

Eat Pray Walk

Episcopal Relief & Development seeks to assist individuals and whole communities to believe in themselves—their knowledge, their abilities, their values, their worth. This approach can help break through traditional hierarchical perceptions of power and cycles of dependence that have been reinforced by an overemphasis on outside solutions and outside funds.

We use Asset-Based Community Development to catalyze change and development based on utilizing the gifts and capacities of people and their communities. The ABCD model discourages development brought in from an outside source but rather energizes change and development from within. For truly sustainable development, it's important to focus on a community's strengths versus solely its needs.

You can join us in this work by revealing the climate strengths in your neighborhood. Also, in partnership with your neighbors, you can begin discernment about what climate-related improvements can be addressed.

The idea of Eat Pray Walk is not about taking a stroll in the neighborhood or prepping for a 5K. It's not just walking around. It's not just praying. It's walking through your neighborhood praying with your eyes and your heart wide open. It's noticing signs of hope and signs of need—and how God calls you to be present to both. Pay extra attention to the environment. Do an assessment. How are the plants? The trees? The animals? How is the soil? Where is the water coming from, and where is it going?

When your walk is complete, then it's time to say your prayers, break bread with others in your community and re-imagine how your Creation Care ministry team could join God and your neighbors in caring for the earth in your own backyard.

Guidelines for Planning and Introducing Your Prayer-Walking

- Plan your route ahead of time. Try to walk on a variety of days and times, not just Sunday morning. What's happening on a Tuesday at 5 p.m.?
- Meet at your community space or church and pray before you leave. Form groups of 2-6 people. Multiple groups can cover different areas. If the group is too large, you're likely to focus on each other instead of the neighborhood.
- If your area is dependent on cars, you can still do a prayer walk. Your route should include common gathering places: shopping centers, groceries, dog parks, town squares, community gardens, your community's 5-block radius and more.
- As you walk, look around with care and pray, either in silence or aloud softly. Use the Prayer Walk Community Observation Guide on the following page as a tool.
- Don't call attention to yourselves. Respect the dignity of community members. Be present as servants, not tourists. As veteran prayer walkers say, "You can be on the scene without making one."
- Although it is not the primary purpose, be open to opportunities to interact with people you encounter. If anyone asks what you are doing, be prepared to respond: "We're the Creation Care Ministry Team from (*church/community/school*) and we are praying and getting to know our neighborhood better."
- Offer to pray if it feels appropriate.

How Should We Pray?

- **Pray for discernment:** Seek the gift of seeing the community through Christ's "lens" and to discern what God is already doing there; ask God to show you how you can pray with greater insight for the people, events and places in the community.
- **Pray for blessings:** Pray for every person, home, school, business and situation you encounter.
- **Pray with empathy:** See and feel what your neighbors live with every day; offer intercession for signs of brokenness and give thanks to God for the blessings and gifts in the community.
- **Pray with gratitude:** Give thanks for the beauty of all living things, including plants, people, water, air and animals.



Abubakari, a teacher in Lamaiti Secondary School, in Tanzania, assists his students in weeding together in their kitchen garden plots.

Concluding the Neighborhood Prayer Walk

Immediately afterward, perhaps over a meal, gather to share your prayers, observations and experiences:

- What did you learn about the neighborhood?
- Where was God's presence especially apparent?
- What surprised you?
- What was hard? What was engaging?
- What ministries and what worship would truly speak here? With whom could you partner and learn?

An important note: the goal for your Creation Care team is not to define problems to be solved—or to come up with all the solutions—but to look for opportunities to partner with neighbors to imagine what is possible with the gifts available. This is not about doing *for*; it's about doing *with*.

Prayer Walk Community Observation Guide

On your walk, look for evidence of the following:

People groups—Who is standing at bus stops, hanging on street corners, going into businesses, playing in parks, waiting in line at the store? How much do people interact with one another?

Places of activity—What are the places with the most activity? Cafés, shopping plazas, heavily trafficked intersections, playgrounds, schools?

Structures—What are the types and conditions of the structures (homes, businesses, roads, parks)? How much “free space” is there in the community? What is the mix of private and public space?

Services—Where do people go to shop, eat, study, worship and receive assistance? What appears to be the quantity and quality of available services? Who provides services, and who is receiving?

Signs of change—Note businesses opening or closing; housing under construction, for sale or being demolished. Look for unusual languages on shop signs and buildings used differently from their original purpose.

Signs of hope—Where do you see evidence of God's grace and God's people at work? Look for other churches and nonprofit organizations, playing children, uplifting artwork, faith symbols, social gatherings and gardens. Look especially for local assets that could be connected with neighborhood needs.

Signs of need—Look for evidence of hardship, hurt or injustice. Is what you see specific to particular areas or affecting the neighborhood as a whole? Be aware that marginalized people and social problems are often hidden, especially in communities that appear well-off.

(This resource was initially adapted by Stephanie Spellers and the Missional Vitality Team in the Diocese of Long Island from resources by Waymakers and then adapted for Episcopal Relief & Development's Creation Care toolkit for parishes, communities and individuals.)