

**Relationships Are Key
in the
Post Pandemic Church**

Joy Skjegstad & Heidi Unruh

Practical Resources for Churches

May 5, 2022

WELCOME!

Please introduce yourself!

We invite you to share your name, church and location in the chat box.



Introducing ... Joy Skjegstad

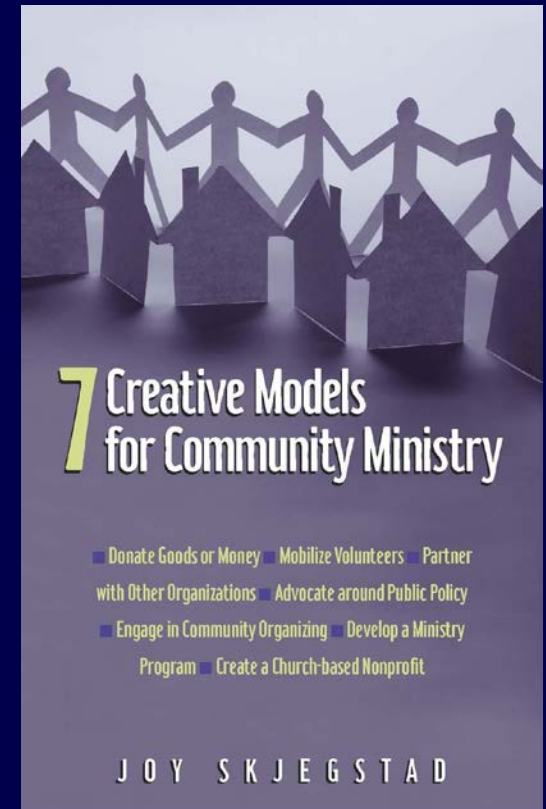
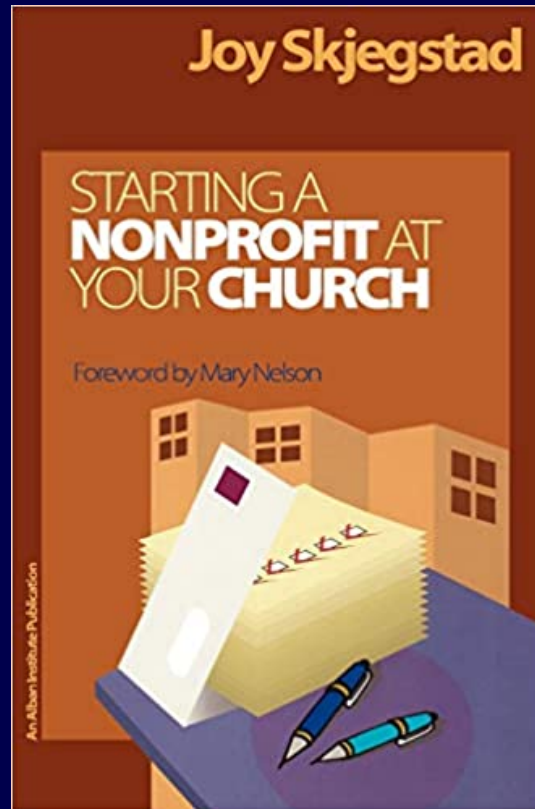
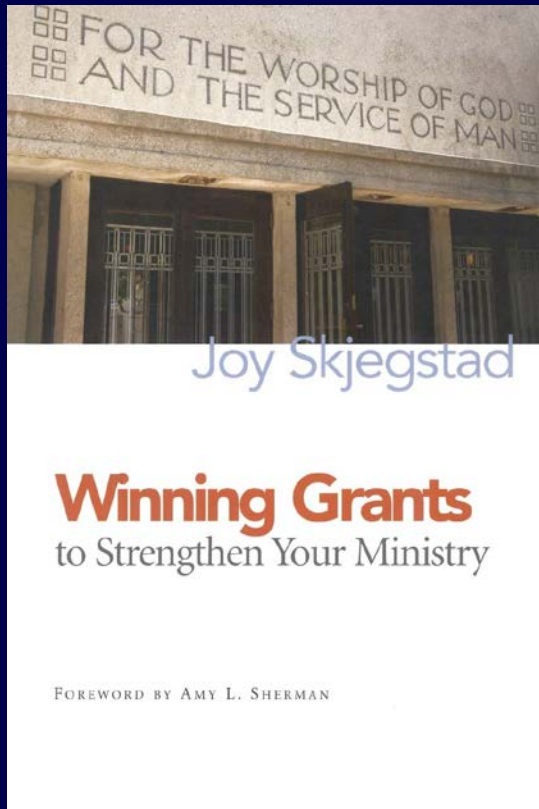
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Joy Skjegstad is a national speaker, author and consultant on nonprofit management and ministry development. She has more than 30 years of experience starting and growing nonprofit organizations, with a special focus on faith-based groups, and youth and community development.

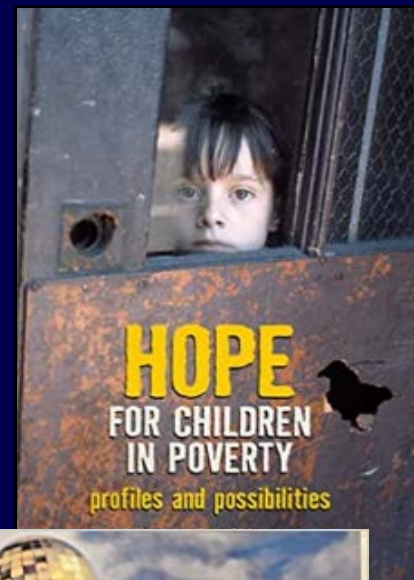
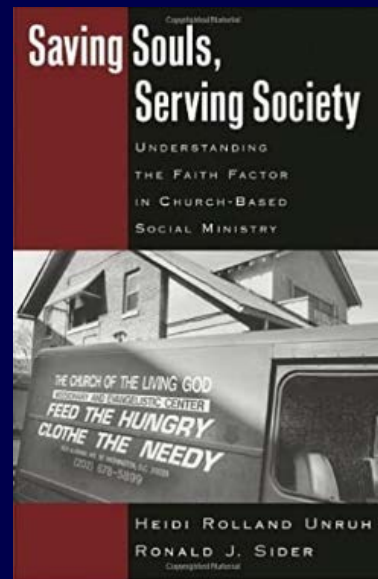
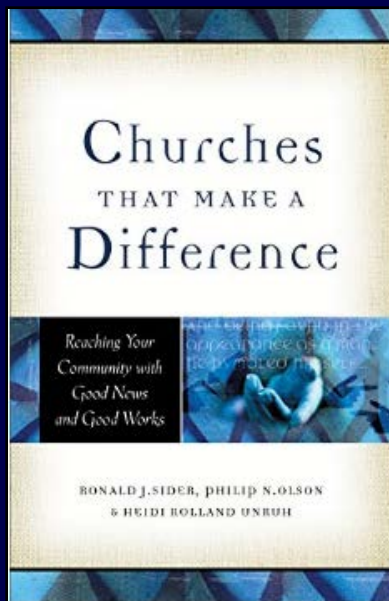
Books by Joy Skjegstad

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Introducing ... Heidi Unruh

*Coming alongside leaders and their good ideas,
so good works can shine! (Eph. 2:10)*



**Congregations &
Community Outreach Project**
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Heidi Unruh UnruhHeidi@gmail.com



**SHINE
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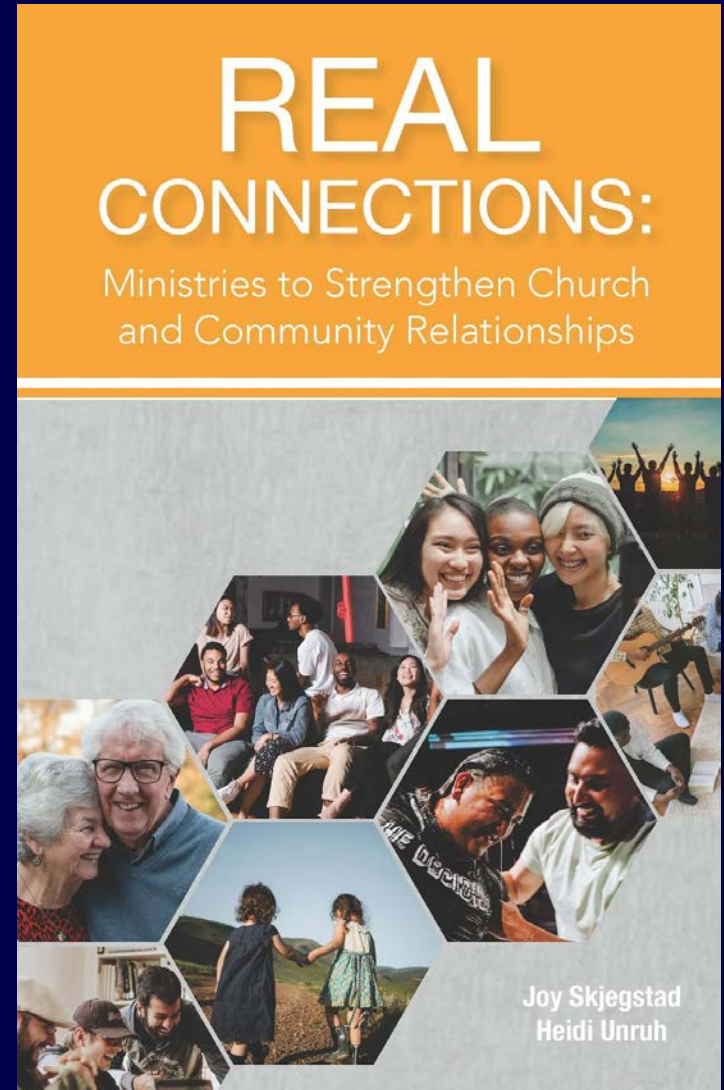
Our New Book!

Order from
[Judson Press](#)

REAL CONNECTIONS: Ministries to Strengthen Church and Community Relationships

Plus FREE download –

[“Guide to a Congregational Listening Process”](#)



How can the post-Covid church recover and grow?

One vital element is a focus on the relational aspect of church.



Relationships matter for the church

(Theology) We are designed for relationships

(Function) Church life goes more smoothly when people know & like one another

(Well-being) Connections have a big impact on mental & physical health

(Growth) Relationships attract new people

(Ministry) They are foundational to great programs

(Mission) Knowing people opens doors to sharing God's love

Relationships matter for the church ... Now more than ever!

The past two years have brought ...

- More isolation
- More divisions
- More hardship
- More need for real connection online
- More distrust of churches / Christians

We invite your input!

Please share in the chat box:

**What makes focusing on
relationships important to YOU?**

VISION: What a church that focuses on relationships looks like ...

- A warm and inviting place for everyone
- A fellowship where those who are isolated can find a friend
- A bridge during a time of division
- A catalyst for mutual care and partnerships



How can a church become a hub of connection?



Make church more relational by building connections ...

1. Within the congregation
2. In small groups
3. In the church's neighborhood
4. With people who are isolated
5. With "the loneliest generation"
6. With those not at the center of church life

Strategy #1: Help the congregation get to know another better



Have fun together

Any excuse for a party!



Have fun together

What sounds like fun to you?

Yoga session

Game night

Nature walk

Cooking class

Pet show

Frisbee golf

tournament

Ice cream social

Minecraft

marathon

Cookie
decorating

Picnic

Talent night

Scrapbook

retreat

Square dance

Scavenger hunt

Hymn sing

Bonfire

Woodworking

Talk together

Make time for conversation
& provide questions



Intentional listening

Invite people to share life stories
and perspectives



Process hard times together

Create safe space for sharing struggles
and stories of God's faithfulness



We invite your input!

Share in the chat box:

**What is one thing that has worked
at your church to help strengthen
connections within the
congregation?**

Strategy #2: Bring people together through small groups



Affinity groups

Based on something people have in common:

- Life experience or stage of life
- Activity they enjoy
- Vocation
- Location



Other types of small groups



Support for struggles
(grief, divorce) or goals
(exercise, nutrition)

Service /mission
*Build relationships while
working together*



Other types of small groups

**Intergenerational or
intercultural**

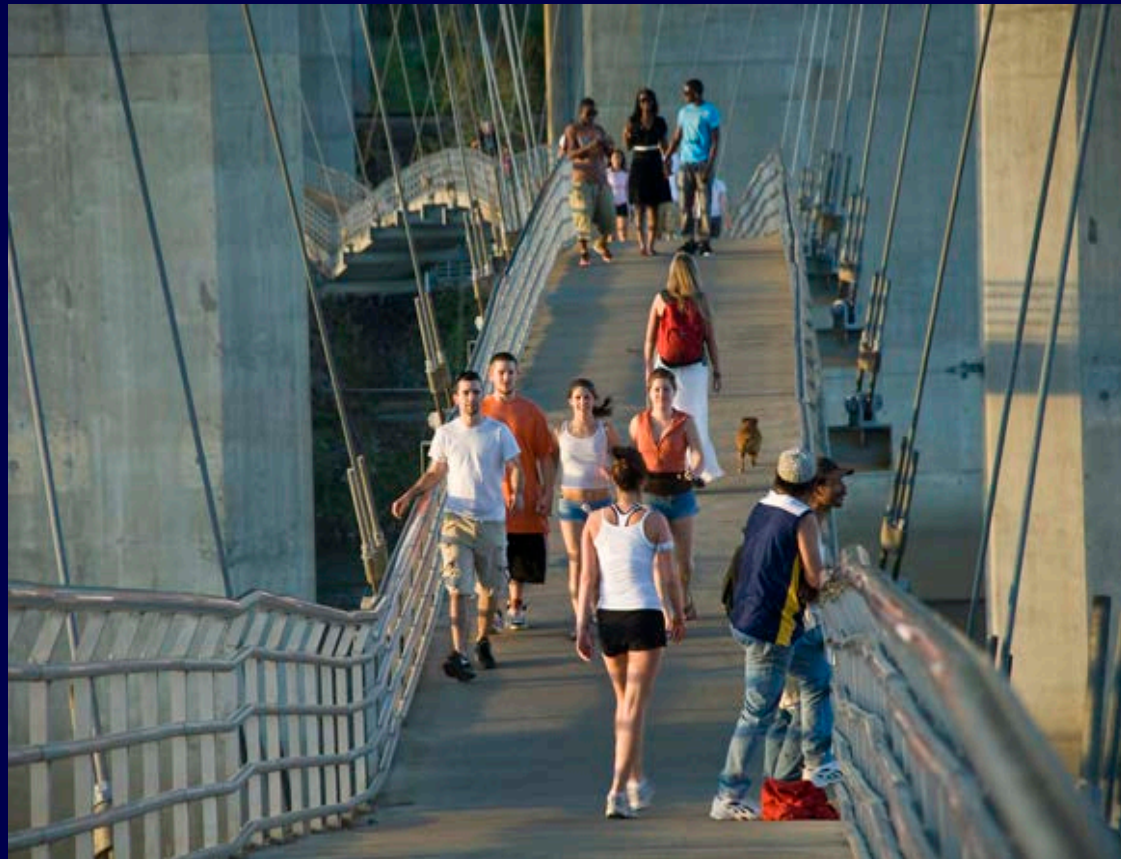
*Bring people together
across differences*



Shared life

*2-3 families / households
that bond together*

Small groups can be a bridge



connecting church and community

Strategy #3: Build relationships among people in the church's neighborhood



Host connection oriented events



Do activities that encourage connection
(Eat! Play! Create!)

Tips for keeping the focus on building relationships:

- Build in time for introductions & conversation
- Provide icebreakers and questions
- Mix up “church people” & “neighborhood people”
- It’s OK to **just** have fun

Show up & be a great guest



In addition to hosting, participate in local events organized by others. Make new friends on someone else's turf!

Make & enjoy art together

Artists' group, craft fair, mural project,
poetry coffeehouse, music night ...



Connect around a shared concern

Form or join a group to learn, serve,
engage, & advocate on a community issue



Social Justice Team

First meeting on Thursday, January 6 at 6:30 p.m
For more information or zoom invitation
socialjustice@millplainumc.org

The graphic features a central dark red rectangular box containing text. Below the box is a row of stylized hands in various colors (green, yellow, orange, red, pink, purple, blue, teal) raised in a gesture of unity. The background is white.

We invite your input!

Share in the chat box:

**What is one thing that has worked
at your church to help build
relationships with people
in the community?**

Strategy #4: Build connections with people who are isolated and hurting



Epidemic of loneliness

- 40% of adults report being chronically lonely
- 25% of adults have no one they feel close to

What barriers isolate people in your context?



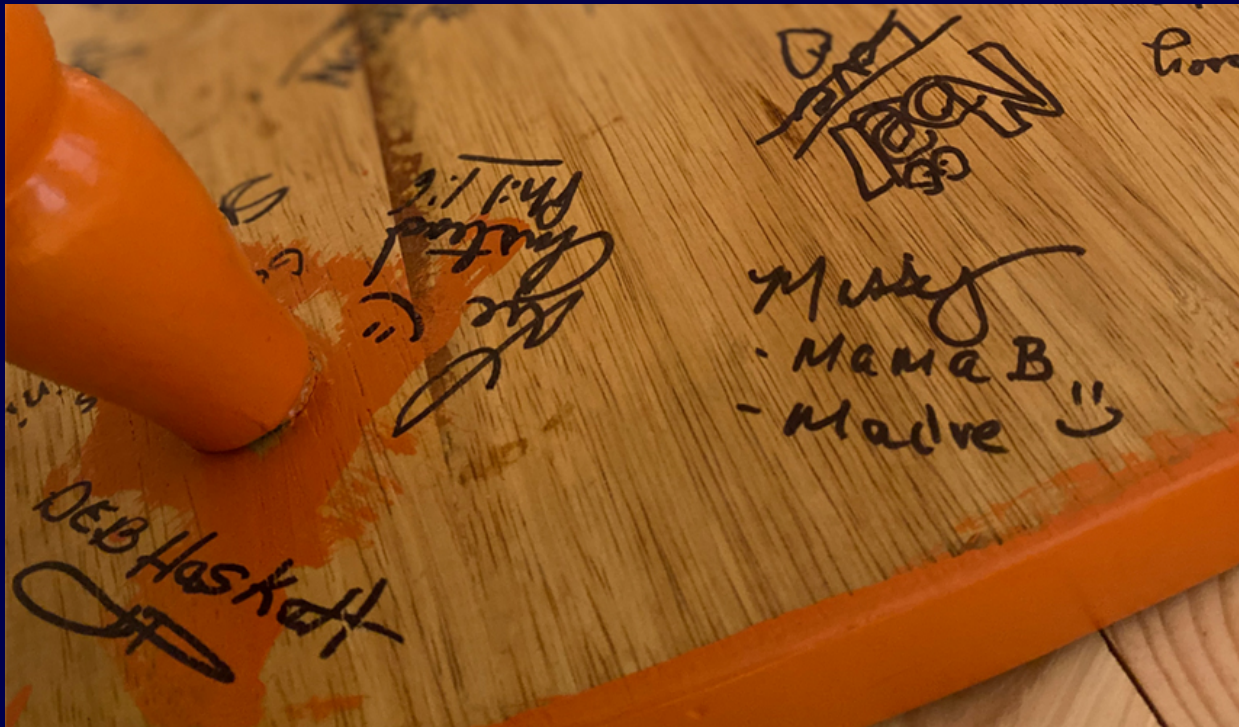
Get to know people assisted by your church's service ministries

Build in time for conversation, checking in,
seeking input, celebrating milestones, having fun



Connect with other organizations that engage with people

Service providers, group homes, senior residences,
shelters, meal programs, resettlement agencies



Terre Haute Friendship House – guest chair

Build personal connections with people going through tough times ...

- Volunteer for relational programs
 - Mentor or be a support person
 - Visit / call to check in
- Engage with kids while parents get help
 - Be a prayer partner
- Invite people to connection-focused groups and activities
- Share an interest or activism together
 - Have meals together

Ministry of presence



“You were there for me.”

Strategy #5: Connect with the loneliest generation ...



Build relationships with young adults

- Generation Z (born 1997-2012) is most likely to say they are lonely
- Two-thirds of young adults feel no one really knows them well
- 40% of young adults agree: “I feel completely alone.”
- The loneliest demographic: young men



Connection points

- Enjoy meals together
- Create things together
- Act together to make a better world
- Seek their input
- Be like family



Strategy #6: Engage with people not at the center of church life



Help new people get connected

Being friendly is good ...
but not enough for real connections.



Reach out to disengaged attenders

Who has some connection with the church ...
but is not well connected?

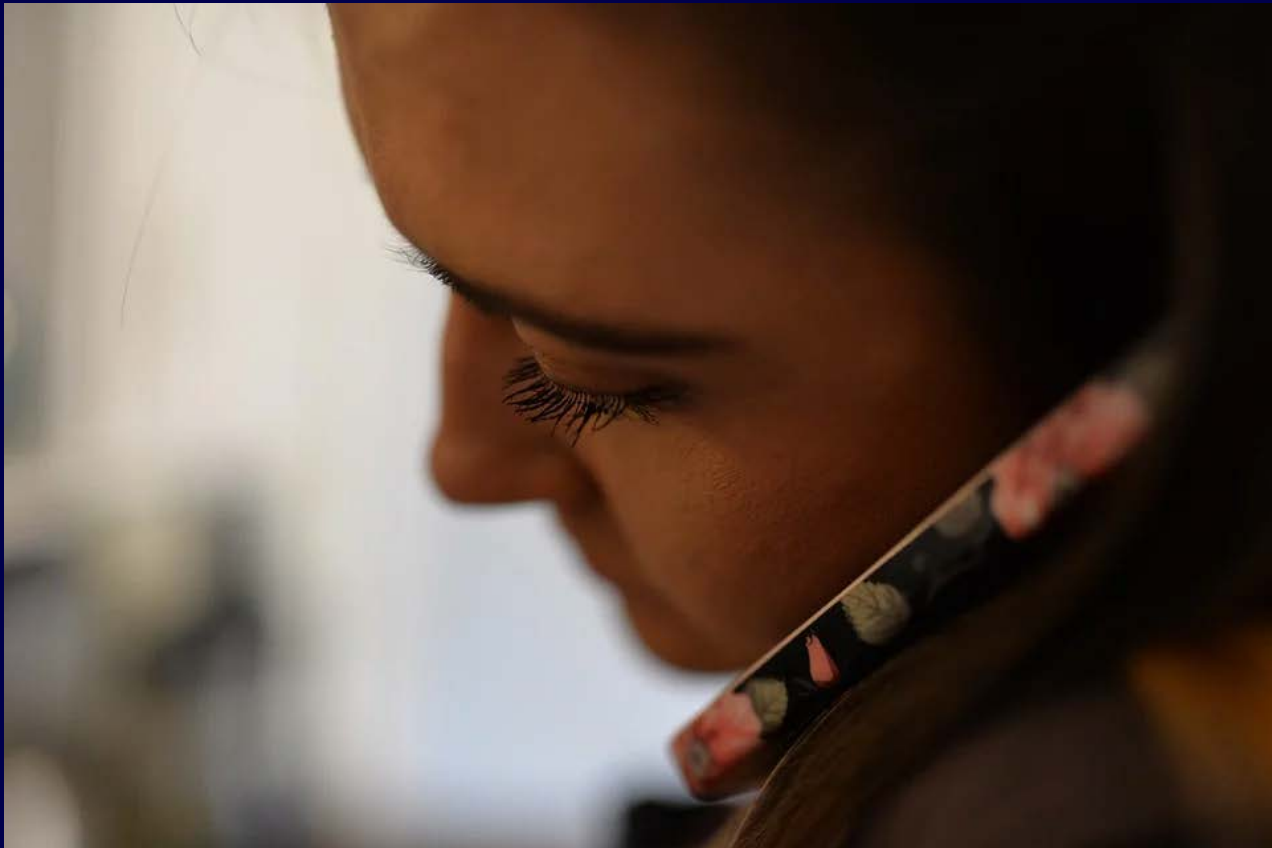
- Homebound / distancing
- Parents of small children
- Social anxiety / mental health
- Personal crisis
- Prefer church online

4 ways to build engagement based on relationship:

- Be **intentional** about looking out for people who are new or sitting alone
- **Introduce** people to others in the congregation
- **Invite** people to get together outside of Sunday service
- Discover people's **interests** and gifts

Keep up a habit of checking in

Contact lists, “buddy” program, card ministry ...



Build relationships online

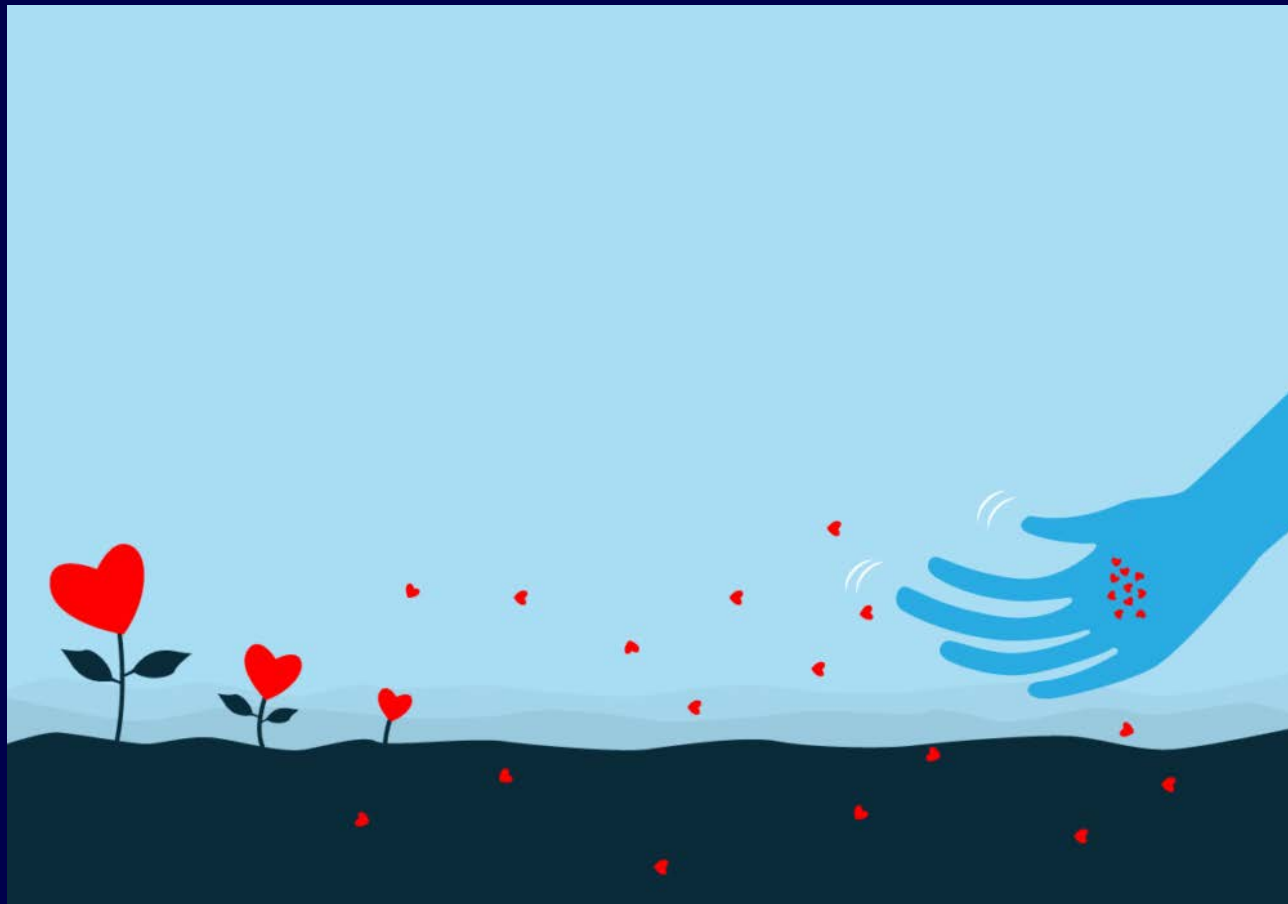
Personal interactions via Zoom rooms, chats, social media, online communities, e-events ...



We invite your input!

**Which of these strategies for addressing social isolation have you tried before?
How did it go, and what did you learn?**

Next steps for churches wanting to focus on relationships



Connection step #1: TAKING STOCK

Where would you like to work on strengthening relationships ...

Within the congregation?

With the community?

To address social isolation?

To engage new people?

Connection step #1: TAKING STOCK

What are the barriers to focusing on relationships?

Too busy?

Lots of introverts?

Cliques?

Divisions?

Issues of trust?

Connection step #2: OPENING UP

Clear up space in the church's / members' calendar for relationships –
Have an attitude of availability



Connection step #3: ENGAGING

Identify & organize people gifted
for building relationships
(both extroverts AND introverts!)



Connection step #4: TRYING

Pick a connection idea that is relevant and doable in your setting



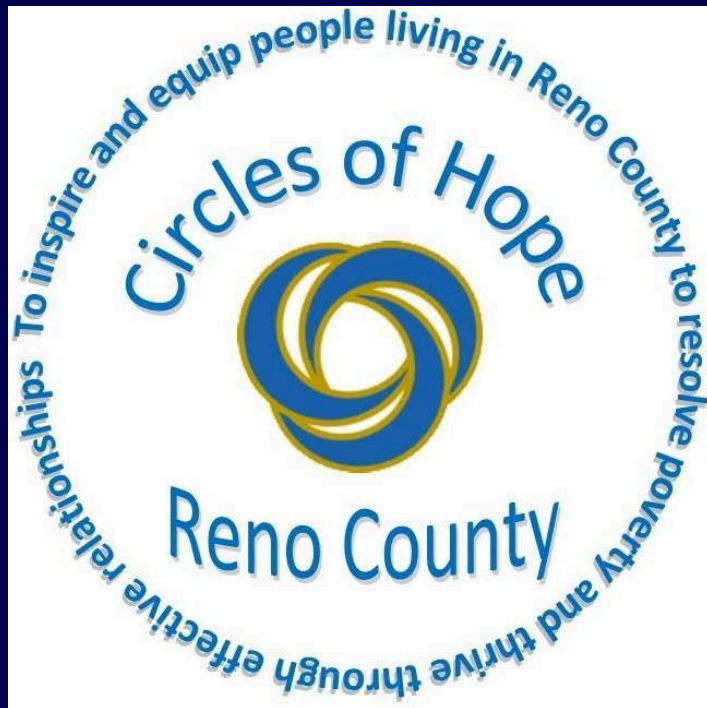
Connection big step: LISTENING

Intentional listening process in your congregation and community, exploring assets as well as needs



Connection big step: RELATIONAL PROGRAMS

Explore adding new programs with
building relationships at the core



We invite your input!

**What is one idea that you heard today
that you want to try next?**

***Or, What excites you about focusing
on relationships in your church?***

Imagine your church as a hub of relationships ...

Everyone has the chance to expand
their circle of connections



Imagine ...

Everyone can find a friend at your church
(even if they don't go to church)



Imagine ...

Lots of listening happens, within your church
and in the community



Imagine ...

People try to understand and respect one another (even when they don't agree)



Imagine ...

People know, trust and collaborate
with one another better



Imagine ...

No one has to go through
life's hardest moments alone



Joy & Heidi

Connect Church and Community

Services we offer include:

- **Training** via webinars and workshops
- **Consulting** on strategic plans for community ministry
- **Coaching** that walks with leaders to implement ministry plans and get “unstuck”
- Facilitating an **asset discovery** process
- Guiding **listening activities** in the church and community
- Hosting **conversations** to help explore new directions

Training to Strengthen Connections

Sample training topics:

- Everyone can make a friend at church
- Getting to know your neighbors
- Building relationships in a hybrid world
- Strong community partnerships
- Connecting with people who are hidden & hurting
- Building bridges through difficult conversations
- Cultivating community with young adults
- How to talk to strangers

Our process is customized and flexible.
We work with individual churches, leadership bodies,
or a group of churches learning together.

*How can we support your ministry
in these difficult times?*

Your questions and comments for Joy & Heidi!

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