

ELCA Macedonia Project

Building a New Roof and a New Future

In recent months at American Lutheran Church in Gibson, Ill., where the Rev. Jim Davis is serving in his first call, the congregation had to face a growing problem: a leaky roof. Members had known for a while this was becoming a more pressing need, but in the midst of a struggling economy and other priorities the roof had never risen to the top of their list — until now. They could not afford to wait any longer to fix the roof, and suddenly they found themselves in need of nearly \$90,000.

When Pastor Davis presented his congregation's situation to Terry Moore, director for evangelical mission in the Central/Southern Illinois Synod, he recommended the congregation participate in the synod's Macedonia Project workshops to get fresh ideas to talk about stewardship.

"The purpose of these two workshops is to give people a basic overview and also specific tools that they can use in their congregations to either strengthen or create stewardship programs," said Moore. "I think this is the first attempt in a while to address stewardship more systemically across the synod."

Not only did Pastor Davis get excited about the Macedonia Project for gaining ideas to raise money for the roof, he wanted to take it a step further.

"I started to think that we really needed to increase our giving to a level where we could finance the roof, then keep it at that level after the roof is paid off. We could start sending some money to the synod to fund community events, etc." he said. "How can we get our level of giving up and keep it up so we can have funds for future projects without having to go in debt? How can we start looking beyond our walls and determine what can we do at the community level and the international level?"

For years, members of the congregation had not ventured into talking about money and what it means to give. Now, Pastor Davis and fellow members attending the Macedonia Project workshops are assembling committees and working to implement a short-term and long-term plan for growing the mission of the congregation through stewardship of members' time, talents and finances.

"We have already started sharing some of the Macedonia ideas through our conversations with people," said Pastor Davis. "One aspect of this is developing a 'relational ask.' The Macedonia Project gave us a series of questions that were really quite touching and moving to a lot of people, and it has helped put giving in a different light."

Members are now talking with each other about what money means to them personally, what it means to give of oneself to God, and the importance of giving back and showing gratitude to God for their many blessings.

"I have preached a few sermons that offer ideas about what stewardship is, not just from a financial point of view," said Pastor Davis. "Instead of looking at it from a perspective of how terrible the economy is or how hard we've been hit, I want us to look at stewardship from a bountiful point of view — that God has been very generous to us, and so how can we look at life from a perspective of generosity. How can we be generous?"

Moore puts into perspective the unique nature of the Macedonia Project and the equally unique potential it carries to help congregations better understand and contemplate what stewardship is.

"The Macedonia text is an important example of people's generosity, people who were not well off," said Moore. "It's also mysterious in some ways. It uses atypical language that in

our culture is very foreign ... about abundance and sharing and people really excited about giving what they have.”

“The intent is to help increase awareness about and build a culture of generosity within the congregation,” Moore continued. “And there are specific things that congregations and leaders can learn to do that will help with that process. The goal is for people to affirm and better understand God’s great abundance and overflowing grace and the implications of that in our lives if we truly believe and live it.”