



Planning Calendar for Congregational Meal Response Method

Nine Weeks before the Congregational Meal

1. Recruit and select Leadership Team members. Exchange phone numbers, likely schedules and e-mail addresses.
2. Members of the Leadership Team meet and familiarize themselves with all of the MAKE IT SIMPLE resource materials. (Refer team members to the Web version of this stewardship resource— <http://www.elca.org/makeitsimple> —or burn another copy of this DVD-ROM for their use.)
3. For this response method, ask members of the congregation to fill additional roles:
 - Congregational Meal Coordinator (This person chairs the meal planning committee.)
 - RSVP Coordinator (This team member receives and tabulates reservations for meal reservations.)
 - Congregational Meal Program Coordinator (This team member focuses on the activities that will take place during the entire event.)
 - Meal Serving Team (This team organizes and serves a meal that may be catered, potluck, etc.)
 - Meal Clean-up Team (This team cleans up following congregational meal event!)
4. Clarify each Team member's responsibilities and identify the assets of additional potential leaders for MAKE IT SIMPLE.
5. Set a MAKE IT SIMPLE "Master Calendar" (who will do what by when). Remember that not all meetings have to take place "down at church." Leave some "thinking together outside the box" time in the calendar's tasks.
6. View one or more of the videos as a form of devotions for your team. Consider how you might use the videos in this response method.

Eight Weeks before the Congregational Meal

1. Team members communicate with appropriate leaders concerning the program calendar and their participation in MAKE IT SIMPLE (Pastor, office staff, worship committee/leaders, Sunday school leaders, women's or men's group, etc.). The "communication" might take place at breakfast, as a kind of kickoff event for leaders.
2. Prepare communication materials that will be used. Customize sample letters, newsletter articles, worship bulletin announcements, etc. for your setting and note the date that they will be used.
3. Schedule support activities that will take place—congregational learning events, Bible conversations and Bible studies, youth group activities, children's ministry activities, etc. You might post onto your congregation's Web site—as a kind of preview or teaser—a link to the file for the video you have chosen for Commitment Sunday.
4. Recruit committees for the Congregational Meal.
 - Meal planning committee plans the details for the food that will be served. (Will it be catered or potluck? What will the menu consist of? Simple menu?)
 - Clean-up committee plans best way to take care of clean-up details, including matters of leftover food, disposal of waste, recycling of utensils, etc.
 - Program committee to lead MAKE IT SIMPLE Program (including opportunity for each member/household to bring forward Commitment Cards and Covenant Cards.)

These committees may meet separately from the MAKE IT SIMPLE Leadership Team, but should stay in touch with the larger committee.

Seven Weeks before the Congregational Meal

1. MAKE IT SIMPLE announcement (Letter #1) sent to every home.
2. Write—and submit or post—a newsletter article announcing the MAKE IT SIMPLE Congregational Meal and inviting everyone to participate.
3. MAKE IT SIMPLE Team meets to check in and to talk about pertinent Scriptures together.
4. Use additional communication opportunities—i.e., bulletin board, congregation's Web site, etc. (See the following reading for some other simple possibilities.)

Communication with a Smile and Some Pizzazz



You can make “communication” into an attractive, inviting and energizing part of MAKE IT SIMPLE. (And yes, “pizzazz” is different than “pizza!”) Consider these simply completed communication possibilities:

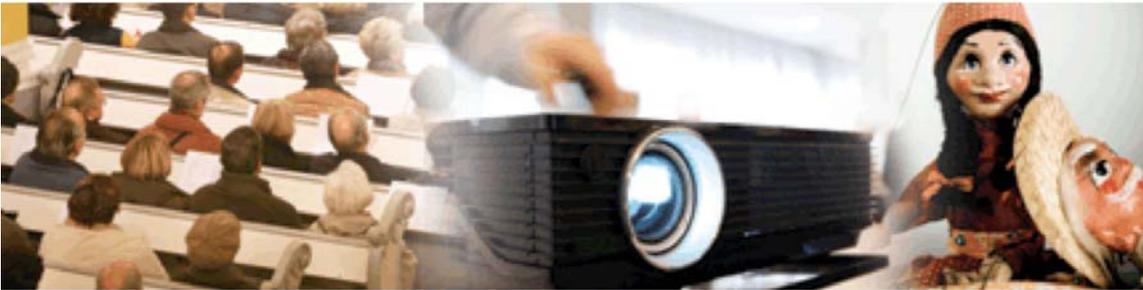
- Ask high school youth or a Sunday school class to make a simple video on this theme, “We Live (Give) Simply Because . . .” Post the video on your congregation’s Web site or a social networking site like YouTube or MySpace.
- As an alternate method, post one or more of the videos included in this resource on your congregation’s Web site, perhaps with introductory or follow-up commentary. Change the videos weekly.
- Print your announcements on different sized and different qualities of paper—check with a local printer about buying odd-sized leftover paper.
- Feature testimonials or stories of “joyful simplicity” by congregation members. Use photos or drawings.
- Make children’s art a part of all your communications. Kids get the idea of “enough!”
- If surprising, delightful, or inviting words are difficult to come up with, dig around in the Sermon Outlines for each MAKE IT SIMPLE theme to find good words. Stewardship doesn’t have to be trapped in the usual verbiage!
- Frame your invitation in terms of the benefits that can come to members because of their participation in this stewardship emphasis. “Simple living” helps everyone.

Think about the communication value of cartoons, drawings/photos, charts, personalized invitations, questions-and-answers, emotional honesty, high-quality design and layout, and drama.

Six Weeks before the Congregational Meal

1. Make an announcement in worship—Temple Talk #1—that briefly describes MAKE IT SIMPLE, and encourages worshipers to plan to participate. Describe the events and support activities that are planned. (See the following reading for some simple-yet-out-of-the-ordinary variations on a standard Temple Talk.)
2. MAKE IT SIMPLE Team meets to check in and to study the Bible together. Bible Study #2 would be a good place to start. Check on any plans you have made regarding special features for the congregational meal.
3. Use support activities that are appropriate to your situation and this time in the overall schedule.
4. If you have not already done so, finalize your use of one or more of the videos included in this resource. Remember that you can use the videos as more than just presentations of fact. Because they elicit feelings, the videos also can serve as prayer starters, prompts for a time of sharing, or devotional material.

Temple Talks That Speak Up



If “Temple Talks” have lost a little of their zip, consider some of these simple variations to help garner—deserve?—the attention of worshipers:

- Change the location from which the Temple Talk originates. How about the balcony, a “roving reporter” or a variety of individuals standing up among the pews?
- An almost-completely “silent” Temple Talk—use placards with key concepts or symbols—might end with two really powerful sentences.
- Think how you might use portions of the videos in this resource as a piece of the Temple Talk. (Using the videos as the entire Temple Talk is probably not an effective use of the time.)
- Change the announcement to a simulated “interview.” Puppets make good subjects for these question-and-answer times.
- Pre-record the Temple Talk—with background music—as a kind of meditation and play it over your sound system as a form of pre-worship preparation.
- Surprise the listeners with speakers who are not “the usual suspects.”
- Ask the Temple Talker to include a personal invitation, story, or testimony.
- Feature an object, a “costume,” or an action as part of the Temple Talk.

Five Weeks before the Congregational Meal

1. Include in this Sunday’s worship bulletin an announcement that includes the anticipated schedule of MAKE IT SIMPLE activities or events or themes. Remind and invite worshipers to participate in support activities as well as the coming congregational meal. (See the following reading for some simple ways to perk up a worship bulletin relating to stewardship.)
2. MAKE IT SIMPLE Leadership Team meets to check in and study Scriptures together. You might start with Bible Study #3.
3. Prepare a second Invitation Letter (Letter #2) to be sent during the next week to every home.

Bulletin Inserts for Keeps



Tired of finding worship bulletin inserts in your trash bins, out in the parking lot, lining parakeet cages, or morphing into paper airplanes? Here are some simple ways to construct stewardship-related bulletin inserts that get taken home—or that REALLY inspire the parakeets!

- Include photos of your members—don't forget youth and children as subjects—along with personal stories or invitations.
- Keep your verbiage to a minimum, your sentence structures simple, your vocabulary unadulterated and unpretentious, and your message not coded in ecclesiastically coated jargon. In other words, don't write like this!
- Think of other models of “insert” such as: puzzle piece, bookmark, or simply folded paper sculpture.
- Include a way for worshipers/readers to respond to the message. You might include tear-off coupons with a deadline, include a checklist or survey form to be returned, or ask worshipers to complete some prompts on the insert and return the completed insert with their offerings.
- Place the bulletin inserts inside of something besides worship bulletins!

Four Weeks before the Congregational Meal

1. Send the second MAKE IT SIMPLE Invitation Letter (Letter #2) to every home. Include a reservation and deadline date for the congregational meal.
2. In worship, present another Temple Talk—Temple Talk #2—that invites people to make reservations to attend the congregational meal as well as participate in the support activities that are planned. (See the following reading for some simple-yet-out-of-the-ordinary variations on a standard Temple Talk.)
3. As a team, meet to check in and to study the Bible together. Continue with Bible Study #3.

4. Double-check your readiness for the next four weeks of themed worship and support activities. This is a good time for a progress check on details surrounding the meal and its program.

Three Weeks before the Congregational Meal—MAKE IT SIMPLE: Following Jesus

1. Worship with the “MAKE IT SIMPLE: Following Jesus” theme, using suggestions about sermons, children’s activities, and worship resources.
2. Conduct, offer, or present the activities or resources you have chosen to support this week’s theme. (See the ESSENTIALS and MORE ESSENTIALS navigation buttons on the right side of your screen).
3. Bring your MAKE IT SIMPLE Team together to check in regarding the progress of the program and the need for possible support for other leaders involved. Consider conducting check-in times via phone, using flash-link capabilities. You might also set up a social networking page—e.g., My Space—for your team’s use in planning and checking in. Another possibility: Early on, set a weekly or biweekly schedule of breakfast meetings or coffee breaks.

Two Weeks before the Congregational Meal—MAKE IT SIMPLE: Facing the Truth

1. Worship with the “MAKE IT SIMPLE: Facing the Truth” theme, using suggestions about sermons, children’s activities, and worship resources.
2. Prepare and mail Congregational Meal Letter A. Include as an insert a “Percentage Giving Chart” and “Household Giving Step Chart”.
3. In worship, present another Temple Talk (#3) that describes both charts and encourages prayerful conversation within the family concerning their stewardship of God’s blessings (financial, time, energy, giftedness, etc.). Describe the charts as the start of stories families can tell or begin. Model the kind of prayer you want to encourage. Use denominational materials to talk about the results of specific dollar contributions in the larger work of your church body.
4. Conduct, offer, or present the activities or resources you have chosen to support this week’s theme. (See the ESSENTIALS and MORE ESSENTIALS navigation buttons on the right side of your screen).
5. Note the deadline for meal reservations that you have set. Update reservation figures for the Congregational Meal.
6. Prepare a sample MAKE IT SIMPLE Covenant Card and Commitment Card for including as bulletin inserts for next week’s worship.

7. Consider another personal invitation to congregation members to attend next week's worship. The more personal an invitation is, the more likely a person will respond to it. A phone-tree method of reaching all members might work well here, or an e-mail message to all members who have e-addresses. Another effective invitation: Post cards that are hand-written by team members and personalized to each family.
8. Prepare Congregational Meal Letter B to be sent to every household. The letter describes the Commitment and Covenant Cards and the process for their use.
9. Arrange for the MAKE IT SIMPLE Leadership Team to check on progress and the need for any support for other leaders involved.

One Week before the Congregational Meal—MAKE IT SIMPLE: Acting Together

1. Worship with the "MAKE IT SIMPLE: Acting Together" theme, using suggestions about sermons, children's activities, and worship resources.
2. Include in worship a bulletin insert that samples the MAKE IT SIMPLE Covenant Card and Commitment Card.
3. Offer Temple Talk #4, describing both cards and the plans for next week's Congregational Meal event. Encourage prayerful conversation within the family concerning their plans for using both cards.
4. Mail Congregational Meal Letter B to every household, enclosing sample Commitment and Covenant Cards.
5. Conduct, offer, or present the activities or resources you have chosen to support this week's theme. (See the ESSENTIALS and MORE ESSENTIALS navigation buttons on the right side of your screen).
6. Schedule another MAKE IT SIMPLE Leadership Team meeting for check in on progress and the need for any support for other leaders involved.

The Congregational Meal—MAKE IT SIMPLE: Sharing Enough

The week of the Congregational Meal and the tasks of the past weeks now come to their culminating moments.

1. Worship with the "MAKE IT SIMPLE: Sharing Enough" theme, using suggestions about sermons, children's activities, and worship resources.
2. Include an opportunity during the program for a sample MAKE IT SIMPLE Covenant Card and Commitment Card to be distributed. As part of the program, your MAKE IT SIMPLE Team Leader describes both cards and how each family will have the opportunity to bring their cards to a common place of offering. (See the following reading for some ways to approach this moment.)
3. Conduct, offer, or present the activities or resources you have chosen to support this week's theme. (See the ESSENTIALS and MORE ESSENTIALS navigation buttons on the right side of your screen.)

Bringing Our Gifts to God



The act of bringing an offering to the altar or another common gathering point—especially the offering of one’s commitment to contribute money for God’s mission through this congregation—can be a deeply spiritual moment. Consider some of these possibilities as you offer a variation on that opportunity as part of the Congregational Meal.

- Make a special receptacle—such as a colorful kettle or basket—to receive the Commitment and Covenant Cards. Place it in a central location.
- Collect the Commitment and Covenant Cards as part of a mealtime “offering.” Instead of asking ushers to come forward with filled offering baskets, invite the entire group of mealtime participants to surround a common collection point (such as the tables laden with food) as you dedicate in prayer these offerings—and commitments—to God’s purposes.
- Designate representatives of the congregation’s ministries—chairs of teams, age-level groups, children and youth, leaders of various programs, events, or emphases—as symbolic receivers of the Commitment Cards.
- Combine the moment of receiving the Commitment and Covenant Cards with a moment of music, the Passing of the Peace, the Benediction, or the sharing of a word of Scripture.
- Add to the impact of this moment with music other than the traditional hymns about giving or stewardship. This is a moment of celebration as well as solemn promises.

The Week after the Congregational Meal

1. The MAKE IT SIMPLE Leadership Team meets to wrap up your work. Tabulate the amount of Commitment Card figures, and participation figures for Covenant Cards.
2. Send out the Thank You Letter (Letter #3) to families who participated. Include any plans and an invitation to participate in any possible further MAKE IT SIMPLE activities.
3. Send the Follow-up Letter (Letter #4) to families who were not able to participate in the Congregational Meal event. Include Commitment and Covenant Cards and invite the participation of these families and the return of the two cards to the church office within two weeks. Also invite them to participate in any possible further MAKE IT SIMPLE activities that may take place.
4. Send the Thank You Letter (Letter #3) to those who respond to the Follow-up Letter.
5. Determine how you will announce the totals of contributions committed for the coming year.
6. Decide how to feature some of the content of the Covenant Cards as an encouragement for the congregation. (See the following reading for other ideas about these cards.)

Ideas You Probably Already Know About



You've probably already thought about how to put the Covenant Cards to some valuable use, for some valuable outcomes. Here are some others that you may also already know about:

- Assemble the completed Covenant Cards into a quasi-mural that can grace the entryway to your worship space. Affix cards to large sheets of paper and hang them from the ceiling as a kind of gallery. Put parts of the “mural” on doorways leading out of the church building. Add drawings, photos, or newspaper clippings to the mural to give it immediacy and context.
- Gather the completed cards together in categories, as a kind of survey of congregational faithfulness in these times.
- Read selected Covenant Cards—anonously or with attribution—as part of devotional time at meetings during the coming months.
- Pull selected quotes or ideas into your congregation’s newsletter.
- Use the most touching, encouraging, or challenging Covenant Cards as part of a larger answer to an obvious larger question, “Now what can we do?”
- Transcribe the entire body of covenants on these cards into an assembled congregational covenant. Put this document—or all the Covenant Cards—into a time capsule that will be opened one year from now.

Sample Letters

Use the following sample letters for a Congregational Meal response method using the MAKE IT SIMPLE themes and resources.

Letter #1—Congregational Meal Introduction to MAKE IT SIMPLE

Date

Cong. Member
Address
City, State, Zip

Dear *Cong. Member*,

This year our congregation will be participating in a stewardship response program entitled “MAKE IT SIMPLE.” The MAKE IT SIMPLE theme will be the focus of our congregational meal to be held *XXXDAY, XXX XXth*. At the congregational meal there will be the opportunity for members of each household to bring forward a Commitment Card indicating their financial support intent to the ministry of our congregation for the coming year. Covenant Cards will also be used to help us commit ourselves to simpler, sustainable lifestyles.

The theme for MAKE IT SIMPLE provides important opportunities for study, reflection, and discussion about the choices we make in our daily lives in these times. The MAKE IT SIMPLE stewardship program includes congregational learning events, small group Bible studies, children’s activities, and themed worship. We invite and encourage you and your family to participate in the MAKE IT SIMPLE activities. More details will follow in *the church newsletter*.

Sincerely,

XXX XXXX
Pastor

XXX XXXX
MAKE IT SIMPLE Chair

Letter #2—Congregational Meal Invitation

Date

Cong. Member
Address
City, State, Zip

Dear *Cong. Member*,

This year our congregation is participating in a stewardship program entitled “MAKE IT SIMPLE.” We will focus on this theme in four weeks culminating in our Make It Abundantly Simple Congregation Meal on *XXXDAY, XXX, XXnd*.

The MAKE IT SIMPLE theme provides opportunities for study, reflection, and discussion about the choices we make in our daily lives. It is biblically centered to help us grow in faith and our daily living as a disciple of Jesus. Congregational learning events, small group Bible studies, and children’s activities will supplement our themed worship.

We invite and encourage you and your family to participate in the MAKE IT SIMPLE program. Enclosed is a calendar of scheduled MAKE IT SIMPLE activities.

Sincerely,

XXX XXXX
Pastor

XXX XXXX
MAKE IT SIMPLE Chair

Letter A—Congregational Meal Response Items

Date

Cong. Member
Address
City, State, Zip

Dear *Cong. Member*,

This year our congregation is participating in a stewardship program entitled “MAKE IT SIMPLE.” We are making our final preparations for our MAKE IT SIMPLE Congregation Meal on *XXXDAY, XXX, XXnd*. We hope that you and your family are planning to attend.

The MAKE IT SIMPLE theme has provided us with opportunities for study, reflection, and discussion about the choices we make in our daily lives. We are experiencing growth in our faith and in our daily living as disciples of Jesus. We hope that you have been able to participate in our congregational learning events, small group Bible studies, children’s activities, and our themed worship.

Enclosed you will find two items that will help you in your prayerful discernment of your family’s stewardship and support for the ministries of our congregation in the coming year. The Percent Giving Chart shows various levels of income and, by percentage giving, what a weekly offering amount would be. The Step Chart shows the numbers of our congregation’s households that contribute at different levels. We encourage you to find where your household falls on the chart and to consider making a “Step-Up” in your giving next year.

We invite and encourage you and your family to participate in the MAKE IT SIMPLE program. Enclosed is a calendar of scheduled MAKE IT SIMPLE activities.

Sincerely,

XXX XXXX
Pastor

XXX XXXX
MAKE IT SIMPLE Chair

Letter B—Congregational Meal Response Items

Date

Cong. Member
Address
City, State, Zip

Dear *Cong. Member*,

Our congregational stewardship program this year is entitled “MAKE IT SIMPLE.” We are making our final preparations for a MAKE IT SIMPLE Congregational Meal on *XXXDAY, XXX, XXnd*. We hope that you and your family are planning to attend.

As we have focused on the MAKE IT SIMPLE theme we hope that you have been able to participate in the various activities and events. As a congregation we are having good conversations and prayerful reflection concerning the choices we make in our daily lives and our stewardship of all of God’s blessings. We are growing in our faith and in our discipleship.

Enclosed you will find a MAKE IT SIMPLE Commitment Card and a MAKE IT SIMPLE Covenant Card.

The Commitment Cards will be brought forward during our Congregational Meal event. We ask your family to have prayerful conversation about your stewardship, and then complete the card indicating your estimate of financial support for the ministries of our congregation for the coming year.

The Covenant Card is the opportunity for you to covenant as a family or with others concerning the steps you will take in the coming weeks and months to live a more simple life. The Covenant Cards will be brought forward at the Congregational Meal event as well.

We look forward to seeing you at our Congregational Meal on *XXXXX, XXnd!*

Sincerely,

XXX XXXX
Pastor

XXX XXXX
MAKE IT SIMPLE Chair

Letter #3—Congregational Meal Thank You

Date

Cong. Member
Address
City, State, Zip

Dear *Cong. Member*,

We write to say “Thank You” for your participation in this year’s stewardship response program, “MAKE IT SIMPLE.” We hope that your experience was spiritually enriching. As a congregation we have experienced rich conversation, thoughtful reflection, and prayerful discernment concerning more simple living and our stewardship of the abundant blessings we receive from God. We have experienced a good response in estimates of giving through the Commitment Cards. And we have grown as a community of faith in the covenants that we have made with one another in the use of the Covenant Cards.

We encourage you and your family to continue in your covenant to grow in your discipleship through prayer and conversation regarding your stewardship of your blessings.

Sincerely,

XXX XXXX
Pastor

XXX XXXX
MAKE IT SIMPLE Chair

Letter #4—Congregational Meal Follow-up Non-participant

Date

Cong. Member
Address
City, State, Zip

Dear *Cong. Member*,

We are writing in regard to our congregation's stewardship response program, "MAKE IT SIMPLE." Our records indicate that you have not yet responded with your Commitment Card or Covenant Card. As we bring this year's annual stewardship response program to a close, we want to invite you to take this opportunity to participate.

As a congregation we have engaged in rich conversation, thoughtful reflection, and prayerful discernment concerning more simple living and our stewardship of the abundant blessings we receive from God through this program. We have noted a good response in estimates of giving through the Commitment Cards. And we have grown as a community of faith in the covenants that we have made with one another in the use of the Covenant Cards.

We hope that you and your family have been able to experience at least some of the MAKE IT SIMPLE program through our recent activities. And we invite you to complete and return to the church office the enclosed Commitment and Covenant Cards.

Sincerely,

XXX XXXX
Pastor

XXX XXXX
MAKE IT SIMPLE Chair

Temple Talk Outlines

Overview

These Temple Talk Outlines can be used during the announcement time at worship the four weeks leading up to the MAKE IT SIMPLE congregational meal. The Temple Talks should be brief, inviting, descriptive of the MAKE IT SIMPLE program, and including some personal sharing. Use the outline to create your own bulletin announcement to augment the Temple Talk each week—written, projected, etc. Consider asking a different member of the Leadership Team to present each weekly Temple Talk.

Temple Talk #1

Announcing MAKE IT SIMPLE

- Introduce yourself.
- Note that this year the congregation is using MAKE IT SIMPLE—Congregational Meal for its annual stewardship response program. (If this is a new experience for your congregation, describe a response program and why you are using this resource—see Stewardship 101.)
- Briefly describe the Congregational Meal, as well as the worship and support activities that are planned. Invite congregation members to the meal, as well as to the support activities.
- Share why you are excited about this opportunity for you, your family, and the congregation.
- Close with a thank you and expression of looking forward to everyone participating in MAKE IT SIMPLE.

Temple Talk #2

Describing MAKE IT SIMPLE theme or financial response and inviting participation.

- Introduce yourself.
- Briefly recap the Congregational Meal format and your congregation's hopes for this annual response method—specifically, growth in discipleship, choosing a simpler lifestyle, and growth in personal stewardship—not the amount of money you want to raise.
- Describe the Congregational Meal, the weekly worship themes, and support activities that are planned. Invite folks to plan ahead for their participation. Note how reservations for the meal will be handled and when participants can sign up.
- Share your own hopes for your participation in MAKE IT SIMPLE.
- Close with thanks and an expression of your anticipation for everyone participating in MAKE IT SIMPLE

Temple Talk #3

Describing Percentage Giving Chart and Step Chart

- Introduce yourself.
- Ask people to find in their worship bulletin the insert containing the two charts.
- Share with the congregation your journey of simple living and generous giving as a disciple of Jesus. Encourage each family to engage in prayerful conversation about God's abundant blessings and stewardship of all that they have received from God.
- Describe the Percentage Giving Chart. Using the chart, walk through a percentage example.
- Describe the Step Chart. Using the chart, guide people to find their giving level on the chart and invite them to take a "step-up" in their giving to the ministry of the congregation for the next year.
- Encourage growth giving with the goal of a tithe (10% and beyond) in giving.
- Close with thank you and an invitation for the congregation to accept the "step-up" invitation.

Temple Talk #4

Describing the Commitment Card and Covenant Card

- Introduce yourself.
- Ask the congregation to find the Commitment and Covenant Cards located in their bulletin.
- Describe the information contained on the Commitment Card and how it will be used by the congregation. (See Stewardship 101.)
- Describe the information contained on the Covenant Card and how it will be used by the congregation. (See Stewardship 101.)
- Explain what to expect and what activities are planned for the Congregational Meal event.
- Close with thank you and expression of anticipation of their participation in the Commitment Sunday celebration.