

Leading with Vitality Council Reflection: Partnerships

How to use the Leading with Vitality Council Reflection: Share this document with the Council members prior to the Council meeting and add 15 minutes to the beginning of the agenda for shared reflection. Prior to the meeting, invite one member of the Council to lead the discussion. Here's a simple outline for how the shared reflection might go.

First, the reflection leader reads the scripture passage aloud. Second, the reflection leader highlights one idea from the reflection that the reflection leader found meaningful or challenging. Third, the reflection leader uses one or more of the reflection questions below to encourage discussion. When the discussion draws to a close, the reflection leader closes the time with the prayer using the prayer below or another prayer they create.

Scripture Reading

1 Kings 17:7-16 (NRSV)

But after a while the wadi dried up, because there was no rain in the land. Then the word of the Lord came to [Elijah], saying, 'Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you.' So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, 'Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink.' As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, 'Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.' But she said, 'As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.' Elijah said to her, 'Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. For thus says the Lord the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth.' She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah.

Partnerships

Christmas was just around the corner, so the offer of help was not a surprise. At that point, Micah's Backpack was feeding roughly 150 students a week with the help of nearly 100 community partners and several hundred volunteers. The Director fielded calls and emails almost daily from folks offering to help. Unfortunately, this offer was one that the organization had to turn down.

The church that wanted to help called to tell the Director that they were willing to provide candy canes for each bag of food the week before Christmas break. They were excited to let her know that each candy cane would have a card attached to encourage the students to think of the candy cane as a letter 'J' for Jesus and to invite the students to believe in Jesus. The person who called was surprised when the Director politely declined the offer. While the Director would have been happy to take the candy canes, Micah's Backpack could not include the cards referring to Jesus and the donor was only willing to donate the candy canes if the cards were be included.

Now to be clear, Micah's Backpack is sponsored by a Lutheran Church and has plenty of churches who are partners. The name Micah's Backpack is inspired by Micah 6:8, but Micah's Backpack also partners with public schools, local businesses, university groups, and non-Christian faith groups to accomplish its mission of feeding students over the weekend. While the Director was a follower of Jesus, she knew that the mission of Micah's

Backpack was not making new Christians. If she had included the explicit invitation to believe in Jesus with the gifts of food, she would have risked losing the broad-based support in the community that allowed the ministry to provide food so effectively.

In the simplest terms, the potential donor's mission was to create new Christians. Micah's Backpack's mission was to feed students over the weekend. In this particular case, the organizational missions didn't match and so a partnership couldn't be formed.

In today's world, nearly every congregation needs partners to accomplish the ministry God is calling it to do. The key is to look for partners whose mission aligns with your own. You may be able form a partnership that works in the short-term around a common interest or a shared problem, but in the long run if there isn't a missional match, the partnership won't be successful.

To check for a missional match, ask yourself questions like these:

- What mission are we trying to accomplish?
- What mission is the potential partner trying to accomplish?
- What is motivating this partnership?
- How does this partnership benefit both parties?
- What outcome are the parties in this partnership hoping to achieve?
- Is this partnership about survival or about mission and ministry?

Every partnership will have growing pains, but if you start with good missional alignment, you have a much better chance for success.

Reflection by Pastor John Wertz, Jr.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Who are your congregation's existing partners?
2. How closely does your partner's mission align with your own?
3. Where do you see the potential for new partnerships?

Prayer:

O God, you call us to work together to participate in your mission to love, bless, and save the world. Help us to see and to affirm the gifts that others bring and inspire us to seek ways that partner for the good of all Amen.