



Minneapolis Area Synod of the ELCA

One-to-Ones

What are one-to-ones?

One-to-ones are intentional conversations between two people intended to build authentic relationships, discover gifts and strengths, identify self-interest, and gather information.

What is self-interest?

Self-interest is the reason or motivation behind why someone participates in something. We all have self-interest, and the clearer we can be about what that motivation is, the stronger our commitments to one another will be.

How do you do a one-to-one?

One to ones are incredibly simple, but that doesn't mean they are easy. They require intention and attention from the person requesting the conversation, as well as purposeful and curious listening.

1. **Identify the person you would like to speak with.** Do you want to learn more about your congregation's story? Do you want to learn about the experiences of your neighbors? Are you hoping to identify some new leaders? Ask yourself some questions that will help you clarify who you would like to speak with.
2. **Set up a time to talk.** Give the person a call and ask if they could set aside 45 minutes for a conversation. Tell them why you want to talk with them. "I'd like to hear about your experiences in the congregation" or "I'd like to talk about your work in the neighborhood".
3. **Introduce yourself.** When you meet with your conversation partner, take a few minutes to introduce yourself and tell them why you are interested or engaged in the area of conversation you proposed. "I'm working with some leaders in the congregation to learn more about our church's story" or "I'm meeting with residents in the community to learn more about my church's neighborhood". Identify your self-interest, the reason you are committed to having this conversation.
4. **Warm up with some easy questions.** Ask your conversation partner about where they are from, their family and friends, how their week has been, or how they spend their free time. This will help to ease both of you into the conversation.
5. **Ask questions to draw the other person out.** Once you have warmed up the conversation, begin asking those questions that get at the topic you wanted to discuss. The key here is to be intentionally curious about the other person's story, experience, and thoughts. Ask questions that encourage them to tell a story or reflect on a lived experience. Some possible questions could be:

- a. How did you end up becoming a member of your congregation?
 - b. How long have you lived/worked in the neighborhood?
 - i. Long-time? How have you seen the community change over the years?
 - ii. Short-time? What made you choose this neighborhood?
 - c. What are some of the things you really value about this community? Why?
 - d. What challenges have you seen the community grapple with? Can you give me an example of when you've seen this challenge present itself?
 - e. What are the stories that you think really speak to the character of this community?
6. **Listen. Listen. Listen.** If your conversation is going well, the other person should be talking about 60% of the time. Ask the questions that help you to find common ground and get them talking but honor their time by listening carefully. Here are some things to listen for:
- a. Anything that sounds like it might lead into a story. Stories are often the best way to get a sense of what matters most to someone, or where their gifts lie.
 - b. Listen for what excites or motivates them, or what frustrates and demotivates them.
 - c. Listen for stories that highlight the other person's values and commitments.
 - d. Listen for this person's gifts and strengths? What are their hopes and dreams?
 - e. Listen for stories about the congregation or neighborhood. Who are the people they highlight, the places they name, or the vibes they seem to value?
7. **Watch your time.** For most folks, a good one to one lasts about 45 minutes. However, this can depend on the individual and any potential cultural differences. For example, in cultures where trust-building is primarily relational (ex. Mexico, Thailand, Russia), 45 minutes may not be enough for someone to truly open up in the ways you expect (see the next step). Bottom line, keep an eye on your time, and be sure to close by thanking the other person for the conversation.
8. **Close with a next step.** Never leave without a next step. Let them know that you will follow up with them in a few weeks, or that you'd love to make time in the future for another conversation. You want to be sure that you are laying the groundwork to see them again.

Power Analysis and Cultural Considerations

Power is always at work in our relationships whether we are aware of it or not. It is especially helpful to run through a simple power analysis prior to setting up a one-to-one and meeting with someone for this intentional conversation. Here are some questions to consider:

- Is there a clear power differential between you and the person you are scheduling a one to one with? i.e., clergy/layperson, differentials related to gender, race, or class? How might the other person perceive this differential?
- How might your questions be different once you've considered these dynamics?
- How might the other person's answers to your questions be influenced by these dynamics?
- Could an existing power differential get in the way of a meaningful conversation?
- Are you the right person to schedule a one-to-one with this individual? Who might offer a better connection point?
- Who or what might you represent to the other person, and vice versa? Do you represent the church or Christianity?

Similarly, culture is also always at work in our relationships with one another. Just as it can be helpful to think about existing power dynamics prior to your one to one, it can also be helpful to think about any cultural considerations, especially when meeting with someone who is from a different culture than your own. Here are some questions to consider:

- Are there differences in communication styles across cultures? Some cultures are more direct, others are indirect. Some engage in conflict openly; others might avoid conflict.
- Are there cultural norms about people of opposite genders, ages, or roles meeting together?
- Are there different considerations about meeting in public or private space?
- Are there culturally different ideas about time between you and the person you meet with?
- Are there culturally different understandings around how trust is built that might influence a conversation?

While these considerations are important to pay attention to, don't let them be used as an excuse to avoid meaningful conversations with people in your community. Learn to see these differences as opportunities for learning, growth, and transformation. The most important thing to remember for having a successful one-to-one is to be curious and to center the experience of your neighbor.