



**WISCONSIN
CONFERENCE**
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

What do you DO in Lay Academy? A Glimpse into Faith Foundations

Perhaps you are pondering signing up for the transformative learning community we call Lay Academy but are wondering to yourself, what exactly do you DO in Lay Academy? Here is a snapshot from the April 2018 session, which was titled “Christian History: The Church, It’s Mission.”

After a weekend of conversation about Christian History and theology of mission inspired by diverse readings, first person accounts, scripture passages and conversations among their peers, participants were provided with two options for deeper personal reflection on what they had learned. One of these options was:

“From the epistles of Paul to the present day much of Christian theology has been shared through letters. Write your own letter to your congregation, a friend, or even to yourself. Engage with issues relevant to our unique time and place in history. Take care to involve the perspective of the voiceless and those outside of your own culture who are too often silenced on the historical stage.”

What follows is an edited excerpt from a current Lay Academy participant who composed a letter to the church in general addressing today’s challenging context and offering words of hope and encouragement.

Grace and Peace!

From Joe, one of the many servants of God to all who are concerned about the future of the church and who long to spread Christ’s teachings to others but are struggling with ways to reach out to them.

Congratulations and thank you for your desire to keep Jesus’ movement of love and caring for all people going! The concern you have expressed in how to share this movement in your local community is an inspiration! What a great way to continue the

movement, close to home. You will be amazed at how your work will impact others.

To continue the movement Jesus started, reflect first on the characteristics and attitudes of the people you want to impact with the message. Most likely, they are people who are thinking for themselves. They are interested in social issues and want to make a difference through their actions. They are proficient in the latest technology and less likely to sit for extended periods of time. They are people who ask questions and who often lack confidence in the leadership of institutions. Many of them feel the church is too judgmental and closed minded. Most experience God in everyday life, in nature and in places outside the church. How will you reach out to them? How will you discover their spiritual needs and longings?

To make sure the movement continues you will need to listen carefully to the people around you. There are a number of things you can try to reach your new audience always keeping in mind the institutional church as we know it continues to meet the needs of some worshippers. Don't be afraid of failure, everything you try is not going to have the results for which you hope. Be patient. Implement a few ideas at a time. You don't want the movement to die because of an exhausted leadership.

You might start by gathering a small group of people to walk through your community. Talk about what you see, the good and the bad. What are you proud of, what would you like to change, what needs do you see? Once you've identified a need or needs, connect the people interested in addressing this need with one another and encourage them to look at solutions. Develop partnerships with others addressing these needs in your community, regardless of whether they attend your church. Let them take leadership and watch the group of people committed to sharing God's love grow.

Take the Gospel to those not coming to church. Initiate small discussion groups in homes, the library, or the local pub. Start with religiously neutral topics and let the spirit and the participants lead.

Repurpose your building to meet other community needs such as housing for the homeless or child or adult day care. Open space for community classes or become a place for art and music to thrive all week long.

These ideas and others you may consider will keep Jesus' movement of love, caring grace and justice going. Think big, start small. Be encouraged knowing that it is not the number of people who attend worship but those who are engaged in sharing God's love through their actions in the community that make up today's church. Watch the gate swing both ways as you reach out beyond your building to God's people and they reach back to serve.

Remember: Be the people of God! Do Justice. Love kindness. Walk humbly. Listen. Look around you. Protect the environment. Care for the poor. Forgive often. Reject racism. Fight for the powerless. Share earthly and spiritual resources. Embrace diversity. Love God. Enjoy this life. Keep up with the times, for God is still speaking.

What do you DO in Lay Academy? You learn, grow, imagine, develop, strengthen and deepen faith in community with others from around the state. A new cohort of faithful learners is gathering for another round of Lay Academy. Registration is open now at wcucc.org/layacademy. All are truly welcome!