

REDISCOVER MACEDONIA

A spirit of gratitude and generosity



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

Six Steps to a Relational Ask

While probably not the first relational ask, Apostle Paul used a form of this approach in his invitation to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9). Paul had an existing relationship with the people of Corinth from a previous visit. He sent a letter in advance. He sent a personal emissary chosen by the people of the church (8:19). This emissary, Titus, went on his own initiative and with great enthusiasm (8:17). Titus went “taking pains to do what is right” (8:21), both in the eyes of God and man. And, Paul expressed a desire to visit again (10:2) as part of an ongoing relationship.

It is clear that a relational ask is a multi-step process. While some traditional approaches might rely on a simple letter or an impromptu visit, the relational ask in this effort involves six specific steps:

Step 1: Thank

*And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,
to which indeed you were called in one body.
And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell
in you richly; teach and admonish one another
in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts
sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to God.
Colossians 3:15-16*

There are more than 100 places in Scripture where “thanks” is referenced in one form or another. The passage above is one place that is surrounded by many descriptions of why and how this might be expressed. Saying a sincere “Thank You” is a friendly and non-threatening way to affirm and strengthen a relationship. What would be a fresh approach to saying “Thank You” in your congregation? Perhaps it is a personal call from a pastor or council member, or recognition in an appropriate setting. Look for ways to say thank you to as many individuals as possible. This effort can begin tomorrow, and it can begin with you.

Step 2: Inform

*...I have now come out to give you wisdom and
understanding. At the beginning of your
supplications a word went out, and I have come
to declare it, for you are greatly beloved. So
consider the word and understand the vision.
Daniel 9:22-23*

These words were spoken to Daniel by Gabriel at the time of evening sacrifice, and informed Daniel of God's will for him. Gabriel goes on to tell of the 70 weeks "to finish the transgression." Have you ever had an experience when you have been informed by God? Perhaps it was not a visit by Gabriel, but through apophatic prayer – a time when one listens for God's guidance rather than asking for God's blessings.

There are many times when leaders are in a position to inform God's people. An example is informing people about the Rediscover Macedonia theme and the process you will use in the weeks ahead. This will include important activities and dates. How this information will be communicated can take many forms – announcements, newsletter articles, emails, postings and bulletin boards.

It is also important to inform people about the status and direction of ministry in the congregation and beyond. This could include:

- ▶ Congregational line item budget
- ▶ Missional spending plan
- ▶ Synodical spending plan
- ▶ Churchwide spending plan

This information may be shared in a forum, on a website, through a proposal or in a video. Look at "Building a Case" as one approach to informing people about ministry in your congregation. Look at your synod website for more information about ministries you make possible. The ELCA offers a variety of resources at www.ELCA.org.

Step 3: Teach

*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.
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,
and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded
you. And remember, I am with you always to the end of
the age.*

Matthew 28:18-20

These words are often referred to as The Great Commission. Jesus tells his followers to make disciples and teach what he has commanded. In Matthew's Gospel, this may have included the parable of the talents, the story of the widow's mite or not to lay up for yourselves treasures on earth. In Luke's Gospel, this may have included the following:

*... whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and
whoever has food must do likewise.* *Luke 3:11*

*... none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your
possessions.* *Luke 14:33*

*Everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and
From the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be
demanded.* *Luke 12:48b*

When Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians about the Macedonians, he highlighted several principles:

Gratitude

We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches ... 2 Corinthians 8:1

Share

... begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints ... 2 Corinthians 8:4

Give Freely

For as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means ... 2 Corinthians 8:3

Sacrifice

... according to their means, and even beyond their means, ... 2 Corinthians 8:3

Commitment

... and this, not merely as we expected, they gave themselves first to the Lord, and by the will of God, to us ... 2 Corinthians 8:5

Generosity

... for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. 2 Corinthians 8:2

Abundant Joy

... their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity ... 2 Corinthians 8:2

These principles are highlighted in Rediscover Macedonia. As your faith community continues on your stewardship journey, consider where and how these principles are taught to people of all ages in your setting. How are these principles lifted up in prayer, worship, service, education and invitation? How are people encouraged to live out these principles? One way is to invite conversation around these principles. The questions on the back side of the Rediscover Macedonia bookmarks are a tool for such conversations. By engaging in such conversations, individuals of all ages discern how these principles apply in their life today and shape their life for tomorrow.

Step 4: Inspire

*But truly it is the spirit in a mortal, the breath of the Almighty,
that makes for understanding.* Job 32:8

What is it that inspires you? Is it the breath of the Almighty? Perhaps it is words, music, a movie, a person or an experience that has touched your heart. Many cultures recognize that stories can touch the heart of their listeners for centuries. Different stories may touch your heart in different ways. What was the last story you heard that touched your heart? What did that story inspire you to do?

God is at work in many places. And, where God is at work, lives are being inspired and transformed. These experiences create stories. What stories can you share about how your congregation has made a difference in the lives of others? Your synod may offer such stories. These may be found on the synod website or in publications. The ELCA offers such stories at www.LivingLutheran.com and www.ELCA.org/stories.

These stories can be shared in a variety of ways – temple talks, videos, newsletters, bulletin boards, Facebook, emails and more. Some people may know this as mission interpretation. How can sharing such stories connect the network of followers in your faith community with how God is making a difference in the lives of others through your giving?

Step 5: Tie Together

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.
John 15:1-4

The use of branches in this text seems an appropriate way to illustrate how we are connected to Jesus Christ. We are tied together in the body of Christ. Within the church there are three expressions – congregations, synods and churchwide ministries. These expressions connect each one with other parts of the body of Christ beyond ourselves and facilitate collaborative ministries.

What are the ways your congregation is connected to the body of Christ beyond itself? How do these connections make God's work possible together that could not be done alone? Your responses to these questions demonstrate that you as an individual and a congregation are not alone. Christ is always with us. And, by lifting up what we do together, we see the strength of the body of Christ. .

Step 6: Invite

*... "Inquire of God that we may know whether the mission we are undertaking will succeed." The priest replied, "Go in peace. The mission you are on is under the eye of the Lord."
Judges 18:5-6*

Do you ever wonder whether what you are undertaking will succeed? This question was asked in Micah's house. It was in response to an invitation to go into a strange land where a small group of people did not know many others. Perhaps you have been in similar situations. The priest assured the travelers their mission was under the "eye of the Lord."

One of the most challenging responsibilities of most Christians is to ask another person to make a commitment. Whether it is a commitment to attend an event, serve on a task group or make a financial response for God's work, many people are uncomfortable making an ask. Why? Perhaps because some people are afraid of rejection. Perhaps some are concerned whether others will value the event, cause or ministry the same way they do. Perhaps because a few have lost sight of the reasons why a specific ministry was undertaken in the first place. When given the opportunity to ask others to make a commitment, many people have a tendency to look at why not, rather than what God can make possible.

Remember Paul's advice to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 7:16), "I rejoice, because I have complete confidence in you." There are people in your congregation and across the church who have complete confidence in you. By recalling the positive experiences you had when being asked or asking, you can visualize the positive outcomes of this opportunity.

When you prepare to make a "relational ask", consider the following points:

- **The gift of appreciation.** Based on what you know, or others have told you, what do you or the congregation appreciate about the person you are about to ask? This may be their actions, passions, skills, talents or resources. It always seems appropriate to start by saying thank you for something that has already been shared.
- **The gift of L.O.A.V.E.S.** This is a reminder to listen, observe, assess, value, encourage and support. You are thankful for the time and attention of those you visit. Let them know you value this time together.
- **The right reasons.** When possible be certain the person being asked is informed in advance about the purpose of the conversation. Hopefully, information in preparation for the relational ask will have been shared at least three times prior to the visit. During your time together, you may explain the process leading up to the conversation, build the case for the ask and share the reasons for your personal support. Highlighting the principles that motivate you, a story that inspires you and how you see this effort connected to a larger purpose or goal may be helpful in guiding others to a response.
- **The right person is doing the ask.** This usually means someone the person knows and already has an existing relationship with.
- **The right place to make the ask.** Where is the ask most likely to be made? Find a place that is comfortable for both parties to have an open conversation. This may be at the church in the fellowship hall or library, in a coffee shop or in a home.

■ **The right invitation.** Prior to the ask, know what you would like the person to do. What action is requested? Two important considerations are the expectations and duration of the commitment.

■ **The right time for the ask.** Having arranged a time that is convenient for both parties, it is important to listen for right time to ask. This may come when there are no additional questions, or when someone indicates a willingness to make a commitment. Patience and a prayer are always appropriate.

Based on what you know going into the conversation, write down the key points you want to make. As you prepare for the relational ask, take time for personal prayer. Invite the Holy Spirit to guide you in the conversation. Afterward, do a personal debriefing. How was the experience for you? What felt most comfortable? What was least comfortable? What would you do differently when making another relational ask?

These six steps can help you and your congregation embrace an effective relational ask!

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