



# Building Healthy Communities Together

A Framework for  
Area Ministry Strategy in the  
Evangelical Lutheran Church  
in America



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

Building Healthy Communities Together: A Framework for Area Ministry Strategy in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Written by Dave Daubert and Amy Walter-Peterson, Congregational and Synodical Mission.

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# Table of Contents

<b>Area Ministry Strategy: A Framework</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>PHASE 1: Begin with Three Great Listenings</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>PHASE 2: Covenanting for Partnership</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>PHASE 3: Do Something Together</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>PHASE 4: Evaluate, Revise, Repeat</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Final Thoughts</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Resources</b>	<b>30</b>

# Area Ministry Strategy: A Framework

Area Ministry Strategies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) have three goals, and all three are important. The order below is not based on the goal's importance or priority in the overall strategy. These goals are about doing ministry and making a difference in order to:

- Rejuvenate the faith of people who participate in an Area Ministry Strategy (AMS) in ways that enhance their awareness of God's work and their vocation.
- Renew the ministry of partner congregations and the members who participate in them.
- Call ministries into partnership to have a collective impact on a specific area (i.e., neighborhood, city, county, issue, etc.) and, in so doing, re-root ministries and people in their communities.

These three goals work in a continuous cycle. As ministries re-root in their neighborhoods, strangers become neighbors and neighbors become friends. Individual lives are transformed through new relationships and new understandings, and the congregations renew their worship and ministry, examining, adapting and sometimes ceasing established practices to make space for the ever-changing body of Christ.

## Four essential elements of an Area Ministry Strategy

The work of developing an AMS is extensive and multifaceted. It takes a good deal of care and enough time to allow things to develop fully, come together relationally, and involve a significant portion of the members and participants in the ministries seeking to work together. Experience has shown that trying to do too much at once, attempting shortcuts, or moving too quickly without being sure that benchmarks have been met can be problematic.

As you move forward in this work, there are four essentials that need attention. Attending to these essential elements increases the chances of success of an AMS, and each are described below. The phases of an Area Ministry Strategy will describe how to integrate these essentials in ways that fit the context and the people involved.

**1. Pay attention to God.** Remember that an AMS is about participating in God's mission. It is about joining with God at work in the world. God works both inside the community of faith, and also around the community of faith in the world. The healthiest work will keep this truth front and center – both among the leaders working most directly to formulate the strategy and among the wider membership of the congregations involved. The AMS is not simply about finding an efficient way to collaborate and use resources. It is about joining and advancing the mission of God in purposeful and significant ways.

**2. Engage all the baptized.** An AMS must engage more than congregational leadership as it develops. The temptation for leaders to develop an AMS, report progress and recruit support from membership is less fruitful than engaging people in the pews early and often. A congregation needs to be involved throughout the process, and lay members should have key roles in leadership as the process unfolds. This engagement is best done on multiple levels. One level is intercongregational – providing opportunities for members in various ministries to meet each other, reflect on what it means to be in mission together, dream and share ideas, etc. These relational times are critical to having more than

tacit approval later in the process. However, events like this are intermittent and not generally able to be held too often. A second level of engagement needs to happen within congregations. Pastors and other leaders need to engage congregational members regularly and with clarity. This can involve using adult forums and educational sessions, campaigns, shared sermon series, pulpit exchanges, shared Bible reading, common prayers, etc. Pastors should consider coordinating preaching and shared reflections on how sermons and lectionary texts relate to the AMS and its development. The more these activities include dialog among members, the more clarity and ownership they are likely to develop. Ultimately, if this is done well, members will experience this as faith deepening and spiritually fulfilling. They will grow both personally and corporately through this work.

**3. Pay attention to transforming the church.** An AMS involves new ways of acting and thinking about what it means to be the church. The call to join in the transformation of the surrounding context is matched by the same call to be committed to transformation inside the faith community as well. A well-thought-out AMS will be strategic about how congregations who participate in this shared ministry will be transformed by this work but will also be attentive to the time it takes for this transformation to happen. Taking time to build real trusting relationships between partners is essential. Congregations doing this work should be clear about why they exist, what they believe is important and what are their priorities for ministry. They should know how their work and ministry contributes to the whole AMS. They should be more vibrant and experience genuine renewal as the fruit of their involvement.

**4. Be clear about engaging in context.** Each AMS focuses on a defined area and is intended to make a difference in that area. A strategy process needs to be asking: What is God already doing? And, what does God want to see happening in this area? Once there is some clarity around those questions, ministry partners must be committed to advancing God's dream for this place. Not all collaborative ministry will be defined as an AMS – only those

which are clear about the call to transformation in the context and committed to helping bring it about. Be clear about the context to which God is calling you, and try to gain clarity about how God is inviting you to join in ministry that matters in that place. In order to do this, ministries must also have a realistic picture of what effective and meaningful ministry in their context looks like today.

As you look at the phases of work outlined below, keep all four of these concepts in mind. These essential elements are independent of the phases in which you are working. These elements should find their way into all of them, but in ways that fit the setting and culture from which your strategy emerges.

### **A word about “areas”**

As you begin to think about potential areas where you might pursue an AMS, it’s helpful to begin with a sense of imagination. For example, you can begin to enter into the work by gathering potential partners around a common issue (e.g., hunger, immigration, an ethnic-specific ministry strategy, concern about a particular neighborhood, etc.) that transcends a specific geography, and then work to identify additional partners who could contribute to the issue you hope to impact. You can also begin by defining the geographic area you wish to impact (e.g., metropolitan area, urban neighborhood, suburb, county, small town, school district, etc.), and then work to identify potential partners who share a desire to have an impact on the place you’ve identified. In many cases the area for the AMS will be a composite of the areas served already by the partners and this physical area will define the initial partnership. Be aware that there may be partners who lie outside the geographic area but are willing to commit to the work anyway. Therefore, in either of these scenarios, you could potentially have partners who are physically located outside of the geographic area you hope to impact.

You may also enter this work at some other entry point that lies somewhere on the continuum created by the two examples above (or some other entry point). Your area may also change over time

based on the partners who wish to participate in this shared work. The key is to be both imaginative and open as you identify the area and the potential partners for this work. This means that an Area Ministry Strategy can fit anything from an urban to a rural context. The particular nature of the context is less important than the willingness to work with others to develop a shared strategy to address the area using the three goals identified at the forefront, which lie at the heart of all strategies.

### **Leadership**

As you read through this framework and the corresponding phases, you’ll notice that an AMS will not happen without a champion or champions shepherding this work every step of the way. AMS champions serve as conveners, coaches, facilitators, organizers, cheerleaders, cajolers, agitators and spokespeople for this work. Directors for evangelical mission are natural champions for these strategies though a strong, self-differentiated and self-aware local leader or leaders can serve this role as well – often better due to the grassroots passion and connections they bring. In some instances, a small and committed steering team consisting of four or five people have served as the champions. On the one hand, using the team approach increases the amount of time and energy used in coordination and communication that is necessary. On the other hand, it also ensures that work is shared and that no one person becomes a bottleneck in making progress. If the steering committee route is taken, be sure to include a mix of rostered and lay leaders. No matter what approach you take, experience reveals that strong synodical involvement from the director for evangelical mission increases the success of the strategy by facilitating communication and interfacing with the wider church.

Bishops also play an important role in providing leadership that strengthens the success of these strategies. By casting a vision for shared ministry that has the power to strengthen individual discipleship, renew congregations and impact neighborhoods and communities, bishops can use their authority, office and oversight

of synodical resources to spark the missional imagination of the church. Bishops may also have the ability to bring additional resources and partners to the table – social ministry organizations, ecumenical partners, etc., – that local leaders may not have access to. By serving as a cheerleader and encourager of this work, while also using the office to cajole, challenge and leverage involvement, bishops offer important leadership and can provide a much needed boost when the work of an AMS starts to lag.

### **Phases in the work**

It is often easiest to block out a process with phases. Each phase includes benchmarks to be reached before moving into the next phase. How these benchmarks are reached may vary from place to place – there are multiple ways to work. The key benchmarks will remain as markers along the way and help people in varied locations to pursue some clarity, as well as to share insights with other people working on an AMS in other places. Awareness of a common process allows for a framework in which shared learning can be understood, and people can serve as teachers for each other across the whole church. With that in mind, the process below maps out the key phases in this work. Each phase contributes something to the development of an AMS. It also provides clarity needed to move forward to the next phase. Done well, it allows a framework that is participative. Many people can contribute in each phase along the way if leaders are intentional about involving people and paying attention to the four essential elements in the section above.

Existing pilot projects offer us two learnings about proceeding with this work. First, it can be helpful to have participating ministries commit at each new phase. This provides a way for ministries to engage in the initial phase without committing to an unknown outcome and provides an opportunity for increased commitment as the strategy develops. Second, designated leadership is essential for moving an AMS forward. Some areas have found it helpful to work with trained outside coach/facilitators to serve in this role. Other

areas have developed a leadership team made up of both rostered and lay people from multiple ministries to guide the AMS process. However leadership is developed in your setting, movement in the process is more likely if leadership is in place holding partners accountable for the work that they've agreed to do.

# PHASE 1: Begin with Three Great Listenings

- To God in Scripture, your theological tradition and in prayer
- To God's voice within the community of faith
- To God's voice through your neighbors and the broader community

The work of an AMS begins with listening. Listening with other potential partners to what God is up to in your area and the work God is calling you to join. Listening within the community of faith for the yearnings of God's people. Listening to God's voice beyond the boundaries of your ministry to hear how God is active and alive in the broader community. Some key components mark this first phase.

- Establishing or learning new practices of how you will listen for the movement of the Spirit in your shared work
- Identifying potential partners
- Assessing the setting

## Individual transformation

A basic truth is that systems don't change themselves. Systems are designed to sustain themselves and are resistant to change. That means that change requires people to consciously act in new

or different ways. When this happens, systems begin to change – changed people change churches. A key part of any effective AMS is the ability for the work to encourage and facilitate ways that individuals can change. From the start, the AMS needs to intentionally explore how the shared work engages people as disciples. Some early questions that will help discern this include: What are people hungry for and what opportunities are provided by working together in the AMS to help nourish and encourage people to grow in their discipleship? What are the passions of individuals? What excites people that would make them want to be involved in some form of shared ministry across congregations or ministries. What could we do together that we can't do separately? In addition, listening to God is essential. An effective strategy engages people's prayer and spiritual lives more deeply – equipping and engaging people in deepening their spiritual lives.

## Congregational renewal

A core group of leaders may be involved in assessment at the area level in this phase, but individual congregations and ministries should be aware of and experience this work at the congregational level as well. Rites of commissioning or installing leaders for this work within worship provide a way to publicly recognize those involved in a leadership role. Worship, preaching, prayer and study in each ministry should be shaped by what's being heard and explored in this listening phase. In addition to focused listening in the wider community that is part of this phase of work, each congregation in the strategy will want to be focusing on listening to God through worship, prayer, teaching and preaching, and listening to each other within the community of faith to discern the ways that God is already working in people's lives and to assess where renewal might be needed within the congregation.

As congregations begin to focus on the work of listening to the wider community, they may begin to have insights on the ways that the current worship and congregational life is or isn't reflective of the community in which they are located. These

insights are worth noting and can serve as a starting point for deeper conversation within the congregation. How might established traditions, practices and ways of being church need to be adapted or changed in order to make room for the community that is not currently a part of congregational life?

### **Collective impact**

Identifying potential partners begins with who you know but, as you listen together in the community, you will likely begin to hear of other people, ministries or organizations to invite to the table to join you in listening. Think broadly about potential partners in this first phase. This is the chance to see if they're interested in listening with you. Are there ecumenical or full-communion partners? Lutheran or other social ministry organizations? Lutheran educational institutions? Invite people to the table to engage the three great listenings with you, trusting that God's Spirit is at work in the assembling.

Once you've identified some partners together, you can begin an assessment of the area where a ministry strategy is being considered. The assessment attempts to map the lay of the land as it currently stands. It can be helpful to do the assessment with one or two people who are new to the context and can bring a fresh pair of eyes. This is a time to ask a lot of questions and approach each ministry setting with curiosity. It's best to do this in person by visiting sites, buildings and ministries so that the wider context can be seen and observed. Remember that long-term fruitfulness will be most likely if you build relationships here. Don't just look for data but also plan to meet people and listen to them and with them. This is not just research but a chance to expand your relationships and connections within your setting. Assessing the area goes hand in hand with assessing the local ministry partners in order to gain an understanding of their current capacity.

### **Some questions to consider while exploring the assessment include:**

- What is God already up to?
- What might God like to see happen here?
- What ministry is currently happening?
- Who is doing good work there already?
- Who are the current players and partners? Consider congregations, ministries, ELCA churchwide partners, ecumenical and interfaith partners, local government, civic organizations, non-profits, etc.
- What's the area? What are its boundaries? Who lives here?
- What issues face the area as a whole? What issues impact households and families living there?
- What are some key opportunities and possibilities?
- What are some of the gifts, assets and passions that are currently in place?

### **Outcomes of this assessment should include:**

- A list of the key partners doing good work in this area that may provide opportunities for collaboration as you pursue an AMS.
- A clear understanding of the key issues in the mission area where God is calling for transformation to happen now or soon. How do these issues provide opportunities for the AMS?
- A list of the top 10 things we've heard/learned that could be a catalyst for gathering partners together. Discuss/brainstorm what could be done about these items and discern which ones excite and energize potential partners.



- Identify some low-hanging fruit for shared ministry that provides an early experience of collaboration that energizes partner ministries and propels them into deeper partnership and a broader strategy. In some instances, if ministries have little or no experience of working together they may need the experience of accomplishing something together to begin imagining other ways of partnering.
- Insight about how to engage the members of partner congregations in deepening their individual discipleship.
- A realistic assessment of which ministry partners have the capacity for real transformation and partnership. Ministries that are engaged only for the sake of their own survival or who wish only to maintain or sustain current ministries without identifying ways that current ministries must be renewed or transformed are not strong partners for an AMS.
- Clarity about how engaging the partners and/or opportunities above provides a doorway to partnership that contributes to the vitality of congregations and their leaders involved in the AMS. Most ministries will benefit from the partnerships and connections they establish. The church functions best when it is not simply a giving or serving organization filling needs but forms symbiotic relationships with others around it.
- A developing understanding of how congregational partners might begin to renew their ministries.
- Awareness of where the holes are in ministering to people in the community. Are there populations in the community that do not have access to the gospel due to differences in language or culture?

The work of Phase One is embedded in prayer, reading Scripture together and discerning in community what God is already up to in the world around and in us.

## Timing

This phase has a lot of moving parts. If ministries and potential partners don't have a history of working together this phase may take a year or more as folks both get to know and understand each other's contexts as well as spend time figuring out their larger context together. Experience teaches that time spent on the front end in building relationships, growing trust, developing a common understanding and context for shared work pays off exponentially over the long haul.

## READINESS FOR PHASE 2

### Individual transformation

In the initial phase, one place for there to be signs of transformation will be in the way individuals understand God's work in the world, church and in their lives. They will also have an increased sense of their role as disciples in that work. People exhibit personal readiness for moving forward when they have shown the ability to:

- Articulate a sense of God's mission and their purpose/role in that work.
- Demonstrate increased engagement with each other, the context and with God.
- Build new relationships through engaging in the three great listenings.
- Accept responsibility for being involved in meaningful leadership and are receiving coaching to develop new leadership skills.

## Congregational renewal

Congregations will find a new corporate sense of calling in this work as well as new ways to work. Signs that congregations are ready to move ahead include:

- Gaining a sense of the local leadership and gifts among various partners that could be invested in an AMS, through engaging in three great listenings within congregations and ministries.
- Increased clarity about how an AMS will connect with congregational life and congregational participants in ways that will renew congregations, engage people as disciples and provide an opportunity for congregational transformation.

## Collective impact

The common commitment to a particular area is a key aspect of defining an Area Ministry Strategy. The purpose of an AMS is to share commitment, resources and relationships in a way that helps transform the context into something that looks more and more like God's vision for life in that place. Signs that this is happening that would encourage groups to move ahead include:

- Discernment of what God is already doing in your context.
- Identification of key observations and insights on how you are being called to have a collective impact in your area.
- A shared sense of excitement and energy as well as determination of which ministries are ready to work on a common strategy in the defined area.

# PHASE 2: Covenanting for Partnership

At this point, some of the partners that have been part of the conversation are ready to make a deeper commitment to a shared mission approach within a given area. In order to do this, you will need to develop a covenant that spells out how partners will show mutual accountability and share resources for the sake of the whole. As the AMS moves into this covenant phase it may be necessary for individual congregations to vote on entering into an intentional partnership. The work of listening begun in Phase 1 continues in this phase.

Some ministry partners may opt out of continuing to participate in the AMS at this point or they may choose to be involved as the covenant is developed and then opt out of signing it. If Phase 1 was marked by a lot of coming and going at the table, Phase 2 will be marked by more consistency around the table. That said, as the covenant moves forward with a coalition of the willing, keep open the possibility of others joining you at a later time. Phase 2 will require more clarity about who is in and who is not, as well as the formation of a more formal structure to advance the work and to allow concrete decisions to be made and carried out with mutual accountability becoming more clear as the work advances. By the end of Phase 2 there will likely be a formal structure, possibly experimental, in order to move ahead.

In addition to the development of a covenant for shared ministry, individual congregations will need to identify goals regarding their own congregational renewal that have arisen through their participation in the three great listenings. Partnerships developed through the AMS can function to hold congregations accountable to their individual renewal goals.

### **Individual transformation**

By this stage in the process people in the partner congregations should be sharing in some common experiences and working together in ways that extend beyond just cooperation among the leaders. Key questions to explore in this phase include:

- What are some of the shared discipleship needs of the partners that could be worked on collectively?
- Where are shared passions that would encourage people to get involved and do something that demonstrated the capacity to be significant?
- What individuals, especially lay people, are emerging as having a calling, passion and gifts for taking on leadership roles in the AMS?
- How can the people in the pew be brought into this work – both via communication and also through hands-on experiments?

### **Congregational renewal**

As partners have been discerning their mutual commitments, individual ministries are examining their own settings, asking questions, renewing their congregational life and setting goals to address these new learnings.

- What have you learned in practicing three great listenings that needed to be addressed in your congregation?
- What have you learned about God's commitment to and involvement in the wider community, and how will your ministry adapt in order to participate in that work?

- How are stewardship practices being changed in order to offer time, talent and treasure in this work?
- How is leadership being equipped to minister, serve and work for justice?
- How does this shared work engage “people in the pews” more fully as disciples?
- How are congregational practices (including worship) adapting to reflect increased awareness, attention and care for the neighborhood and community?
- How are relationships between congregational partners being developed in ways that enhance commitment and trust to a larger picture and identity about what congregational ministry involves, especially concerning a shared commitment to the area jointly being served?

### **Collective impact**

In order for an AMS to have the best chance of success, in this phase the group should now be able to establish:

- A statement of shared purpose (WHY are we doing this?).
- A set of core values or guiding principles that shape their work together (HOW will we act together as we pursue this work?).
- Strategic directions/priorities for their shared work (WHAT will we work on?).

These things will be one key difference between Phase 1 work to explore possibilities and Phase 2 where the group has clarified some key things that will mark their shared work and identity.

Those who study collective impact across organizations have identified five conditions that are necessary for achieving larger-scale social impact. These conditions are<sup>1</sup>:

Common Agenda	All participants have a shared vision for change including a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions.
Shared Measurement	Collecting data and measuring results consistently across all participants ensures efforts remain aligned and participants hold each other accountable.
Mutually Reinforcing Activities	Participant activities must be differentiated while still being coordinated through a mutually reinforcing plan of action.
Continuous Communication	Consistent and open communication is needed across the many players to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation.
Backbone Support	Creating and managing collective impact requires a separate organization(s) with staff and a specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative and coordinate participating organizations and agencies.

These five conditions will need to be addressed in the covenant that is developed during this phase.

### Timing

If Phase 1 has been attended to thoughtfully, Phase 2 can be completed in a few months.

## READINESS FOR PHASE 3

### Individual transformation

By this point, people in the partner congregations should be sharing some common insights and experiences. Readiness to move ahead would be marked by:

- Identification of ways that partners are able to enhance the discipleship of members of the partner congregations.
- Some shared emphases that show up across the partners' programming (shared emphasis on prayer, joint series on Scripture, stewardship, etc.). The ability to work on discipleship as a part of the collective identity of the AMS and not just randomly among the partners is a key to moving ahead and creating a shared identity.
- Individuals who will provide longer term leadership to the AMS are starting to be identified.
- Growing understanding of a congregation's participation in a wider strategy.

### Congregational renewal

Signs of readiness by partner congregations in order to move forward to the next phase should include the following:

- Partner ministries understand how each individual congregational ministry connects in concrete ways to the AMS and have set clear goals for their own ongoing congregational renewal as part of the strategy.
- Trusting relationships have been developed across congregational lines, where people are able to commit resources to common ministry outcomes that benefit more than their own congregation.

## Collective impact

Phase 2 is marked by concrete ideas that can make a difference within the context as well as increased clarity about leadership, structure and accountability in the shared work of the AMS. In order to see this in place, partners should exhibit the following:

- Articulate a common purpose (why they are partnering), shared principles (how they will partner) and a set of strategic priorities (what they will do) for the AMS.
- Develop and commit to a covenant for shared ministry that attends to the five conditions necessary for common social impact.
- Form an initial structure where leadership, channels of communication and accountability are becoming clear. This includes clarity about who has the authority to carry out the work.

In addition, a champion or champions for this cause have been identified and accepted the role in order to insure concrete progress happens.

## PHASE 3: Do Something Together

As a process of discernment and intentional listening, an AMS can feel reflective and passive. The point of an AMS is to identify how God's people are being called to join God's work in the world. This means that clear goals that provide flesh to the shared agenda you've developed are essential. By now, you should be able to create an action plan that helps define the contributions that partners will make to this work, provides clarification about how you will measure and/or recognize success and learn from failure, identify what resources you have and/or need in order to move forward, and common work that will be the outcome of the process.

### Individual transformation

By this time, if the AMS has found its bearings, individuals should be genuinely involved in the work and some key lay leaders should have cultivated a passion. In addition, the members of participating congregations and other partners should be actively moving toward making this work happen. This will best be demonstrated by:

- Shared projects or events to bring people together for meaningful work, relationships or both.
- Some common aspects of discipleship and some shared practices have been identified. Common language and

identity are being cultivated within the AMS, and also have started being put into practice in preaching, education and leadership conversations.

- Clear understanding of being part of a ministry that is bigger than the individual congregation.

## **Congregational renewal**

A key outcome of an AMS is not just shared impact on the geography but also renewed vitality in the life of the congregations and members who participate. In order to have the grounding, connections and impact that it can, it is essential that the shared work engage congregational members. This engagement will be most effective when it is coordinated and a priority of the shared work. Leaders could consider:

- Clear preaching, teaching and spiritual formation activities that take place in each congregation. These should be coordinated in ways that help align each congregation with a larger sense of purpose and direction. Leaders strategically planning sermon series across the partnership. Jointly planned and implemented Bible studies and prayer emphases, etc., can provide the kinds of connections and a sense of a shared journey.
- Coordinated stewardship and/or budgeting efforts with clear ties to the AMS work as part of these efforts.
- Projects planned and coordinated with an eye toward engaging members but doing so in a way that brings people together across congregational lines.
- By now, individual congregations within the AMS will be working on specific goals focused on their own congregational renewal.

Since congregational partners will have been engaged in this process from the beginning, they will now be prepared to support the AMS with tangible resources.

## **Collective impact**

In Phases 1 and 2 ministry partners have listened together and have covenanted to participate in an AMS together. Now it's time to develop some clear goals for your shared work. These goals need to include specific actions for partnership and involvement in ways that provide for significant forms of collective impact in your community – this is a key criterion for this kind of work. For the strategy to prosper in the long term, it's important that at least one of the goals produce an early win that demonstrates the benefit of working in partnership and helps to create momentum for future work.

## **Timing**

Having taken sufficient time in Phases 1 and 2, a goal setting and prioritizing exercise among covenanted partners can happen quickly. A mix of short-term (3 to 6 months) and long-term (1 to 3 year) goals should be considered with an emphasis on producing at least one early win. For longer-term goals, be sure to plan in shorter 3 to 6 month segments to ensure that movement toward the longer-term goal is made.

Note: In some situations, doing something together is necessary earlier in the process to help partners identify where and how they might have a collective impact. If partners have a history of suspicion, mistrust or a lack of understanding for how they could partner with others, it may be useful to build momentum by experimenting with a short-term project that shows partners the kind of impact that's possible. A successful experiment after some initial listening in Phase 1 can create momentum and propel ministry partners into the covenant phase. Coach/Facilitators will have to gauge this as the AMS framework unfolds.

## READINESS FOR PHASE 4

Phase 4 will involve assessing progress, because the AMS is actually in place and doing shared work. In order to move ahead to the next phase, the following benchmarks should be visible:

### Individual transformation

- A mix of short- and long-term SMART goals addressing the discipleship development of participating members are set.
- Shared experiences have created connections and meaningful relationships between people who participate in a variety of the partners in the AMS.
- There is a willingness to commit time, talent and treasure on the part of people to the renewal of congregational life, as well as the shared work of the AMS.

### Congregational renewal

- A mix of short- and long-term SMART goals addressing the congregations' renewal priorities are set.
- Individual congregations have tried something to address the congregations' vitality and are in a position to learn from the experience(s) and discuss the outcomes.

### Collective impact

- A mix of short- and long-term SMART goals aimed at the strategy's desired collective impact are set and prioritized.
- Strategy partners have tried to accomplish something specific (large or small) for the sake of having an impact on the surrounding community and are now in a position to learn from the experience(s) and discuss the outcomes (whether it failed or succeeded is not the primary issue here).

## PHASE 4: Evaluate, Revise, Repeat

Evaluating your work is a helpful and healthy practice from the beginning of an AMS. In one pilot project every gathering ends with a brief evaluation along the lines of: What worked? What didn't? How could we work differently next time?

Once you've had a chance to work on some of your prioritized goals, you'll want to set time aside for specific review of your shared work, as well as revisiting and/or revising your longer-term goals based on your early learnings. Be sure to celebrate what you've accomplished at this point. If something hasn't gone according to expectation (either positively or negatively) take the time to learn from your experiences and adjust your goals and work plans. As you gain experience in working together, plan for annual time for new goal setting. The work of the three great listenings continues to shape your work at every point along the way.

Be sure to think about how you will evaluate your shared work related to collective impact, as well as how you will evaluate individual congregation's work on their specific renewal strategies.

A good evaluation will set aside intentional time for assessing progress on work that has been done. This means getting all

partners to agree on benchmarks and setting up assessments when key benchmarks are to be reached. Having partners agree on evaluation points, criteria and timing ahead of time is essential in an AMS in order to provide for a good foundation to work together. Otherwise, there may be as much stress over when and how to evaluate as there is about the material being evaluated. Regular evaluation should happen at each step along the way. A healthy leadership team can generally do this as part of the ongoing conversations that take place as the AMS is in progress.

For a more significant evaluation of the overall progress and major benchmarks, it is often helpful to involve an outside facilitator. This allows everyone involved in the AMS to be a participant on more equal footing and feels more collegial than having someone from inside the AMS lead the assessment. Consider what you can assess along the way and be sure to do it well and often. Be conscious of those major evaluations that will happen at key points and look for a helpful coach/facilitator to walk with you through them.

Some aspects of the evaluation are general – they can be found in evaluating almost any project. The resource listed below, “Some Basics for Evaluating,” covers many of these, and provides some tips and advice for people as they do an evaluation of their shared work.

Every project has specific questions related to the work and outcomes that are unique. Be sure to think about these things ahead of time and include some of these specific measurements/questions in the planning phase, so when it is time to evaluate you have a good basis from which to do the assessment.

In addition, within an AMS, those doing the evaluation need to remember that there are always three distinct but equally important aspects to this assessment:

- How have individuals been transformed by the shared work? What difference has this work made in the lives of individuals both within the community of faith and in the area that is being served?
- How has each partner/congregation in the work been involved/transformed in ways that have renewed them? What can be affirmed and celebrated in each one? What critique leads to a need for adjustments and future changes?
- How has the shared work gone and what can we affirm and celebrate, critique and change about our collective impact in the surrounding community? Specifically, what has changed and/or is changing as a result of this shared work?

Keeping all three levels of evaluation functioning is critical since an AMS has as its goals: individual transformation, congregational renewal and collective impact in your community/neighborhood/area. This may mean doing more than one evaluation along the way – even multiple evaluations in a short period of time since it may be important to evaluate the collective impact in the context and also to evaluate the renewal impact within each partner organization/congregation.

### **Timing**

Whenever you come together to do shared work in partnership, or whenever you try something new in the congregation, take time for evaluation. This may happen after a few months of working on some specific goals or it may occur earlier.



# Final Thoughts

An AMS is cyclical work. Listening leads to actions. Actions require planning. In evaluating our plans we listen again for how God's Holy Spirit is present and what we are learning that leads to new actions. Throughout this work we are learning, discerning, acting and evaluating – where is God already at work, and how is God calling us to be part of this work?

The framework outlined here describes a way of being church in the world that might be different from how we're used to thinking about it. Leaders in this work are called to assist communities in discerning the movement of the Spirit and ministries are called to participate with the Holy Spirit in co-creating communities that advance God's dream for a place. This can be messy work that does not unfold in a linear fashion. The lack of orderliness does not mean that you are failing in your work or that the process is unsuccessful. Keep listening and working together. Clarity will often emerge from the chaos.

Through it all we listen – to God, to each other, to the community around us. In listening we see the face of Christ revealed to us in new ways. This is holy work and you will be walking on holy ground. May the Holy Spirit fill you with an abundance of humility, wisdom and courage.

# Resources

Many resources available from [www.ELCA.org/Resources/Mission-Planning](http://www.ELCA.org/Resources/Mission-Planning) are helpful for the process of developing an Area Ministry Strategy. These resources have been developed across the church to assist congregations in practicing three great listenings and developing congregational mission plans.

- Guiding Principles for Congregational Mission Planning
- A Season for Prayer and Renewal
- Read/Reflect/Respond
- Dwelling in the Word
- Story Matters
- Bible studies from Manual for Congregational Mission Planning and Beyond Our Doors
- Guide to One-to-One Conversations
- One-to-One Relational Meetings and Six Practical Applications
- One Body, Many Members - Part 2 Meeting Our Neighbors
- Some Basics for Planning
- Some Basics for Evaluating

## Other internet resources

- Talking Together as Christians Cross-culturally: A Field Guide, Revised Edition, free download at [www.ELCA.org/Resources](http://www.ELCA.org/Resources)
- Hope at Work Resources available at [www.ELCA.org/Resources/Congregational-Based-Organizing](http://www.ELCA.org/Resources/Congregational-Based-Organizing)
- Asset Based Strategies for Faith Communities, free download at [www.abcdinstitute.org/publications/workbooks](http://www.abcdinstitute.org/publications/workbooks)
- Christian Community Development Association, [www.ccda.org](http://www.ccda.org)
- Community-Based Organizing Groups – DART, Gamaliel, IAF, National People’s Action, PICO, IVP (search online for websites and local contact information)

## Other resources

- Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work, Fay Hanleybrown, John Kania and Mark Kramer (Stanford Social Innovation Review, 2012)
- 7 Creative Models for Community Ministry, Joy F. Skjestad (Judson Press, ISBN 978-0-8170-1730-9) - Part 1: Getting Started
- Living Lutheran: Renewing Your Congregation, Dave Daubert (Augsburg Fortress, ISBN 0-8066-5334-5)
- The Mission Table: Renewing Congregational and Community, Stephen P. Bouman (Augsburg Fortress, ISBN 978-1-4514-7812-9)
- 95 Questions to Shape the Future of Your Church, Thomas G. Bandy (Abingdon Press, ISBN 978-0687343744)
- The New Parish: How Neighborhood Churches Are Transforming Mission, Discipleship and Community, Paul Sparks, Tim Soerens and Dwight J. Friesen (InterVarsity Press, ISBN 978-0-8308-9596-0)
- The Organizational Master Plan Handbook: A Catalyst for Performance Planning and Results, H. James Harrington and Frank Voehl (Productivity Press, ISBN 978-1439878774)

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[1] Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work, Fay Hanleybrown, John Kania and Mark Kramer (Stanford Social Innovation Review, 2012)