

# NURTURING NEW COMMUNITIES: HIKE AND SEEK

How might friends and family gather around scripture seek to nurture new communities that do life together?

The first cohort of the Innovator Learning Academy recently completed their nearly 18-month learning experience! Equipped with new skills, spiritual practices, and deeper relationships, they are active in their parishes, committed to nurturing new faith communities. One of these innovators, Deacon Heather Smith, has been exploring how to bring faith out of the church building and into God's creation.

During the most intense peaks of the pandemic, Deacons Heather and Blaire Smith were looking for ways to get outside and engage with their neighbors safely. In the Marion area, the Smith family explored ways of “connecting spiritually” with members of their community out in nature. And just like that, Hike and Seek was born. This **experiential form of witness to what God is up to in the natural world** blossomed from their collective love of nature, combined with the ancient practice of Visio Divina [divine seeing]. Deacon Heather invites hikers of all ages to reflect on a word from scripture and search for it in creation as the group of grandparents, children, parents, and friends hike together along a path.



Heather’s story is just one example of how our innovators are forming new communities that share Jesus where people gather to work and play. Our second cohort is underway, with 13 innovators **prayerfully listening to their community to discover natural opportunities to engage with their neighbors** beyond the walls of their church buildings to share the message of Jesus with the world. We look forward to welcoming a new cohort of innovators in the fall!

For more information about ILA, contact:  
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“There is so much to be said for what God created. It’s obvious that Jesus is involved and active in the churches, but it is also obvious that Jesus is involved and active everywhere else too”.

**Deacon Heather Smith**

