



Planning Calendar for Small Group Gatherings Response Method

Nine Weeks before Conclusion

1. Recruit and select Leadership Team members. In this response method, you will also recruit additional leaders as follows:
 - Coordinator for Small Groups (This person will recruit and, where necessary, train small group leaders, serve as resource to these leaders during the time of the four small group meetings, and coordinate the use and collection of the Commitment and Covenant Cards.)
 - Small Group Leaders (These individuals will form the core of the Leadership Team, and share the major responsibility for the effectiveness of MAKE IT SIMPLE.)
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. Exchange phone numbers, likely schedules, and e-mail addresses.
3. Clarify each Team member's responsibilities and identify the assets of additional potential leaders for MAKE IT SIMPLE.
4. Set the time frame for the small group gatherings, and set the remainder of 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.
5. Set a time for the small group leaders to meet with the Leadership Team sometime during the next two weeks.
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 Conclusion

1. Team members communicate with other congregational leaders concerning the program calendar and their participation in MAKE IT SIMPLE (Pastor, office staff, worship committee/leaders, Sunday school leaders, women's/men's group, etc.) The "communication" might take place at breakfast, as a kind of kickoff event for leaders.
2. Prepare the communication materials that will be used. Customize sample letters, newsletter articles, worship bulletin announcements, etc. for your congregational 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 on 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. Preview another one or two of the videos in this resource, for devotional purposes as well as possible inclusion into your total plan.

Seven Weeks before Conclusion

1. The small group leaders join the Leadership Team for planning the group gatherings, reviewing the themes each gathering will feature.
2. Offer assistance to small group leaders in their task of facilitating gatherings. Refer them to the sample outline for conducting a small group gathering. (See the sample outline at the end of this document.)
3. MAKE IT SIMPLE Announcement Letter sent to every home.
4. During worship, make the first announcement—Temple Talk #1— regarding MAKE IT SIMPLE small group gatherings.
5. Write—and submit or post—a newsletter article announcing MAKE IT SIMPLE and inviting everyone to participate.
6. MAKE IT SIMPLE Leadership Team meets to check in and to talk about pertinent Scriptures together. The Bible conversation, "Following Jesus," would be a good starting place.
7. 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



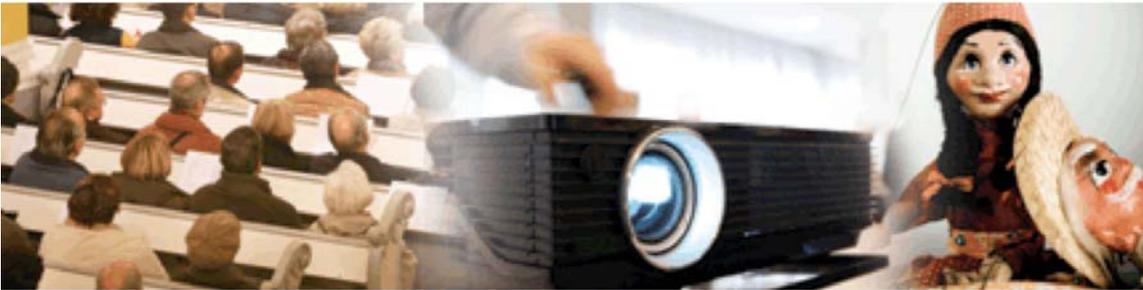
You can make “communication” into an attractive, inviting and energizing part of MAKE IT SIMPLE. (And yes, “pizzazz” is different than “pizza!”) Consider these simply completed communication possibilities:

- 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 tied to 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 Conclusion

1. Make an announcement in worship—Temple Talk #2—briefly describing MAKE IT SIMPLE, and encouraging worshipers to sign up for a small group.(Adapt this task to the option you have chosen for forming small groups.) 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 Leadership Team meets to check in and to study the Bible together. The Bible conversation, “Facing the Truth,” might be helpful.
3. The Coordinator of Small Groups checks in with small group leaders regarding their progress. Use support activities that are appropriate to your situation and this time in the overall schedule.
4. Prepare the second Invitation Letter (Letter #2) for distribution to every household during the coming week. The letter reminds congregation members of the deadline
5. for joining a small group. The 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. Send post cards that are hand-written by team members and personalized to each family.
6. 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 throughout 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, and testimony.
- Feature an object, a “costume,” or an action as part of the Temple Talk.

Five Weeks before Conclusion

1. Include in this Sunday’s worship bulletin an announcement that includes the anticipated schedule of MAKE IT SIMPLE activities, events, or themes. Remind and invite worshipers to participate in support activities as well as the four themed Sunday worship services. (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. The Bible conversation, “Acting Together,” would be a good one.
3. Send second Invitation Letter—Sample Letter #2—to every household.

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. Include tear-off coupons with a deadline. Include a checklist or survey form to be returned. 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 Conclusion

1. In worship, present another Temple Talk (#2), inviting people to join a small group as well as participate in any scheduled support activities that you have planned. (See the following reading for some simple-yet-out-of-the-ordinary variations on a standard Temple Talk.)
2. As a team, meet to check in and to study the Bible together. The Bible conversation, “Acting Together,” will work well here.

Three Weeks before Conclusion—MAKE IT SIMPLE: Following Jesus

1. The first of the small group gatherings take place, using the “MAKE IT SIMPLE: Following Jesus” theme.
2. Worship with the same theme, using suggestions about sermons, children’s activities, and other worship resources.
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).
4. Bring your MAKE IT SIMPLE Leadership Team together to check in regarding the first gatherings. You might conduct your check-in times via phone, using flash-link capabilities. You could also set up a social networking page (e.g., My Space) for your team’s use in planning and checking in.

Two Weeks before Conclusion—MAKE IT SIMPLE: Facing the Truth

1. The second small group gatherings take place, using the theme, MAKE IT SIMPLE: Facing the Truth.
2. Worship with the “MAKE IT SIMPLE: Facing the Truth” theme, using suggestions about sermons, children’s activities, and worship resources.
3. Include as a bulletin insert a “Percentage Giving Chart” and “Household Giving Step Chart.”
4. In worship, present another Temple Talk (#3) that describes both charts and encourages prayerful conversation within the small groups and within families 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.
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. Prepare a sample MAKE IT SIMPLE Covenant Card and Commitment Card as bulletin inserts for next week’s worship.
7. Consider another personal invitation to congregation members to join a small group if they have not already done so.
8. Arrange for your MAKE IT SIMPLE Leadership Team to check in on progress and the need for any support for other leaders involved.

One Week before Conclusion—MAKE IT SIMPLE: Acting Together

1. The third small group gatherings take place, using the theme, “MAKE IT SIMPLE: Acting Together.”
2. Worship with the “MAKE IT SIMPLE: Acting Together” theme, using suggestions about sermons, children’s activities, and worship resources.
3. Include in worship a bulletin insert that samples the MAKE IT SIMPLE Covenant Card and Commitment Card.
4. Offer a Temple Talk (#4) that describes both cards and the plans for the next small group gathering activities. Encourage participants’ prayerful conversation concerning their plans for using both 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.

Concluding Week—MAKE IT SIMPLE: Sharing Enough

1. The fourth small group gatherings take place, using the theme, “MAKE IT SIMPLE: Sharing Enough.” These may be the final gatherings, or the transition to continuing small group ministry in your congregation. Include opportunities for Commitment and Covenant Cards to be distributed, explained, completed, and received.
2. Worship with the “MAKE IT SIMPLE: Sharing Enough” theme, using suggestions about sermons, children’s activities, and worship resources.
3. As an option for receiving Commitment and Covenant Cards, include an opportunity during worship for a sample MAKE IT SIMPLE Covenant Card and Commitment Card to be distributed. As part of the service, your MAKE IT SIMPLE Team Leader describes both cards and how each family will have the opportunity to bring forward their cards to the altar. (See the following reading for some ways to approach this moment.)
4. Conduct, offer, or present the activities or resources you have chosen to support this concluding 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—especially the offering of one’s commitment to contribute money for God’s mission through this congregation—can be a deeply spiritual moment in a worship service. Consider some of these adaptations as you offer a similar opportunity as part of the concluding small group gathering.

- Collect the Commitment and Covenant Cards as part of the normal process of offering time on the Sunday following the last small group gathering. Instead of asking only the ushers to come forward with filled offering baskets, invite the entire congregation to surround the altar as you dedicate in prayer these offerings—and commitments—to God’s purposes.
- If you will collect both Commitment and Covenant Cards as part of the final small group gathering, arrange for special receptacles (such as decorated baskets or bowls from other countries) to be given to each small group leader. These receptacles can be symbolic of how these commitments extend God’s mission into the world beyond the confines of the church building.
- Collect the two cards at the final small group gathering and designate one member or each small group to bring the entire group’s collection of cards to the altar on the following Sunday.
- On that Sunday, 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 Sermon itself.
- Whether in homes or at church, 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 Following the Conclusion of This Emphasis

1. The MAKE IT SIMPLE Team meets to wrap up its work. Tabulate the amount of Commitment Card figures, and participation figures for Covenant Cards.
2. Send out the Thank You Letter (#3) to families who participated. Include any plans and invitation to participate in any possible further MAKE IT SIMPLE activities.
3. Send the Follow-up Letter (#4) to families who were not able to participate in small groups. Include Commitment and Covenant Cards and invite the participation of these families and return of the two cards to the church office within two weeks. Also invite them to participate in any further MAKE IT SIMPLE activities that may take place.
4. Send the Thank You 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.)
7. Determine a special way to express your gratitude to the small group leaders. (A special dessert or luncheon for this group?)
8. Provide for the possibility that some small groups will continue their conversations after the four-week emphasis in MAKE IT SIMPLE. Consider using a frank and hopeful simple-living resource such as Sustaining Simplicity as a beginning point. <http://archive.elca.org/hunger/resources/simple/sustaining.html>

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 Small Group Gatherings response method using the MAKE IT SIMPLE themes and resources.

Letter #1—Small Group Gatherings 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 program entitled “MAKE IT SIMPLE.” The MAKE IT SIMPLE theme will be the focus of small group gatherings from *Sunday, XXX, XXth through Sunday, XXX, XXnd*. We will focus on living a living simply and generously. At the conclusion of the small group gatherings you will have an opportunity to bring completed Commitment Cards that indicate your intent to support financially the ministry of our congregation for the coming year.

The small group gatherings for MAKE IT SIMPLE provide opportunities for study, reflection, and discussion about the choices we make in our daily lives. The MAKE IT SIMPLE stewardship program includes congregational learning events, 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—Small Group Gatherings 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 over four weeks. During this time we invite you to participate in a small group—about six to ten people—for conversation, Bible study, and fellowship. You can sign up with *XXXX XXXXX*, our congregation’s Coordinator for Small Groups. Please sign up by *Sunday, XXX, XXnd*.

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 #3—Small Group Gatherings 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 entitled “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—Small Group Gatherings 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 entitled "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 experienced 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 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 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 final worship on Week Ten. The Temple Talks should be brief, inviting, descriptive of the MAKE IT SIMPLE program. Include some personal sharing. Use the outline here to create your own bulletin announcements 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 your congregation is using MAKE IT SIMPLE—Small Group Gatherings for your 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 small group gatherings and the support activities that are planned, inviting participation.
- 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 small group gathering 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 specific themes for the small group gatherings and support activities that are planned. Invite the congregation to be intentional about participating. Describe how and when worshipers can sign up to be part of a small group. (You may also want to introduce the small group leaders.)
- 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 prayerful conversation as a family about God's abundant blessings and each family's 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 a thank you and an invitation for the congregation to prayerfully 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 will take place in the small group gatherings.
- Close with a thank you and expression of anticipation of their participation in the Commitment Sunday celebration.