



Congregational Sermon Whisperers

The Iowa Preachers Project offers you resources for building connections within your congregation that support your preaching and nurture members' appreciation of the preached Word. The structure laid out here is a suggestion. Use it as is or adapt it or ignore it. As always with participation in the Project, it's intended as a gift rather than a burden. You're free to make it work for you.

Goal: Along with gaining valuable feedback from sermon hearers, build a cadre of congregational members who connect monthly and who come to understand the importance of preaching and gain language to talk about what makes for faithful and effective proclamation of the Gospel.¹ By the end of the program year we hope you will have gained a set of advocates for your preaching who also regard themselves as faith influencers and stewards of God's Word in your congregation.

October

Early in the month Preaching Fellows assemble a Sermon Whisperers group of congregational members to serve as conversation partners over the course of the program year. Think about factors like generational range,² varied life circumstances, length of church membership, and gender balance. You want a group that reflects the congregation.

At your first meeting, watch these "How to Listen to a Sermon" videos:³ Introduction, What Qualifies You, Before and After the Sermon, the Goal of Preaching. Decide which sermon and which Sunday they'll provide you with feedback. Read the preaching text for that sermon together. As a way to prepare for that sermon, go through the T.R.I.P. process laid out in the video. Finally, pray for God's Word to come to them.

After the designated Sunday, ask your Sermon Whisperers to complete the feedback form for that month. PDFs of the forms are available on the IPP website. This month you'll just

¹ In his treatise "On Whether a Congregation May Call or Dismiss a Pastor," Martin Luther argued that the primary task of lay people in a congregation is to "judge doctrine." In other words, people in the pews need to be able to know the difference between what is Christ (who saves) and what is not Christ (that doesn't save), so they can know if their preacher is doing what they're called to do.

² Don't neglect to include a high school-age member. Think of it as creating a group of young people with a theological vocabulary and, maybe, even the start of a pipeline for future pastors. Check out this book: Lyle Griner, *Youth Are Either Leading or Leaving*.

³ Iowa Preachers Project videos on "How to Listen to a Sermon" are found at www.iapreachers.org.

ask them to write a general response. (If you choose not to use the forms and simply have a conversation, that's just fine. Submitting forms to the Project isn't required.)

November: Delivery

The Sermon Whisperers' contributions will begin with a low-stakes evaluation of your delivery. They already know what good communication looks like. But to make sure everyone is on the same page, either individually or as a group, watch the video about sermon delivery. Have your Sermon Whisperers fill out the form or answer the same questions as a part of a group discussion. If your group has begun to use the T.R.I.P. process, find out from them how they'd deal with each of the letters in the acronym. Then as a group, say a prayer that includes some of those things.

December: Faithfulness to the Bible

This month the scaffolding of the Sermon Whisperers structure begins. Last month the group focused on delivery. This month you'll want feedback on delivery on the new sermon. But now we'll add questions about whether a sermon is faithful to Scripture. Have your Sermon Whisperers watch the video about that category. Whether people complete this month's form individually or talk about it as a group, move through the questions. Again, if your group uses the T.R.I.P. process, talk about it and say a prayer that includes those things.

January-April: Structure/rhetoric, illustrations, language, theology

As you move through the coming months, follow the previous pattern: watch the associated videos, do the feedback via the form or discussion, and pray. Each month will have a little longer form that builds on what's gone on before. These are your topics for each month:

-  January: Structure and rhetoric
-  February: Illustrations
-  March: Language
-  April: Theology (two videos on Law and Gospel)

May

Celebrate! God's Word isn't intended to be delved into alone. God speaks not only to shape us individually but also to speak the Body of Christ into existence. Like the cosmos that is created by God speaking into the chaos in Genesis 1, through the Sermon Whisperer process God started with nothing and now has given you as a preacher, your feedback group, and your entire congregation an expanding universe of the Word. That's a work of distinct grace. And it's worth rejoicing over. Find a way to bring your Sermon Whisperers together to give thanks and maybe even plan how you might move forward from here. It's possible your entire congregation could whisper sweet somethings into their preacher's ears.