



Going Deeper with the Narrative Questions

The Fellowship / ECO National Gathering

Orlando, FL

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1. How has the Holy Spirit been evident in your congregation in the past year; through conversions, growth in the fruit of the Spirit, or other transformational experiences that make disciples of Jesus Christ?

Historically this question was asking how the Holy Spirit was moving in terms of conversions. Reformed people know conversions happen only by the action of the Holy Spirit. The original question also had an application for ways of talking about deepening the Christian life, also because of the Holy Spirit. The shape of this question keeps much of the original intent as we focus on the ways the Spirit of God is changing and transforming people. Imagine a spiritual awakening among a youth group, or a new powerful movement toward mission, or a surprising visit by the Holy Spirit in a retreat setting or particular ministry: these may give us examples that help us discern where the Holy Spirit is on the move. We come to a Mission Affinity Group noting that this is occurring. There may be years when we don't see much. That should be shared and prayed about as well.

2. How has your congregation extended itself beyond its bounds through the establishment of new communities of worship and discipleship, expanding the Kingdom of God?

This question originally focused on outpost Sunday schools and new congregations. In order for this current movement to flourish, our congregations will need to grow in new places. Each session should at least *ask* this question every year to listen for the voice of God: do we need a new service in a retirement home, or in a location where many members live? Do we need to focus ministry in a location where no members live but which needs a congregation, or in a neighboring town, or down the hall in another room? Sessions need to discern where God is leading them.

3. In what ways is your congregation seeking the welfare of the community to which you have been called; devoting itself to the poor, seeking justice, and living out the whole of the Great Commission?

This question is not in the original Narrative. It comes from a recognition that the work of the Kingdom often is exhibited through the way a congregation helps a community to thrive. How is our congregation impacting the community around us by our ministries of compassion or justice? This is a way of measuring a congregation out of Matthew 25 as well as Matthew 28.

4. How are you encouraging people to allow God's Word to shape their priorities and actions, and to nurture constant learning and the life of the mind?

Reformed people are people of the Bible. How is Scripture impacting the life of our congregation; nurturing a lifetime hunger and deepening our theological and biblical understanding? The Fellowship/ECO is committed to making sure faith is understood, expressed and passed on. Our Theology Project will continue to nurture helpful study. But everything we study from the great Confessions of history or our Essential Tenets is designed to focus us back on the Word of God.

5. How are you helping children and others new to the Christian faith to discover Jesus and grow in their understanding and love of God's Word?

Prior to 1925 we were deeply committed to reaching unreached children for the gospel. Our outpost Sunday schools were entirely designed for children who did not grow up in Christian homes. We gave up outpost Sunday schools years ago when it seemed that Christendom had reached the frontiers. Now we again see a huge population of unreached children. Most decisions for Christ happened between ages 4 and 14, the "4/14 Window." Is this an aim of our congregation? If so, how is it being expressed? If not, why not?

6. Describe the moral expression in your congregation. Are you more like the world or more like participants in the values of the Kingdom of God?

This moral question will take us to issues of sexuality, greed, materialism, racism, gossip, and a host of other topics some will consider to be "hot." In The Fellowship / ECO we promise to be guided by Scripture and our Confessions. This question will challenge all those places where accommodation to culture is so appealing. Are we more like the world or more like residents of the Kingdom? How to have this discussion while walking the narrow ridge between legalism and license, is part of our challenge.

7. How is your congregation intentionally unleashing the ministries of women, men, and people of different ethnic groups who are experiencing God's call?

If the values of the Kingdom include liberation for race and gender, that should also be expressed in how people are called into vocations. This question flows out of our value of "celebrating the ministry of women" as well the value we place on full participation of people from all ethnicities.

8. How is the idea of ministry as the joy and calling of every disciple evident in your congregation? How are you equipping people to represent Jesus more effectively in their respective professions?

Reformed people believe in calling to vocation. The various settings in which God's people work are "callings," including but not limited to the vocations we recognize in the Church. How does our congregation equip us to live for Christ in business, government, medicine, education, the home, etc.?

9. Illustrate the commitment of your congregation to global evangelism and discipleship, including examples of where you are engaging and with whom you are partnering.

Where and how is our congregation actively involved in the global expressions of ministry? Where do we discern God calling us to be involved around this world, and why? What do we know about the joys and challenges faced by disciples of Jesus in other lands and other cultures? How are these our joys and challenges too?

10. How does your congregation understand commitment to the larger church through our connectional relationships within the Body of Christ?

How are relationships within the larger Body of Christ being nurtured in our congregation? Are our relationships crossing racial, cultural, and stylistic lines? Are there new kinds of worshiping communities that receive deep support from us? Are we striving to continue to relate to others in our Presbyteries and with those who are now in other expressions of the Presbyterian Church?