



Equipping 21st Century Disciples

Introduction to the Tool Kit



My father's tool kit looked a lot like the one on the left. The tools were basic: hammer, screwdrivers, adjustable wrench, pliers, saw and measuring tape. Dad taught me to use every tool in the box, and I did. Only occasionally did I pulverize a fingernail instead of the iron nail I was attempting to hammer into place. Basic tools worked for most chores around the Hughes household in the 1950's.

When I grew up and owned both a beat up '49 Chevy and later a starter home, the chores became more complex. Basic tools were still in my big bag, but new devices had been added. Even with the help of the user's manual that came with the tool kit (at the right), a few gadgets never saw the light of day.



I confess that analogies are imperfect. There are significant differences between changing spark plugs on a Chevy, replacing a dryer belt, and doing adult ministry in a new era. But there are similarities too.

The "Why?" "How?" and "What?" of age 50+ ministry

PURPOSES (Why?)

Like the user's manual in today's tool bags, this section addresses foundational issues:

- Why has ALOA's mission emphasis over a quarter century shifted somewhat?
- Why is ALOA concerned about ministry by, with, and for persons in life's second half?
- Why do both the Bible and our Lutheran theology affirm the task of equipping senior disciples?
- Why do we still use the term "disciple" for persons committed to serving God and others?

GETTING STARTED (How?)

Like my dad's box of basic tools, this section addresses practical questions for pilot congregations:

- How will we begin? Where is the starting line?
- How will pilot congregations enlist and support adult ministry planning teams?
- How will congregations discern the resources and desires of their members?
- How will adult ministry teams match programs to the needs of congregation and community?
- How will teams evaluate what they have done to know if or how they have achieved their goal?

PROGRAM RESOURCES (What?)

Like my "big bag" of tools, this section will have some basic items but will grow with regular additions:

- What program emphases will ALOA recommend for pilot year congregations?
- What media resources and study guides will be produced and featured in the ALOA newsletter?
- What program resources will be chosen and adapted to fit a variety of churches and locations?
- What "Best Practice" programs will be packaged for sharing with network congregations?

RUMMAGE AROUND IN THE BIG BAG AND CHOOSE WHAT IS USEFUL

Rev. Dr. Robert Hughes, for the Program Team

TOOLS CHANGE EVERYTHING

Via Romana, the roads built by the Roman Empire, enabled the legionnaires to conquer and to rule the ancient world. But these same military highways enabled Saul of Tarsus to found and later visit Christian congregations in places like Philippi and Ephesus around the rim of the Mediterranean Sea, and finally in Rome itself. Tools change things.

The Protestant Reformation may not have taken place without the invention of the printing press. That tool enabled 16th century Christians and successors in our own day to get copies of the Bible in their native languages. This tool helped move the church into the information age. Tools enable the Word to be read and heard everywhere.

The tool of the moment is the Internet, and churches are only beginning to scratch the surface of its potential. Congregational web sites are becoming sophisticated and helpful means to link congregants and share information. Many worshippers no longer struggle to balance hefty hymnals and service books as they become accustomed to reading the lyrics of hymns and liturgies “off- the-wall.”

During the pilot year of Equipping 21st Century Disciples, networks of pilot year congregations will be experimenting with various means of linking across geographical barriers. Without abandoning traditional forms of print communication, telephone conferences, and early digital highways like e-mail, groupings of congregations will reach out to each other through newer venues.

This will lead to interactions that would have been improbable or impossible in a church bound by the geography of regions, synods, conferences and clusters. To be sure, there will be challenges as well as discoveries. What’s clear already is that new tools will impact the system of adult ministry in the church.

As ALOA officers and members of the Program Team of the Equipping...Disciples initiative, we embrace the opportunity to learn from both our stumbles and our successes. Let the journey begin.

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