

OIKOS ACCELERATOR IMPACT REPORT

Helping congregations to
navigate their economic future



ROOTED
GOOD

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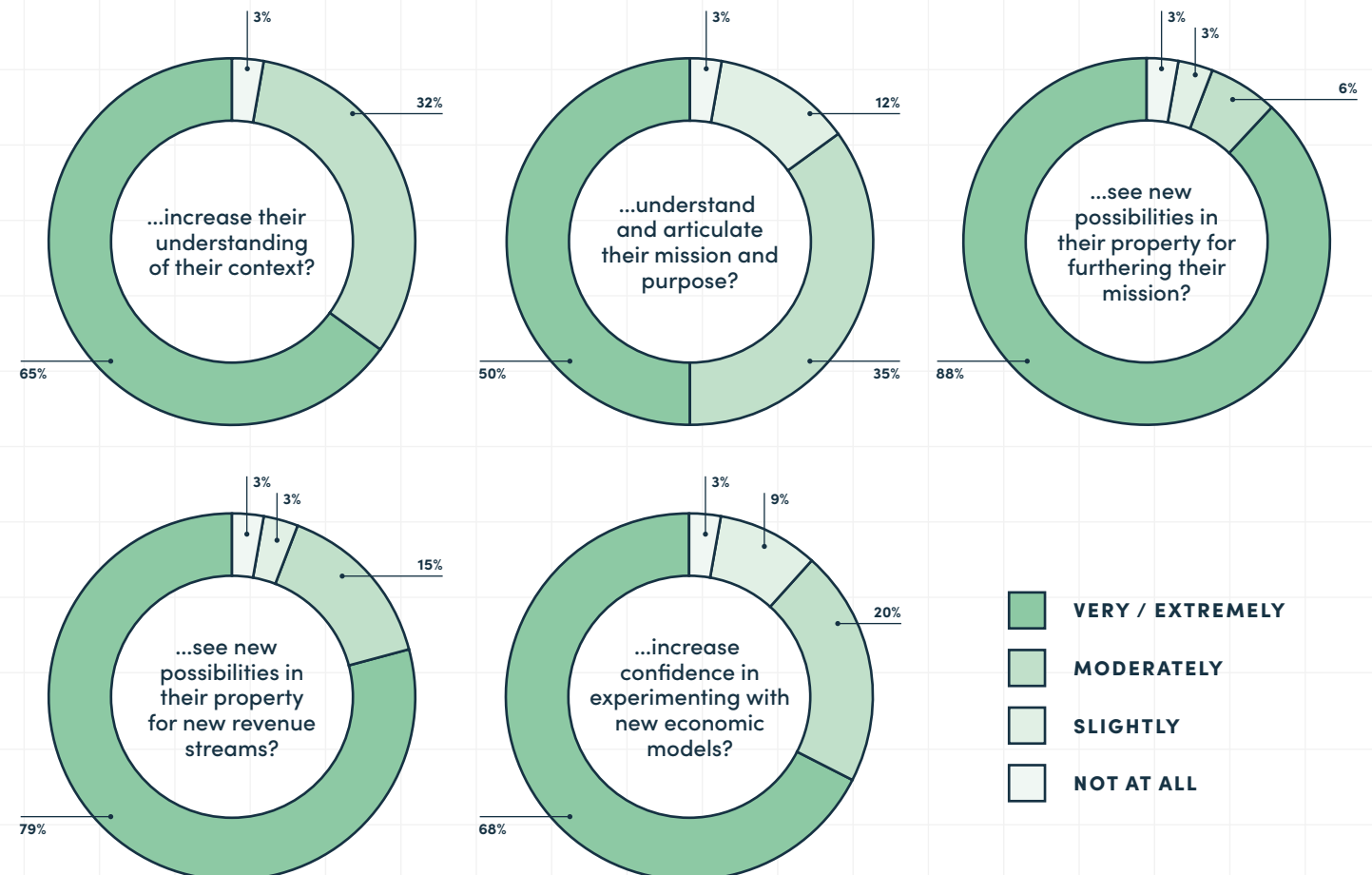
REPORT SUMMARY

The Oikos Accelerator was an initial three-year project from Rooted Good designed to help congregations explore how to reimagine their mission and money through social enterprise, using their buildings and property. This impact report looks at the outcomes from the initial project, unpacks what has been learned, and looks forward to the next iteration of this project.

How likely are you to recommend the Oikos Accelerator to others?



TO WHAT EXTENT HAS THE OIKOS ACCELERATOR HELPED CONGREGATIONS...



88%

said Oikos was very or extremely helpful in seeing new possibilities for how their property can help further their mission.



79%

said Oikos was very or extremely helpful in seeing new possibilities for how their property can generate new revenue streams.



WHAT PEOPLE SAY

“Without Oikos, we would continue to slowly and painfully decline. The only things we would be doing are the food pantry and worship service. I will have left. The only reason I came back after a mini-sabbatical was Oikos.”

“The first shift was from ‘How do we use our space?’ to ‘How do we use our space with a lens towards revenue?’ The second shift...was, ‘How do we use our space with the lens towards revenue and mission?’”

“Without Oikos, I think we would be considering selling our building and just trying to survive.”

“Oikos Accelerator and this gathering have radically changed my feelings about our congregation’s future. I had little hope for us prior to coming here, but now I do.”

SOME OF THE IDEAS GENERATED THROUGH OIKOS

See full map on pages 14-15



WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED



Imagination is primarily caught not taught.

Local structures of support and encouragement are invaluable (maybe more than denominational structures).



Congregations need help with forming internal teams and interacting effectively with their own governance structures.



Congregations need help with developing effective partnerships.

Congregations need to slow down!

Concern about taxation implications and fear about losing “charitable” status with the IRS hinder congregations from exploring new economic models.



Some congregations need a cash flow boost in order to give themselves enough runway and time to work on a bigger project. Rental income can provide this.



CONTEXT

The Oikos Project emerged at the very beginning of RootedGood's journey as a new organization.

RootedGood was founded by three practitioners who have spent decades working at the intersection of faith and social enterprise:



SHANNON HOPKINS



MARK ELSDON



MARK SAMPSON

With funding from Lilly Endowment, RootedGood initially explored creating a diverse cohort of 12 congregations to have a series of in-person gatherings to discern and design a social enterprise that utilizes their buildings and property, generates new income and, most importantly, fulfills their mission in new ways.

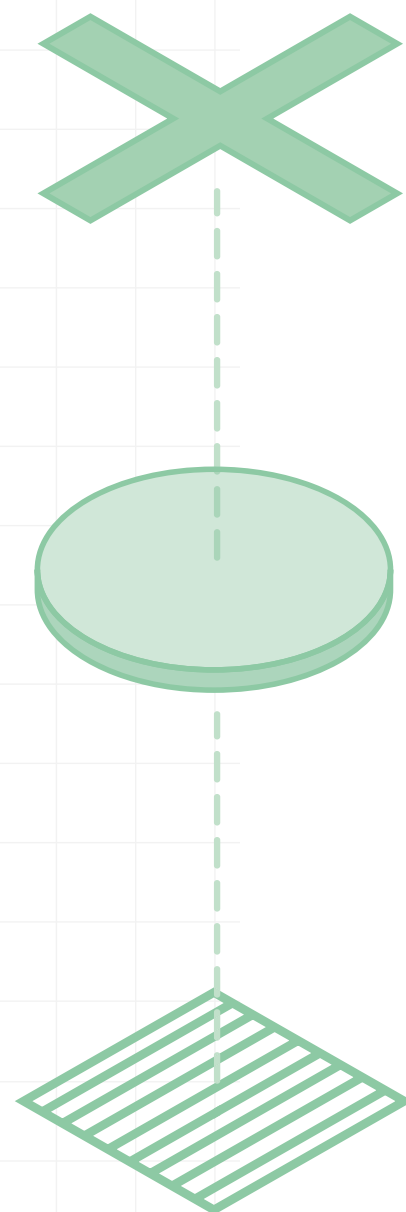
Then, Covid intervened.

We pivoted to providing resources for congregations seeking to respond to the challenges of the pandemic and, as many others were having to do, redesigning our Accelerator for an online world. Unsure of whether this would work, this impact report unpacks what happened next.



TITO JOINED!

Tito Ponce joined the team as Operations Director, overseeing the Oikos Accelerator.



OVERALL AIMS

The Oikos Project helps congregations address core questions related to the use of property for mission and ministry in the changing context congregations face today. The project invites congregations from diverse denominations, locations, size, wealth, and other characteristics into a multimodal learning experience to discern, experiment, and learn together.

Specifically, this project aims to:

- ★ Help congregations **understand** their changing context – both in terms of ministry and finances – and how that impacts their use of property and buildings.
- ★ Help congregations **clarify** how their core mission and theology shapes the use or development of property/building in light of this changing context.
- ★ Help congregations **cultivate** ecclesial imagination, with a particular emphasis on developing social enterprise as an expression of mission.
- ★ Help congregations **experiment** with new uses of property/building that both further their mission and generate income.



OIKOS APPROACH:

What it involves

The Accelerator was re-designed to work with teams of three to seven from each congregation, a mix of clergy and lay leaders, in the context of the social-distance constraints related to the pandemic.

At the center of the learning experience is the online learning platform Thinkfic. Participating congregations have access to two online courses, one for individual team members and one for the whole team to work through together, using Zoom. Each stage of the curriculum involved an individual lesson, where participants would learn more about the topic, read case studies, and watch video content, followed by a group lesson, where the team would gather virtually, discuss, learn, and make decisions.

In addition, congregations were given interactive tools and activities, such as:



SKILLS DECK
(identifying existing skills in the congregation)



I-SPY
(identifying what is happening in the neighborhood)



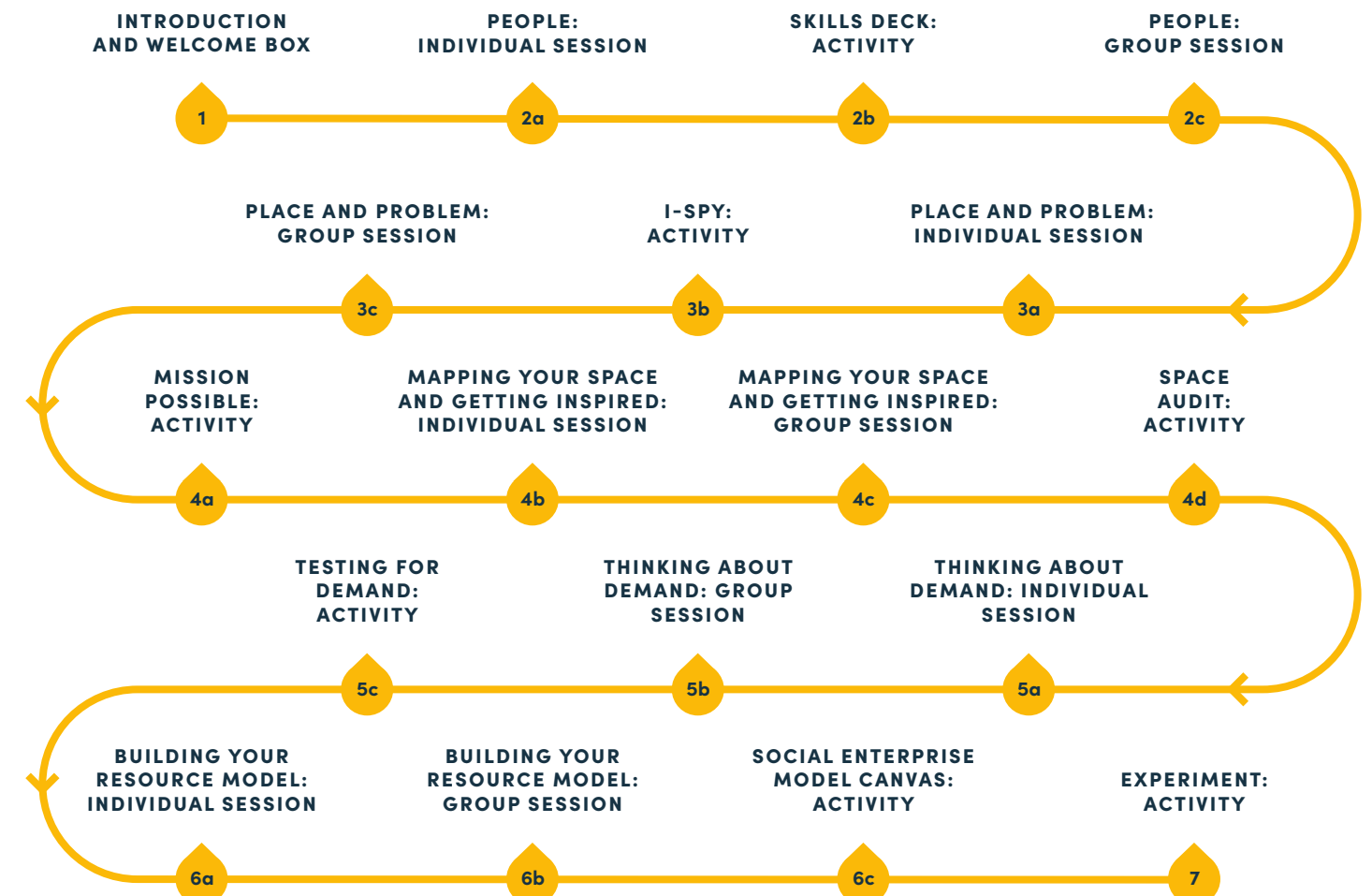
MISSION POSSIBLE
(teaching principles of design thinking)



SPACE AUDIT
(utilization of church buildings and property)

These tools and activities were opportunities for the team to engage other members of the congregation and have them involved in the Oikos journey.

THE LEARNING JOURNEY OR CURRICULUM HAD THE FOLLOWING SHAPE:



CASE STUDY



BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS: THE UNFOLDING STORY OF COMMON GRACE

Common Grace is a story of transformative partnerships. The congregation is itself a partnership – a federated congregation of Lakeview Moravian Community Church and Zion Faith Community (ELCA), in Madison, WI. The pastors of both congregations, having known each other for nine years, began dreaming together about what could happen if they formed a partnership.

Zion, recognizing they no longer needed a building, began preparing to sell, while Lakeview began opening their doors to many community groups that needed some space. In the midst of this, Common Grace found out about Oikos Accelerator.

“At this point, we realized that something bigger needs to happen with the church. It makes no sense to keep going as it is and to slowly decline.”

“We discovered Oikos, which helped us see with new eyes the ways we can use the property, not just to generate money, but also, and primarily, to generate usefulness.”

One of the most impactful parts of the Accelerator for Common Grace was Mission Possible, the RootedGood game that teaches the process of design thinking. “Mission Possible was great – we learned to master a new way of thinking. We keep referencing this as we go through our own process of creating something new. People keep saying, ‘we did this in Mission Possible.’”

The church began a partnership with Ethical Trade Co, a fair trade business working to end human trafficking through job creation, which led to opening a store on the property. They also began partnering with a bilingual preschool that uses the building, and three different theater companies.

Common Grace then began thinking about a bigger, longer-term initiative, addressing a systemic problem in their neighborhood: the lack of affordable housing. Of course, being true to their beginnings, this has involved creating partnerships to explore what this might look like. A local mission-focused developer, representatives from the city, RootedGood, and the local community land trust all became involved in a series of conversations about what might be possible.

“Through Oikos, we have learned that in the midst of listening, not to get anxious; how to think differently; how to ask more pertinent questions of development partners; and we have realized that we can’t do this ourselves.”



Watch this space.
(Warning: more partnerships likely!)

IMPACT:

What difference did the Oikos Accelerator make?

The longer-term impact of Oikos on the participating congregations will not be fully known for some time, until after their social enterprizes have been running for a few years. Ultimately, it will be reflected in the combination of (i) a more financially resilient congregation that is (ii) having an increased positive impact on the neighborhood, and community, (iii) full of confidence in their sense of identity and mission. At this point of the process, we can see progress made towards this intended impact, as well as feedback on the Oikos journey so far.

DATA SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

We have been able to collect a significant amount of data through the following sources:

- ★ Anonymous pre- and post-surveys. The pre-surveys were carried out before any interaction with the Oikos material or process. The post-surveys were carried out at the end of the program.
- ★ Semi-structured interviews with the team leaders from each congregation.
- ★ Participation data from the online learning platform.
- ★ Video interviews with team leaders.
- ★ Independent qualitative research from a doctoral candidate, including primary research; repeated semi-structured interviews with clergy and lay participants. For a copy of the doctoral research, please reach out to Jason Mack - jasonmack123@gmail.com.

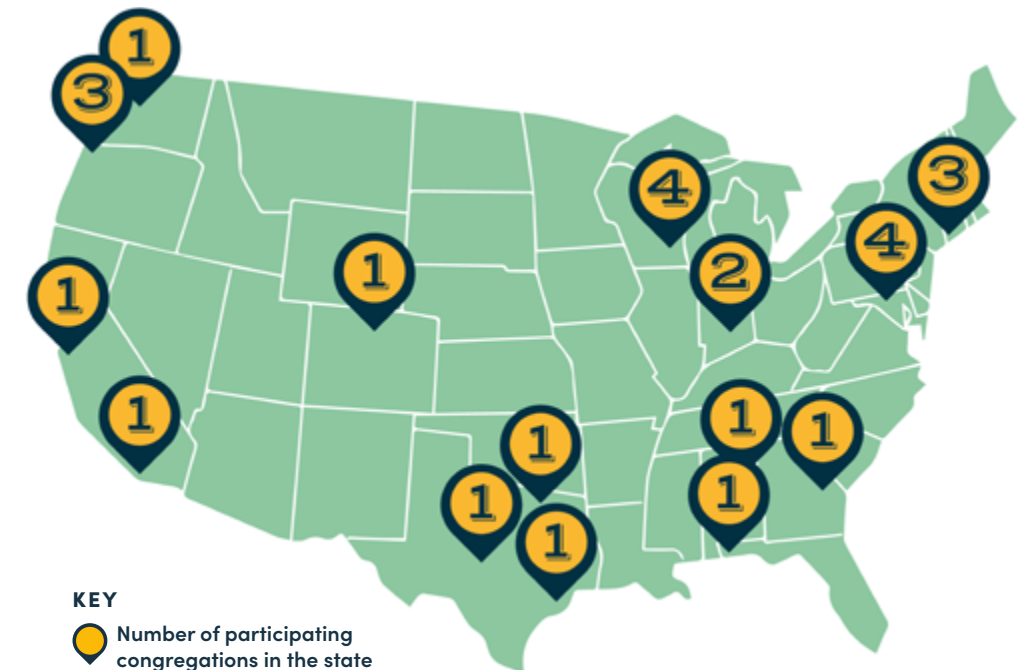
PARTICIPATING CONGREGATIONS

Participating congregations are from across the nation and represent diverse denominational backgrounds: Presbyterian, Methodist, United Church of Christ, Episcopalian, Non-Denominational, Apostolic, Lutheran, Moravian, Baptist, and Christian Church.

There are two concentrations of participating congregations, one in Wisconsin and one in the Pacific Northwest. The first concentration was “accidental,” and coincidentally, is where one of RootedGood’s team members lives, in Madison, WI. When it was safe to do so, the congregations in and near Madison formed an informal ecumenical cohort. The impact of this cohort is discussed later in the report.

Based on the success of the Madison informal cohort, we wanted to test that model and worked with a connection in the

Pacific Northwest to start a cohort of congregations there. Unfortunately, this cohort was deeply affected by a wave of Covid-19 which meant that they paused their involvement in the Accelerator. In addition, for similar reasons due to the disruptions and challenges of the pandemic, three more congregations that were accepted did not begin. Of the remaining 18 congregations, 17 made good progress, with 14 congregations attending the gathering in San Antonio in September 2022, for the program’s concluding event.¹

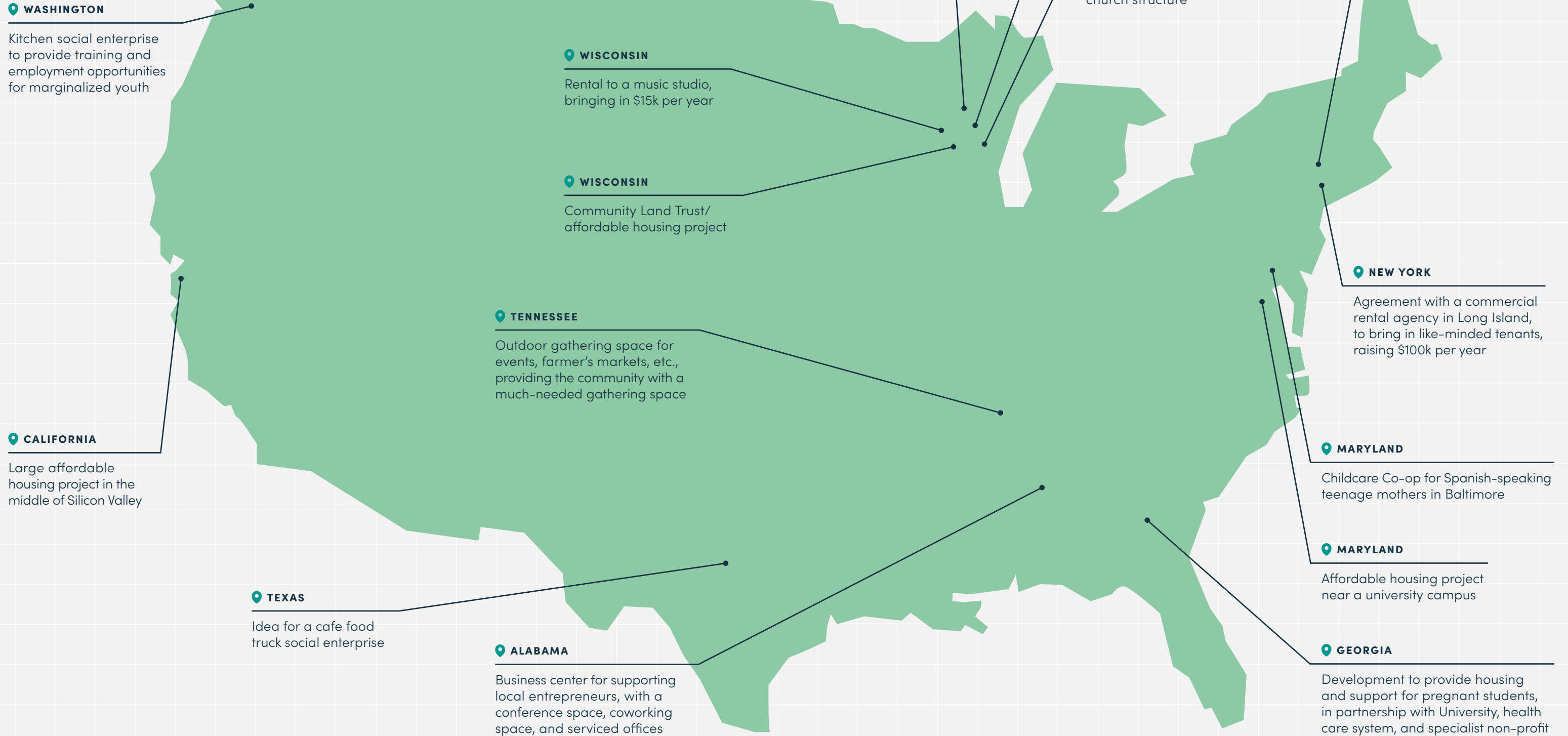


KEY
● Number of participating congregations in the state

¹One congregation struggled with the technology and online requirements of the program, and found it inaccessible due to their context and technical set-up. This was a concern of ours when we made a pivot to an online course. It is important to recognize that there are many congregations that can't be effectively reached with online offerings.

IDEAS

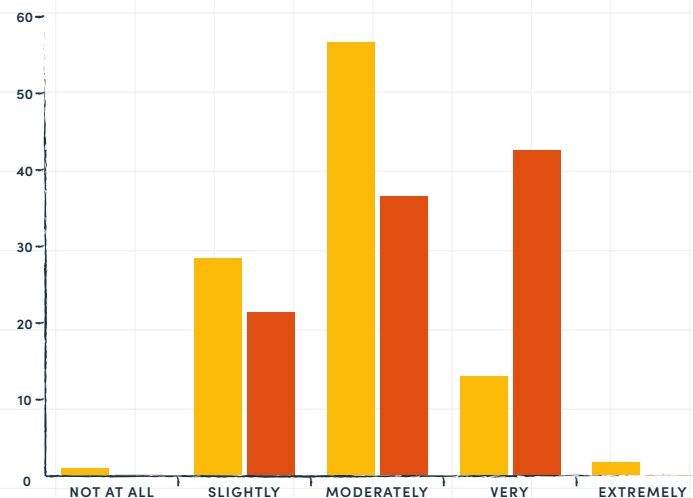
One of the most tangible outputs of the Accelerator are the ideas that are generated by the congregations. Congregations in the Oikos Accelerator are currently at different stages of working towards launching these social enterprises:



PRE- AND POST-SURVEY DATA

These surveys were conducted anonymously, with the pre-survey being a required part of the online Accelerator. It is a robust way to measure the group's overall progress. However, with all pre- and post-survey approaches, the method is vulnerable to other factors, as the data is not attributable. Given the wider context of the pandemic and the profound struggles of post-Covid congregations, we had expected to see a general decline for the congregations. The results are generally much more positive than we expected.

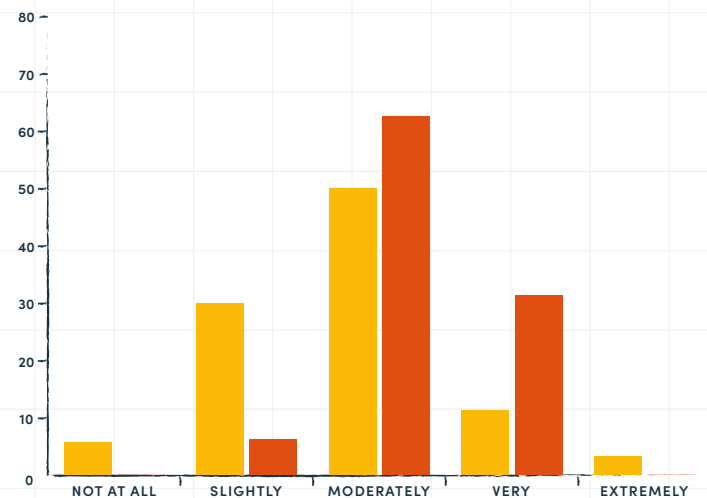
How well does your congregation understand the gifts and needs of your local wider community?



RESULT: INCREASE IN UNDERSTANDING OF CONTEXT

The Oikos Project is firmly rooted in helping congregations more deeply connect with the gifts and needs of their local wider community. There is a clear shift towards a fuller understanding of their context for congregations, for example, those that replied "very" increased from 13% to 42%.

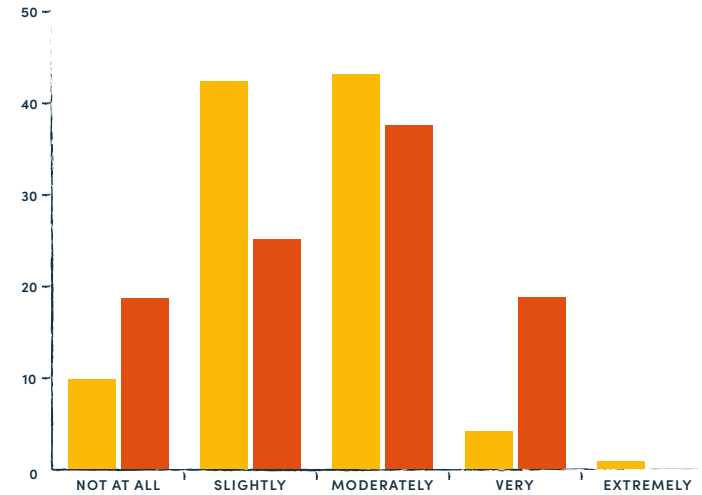
How well equipped do you feel your congregation is to experiment and try something new?



RESULT: INCREASE IN FEELING EQUIPPED FOR NEW IDEAS

In the pre-survey, 36% of congregations reported that they felt either "not at all" or "slightly well equipped" to try something new. This decreased to only 6% in the post survey, with 94% saying they now feel either "moderately well" or "very well equipped" to experiment and try something new.

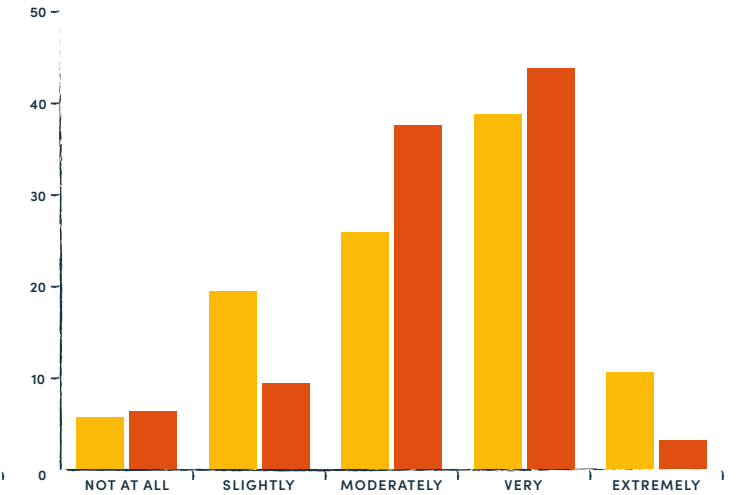
How effectively do you currently use your property for mission and ministry, beyond worship services?



RESULT: AWARENESS OF UNDER-UTILIZED SPACE

This intriguing dataset shows a mixed response from congregations. There was an increase in the congregations that responded "not at all effective" (10% to 19%) and "very effective" (4% to 19%). Our current hypothesis is that by showing congregations examples of effective use of buildings and property for mission and ministry, some will, from that vantage point, see their own use of buildings and property as being even less effective than they previously thought. As the majority of the congregations are in the idea phase, and have not yet started, we would expect this to change in the future.

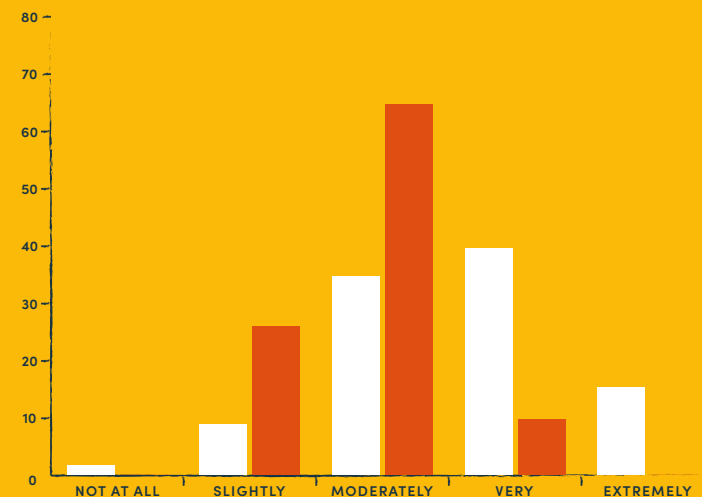
How hopeful are you that your congregation will have a secure economic future?



RESULT: CONGREGATIONS ARE HOPEFUL AND REALISTIC

There is a general slight trend towards being more hopeful about a secure economic future, but it is not significant. Interestingly, there are some who remain "not at all hopeful" and there was a decrease in those who are "extremely hopeful." However, there was an increase in those who are either "moderately" or "very hopeful" (from 65% to 82% combined). Taken together, this suggests to us that the program may have helped congregations become more hopeful AND more realistic about their current situation and their future.

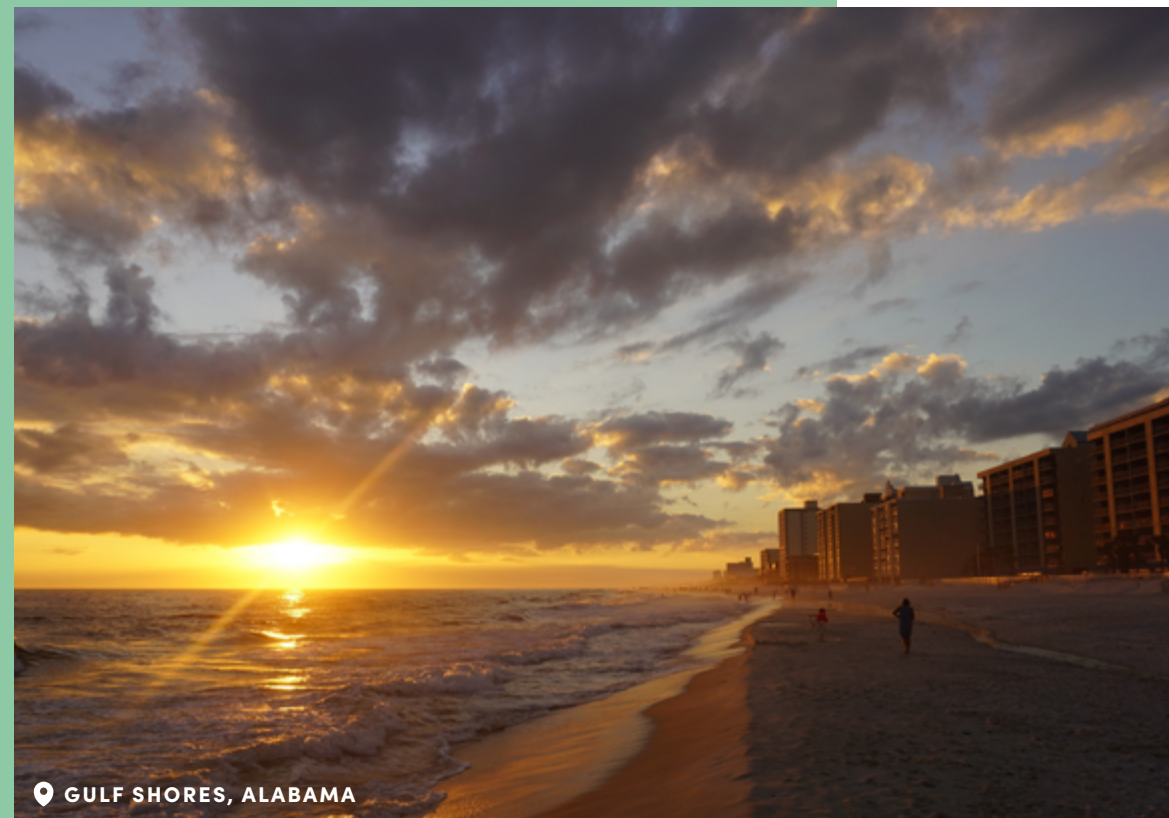
How effectively do the clergy/staff collaborate with lay people in your congregation for mission and ministry?



RESULT: NEED FOR BETTER COLLABORATION

Another intriguing dataset related to clergy/lay collaboration. The post-survey shows a decline in those that responded either "very" or "extremely effectively" (down from 55% to 10%) and an increase in those who responded "somewhat effectively" (up from 9% to 26%). While there are clearly a few outliers (the 15% who said "extremely effectively" in the post survey), this data is somewhat concerning. It might give some insight into the challenges of post-pandemic congregational life. It also suggests the need for more focus on team-building and collaboration as part of the Oikos Accelerator. This is also confirmed by qualitative data later in the report.

CASE STUDY



RESPONDING TO NEED AND DEMAND: GULF SHORES FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Located on the beautiful coast of Alabama, Gulf Shores First Presbyterian Church (GSFPC) realized three years ago that it was facing an increasingly uncertain future. It had only enough expected income to cover the costs for the next two years. Without a pastor for two years, the church realized it needed imaginative, resilient leadership to create a new future. Fortunately for the church, two things happened: It found such leadership in Rev. Chrisy Ennen and it found Oikos.

Responding to a post mentioning Oikos on social media, the church applied for the program knowing that they had to do something different. The future could not look like the past.

One of the early tools in the Accelerator, "I Spy," proved particularly helpful.

"I Spy helped us start asking the right questions about what is needed in the community."

GSFPC also reached out to local Facebook groups, interviewed friends and neighbors, spoke with the Chamber of Commerce, and developed a list of needs in the community. Two needs floated to the top of the list: space for local small business and childcare.

There was an option to rent the entire space to a childcare center, but in the midst of their discernment, a property owners association came to the church and said that they were losing their office space and could they rent one of the classrooms. The church saw this as not only a sign of local demand for office space but also a divine nudge in that direction. For a community to flourish, it needs healthy small local businesses.

The church managed to find a small grant, which it used to run free business-related seminars for the local community, on issues such as finance, startups, and cyber-security. The church welcomed local businesses that attended, fed them, and of course, showed them their space. Before long, every available space was rented.

The church is building really good relationships with the small business community, creating a place for business and a place for sanctuary.

Rev. Ennen commented:

"Without Oikos, I think we would be considering selling our building and just trying to survive."



\$65,000 INCOME

Currently, GSFPC has seven tenants in nine different spaces. Along with renting out the parking lot, this brings in income of up to \$65,000 a year.



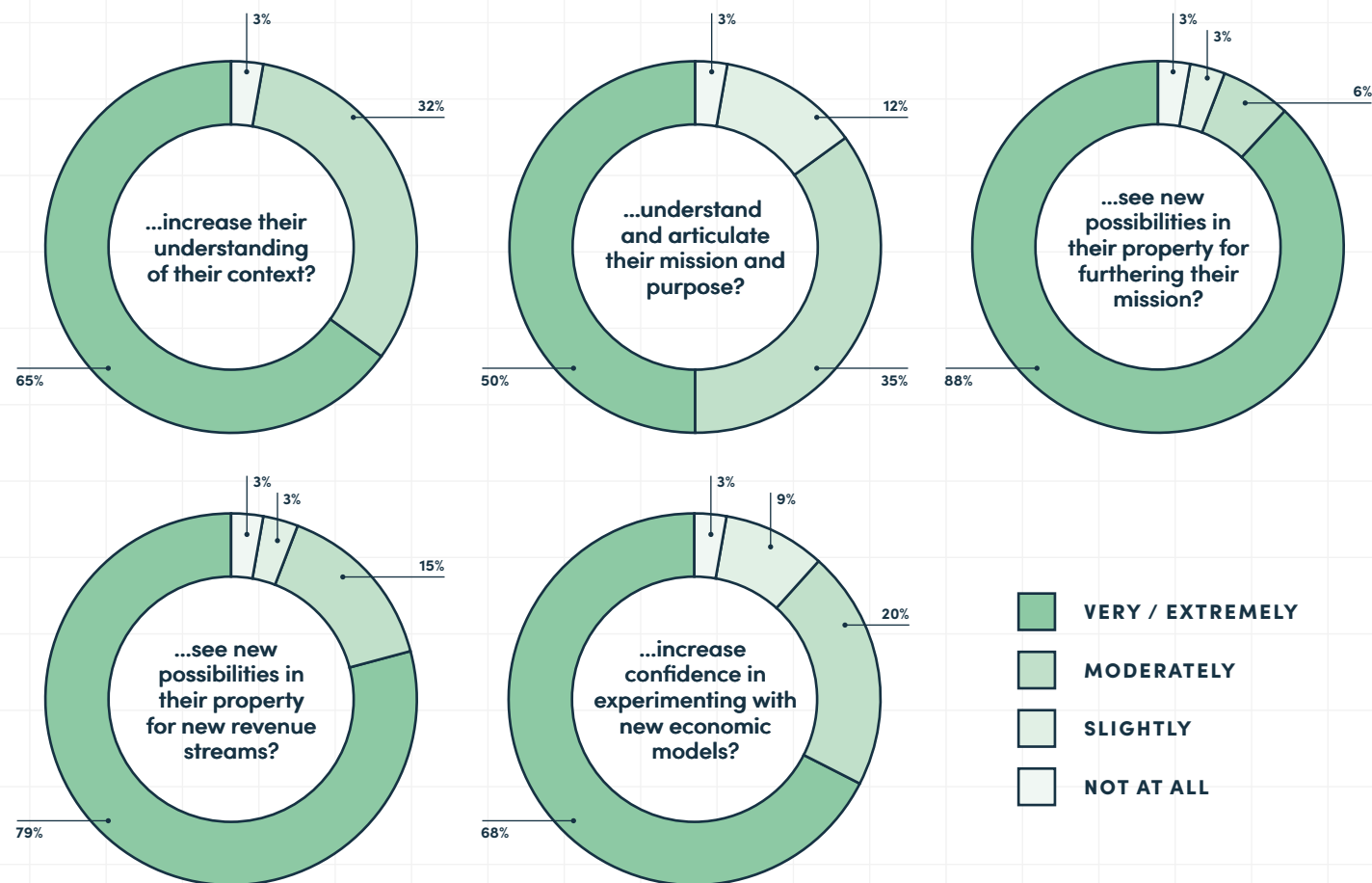
SPECIFIC FEEDBACK

How likely are you to recommend the Oikos Accelerator to others?



The Oikos Accelerator is highly likely to be recommended to other congregations. While the pre- and post-surveys consider general changes over the duration of the initiative, these questions focus on the specific impact the Accelerator had on the participating congregations.

TO WHAT EXTENT HAS THE OIKOS ACCELERATOR HELPED CONGREGATIONS...

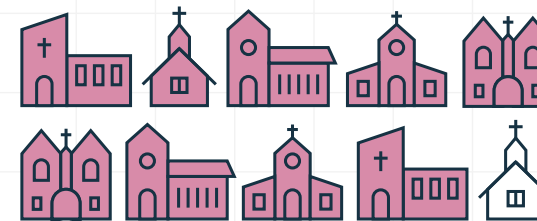


Please note: One participating congregation never started because of technical challenges in accessing the content on older computers. We tried to make applicants aware of this during the application phase but it did not work for this congregation. Understandably, this congregation responded 'Not at all' for each question. Outside of this one outlier, every single congregation found Oikos Accelerator helpful in every category.

FOR THE TOP TWO INTENDED OUTCOMES OF OIKOS:

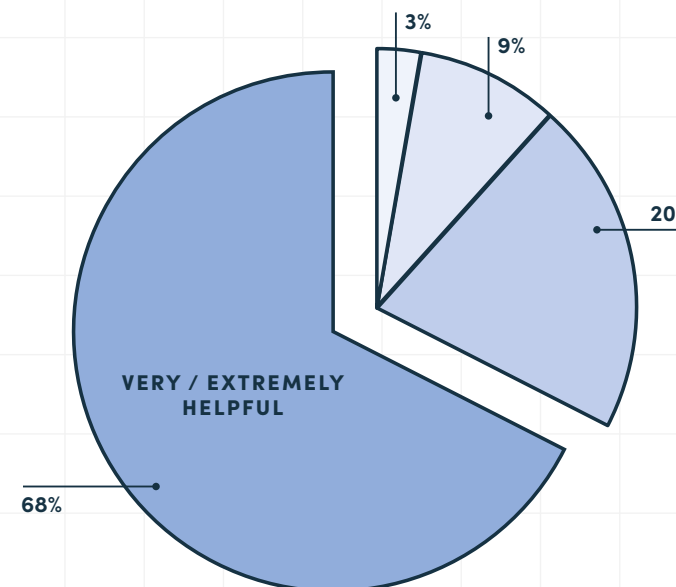
88%

said Oikos was very or extremely helpful in helping them see new possibilities for how their property and buildings can help them further their mission. Half of these congregations (44% of the total) said Oikos was extremely helpful.

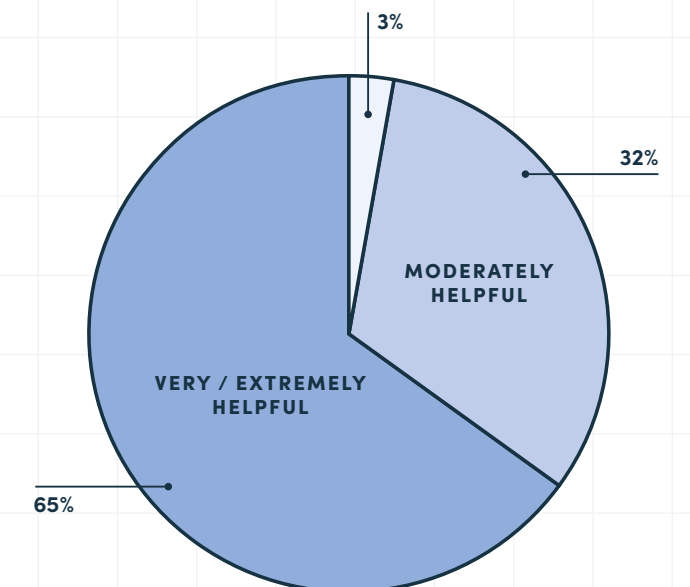


79%

of congregations said Oikos was very or extremely helpful in helping them see new possibilities for how their property and buildings can help them generate new revenue streams.



Two thirds (68%) said that Oikos was very or extremely helpful in increasing confidence in experimenting with new economic models.



All but one congregation said that Oikos was moderately, very or extremely helpful in helping increase their understanding of their context.

QUALITATIVE FEEDBACK:

Themes and Reflection

Based on in-person interviews, video interviews, surveys, and the independent doctoral research, we identified the following themes:

- ★ The pedagogical journey
- ★ Without Oikos
- ★ Importance of gathering
- ★ Partnerships as a solution



THE PEDAGOGICAL JOURNEY: TOWARDS ALIGNMENT OF MONEY AND MISSION

“Almost every layperson interviewed who was part of the Oikos process talked about going through a mental shift. They entered the process with hopes, as one participant from Underwood put it in their first interview, to ‘make our church more sustainable and hopefully more financially viable.’ And by the end of the process, their motivations had changed rather dramatically. Six months later, that same lay leader answered the same question like this, ‘I think the goal has expanded in terms of understanding that it can and should be more than that... that we can accomplish some other things...in terms of community impact.’ Another lay leader explained the change this way, ‘This idea around how we use our space with the lens towards revenue and mission... and really being mission focused.’”

This quote, from the doctoral research, epitomizes the pedagogical journey we hoped congregations would go through. We knew that the majority of congregations would start this journey primarily interested in financial sustainability. We hoped to take them on a journey where they could imagine a future oriented by mission, with new forms of income aligned to that mission. We are delighted to have supported congregations on this journey, which can be transformative for the whole congregation.

Other feedback from participants reinforces and gives more texture to this pedagogical journey: “The first shift was from ‘How do we use our space?’ to ‘how do we use our space with a lens towards revenue?’ The second shift, from San Antonio was, ‘How do we use our space with the lens towards revenue and mission?’”

“We now want to find some way to be meaningful in the community beyond what we are doing now, which is largely Sunday Morning. I want us to be a neighborhood oriented church.”

“Some Oikos words and phrases, like ‘aligning money and mission’ have started to work their way into meetings and conversations.”

“Overall, Oikos Accelerator and this gathering have radically changed my feelings about our congregation’s future. I had little hope for us prior to coming here, but now I do have hope.”

“This is so valuable and amazing. Keep up the good work. Every church needs this.”

“You are doing great and transforming work. Be humble, but take time to rejoice and thank God for the victories.”

²Independent doctoral research on Oikos Accelerator. “Designing A Future Beyond The Building: Exploring The Strengths And Weaknesses Of The Design Thinking Process For Churches Rethinking Their Building And Property,” A Dissertation submitted to Central Baptist Theological Seminary, by Rev Jason M. Mack.



WITHOUT OIKOS (THE COUNTER-FACTUAL)

One of our favorite evaluation methods is to ask a counter-factual question. In this case, without the Oikos Accelerator, where do you think you would be as a congregation?

These are some of the responses that stood out:

“Without Oikos we would be dead! We would have blown through the 430k [endowment] in however many years it would have taken to go through that. Then we would be dead and not doing anything for our neighborhood. I would have quit as a pastor and I don’t think us two pastors would have been able to work together.”

“I am not sure we would be here at all. Without Oikos, I think we would be considering selling our building and just trying to survive.”

“We would continue to slowly and painfully decline. The only things we would be doing are food pantry and worship service. I will have left. The only reason I came back after sabbatical was Oikos.”



IMPORTANCE OF GATHERING (EVEN IN THESE TIMES) - SAN ANTONIO

One of the stand-out successes of the program was the gathering in San Antonio. The grant product attached to this report should give a sense of the various activities and experiences that contributed to its success.

This experience reminded us that despite all the innovative ways we have tried to reach people in the midst of the pandemic, there is nothing that compares to an in-person gathering, particularly for inspiring and connecting. Some of the feedback from the participants on the gathering:

“Amazing. Inspiring. Really well done.”

“Going to San Antonio made things feel a lot easier because there were other people trying to do what we are doing. And we learned the idea that we could partner with people, like we don’t have to do this all ourselves.”

“Far and away, the most impactful element of the Oikos Accelerator program, according to the research, was the trip to San Antonio. The trip was mentioned by everyone who went, as well as several people who only heard about it secondhand.”

“The challenge we have always been saying is... we were looking for what other people were doing, right? And I think as we...earlier on, that was a bit of a struggle. And I think that that’s been very helpful. That was, again, what San Antonio offered was a view of that, what others are doing and, and helping that process.”

“This conference has been extremely helpful and inspiring and I wish our full team would have attended and had more connection opportunities.”

“The gathering of congregations has been so helpful! I learned a great deal from others and now have an appreciation of what it takes to do this work. Thank you!”



PARTNERSHIPS ARE NOT AN OBVIOUS SOLUTION FOR CONGREGATIONS (BUT THEY SHOULD BE)

One area of unexpected learning for us as a team was the extent to which congregations do not think of partnerships as a way of achieving their goals.

Congregations are used to doing things themselves, with their own resources. The sheer size, amount of work, and complexity of most of the ideas that came through Oikos can only work through partnerships. While this is obvious to us as a team, it was only when we brought it up explicitly that it became obvious to the congregations. This led us to start creating the next “How to...” resource: “How to Partner Well.”

“I knew about partnerships but for some reason it was a block in my mind. One of my mental blocks personally is the extra work I thought this would have to involve - I am already overworked and was thinking ‘I can’t just run a non-profit in addition’. For some reason, I did not think about partnership.”

“Most helpful: don’t limit ourselves. Find partners to work with. We don’t have to do everything ourselves.”

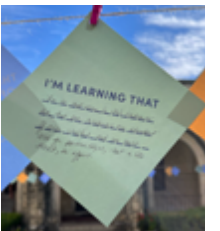
“New insight is that we can enter partnerships. That we don’t have to do this ourselves. If we could find the right partnership, it could be a win-win for both of us.”

“Find a partner that’s already doing the work.”

“Barrier - ‘We have to do this all ourselves’ - it is the only way we do anything! We are not used to partnering with others.”

“A primary learning for everyone involved was that this was not a problem that any of our churches are prepared to solve on our own. And the good news is, we don’t have to. Most, if not all, of the examples we came across throughout the process began with a church partnership. Churches that were looking to redevelop started by working with a developer, churches that were interested in reaching their community in a new way partnered with an area entrepreneur, and churches that were interested in providing housing partnered with the city.³”

³bid



STRENGTHS OF THE ACCELERATOR

Participating congregations considered the following to be strengths of the Accelerator:

- ★ Curriculum, methodology, and resources
- ★ RootedGood team as practitioners
- ★ Expanding imagination and creating teams

“

CURRICULUM, METHODOLOGY AND RESOURCES

When asked an open-ended question about what the participants see as the main strengths, two thirds (64%) responded with a comment about the methodology, resources, and curriculum. Some examples include:

“Extremely strong curriculum organization, accessibility of materials and exercises, flexibility of use for different sizes of groups, respectfully secular language, not isolating or alienating.”

“Helpful to have a process and method to move things forward.”

“The structure of the materials; the intent of the curriculum...”

“A curriculum structure to begin the conversation of repurposing space. It’s very helpful to move from individual to group members to the outside community in the assessment of prioritizing skill sets and needs.”

“Very practical resources to use. A container for people in the church to reimagine what is possible and what we can use our resources and property for.”

“Process and structure, connection and inspiration with other churches and social enterprises.”

“Great tools and examples.”



“

ROOTEDGOOD TEAM AS PRACTITIONERS

In responding to the open-ended question about the strengths of the program, 20% of respondents mentioned the RootedGood team, particularly focusing on the practical experience of the team in having done this kind of work. Examples include:

“The staff have walked the path of the congregations so their experiences are real and not just theory.”

“Structure of the program, support (Q+A if unsure), expertise of the leaders, real life examples of successful social enterprises.”

“Experience of the RG team members and amazing combination of technical and personal experience. Range of answers and know where to point you for help.”

“Opening imagination, encouraging, making the impossible seem possible, accessible – easy to enter and understand the process and walk through, wide range of examples and projects, large and small, all lifted up with enthusiasm...”

“

OTHER STRENGTHS

Other strengths identified include:

- ★ Expanding imagination and thinking outside the box (3 responses)
- ★ How the Accelerator creates teams to work through the curriculum and tools (2 responses)

“Opening imagination, encouraging, making the impossible seem possible, accessible – easy to enter and understand the process and walk through, wide range of examples and projects, large and small, all lifted up with enthusiasm...”



IMPROVEMENTS

Oikos participants were asked an open-ended question about where there could be improvements in the Accelerator. There were some overlaps and themes in the responses.



MORE IN-PERSON INTERACTION (POST-PANDEMIC)

"Might be different post-Covid but maybe more in-person interaction, site visits maybe to help with problem solving."

"You couldn't do anything differently during Covid, but starting with an in-person experience would give people purpose and vision."

"More gatherings?"

"More collaboration with other congregations, some guidance/coaching/mentoring with leaders and teams, some ongoing support or follow-up as projects are actually launched and experimented with. I wonder about two in-person gatherings, one at the beginning and one at the end."

MORE SUPPORT AND CHECK-INS WITH THE CONGREGATIONS

"More support readying the congregation, preparing for change, ensuring basic governance processes are in place to support decision making."

"More connection points and conversation with leaders and other churches throughout the process; spiritual support/recommendations that are ecumenical."

"Routine check-ins with our group rather than as needed. More interaction on trickier bits like the game."

"Maybe more check-in from Oikos folks - quarterly basis? Would be helpful to get feedback."



ACCESSIBILITY AND PRINT OPTIONS

"More pdf options as many of the users are over 50. Ways to do it online as well as offline."

SPECIFIC FEEDBACK ON TOOLS

"We didn't use Mission Possible because we just don't have the numbers of people to do an activity like that so think about how to engage very small groups of people."

"We think it would be cool to have video walkthroughs of different tools and a 'how-to' video for Mission Possible."

"I don't think I Spy was extensive enough. Skills Deck did not unearth a lot of useful skills in our setting."

"A video of how Mission Possible is played."

MAP OF THE SYLLABUS AND LEARNING JOURNEY

"There needs to be a syllabus to plan out the group's timeline for how long the process is likely to take. People want to plan."

"Walking through the process without fully understanding where it was going and why - it became evident eventually, but love to know upfront."

"More orientation and instruction at the beginning."

CASE STUDY



FROM PROVIDING A MEAL TO MAKING A HOME: CHURCH IN THE VALLEY⁴

Church in the Valley is located on five acres in urban California, right in the heart of Silicon Valley. Providing space for a local school has enabled the congregation to generate just about enough income to survive. However, in recent years membership has dwindled significantly and there are no longer any families with children in the congregation. There is considerable deferred maintenance on the property and a budget that only covers emergency repairs. On top of these challenges, for the majority of their Oikos journey, the congregation has been without a pastor.

While most mission-based work has either stopped completely or has minimal participation, the Food Pantry that serves the community has expanded and is supported not only by the church but receives donations and volunteers from other organizations as well. The signs of life and vitality in the Food Pantry initiative encouraged the congregation that there is a future worth fighting for.

In 2020, the interim pastor at the time had heard about RootedGood and the call for congregations to participate in the Oikos Accelerator. Aware that the congregation was stuck, the pastor and church council thought that Oikos might be able to provide the support that was needed.

“The structure of the program was critical. The exercises built on each other in such a way that we had more clarity of purpose after each meeting. The fact that the RootedGood team had also done this work on the ground themselves brought credibility and trust to our team.”

As the church began to gain new clarity about who they are, and the needs that exist in their local community, they began to develop an ambitious idea for providing affordable housing on their site. Having fed those in need of a meal for many years, the congregation began to imagine how they could also house those in need of a home.

“The Oikos process enabled us to see what is possible. It widened our vision and empowered us to take action, giving us the confidence that we can make this happen. It would be extremely difficult if not impossible for a congregation to do this work on their own without this type of structure and ongoing support.”

As the church looks towards the future, there is a new sense of purpose:

“Our hope is that our church still exists, but regardless of that outcome, our legacy of caring for those who are underserved in our community will live on by providing much needed affordable housing on the site.”



⁴Name changed

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

Including what we have already changed and want to include in future iterations



IMAGINATION IS PRIMARILY CAUGHT NOT TAUGHT

The gathering in San Antonio catapulted the congregations into the future by helping them with their imagination, as a result of visiting a number of interesting church-based projects, and talking to the leaders there. Case studies, books, podcasts are all crucial and helpful but there seems to be something more substantive that happens in immersive, in-person learning experiences. One of the key challenges to scaling the Oikos Accelerator relates to replicating this type of experience.



CONGREGATIONS NEED HELP IN DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHERS

For numerous reasons, congregations are often not equipped to develop good partnerships. Indeed, from our experience, they might have not even been aware of partnerships as a crucial way of achieving a significant project. Given the investment, expertise, and networks needed to make many social enterprises successful, partnerships are likely to be a crucial part of a congregation's future. We are planning on developing a "How to Partner Well" guide that will help address this.



SOME CONGREGATIONS NEED A SHORT-TERM INCOME AND CASH FLOW BOOST IN ORDER TO GIVE THEMSELVES ENOUGH RUNWAY AND TIME TO WORK ON A BIGGER PROJECT

Rental income can provide this. Four congregations in the Accelerator started working on mission-aligned rental opportunities early on in their process, with the combined rental income at least \$138k a year. This does two things - it is an early experiment in aligning money and mission, and gets the leadership team and congregation thinking with this framework. For example, one of these congregations told us, "Some Oikos words and phrases, like 'aligning money and mission' have started to work their way into meetings and conversations." Secondly, and crucially, this income and cash flow helps provide a runway for a bigger project, reduces anxiety, and also builds confidence. As a result of this learning, we have designed and produced the tool, "How to Rent Well" and will give it to every participating congregation near the beginning of the Accelerator journey.



CONCERN ABOUT TAXATION HINDERS EXPLORATION OF NEW ECONOMIC MODELS

Concern about taxation implications and fear about losing "charitable" status with the IRS hinder congregations from exploring new economic models. We think that the absolute worst reason for not doing something new is fear about tax implications. As we began to see this concern emerge, we wanted to do something about it. We created the "What About Taxes" tool and webinar to help allay any fears and provide congregations a process to help them answer tax-related questions for their project.



CONGREGATIONS NEED TO SLOW DOWN

This surprised us immensely, as we were previously under the impression that congregations should probably speed up! However, a lot of the informal feedback we received was that our process helped them slow down and make much better decisions which, crucially, brought others in the congregation along. One participant even joked that we should call it a 'decelerator'.



LOCAL STRUCTURES OF SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGEMENT ARE INVALUABLE

Perhaps some of the most important learning at a macro level has been around the significance of place-based support for congregations doing this innovative, courageous work. The success of the Madison cohort has encouraged and inspired us. We have already seen tangible, practical help that this cohort has provided alongside the support and mutual encouragement. We have seen early signs of the development of a network or ecosystem of support:

- ★ Connections with local property developers, including a mission-aligned, values-driven property developer (a rare find!). The relationship between a congregation and a property developer is highly vulnerable to exploitation, as many stories suggest.
- ★ Connections with city officials, including elected alderpersons and city planning staff.
- ★ Connections with the Madison Area Community Land Trust that is emerging as a valuable partner in helping ensure long-term affordability of housing projects.
- ★ Connections with attorneys, parking lot operators, architects, and other key partners that are being used and shared among multiple congregations from different denominations.



CONGREGATIONS NEED HELP WITH FORMING INTERNAL TEAMS AND IN INTERACTING EFFECTIVELY WITH THEIR OWN GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

While some of this (structural governance change) is inevitably beyond the reach of the Oikos Accelerator, we are going to add new content and training materials to help congregations navigate internal and external barriers related to effective decision making, including building and maintaining effective teams. Inevitably, the diversity of church polity and structures involved in Oikos means that we won't be able to address all the different ways in which existing governance structures might be a barrier for some congregations.

NEXT STEPS

2023 and beyond

In partnership with Lilly Endowment Religion Division, and other key funders, RootedGood is delighted to be able to expand and develop what we have learned through Oikos in three different ways:

- ★ **Oikos Accelerator:** We will take the existing Accelerator and redesign it for post-pandemic life and in light of what we have learned during the pilot phase. This will include: new content videos, worksheets for teams to use in person, and workbooks for participants. This Accelerator will remain self-directed and be more scalable. The Accelerator will get congregations all the way to an idea they are ready to test.
- ★ **Cohort Incubator:** Taking our learning from the “accidental” Madison cohort, we will seek to replicate this in other cities, with three cohorts in the first year, growing the number of cohorts each year. We have significant interest in this already. We want to explore the possibility of creating “partner cities,” where we help stakeholders on the ground create a succession of cohorts and build the key relationships that will help the ecosystem: developers, funders, specialists, civic and political leaders, and so on. This incubator will include the material from the Accelerator and also take congregations further – not just developing an idea, but getting ready to launch their idea.
- ★ **Licensed Toolkit:** We will take some of our existing materials and tools, add new content, and create a toolkit that will equip other organizations to help the congregations they are working with. This will involve training, equipping, and developing key partnerships. We want to find three initial partners to design and test this approach with us.

OIKOS RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR DIRECT PURCHASE:



HOW TO RENT WELL

<https://bit.ly/rg-rentwell>



HOW TO DEVELOP WELL

<https://bit.ly/rg-developwell>



MISSION POSSIBLE

<https://bit.ly/mi-missionpossible>

FORTHCOMING:

- ★ How to Sell Well
- ★ How to Partner Well

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