

Many congregations involved in community or congregation-based organizing are actively involved in a one-on-one listening process in their congregations and communities. It is a structured process that seeks to build relationships and discover concerns, interests, commitments and resources. You can learn more about the ELCA's congregation-based organizing at its website <http://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Publicly-Engaged-Church/Congregation-based-Community-Organizing>.

The act of listening that is part of any organizing activity is an act that is central to all human relationships. Whether the hoped for outcome is one of political strength and voice in the community; of collective action to address a community concern; of identifying community resources; or to build relationships that are key to a strong congregation and community – the process of listening with care and intent stands at the center.

As you begin to get to know people in the community – possibly people who participate in programs or ministries of the congregation or who begin to attend worship or parents or grandparents of children who participate in programs at the church – ask to have an opportunity to visit with them. Use the time to listen and build a relationship.

As a congregation seeks to meet its neighbors again for the first time, the act of listening is essential. Too often we listen to our neighbors (even our families and friends) with our minds already fixed on what we think they will say or want or need. Too often we listen with preconceived ideas based on stereotypes or past patterns, or listening only partly while we are really thinking about what we want to say. Listening again for the first time means sitting down with our neighbor to really hear what our neighbor has to say. It means talking less and listening more.

As we enter the world of our neighbor and seek to listen, we listen at a deeper level to all of the layers of life. We listen past our own cultural and class biases to step into the place where our neighbor lives and experiences life. We enter into a place where we can come to know one another as human beings – to build a relationship based on trust and genuineness. The act of listening is an ongoing process – not a one-time event. To truly enter the world of our neighbor means we commit ourselves to our own process of transformation even as we commit ourselves to listen to our neighbor. When I have truly heard my neighbor's story, it becomes part of my story, and I am forever changed.

Guidelines for listening:

- Set a time and place where you can be free from interruptions
- Focus on listening – not on talking
- Ask about the person's family, activities, interests
- Take the direction of the conversation from the person you are listening to
- Listen for feelings and concerns and ask further questions that can clarify points and move beyond surface conversation
- Ask about visions and concerns for the community and for the congregation

- Thank the person for his/her time and continue to stay in touch and build the relationship

It is helpful to take notes after the conversation. As members of the leadership team use your collective notes to more clearly discern the needs and concerns expressed and to hear where God may be leading you as a congregation.

Continue to For Discussion: Reflections on Steps in the Journey



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You have been moving around the circle of learning – asking questions, searching for answers, acting on your thoughts and learning, and now it is time again for the fourth step in the learning circle – reflecting on your actions and learning in order to ask new questions. And then begin the process again in our lifelong journey of living as one body with many members.

As a leadership team, reflect on your growth and the transformation that you are seeing in the congregation. Engage in reflective discussion with one another and the congregation.

- How has the vision of the congregation taken life?
- What insights and understanding do you have of the cultural values and norms, customs and practices, and symbols and rituals that are important to your life together as a congregation?
- What are signs that the life of the congregation is expanding to embrace other cultures?
- How has the congregation grown in its spiritual and relational life?
- What are the difficulties and challenges that have been encountered along the way?
- Acknowledge the places of pain and feelings of loss. Re-visit the sections on fears, hesitations, and loss as that is needed. What we are afraid of losing becomes clearer as things change and we miss some things of the past. Lift those feelings in prayer.
- Have you come up against new or unexpected barriers and resistance? If so, how can you address the barriers?
- What old messages are resurfacing that make it hard to continue to trust God and the process of growth and transformation?
- In what ways has it been difficult to cross race, ethnicity, or class? What are the challenges you face within yourselves and the congregation; what are the challenges and frustrations you face as you interact with the community?
- What have you learned from the people in the community?
- What gifts are new people bringing to the congregation? How can those gifts be fully embraced?
- How are you doing on meeting your neighbors? What skills do you need to continue to develop?
- What have you learned about who you are as a congregation within this community? How do you see your place in the community?
- In what ways has the congregation grown as one body with many members?

- Talk about experiences of life-giving spirit, energy, and joy. Celebrate the growth.
- What does it mean now to live into your vision with ministry plans that meet the spiritual, educational, and mission needs of the congregation and the community?
- What are your new areas for growth?

Continue to Part 3: One Body Many Members



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