

Mapping Your Community

A resource from





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Mapping Your Community

We all know that we need others to help us in our work and lives, especially when times are stressful. In the Genesis creation narratives, God creates humanity to exist in community. Relationships are so important, the observation “It’s not good for a human to be alone” is recorded as sacred scripture.

Yet too often, we don’t have communities of support prepared for when stressful times hit, or don’t activate those communities when we need them. To buffer against withdrawal that can add to a sense of loneliness and isolation, map out your community of support, your “people,” and keep this list on hand for when you need extra support. Sometimes even just seeing the community of saints and potential support can be helpful; keep it somewhere you can readily access it, such as your journal or a note-taking app on your phone.

Support in your Personal Realm

- First, list anyone in your **innermost realm** of life: significant others, house mates, children, pets. You may want to visualize this by drawing it in a house, or just a smaller circle.
- Next, list the names of your **family support**. This may be your biological family of origin or “chosen family,” the people to whom you are so emotionally close and committed that you consider them family even though you are not biologically or legally related. Perhaps this is a circle near the house, or a concentric circle surrounding it; examples are below. Position them however it makes the most sense to you.
- List the name of your **friends support**. These are people who don’t need you in any productive or professional sense; people from and with whom you can safely practice needing, asking for help, and setting and maintaining boundaries.
- Finally, list your existing support system for any of the personal **need-based support roles**. Some such roles (by no means an exhaustive list) are below.

Emotional: Counselor or therapist

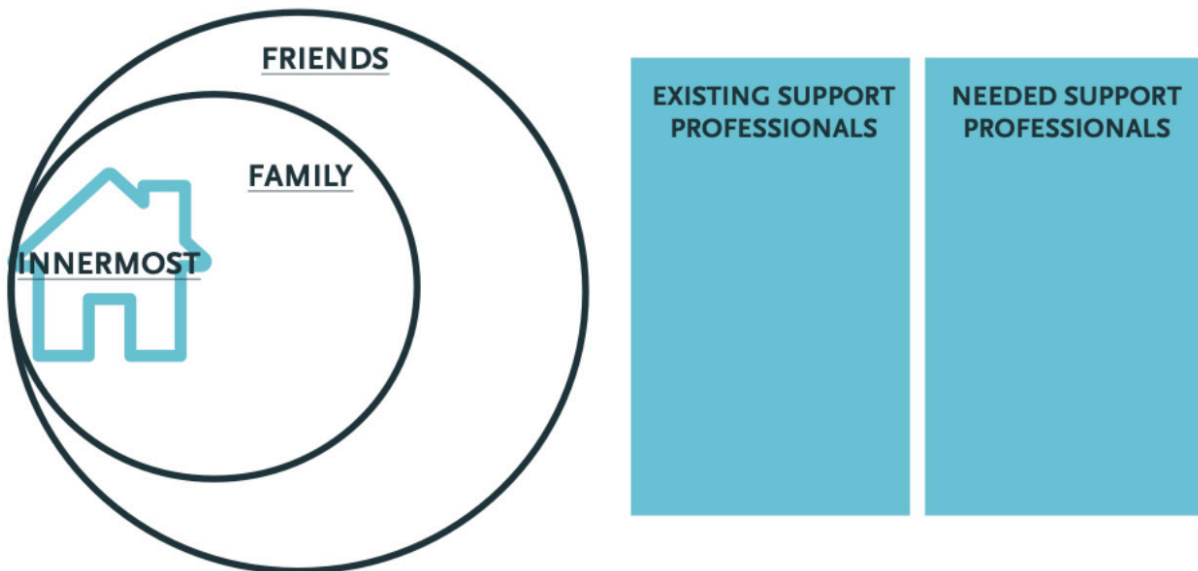
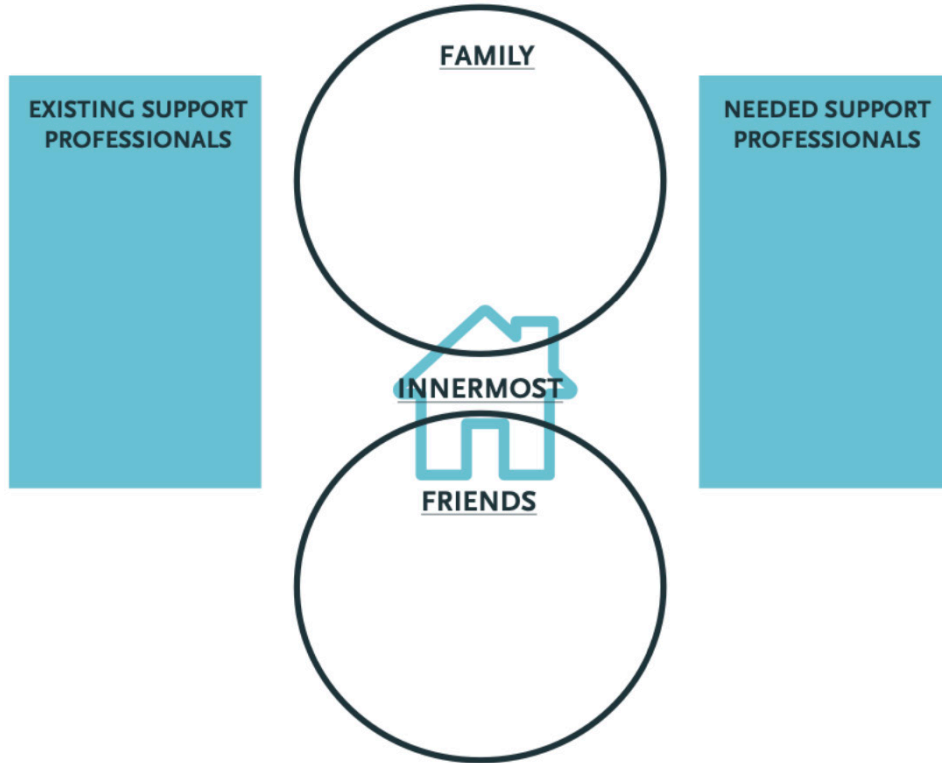
Spiritual: Spiritual director

Physical: Nutritionist, massage therapist, naturopath, acupuncture, etc.

Physical (active): Personal trainer, community of yoga or martial arts practitioners, sports team members, walking buddy, etc.

Holistic: Life coach or profession-specific coach

Example Layouts



Support in your Professional Realm

Remember, the purpose of this map is to make visible *true support* of you as a *whole person* - not only your “work relationships.” Org charts are immensely useful, but this is not that! Don’t list all your colleagues, professors, or student peers, just those you can truly trust and call upon in a crisis.

There are often individuals who fit into multiple categories. A cousin who is also a coworker; a mentor who is also a professor. It’s fine to have a single person listed multiple places; you may even want to draw lines to connect them, or arrange your map with overlapping spaces between categories.

- **Write the names of your partners and advocates**

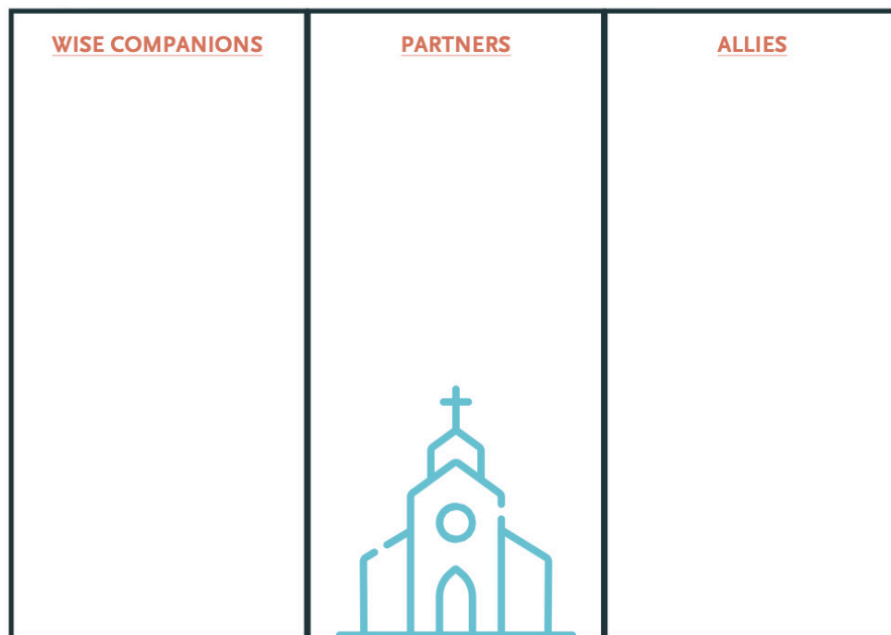
Partners are people *inside* your community/organization/partnerships work who understand the ins and outs of it, are trustworthy to think through that with you, and can partner to effect change with you. This may be someone in a top role of leadership within your institution (chair of the board, senior warden of the vestry, an associate staff person, etc), or someone in a similar role within your field/denomination (the person with the same title at another branch of your business; the pastor at the parish two towns over). **Advocates** are partners who can represent and give voice to your concerns, needs, and interests to others — and who is authorized by others to do so. This may be a member of the vestry or a supervisor.

- **Next, list your allies:** people outside your community who can offer you a perspective with some emotional distance; they can see more clearly because they’re not as close. An ally might be someone you went to school with, used to work with, or who has relevant experience (a pastor who works in another denomination, the same role of another organization, a similar tier of responsibility in another field).

It can be beneficial to have multiple levels of allies: If you’re a pastor at a denominational parish, you might want an ally who is in the same denomination of another parish (an ally in regards to the parish, a partner in the denomination), as well as a pastor of another denomination (an ally in regards to both the parish and the denomination).

- **List your mentors or wise companions.** These are people with whom you naturally feel connected, resonant, or safe. A sign of a good companion is someone who is not shy about showing delight in you — and similarly open about growth areas and conflicts. Often the start of these relationships is like dating; you have to put yourself in situations where you could meet people and engage the process of assessing natural connection. Don't assume the other person will initiate; ask them out for coffee, determine whether it feels more appropriate to build the relationship slowly over time or to ask more directly for guidance, perhaps even specifying the kind of engagement you want. This could include:
 - feedback on your style of relating and/or your style of leadership;
 - “case consult” of concerns you're facing;
 - studying a book together;
 - spiritual nurture, direction, discernment, or prayer;
 - unstructured conversation;
 - visits to each others' faith communities;
 - embarking on a project together and receiving feedback on the choices you make in that project and how you lead.
- *You may want to include mentors from your past; their voices are within you, and calling upon the memory of their input in imagined conversations can offer guidance and support.*
- **If you have boundary-walkers,** you may want to write their names in a space between categories. **Boundary-walkers** are often somewhere between a partner and an ally. Maybe they occasionally attend your worship service, volunteer with your ministry, or even do some paid work for you — but they primarily belong to another organization or community. These relationships can be particularly valuable in that they are “in” enough to get the complexities of the context, but “out” enough to be able to offer some perspective.

Example Layout:



Now that You Have a Map, Enter the Terrain

Sometimes it's valuable to simply see the community that is available to surround us. Other times, it may take more engagement: a good practice can be writing a sentence of gratitude for each name on that list. What do they add to your life? What about them brings you delight?

At other times, we need to actively set aside time to connect with this community. If you can see a time on the horizon that may require some resilience (an upcoming decision, transition, or experience), invite your community to care for you, with you. "Community care" is much more vital and helpful than "self care."

Schedule a walk with a friend, make an appointment with your therapist, put a yoga class on your calendar, tell your professional partners what you're anticipating and how it might impact you. Don't wait until you "need" it. Inviting your community to support you in anticipation of needs will give you caring people to notice when your resilience is being tested — often before you notice yourself.

I will _____ (action) to connect with _____ (person) by _____ (date).

Review Your Map and Explore the Unknowns

First, review your map. Where do you need more support? This can be as broad as "professional" or as particular as "an acupuncturist who focuses on stress and hormone balance."

On your maps, perhaps in a different color or its own section, write any additional support roles you may need to find:

I'd like to cultivate more relationships with _____ (role).

Next, name some strategies for how you'll find that role. Perhaps there's an acquaintance or distant friend that you can invite to an upcoming event to reconnect or strengthen a connection. Perhaps you can ask existing connections for referrals. Perhaps there's a conference coming up where you can be looking for allies, or maybe you recently went to a training and could follow up with someone you met there.

Occasionally we are asked for recommendations of alumni from The Seattle School who work as counselors or spiritual directors. While we can't recommend individuals, you can find many of them on The Seattle School's LinkedIn page: <https://www.linkedin.com/school/the-seattle-school-of-theology-&-psychology/>

I will _____ (action) to connect with _____ (role) by _____ (date).

Finally, tell someone your goals and strategies for caring for yourself, and ask them to check in with you on those practices. Tell them how you'd prefer them to check in with you (text, email, call, face-to-face), and the type of conversation you'd like to have — we find it best to make explicit that when we fail, we're looking for curiosity about why we didn't act, or what got in our way, not punishment. Perhaps you can have this conversation on one of the "community care" activities you scheduled above.



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