

Church & Community Engagement

Glossary of Terms



About This Glossary

Purpose of the Glossary

This glossary is designed as a shared language and learning tool for church and community engagement. Its purpose is not merely to define terms, but to cultivate clarity, coherence, and thoughtful conversation across diverse roles, contexts, and partnerships.

The glossary provides working definitions for key theological, missional, and community engagement concepts, helping readers develop a common vocabulary that supports discernment, collaboration, and faithful practice. It is intended to aid learning, reflection, and alignment rather than to prescribe strategies or offer exhaustive explanations.

Intended Audience

This glossary is intended for a broad range of individuals and organizations involved in church and community engagement, including:

- Church leaders, staff, and volunteer teams
- Individual Christians seeking to live faithfully in their communities
- Faith-based and community-based nonprofits and their staff
- Community engagement leaders, practitioners, and volunteers
- Foundation partners and collaborators working alongside churches and nonprofits

Because these audiences often work together across different sectors and perspectives, the glossary is written to be accessible while remaining theologically grounded and practically useful.

Scope and Limitations

This glossary is intentionally focused rather than exhaustive.

It does not attempt to define every possible term related to theology, justice, community development, or social change. Instead, it concentrates on concepts most directly relevant to church and community engagement as understood within this context.

The definitions offered here are not meant to be final or universally authoritative. They are contextual, functional, and designed to support shared understanding and productive dialogue. Some important ideas are named implicitly rather than fully developed, and others are intentionally omitted to preserve clarity and coherence.

Readers are encouraged to use this glossary as a starting point for learning, reflection, and conversation, supplementing it with additional resources, lived experience, and communal discernment as appropriate.

Using This Glossary: Orientation and Practice

The terms in this glossary reflect two closely related dimensions of church and community engagement: orientation and practice.

Orientation refers to the underlying posture, identity, and way individuals or communities understand their role in relation to God, the church, and the world. Orientation shapes *who we are becoming* and how we are positioned for engagement.

Examples include terms such as *Missio Dei*, *Missionality*, *Biblical Justice*, and *Bounded-Set and Centered-Set Approaches*.

Practice refers to the concrete actions, behaviors, and strategies that flow from that posture. Practice shapes *how engagement is lived out* in everyday life and local contexts.

Examples include *Missional Living*, *Local Missional Outreach*, and *Church Mobilization*.

Also, throughout this glossary, *engagement* is understood as relational, participatory, and sustained involvement with people and communities, rather than one-directional support or programmatic activity; this understanding informs both orientation and practice.

Healthy church and community engagement attends to both—cultivating a faithful orientation while developing practices that embody and express that posture in lived, relational, and contextual ways.

Glossary of Terms

Terms are listed alphabetically, but are best understood relationally rather than sequentially.

APEST – APEST is an acronym drawn from Ephesians 4:11–13 that refers to five complementary leadership roles within the church: Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Shepherds, and Teachers. Together, these roles describe diverse gifts given to the church for the purpose of equipping God’s people, strengthening the body of Christ, and supporting the church’s participation in God’s mission. Each role contributes a distinct perspective and function—such as pioneering, discerning, proclaiming, caring, and forming—while none stands alone as sufficient in itself.

APEST is often used as a framework for leadership development and ecclesial health, emphasizing shared leadership, gift diversity, and the formation of a mature, unified, and mission-oriented church.

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) — Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) is an approach to community development that focuses on identifying, valuing, and mobilizing the existing strengths and assets of a community, rather than primarily addressing deficits or needs. ABCD emphasizes the active participation of community members and builds on local skills, relationships, institutions, culture, and resources. It shifts the mindset from “*What is wrong here?*” to “*What is already present, and how can it be activated?*”

By centering community assets and relationships, ABCD seeks to foster community-led, sustainable, and long-term change driven from within rather than imposed from outside.

Attractional Approaches (vs. Missional Approaches) — An attractional approach centers on inviting people to come to the church or organization in order to receive spiritual, relational, or programmatic benefits. Attractional models often emphasize excellence in gatherings, programs, and services, assuming that transformation occurs primarily as people are drawn into the institution. While attractional approaches can play a legitimate role, especially for formation and community life, they may limit engagement with those who are unlikely or unwilling to come.

Biblical Justice — Biblical justice is the expression of God’s righteous and merciful character in human relationships, community life, and social systems. It affirms the dignity of all people as image bearers of God and seeks right relationships by addressing wrongdoing, protecting the vulnerable, and restoring what has been broken.

Biblical justice includes *retributive justice*, which focuses on accountability and fairness by naming harm and applying proportionate consequences. Retributive justice seeks to uphold truth, restrain wrongdoing, and prevent further harm by ensuring that actions have appropriate and just outcomes. In Scripture, this form of justice establishes moral clarity and guards against both injustice and excessive punishment.

At the same time, biblical justice is ultimately oriented toward *restorative justice*, which emphasizes reconciliation, healing, and the repair of relationships between offenders, victims, and the broader community. Restorative justice seeks transformation rather than mere punishment, aiming to restore people and systems toward wholeness, faithfulness, and renewed participation in community life.

Biblical justice holds retributive and restorative justice together in tension, but with a restorative direction—accountability in service of healing, truth in service of reconciliation, and justice in service of God’s redemptive purposes. In the life and teachings of Jesus, this restorative trajectory comes fully into view, revealing a justice that is not only right, but renewing.

Bounded-Set Approaches (vs. Centered-Set Approaches) – A bounded-set approach defines faith, belonging, and engagement primarily through clear boundaries, shared beliefs, and defined commitments. It emphasizes clarity about *who is inside the community and who is outside*, and what beliefs or behaviors mark faithfulness.

In community engagement contexts, bounded-set approaches often align with more attractional and supporting postures, where engagement with the community flows from a clearly defined Christian identity and is frequently mediated through programs, resources, or institutional structures. Proclamation may be prioritized over presence, and engagement may emphasize relief or support rather than long-term relational involvement.

Bounded-set approaches play an important role in maintaining theological integrity, defining membership and leadership, and preserving shared identity. When overextended into community engagement, however, they can unintentionally shift focus from participation in God’s mission toward boundary maintenance, limiting relational engagement with people who do not yet share the church’s beliefs or language.

Capacity Building / Capacity Development — Capacity building (or capacity development) refers to intentional investment in strengthening the abilities, systems, and leadership of organizations so they can more effectively and sustainably pursue their mission.

This may include funding, training, coaching, and technical assistance in areas such as leadership development, financial management, governance, evaluation, fundraising, strategy, and organizational learning. Capacity building focuses not only on improving current performance, but on increasing an organization’s ability to adapt, take appropriate risks, build relationships, innovate, and grow over time.

Centered-Set Approaches (vs. Bounded-Set Approaches) – A centered-set approach understands faith and engagement primarily through orientation and movement toward Christ and God’s redemptive mission, rather than through fixed boundaries of belonging.

In community engagement contexts, centered-set approaches align strongly with missional and engaging postures, emphasizing active participation, relational presence, and shared life with the local

community. The central question is not *Who is in or out?* but *How are people and communities moving toward wholeness, restoration, and alignment with God's purposes?*

Centered-set approaches emphasize engaging rather than merely supporting, demonstrating alongside proclaiming, and communal participation rather than solely personal faith expression. They are especially suited for long-term, relational, restorative engagement in the local community, where belonging can precede belief and transformation unfolds over time.

Rather than minimizing conviction, centered-set approaches hold Christ at the center while creating space for people to journey toward Him through relationship, presence, and shared participation in God's restorative work.

Church Mobilization — Church mobilization is the process of equipping and activating a faith community to live out its missional calling together. This includes helping church members move from passive participation to active engagement in God's mission—both within the congregation and beyond it. Church mobilization may involve partnerships with other churches, faith-based organizations, or secular groups to address community needs and pursue shared goals for the common good.

At its core, church mobilization seeks to activate Christ-followers to tangibly participate in God's restorative work while deepening their sense of shared purpose and connection within the faith community.

Collaborative Strategies — Collaborative strategies are intentional approaches through which organizations with shared goals or desired outcomes cooperate, communicate, and coordinate efforts in ways that are efficient, respectful, and non-competitive. Effective collaboration often involves shared vision, aligned goals, trust-based relationships, and, in more formal partnerships, shared decision-making, resources, and accountability. Collaborative strategies reduce duplication, leverage complementary strengths, and increase shared impact.

Community Flourishing — Community flourishing refers to the holistic well-being of people and places, encompassing relational health, economic stability, safety, belonging, opportunity, and shared purpose.

Flourishing goes beyond the absence of problems to describe conditions in which individuals and communities can thrive—socially, materially, culturally, and spiritually. It reflects a vision of communities marked by dignity, mutual care, resilience, and hope.

In church and community engagement, community flourishing serves as a guiding aim that integrates justice, restoration, quality of life, and long-term sustainability.

Cradle to Career Continuum — The Cradle to Career Continuum is a lifespan framework that emphasizes coordinated support and opportunity from early childhood into adulthood and workforce participation.

It highlights key developmental stages—early childhood, K–12 education, post-secondary pathways, workforce development, and lifelong learning—and underscores the importance of alignment across systems that support individuals at each stage.

The continuum prioritizes equitable access, seamless transitions, and cross-sector collaboration to improve long-term educational, economic, and quality-of-life outcomes.

Cross-Cultural — Cross-cultural refers to intentional interaction, understanding, and collaboration across different cultural backgrounds in ways that promote respect, effectiveness, and mutual learning. In community-serving contexts, cross-cultural engagement involves recognizing cultural differences,

adapting practices accordingly, and designing programs that reflect and honor the diversity of the communities being served.

Cultural Competency — Cultural competency is the ability of individuals and organizations to understand, respect, and effectively respond to cultural differences through appropriate attitudes, knowledge, behaviors, and policies. It goes beyond just awareness by actively integrating cultural understanding into decision-making, service delivery, and relationship-building to improve trust, relevance, and effectiveness in diverse communities.

Cultural Humility — Cultural humility is a posture of lifelong learning, self-reflection, and openness in cross-cultural relationships. It emphasizes listening, curiosity, and respect rather than expertise or mastery, recognizing that individuals are the experts of their own lived experiences. Cultural humility also includes awareness of power dynamics and a commitment to building equitable, trust-based relationships over time.

Cultural Literacy — Cultural literacy is the ability to understand and fluently engage with the shared knowledge, values, symbols, language, and social norms of a particular culture. It enables meaningful communication and relationship-building by helping individuals interpret cultural references, behaviors, and expectations within their proper context.

Disinvested Neighborhood — A disinvested neighborhood is a geographic area that has experienced long-term economic, social, and infrastructural decline due to reduced public and private investment.

These neighborhoods often face challenges such as deteriorating housing, limited access to services, fewer employment opportunities, and systemic inequities rooted in historical and policy-driven decisions. Addressing disinvestment requires coordinated, community-informed strategies that target root causes rather than symptoms alone.

Ecumenical — Ecumenical refers to efforts and postures that seek unity, cooperation, and mutual recognition among diverse Christian denominations and traditions. Rooted in the Christian conviction that the church is called to reflect unity in Christ, ecumenical engagement emphasizes collaboration across theological, cultural, and institutional differences without requiring uniformity. The term derives from the Greek *oikoumene*, meaning “the whole inhabited world,” reflecting a vision of the church as a shared witness within the broader world.

Ecumenical approaches often extend beyond theological dialogue to include shared mission, public witness, and cooperative action for justice, peace, and the common good, embodying unity as both a theological commitment and a lived practice.

Focus Areas (Welborn) – Focus Areas are the primary issue areas in which Welborn concentrates its investments and partnerships to advance meaningful and measurable community outcomes. Welborn’s current Focus Areas include Early Education, Healthy Communities, Christ-Centered Communities, and Nonprofit Excellence, a term that replaced the earlier language of “Impact Areas.”

Incarnational Presence — Incarnational presence refers to a posture of long-term, relational, and embedded engagement within a particular community or context. Rooted in the example of Jesus’ incarnation, incarnational presence emphasizes being with people—listening, learning, and sharing life—rather than approaching communities primarily through programs, projects, or transactions. It values proximity, patience, and faithfulness over quick outcomes or visible results.

In church and community engagement, incarnational presence creates the conditions for trust, mutual understanding, and meaningful participation in restorative work over time.

Local Missional Outreach — Local missional outreach is the concrete, contextual expression of missional living and a church’s missional identity within a specific local community. It involves intentionally and relationally engaging people in close proximity—neighbors, workplaces, schools, and neighborhoods—through presence, service, witness, and partnership.

Local missional outreach may include evangelism, acts of mercy, meeting tangible needs, advocacy, and efforts toward community flourishing, all incarnating the gospel so that the love and message of Jesus are experienced and seen locally.

Marginalized People — Marginalized people are individuals or groups who experience systemic exclusion, reduced access to power, or diminished social, economic, or political influence, often resulting in vulnerability or invisibility within society. Marginalization may occur due to structural barriers, social stigma, or historical inequities and often intersects across multiple dimensions of identity and experience.

Missio Dei (Mission of God) — *Missio Dei* is a Latin phrase meaning “the mission of God.” It names the foundational Christian conviction that mission originates with God, not the church or individual Christians.

God’s mission is the redemptive and restorative work of reconciling all creation to Himself, revealed throughout Scripture and most fully in the sending of the Son (Jesus Christ) and the Holy Spirit. God initiates, leads, and sustains this mission.

The church does not invent its own mission; rather, the church exists as a participant in God’s mission. All Christian mission—whether evangelism, service, justice, or community engagement—is an act of joining what God is already doing in the world.

In short, *Missio Dei* means that God is the primary actor in mission, and the church is invited to participate in God’s ongoing work of restoration and reconciliation.

Missionality — Missionality refers to the orientation and posture of a person, group, or church around God’s mission (*missio Dei*) rather than around inward, institutional, or self-preserving concerns. Missionality describes *who we are* before it describes *what we do*. It is the degree to which individuals or communities understand themselves as sent participants in God’s redemptive work and organize their lives accordingly.

Missionality is expressed through everyday rhythms, relationships, and engagement with the local community, revealing whether a church or Christian is living primarily as a gathered institution or as a sent people.

Missional Approaches (vs. Attractional Approaches) — A missional approach centers on being sent into everyday life and the local community, emphasizing presence, relationship, and participation beyond institutional boundaries. Rather than asking how people come to church, missional approaches ask how the church goes to people—living, serving, and bearing witness within neighborhoods, workplaces, and civic spaces. Mission is not a program, but the organizing posture of the church’s life.

Missional approaches prioritize engagement, proximity, and long-term faithfulness over attendance or program participation.

Missional Church — A missional church is a community of Christians whose identity, structures, and activities are shaped by participation in God’s mission (*missio Dei*).

Rather than treating “missions” as one program among many, a missional church understands that *all* of church life—worship, discipleship, leadership, and outreach—is organized around being sent into the

world. A missional church exists not merely as a place people attend, but as a people formed, equipped, and sent to embody and demonstrate the life and message of Jesus within their local context.

Missional Living — Missional living is the daily practice of living as a sent participant in God’s mission in ordinary, everyday contexts.

Rather than reserving mission for special programs, events, or professionals, missional living calls every Christian to adopt the mindset and habits of a missionary in their normal spheres of life—home, work, neighborhood, school, and civic spaces.

Missional living involves both demonstrating and proclaiming the gospel, joining God’s restorative work through Christlike presence, love, service, and witness wherever one is sent.

Missional Movement — A missional movement refers to a broad renewal within Christianity that re-centers the church’s identity and practice around participation in God’s mission (*missio Dei*).

This movement challenges predominantly attractional models—where people come to church to receive religious goods—and calls churches to become sent communities that go into the world to serve, love, witness, and seek justice.

A missional movement emphasizes that all Christians are missionaries in their everyday lives and that mission is not a program, but the organizing principle of the church’s life and witness in every sphere of society.

Neighborhood Revitalization (NR) — Neighborhood revitalization refers to intentional efforts to strengthen and renew communities that have experienced disinvestment or decline. Revitalization may include physical improvements, economic development, community organizing, and social services, with the goal of creating safer, healthier, and more sustainable neighborhoods. Effective revitalization prioritizes resident engagement, equitable outcomes, and long-term community well-being rather than displacement or short-term gains.

Outcomes — Outcomes are the intended and measurable changes that result from a program, strategy, or intervention. They describe what difference an effort is expected to make—whether in people, organizations, systems, or communities—and provide a way to assess progress and effectiveness beyond activities or outputs. Outcomes help clarify purpose, guide learning, and support accountability by focusing attention on meaningful results rather than simply what was done.

Partnership — Partnership refers to a relationship of shared commitment, responsibility, and accountability between organizations or groups working toward common goals.

Unlike short-term collaboration, partnerships often involve shared risk, aligned vision, ongoing learning, and sustained investment over time. Effective partnerships are grounded in trust, clarity of roles, mutual benefit, and a willingness to adapt together.

In church and community engagement, partnerships enable deeper impact by combining complementary strengths and honoring the contributions of each partner.

Path(s) to Impact (Welborn) — Path(s) to Impact is Welborn’s simplified logic model that articulates how and why the foundation invests its resources. It outlines the connections between Welborn’s investments, the strategies it prioritizes, and the outcomes it seeks to advance. The Path(s) to Impact framework guides grantmaking and partnership across Welborn’s focus areas—Early Education, Healthy Communities, Christ-Centered Communities, and Nonprofit Excellence—by clarifying shared vision, priorities, and desired impact.

Place-Based — Place-based approaches are strategies or initiatives centered on a specific geographic community, emphasizing local context, resident leadership, and tailored solutions. Rather than applying one-size-fits-all models, place-based work integrates cultural, social, economic, and environmental factors unique to a place. It values long-term commitment, layered investment, and cross-sector participation to support community-driven change.

Policy, Systems, and Environmental (PSE) Change — Policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) change focuses on modifying laws, organizational practices, and physical environments to create conditions that support long-term health, equity, and well-being. Rather than targeting individual behavior alone, PSE change addresses the broader structures that shape access, opportunity, and outcomes across a community.

Power and Power-Sharing — Power refers to the ability to influence decisions, shape outcomes, and access resources within relationships, organizations, and systems. Power-sharing is the intentional practice of recognizing, redistributing, and sharing influence and decision-making with those most affected by the issues being addressed. It involves attending to whose voices are heard, whose knowledge is valued, and who has agency in shaping solutions.

In community engagement, power-sharing supports dignity, trust, and more sustainable outcomes by moving away from top-down control toward mutual participation and shared ownership.

Quality of Life — Quality of life refers to the overall well-being and lived experience of individuals and communities, shaped by economic stability, health, safety, relationships, environment, culture, and access to opportunity. It reflects not only measurable outcomes, but also whether people feel able to live, work, and thrive in a place with dignity and hope.

Relief, Recovery, and Restoration (RRR) Response Framework — The relief, recovery, and restoration (RRR) framework describes a phased approach to responding to crisis or hardship.

- *Relief* focuses on immediate stabilization and meeting urgent needs.
- *Recovery* emphasizes rebuilding, healing, and regaining functionality.
- *Restoration* seeks long-term resilience, sustainability, and renewed well-being by addressing root causes and strengthening systems.

Effective engagement recognizes which phase is needed and builds partnerships to support individuals and communities across the full continuum.

Systemic Transformational Change — Systemic transformational change involves deep, structural shifts in policies, practices, relationships, and power dynamics to address root causes of complex challenges. Unlike incremental improvements, this form of change reimagines how systems function in order to produce lasting, equitable outcomes across interconnected social issues.

Wrap-Around Care — Wrap-around care is a coordinated, holistic approach to supporting individuals or families by aligning services across multiple sectors around their goals and needs. With the individual or family at the center, wrap-around care emphasizes collaboration, personalization, and continuity, creating a network of support that adapts over time to promote stability, growth, and long-term flourishing.