

Six House Meetings

For exploring the comic book...

HOPE AT WORK: First Steps in Congregation-based Community Organizing



This document provides you a step-by-step guide for six house meetings that gather the insights of Hope at Work, a comic book that helps congregations begin community organizing efforts in their locale. By following this guide, you can offer people a rich personal experience that satisfies their yearnings to be involved in effective mission.

About these house meetings

These 90-120 minute “house meetings” ideally take place in the homes of individual members of your congregation, a setting that encourages honest, intimate conversation among a small group of participants. The meeting is really *not* a meeting in the traditional sense. Participants don’t need to plow through an agenda, keep minutes, or make decisions on behalf of the entire congregation. A facilitator takes the place of a chairperson and each participant comes away with benefits specific to her or his own yearnings for meaningful ministry in God’s world.

The intent of these six meetings is to acquaint people with the church-based community organizing comic book, *Hope at Work*. This delightful resource draws its readers towards a decision about beginning community organizing through your congregation. The meetings also help participants discover or strengthen their resolve and ability to make a difference in God’s world.

For maximum benefit, the meetings should be used in the order prescribed here. Because each of the meetings can stand on its own as a single learning experience, the suggestions here can also support other patterns or sequencing of meetings.

In the order described in this document, the six 1 to 2 hour meetings follow a path that moves from knowledge towards action. Used only partially, the set of meetings can help acquaint participants with the rudiments of congregation-based community organizing. In that case, the meetings may not be useful in bringing a group to a shared decision about beginning this work together. (In order to accommodate situations in which only one gathering is possible, a single-meeting option is also offered in this user’s guide.)



About the power of conversation

Some of the most important changes begin when a few people start talking about something important. Conversation—not discussion or interviewing—draws out of people who they really are. Body language, eye contact and words combine to form a powerful motivation toward shared interests or concerted action. Heartbeats and breathing adjust to a similar rate, people intuitively find a common pace and style of communication. Stress is lowered and natural feel-good chemicals begin coursing through people's brains. Relationships deepen, and groups bond together in a common identity.

Conversation is at the heart of these house meetings; it will also be at the heart of your congregation's exploration of community organizing. (For further information and on conversational methods of change, see www.turningtooneanother.net/howtostart)

About leading house meetings

To facilitate these meetings you should be less a presenter and more a guide for conversation. Your questions and invitations are more important than your knowledge. Your ability to draw out others' wisdom is more valuable than sharing your own.

Each meeting uses the same general format and the same types of activities. Each meeting depends on participants' willingness to share their thoughts and learn from each other. Each meeting requires that participants read pertinent sections of *Hope at Work*, which will be the basis of all conversations and activities. (For ordering information, see www.augsburgfortress.org/store, then search for *Hope at Work*.)

In order to be an effective facilitator, consider these general suggestions:

- Familiarize yourself with the entire contents of the comic book and this guide.
- Select from the suggested schedule for each meeting those activities that best fit the group of participants you have invited.
- Use this guide to construct a rough framework for the progress—and timing—of the activities of each session.
- Choose the questions and prompts that will best invite participant conversation.
- If you anticipate that participants will take concrete steps to begin community organizing efforts, visit <http://www.elca.org/organizing> for deeper background.
- If you will also be the person who invites participants to these meetings, determine how you will extend those invitations in ways that are personal and compelling.
- Ask one or more participants to evaluate your facilitation of the first meeting, and adjust your behaviors for the remaining sessions.
- As you lead and elicit conversation, keep in tension participants' need to move through a variety of subjects while also learning about each matter at some depth.

Description of a typical house meeting

A typical house meeting lasts about 90-120 minutes, which allows for a longer period of time to be spent on a great number of matters or activities. You can adjust the number and duration of each part of the meeting to the interests and abilities of participants.

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Time</u>
Welcome and introductions/check-in	10 minutes
Prayer	10 minutes
Conversation 1 (Activity 1)	20-25 minutes
Refreshment break	15 minutes
Conversation 2 (Activity 2)	20-25 minutes
Conversation 3	10-20 minutes
Closing comments and prayer	5-15 minutes
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TOTAL	90-120 minutes

Welcome and introductions/check-in

During this time you greet participants by name and direct them to a place of refreshments or a comfortable chair. If necessary, ask participants to complete and wear name tags. When it's time to assemble, welcome the entire group and begin introductions (first meeting) or check-in time, using any of these prompts:

- Tell us your name, how you spend a typical week, and why you've chosen to be here.
- What have you learned about power (change, motivation, the movement of God's Spirit) during this past week? (For more information about the concept and practice of power, see http://www.janethagberg.com/real_power.htm.)
- Who has been persuasive in your life these past several days?
- What has surprised (heartened, humbled, emboldened) you recently?
- What godly good to you see being accomplished where you spend most of your time? How can you tell?
- What's started (or continued) to burn in your soul?
- What have you noticed this past week that might be important to this group?

Prayer

Begin and end each meeting with prayer or centering ritual. Depending on participants' comfort and experience levels, you might use this time in any of the following ways:

- Select especially helpful pieces from a book of prayers or devotions, or the prayers portion of your congregation's worship book.
- Invite participants to be prayer or centering leaders for each of the house meetings.
- Offer "breathing prayer prompts" as a kind of silent prayer: As participants breathe slowly and deeply, name prayer subjects that focus short thoughts between breaths.
- Ask participants to offer their own suggestions for specific prayers, and then begin a prayer circle that focuses on these matters. (After you begin, participants continue out loud with petitions until you complete the circle with a final petition.)

- Select a subject on which to focus, ask for participants' opinions or knowledge about this matter, then frame a prayer that consolidate this gathered wisdom.
- Refrain from prayers that explain to God what God undoubtedly already knows. Likewise with prayers that are filled with code-language or overwrought stylistic flourishes. Use common words, sentence fragments, pauses and some silence.

Conversation 1 (Activity 1)

If you choose to begin the meeting with a conversation, choose from among the prompts found later in this design (See suggestions specific to each meeting.) Remember to solicit the thoughts of all participants, gently encouraging the quiet ones to offer their wisdom and the garrulous ones to give conversational space to others. Model the back-and-forth nature of conversation, encouraging participants to ask their own questions of each other, thereby avoiding question-and-answer styles of sharing. Keep your own opinions short, to the point and rarely voiced. When you are asked a question directly, consider the value of asking other participants their thoughts before voicing your own.

Choose from among any of the following conversation formats:

- Pairs, with both participants having equal time to talk and listen.
- Triads, perhaps with one person assigned the role of reflector or recorder.
- Mixers, where people move from person to person, sharing about the same question.
- Whole group conversation, perhaps captured on newsprint or with another visual medium (mind-map, overhead projector).
- Fishbowl format, where a pair or triad converses about a matter while others surround them as a listening circle. (Later, the listeners reflect on what they have heard and perhaps reverse roles with the inner circle.)
- Role play with thoughtful sharing, perhaps based on the story line of *Hope at Work*.

If you choose to begin the meeting with a shared experience—see the following suggestions specific to each meeting—then explain quickly what participants will do together as well as the purpose for the activity.

Refreshment break

As break time approaches, look for a natural stopping point in the discussion or action. Ask the meeting's host to direct participants to bathrooms and refreshment tables. Encourage participants to stretch their limbs and to refresh or renew friendships.

Conversation 2 (Activity 2)

A second time of conversation follows. Try to vary the conversational approach, not only for the sake of variety but also to allow and encourage deeper attention to the matters at hand. Another good reason: To challenge the group away from patterns of thinking and speaking that allow only a few individuals to dominate the verbal exchanges.

If the meeting has begun with an activity, this second conversation could be a debriefing of the experience. These prompts might be helpful:

- What (in the experience) corresponds to your own feelings, behaviors or identity?
- What challenged you to think or act differently?
- What was the most enriching part of the experience? Why?
- What would you do differently, should you repeat this activity? Why?
- What portions of this activity correspond to a portion of Scripture that is especially meaningful to your life?
- If we had more time, where would this experience likely lead? How do you know?

If you choose to use this time segment for an (additional) activity, you might wish to choose one that takes the story line and learning from the book and pushes them into events and circumstances that are familiar to participants. Another option is to use this activity time to foster creativity or encourage participants' imaginations about congregation-based community organizing. In any case, consult the meeting plan for each meeting for further suggestions.

Conversation 3

(In a shortened meeting schedule, this conversation might be optional.) A good way to think of a third conversation is as a deepening or broadening conversation. In that framework, consider how you might lead participants to another level of thought and sharing. These prompts could help that to happen:

- Of what we've talked about together, which matters still warrant further conversation?
- What questions or comments haven't yet been raised?
- Whose viewpoint (about a matter or question) would you like to hear more of?
- If we were to take seriously what we've talked about, what might be a likely outcome of that conversation? Why?
- Based on our conversations, for what might this group to pray in the coming days?
- What parts of our conversation call into question some of what you have believed or practiced in the past?
- What (about our conversation) don't you understand (or agree with) still?
- How does our conversation connect with your experiences (current events, the direction our congregation is headed, the teachings of Jesus) in these times?

If it seems important, bring this conversation to a close, perhaps with participants in agreement or perhaps with matters still whirling inside of necessary tensions among viewpoints or traditions.

Closing comments and prayer

The final conversation may warrant a few of your summary comments or generic observations. You might also connect here with relevant scriptures, doctrines or statements of the Faith, or current events that are important to the subject(s) at hand.

You or a participant can close with another prayer or reflection, drawing together the blessings and yearnings expressed during the meeting's conversations. Remind participants of the date and content (with assignments) for the next meeting. Dismiss the group with your thanks.

Options for setting and scheduling

The six house meetings will likely take place in the evening, at the home of a member of your congregation. You might consider the benefits of other options for settings and scheduling, such as these:

- Schedule the meetings as informal potluck dinners. The conversations and activities will mix well with the blessings of shared meals!
- Hold one of your meetings at a "surprise location" that might lend some real-life contexts to the conversations. For example, meet at the restaurant at a bus station or truck stop, a local park, a place of recreation, a bar, coffee shop or lounge, the sanctuary of another place of worship.
- Try a "walk and talk" format, where participants spend part of the time in pairs or triads sharing their thoughts about a specific matter while taking a short walk.
- Consider the availability of participants for an early breakfast meeting at a local restaurant or member's home.
- Schedule your meetings as after-worship luncheons on Sundays.
- Use the six meetings as the content for a six-week seasonal discipline (i.e., Lent), with a larger number of house meetings scheduled throughout the congregation.
- Combine the six sessions into a 24-hour overnight retreat away from your locale.
- If the group of participants wants to meet for a longer span of time, divide each of the sessions into two parts and meet over twelve or thirteen weeks. (This approximates one quarter of a Sunday school curricular year.)

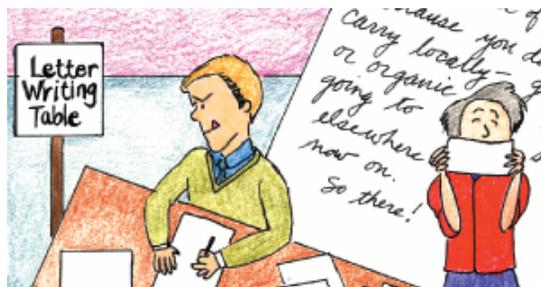
Materials needed

In order to conduct the six house meetings, you will need to provide the following materials or resources:

- Participant copies of *Hope at Work*. Order at www.augsburgfortress.org/store
- Copies of the handout "One-to-One's That Work"
- Pads of writing paper, pens or pencils
- Low-impact masking tape or other means of displaying newsprint sheets
- Newsprint and water-soluble markers (with portable or stand-up easel)
- Bibles for participants' reference
- A comfortable, well-lit, well-ventilated setting with comfortable chairs, couches or pillows.
- A place or method of displaying newsprint sheets
- Laptop computer connected to Web site, www.elca.org/organizing (optional)
- LCD projector and screen (optional)

What follow are plans for the six house meetings

Meeting One: Changing the World



The content for this session is simple: A small group of God's people can change the world, one action at a time. The group learns the concept and skills of one-to-ones, and reflects on the experience. (For a generic treatment of a house meeting, see "Description of a typical house meeting" earlier in this document. Specific directions follow here.)

Welcome and introductions/check-in

10 minutes

As participants arrive, distribute copies of *Hope at Work* to them. Instruct them to find, while they are waiting for the meeting to begin, any places in the comic book where individuals first met or got to know each other better

When all participants have arrived, ask them to introduce themselves briefly using these prompts: What is your name, and what question would you like us to ask you, whose answer will reveal something interesting about you? (Obviously each participant briefly answers that question as well!)

Prayer or Centering Ritual

10 minutes

Your prayer might include gratitude to God for the people who have chosen to be part of these meetings, for wisdom and honesty in the conversations yet to come, and for joy in service to God's will.

Conversation 1 (Activity 1)

20-25 minutes

This meeting concentrates on the idea of one-to-ones. Refer participants to pages 4 – 7 in *Hope at Work*, which they should read silently. After a few moments, ask participants to talk together about any of the following matters:

- How have conversations helped you get to know someone better?
- What are some good conversational gambits you can use to start (or deepen) a get-to-know-you conversation? (HINT: The reading from *Hope at Work* might contain helpful examples.)
- What might get in the way of genuine, heartfelt conversation?

End this time segment with a 2-5 minute presentation characterizing "one-to-ones," a key element in community organizing. (For some sample background about one-to-ones, go to www.marininstitute.org/site/resources/20-tool-kits/68-community-organizing-one-on-ones.)

If you choose to begin the meeting with an activity, ask participants to assemble a list of effective and ineffective "get to know you" conversation starters. Participants might write

their ideas individually, then talk with each other about their ideas, and finally share with the whole group. Write participants' thoughts onto the newsprint. Compare participants' ideas with the apparent conversation starters used on pages 4 and 7 in *Hope at Work*.

Refreshment break

15 minutes

Because this is likely the first meeting of the group, ask your host to tell the location of bathrooms and give directions for any refreshments she or he is serving. If the time or setting allows it, encourage participants to walk around—perhaps even outside—and to learn more about each other during break time.

Conversation 2 (Activity 2)

20-25 minutes

The second conversation is a practice of one-to-ones. Divide the group into pairs, indicating break-out locations in the home (porch, another room, a study or family room, outside seating area) where the pairs can conduct their one-to-ones.

Referring to your earlier presentation, distribute copies of the handout, "One-to-Ones That Work". Provide 3-5 minutes for participants to scan or read the handout. Then ask pairs to find a semi-private location and begin their conversations with each other. They should divide in half the time remaining in this segment so that both of them have opportunity to be the subject of the questions *and* the asker/listener.

When about half of the remaining time has elapsed, visit each of the pairs, reminding them that it is about time to switch roles.

If you choose to make this time segment more activity-based, use a fishbowl technique—see a description earlier—to conduct a more involved or in-depth one-to-one. Ask participants on the outside of the fishbowl to observe carefully, taking notes. (See http://www.udel.edu/dssep/teaching_strategies/fishbowl.htm for one description of this technique.)

Save about ten minutes for a debriefing of the experience. Distribute copies of the handout, "One-to-Ones that Work," asking participants to read the handout and then offer comments or questions regarding the fishbowl one-to-one they just observed.

Conversation 3

10-20 minutes

This final conversation helps participants deepen their understanding of how intimate, appreciative conversations change the world. Use any of the following prompts—or the generic suggestions offered earlier in this guide—to assist the flow of conversation among participants. (Learn more about "appreciative inquiry" at <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/>.)

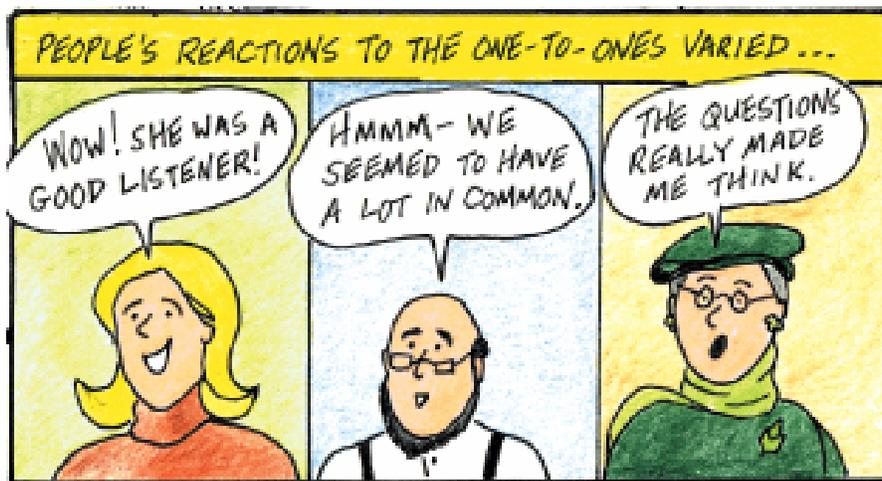
- In *Hope at Work* do you see the first hints of change? How do those moments depend on conversation?
- When in your life have significant and lasting changes begun with a conversation? (For example, think of meeting a soon-to-be friend or future spouse.)

- How might significant and lasting change in this community start with conversations (one-to-ones)? Imagine the conversations in terms of setting and content.
- Where in Scripture did conversations signal (or cause) important changes in individual lives or in larger movements of God's Spirit? (For example, the snake's conversation with Eve, Abram's conversations with his punishment-bound guests, Jesus' conversation with the woman at the well, David's conversation with the prophet Nathan, or Paul's conversation with Lydia at the riverside.)

Closing comments and prayer

5-15 minutes

Use this time to summarize key learnings or key places of disagreement. Ask participants to read most of the book—especially pages 2-10 and 19-20 and 28-29 --in preparation for the next meeting. If you choose, ask one or more participants to be responsible for refreshments and prayers for the next meeting. End the evening with a prayer of gratitude for the gift of change and the power of conversation in our lives.



Meeting Two: Looking at What's Inside Us



In this meeting, participants examine their inner call, their outer call, their motivations for organizing, their spiritual moorings, their willingness to do more than talk, and their personal histories. (For a generic treatment of a house meeting, see “Description of a typical house meeting” earlier in this document. Specific directions follow here.)

Welcome and introductions/check-in

10 minutes

Greet participants by name as they arrive. Welcome newcomers. Engage the gathering group in sharing about the progress of their lives since the last meeting. (See the generic description of a typical meeting, found earlier in this design.)

If you choose to use this time of introductions and check-in to focus more on the theme or content of the meeting, use any of these prompts:

- If you have a personal mission statement, what can you tell us about it?
- What word or phrase describes your sense of life purpose?
- In the past few days (weeks), what new thing have you learned about yourself?
- What keeps you going?

Prayer or Centering Ritual

10 minutes

This moment in the meeting can set the tone for inner seeking, or the willingness to share with others what's at the core of participants' lives or personalities. Another direction might be the joy or blessing of being able to reveal one's self in an accepting and affirming environment.

Conversation 1 (Activity 1)

20-25 minutes

Refer participants to pages 2-10, 19-20 and 28-29 in *Hope at Work*. Provide a few moments for rereading these sections of the comic book. Then begin the conversation using any of these prompts:

- What did you notice about the “inner call” of the characters in the book? How easily did you discover their core convictions? Why or why not?
- How would you define “inner call” or “core convictions”?
- How do your core convictions develop into actions (or inactions) in your life?
- Name some of the important inner qualities of the characters in this book. Which do you think function most powerfully to motivate those people to take action?

If you choose to use this time for an activity, ask participants to reread pages 4, 6-7 and 10 in *Hope at Work*. After a short time, divide the group into two smaller groups, each with the same task: Conceive of a different (better?) way of drawing out people to reveal

what makes them tick. How, when and where would it take place? What would be accomplished? What would be difficult?

Provide a few moments for each group to do its work, and then ask both groups to report out what they have discovered and invented together. Allow some time for comments or questions.

Refreshment break

15 minutes

During the refreshment break for this meeting listen unobtrusively to the sidebar conversations of participants. Are any of their core convictions coming to the surface already? Do they seem to avoid those conversational directions?

Conversation 2 (Activity 2)

20-25 minutes

In this second round of sharing, participants begin the process of revealing their spiritual moorings or inner workings. Use any of these prompts to conduct this conversation:

- Which of the characters in the book seems most introspective? How can you tell? What comes from that quality or activity?
- In terms of your basic values or understanding of your faith tradition, which of the characters in *Hope at Work* most resembles you? Explain your answer.
- What inside of you seems to be pushing you to explore congregation-based community organizing even more?
- How would you respond to any of the introspective questions or comments raised by the book's leading characters on pages 6-7, 12-13, 18-19 and 22-23?
- What personal quality or conviction would you have a hard time giving up if you were asked or forced to do so?

If you choose to engage participants in an activity during this segment, ask the group members to imagine themselves conducting one-to-ones with the characters in the book. What questions would you ask each of these people in order to find out what was at the core of their spiritual identity? Use the newsprint to record participants' answers.

An option: Role play these imagined conversations with the book's characters. Another option: Use the contents of the handout, "One to Ones That Work" for some starter ideas. (For additional insights about role-playing, see <http://www.ntlf.com/pod/roleplay.htm>.)

Conversation 3

10-20 minutes

Talk about these questions:

- What are the "best questions" that get at inner cores?
- What makes them "best"?
- What gets you talking about your core convictions?

Record on newsprint participants' responses. Save a few minutes for a time of personal sharing among participants: Divide the group into pairs, and ask them to use any of these "best questions" to interview each other.

Closing comments and prayer

5-15 minutes

Characterize what you have observed about the inner convictions of this group of participants, and your deep admiration for those qualities as well as participants' willingness to share. Ask participants to prepare for the next meeting by reading pages 14-15 and 20 in *Hope at Work*.

The prayer at the end of this meeting can point participants out into their daily lives, asking the Spirit's gift of courage and honesty as participants continue to show their faith in their words and actions.



Meeting Three: Looking at What's Around Us

This house meeting offers an informal assessment of the community in which the congregation is located. This is a beginning step in determining the matters around which organizing efforts might eventually be positioned. (For a generic treatment of a house meeting, see "Description of a typical house meeting" earlier in this document. Specific directions follow here.)



Welcome and introductions/check-in

10 minutes

Participants are now familiar enough with each other that the check-in time can become a little more personal or insistent. After welcoming new members to the group, you might continue with prompts such as these:

- Tell us about the most hopeful person you know. How does this person act or think? How did she or he get to be hopeful?
- Besides through your congregation, how else do you get God's work done?
- What's the most important question you continue to ask about this community?
- What part of God's will do you accomplish in your daily life?

Prayer or Centering Ritual

10 minutes

This opening moment turns participants' vision onto their surroundings—the neighborhood, community or locale in which the congregation is located. Ask and thank God for the ability to look deeply and wisely at the assets and needs of the people this congregation wants to engage.

Conversation 1 (Activity 1)

20-25 minutes

Pages 14-15 and 20 of *Hope at Work* can help participants understand how to undertake in-depth community research as one important step in community organizing. You can help develop a focused conversation about this matter with any of these prompts:

- Look at the contrast between the "community research" on pages 14-15 and another variation of that same task as evidenced on page 20. What are the major differences between the two approaches?
- How well do you know *both* the needs and the assets of the community (locale) your congregation claims to serve? How does that happen (or not happen)?
- How might the questions you ask – or the way you ask them – determine the answers you get? (HINT: See the referenced pages from *Hope at Work*.)
- What (or who) might be readily available sources for information about your community? What could they tell you?

- What biases or stereotypes might you have to overcome or dodge as you start an in-depth assessment of your community (or locale)?

If you choose to use this time in an activity, consider these ideas:

- Using a laptop computer connected to the Internet (and optional LCD projector), visit a Web site that offers data specific to your locale. For starters, look at <http://factfinder.census.gov> or your community's Web site. Talk about what questions you'd like answered and/or what you learn from the visit.
- Construct a BEFORE AND AFTER chart on newsprint, characterizing the first community analysis approach of Hope Church (pages 14-15 in *Hope at Work*) with the second effort (page 20). What was valuable or not-so-good? What assumptions guided each of the two approaches? What people-skills were evident or necessary? When participants have completed the chart as a group, talk about what you notice.
- Obtain from local public officials any already-existing surveys or analyses of your community. Make copies and use these documents as content for discussion about the realities of your community.

Refreshment break

15 minutes

For fun, ask the meeting host to serve products grown or manufactured as close as possible to the site of your meeting! (HINT: Baked goods and fresh fruits might be possibilities, along with some ready-prepared snacks or refreshments.)

Conversation 2 (Activity 2)

20-25 minutes

In this second conversation about the process of community surveying, adopt a slightly more insistent tone as you facilitate participants' sharing about this matter. Use any of these prompts:

- What might be (have been) some common mistakes that congregations can make when they attempt to get to know their surroundings? (Share a story.)
- About which facts regarding your community might your congregation be unaware?
- In the comic book, the assessment was tightly focused (on matters of food availability). Comment on the value and difficulties associated with this kind of research.
- Given your actual community, who knows the most about the locale in which your congregation is located? How do these persons get their information?
- What might keep this congregation from wanting to know the community better? What might compel the congregation to undertake this effort?
- What Scripture comes to mind?

If you want to involve participants in an activity during this time segment, consider these options:

- Role play an imagined set of conversations in your community, using the same topic noted in *Hope at Work* (food availability) and the same kinds of concerns. Who would you talk to, and what would you ask. (See page 15 in *Hope at Work* for some starter

ideas.) (For further background about the larger questions surround the sustainability of food production in the world, see <http://www.theendoffood.com/id8.html>.)

- As a group, invent a “Guidelines for Community Assessment” chart. Based on the assigned reading in *Hope at Work* and participants’ own experiences or expertise, write on newsprint some principles, aphorisms, proverbs or directives that might be helpful to anyone wanting to conduct such a survey in an effective way. When the chart is complete, talk about what you have invented together.
- Imagine that Jesus and a small group of his followers showed up in your locale and decided to conduct the community analysis. Based on what you know about your community—and about Jesus!—think what wisdom you might glean from Jesus’ approach to this task.

Conversation 3

10-20 minutes

In the final conversation, the matter gets just a little deeper and more personal. Use any of these prompts:

- Besides accurate data, what other value would come to you personally from an in-depth community analysis?
- Where would you start—e.g., what people, institutions, data bases, etc—in assessing your community or locale?
- What might the story of Jesus’ feeding of five thousand people say about this matter? (HINT: See Mark 6:38.)
- If we were to pray for and about our community (locale), what would those prayers include? (HINT: Remember that prayers are always about more than neediness!)

Closing comments and prayer

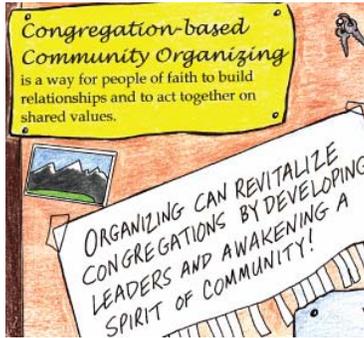
5-15 minutes

Depending on the directions of your conversations (and activities), your summary about today’s meeting can take a number of directions. However you characterize the conversation, hold together the tension between the community’s needs and its capacities (assets) for change. Think about God’s will—HINT: Think of the creeds and biblical evidence for what God wants the world to be like—and how your congregation (or this group of people) might bring God’s will to bear on your community.

Assign for the next meeting the reading of the entire comic book, *Hope at Work*. In that meeting participants will learn about the general process of community organizing, which the comic book outlines in narrative form.

Pray with joy and thanksgiving for what you have learned today, and for the blessings that come from living in your community or locale.

Meeting Four: What's "Organizing"?



The content for this meeting is a straightforward section-by-section walk through of the comic book, showing the process followed in an organizing effort as well as some of the philosophical underpinnings of community organizing. (For a generic treatment of a house meeting, see "Description of a typical house meeting" earlier in this document. Specific directions follow here.)

Welcome and introductions/check-in

10 minutes

Because there is a lot of content to pack into this meeting's time frame, you might want to keep this time segment brief. If newcomers have joined the group, welcome them warmly and continue with a general question/prompt such as: "What have you noticed about our community this past week?"

Prayer or Centering Ritual

10 minutes

You or the designated leader for this moment can include specific petitions and thanks for events in your community, and those that lead them. Think of elected, business, volunteer and appointed leaders. Don't forget youth and children.

Conversation 1 (Activity 1)

20-25 minutes

The task for this meeting is to wend your way through the entire comic book, *Hope at Work*, so that participants see the entire process of congregation-based organizing. You might begin the process in this first conversation with any of these prompts:

- On what principles does congregation-based organizing seem to be based? Ask participants to refer to specific parts of the book as evidence for their conclusions.
- What values or passions do the various characters in the book hold in common? How can you tell?
- In this true-to-life story, how do the viewpoints of the main characters change? What leads to this change?
- From what you've read, what does congregation-based community organizing accomplish, and how does that get done?

If you choose to devote this time segment to an activity, try the following:

Divide participants into pairs or triads, assigning each small group a section of the book so that the entire comic book will be explored. Ask each small group to read the section assigned to it, and then to develop answers to these questions: In what you have read, what seem to be the theological, philosophical, theoretical or practical foundations for congregation-based community organizing. After a few minutes, gather the entire group

back together to report out what they have found. Use the newsprint to record comments. Save time for whole group reactions or questions. (For your own background on the subject, see www.elca.org/organizing.)

Refreshment break

15 minutes

Keep refreshment time short today, or ask your host to serve refreshments to participants as they engage in either Conversation (Activity) 1 or Conversation (Activity) 2. If you choose this format, participants can use the bathrooms at any time they choose.

Conversation 2 (Activity 2)

20-25 minutes

This “conversation” may resemble more a presentation-with-discussion than a true conversation among peers. If you choose this option, walk participants through the sections of the book, telling them what is taking place. They can follow your presentation by surveying the pages or sections you reference. Here’s a simple outline to guide you:

The problem presents itself as opportunity	Pages 2 – 3
Connecting with likely partners	Pages 4 – 5
Connecting to community organizers	Pages 6 – 7
Drawing in Hope congregation	Pages 8 – 13
The larger questions and possibilities	Pages 14 – 17
Wake-up call and another try	Pages 18 – 23
The action takes place	Pages 24 – 26
Summary, review and the future	Pages 27 – 29

If you choose to use this time for an activity, try a “mind-mapping”: On a set of large pieces of newsprint taped together, draw a map of the progress of the story in *Hope at Work*. Draw quick representations of the key events along the way, perhaps as a path that rises or falls with the terrain. Add comments, captions, or titles to mini-events within the story. (For a quick introduction to mind-mapping, see www.youtube.com/watch?v=AllXU_3nktU or <http://www.paec.org/planetdiscovery/air/mindmapping/mindmapbasics.pdf>.)

Conversation 3

10-20 minutes

This more personal or intimate conversation takes place in pairs. The prompts you might use include these:

- What part of the process most excites you?
- Which part of the process appeals to your best (most courageous) qualities?
- Where in the process did you find yourself thinking about Hope Church as your own congregation?
- In what parts of your life have you experienced something like this? How did the effort turn out?
- If you had been part of Hope Church, which of your personal assets could have added to the effectiveness of the congregation’s efforts at community organizing?

Closing comments and prayer

5-15 minutes

Most likely you will have very few moments left for closing comments. If so, use the time as a bridge to the content of the next meeting: How this group might spearhead a more formal and focused effort at community organizing in your own congregation. In that case, be positive, hopeful and encouraging. Invite participants to reread the comic book in advance of next week's meeting.

In your prayer, thank God for the people all around the country who, in situations similar to your own, have taken on community organizing as an artful tool for accomplishing God's will for the world. If you know the organization or congregation by name, be specific with your prayers of gratitude.



Meeting Five: Why and How We Could Organize

Here participants make some preliminary choices about directions for community organizing efforts in this congregation. This is NOT yet an actual step in the formal process of organizing, but a practice session with asset-based planning as its basis (For a generic treatment of a house meeting, see “Description of a typical house meeting” earlier in this document. Specific directions follow here.)



Welcome and introductions/check-in

10 minutes

Welcome participants as they arrive, greeting especially warmly any new participants. Because this meeting helps participants look at their capabilities for possible community organizing by this congregation, conduct the check-in time using any of the following prompts:

- When/where are you at your best?
- When/where are you most fully yourself?
- What's one amazing capability you possess that may not be known by most of the people at this meeting?
- What's “useful” about you?

Prayer or Centering Ritual

10 minutes

You or the designated leader of this moment can begin this meeting with words of gratitude for the amazing talents, attitudes, experiences and useful gifts (assets) that are present in this room. Pray for guidance as participants consider the possibilities of combining their various assets in an effort to begin community organizing through this congregation.

Conversation 1 (Activity 1)

20-25 minutes

The first few pages of *Hope at Work* show how an asset-based approach to community organizing might develop. (This approach is characterized by attention to power of connected capabilities in a group rather than their disabilities or incapacities. For a quick look at asset-based thinking, see <http://www.alban.org/conversation.aspx?id=2958>.) In this first conversation (or activity), you will see how the people at Hope Church chose this approach rather than a deficits-based model of planning.

If you choose to spend this time in conversation, use any of the following prompts to elicit participants' thoughts and feelings:

- On page 2 of *Hope at Work* you get an inkling that Robert and Elena are dissatisfied with their congregation's usual approach to "social ministry". What do you think is happening under the surface for both of these faithful members? How can you tell?
- In what ways do Robert, Elena and Pastor Kathy operate from a posture of capabilities rather than of deficits? (HINT: See conversational snippets on page 4.)
- What evidence do you see of "useful gifts" (assets) being used in pages 2 – 5?
- What kinds of assets do you see being referenced or used in pages 2 – 5?

If you choose to use this time for an activity, consider any of the following:

- In pairs or triads, re-imagine the first five pages of *Hope at Work* from a (typical?) viewpoint of negativity or dispirited deficiency. How would the dialogue be changed (or not exist) and what would be the outcome by the end of page 5? How is Hope Church's approach different?
- "Interview" any of the characters on pages 2 – 5. Ask them about their motivations, the reasons for their statements and inner feelings.
- As a whole group, pretend to insert a "phantom page" between the present pages 4 and 5. Work at answering this question: What other conversations might have taken place if "Hope Church" were our congregation?

Refreshment break

15 minutes

Refreshments today might be prepared and served as a "potluck asset break" in which participants bring refreshments that show their own particular abilities or likings when it comes to foodstuffs.

Conversation 2 (Activity 2)

20-25 minutes

This time period offers participants an opportunity to examine the assets that might be available for community organizing in this locale. If you choose to use the time in conversation, use any of the following prompts. It might be good to list participants' responses on newsprint sheets for reference.

- Recalling our earlier conversation (or activity) what assets (useful gifts) for community organizing exist within this group?
- Because participants in this group are connected to other gifted individuals, what other assets could this group draw on?
- When it comes to community organizing, what are you good at doing? What do you like to do? Who do you know? What attitudes, skills or experiences could be useful? What did you used to be good at doing?
- What assets in this congregation or community might be hidden right now?

Save a few moments for participants to analyze what patterns they see in the answers you have recorded on newsprint. What conclusions can be drawn, what possibilities given a name?

If you choose to use this time in an activity, distribute writing paper and writing instruments. Direct participants to *Hope at Work* with this task in mind: Parse sections of the book looking for the assets (useful gifts) that were put to use in this story. Give each asset a name and assemble them into a list. After about seven or eight minutes, ask participants to come back to their list of assets and place the name of people they know—including themselves—who *also* possess the assets they have drawn from *Hope at Work*. Save a few moments for participants to share their lists.

Conversation 3

10-20 minutes

This conversation wraps together participants' experiences in this meeting with some summary thoughts. The conversation also serves as a bridge to Meeting Six. Use any of these prompts, referring to any recorded observations or findings developed earlier in the meeting:

- How would you characterize the amount and variety of assets available for community organizing?
- What thoughts (about community organizing assets) have been building or coalescing during this meeting's conversations?
- If this group were to begin a formal process of community organizing right now, which of the assets you've listed, seen or noticed would be the most necessary or useful?
- How do the capabilities of this group (this congregation) compare with those of Hope Church? Give examples.

Closing comments and prayer

5-15 minutes

Your summary thoughts today will flow from the previous conversation. Without presupposing what this group or your congregation might do, offer positive comments on

the wealth of assets that *could be* useful were the congregation to take up community organizing in a more formal way.

Your prayer can be simple and profound: Thank God for the amazing gifts that exist within the people at this meeting.



Meeting Six: First Steps



Most likely dependent on several of the earlier meetings, this get-together offers participants the opportunity to come to a decision about whether to proceed formally towards congregation-based community organizing. Participants

determine together what their next steps might be. (For a generic treatment of a house meeting, see “Description of a typical house meeting” earlier in this document. Specific directions follow here.)

Welcome and introductions/check-in

10 minutes

This meeting may be a pivotal moment in the process of developing a community organizing capability in your congregation. For that reason, take a little more time to conduct a check-in. If visitors or new members have joined your group, welcome them warmly. Use any of the prompts from previous meetings, or choose from among these:

- Tell about a time when a group you were a part of moved from “good idea” into action.
- What does it take for you personally to make up your mind to do something important, necessary or truly noble?
- How would you characterize your style or behavior as a decision-maker?
- How good are you at helping others take action?

Prayer or Centering Ritual

10 minutes

Thank God for the past meetings, what you have learned from and about each other, and how the group has grown in knowledge and wisdom. Ask for the Spirit’s guidance as you come to some points of decision-making together.

Conversation 1 (Activity 1)

20-25 minutes

As a conversational bridge, refer back to the content of Meeting 5, perhaps using newsprint notes for reference. Because the direction of this meeting is decision-making, offer participants a chance to revisit briefly any aspect of community organizing they still don’t understand or still question.

The majority of this conversational time is spent imagining what “congregation-based organizing” might look like in your locale and faith community. Use any of these prompts:

- Imagine what might happen if this congregation took up community organizing as one of its ministries. (What good would come of it; what value would it have for this congregation’s vitality; who might be involved; how would this continue or start the congregation’s mission legacy?)
- If you were to substitute specific features of this congregation and community for the specific features in the *Hope at Work* story, what would they be?

- How close is this group to recommending this congregation's participation in community organizing? How do you know that?
- As you've read and talked about *Hope at Work*, which parts of the story feel very much like present or possible parts of this congregation's story?

If you choose to use this time for an activity, consider the following possibilities:

- In pairs or triads, scan *Hope at Work* to find the obvious *and* hidden "tipping points", places where decisions actually took place. (Perhaps those decision points occurred *before* a more formal time of decision-making.) Talk together about what participants have discovered. (For background on the concept of "tipping points" see <http://www.gladwell.com/tippingpoint/index.html>.)
- In the larger group, tell stories about times in the congregation's history when large decisions for ministry were made well. What characterized the effectiveness of these times of decision? What tipped the decisions in a positive direction?
- Using writing paper, construct a journal or diary page of one of the main characters in *Hope at Work*, the page on which this person decides that he or she personally will commit to community organizing efforts. After a few moments of thinking and writing, form pairs or triads and share what participants have written.

Refreshment break

15 minutes

You may want to make this final meeting's refreshment time into a small celebration—for example, thanks or accolades for leaders or hosts. In that case, adjust the refreshments themselves as well as the time segment to accommodate this special occasion.

Conversation 2 (Activity 2)

20-25 minutes

In this conversation and activity, participants are asked to decide whether to proceed toward a formal congregation-based organizing effort in this faith community. Announce that the time has come for this group to decide whether or not to take next steps together. (Participants might also decide "not yet".)

Canvass the members of the group individually, asking their thoughts about the possibilities, and their personal choice. You might start with those most vocal, interspersing them with those who have been quieter about their thoughts. You might use prompts such as these to elicit decision-sounding answers:

- What do you think this group should do next?
- What are you personally committed to doing next?
- What are you convinced is the right thing for this congregation to do regarding community organizing?
- Where do you feel led (called or compelled) in this matter?

If you choose to use this time as a decision-making activity, try the following possibility.

On separate newsprint sheets, write YES, WE CAN; YES, WE SHOULD; NO, WE CAN'T; NO, WE SHOULD NOT and NOT YET. Post the sheets in easily accessed

locations in your meeting room. Provide water-based felt markers for participants and ask them to “vote with their feet” by writing their name on one of the posted sheets. As an added feature, ask them also to write next to their names a brief explanation of the reason(s) for their vote.

Save enough time at the end of this conversation to tally or summarize the results of the opinions (or votes).

(NOTE: If you are fairly certain that the spirit of these meetings is already inclined towards starting the formal process of participation in community organizing, use this time segment to develop and decide on next steps. Use the suggestions listed below.)

Conversation 3

10-20 minutes

This final conversation focuses on next steps, and moves quickly. Using newsprint, quickly list what are most likely the next tasks to be accomplished. Don't spend time discussing their shape or substance yet. When the group has listed several tasks, revisit the list and decide the time frame and people responsible for accomplishing those tasks.

Save a few minutes at the end of this conversation to summarize or review what the group has decided to do. If necessary, set another time and place for your next meeting.

Closing comments and prayer

5-15 minutes

Briefly review the progress of these meetings, the highlights of these conversations and the direction(s) you have chosen. Offer time for participants to express their parting thoughts. As in other meetings, your closing prayer(s) will be filled with thanks to God.





Hope at Work Participant Handout One-to-Ones That Work



WHAT IS A “ONE-TO-ONE”?

In congregation-based community organizing, the “one-to-one” is a relational visit that cultivates possibilities that lie within new or growing relationships. The one-to-one is an appreciative inquiry, an opportunity to bond and bridge two people. As they gather together in larger patterns, one-to-ones build community and cultivate commitment to action.

WHAT HAPPENS IN THESE CONVERSATIONS?

Tapping into the curiosity and courage of the listener and the openness of the one to whom they listen, two people converse about what’s important to the one being asked questions. The two people uncover self-interests, develop clarity about feelings and beliefs, and gather information about the congregation, community or neighborhood. Wrapped into what seems like a simple conversation are all the elements of deep respect, appreciative curiosity and affirmation of the person who is answering the questions.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD ONE-TO-ONE?

Although most intimate conversations are satisfying experiences, the effective one-to-one is characterized by these behaviors:

- Pre-arranged meeting time and place.
- Courage and honesty, both in the asking and answering of questions.
- Discovery of common ground.
- Intense listening.
- Story-telling prompts and elements.
- Clear, direct, respectful-yet-probing questions.
- Identification of passions and self-interests.
- A formal or informal invitation to continue in dialog into the future.

HINTS FOR THOSE ASKING THE QUESTIONS

Although the one-to-one is a kind of conversation, it has a direction and purpose that may require some usual elements of conversation to be diminished, and others strengthened. Here are some simple hints for an effective one-to-one:

- Keep the visit short, between 1/2 to one hour.
- Ask straightforward, personal questions.
- Move into deeper, riskier, more intimate questions fairly quickly.
- Prompt the one answering questions to give examples or tell stories.

- Spend very little time on your own story. The one-to-one is more about them than you.
- By your body language and voice, communicate intense interest in the person's answers.
- If possible, move through a number of questions without lingering too long on any single question.
- At the same time, don't turn the conversation into a checklist to be completed.
- End the conversation with appreciation and thanks.
- Take notes only *after* the conversation is over and you've left the person you visited.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

You can use these and similar questions to establish rapport, then to move it toward deeper matters:

- What was it like when you were growing up?
- What was your family life like?
- What brought you here? (To this place, to this congregation, to this stage of life)
- What attracted you to this faith community?
- What occupies your time during a typical week?
- What do you like about your occupation, career, calling, stage in life?
- What is the most important thing in your life right now?
- What's the biggest challenge you've ever faced and how did you handle it?
- What role does your faith play in your daily ministries?
- What accomplishment in life are you most proud of? Why?
- What do people say about you that's most positive?
- What have you wanted to do with your life, but haven't yet accomplished?
- What makes you hopeful? (Or angry, motivated, discouraged, energized, or wistful?)

OTHER NOTES ABOUT ONE-TO-ONES

