face of Jesus in our neighborhood, and through our project of redemptive placemaking.

As we begin our discernment together, may we offer one another hospitality and dedicate our gifts to your service and to the good of our community.

In the holy name of Jesus, we pray,
Amen.

Assemble Your Placemaking Team

The members of this group will serve as the key leaders and advocates for your redemptive placemaking project. Convene a team that has the time and capacity to fully engage in this process and is committed to follow-through with each of these steps. You will be relying on this team to implement a successful project.

We suggest limiting the team to 5-7 core participants. A group larger than this will be difficult to convene with regularity and will potentially suffer from “too many cooks in the kitchen” syndrome. There will be other opportunities to involve a larger circle of people throughout the process. In this core group, include a diverse mix of ages and life stages, from youth through elderly, singles and families. Use the table on the following page to brainstorm potential group members.



Brainstorm Your Placemaking Team

Step One: Initiate

Type of Team Member:	Potential Members:
<i>Church leaders or staff who can make decisions about maintenance, capital improvements, and budgets</i>	
<i>Church members who are champions for new ideas and programs</i>	
<i>Church members who are connected to people, businesses or organizations of the neighborhood or area</i>	
<i>Church members who are interested in being involved but have not yet been engaged</i>	

Final Placemaking Team:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.



Understand Your Church Context

The goal of these exercises is to learn and share more about the context of your church, its history, and its mission, particularly as it relates to the built environment. Before the group meeting, ask each team member to do the pre-meeting activities on these pages as time allows.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What is the story of your church's presence in its current location? How did it come to be located where it is?</i> • <i>What features of your property refer to this story?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What relationships (historic and/or new) exist between your church and the surrounding community?</i> • <i>Are these relationships positive, negative, a mix of both?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What core values and gifts does your church emphasize?</i> • <i>What features of your church property exemplify these gifts and values?</i>



Pre-Meeting Activity #2: Walk Your Church Property

Step One: Initiate

This walk is meant to help you assess the physical qualities of your church property and identify where there are opportunities to represent your mission and your story as a church in a more visible way.

- **Walk** the church property, every nook and cranny outside. We even suggest you walk your property in the evening and in the rain! Walking at different times of day and in different weather will help you recognize things like whether more lighting is needed to provide safety at night, or if shelter from the elements would be beneficial in particular locations.
- **Notice** as much as possible about:
 - features that invite personal or community interaction;
 - aspects that hinder connection; and
 - areas that are underused.
- **Sketch** out a rough map of your property on the following page.
- **Annotate** your map with examples of the following:
 - In **green**, highlight or mark physical features that encourage exploration or curiosity, social interaction, and lingering or rest (such as seating, gardens, art, playgrounds).
 - In **red**, mark features that feel closed off, are hard to navigate, or discourage interaction (such as physical or natural barriers, areas that feel unwelcoming, unsafe, or confusing).
 - In **yellow**, mark areas that feel blank or underused (such as open parking lots or pockets of empty land).
 - Draw a ★ on two or three parts of your property that give you ideas about possible projects. What places could benefit from some improvements or enhancements?



Map your church property:

A large empty rectangular box with a dotted green border, intended for mapping church property. The box is positioned below the text 'Map your church property:' and occupies most of the page's width and height.



Meet to Share Your Findings

Step One: Initiate

Spend some time as a group sharing your findings with one another. Ask one person to be the note taker and highlight consistent themes that are brought up among your team. Focus on the following points.

<i>What values or forms of mission came up as the most important and/or most evident in the life of your church?</i>	<i>What aspects of your property could use attention?</i>



Do Some Preliminary Brainstorming

Step One: Initiate

Based on these initial findings, what possible projects come to mind? Are there creative ways to connect your church's missional priorities and values to aspects of your property where you see the most opportunities for attention and improvements?

- Brainstorm some possibilities with your group.
- You're not done with your investigation yet, but what ideas from your first meeting inspire the most excitement or energy? Record these in the space below.

Preliminary Project Ideas:

- ◀ Perhaps you are a church that takes creation care very seriously – could you paint some brightly colored rain barrels to grace the church property and post playful and informative signage to explain this commitment to others?
- ◀ Maybe your church operates a clothing donation “store” on site – could you initiate summer sidewalk sales and other festive events to make your mission more of a neighborhood celebration?
- ◀ If hospitality is one of your driving values – can you make that evident with places for people to enjoy eating and relaxing together outside?



Step Two: Investigate

A Prayer for Our Place and Our Neighbors

Dear Jesus, Son of the Father and the Word Made Flesh,
You walked this earth. You humbly entered space and time to guide us in the merciful ways of sharing paths and places with others.

You have called us to seek the welfare of our neighbors and our city. Too often we have focused inward and failed to see how our place in the neighborhood affects the well-being of those living and working nearby. Forgive us for where we have not paid attention to the ways in which the physical paths and property of our church connect us to the larger neighborhood.

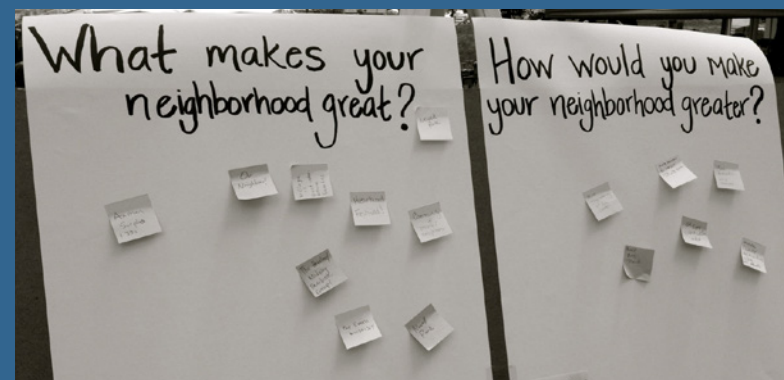
Guide us in identifying and connecting with those with whom we share paths and places in this neighborhood. Teach us to advocate for places that promote the well-being of our neighbors. Show us how we might best shape these paths and this property for the good of those who encounter them.

Let our property be a reflection of your truth, beauty, and goodness in the neighborhood. Let it be an invitation to human flourishing and an expression of your love and redemption to those around us.

In the holy name of Jesus, we pray,
Amen.

Understand Your Neighborhood Context

The goal of this step is to learn more about the larger neighborhood context of your church, particularly in terms of the built environment. Before the group meeting, ask each team member to do the pre-meeting activities as time allows.



Find opportunities to ask questions and listen to neighborhood stakeholders. You may be surprised by what you learn and how easily you might be able to help with some “wins” for the local community. Seek to discover overlapping desires and augment assets rather than pursuing projects in response to specific problems. For example, instead of installing something to specifically deter perceived “unwanted” behavior, implement a project that provides opportunities for positive community interaction and a heightened sense of safety and belonging for everyone.



Pre-Meeting Activity #1: Research Your Neighborhood

Step Two: Investigate

To help cover more ground, consider assigning each member of the team to dig into a particular area of research listed here.

<p>Walk Score: Visit walkscore.com and type in your church's address. This score is based on the density and diversity of basic goods and services that are accessible by foot. What is your area's score? What are the positive attributes or amenities of your neighborhood? What areas could use improvement? Are there particular services that are missing and needed?</p>	
<p>Zoning Data: Go to your city's website to look up the zoning for your church property and the properties around it. What sorts of buildings and uses are permitted for your neighborhood? Are there types of businesses or housing that you would like to see, but are missing because of zoning regulations?</p>	
<p>City Comprehensive Plan: Find the comprehensive plan on your city's website and read through some of the summary points. What are the main concerns surrounding change in the city or neighborhood? What are the main goals to make the neighborhood more livable?</p>	

<p>Demographic Data: Find demographic data related to your area of the city using sites such as factfinder.census.gov, city-data.com, and naco.org. What is the range of incomes, ages, and ethnicities in your area? How similar are these demographics to the makeup of your church?</p>	
<p>Neighborhood Values: Spend some time reading through and/or visiting various neighborhood forums to understand what people are most excited and concerned about in your neighborhood. Many neighborhood groups use social media platforms such as Facebook, Nextdoor, and Twitter to discuss local news and projects. Consider attending a neighborhood association meeting or local chamber of commerce meeting to meet people and learn more. What topics appear to be a central concern in the neighborhood? Are there ways your church can be actively listening to the conversation and participating?</p>	



Pre-Meeting Activity #2: Walk Your Neighborhood

Step Two: Investigate

On this walk, you will examine how your church connects to its surroundings and take note of the proximal neighbors who are affected by your property.

- **Explore** as much as you can within 2 blocks in each direction of your church property. Consider how a person with limited mobility or young children might experience the neighborhood on foot, and whether or not the area is safe, easily navigable, and provisioning for this population. Keep an eye out for neighbors who cross your path and be ready to chat with them during this exercise.
- **Draw** a rough map of your neighborhood on the following page.
- **Include** on your map the following:
 - Notable features and institutions, such as parks, schools, public spaces, community service buildings, local businesses, and gathering spots like coffee shops or restaurants.
 - Paths such as streets, walking trails, bike paths, and other means by which people navigate the area.
- **Annotate** your map with examples of the following:
 - In **green**, highlight or mark physical features that bring you delight (such as gardens, public art, lovely homes, or vibrant gathering spaces).
 - In **red**, mark features that are challenging to navigate or that make you nervous (such as difficult street crossings, tired or abandoned buildings, or expanses of parking lots).
 - In **yellow**, mark areas that feel blank or underused (such as open parking lots or pockets of empty land).
 - Draw a ★ on two or three parts of your neighborhood where you see opportunities for merciful encounters with others. Where do you see the need for God's reconciliation or evidence of grace?



Map your neighborhood:

A large, empty rectangular box with a dotted green border, intended for mapping a neighborhood. The box is positioned below the text 'Map your neighborhood:' and occupies most of the page's width and height.



Pre-Meeting Activity #3: Identify Area Stakeholders

Step Two: Investigate

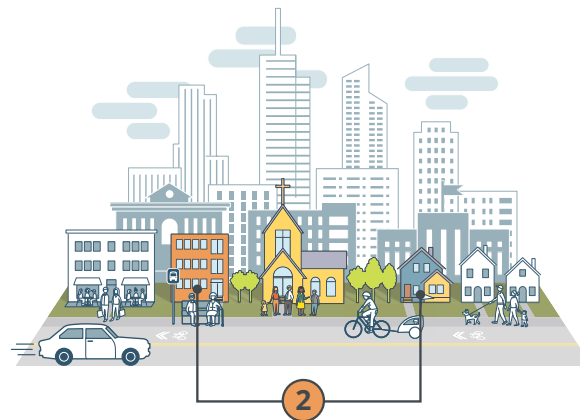
It's important to recognize who might be affected by the projects you will consider. Stakeholders are those people whose activities, goals, and visions are affected by your church property in some way. Think of them as broadly as possible: Who uses your church property? Who crosses paths with your church's land? Who does your physical presence impact? Stakeholders will also relate to you with varying levels of intensity. Using the chart below as a guide and your neighborhood walk as a starting point, identify as many stakeholders as possible so that you can find connections that you otherwise might not have noticed.



The Church Body & Direct Property Users

Church members and staff, renters, service programs, and others regularly using the church property

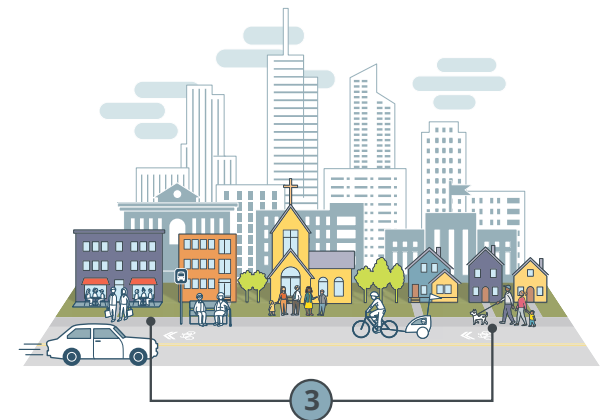
Examples:



Immediate Neighbors

Homeowners and renters, businesses, organizations, and property owners directly adjacent to the church property

Examples:



Living in the Neighborhood

Homeowners and renters; housing developers and property management companies

Examples:



Working / Studying / Worshipping

Employees, students, and parishioners; local business owners, major employers, cultural, educational, and religious institutions



Visiting / Recreating / Commuting

Visitors and commuters passing through the neighborhood; destinations such as parks and commercial centers; transit routes/stops/stations, trails, and high-volume roadways



Civic Groups / City Representatives

Community organizations, elected officials, non-profits, and other groups at the neighborhood, district, or city level that may have shared interests in the health of the neighborhood

Examples:

Examples:

Examples:



Meet to Share Your Findings

Step Two: Investigate

Use the questions below to help kick-start your discussion.

- Were there particular places in the neighborhood that surprised you?
 - Businesses you weren't aware of?
 - Missing sidewalks or poor street crossings?
 - Hidden places of delight?
- Were there places of current or historic neighborhood conflict?
 - Are there opportunities to take small steps that demonstrate reconciliation and peace in these places?
- What areas seemed most in need of enhancement?
- Who were some unexpected stakeholders?
 - Are there ways you can connect with them if you have not already?
 - How might you begin listening to the needs and desires of these stakeholders?

Take some notes about what stands out most among your group.

Discussion Notes:

A large rectangular area outlined with a dotted green border, intended for taking discussion notes.



Continue to Brainstorm as a Group

As a group, look at the stars on the maps you drew of your property and the surrounding neighborhood and your list of stakeholders.

Do you already have some preliminary project ideas? If so, write these ideas here. Don't be afraid to write anything and everything down.

Get creative! Note what ideas inspire the most excitement and energy.

At your next meeting, you will narrow down ideas based on your resources and the needs of your community and neighborhood.

Preliminary Project Ideas:

A large rectangular area defined by a dotted green border, intended for writing preliminary project ideas.

Step Three: Ideate

A Prayer for Vision and Creativity

Holy One, who enlightens our minds
and sets our hearts aflame:

Grant us clear hearing of the needs around us,
bold visions of the possibilities before us,
and passion devoted to your transforming love.

May we recognize our resources as treasures to be shared,
our time as a canvas for your story of redemption,
and our church property as a signpost to your kingdom.

Give us the inspiration to find new possibilities
and the courage to take risks in service to you
and our neighbors.

In the holy name of Jesus, we pray,
Amen.

Assessing Capacity and Brainstorming Ideas

The goal of this step is to determine your church capacity for implementing a redemptive placemaking project and narrow down which projects to further explore.

The following exercises are designed to help you be realistic about the resources you have available to undertake a project and sustain it over time. Even the best of intentions can run out of steam if there are not enough resources to keep things going properly. Meet together as a team to assess your capacity in the areas outlined on the following pages.



Assess Your Resources

Use the following matrices to think through the resources you can bring to this project. Categorize your project ideas into general dollar amounts to begin assessing financial resources needed to accomplish each. It's okay if you don't fully know how much each will cost. Simply use this rubric as a guide for a ballpark estimate.

\$ Money: *How much financial capital will your project ideas require and what options exist for monetary support?*

\$100 Ideas	\$1,000 Ideas	\$100,000 Ideas

As you review possible project ideas, consider the following questions:

- *What money is available for this work?*
- *Could you (re)allocate mission or building funds for any of your project ideas?*
- *How easily could you raise money for a specific project?*
- *Are there church or neighborhood/city grants that might help with this work?*
- *Are there in-kind resources that could help with materials and services related to a project?*
- *Who needs to be consulted (or who has the ultimate say) over the appropriation of funds and other resources?*

As you brainstorm project ideas, frame them in terms of running a race. Some races are short and require little training. Others require months of training and sustained effort. Not every project idea will fit squarely in one category or another, but this rubric will help guide your assessment of the varying levels of commitment necessary to implement and maintain specific projects.

 **Moxie:** *How much grit can you give to implementing and maintaining a project?*

Distance	Project Ideas	What can you commit to?
<p>100M Dash: <i>Less than 1-month implementation, minimal volunteer help, little to no regular maintenance</i></p>		
<p>5K Run: <i>3-6 month implementation, moderate volunteer help, ongoing regular maintenance</i></p>		
<p>Marathon: <i>6-12 month implementation, significant volunteer help, long-term regular maintenance, may require infrastructure installation, professional design, and city permitting</i></p>		

- ◀ If you have not done a placemaking project before, we recommend you start small even if you have significant resources at your disposal. It is easier to sustain commitment if you start small and grow than if you invest a lot of time and energy for a project that does not work.
- ◀ A benefit to a small and incremental approach is that it turns failure into a low-cost, low-risk learning experience. If a small project fails, you have not wasted many resources. If anything, you have gained perspective about what does not work and perhaps deepened your knowledge of the needs of stakeholders. You can use these lessons to inform further projects and build on the momentum.
- ◀ For example, imagine that you decide to add a prayer garden to your property to create a space where members and neighbors can stop, appreciate the natural beauty of your land, and reflect. Rather than making a large investment in landscaping right away, you might consider starting small: find inexpensive seating, put out flowers in inexpensive pots to create a pleasant place, and gauge whether people actually use it. Remember to encourage your members to use the space themselves when they are present! A rhythm of activity brings life and vibrancy to a property and encourages growing use.



Assess Preliminary Project Ideas

Based on your previous meetings, conversations, reflections, and initial resource discernment make a list of possible projects you might undertake. Also consider where there are gaps in information that could be helpful to close before making a decision. For example, it might be helpful to survey your congregation, set up a meeting with stakeholders who might be involved, or do some preliminary research on what would be involved for each of your project ideas. End your meeting by assigning each team member to do research so that you have the information you need to choose a project.

Project Idea	What stakeholders would benefit?	Unknowns; What do we need to know?
<i>eg. benches in the parish garden</i>	<i>Passersby who want to enjoy the garden; elder church members waiting for rides</i>	<i>Parts of the garden that are most accessible and sunny/shaded.</i>

Inviting public use of your property can feel risky and will likely open the door to various concerns within your church community. Being cognizant of potential problems is important, but we encourage you to not let these fears stop you from carrying out redemptive placemaking work. We believe that Jesus calls his followers to be wise risk-takers. Here are some common apprehensions and suggested ways to navigate each of them.

Liability: Check with your insurance agent about sufficient coverage for events that are open to the community or improvements to your property intended for public use, but do not let this dissuade you from pursuing a project. Too often, churches will disregard exciting ideas because they assume that expensive insurance coverage is required without actually checking with their provider. You might be surprised how receptive your insurance company is to your project ideas. Moreover, churches are often already carrying extensive coverage that makes even bold projects require only minimal additions to the policy.

Vandalism: Putting out lawn furniture, games, and art for public enjoyment may subject these things to harsh treatment or even being stolen. We recommend starting with inexpensive options to assess whether or not these things will actually be vandalized. If you haven't spent thousands of dollars then the disappearance of a couple of chairs will not feel like such a significant loss. Additionally, consider brightly painting your accessories and placing stickers or signage that reads along the lines of: "Chairs are courtesy of 'Your Church Name'. Please enjoy sitting here." Small statements like this can make all the difference for curbing ill-intentioned action.

Research has also shown that public art, like murals, is often left untouched by tagging and vandalism because there is a culture of mutual respect that street taggers have for the work of other artists.

Soliciting Bad Behavior: Oftentimes people fear the types of people or activity that might be attracted to using outdoor seating and other community engaging accessories. Good behavior drives out bad behavior so that is why we highly encourage you to actively use the spaces you create and make continuous open invitations to neighbors to use these spaces as well. Perhaps you can even identify a block "mayor" who would be willing to keep eyes on the street and help serve as a safeguard for these places. One of the best avenues for keeping this issue in check is knowing your neighbors and stakeholders and creating partnerships that can provide oversight for these places. Providing good lighting and clear sightlines are also important for preserving the safety of a place.

One of the reasons we suggest you start with a small, low-risk project is this allows you to assess the legitimacy of the various apprehensions raised. Oftentimes people spend a lot of energy worrying about hypotheticals, which ultimately paralyzes them from moving forward. If you implement a small-scale project that requires only a little investment, you have the opportunity to root the conversation in reality. A pilot project will help you determine whether or not the apprehensions are founded, and you may actually discover other concerns that need accounting for in your project. Either way, when you have not invested large amounts of money, you are freer to take risks, adapt where changes are needed, and negotiate concerns.

Step Four: Initiate

A Prayer for Clarity and Implementation

Come, Holy Spirit,

You who descended upon the apostles as tongues of flame, sending them into the streets to proclaim the gospel to the nations, guide us now as we serve the community outside our doors.

Send us the gift of wisdom to help us decide and plan.

Send us the creativity to make our project a sign of your inspiration.

Send us fortitude as we face the work, challenges, and rewards before us.

We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ,

Whose footsteps transformed the places where he carried the good news.

In the holy name of Jesus, we pray,
Amen.

Making a Decision

By this step you will hopefully be able to share what you have learned and select a project based on community needs and opportunities. Base your decision on your available resources, buy-in from stakeholders, and potential impact. Pray with your group to ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in selecting a project that matches your interests, gifts, and resources and the needs and desires of your stakeholders.

When selecting your project, keep the following considerations in mind:

- **Start small**, especially if your community has never done a placemaking project. Limited, low-risk projects that are adaptable and nimble can be valuable pilots that lay the groundwork for more ambitious investments on your church property and in the surrounding neighborhood.
- **Observe your congregation's procedures and protocols.** Make sure to consult with whomever has control over church finances, mission resources, and overall decision-making.
- **Consider starting with two placemaking projects:** one that primarily serves stakeholders within the church community and another that connects to the broader neighborhood. This approach allows you to be attentive to several groups of stakeholders at once while building commitment from the members of your congregation whose time and resources will support projects that benefit others.
- **Think of your stakeholders as partners in your mission, not simply beneficiaries.** A successful project will require their buy-in and sense of ownership. Therefore, it's worth building relationships with stakeholders as you plan, execute, and evaluate your project.

Record your placemaking project decision below. Congratulations on discerning an opportunity to do redemptive placemaking in your place!

Your Redemptive Placemaking Project:

A large rectangular area enclosed by a dotted green border, intended for recording the details of the redemptive placemaking project.



Tips for Project Implementation

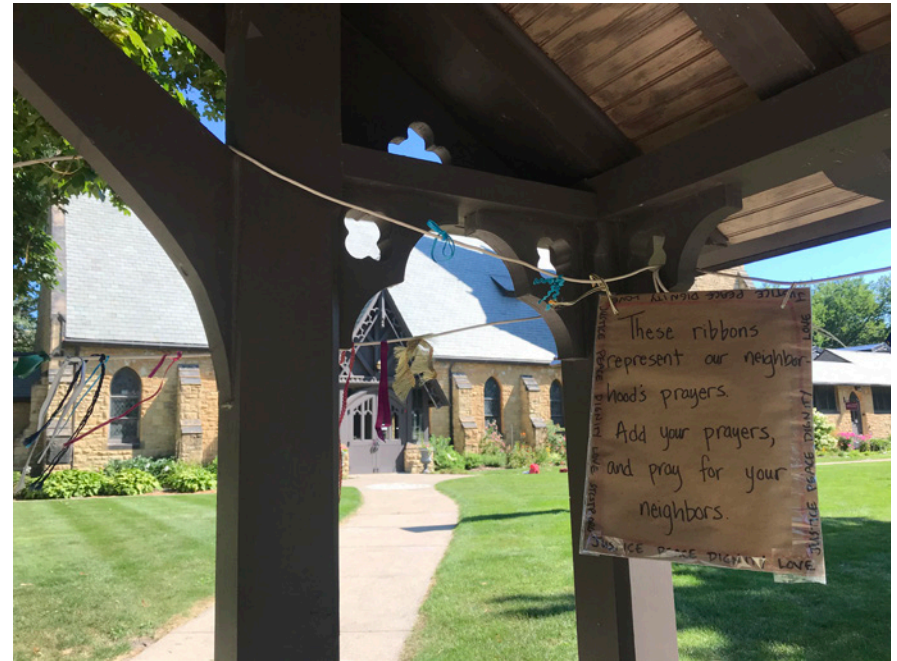
Identify and solicit the people who will be key players in the success of the project.

- **Project Coordinator(s)** A project coordinator will develop and manage the timeline and task list, serving as the hub of information for all project partners and participants. Choose someone who is detail-oriented, organized, easily able to multi-task and prioritize, and can successfully build relationships and drive a common vision amongst members of a team.
- **Storyteller(s)** A storyteller will document and share about the project and vision in a compelling way that will get others excited about the work that is happening, both within your church community and around the larger neighborhood. Choose someone who is gifted with using social media, engaging with creative perspectives, and speaking in winsome ways.
- **Connector(s)** A connector will facilitate valuable partnerships with project participants both within your church community and within the larger neighborhood. They will be persons adept in identifying opportunities for volunteer help, in-kind resources, and community connections, as well as navigating politics and resistance from project critics. Choose someone who is a natural networker, locally invested, and well-respected in the community.
- **Implementer(s)** An implementer will do the work of actually getting the project done by providing the necessary technical expertise and/or physical labor to install and complete the project. Choose those who have the technical skills, are willing to swing a hammer, and have patient oversight to help others, such as youth and neighborhood volunteers, do the work alongside them.



Connect the project to the community and connect the community to the project. Think of the community both in terms of your congregation and the neighbors who will benefit from your project.

- **Invite Participation** Think of creative ways to involve the community in the project. Instilling project ownership is a key ingredient for encouraging others to actively interact with the project and provide maintenance on a long-term basis. For example, if you decide to install some public art, could you develop a neighborhood Request For Proposals that invites both local residents and church members to develop the art? Or, if you plan to put in some public seating, could you work with a local middle school to have students help design, build, and paint the benches?
- **Tell the Story** Be sure to communicate with the local community about what you are doing and why you are doing it. Too often projects are done with the intention of serving the community, yet very little thought and press is given to actually sharing the process and goals with the community. Post the plans on your Facebook page and website. Talk about it on Twitter. Share pictures and develop the vision with the local community. Keep a record of before and after to document any positive changes that result from the implementation of the project.
- **Celebrate Together** Celebrate when the project is complete and invite the community to join. This is an easy way to encourage the church community and local neighborhood to use the new space. Making sure people know they are invited to interact with the project is crucial for active use. Consider hosting a “ribbon cutting” ceremony, even for something as simple as a creative and fanciful park bench. If you’ve had community participation in the design and implementation, this celebration is a fun opportunity to highlight the work, talents, and gifts of those involved.



Step Five: Iterate

A Prayer for Reflective Hindsight

Our Steadfast Lord,

You guided our steps as we trod new paths.

We give you thanks for the blessings of successes and lessons learned,

for new relationships and insights,

and for the privilege of doing your holy work in the world.

Help us to see clearly our triumphs and failings,

and grant us the persistence to see this project as just the beginning of new mission in your name.

In the holy name of Jesus, we pray,

Amen.

Reflect and Repeat

As we've emphasized before, placemaking is an iterative process. That is why we have encouraged you to take small steps that enable you to test ideas and projects without much risk on the front end. The small projects are key building blocks that help you learn and press into bigger projects as you develop deeper insights and relationships with your place and stakeholders over time.

After you have implemented your redemptive placemaking project, ask each team member to answer the questions on the following pages based on their perceptions and experience. Meet together as a group to discuss your team's individual insights, identifying any common themes or responses that emerge. Give yourself time to celebrate successes, mourn aspects of the project that did not go as planned, and affirm one another's hard work. Then, consider what your next project might be!



Project Perception:

<p><i>From your perspective, what were the project "wins" (big and/or small)?</i></p>	
<p><i>How would you define a successful project? Based on your definition, would you say the project was successful?</i></p>	
<p><i>How was the project received by members of your congregation? Share any comments and feedback you heard. Comment on the level of active engagement as well.</i></p>	
<p><i>How was the project received by members of the neighborhood and/or project partners? Share any comments and feedback you heard. Comment on the level of active engagement as well.</i></p>	

Project Execution:

<p><i>What aspects of the project were easiest to execute? What in particular worked well with these aspects?</i></p>	
<p><i>What were the challenges you faced in implementing the project?</i></p>	
<p><i>Were you able to overcome these challenges? How so?</i></p>	
<p><i>What might you do differently next time?</i></p>	

Project Learnings:

<p><i>What did you learn about the needs of your neighborhood?</i></p>	
<p><i>What new relationships did you build? Are there opportunities to grow these with future projects?</i></p>	
<p><i>Did you realize any opportunities for future placemaking projects? Are there ways in which you might expand on the work you have already done?</i></p>	

Beyond Planting the Seed

Our goal with this toolkit is to help you discern and grow your church's vision and mission in creative ways that consider your physical property as an asset for serving your local community and deepening relationships with neighbors. This is an initial call to step outside and take the street view of your property; to envision the capacity that exists for reflecting the truth, beauty, and goodness of Jesus in your neighborhood. We encourage you to start small, so that you might feel freer to take risks and adapt projects as needed throughout the process. Too often we've seen churches easily paralyzed by large scale plans that feel unachievable.

We understand that for many churches, resources are limited. We don't want this to be a hindrance to engaging in this good community work, which is another reason we suggest beginning with simple and nimble projects that can be accomplished without extensive resource investment. We are reminded that the way of Jesus exemplified in the Bible is a path of small and faithful steps of service to those around us. These small steps are intrinsic to a larger vision and a longer view of what it means to be the church pointing towards Christ's redeeming work and the fullness of God's kingdom that is to come. Thus, like planting a mustard seed, we hope that the small projects this toolkit inspires will whet the appetite of your church to pursue future projects and greater partnerships with your neighborhood.

Let the bike rack installation lead to better bike lanes and more mobility options for those in your neighborhood!

Let the community garden lead to farmers markets and better food security for the local community!

Let the outdoor seating lead to community game nights and knowing the names and stories of neighbors!

The church serves as a great testament of God's faithfulness to bring redemption to every aspect of creation, even the streets of our neighborhoods. We believe your physical property is a valuable component of the redemptive story, so step outside and ask God to give you the eyes to see how you might make his glory revealed on your property and in your neighborhood. By developing vibrant places for sharing stories and invitations, you have even more opportunity to share the good news of the reconciling work of Jesus with those in your neighborhood and community.

“ *Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.”*

-Isaiah 58:12

Additional Resources

Articles

- *101 Small Ways You Can Improve Your City*
www.curbed.com/2016/9/22/13019420/urban-design-community-building-placemaking
- *Beginner-Level Placemaking Recipes*
www.aarp.org/livable-communities/tool-kits-resources/info-2019/pop-up-beginner-recipes.html
- *The Pop-Up Placemaking Tool Kit* (AARP & Team Better Block)
www.aarp.org/livable-communities/tool-kits-resources/info-2019/pop-up-tool-kit.html

Books

- *Good Places for All* by Mark Bjelland
- *The Space Between: A Christian Engagement with the Built Environment* by Eric O. Jacobsen
- *Tactical Urbanism* by Mike Lydon and Anthony Garcia
- *Happy City* by Charles Montgomery
- *Walkable City* by Jeff Speck

Media

- The Embedded Church Podcast by Eric O. Jacobsen & Sara Joy Proppe | www.embeddedchurch.com
- Strong Towns Podcasts | www.strongtowns.org/podcast

Organizations

- Proximity Project | www.proximityprojectinc.com
- Project For Public Spaces | www.pps.org
- Strong Towns | www.strongtowns.org
- Team Better Block | www.teambetterblock.com

About the Authors

Sara Joy Proppe ('Pro-pay') is a native Texan who is always looking for good walking paths, neighborly connections, and meaningful stories. She is the Founder and Director of Proximity Project, a firm centered on educating and activating churches to be creative stewards of their properties within the context of their neighborhoods. She guides churches in implementing everything from small-scale placemaking improvements to pursuing real estate development projects. Prior to starting Proximity Project, she worked in private real estate development, leading numerous historical rehab, housing, and commercial development projects in the Twin Cities. She writes and speaks nationally on the intersections of theology, placemaking, and design for dignity and is the co-host of The Embedded Church podcast. Sara Joy has a B.A. in English Literature and a Masters in Community & Regional Planning. She currently resides in St. Paul, Minnesota where she loves to cook, garden, and ride her bike.

Edward Dunar is a Ph.D. Candidate in Systematic Theology and Instructor at Fordham University in New York City. His research focuses on the church's foundation in the Holy Spirit and call to mission in the built environment. As an extension of this work, he has published articles related to how theologians can contribute to conversations about urban space, the relationship between race, theology, and urban design in U.S. history, and methods for using pop culture to teach theological ideas. He is passionate about teaching and helping students find connections between theology and their own interests, concerns, and careers. He has also served as a lay minister in settings ranging from a homeless day shelter in Boston to a summer worshipping community on Cape Cod. Edward lives in New Haven, CT with his wife Kate, a hospital chaplain. In his free time, he enjoys hiking, theater, and science fiction. He holds a B.A. in Religious Studies and an M.Div. in Christianity.



An Unexpected & Providential Partnership

In December of 2017 I received an unsolicited email inquiry from Edward, who was researching theological connections in the built environment. He asked if I needed help with Proximity Project work, which he had discovered through some of my online writings. Proximity Project was still such a budding enterprise that I couldn't imagine having someone work alongside me, but I was intrigued! In January 2018 we met for coffee at Augustine's Bar & Bakery in St. Paul. And, over the next few months our partnership was born. He moved to St. Paul in June for his summer research grant. We spent the summer developing this toolkit among other things, while I made the bold transition to make Proximity Project my full-time work. I had long dreamed of developing this toolkit and his partnership has made it a reality for me. His support, insight, and giftings could not have been more meaningful and helpful for getting this toolkit off the ground. I am incredibly grateful for his generosity of time, knowledge, and wisdom, which has given me continued courage to press into Proximity Project. To God be the glory.