



Learning Together

IRCA Conference Learning Community
New Zealand April 2018



Introduction to Learning Communities

- Prayerfully developing a rural church missional plan for your region
- Working together as a regional team, listening to and learning from each other
- Inspired by stories from the learning community i.e. from other regions
- YOUR context, YOUR strategy
- Framework:
 - What is
 - What could be
 - What will be



Legacy



- An outline plan for your region to share and further develop
- Actions you, your church or organisation can implement
- An understanding of learning communities and materials you can adapt to your context to help inspire local plans.
- Ongoing support from IRCA and your friends around the world.

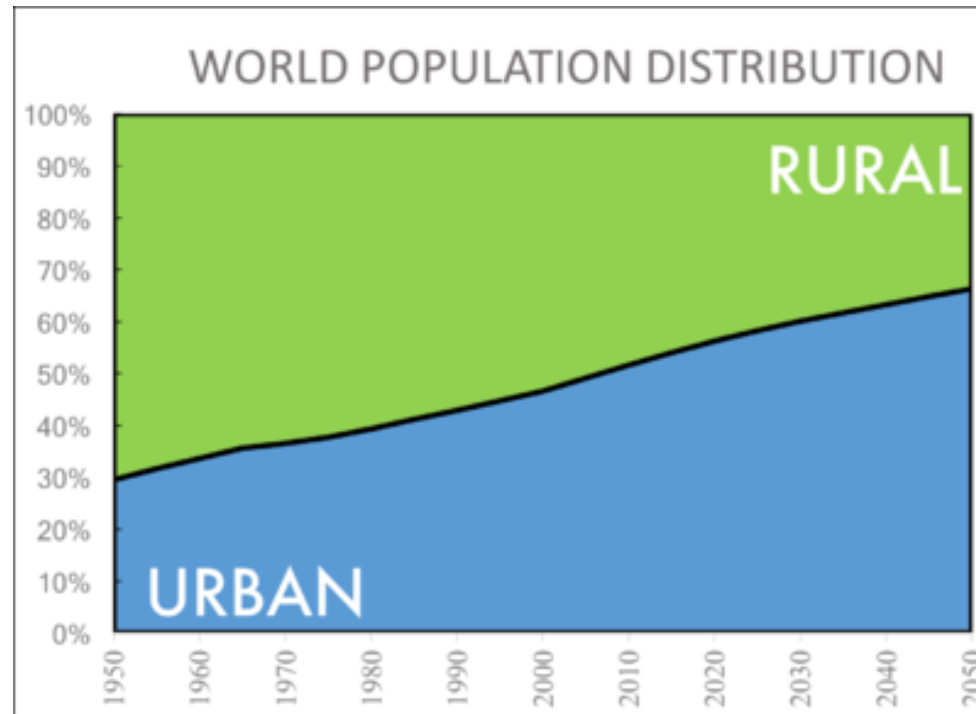




Learning Together 1: *What is?*



Global trends and implications for the rural church



Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2014). *World Urbanization Prospects*.







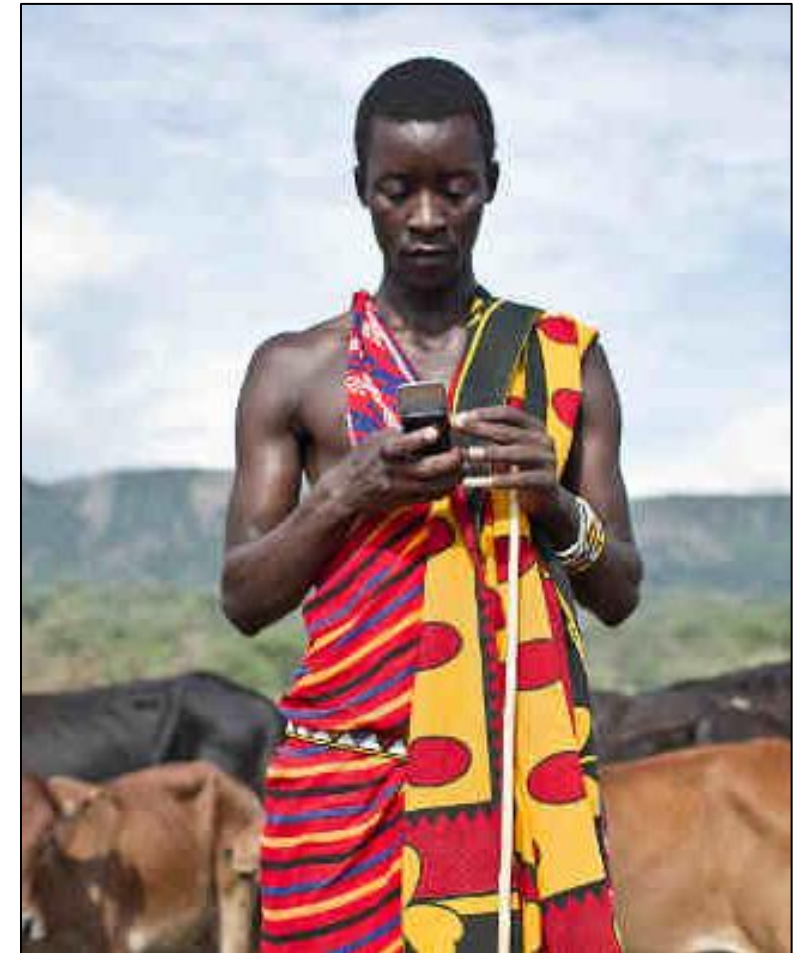
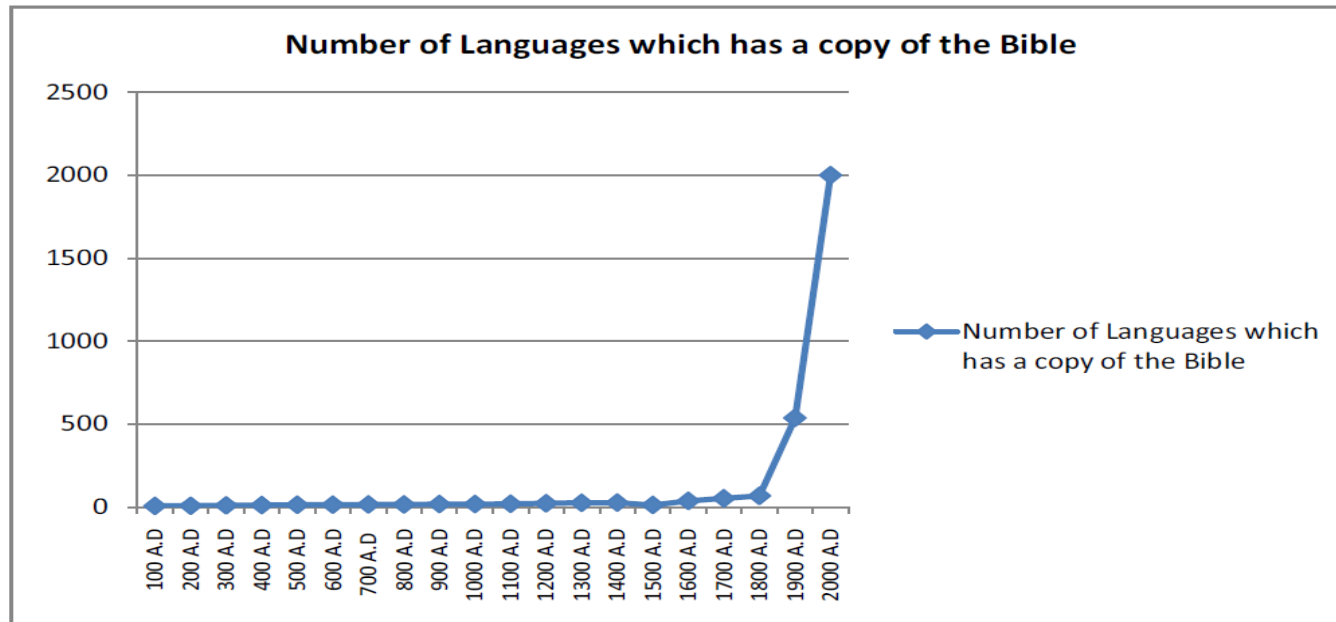
Challenges

- Poverty
- People have moved to cities for work
- High transport and energy costs
- Poor public transport
- Local shops and services are disappearing
- Cell phone and internet access may be poor
- Decline in direct agricultural employment
- Churches closing or clergy shared with other churches



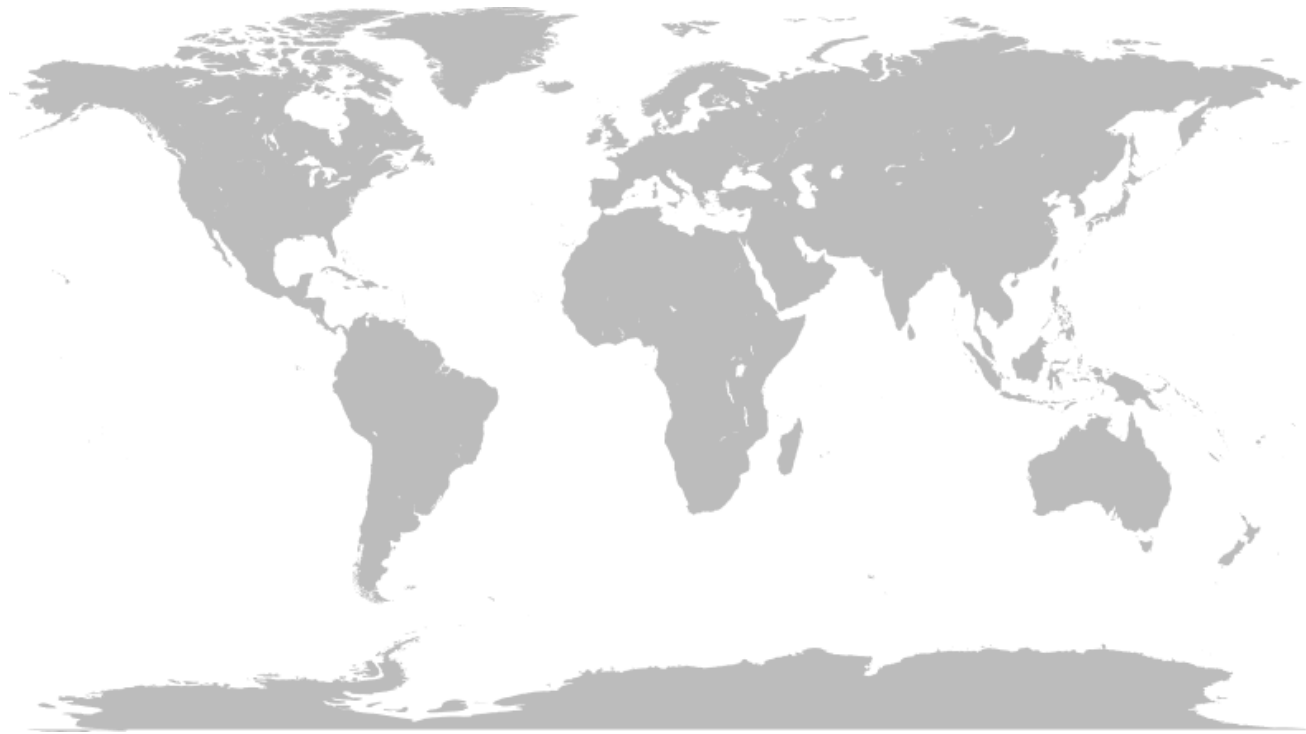
But...

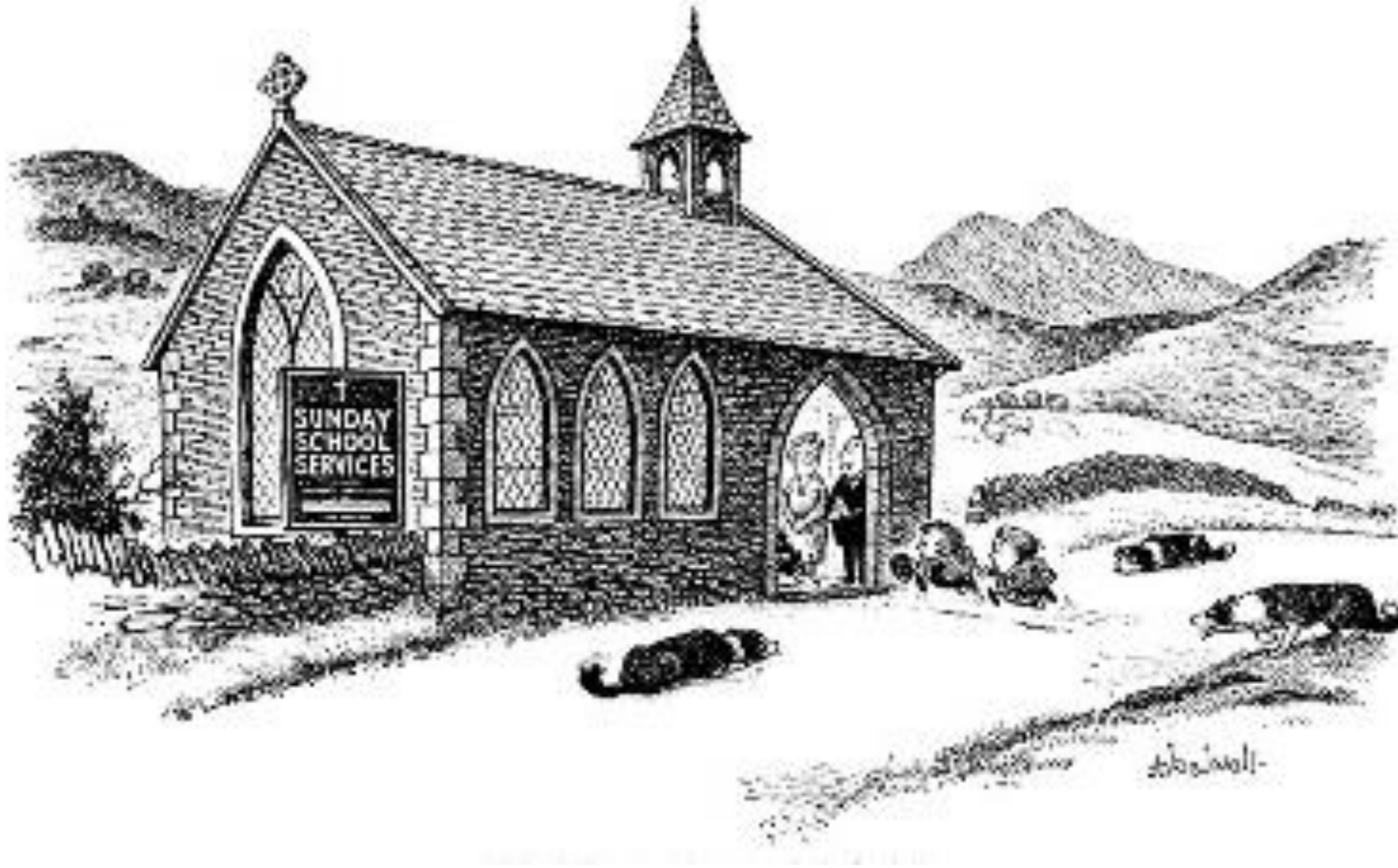
- Poverty is falling in many areas
- Cell phones and the Internet are transformational
- Material wealth isn't everything
- Bibles are now available in thousands of languages and Christian material is available digitally



Regional trends

- **Europe**
- Oceania
- Africa
- Asia
- Americas





A view
from
England



Rural context in England

- 17% (9m) people live in communities of under 10,000 in England
- Older age profile:
 - more over 45 year olds than urban
 - fewer 15-29s
- Net migration to rural approx. 50k p.a.
- Uncertainty of Brexit
- Impact of climate change especially flooding



Types of rural people

- Established rural residents
 - the agricultural community
- Commuters
- Life style shifters
- Privacy seekers / trophy owners
- Migrant and transient workers
- Second home owners
- Tourists / visitors



What's good about rural?

- Beautiful environment
- Lower unemployment
- Higher household incomes
- Smaller numbers on benefits
- Higher qualifications
- Better health
- Lower homelessness
- Lower risk of crime



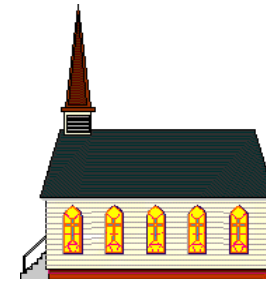
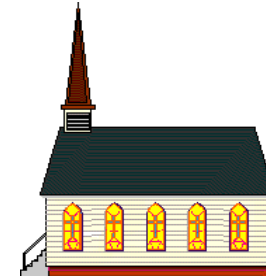
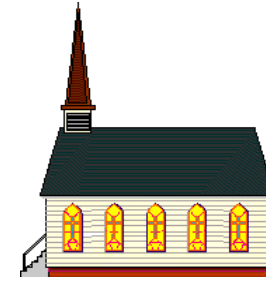
Rural disadvantage

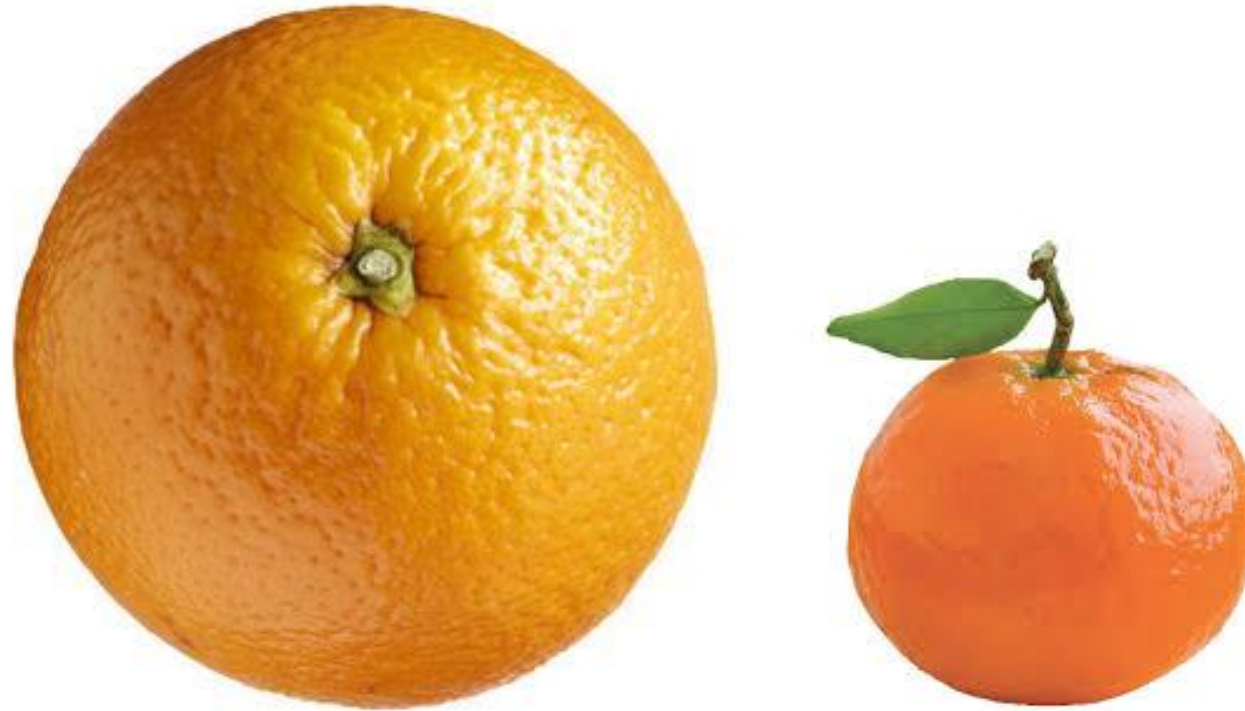
- Financial poverty
 - Low wages, seasonal work, minimum wage, fixed pension, reliance on benefits
- Access Poverty
 - Transport, healthcare, Job Centre Plus, poor mobile and internet
- Network Poverty
 - Isolation, loss of supportive networks, family moved away for affordable housing



Challenges in rural mission

- The days of one ordained minister / one church were brief and are long gone
- The number of churches in a group will continue to grow in most areas
- Need to move towards collaborative / shared ministry
- Buildings can be a challenge
- Most churches are small, with limited financial and leadership resources.



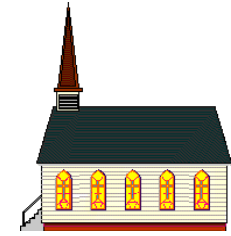


BUT... a satsuma is not a failed orange



Opportunities in rural mission

- Many feel a connection with the church and therefore a sense of journey of faith
- Sense of connection with God the Creator and opportunities provided by agricultural seasons and traditions
- Congregations are embedded in communities
- Many churches are at the forefront of Fresh Expressions and ministry of the whole body of Christ
- Opportunity to bring different groups of people in the community together
- Ecumenical opportunities
- Buildings can be an opportunity.



**YOUTH
CHURCH**



What does the future look like?

- Ecumenical
- Growing ministry of lay people with leaders coaching and releasing others
- A “mixed economy” that values both traditional and new.
- Recognition that our involvement in the community is part of mission, part of being an “effective Christian presence”
- A willingness to take risks



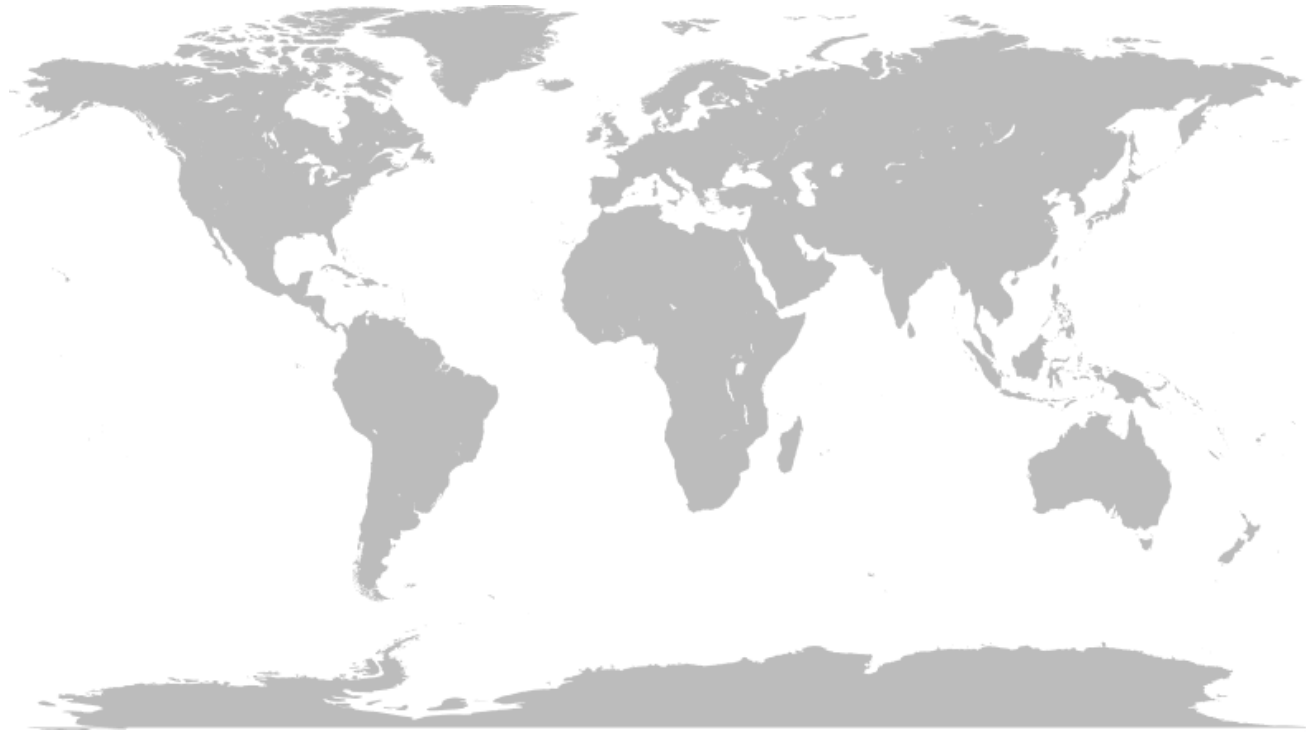


Other
European
perspectives?



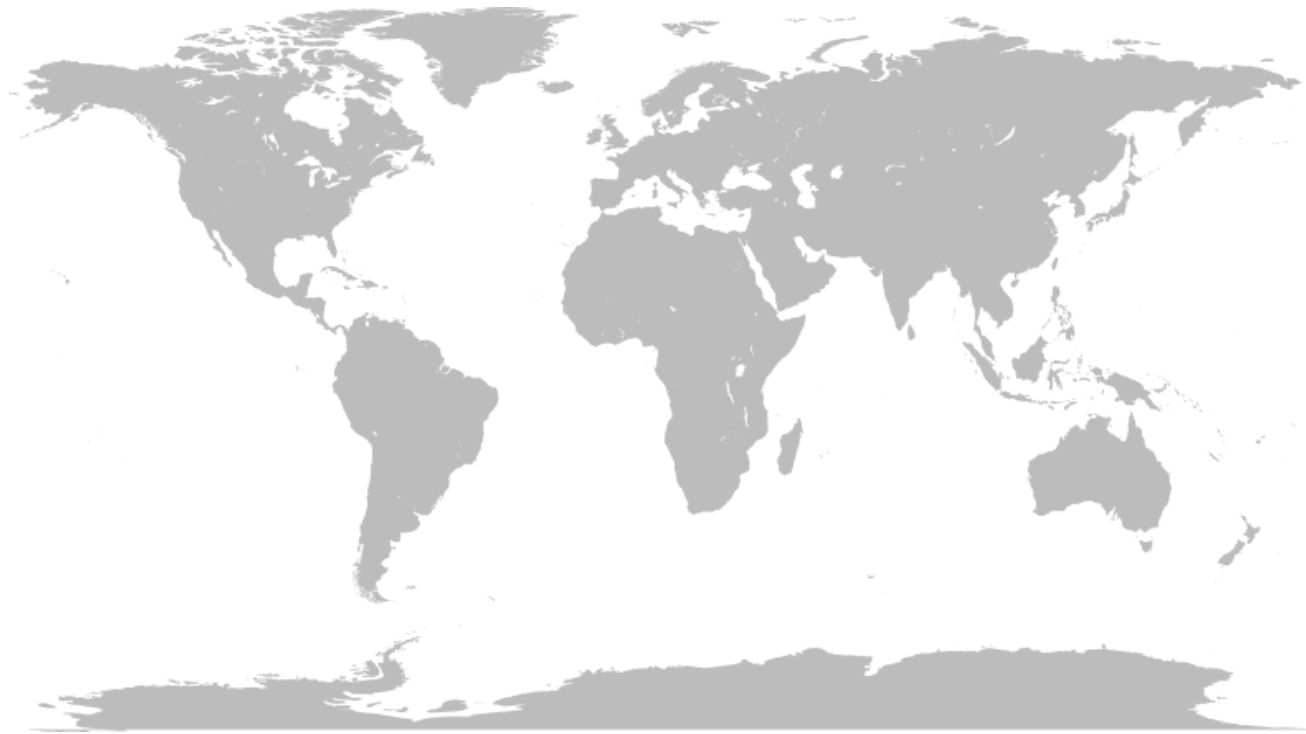
Regional trends

- Europe
- **Oceania**
- Africa
- Asia
- Americas



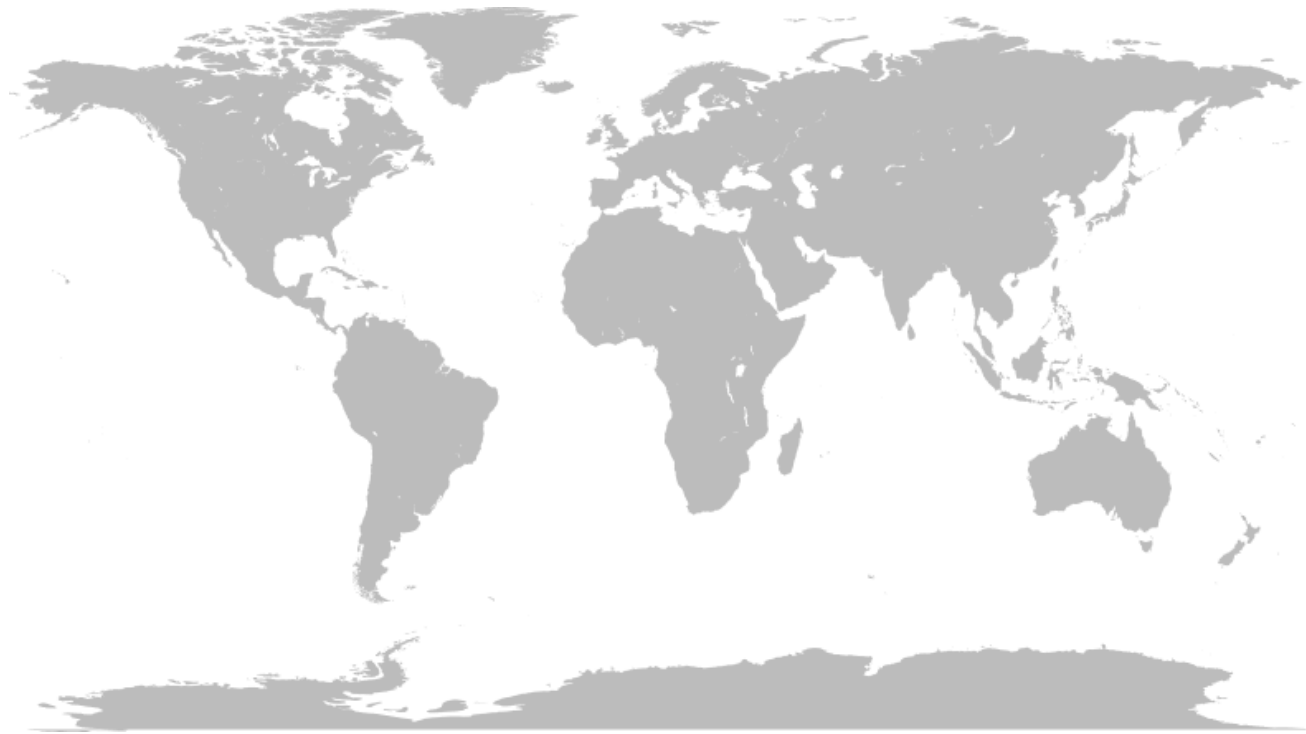
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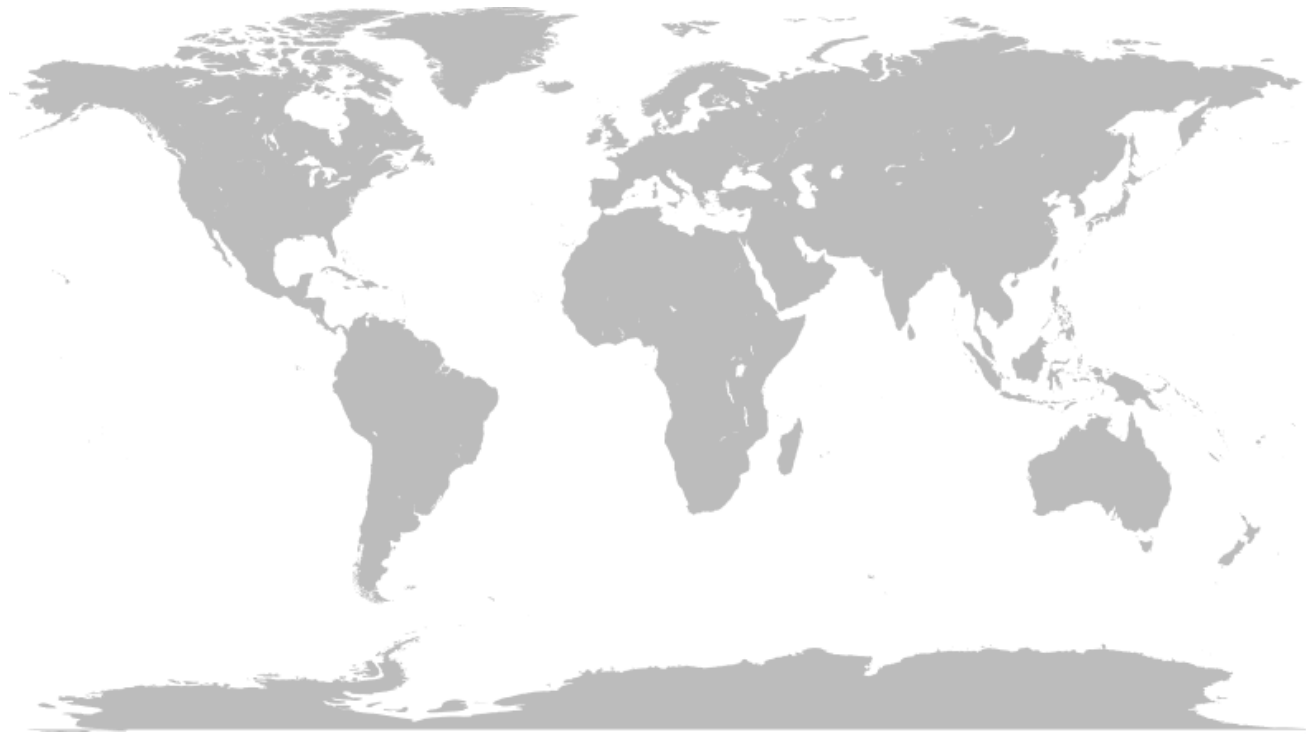
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Regional trends

- Europe
- Oceania
- Africa
- Asia
- **Americas**



Understanding '*What is?*' for you

- What is the Holy Spirit doing in your area?
- What is the condition of the church?
- What are the needs and opportunities?

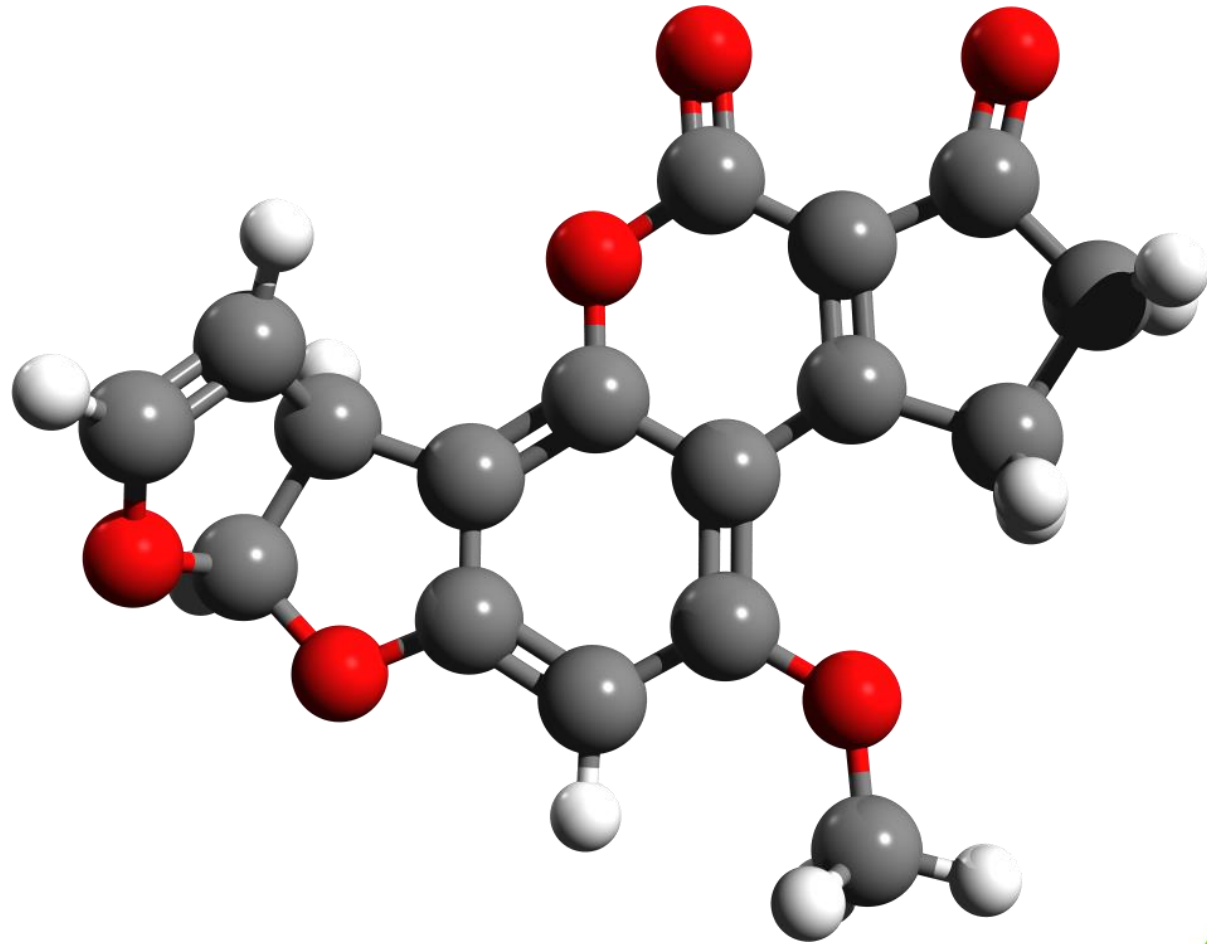




Warm up:
If your church
was an
animal, what
sort of animal
would it be?



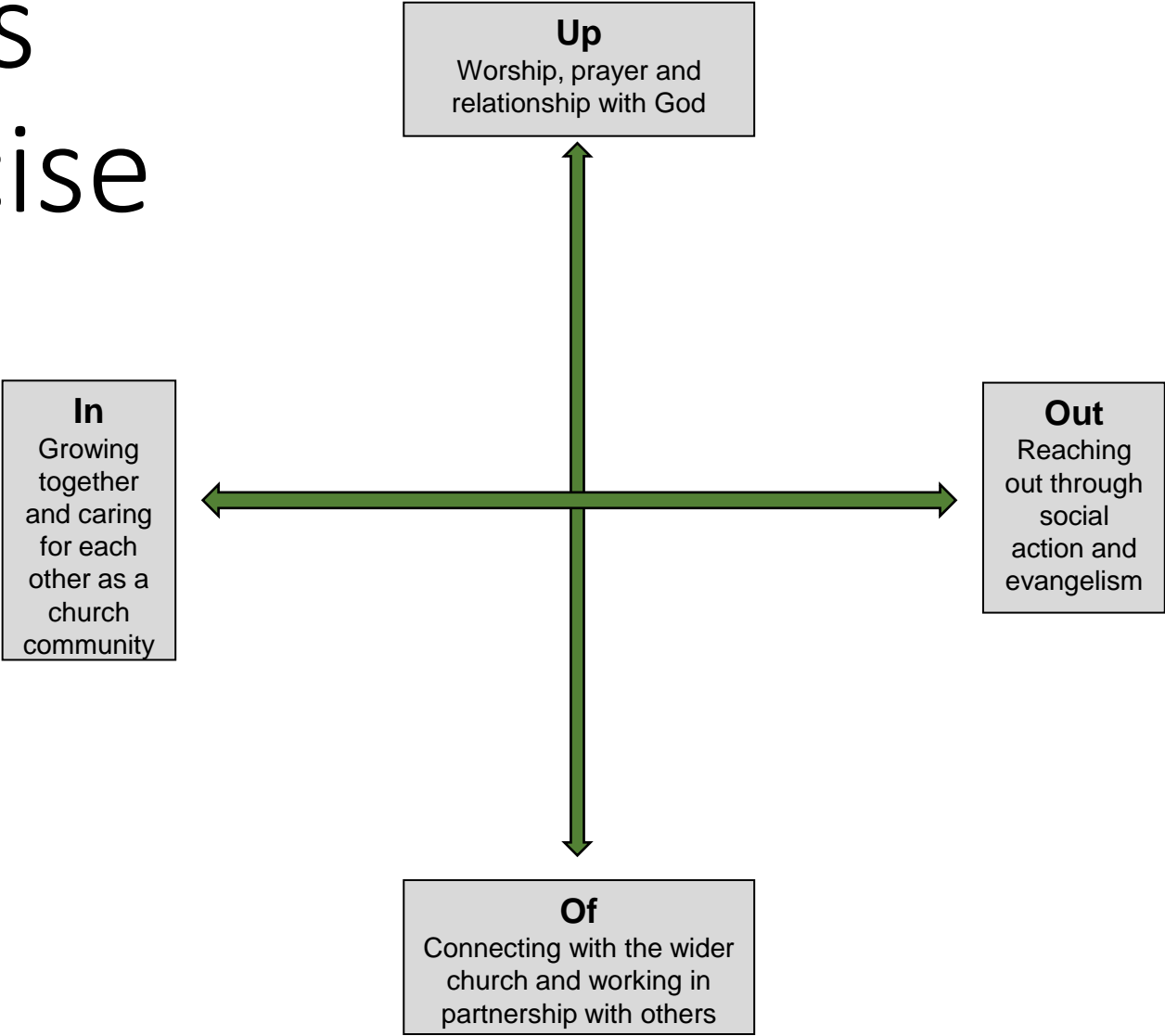
How do
churches in
your area
relate
together?



What are the relational dynamics?



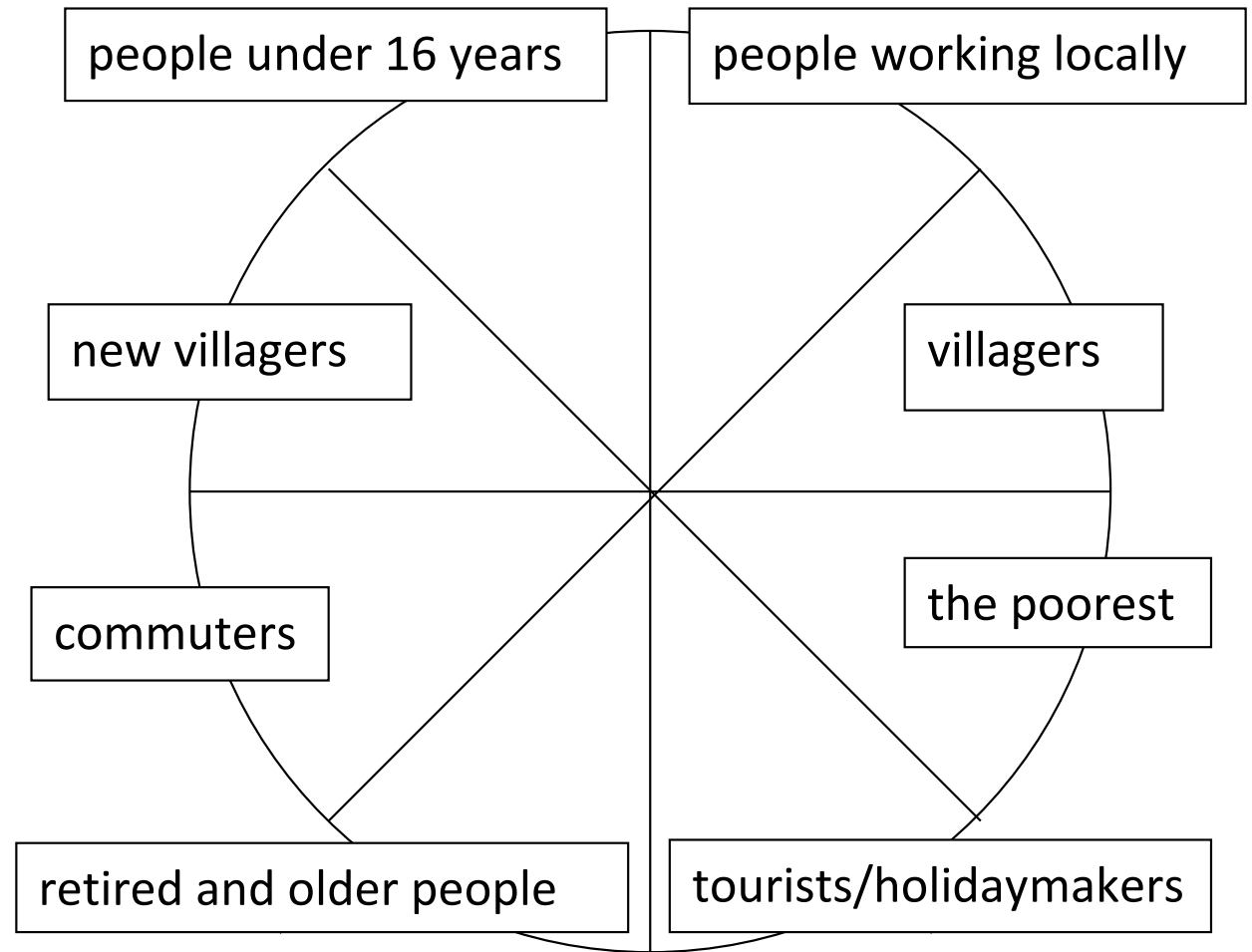
axis exercise



Who is in your community?

Who is missing from your church?

How can you show God's love to them?



Introduction to group work

As a group, review:

- the state of the church
- trends
- challenges
- needs and opportunities

