



# Western North Dakota Synod

## Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

### Section #1: “Why, for God’s sake, does our congregation exist?”

Purpose: In this section you are invited to explore a core question; “Why does your congregation exist?” You will be invited to look at various Bible texts, spend time in discussion and think about the place that you live, the gifts God has given you, and the reason that your congregation continues to take up precious space on God’s green earth.

Open With Prayer:

*This opening section of scripture is meant to be a conversation starter. If you are working with a group of people who do not know one another please take a moment to go around the room and share introductions.*

Mark 4:1-9

<sup>1</sup>Again he began to teach beside the sea. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the sea and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. <sup>2</sup>He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: <sup>3</sup>“Listen! A sower went out to sow. <sup>4</sup>And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. <sup>5</sup>Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. <sup>6</sup>And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. <sup>7</sup>Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. <sup>8</sup>Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.” <sup>9</sup>And he said, “Let anyone with ears to hear listen!”

From listening to this story, what do we know about the sower? What are some of his characteristics?

*Help people open their imaginations to enter into this story, what conclusions might they be able to come to about the sower? For example:*

- The sower is focused – he knows his job is to sow. He did not stop to try and make the soil better by adding manure to the sandy soil, or pick rocks, or anything else – the sower sowed, that is what his job was and that is the job that he did.*
  - The sower is generous. He scatters the seed wherever, he does not worry that some seed might not fall in the most advantageous spots for growing – he just sows.*
  - The sower is not a worrier about those things which he can’t control. Only time will tell what happens in the different types of soil. For example is adequate rains had come all season long even sandy and rocky soil can produce a crop.*
- It is also interesting that the “good soil” produces different amounts in the end.*

**Discussion Question:** Why do you think Jesus closes this parable with the command, “Let anyone with ears to hear listen!”

The point of this study is to invite people to a prayerful journey, seeking God’s guidance about the ministry of this congregation. Congregations who are clear about why they exist are usually healthier and more focused on participating in God’s mission that all the world would know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

So back to the centering question for this section of the Bible Study:

### **Why, for God’s sake, does your congregation exist?**

*(take several minutes to explore that question. What are people’s initial thoughts? Have they ever thought about this question? Does a person’s answer to this question depend on their age? Gender? Whether they are single or married? Has the congregation ever spent time in discussion around this question in the past?)*

Jesus has some things to say about faith and life. Let’s spend some time listening to scripture and thinking about how it applies to congregational purpose.

Matthew 22:34-40

#### **The Greatest Commandment**

<sup>34</sup>When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, <sup>35</sup>and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. <sup>36</sup>“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” <sup>37</sup>He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ <sup>38</sup>This is the greatest and first commandment. <sup>39</sup>And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ <sup>40</sup>On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

In groups of 3 or 4 people, take a sheet of paper and draw a dividing line down the middle. At the top of left column write **“Love God”**. Take 3 to 5 minutes in your small groups to list all of the ways that your congregation fulfills the first half of the “Greatest Commandment” to Love God.

At the top of the right column write **“Love Neighbor”**. In your same groups of 3 or 4 people take 3 to 5 minutes to list all of the ways that your congregation fulfills the second half of the “Greatest Commandment” to Love neighbor.

\*Have the small groups report out, using newspaper print or a chalk board list all of the ways your congregation **“Loves God”** and **“Loves Neighbor”**.

\*From this exercise what do you learn about your congregation?

The final scene of the Gospel of Matthew has Jesus sitting with his disciples and giving to them what has been called “The Great Commission”. In these final verses of Matthew Jesus tells his disciples what the center of their life’s work should be.

Matthew 28:16-20

### **The Commissioning of the Disciples**

<sup>16</sup>Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. <sup>17</sup>When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. <sup>18</sup>And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

According to Jesus, his followers are to:

- go** and **make** disciples
- baptizing** them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit
- teach** everything Jesus had commanded
- to **remember** that no matter what, Jesus is present

It would have been easy for the 11 disciples to sit around, telling stories of the miracles that Jesus had performed, recalling the heated debates between Jesus and the religious leaders of the day, even about the people that Jesus would hang out with (sinners and tax collectors). However, Jesus made it clear that they had a job to do, to take what he had taught them and tell others.

- They were not to *sit* but *go*.
- They were *not to hold* this Good News to themselves but to *welcome others* into God’s family through baptism.
- They were *not to forget* but they were to *teach*.

And just in case they thought this was going to be easy work Jesus told them he would be with them always, to the end of the ages.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- \*In what ways is your congregation fulfilling the “Great Commission”?
- \*Take some time for some honest assessment. Is your congregation more apt to:
  - sit or go?
  - hold or welcome?
  - forget or teach?

Now, let’s spend some time talking...

1. As a congregation why are you here for God’s sake?
2. What God given gifts/strengths does your congregation/parish have to offer?
3. What God given gifts/strength do you have to offer?

*Use newspaper print to capture answers to each of these questions. Let people talk, brainstorm, listen carefully... Make sure there is space for everyone to share, even people who are more reserved, invite them to share their thoughts. Save the newspaper print for later work.*

### **Take Home Exercise – Section #1**

One of the ways we can “listen” for God’s guidance is by talking with other people. Before we gather next time have a conversation with some people in your circle of friends – someone who is a member of your congregation but not involved in this Bible Study and someone who is not a member of your church. *A complete guide to One-to-One conversations can be found in Appendix A.*

Here are a couple of questions:

-What is your deepest concern about our community?

*This is not a question about your church, it is about the larger community, help people think outside the church walls. What do they pray about? Who are they concerned for?*

-When you wake up in the middle of the night, what is it that you think/worry/ or ponder?

-What is something that you have passion about?

During your conversation just listen to the person, pay close attention to them. Part of the goal is to get to know this person in a deeper way. At the same time you really want to hear what they have to say about their “world view”.

Following the conversation take a few notes. What were key phrases or points they shared in relation to each of the questions?

Bring these reflections back to your larger group in a following meeting. Report out the high points of the conversation, not who said them... As you do this in large group listen closely for themes, what themes of concerns are there within your community? What do people worry about? What are people’s passions?

Begin a process of praying around the concerns, worries and passions – asking God, through the power of the Holy Spirit to help see mission and ministry possibilities.

### **Other Texts You Could Explore as Group:**

Exodus 3      The Call of Moses  
Luke 10:25-37    The Parable of the Good Samaritan  
Luke 10:38-42    Jesus Visits Martha and Mary  
John 21:15-19    Jesus and Peter, “Feed my sheep.”  
Acts 8:26-40    Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch  
Philippians 2:1-13



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### Section #2 “Where in Jesus’ name are we going?”

*This section of the Study is intended to help members of your congregation get a sense of where Jesus is calling them to live, share, be the Gospel in their community. Think about it this way, you have a full day off. As you get up in the morning you have plans what so ever. You do know that you want to do “something” today but you are not sure what. Will it be a drive out to a local park where you can walk, bike, or rent a canoe? You could drive a couple towns over to see a couple of friends who have been on your mind. You could grab the new book you bought and head out into the backyard and spend the day lost in the reading. All choices would be good, enjoyable and life giving.*

*Congregations who chose to enter into a process of discernment have endless possibilities in front of them. There are countless opportunities to serve our neighbors, to be God’s church for the sake of the world. This section of the study is intended to help congregations prayerfully discern through study and conversation where God in Jesus’ name is calling them.*

Open Session with Prayer.

Re-Cap what has been learned from Section #1:

- What did you take away from last week’s discussion?
- What new insights did you gain about our congregation? About its purpose? What blessings has God provided through your congregation (to individuals? to the community?)

Question for group discussion:

- If you could do anything you wanted what would it be?
- What is stopping you?

Read the Text

*(Genesis 12:1-4 is the centering text of this section. In the section notes you will find other texts which you can draw into your discussion*

#### **Genesis 12:1-4**

<sup>1</sup>Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup>I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup>I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

<sup>4</sup>So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

(Text Written by Rev. Martin Mock,  
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Biblical Scholars cannot pin it down to an exact time, but somewhere in the early or mid-second millennium BC a nomadic or semi-nomadic Semite called Abram left his native area of Haran in Upper Mesopotamia and went to present-day Palestine. We wouldn't have heard of it, if it weren't for the meaning both Jews and Christians assigned it. To them it was and is a defining moment in the history of the whole human race. It was passed down in story to them, how Abram and Sarai did this out of trusting obedience to God who promises him three things:

- 1) he would father a great nation;
- 2) he would receive land; and
- 3) he would be a source of blessing for all peoples.

Chapter twelve in Genesis marks a new stage, the beginning of human redemption. The first eleven chapters laid out humanity's rebellion against God and the dire consequences of trying to go through life without God. In chapters ten and eleven are genealogies from Noah to Abram. Abram married Sarah, who was barren. It seems to say, or better yet, the Scriptures want to say that everything ends in barrenness. Humanity can go on for ages and ages, but it will end in nothing, unless there is divine intervention. We call it grace, the unmerited love of God. Humanity has nowhere else to go. Barrenness- whether it's war, devastation, destruction, death, loss and grief- this is the way of human history without God. There is no foreseeable future, only hopelessness. Human power, apart from God, cannot create or invent, a future. Then comes Chapter twelve.

The Lord speaks his powerful word directly into this situation of barrenness. It is a word, a promise. It's about the future, spoken to this family without any hope of a future. It is also a call. It is a call to change, to abandon the familiar, a renunciation of all that was considered valuable. It is a call for a dangerous journey from the world of what would be considered by humans as "security." Yet, it was a call to and a promise of a great future, something Abram did not have and could not achieve by himself. He did not even know where to look.

"Go to a land that I will show you:" There is no mention of Abram having a dream of hope to go to a better land than the one he knew. No, this is not Abram's dream. It is God's. He will obey this command without knowing when and where he will have reached God's intended destination until he gets there. God will deal with Abram on a "need to know," basis. God will let him know more details when the time is appropriate in God's estimation. For now, he is to leave the familiar and set out on an as yet unknown path to an as yet unknown destination and destiny. It is so very hard for many of us to realize that God still does that to us today. That is, God will ask us to do something and we have no way of knowing what the outcome will be.

**At your tables, select a partner and discuss the question:**

Does God still call us to leave the familiar, to go to an undefined place, to start over?

*To whom?*

*How?*

*When?*

*Where?*

*Why?*

*What?*

“I will make of you a great nation:” No details given, just promises. Abram must take Gods words of promise as is. Abraham, we will learn, cannot have children by Sarah, though he has other wives. At first, the great nation, meaning “innumerable descendants” promise would be no great problem to believe. But, when he finds out that Sarah is supposed to be the mother of one who will carry forward God’s plan, it does matter. This will call for “great faith.” Nature contradicts even the possibility. Sarah will not become pregnant.

I will bless you: The Hebrew barak, “to bless,” means to empower, to enable to succeed, prosper, be fertile, live long, etc. It is the bestowal or conferral of abundant and effective life on someone or even something. Like promise, blessing has a futuristic dimension to it. Since God is the source of life, and therefore blessing, only God can control it, bestow it, either directly, as here, or through an agent. Those not in a relationship with God cannot bless or be blessed. Thus humanity, at this point, is without blessing, without life, barren. From the time of Adam humanity has been under the curse of death. God demonstrates in this verse that He alone has power to bestow blessing and give life. In the patriarchal narratives, blessing is specifically linked to reproductive powers and the meaning here implies the birth of an heir. The point here also is that God was not asked, by Abram, for God’s blessing. God took the initiative. God wants to bless. It is in God’s nature to bless. God desires to give it to all who trust in God.

### **Enter into discussion with your partner around question #2:**

When you were at a crossroad in life due to events of loss and/or grief:

- Share about the hardships you experienced?
- How did you feel?
- What happened to your dreams for the future?

“Name” is a metaphor for “character” or “being or one’s nature.” God will make Abram great, and therefore his “fame,” will also be widespread. So that you will be a blessing: Abram will be the means or agent whereby God blesses others. As the “model,” paradigm, standard of what God is blessing of a human would look like, Abram becomes a blessing. All the communities of the earth will find blessing in Abram: From the very outset of this renewal of a relationship with God, God intended to include all the peoples of the earth, not just the physical descendants of Abraham. As mediator of God’s blessings, Abraham foreshadows his long-way-off descendant, Jesus Christ.

### **With your partner, talk about table discussion #3**

Share how God responded to your:

Sorrow	Loss
Grief	Pain

Abram went as the Lord directed him: Abram is portrayed as totally at God’s disposal, completely obedient to God’s revealed and express will. Even though he is seventy-five years old, he is not too old to change- his ways, his life-style, his address, his whole outlook on life. The author very succinctly, if obliquely, silences those who would use the excuse of advanced age to excuse themselves from changing at the bidding of God.

Abraham leapt over the limits of humanity, but he did it at God’s direction. Abraham took a spiritual leap of faith. He believed God. He trusted, despite physical evidence to the contrary, that God was innocent of the charge of keeping happiness and fulfillment from humanity. Even though Abraham dies without seeing and experiencing the evidence, the proof that his trust was not in vain, he still trusted to the end.

## Discussion Time:

How has God turned your losses into Blessings?

How are you an agent for God's blessing to/for others?

*The interaction/study of the Abraham/Sarah story has been personally focused, inviting people to think about their own lives. The questions in this first portion of the study are intended to get people thinking how God has acted in and through their own lives.*

*Now it is time to shift the discussion to a corporate discussion, engaging how God might use the congregation, the "gathering of the saints", as a means to bless the community in which the congregation resides.*

### **What do you know about your community?**

- What is your community proud of?
- What are the joys of living where you live?
- What do young people in your community worry about?
- What about middle aged people?
- What do elders worry about?

*The questions above are meant to encourage deep thinking about the community or neighborhood in which your congregation is located. You are invited add questions about joys and concerns for other age groups or demographics within your community. This is also a good way to introduce your people to the idea that while we can guess what others are thinking, feeling, and dreaming about – we really don't know unless we talk to them.*

*This would be a good time for some **outside the church** conversations. Encourage each member of your study group to go have conversation with people from various groups within your community. Some of them might be members of your congregation but a majority should be people outside your congregation. Some people call this a One on One – it is an intentional conversation, where your goal is to listen deeply, form a relationship with the other person and learn about another human beings point of view about the world in which we live. In Appendix A you will find a document that includes some guiding questions for a One on One conversation. There is also a bit more of an explanation about such conversations and the intended out-come of such conversations.*

*You may notice that this idea of One on One's seems similar to what you your participants were asked to do in Section One of this study, you are right. The hope is that these One on Ones will help build relationships with people outside the church (and inside as well – we often don't know members of our congregation as deeply as we think). Remember the goal here is relationship building and learning about the community where you live. However, there is a side benefit, people who will risk doing One on Ones will build confidence in their ability to interact with people they don't know well. It will broaden their horizons, it may be a step that one day will lead to the ability to invite a stranger to worship.*

We invite you to read 1 Corinthians 12:4-26.

-What are the different gifts listed?

-Are there more important gifts than others according Paul the writer of this text?

-What are the God given gifts of your congregation?

In the First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul is dealing with divisions. The people who were worshipping together were finding ways to divide one another. In chapter 11 of the Letter Paul writes of his concern over the way people are divided during the Lord's Supper. In this the 12<sup>th</sup> Chapter Paul continues to work at breaking down divisions, this time probably over spiritual gifts. His point, God has given all people gifts, they are not the same gifts. However, all gifts are important.

We find out just how important each-others gifts are as we begin to discern what the needs are of the community that our church is located within. For example a congregation listened closely to their community through One on One conversations. What they found out was that there was a deep need for an after school program, a place where young children whose parents were still at work, could get help with homework. It just happened that the congregation had a number of retired teachers, an excellent resource for any after school program.

What are the resources that our congregation has? What are the gifts God has placed within our faith community? Split a piece of newspaper print into three sections. On one section write People's Spiritual Gifts, on the next section write Physical Gifts (these are tangible things like building, large fellowship hall, kitchen, computers, etc.) on the third section write Financial Gifts. Now it is time to brainstorm. What has God gifted you with? See how many items you can get into each of the categories.

When you have listed all that you can ask your group this question: For Jesus sake, how might the "Gifts that we have" intersect with the needs of our community? If the group is uncertain at this point that is alright hopefully the next time they gather, after participants have completed a number of One on Ones, you will engage this question again because remember we are trying to prayerfully discern:

Why in God's name we exist?

Where in Jesus' name are we going?

and How by the Holy Spirit will we get there?

Additional Exercise:

*Another helpful resource that can get at the question "How in Jesus' name do we get there?" is the Acts Bible Study (Appendix B). This resource provides a process that can be used by dyads and triads. As participants meet regularly for Bible study and prayer, relationships are deepened in conversation and reflection as they explore God's work through the formation and ministry of the early Church. This is a great Bible study tool to use alone or alongside the group process described above.*

### **Other Scriptures that you could bring into discussion:**

Isaiah 6:1-8	The Call of Isaiah
Luke 15:11-32	The Parable of the Prodigal and His Brother
Matthew 14:22-33	Jesus Walks on the Water
Mark 5:22-43	A Girl Restored to Life and a Woman Healed
Luke 1:26-38, 46-56	Mary's Song
Luke 24:13-35	Road to Emmaus
1 Corinthians 12	One body Many gifts
Hebrews 11:1	



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### **Session #3: “How through the Holy Spirit will we get there?”**

*In the previous section of this study you were invited to prayerfully dream and discern “Where in Jesus’ name are we going” – in other words to listen to God (through prayer), our members (through conversations) and our neighbors (by asking some questions) – to help define how God is inviting us to be a part of God’s mission in the world.*

*In this section of the study we will work at setting a plan in place to engage that mission.*

#### **Open:**

Prayer – spend time “checking in” – gather a list of prayer concerns and then open with prayer. *It would be a gift if through these weeks the participants would have grown in relationship and trust with one another that they would be willing to share their own prayers in this opening time.*

Spend time listening to reports from the One-on-One’s that people conducted. What did they learn? What surprised them? What troubled them? Did they learn anything new about the community? Have any of your preconceived notions been challenged through these conversations?

*(Spend plenty of time here. This is an extremely important exercise as we create relationships with people inside and outside our congregation. Listen carefully for repeating themes, community concerns that are expressed by different people. Ask if others hear themes that are similar to what they heard in their One-on-One conversations. This is a tool that should be used often as the congregation is in the process of understanding who they are and how they can best serve the community.)*

Go back to the newspaper print from last session. Read through the “Gifts” that your community possesses. Is there anything that was missed, are there things that need to be added to the listings? Do any of these gifts intersect with needs that are rising up?

It is important to keep all of this in mind as we move into our discussion of this section. This study shows a progression. Section One challenges us to think why we exist, that it is God who calls congregations into being. At the same time each congregation is unique, so how does it live out God’s call to be a Word and Sacrament Community for the sake of the neighbor? By now we should have a sense of why God has called your congregation into being. The second section focused on where in Jesus’ name your congregation is going. This section recognizes that congregations change over time, just as communities do, so we need to be prayerfully asking the Savior how do we serve our neighbor in this day? As we set that course, through prayer and Bible Study, then it is important to determine the steps it will take to become the servant community God calls us to today, that is our work in this section of the study.

### John 6: 1-15

<sup>1</sup>After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. <sup>2</sup>A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. <sup>3</sup>Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. <sup>4</sup>Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. <sup>5</sup>When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?” <sup>6</sup>He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. <sup>7</sup>Philip answered him, “Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” <sup>8</sup>One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, <sup>9</sup>“There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?” <sup>10</sup>Jesus said, “Make the people sit down.” Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they<sup>£</sup> sat down, about five thousand in all. <sup>11</sup>Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. <sup>12</sup>When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, “Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.” <sup>13</sup>So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. <sup>14</sup>When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, “This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.” <sup>15</sup>When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

Think of the grassy hillside as an intersection, it a places where the world’s need and our God-given gifts intersect. Jesus has been teaching, there is a large crowd, the hours slip away and just as you would expect people become hungry – there is the need

Jesus *nudges* the disciples, “Where are we to buy bread for all these people?”

Look closely at the text, how do the disciples respond to Jesus question? What does each of those responses say about their expectations?

*For example*

*-It costs too much! (Philip) “Six months wages...to get a little”*

*Implied: God knows we don’t have any money...*

*How else might you interpret Philip’s statement and what might it mean about our attitudes about how God works in the world?*

*-What about Andrew’s Response*

Jesus is inviting the disciples to think about how the feeding might be accomplished. Sometimes all we can see is what we don’t have, or how we can’t do something.

Take some time to talk about: **How do our attitudes become roadblocks to God’s mission?**

**Gift:** Andrew recognizes the gift that is in front of them – a little boy with 5 loaves and two fish. It doesn’t seem like enough, especially in the face of this huge crowd. However, God is a God of abundance. Jesus takes the bread and fish, blesses them and they are distributed. Look closely at the text – it says all received “as much as they wanted”. In other words there was no skimping, people ate their fill and then 12 baskets of left overs were gathered.

Sometimes we don’t recognize the abundance that God blesses us with. Have you ever served a pot luck where the crowd looks too large, where you wondering if there would be enough food for everyone? Yet, when it is all said and done all are fed.

**Discussion:** Spend some time talking about examples of God's abundance.

God has given us (congregations) everything we need to carry out the mission and ministry God is calling us to. Remember, this study is meant to help us prayerfully discern what ministry God is calling us to and how to engage that ministry. God would not call us to a ministry that had not already equipped us for. We have incredible untapped resources in our congregations.

In the previous section you began to identify the ministry God is calling you to - now it is time to begin putting in place an action plan to carry out that ministry.

**First:** *“Why For God’s Sake Does our Congregation Exist”*

-Write a statement about the ministry you sense God is calling your congregation to:

*Example: We believe God is calling us to be a place of honest conversation for young people in our community, where they will find caring adults who will walk with them.*

**Second:** *“Where in Jesus’ name are we going?”*

-With that “God Given Calling in Mind” write a one line statement about the ministry.

*Example: First Lutheran Church will be a welcome place for young people.*

Make the statement brief so members can remember it.

**Third:** *“How by the Holy Spirit will we get there?”*

-Write several overarching principles about how you as a congregation will live into the statement above.

*Example:*

*-we will train adults in how to have caring conversations*

*-we will open our church up every Wednesday for food and conversation with young people*

*-we will do “One on One” interviews to build relationships with the youth of our community, to learn about their joys and concerns, hopes and dreams, and what they need to feel a sense of being cared for, listened to and loved by adults in this community*

**Fourth:**

-For each of the overarching principles state a time line of when the principle will be engaged, by whom, and how you will measure if positive movement is being made toward fulfilling the goal.

**Exercise:**

*A helpful grid is attached (Appendix C) that can help you walk through this process and record your steps and action plan.*

**Other Scriptures that you could bring into discussion:**

Matthew 1	“God With Us”
Mark 2: 1-12	Jesus heals a paralytic
1 Corinthians 12	
Romans 12	New Life in Christ
Jeremiah 29: 11-14	“I know the plans I have for you...”
Recall the Abram and Sarai Story	



## **Appendix A**

### **One-to-One Relational Meetings: A Starter Kit**

#### **What is a One-to-One meeting?**

As we enter into the 3 Great Listeners, paying attention to God, our church communities and our neighbors in the greater local and global community, we face a need for deep and connective conversation. *A one-to-one meeting is a natural but uncommon conversation with someone you want to know (or know better) about their values, vision, life and motivations.* It's natural because it flows from your curiosity and your conversation partner's responses, rather than using a set of pre-determined questions. It's uncommon because it requires intense listening and courageous inquiry as you focus primarily on going deep into your conversation partner's story and resist turning it too much toward yourself. You'll find that you and the person you're visiting have things in common; you should acknowledge that with brief accounts of your own experience, building trust and connection. But always return your focus to your partner with a question that can lead them deeper into their story.

**“No one has ever seen God;  
but if we love one another,  
God lives in us and God’s  
love is made complete in us”  
1 John 4:12**

#### **What am I trying to accomplish in a One-to-One?**

Your objectives are simple and transparent:

- First and foremost, you want to establish or deepen a relationship with this person.
- Learn some significant things about them. What makes them 'tick'? What do they value? Who are they, really? What has brought them to this point in life?
- Establish some commonly held interests, goals or values. These can lead to new opportunities for relationship and collaboration.
- Through your attentiveness and inquiry, this person might learn some things about him or herself that they didn't realize were true, leading to new clarity and self-appreciation.

Your conversation should last 30-45 minutes. Remember that your main focus is on your partner, this is not a 50/50 conversation. You should be listening and learning for about 70% of the conversation, and sharing for about 30%. If your partner wants to learn more about you, he or she can schedule another time for that. Focusing on one person at a time allows each to feel deeply heard, and requires discipline about time and intent.

#### **How do I start a One-to-One conversation?**

- Pray for courage and the right words as you talk and listen to people.
- Pray for the ability to discern through that conversation what God is calling you to do.
- Imagine yourself unconditionally loving the person you are talking with. Speaking to someone from a stance of unconditional love changes the dynamic – people can feel your genuine interest in their lives.
- If you're hoping to get to know a familiar person better, be open with them about your intent, and ask them to meet you for a conversation. You might mention that you are with a

congregation, looking to learn more about your neighbors and how to better serve your community.

- If you're starting 'from scratch' with strangers, you might try spending consistent time at a local 'hang-out' spot (coffee shop, restaurant, etc), striking up simple conversations with other 'regulars' or people working. Conversations might start around seeing each other often, working up to questions around the community (How have you seen this place change since you've lived here? What keeps you here?) and move into deeper and more intentional conversation.

With courage and vulnerability, pay attention to your resistance to probing deeper or admitting your interest in this person's life. You may fear that you are invading their privacy, but courageous questioning actually builds trust and gives the person permission to share something deeply significant. You are not a therapist, and should avoid advice or analysis. Instead, listen deeply and ask what they make of their story, or offer something about yourself that relates to their experience.

A few questions that can lead to great, relationship-building conversation are included here. Never take notes or go into a conversation with the intent to get through all of these questions! Wait until after the conversation to reflect in writing what you heard about this person, and don't be afraid to get 'off topic' and let the person lead you to issues that are important for them to share.

#### **Possible questions to spark conversation:**

- What brings you the most joy in your work?
- What are the greatest hurdles or challenges?
- What kind of impact do you want to have?
- What's the biggest challenge you've faced in your life, and how did you handle it?
- How is that challenge still impacting you?
- What role has faith (or community, family, friends or mentors) played in your life and work?
- What accomplishment or project are you most proud of, and how did you help to make it happen? What did you learn about yourself in that process?
- What has created real disappointment for you in terms of wanting to make something happen?

#### **What you're listening for:**

- Ambitions, dreams
- What makes them angry, sad, joyful
- Why they are attracted to certain people, organizations, communities
- What has grabbed them most along their familial, educational, professional or faith journey
- Why they spend their professional and personal time the way they do
- What values and relationships they are willing to take risks and make sacrifices around

**“Vulnerability is the birthplace of creativity, innovation and connection.”  
-Brene' Brown**

**“To love another person is to see the face of God...”  
-Victor Hugo, *Les Miserables***

## **One-to-One: Reflections**

- With whom did I speak?
- What does this person care most about and why? (Passions/self-interests?)
- What talents or gifts does this person have to offer, and how do they get to exercise them?
- Stories they told that give insight into current/past life issues:
- How did our conversation seem to impact him/her?
- What might be the basis of a follow-up conversation, collaboration, or relationship?
- What might make this person feel honored if they were invited into it?
- Insights I had from this conversation? Any leading direction as to what God might be calling me/us to do?

## Appendix B

### Acts Bible Study Process

Here's the process:

Ask people to choose dyads and triads to meet in. Their choice. . .but gender specific (men with men, women with women). This breaks up husbands and wives and it avoids other temptations. This takes you out of the driver's seat and puts them in charge.

Also ask the leadership team to choose their dyads or triads from those other than the leadership team. If you can get the council, committees, and others involved in this, that's a bonus and make the same request of them. That way, instead of just six or so doing the study, you'll have as many as two to three times the number of people on the leadership team and the council. . .a real bonus. . .

They choose when and where they meet. 6:30 a.m. at the coffee shop, noon at work, whenever. . .you just ask them to be accountable for when and where they meet.

When they meet the time is divided into three sections.

Section one: 10 minutes. Check in time. Relationship building. How's it been with you this past week? What's going on? The kind of stuff we do naturally when we greet people, etc.

Section two: 20 minutes. Conversation about the text. . .assigned in two chapter increments for each week and to be read before arriving for the study. Questions to be asked: What is God doing in these two chapters? What are people doing in these two chapters? (sometimes at odds with God). What is the Holy Spirit doing? What lessons are here for the church in that day? What lessons are here for the church today? What is this telling us about a possible vision purpose for our ministry? These are the basic questions.

Others could be added: Where does the activity take place? What was old in this text? What was new? What kind of impact did reading this and praying about it have on you? Etc.

There are no formal questions here. It's conversation about the text. Don't try to make this into a curriculum. . .

Section three: Prayer. Hard commitment to **at least 15 minutes of prayer**. What to pray for? Each other of course, and what they heard as they checked in with each other. For the gift of the Word they have just encountered. For the ministry. For a vision for mission that God is raising up in them. For their ministry to be connected to the city and to real life. . . etc. . . I ask that this time be a firm commitment. No less than 15 minutes! More if they wish but not less.

Add up the numbers  $10 + 20 + 15 = 45$  minutes. Longer than an hour and they are not doing the right work!

Hope this helps!

Rev. Stephen Kanouse

Director for Evangelical Mission

Northern Texas – Northern Louisiana Synod - ELCA

## **Pray for:**

Each person's 'high'

Each person's 'low'

The week we've just completed: What things are hard to let go of? What things do you need to remember? What have you learned? What can you grow from?

This week we're starting/in the middle of:

What are you dreading or wanting to put off? What are you looking forward to? Where will you find peace this week? Where will you find stress? What can you celebrate this week? What are you hoping to learn?

Your families: celebrations, challenges, sorrows

Your friends/acquaintances: celebrations, challenges, sorrows

Local news: celebrations, challenges, sorrows

National news: celebrations, challenges, sorrows

Foreign news: celebrations, challenges, sorrows

Local, national and global awareness: What's not being covered by the media? What do we need eyes and ears for? What aren't we paying attention to that we should be? How are we called to serve?

Service people, here and abroad (include all types of service to all types of people/needs)

Caretakers: spiritual leaders, emergency relief workers, medical practitioners

Teachers: in schools and in our communities

Healing/health: personal, community, national, global

Understanding: personal, community, national, global

Peace: personal, community, national, global

Perspective: How do you see yourself and your call this week? Where do you see God working?

Silence: Take a few moments to just be present with one another and with God, silently focusing on one word or phrase over and over again, or simply on the sound of your breathing. Center yourself.

**\*\*Remember, we pray always and in all ways. God is present in every conversation, every thought shared, every question raised. Allow yourself to explore new ways to pray: Take a walk together, draw something and explain what you've drawn, talk freely and deeply about your thoughts, concerns and joys. This is a chance to build trust and let yourself and another person begin to reveal the whole truths of your lives. Prayer can be enlightening and fun. It's probably most perfect when it's not perfect at all!**



# ACTS 1

## The Promise of the Holy Spirit

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning<sup>2</sup> until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.<sup>3</sup> After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.<sup>4</sup> While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. “This,” he said, “is what you have heard from me;<sup>5</sup> for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

## The Ascension of Jesus

<sup>6</sup>So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?”<sup>7</sup> He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority.<sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”<sup>9</sup> When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.<sup>10</sup> While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them.<sup>11</sup> They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

## Matthias Chosen to Replace Judas

<sup>12</sup>Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day’s journey away.<sup>13</sup> When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and

Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James.<sup>14</sup> All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

<sup>15</sup>In those days Peter stood up among the believers (together the crowd numbered about one hundred twenty persons) and said,<sup>16</sup> “Friends, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas, who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus—<sup>17</sup>for he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.”<sup>18</sup> (Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out.<sup>19</sup> This became known to all the residents of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their language Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)<sup>20</sup> “For it is written in the book of Psalms, ‘Let his homestead become desolate, and let there be no one to live in it’; and ‘Let another take his position of overseer.’<sup>21</sup> So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,<sup>22</sup> beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection.”<sup>23</sup> So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias.<sup>24</sup> Then they prayed and said, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen<sup>25</sup> to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.”<sup>26</sup> And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.

## Acts 2

### The Coming of the Holy Spirit

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.<sup>2</sup> And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.<sup>3</sup> Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.<sup>4</sup> All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

<sup>5</sup>Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup> And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.<sup>7</sup> Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?”<sup>8</sup> And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?<sup>9</sup> Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,<sup>10</sup> Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,<sup>11</sup> Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.”<sup>12</sup> All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”<sup>13</sup> But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

### Peter Addresses the Crowd

<sup>14</sup>But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning.<sup>16</sup> No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:<sup>17</sup> ‘In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.<sup>18</sup> Even upon my slaves, both men

and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.<sup>19</sup> And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist.<sup>20</sup> The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day.<sup>21</sup> Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.<sup>22</sup> ‘You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know—<sup>23</sup>this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law.<sup>24</sup> But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power.<sup>25</sup> For David says concerning him, ‘I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken;’<sup>26</sup> therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will live in hope.<sup>27</sup> For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One experience corruption.<sup>28</sup> You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’<sup>29</sup> ‘Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.<sup>30</sup> Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne.<sup>31</sup> Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying, ‘He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption.’<sup>32</sup> This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses.<sup>33</sup> Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear.<sup>34</sup> For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand,<sup>35</sup> until I make your enemies your footstool.”’<sup>36</sup> Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

## **The First Converts**

<sup>37</sup>Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?”<sup>38</sup>Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.<sup>39</sup>For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.”<sup>40</sup>And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”<sup>41</sup>So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

<sup>42</sup>They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

## **Life among the Believers**

<sup>43</sup>Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.<sup>44</sup>All who believed were together and had all things in common;<sup>45</sup> they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.<sup>46</sup>Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts,<sup>47</sup>praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

**Appendix C**



**Western North Dakota Synod**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.

**First Step:** As a Mission Task Force, write a statement describing the action God is calling you to engage. (This should be one sentence, which is specific about the action.)

**Step Two:** Write two to four over-arching principles about how you, as a congregation, will live into the statement above.

**Statement #1:**

Goal	Action Plan	Timeline	Measurement	Accountability

Goal	Action Plan	Timeline	Measurement	Accountability

Goal	Action Plan	Timeline	Measurement	Accountability

# LIVING THANK YOU

## A stewardship journey

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

*2 Corinthians 9:15*

3-5 minutes Introduction

10-15 minutes 3 Phases of a Stewardship Journey:

Encounter stewardship → Seek a stewardship lifestyle → Engaged – model and mentor

5 Actions of Gratitude:

1. Say Thanks
2. Give Back
3. Make Welcome
4. Honor Others
5. Create Goodness

5-10 minutes Your Journey - work in pairs

- Who taught you to give joyfully?
- What brings you joy?
- Identify yourself, your congregation – Phase 1, Phase 2, or Phase 3?
- What might be the trigger that causes movement?

3-5 minutes Please Do Try This at Home

- Name it! Name what you are already doing and recognize it as stewardship ministry.
- Perspective: attitude of gratitude. Say thanks everyday – to God and to others in appreciation for the difference their participation and contributions make in your life, work and faith.
- Rethink commitments: its ministry not a mere volunteer activity.
- Begin meetings with devotions and stewardship scripture, FaithTalk questions or engage in a common read.
- Share stories of inspiration, joyful givers and volunteers in worship or at gatherings. Thank them and honor them.
- Incorporate intergenerational activities to foster mentoring. Serve together; engage in conversation with people of all ages.
- Celebrate milestones.
- Gather together small groups of people who seem to be “doing stewardship well” ask who taught them to give? How did they learn about giving? Use what they offer.

3-5 minutes Conclusion

*Lord, We are blessed by you. Help us to live in a way that shows others our faith in you. Amen.*



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.

## Resources

Faith Simonieg  
WND Regional Gift Planner, ELCA Foundation  
[faith.simonieg@elca.org](mailto:faith.simonieg@elca.org)  
701-226-5865

Lisa Ahlness  
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701-223-5312

Not Your Parents' Offering Plate  
A New Vision for Financial Stewardship  
By J. Clif Christopher

Growing Givers' Hearts: Treating Fundraising as a Ministry  
By Thomas H. Jeavons

Financial Meltdown in the Mainline?  
By Loren B. Mead

Ask, Thank Tell: Improving Stewardship Ministry in Your Congregation  
By Charles R. Lane

*FaithTalk cards. Merton P. Strommen and Charles Bruning.* Looking for good conversation? This set of 192 faith-sharing cards is perfect for sparking caring conversations across generations (ages 12 and up). (There is also a phone app for these cards)

