

Epiphany Paper #2: *Accompaniment in Mission*

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 III. Accompaniment in Mission

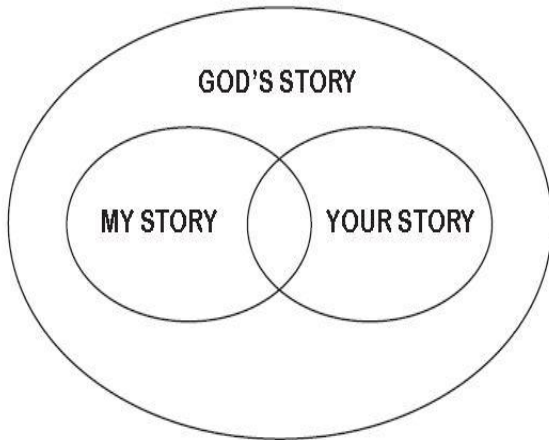
"Accompaniment" is a scriptural and practical way of understanding mission that has been articulated in the past few decades in dialogue between churches in the "global North"—the churches who historically sent missionaries—and churches in the "global South"—churches in Asia, Africa and Latin America who historically received missionaries. Today, there are more Christians in the "global South" than in the "global North." It's a different world than that of the earliest missionaries, and our understanding of and living out mission must respond.

A lot of mission work historically looked like this: there is God's story, my story and your story. Mission meant me



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>

bringing God's story to you. God's story is on my side, and you are on the other side. I'm crossing boundaries to bring God to you.



Accompaniment helps us see mission differently: In reconciliation, we realize that my story and your story are not divided by boundaries, but are both reconciled within God's story.

Because we live in the tension of already and not yet, between reconciliation and alienation from God, we continue to experience alienation from one another. We continue to experience, and to create, boundaries between ourselves and everything else. The categorization of what we encounter is unavoidable as we live in the world, but it can create boundaries between us and others.

Every day, we categorize according to boundaries, such as

- rich/middle class/working poor/destitute
- Black/White/Asian/Native American/mixed race
- high-school educated/college educated/illiterate
- Hindu/Atheist/Buddhist/Muslim/Christian
- human/animal/plant/mineral
- Lutheran/Episcopal/Catholic/Pentecostal

What boundaries do you see between the people around us, in our community and in our world? What other groups or categories can we name?

God's mission of reconciliation means that we learn to see others, not from our human point of view, but from God's point of view. Our old ways of seeing and relating have passed away. We learn to see and to repudiate all that lies between us and our brothers and sisters, valuing reconciliation and relationship above power and domination. In Christ, we no longer live as the world lives. In mission, we live out reconciliation. In Christ's reconciliation, we are all in relationship, all part of the body of Christ. We are not just called to love those who love us, who "get" us and understand us because we are very much alike. Rather we are called to love and be loved by those who are not like us, whom we might have to work quite hard to understand, or who may not understand us at all. God's reconciliation is across borders and boundaries. When we are trying to build bridges in our "already-not yet" reality, it takes a lot of grace.

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The problem for us, as we live out Christ's mission of reconciliation, is that the boundaries between us are not innocent. They are just lines drawn in the sand; they are lines that mean something in our relationships and in how we treat one another. People who are placed in one kind of category might receive less, be able to do less and be treated less well than people in another category. The categories are not equal: they are expressions of inequality and often lead to injustice.

A simple way of putting this is to say that the categories are asymmetrical in terms of their power in society. Someone who is in one category may not have access to the same resources and rights that someone in another category will have. That lack of power can translate into a lack of freedom, a lack of health and a lack of security. The power of one category is huge. Power is not equal; it is asymmetrical, uneven.

Look again at the categories bulleted above. Where do you fall within these categories? When do you feel that you are on the "powerful" side? When do you feel that you are on the "less powerful" side? What does it mean to say that there are asymmetries of power in these categories?

Accompaniment helps us see the asymmetries of power in relationships. Because these asymmetries, just like the creation of boundaries and categories, seem natural to us, often we do not see them or think about them. Through accompaniment relationships we learn to see and think about asymmetries in order to live out Christ's reconciling mission, the reconciliation that has lifted up the lowly, and has broken down the walls between people.

2 Corinthians 5:16–19

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.

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.