

Dear friends,

Happy Eastertide!

This is the latest update on Project Phoenix.

**RECAP:** As you'll recall, Project Phoenix, which aims to [create an experimental prototype faith community](#) for those in their 20s, is being tried in two communities.

- In St. Louis, the effort is being led by the young people on the ground.
- In Los Angeles, TryTank is spearheading a more prescribed method.
- Both designs are based on our research last year, which led us to this point.

**NEW:** Now on to what has happened and what we have discovered.

**St. Louis, MO:** Wesley Ragland, Executive Director of *The Happening*, is pioneering a missional community for young adults who are "Spiritual but Not Religious" (SBNR). Here's what he's been up to since the last update:

- "The Happening" held its first event in St. Louis on Holy Thursday, March 28, 2024.
- An incredible diversity of 75 young people (and this older priest from LA) gathered from 7 to 10 p.m.
- The event as a liturgy:
  - *Gathering:* People come in and chat with each other, stop by the bar, or tour the artsy space.
  - *Liturgy of the word:* Wesley leads the gathered in exploring what the evening, the Happening is about. The first section is improvised hip hop based on what people suggest. "Fear" was the first suggestion. The response verse "I see a shadow."
  - *Response to the word:* In responding to the word, the group was divided into small groups to chat following discussion questions.
  - *Communion:* They shared a meal while in small groups.
  - *More response to the word:* The group gathered back together to further discuss the role of religion in their lives.
  - *Prayers of the people:* The evening ended when anyone could go on stage and perform for a few minutes.
- The evening lived into each of the non-negotiables: radical inclusion and belonging, participatory leadership (shared authority), sacred listening and storytelling (a community of care), shared wisdom (teach each other), table fellowship gatherings (relationships matter).
- See the attached document with pictures and link to a video.
- I will be interviewing four people who participated to evaluate more formally.

**Los Angeles, CA:** The Los Angeles initiative, "Being With LA," is a unique faith exploration program. You can see the website we built here: <https://www.beingwithla.org/>

- We ran ads in Feb featuring the BW video and our website.
- Instagram stats:
  - we reached 7,325 people, 1.62 times each or a total of 11,844 impressions.
  - 125 people clicked through (total of 169 clicks); a 1.06% click through rate which is above the CTR for feed ads on Instagram which ranges between .22% and .88%.
- Not a *single* person signed up, sent an email, or wanted to know more.
- We shared our approach with various church planters and (non-denominational) congregations that do well with young adults. We got some feedback that is now being implemented into a second try following the "church adjacent" model.
- We have partnered with a group that has young adults asking them to invite a friend to a free dinner where they can experience a sample of the BW program.
- The goal is that 16 people will try it and that about 8 will want to do the 10-week program.

**What's next:**

- **In St. Louis**, the diocese is looking to support more of The Happening. I will conduct interviews and see how the model there can be tried elsewhere.
- **In LA**, we will try the church adjacent route.

**Learnings:**

- 1- STL shows that young adults will engage in this type of conversation.
- 2- STL also showed that the 5 non-negotiables are very organic to them.
- 3- LA showed, once more, that once people with no relation to us find out it's sponsored by a church, they are NOT willing to try it out. The "toxic brand" continues.

Let me know what you think.