

REDISCOVER MACEDONIA

A spirit of gratitude and generosity



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

ELCA Macedonia Project Building a Case

How do you tell others about the mission of your congregation? For some this may begin with a story about a ministry that has touched their life in a special way. For others it may be sharing a dream about a ministry that is yet to begin. Such stories may reflect what motivates people to participate in and financially support the ministries of the congregation.

While such stories or a mission statement for the congregation may be a place to start, it is important to provide personal or specific details that build a case for why a person or household would want to give of their time, talents and financial resources. This means more than sending out a letter asking for support. It means identifying a group of leaders who will observe and listen for the spiritual yearnings and blessings in your church family and community. And then, building a concise and complete case that supports God's calling and the mission of the congregation.

Selecting Leaders for Building a Case

While most active participants in your faith community are qualified to be in the leadership group for this undertaking, there are some specific gifts, experience and perspectives that will usually be helpful. Consider the following questions:

- How might you involve significant numbers of your congregation in the case statement building process?
- Who in your congregation is most capable of this kind of persuasive or inspirational work? (Look for those under the age of 40.)
- Which current and past leaders are most respected?
- Who in the congregation knows the historical facts?
- What career and vocational experiences would be helpful for your context?
- What new perspectives or insights might be offered by people under the age of 40 in older congregations and over the age of 60 in younger congregations?
- How might you increase support for the developing case by involving committed givers?

Note that some people may serve on this work group in an advisory capacity. This means asking their advice and assistance at specific points in the process or to reach specific audiences.

Preparing for a Case Statement

Here are some approaches that will be helpful before starting the process of writing statements. One might consider this as pre-work or homework.

- **Identify** the inner yearnings or motivations of people in your community to do God's work. Look at what people naturally enjoy doing to fulfill God's will. Listen for how the Holy Spirit is working through people to make a difference in the lives of others. Watch how others are growing in their relationship with Jesus Christ by using the time, talents and resources God has entrusted to them.
- **Discern** how the spiritual lives of people in your worshiping community are moving or guiding people to do God's work. This is often reflected in a deep and spiritual sense of call. Look at how the faith journey of some individuals is increasingly guided by the Holy Spirit. This may sometimes motivate people beyond their visible physical, mental or emotional capacities.
- **Ask** questions before making statements. The development of a solid and compelling case starts with asking good questions of all those involved – recipients, donors, agents. Take time to listen to their callings, dreams, ideas and motivations.
- **Look** for places where the case may already exist. This could include the congregation's vision, mission, purpose or values statements. How have these changed over time? How might provisions of your constitution or by-law represent a missional document? What other documents in your congregation might be a guide?
- **Quantify** what may already be taking place. One way to measure change is to consider changes that take place over time. Look at participation in worship, education, service, outreach and the growth of people. These facts can provide a practical way of demonstrating what has been or can take place. These may also serve as a baseline or benchmark for monitoring progress of the ministry.
- **Recognize** the benefits of specific case statements. Depending on the audience or stakeholders, different statements may attract, enlist or unify certain individuals. Similarly, poorly worded statements may discourage, divide or devalue some individuals. Develop statements that will be inclusive and reach out to touch others.
- **Focus** case statements about current or future missional plans on specific goals, objectives, programs, outcomes, participants, leaders or facilities that will enhance and sustain ministry in the future. These statements will provide a foundation for funding the plan while being both concise and complete. Effective case statements build credibility with supporters by connecting with the congregation's integrity, both past and present.

Building a Case Statement

With the preparation complete, your leadership group may be ready to start the process. Consider the following steps:

- 1. Review current congregational documents and statements.** This would include the mission and vision statements, values, constitution and by-laws. Take note of the words and phrases that describe why your congregation exists and what it is to do. These could provide a guide for developing specific language in your statement(s).
- 2. Examine other statements or information.** Some congregations make decisions in council meetings or congregational meetings that guide or shape the purpose of the congregation. This could include both formal and informal documents that have guided planning in the past. Consider all the information collected after reviewing the guidelines above.
- 3. Develop preliminary case statement(s).** This clearly describes the focus of the mission plan with action verbs that will excite and motivate people. Look for specific concepts and phrases that encourage a theology of abundance and asset-based thinking rather than scarcity and negativity. What about the statement(s) will really motivate people and compel donors?
- 4. Revise the case statement(s).** Share the preliminary statement(s) with key leaders both inside and outside the congregation. Listen for their insights and suggestions. Do the statements truly and the spirit of the congregation?

It may be helpful to parse out this review process in small groups. For example, taking the statement(s) to specific beneficiaries, recipients or stakeholders the leaders from the work group may find it helpful to

- Critique wording, ideas, or other content of a case statement
 - Provide clarification or insight to content for specific groups or audiences
 - Identify options for places where people get “stuck” and look for fresh ideas
- 5. Share the case statement(s).** Make the revised statement(s) and supporting documents available to key donors. Listen for their initial reaction and feedback. Do not be afraid to make modifications if reasonable objections are raised. When the statement(s) is just about finalized, consider other uses that may broaden or enhance it's use.

Presenting the Case

Distribute copies of the case statement for a mission plan to all who are interested. Then reach out to all those who might be impacted by the outcomes of your statement(s). This could be a large audience, both inside and outside your worshipping community. Let people know in advance of your intention, and your desire to build a broad base of support. You want this mission to be faithful, effective and successful.

Through prayer, discernment and the hard work of many people, this undertaking will be God's people doing God's work.

After people have had time to review the case statement(s) and supporting documents, offer several times for people to gather and discuss. A short presentation would be appropriate. In addition to the statement(s), the following points may be noted:

- Outline the process used to develop the case statements.
- Identify those who provided leadership and took part in the process. This may be individuals or a group.
- Be transparent in presenting and sharing information. This will help to build trust within the community and strengthen relationships with supporters and donors.
- Acknowledge that the case for support, and the subsequent financial giving, rests with the members of the congregation. The community of faith should take ownership and adopt the statements as compelling in their lives.
- Accept these statements as living documents. While the case statements are intended to provide clear direction and support, these will likely continue to evolve.

Case Statements as Living Documents in Congregational Life

Once case statements are adopted, their life has just begun. How will these be brought to life? Here are some suggestions:

- Use these statements as a guide for creating a mission plan, including goals, objectives and outcomes.
- Communicate the case statements to all those who are touched by your ministry, and those who may be in the future. Use a variety of media.
- Case statements are not intended to be law, but rather a guideline for ministry. Learn to live into, through and around statements as God has called you.
- Develop qualitative and quantitative benchmarks that will measure progress in achieving the outcomes of the statements.
- Recognize that as more knowledge, experience and discernment occur, revisions may be made through appropriate decision-making processes.
- Case statements adopted today are probably not eternal. Be aware of how your community is changing and consider how this will impact your case statements.

June, 2012