



Trends and Emerging Issues

Duration: 60-90 minutes **Group size:** 5-8 people per small group

"Nothing remains the same forever. We must always be seeking out ways to do better."

-Sam Geist

Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to stimulate robust small group conversations about faith in the future. It should provoke disturbing concerns about possible futures to avoid as well as creative thinking about new opportunities. The primary intention is to interrupt normal patterns of thinking in order to consider how we might apply scripture and faith to formidable challenges that await us just beyond the horizon.

Outputs

- Heightened awareness of trends and emerging issues that could impact the faith community in the future

Preparation

- Print out several sets of Provocation from the future cards, cut and fold them into sets of individual cards.
- Set up the room for small group discussions.
- Be familiar with the 15 provocations on which discussion is based.

Materials:

- ✓ Provocations from the future cards
- ✓ Flip chart
- ✓ Colored markers

Guidelines

Provocations from the future consider 15 changes external to the church that could provoke some kind of change within the faith community. Please note that forecasting the future differs from predicting the future in that it explores what *could* happen rather than declaring what *will* happen. Even if one does not agree, the forecast can still be useful to stimulate thinking about futures that are desirable.

- Self-organize into small groups of 5-8 people.

- Give each group a set of cards, paper, and markers.
- For 30 minutes, each group goes through the 15 provocations, discusses them briefly, and places them in one of 3 piles: 1) trends of concern to us, 2) not relevant, or 3) unsure.
- At this point, each group should take the cards in the “trends of concern to us” pile or the “unsure” pile and select the top 3-5 trends the faith community should be thinking about.
- For the next 30-60 minutes, discuss the top 3-5 trends in more detail and write down a list of reasons the trend is of concern and how the faith community might address it.
- Select a spokesperson from your group to share the results with the full group.
- Capture the results of the closing full group session on a flip chart.

Tips for facilitating group activities

- Consider changing the usual meeting environment to stimulate creative thinking.
- Keep the end goal of decisive action in mind for the duration of the activity.
- Open with a brief overview of the activity so participants know what to expect.
- Be careful and consistent to maintain pre-set boundaries of time and task.
- Encourage small group self-management; suggest that each group select a recorder, a reporter, a time keeper, and a discussion leader.
- Work with the people, ideas, and motivations you have to find enough common ground to act rather than being bogged down or sidetracked with an attempt to resolve “deeper issues”.
- Seek global perspective on issues by allowing all opinions to be expressed, validating polarities, and by agreeing to disagree on issues that cannot be resolved quickly.
- Encourage people to stay engaged in spite of differences. Resist the urge to intervene unless you observe movement toward ‘fight or flight’. Allow the group to resolve its own differences or agree to set them aside.
- Provide plenty of easily available nutritious snacks and beverages
- Consider using a Church Futures consultant to add depth and breadth of experience.