

# The Great Permission

## Workshop Design

### To start with . . . .

These pages outline a simple 90-minute workshop you can use in a congregation to take advantage of the book, *The Great Permission* and the asset-based approach it advocates. You can lead this workshop with a minimum of preparation, and use it with a group of any size and in virtually any setting.

Asset-based approaches to congregational life can be key ingredients in the continuing reformation of the church. This workshop assists you to realize the delightful possibility that your congregation can be a vital, sustainable place of ministry where “ordinary members” are equipped for daily life stewardship and participation in the life of your congregation. This workshop comes to you with our best wishes. Enjoy this time of learning and sharing.

### Audience

This workshop is intended for a general audience of congregational leaders. With adaptation, it may also be helpful for specialized groups such as pastors’ conferences, participants in first-call theological education and participants in stewardship training events.

### Outcomes

Here’s what you can expect to happen as participants engage in this workshop. They will:

1. Get more excited about the *possibilities* already existing in their congregation.
2. See assets and capabilities where perhaps only problems and needs were seen before.
3. Feel gratitude for God’s blessings and for each other’s gifts.
4. Start an asset-based approach in the matter of forming or revitalizing a stewardship team.

## You will need

- Copies of the book, *\*The Great Permission*, one per participant
- Newsprint and markers
- Bibles (preferably the Contemporary English Version [CEV]), one per participant
- Optional note cards or scratch paper, several per participant

\*Order books from the ELCA Division for Congregational Ministries, 8765 West Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631. Price: 1-4 copies (\$4.50 each); 5-15 copies (\$4.00 each); 16 or more copies (\$3.50 each). Postage and handling included. Include check with order, made payable to EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA. For questions: 800.638.3522, ext. 2555; [heather\\_davis@elca.org](mailto:heather_davis@elca.org)

## Getting ready

To prepare for leading this workshop, you should:

1. Read this whole design, noting places where you will need extra time and thought for preparation.
2. Read the book, *The Great Permission*, taking notes in the margins or on a separate piece of paper.
3. Select between 10 and 15 readings from *The Great Permission* that you believe will be especially helpful to this group of participants. On newsprint, note the name, number and page number of these readings.
4. If you are not familiar with the congregation, arrive at the site early enough to walk the property and facilities so that you are able to suggest examples of artifacts to be found for the optional activity, "Artifact hunt." (If possible, you might ask the leaders of the congregation to make available in obvious places such artifacts as newsletters, copies of pastors' sermons, annual reports, worship bulletins, etc.)

## Schedule

Introduction	5 minutes
Bible conversation	25 minutes
Reading and sharing	35 minutes
<i>(Alternative Activity: Artifact hunt</i>	<i>35 minutes)</i>
Naming names and assets	20 minutes
Closing prayer	5 minutes

**Total: 90 minutes**

## WORKSHOP DESIGN

### **Introduction (5 minutes)**

After welcoming participants, tell them that in the next 90 minutes they will work on the task of forming a (new) stewardship team in their congregation. The underlying presumption: This congregation wants to take a new tack on stewardship ministry – however that is defined in this place – and has decided to put a team into place. (In congregations with an already-existing team, the emphasis will be on expanding or enriching the team that is already in place.)

In what will be a “real-pretend” experience, participants will approach all the activities as themselves – in their present roles and with their own personalities – engaging in a task that may or may not be real for this time and place.

### **Bible conversation (25 minutes)**

Distribute Bibles to all participants, directing them to the Mark 6 version of the story of the Feeding of the Five Thousand (Mark 6:30 - 44). Ask participants to refrain from following along as they listen to you read the story aloud (from the Contemporary English Version [CEV] for its particular emphases). Their job is to “hear themselves into the story.”

When you have completed your reading, ask participants to read the story again, this time silently from their own Bibles. Their task: To decide their answers to these questions:

- If you had been present in the story, who or what would you have been? (On the basis of similarities in events, life circumstance, personality or spiritual qualities, who are you in the story?)
- What would compel you to be, think or act in this way?

After five minutes or less, direct participants to find one other person, preferably someone they don't know that well, and to share their answers to the two questions. They will have about ten minutes for this task.

The object of the conversations: To talk with one other person about your personal faith walk. In some conversations, the threads will weave a cord of mutual understanding; in others, the bits and pieces of back-and-forth will yield understanding about rich gifts and multiple assets; in still others, there will be the shadows of doubt or confessions of shortcomings. In all conversations, the witness of God's hand in our lives will be revealed.

If time remains in this segment of the workshop, collect participants back together, and tally the number of participants who saw themselves in each of the roles in the story. (For example, "How many of you saw yourself as the disciples? Why?" "How many of you saw yourself as the loaves and fishes?" Why not?")

### **Reading and sharing (35 minutes)**

During the next thirty five minutes, participants will read selected portions of "The Great Permission," with the broad question in mind, "How do we find leaders for stewardship ministry in this place?"

Divide the large group into smaller groups of 3 - 5 participants and ask them to reassemble chairs or move, in order to have a good place for reading and sharing. Refer participants to the list of readings you have posted on newsprint. (Suggested readings are listed on the next page.)

---

## GREAT PERMISSION READINGS

Introduction 1	"Grace is where to start"	Page 10
Introduction 2	"'Acid' in our church?"	Page 12
Background 7	"Other ways to say 'asset'"	Page 34
Background 9	"A way of thinking"	Page 38
Background 10	"A way of planning"	Page 40
Background 11	"Approach to resources"	Page 44
Background 13	"Asset-based emotions"	Page 50
Background 16	"The futility of worry"	Page 58
Background 17	"Power in weakness"	Page 60
How to 1	"Spotting the lively ones"	Page 68
How to 2	"Finding enterprising leaders"	Page 70
How to 11	"Naming assets"	Page 90
How to 12	"Building capabilities"	Page 92
How to 19	"Curing complainers"	Page 108
How to 21	"Giving thanks 1"	Page 112
How to 22	"Giving thanks 2"	Page 114
How to 23	"Fostering generosity"	Page 116
How to 26	"Funding mission 1"	Page 126
How to 27	"Funding mission 2"	Page 128

---

Ask each group to divide the readings among themselves, so that each group member is responsible for several readings. Their next tasks:

1. Read the pages assigned to you, taking notes about what you read.
2. Consider how you might answer this question: "What kind of people (in our congregation) might act or think this way already?" (Although the question asks about "kinds of people," participants can also make the leap to think about specific names.)
3. Be ready to talk with the members of your group about your answers, and to come to some agreement about the qualities necessary to be this kind of stewardship leader.

For participants' reference, write the question, "What kind of people might act or think this way already?" on newsprint or chalkboard. At about the ten minute mark, suggest to participants that they complete their reading and move to the sharing of ideas. After another fifteen minutes, bring the discussion to a close.

Use the remaining ten minutes to gather the insights of the group together in a visible way. On newsprint or chalkboard, record quickly what the individual groups have come to see as personal traits, skills or knowledge that characterize the kind of people who would understand, value or practice some of the elements of an asset-based approach to congregational life.

You can keep track of the wisdom of the groups in a list, or a map of ideas. Think of categories – personality, skills, experience – or write specific names as they are shared (especially in a small, intimate leadership group). Be sure to indicate in some way – check marks, "ditto" or attached thought balloons – where a particular emphasis or name is repeated. This affords the group a measure of the strength of a particular trait or life skill among members of the congregation(s) represented here.

Save just a few minute for participants to offer general observations about patterns, trend, connections that they see in this "map".

***Alternative Activity: Artifact hunt (35 minutes)***

As an alternate activity for any of those described here, you might want to try an "artifact hunt." In this activity, teams of two or three participants explore the facilities of the church (building) where the workshop is being held. They look for and bring back artifacts -- physical, tangible evidence of a behavior or value – that demonstrate the presence of asset-thinking people in this place. (An alternate choice: Looking for artifacts that might attract asset-thinking leaders to become involved with this congregation's ministries.)

Give the teams these basic instructions:

1. Your task is to find and bring back to the whole group artifacts in this place that demonstrate how asset-based people are already at work here.
2. Explore the facilities to find these artifacts, noting their exact location so that you can return them to their rightful place when the workshop is completed. If artifacts cannot be removed, agree on how you will describe them to others on your return to the group.

Ask participants to review what they have done together over the course of this workshop and to reflect to each other what an "asset-based artifact" might look like. Provide some hints like these if the group seems puzzled:

1. Where would you see the recorded words of people who were practicing asset-based approaches? (Newsletters, bulletin boards)
2. What public records or public artifacts of the congregation might show the congregation's view of itself? (Evangelism or welcoming brochures)
3. What kinds of reading materials does the congregation suggest?
4. Where would you find notices about the outside-of-church accomplishments of congregation members?
5. What would minutes of meetings, annual reports, or bulletin board notices say about the congregation's basic approach to life?

Provide about ten minutes for teams to search the facilities for the artifacts. When they return, teams can use about fifteen minutes to share what they have found. The remaining ten minutes might function as a good group reflection time, when participants talk about matters such as:

- What seems to be the most asset-revealing artifact? How can you tell?
- Can you sense where the locus, the starting point or the foundation for asset-based thinking might be in this congregation?
- What surprised you?

**Naming names and assets (20 minutes)**

This final activity ties together what has occurred over the course of this workshop. Here participants talk together as a whole group about the individuals that they believe exemplify asset-based leadership. You can conduct this activity in several ways:

1. Distribute note cards or scratch paper, directing participants to write the names of asset-thinking leaders, one per card or piece of paper, and to include their reasons for naming this person in such a way. At the end of five minutes, collect the cards or slips of paper and talk about the experience without naming names publicly. (The names can be given to other leaders responsible for setting a [new] stewardship team in place.)
2. After some statements about what the group has encountered today, participants suggest names of individuals in the congregation they believe could be new stewardship leaders, and the reasons for their choices. You write the names and comments on the chalkboard or newsprint. Talk about what you see as patterns, or possible next steps.
3. Taking your cues from participants' ideas, write on the chalkboard or several sheets of newsprint some adjectives or phrases that describe an asset-based leader. (These can come from participants' reading of sections of *The Great Permission* or from their experiences here today.) Leave space around the words or phrases for participants to write immediately the names of individuals who possess these traits, skills, knowledge or experience.
4. Quickly decide together on some choice-filters that will determine which kinds of individuals you will name as likely asset-based leaders. For example, "Let's concentrate only



on the young adults in the congregation,” or “Let’s try to identify ‘inactive members’ who have an asset-based approach to their lives” or “Let’s confine our naming of names to members or long-term guests who are not presently part of the congregation’s inner circle of workers or volunteers.”

In any of these ways of naming possible asset-based leaders, try to refrain from thinking and acting like a dysfunctional nominating committee, or heading over the line into polite gossip or conjecture about whether or not a person might serve if asked. These are all steps farther down the road.

Instead, your intent in this activity is to *name new leaders in a new way*, and in so doing to see them as valuable, capable and effective by virtue of their particular approach to assets instead of deficiencies or needs.

### **Closing prayer**

**(5 minutes)**

End the workshop with prayers of thanks specific to the people who have attended, and those you have named as asset-based leaders for stewardship ministries. Remember to encourage the participants to do most of the praying!

---

## **VARIATIONS AND EXTRA ACTIVITIES**

You may want to expand this workshop into a longer format, or use individual activities here over a longer period of time – such as in an adult forum. Consider these variations and other activities for reaching the same outcomes:

1. Use the congregational pictorial directory as a source for ideas of the full scope of congregation members, especially children. (15 minutes)
2. Take next steps that follow the activities of this workshop, such as deciding how you will ask newly identified leaders to participate in some part of stewardship ministry. (30 minutes)

3. Lengthen any of the activities over a longer period of time, extending discussion and sharing to a deeper level and allowing for more give-and-take.
4. Spend more time on the artifact hunt, especially in talking about what the artifacts might show about asset-based leadership in the congregation. Better questions might include "How do you know?" "What's behind all this?" or "How does this artifact match your experience?" (30 minutes more)
5. In the Bible conversation time, add a little more depth by "interviewing" several participants *as though they are the person (thing) in the story*. Ask them questions such as, "When did you start to feel this way about life?" "How does this way of thinking/being/acting help you or others?" or "Where do you differ from the other people (things) in the story?" (15 minutes)
6. To add a little drama to the Bible conversations, you might ask groups of participants who have associated themselves with a particular character or object to defend their way of thinking, being or acting in the light of other's views. (15 minutes)
7. Take any of the readings at a little deeper level, answering explicit or implicit questions in the reading, imagining some questions you might have or thinking how you might find examples for the content of these readings among your congregation's members or activities. (15 minutes)
8. Pick only a small set of readings, and have every participant read the same set. Continue the discussion as per this design, now with all participants having the same input from the book.
9. Use any of the readings as a tool by which to evaluate the content or direction of an artifact such as your congregation's newsletter or a recent mailing to members. As a prompt, complete this thought: "If the content of this

reading is true for us, then we might expect to find \_\_\_\_\_ in our newsletter (mailing).” (30 minutes)

10. Photocopy several readings onto standard-sized copy paper, leaving wide margins for comments. Ask participants to read the photocopied reading(s) in the context of finding new stewardship leaders, and to write their questions and comments in the margins. Talk together about what you have learned or what you want to ask each other. (20 minutes)
  11. Write or draw metaphors for asset-based thinking in stewardship ministry. Start participants’ thoughts with some examples or prompts such as: “An asset-thinking stewardship leader is like a dollar bill that thought it was the entire bank.” Or “You can recognize an asset-based leader because he or she is like a \_\_\_\_\_.” Post participants’ work in a place visible by all congregation members. (25 minutes)
  12. Write together some prayers that could be offered over several weeks, by prayer groups or as part of the general prayers in worship.
-