



Epiphany Paper #1:

Introduction to Accompaniment

The diocesan Spring Learning Event, "Glocal" Mission Gathering, takes place on Saturday, March 3, 2012 at the Cathedral Church of St. Paul in Boston and will be in partnership with the Global Mission Office of the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church of America). As part of this event we are exploring the idea of *Accompaniment* as a model for mission – both locally and around the world. These Epiphany papers will introduce us to this idea of Accompaniment which the ELCA refers to as "a lens and methodology for global mission."

"Accompaniment is a response to the changing context of global mission. For many years, North American and European church bodies established, funded, and directed mission around the world.

Today, the churches they helped found are independent and self-governing. As a result, global mission is an endeavor shared by mutual participants in the body of Christ."¹ But this model helps us understand not only global mission but about reaching out in our changing neighborhoods, building new partnerships and relationships within our communities, and finding new ways to work together with other churches in the diocese. "Accompaniment" can teach us all how to walk, learn and grow with others in mutuality and respect.

The Global Mission Office of the ELCA has graciously given us permission to use their material on this model, and every session is taken from their original resource. We invite churches to use these papers as a way to start discussion, either as bulletin inserts or emailed out to folks for individual study.

Part I. INTRODUCTION: EMMAUS STORY

Imagine that you have parked your car, and are walking down the sidewalk toward a dinner with some people you don't know very well. One of your dinner companions parks nearby, and since you had to park quite far away from the restaurant, you walk together, awkwardly getting to know one another, sharing your sadness— awful things have been happening, and all your hopes for the future seem to have been overthrown. Your new acquaintance shares her own pains and griefs, and you discover that you have much in common, but somehow you only seem to become sadder as you walk down the street together. And then someone else joins you—someone you have not met before—and then he begins to speak to both of you about your pain, your loss, your fears and about how God had been present in all of this. You are shocked—you and your new friend look at one another, wondering how this person can speak so without even knowing you, yet feeling your hearts lift together at the good news. You invite him to

¹ Taken from the ELCA Global Mission office's website: <http://www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Global-Mission/How-We-Work.aspx>

join you for dinner, and together you eat and share and begin to feel hope once again. And then, suddenly you recognize him—and he tells you to share with others all the good news that has come from the encounter.

We imagine that this cannot happen in real life. It is a Bible story, something that happened two thousand years ago, when the disciples on the road met the resurrected Jesus on the way to Emmaus. Yet it does and can happen today, every day, when we remember that the good news comes from Christ, who joins us whenever two, or three are gathered in his name. We, and our acquaintances on the road, are all part of the body of Christ. We walk the Emmaus road every day and the people with whom we share the journey accompany us and we accompany them.

The Emmaus road story helps to illuminate Accompaniment, a theology of mission. We see that mission is a journey, and that this journey, taken with many companions, shows us the unexpected and sometimes unrecognized Christ who walks with us. In this journey, as we break bread together, we move toward Christ's mission of reconciliation between us and God, between us and one another.

Part II. THE CONTEXT OF MISSION

When Jesus met the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35), he asked them, "What are you speaking of?" What would we say today about our reality as people of God? What is happening in the world?

WHAT IS OUR CONTEXT FOR MISSION?

If you had to describe the world today to someone, what would you say? What do you see? What is happening in your community? What is happening in the nation? What is happening in the world, both hopeful and challenging?

Just as the earliest disciples needed to know about what was happening in their world, so that they could discuss it together and understand God's call, so we need to know what is happening in ours, so that we can talk about it with our brothers and sisters in Christ. That's the only way that we can understand how God's mission applies to our global reality.

Throughout history mission has been many things, both positive and negative. Christians have constantly tried to understand what mission means, and how to undertake it, working to learn from mistakes and misapprehensions. In the past 80 years, and especially in the past 20, Christians have begun to talk more and more about the meaning of mission with those who once were seen only as "objects" of mission, the members of "younger churches" in Asia, Africa and Latin America. We've begun to see that all of God's people are called to think about the why and how of mission.

That's why our participation in God's mission requires us to think carefully about how we are going about it. So what might that look like? What does mission mean today? What are we called to today, in our world, which furthers God's mission of reconciliation?

What do you think “mission” might mean in our 21st century global world?

- Learning about economics, wealth and poverty
- Preaching to people who have never heard the gospel
- Traveling to learn about the realities of life for Christians in other cultures
- Supporting our country’s commitment to foreign aid
- Simplifying our lives and struggling against materialism
- Witnessing to our faith to the people in our communities
- Converting people from other religions
- Working with people in other countries to strengthen our faith through shared projects
- Giving money or other resources for economic development
- Advocating for the rights and dignity of the poor and of immigrants in our communities
- Trying to become more ecologically conscious and aware of our impact on the earth
- Inviting people, especially from other cultures or economic groups, to visit our church or become part of our community
- What else?

From the gospel and the stories of our faith, we understand that God’s mission is reconciliation. We, and all people, are broken before God. We are turned in on ourselves, away from God and others. We sow discord and dissension. We hurt one another and abuse the earth we have been given to care for. We are alienated, far from God and from one another.

Jesus came to reconcile us with God. God meets us in our brokenness, and restores our relationship with God and with one another. God desires our reconciliation with one another, so that we no longer exploit or hurt; and our reconciliation with the earth, so that we no longer abuse or waste. We continue to be imperfect, but we are constantly called back to God’s mission of reconciliation.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus tells the disciples three times to love one another. Love is a commandment; love is the way we follow him; love is the way we proclaim the gospel. Loving is not just about good feelings or good intentions. The way that Jesus actually loved us is not simply affection or kindness, but actually emptying himself in order to live with us as our friend and companion, and to stand for us before the powers that threaten our lives. That is the reconciling love which Jesus brings: that is the gospel we proclaim. Jesus’ reconciling love, which breaks down all barriers, calls us into mission through accompaniment.

John 13:34–35

I give you a new commandment: that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this every-one will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another

Text and questions taken from a foundational paper on Accompaniment written and produced by the Global Mission Office of the ELCA, www.elca.org. Permission granted by the Global Mission office to copy this material for this publication. For further information on the Accompaniment model see <http://www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Global-Mission/Engage-in-Global-Mission/Resources.aspx>

For information on the Spring Learning Event, visit www.diomass.org. Epiphany Papers are produced by the Episcopal Diocese of MA, 138 Tremont Street, Boston, MA 02111.