



MARCH 2026 Mission Support Memo

STORYTELLING ENGAGEMENT

Post-its Create Shared Encounters

A story from our ELCA Innovation team

**As you read this story, what inspires you?
How do you collaboratively collect ministry ideas?**

When you think of facilitation best practices, conversations about setting agendas, engaging content experts, and managing time and people come to mind. Instead, the Facilitation Fundamentals training developed by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) [Innovation team](#) values collaboration, creativity, accessibility and, yes, innovation. They began creating this training by exploring the opportunities that might create a shared method of working across our complex ELCA processes and systems. The Innovation team took rigorous professional training through [AJ&Smart](#), completing the Workshopper Master Certification and Facilitation Fundamentals, learning participatory facilitation methods originally popularized through Google Ventures' Design Sprint methodology. Rather than reinventing the wheel, the team chose to use proven facilitation methods that enable groups to collaborate quickly and make better decisions together, adapting them for the ELCA's unique culture and ministry context.



Imagine participating in a two-day training experience on facilitation methodology, theory and tools, hoping the days go quickly and you can finally get out of the four-walls. The room is full of ELCA staff from across the country, across churchwide units, in all levels of positions. A few people know each other, but everyone will leave knowing each other. Then everyone gets a pile of Post-it notes of all colors and shapes. The activity starts with "working alone together": a prompt gets each person imagining and putting one idea down per note, anonymously, so everyone ends up with a pile of Post-it notes.

This process gathers a lot of input in a short time and helps mitigate hierarchy and bias, as every idea is accepted, shared and considered. No one talks over each other, no loud voice takes over — everyone's collective thoughts and lived experiences are valued. As ideas are reviewed and themes emerge, ideas are no longer one person's but of the whole. These simple tools help groups surface insights quickly, ensure everyone is heard, and allow people across roles and hierarchy to contribute equally.

Mission Support dollars have made it possible for the Innovation team to train 125 churchwide organization staff, including directors for evangelical mission, in Facilitation Fundamentals. This creates a shared set of collaboration tools that staff can bring into their work with congregations, synods and ministry partners. Many participants leave the training excited, praising the process and ready to try it. One participant said, "Thanks for offering this opportunity. I think it will be super useful for my team to help steer conversations in a productive direction." Another said, "[The process] gave me practical tools to use in-person and online to help me be a better co-worker with the ministries I associate with. Most importantly, these facilitation tools are already being applied in conversations about congregational vitality, ministry innovation and collaborative problem-solving. Synod staff used it to unpack insights for working more effectively with rostered ministers. Directors for evangelical mission (20 trained so far) see how it affirms the work they do in offering structure to seeking vital, new and creative ministry ideas.

The Innovation team has experienced immense joy seeing how excited folks are to have a shared way of working together, across units, bouncing ideas off each other, and mutually being creative and adaptive using the tool. Sarah Weaver, a facilitator, shares, "When I first started working in the Innovation unit, we identified facilitation as a key learning opportunity for the organization. ... Facilitation is a huge part of my work, and I use the tools from the course almost every day and in every project I work in. Everybody has a problem to solve, and the course gives really practical tools to find solutions quickly." Facilitation Fundamentals has become one of the practical tools that helps us become a more connected church. One participant made it clear how they value this work, saying, "This is a fabulous program and hope that more people continue to collaborate with the Innovation team."

ENGAGE WITH US

ELCA Mission Support Thank You Certificate

Access the [2025 Mission Support Thank You Certificate](#) at this link. This annual thank you, given from synods to congregations, is an important part of celebrating the Mission Support given for ministry beyond each congregation's own work. Certificates, available in Spanish, Korean and Chinese, can be accessed [here](#).

GRATEFUL

We are truly grateful for the generosity of this church. In 2025, our congregations and worshiping communities made it possible for synods to share around \$34,514,000 in Mission Support with the churchwide organization. We appreciate each person's generosity and give thanks for the synod staff and volunteers who focus on generosity and stewardship, our bookkeepers and treasurers, and our synod bishops and vice presidents, who help tell the story of the impact Mission Support has on synod and churchwide ministries. We are connected in this generosity.

In gratitude,
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