



User Interview Guide



Evangelical
Lutheran Church
in America

Introduction

The Congregations Lead Initiative (CLI) is a one-year program that trains leaders to use the skills, tools and mindset of design thinking, also known as human-centered design. Design thinking is a method for creative problem-solving that works on an understanding that the best problem-solving involves the perspectives of those who will use the design. Human-centered design is a rapidly growing field of expertise used to help companies, organizations and communities find innovative solutions to meet the needs of those they want to serve. Human-centered design is responsible for many of the apps, technology, software and new services that you use every single day, so the Congregations Lead Initiative asks: “What if we tried out these same skills in the church?” The objective of this project for your congregation is simple: to learn yet another tool that we can add to our tool kit as we go about connecting more people to the gospel and to our faith community. Design thinking generally utilizes five phases: empathy, definition, ideation, prototype and test. The design interviews on which you are about to embark are the primary work of the first phase, empathy. In this phase, we will use interviews to empathize with our target audience and to understand what their daily lives look like, what they interact with, what brings them joy and what keeps them up at night.

What Makes a Design Interview Unique?

Interviews conducted for human-centered design are not the same as interviews conducted by journalists, social science researchers or even hiring managers. Design interviews are not for gathering “facts,” nor are they evaluative in nature. Design interviews are mostly concerned with discovering peoples’ behaviors, habits, emotions and values. Unlike other forms of interviewing, there is no need in design for copious notes or transcripts of the interview. A simple report from the interviewer about what they heard, felt and noticed in the conversation is sufficient. The primary objective is very simple: to get to know the interviewee well enough that, as we are selecting a target need and designing a prototype, we can ask and answer the question “Would this prototype excite and meet the needs of the person I interviewed?”



Design Interviews as Spiritual Practice

Our biblical witness is full of stories about people in conversation with one another, connecting on deep spiritual and emotional levels. These conversations are often turning points, moments of divine revelation. In some ways, what we are doing in a design interview is similar. We are attempting to connect with another beloved child of God and to peek into their lives and stories. Do not be surprised if God reveals Godself to you in these conversations. Before you begin interviewing, you may want to take some time reading one (or more) of the stories below from the Gospels about powerful conversations. Notice how the conversations allow empathy to flourish. What does it mean that God uses empathetic conversation partners to advance God’s mission in these stories? Whose heart is moved and changed in each story by connecting to the emotion and needs of their conversation partner?

Jesus With the Family and Friends of Lazarus — John 11:17-44

The Woman at the Well — John 4:1-42

The Road to Emmaus — Luke 24:13-35

The Father and the Elder Son — Luke 15:25-37

The Syrophenician Woman — Mark 7:24-30

Who are we interviewing?

Each design project has a target audience. The target audience describes people who share a common experience, situation, need or context that the design team would like to learn more about and for whom the team will design a solution to meet the target audience's needs.



Case Study: St. Matthew's Lutheran Church in Fort Worth, Texas

For their experiment, the CLI team at St. Matthew's wanted to learn more about the "commuter" members of their congregation, whom they dubbed "On the Road Again-ers." This describes a group of people who regularly (about once a week or once every two weeks) travel significant distances (20-plus miles) to participate in a community or activity. Here are some examples of personas they developed to help identify potential interviewees:

- A college student in Denton who drives each Friday night to Fort Worth to meet up with friends who form a team to compete in a trivia night at a local pub.
- A mother who lives in Arlington and has a 12-year-old in baseball and a 14-year-old in tennis. Almost every weekend she drives to a tournament in another town within the Dallas–Fort Worth metroplex, racking up at least 100 miles round-trip but also racking up fun memories with her kids.
- A churchgoer who, every Sunday, drives 30 miles each way, passing by countless churches that are much closer to him, just so he can worship and be part of the life of the church he calls home.
- A retiree who loves her rural home, where she can garden, but also likes to drive into town (about 20 miles one way) every Thursday morning so she can take part in the county's Master Gardener Association.

When recruiting members of their congregation to assist with conducting interviews, the St. Matthew's CLI team included the following questions:

Can you already think of some people you know who fit this description? What do they love about these communities/activities that make them travel great distances, week-in, week-out? What do they think about on their drives? What do they wish were different? Where does their connection to these communities feel strained or incomplete? What are they giving up by participating in these activities? We'll be finding all that out and more as we strike up conversations with On the Road Again-ers and learn how they think, what they value, what brings them joy, what frustrates them, what gives them hope.

Steps for Interviewing

1. **Recruit** — Think of someone you know who relates to your experiment topic and invite them to meet with you (in person is ideal, but via phone or video chat is also acceptable).
 - Schedule your interview. See the Recruiting Guide for more detailed instructions.
 - Set a deadline by which all interviews should be completed.
 - Let your team's Communicator know when you have an interview scheduled so you can keep track of how many interviews you will have underway.
 - You may invite members of your congregation who are not on the CLI team to assist with conducting interviews.
2. **Review** — Familiarize yourself with the Interview Guide, the script and the questions you'll be asked in the report at the end.
3. **Conduct** — Using the Interview Script, conduct the interview.
 - Reminder: Your congregation must conduct at least eight user interviews; a minimum of four should be from people who are not members of your congregation.
4. **Report** — Immediately after the interview (or as soon afterward as possible), use the Interview Report document to write up your insights from the conversation. Share these interview reports with your team electronically or via hard copy.

Recruiting Guide

Each interviewer will be responsible for identifying and recruiting their interviewee. You can conduct as many interviews as you like or have time for during the empathy phase. Set a deadline for your team:

All interviews must be completed by_____.

Reminder: Your congregation must conduct at least eight user interviews; a minimum of four should be from people who are not members of your congregation. Take time to identify three or four criteria for people who would be good interview candidates. Once you have thought of someone you know who meets these criteria, call or message them to ask whether they would be interested in participating in an interview for the Congregations Lead Initiative.



Case Study: St. Matthew's Lutheran Church in Fort Worth, Texas

The St. Matthew's team developed the following criteria for their "On the Road Again-ers:"

- ✓ Regularly travels a significant distance to attend an event or be a part of a community/group/association.
- ✓ A "significant distance" is approximately 20-plus miles one way.
- ✓ The person makes this trip frequently, once a week or every two weeks.
- ✓ This activity/community is something that they voluntarily participate in (i.e. not a commute to work, a medical appointment, etc.).



Sample Interview Recruiting Script

Here is a sample script you can adapt and use when asking someone to participate in a user interview:

Hi [NAME],

I am part of a team at my church, [CONGREGATION NAME], that is learning how to do human-centered design and figuring out ways we can use that to better serve our community. For this learning experience, we want to hear more about the experiences and lives of people who [CRITERIA]. I am wondering if you'd be willing to participate in our project and allow me to talk with you about your experience.

The interview is very informal and should take only 30 to 45 minutes. We won't record the interview, and it will be anonymous. The only things I'll report back for our learning purposes are some of the insights, joys, and concerns I hear from you about your experience. We can meet in person sometime or, if you prefer, talk over the phone or by video chat.

Your perspective would be a great gift to me and our congregation's community as we learn new ways of listening deeply to the unique needs of those around us. If you are willing and able, let me know, and we can work out a time to meet.

Thank you in advance and let me know if you have any questions.

[YOUR NAME]

Make sure you and your interviewee have exchanged phone numbers in case something comes up and you need to reach one another. If you are not close friends with your interviewee and are planning to meet in person, consider finding a neutral yet public place to meet (e.g. a coffee shop).

Tips and Reminders Before Getting Started

- ❑ Print a copy of this guide to have with you in the interview and to reference the prompts.
- ❑ Send a reminder email or text message to your interviewee at least a day in advance.
- ❑ High-level notes are great. Don't worry about taking items down word for word. You can also listen only during the conversation and record your notes immediately after the conclusion of the interview.
- ❑ Don't neglect the introductory prompt of this guide. It is important that the interviewee be clear on the purpose and nature of the interview before you begin.
- ❑ It's OK to spend a few moments making "small talk" at the start of the interview, but then make sure you can quickly transition into the interview questions.
- ❑ Focus your attention and questions on behaviors, habits and emotions rather than try to gather lots of information or piece together all the facts/details of what they are telling you.
- ❑ Don't be overly focused on asking the questions precisely as they are in this guide. Allow the interview to feel more like a conversation.
- ❑ Though it is helpful to think of this as a conversation, remember that your primary job is to listen. Aim for the 80/20 rule: your interviewee should be talking 80% of the time, while you speak only 20% of the time or less.
- ❑ It's OK to ask follow-up questions or deviate from the script a bit if you sense there is an interesting thread worth following, but make sure that, at the end of the interview, you have satisfactorily covered most of the questions in the script.
- ❑ Depending on how well you know your interviewee, some of the questions or scripts may be awkward or irrelevant, so use your best judgement to adapt them as needed.
- ❑ What your interviewee says isn't the only thing worth noting! Pay attention to facial expressions, mannerisms and even fashion choices. These nonverbal data points may all have something to tell you.
- ❑ Keep track of time! These interviews should not be long — 30 to 45 minutes. If you're running short on time, it's OK to respectfully tell your interviewee, "I am so enjoying this conversation, and I am also aware of the time ... would you mind if we moved on to a few more questions that I would love to hear your responses to before we run out of time?"
- ❑ Make sure you have some time immediately (or shortly) following the interview to fill out your interview report. If you wait too long, you will forget important insights!
- ❑ If you're feeling nervous, consider teaming up with someone else. You can conduct an interview as a pair.

Additional Resources

If you are interested in more tips, tricks and resources on conducting user interviews, use the link or QR code below to access the Congregations Lead Initiative User Interview Toolkit: bit.ly/userinterviewtoolkit





A Prayer Before an Interview

Be prepared to be surprised by glimpses of the Spirit in your conversation! Before meeting with your interviewee, you may enjoy taking a moment of prayer for yourself, asking God to guide you and to tune your eyes, ears and heart to the other person's story and how God is present:

O Spirit of Creativity, Surprise and Joy,

As I embark on this holy conversation, I come before you seeking guidance, wisdom and understanding. Give me clarity of thought, empathy in my heart and openness of mind. Grant me the grace to listen deeply, to hear not only the words spoken but also the unspoken needs and desires of my conversation partner. Help me to approach this interaction with humility and respect, recognizing the inherent dignity and worth of every individual. Guide my questions to uncover insights that will lead to solutions that are truly meaningful and impactful. May this conversation help our congregation's community to live into its call to bring compassion, understanding, justice, care and connection to those in our midst. Give me the courage to step outside my own perspective, to embrace diversity and to challenge assumptions with curiosity and empathy. May our efforts be guided by a spirit of collaboration, cooperation, co-creation and radical gospel freedom as we work to design solutions that honor the humanity of those we seek to serve. Bless this interview with your presence, O Spirit of Creativity, and may it be a source of inspiration, innovation and transformation for all involved. Amen.



Case Study: St. Matthew's Sample Interview Script

Note: You will need to adapt these questions to your team's focus area.

St. Matthew's Focus Area: "We want to learn more about the experiences and lives of people who frequently travel large distances to get to an event or participate in a community/organization that is important to them."

Thank you again for your willingness to meet with me. As I mentioned, this interview is part of a learning project we are doing at St. Matthew's Lutheran Church. We are learning the techniques and process of human-centered design and exploring how we can use it to better serve our community. For this project, we are specifically interested in learning about the lives, experiences, needs and values of folks who frequently drive a distance to participate in activities, groups or communities that are meaningful to them. So I'll be asking you some questions about your connection/involvement with [GROUP/ACTIVITY].

I won't be recording this interview. Instead those of us conducting interviews will write up important insights from our conversations, and you will remain anonymous in the report. Though I have some questions prepared, my hope is that we can have a more relaxed conversation, so I may ask some follow-up questions as we get talking. If there is ever a question you aren't comfortable answering, that is OK; just let me know, and we can skip it. I also want to be respectful of your time, so I'll periodically check the time to make sure we don't get so lost in good conversation that we take up the whole day!

Do you have any questions for me before we get started?

PART 1 Small Talk — Getting to Know the Interviewee

1. First, tell me a bit about yourself: What do/did you do for work?
2. What would you say is your expertise or special skill(s) in life?
3. What do you typically do for fun?
4. Where do you live now, and where do you have to travel to participate in [ACTIVITY/GROUP]?

PART 2 The Travel Experience

1. When did you begin participating in [ACTIVITY/GROUP]?
2. How frequently do you make that trip?
3. Tell me a bit more about what it's like to travel to [ACTIVITY/GROUP]. Describe what a typical day looks like for you when you make that trip.

PART 3 Motivation and Values

1. What about this activity/group makes you want to travel the distance to participate in it?
2. Tell me about one of your most memorable experiences with [ACTIVITY/GROUP].
3. How much of a priority would you say [ACTIVITY/GROUP] is for you? How would it compare to other aspects of your life?

PART 4 Pain Points and Challenges

1. Can you tell me about a time when you felt particularly stressed or frustrated while participating in [ACTIVITY/GROUP]?
2. Tell me about a time when you decided not to travel to participate in [ACTIVITY/GROUP]?
3. When you can't participate in [ACTIVITY/GROUP] in person, are there other ways you stay connected or participate? If so, tell me more about what that looks like for you and how satisfied you are with those alternative forms of participation/connection.

PART 5 Wrap-up

1. What do you wish could be different about your relationship to or participation in [ACTIVITY/GROUP]?
2. If you could use one word to describe what [ACTIVITY/GROUP] means to you, what word would you use?
3. Is there anything else about your experience with [ACTIVITY/GROUP] that you would like to share before we conclude?

Closing Prompt

Thank you again for taking time to talk with me today. This conversation has been very insightful, and your experiences will be a huge help to our St. Matthew's team as we come up with ways we can better support and serve people no matter their geographic distance. If you'd like, I'd be happy to touch base with you as our project progresses and to let you know what we are up to. Do you have any final questions for me?

Basic Information

Date of Interview: _____ Your Name: _____

Interviewee's Initials: _____

Debriefing Questions

Briefly describe your interviewee (e.g. age, gender, employment, family, location, ethnicity):

Describe how your interviewee relates to your focus area (feel free to tailor this question to your specific focus area):

What motivates your interviewee? What did you notice that they valued, that made them “light up,” that drives them?

What motivates your interviewee? What did you notice that they valued, that made them “light up,” that drives them?

What frustrates your interviewee? What barriers did your interviewee talk about, or what did you notice that they talked about as unmet needs?

Did you notice whether they found any “work-arounds” or solutions to those things that frustrated them or were barriers? If so, what were they?

What suggestions or wishes did your interviewee have?

Were there any recurring themes or patterns observed in the interviewee’s responses?

Were there things your interviewee said that surprised you? If so, what?

Were there any memorable quotes from your conversation that you want to share?

If you could sum up your insights from this conversation in three short statements, what would they be?

1.

2.

3.

Where did you or your interviewee see God at work in your interviewee's life? Did God show up for you in your conversation? If so, how?

Any final comments or reflections?



Thank You

Thank you for your courage and willingness to conduct a user interview. We hope the experience was rewarding for you, and your insights will, no doubt, be a treasure as you continue your design project. Remember, you can always conduct another interview if you have time and would like to; there is no limit! Also remember that you can use this type of interviewing even beyond the Congregations Lead Initiative. We invite you to continue discerning who else in the world your congregation should be interviewing and learning from.

Now that you have done a user interview, this is a tool that you can take with you into the world to connect with more people in our community and to bring your insights back to your congregation, where you can brainstorm about how to be in mission together with those we are learning about and from.

Thank you for being part of this journey!

Credits

This User Interview Guide was adapted from the “CLI Interview Packet,” originally developed by Trent Ormsbee-Hale for use at St. Matthew’s Lutheran Church in Fort Worth, Texas, and has been graciously shared with the Congregations Lead Initiative and greater ELCA Innovation community.