



Epiphany Paper #3: *Accompaniment Values*

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.

IV. ACCOMPANIMENT VALUES

The story of Jesus and the disciples traveling to Emmaus reminds us that mission is a journey, and that it has a goal – living out Christ's reconciliation, breaking bread and forming community together. We reach that goal briefly, and then we begin the journey again, moving again towards reconciliation.

The mission journey does not end at a fixed point. Like the disciples, we might think we know where we are going and where we plan to stop – but when the unrecognized Christ is revealed, our plans, and our journey, are transformed. We walk towards meeting Christ; we return to share what we have learned in that encounter.

In mission, our companions on the road may be individual people in our own community or entire churches in other countries. Engaging in mission through Accompaniment, we re-member that in order to proclaim the Gospel,

Galatians 4:27–28

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

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>

we must place a high priority on relationship – that relationship which God has intended for us since the beginning of the world.

When we walk together, we need to be able to talk honestly, to share with one another, to get to know one another – to undo the boundary of strangeness or suspicion between us. It takes time, thought, and commitment to learn to see how we create boundaries, to perceive the asymmetries in our relationships, and to respond to them from Christ's reconciling mission.

People committed to being ambassadors of God's reconciling mission have discovered that certain values appear in the praxis of Accompaniment over and over again. These Accompaniment Values, help and support us as we celebrate, reflect, act, and examine our work in God world.

Mutuality In accompaniment, we work to build up our capacities to proclaim and live out the Gospel of Christ. We work to recognize that all of us have gifts to offer to God's mission, and to value gifts of all, while caring for one another's needs. Mutuality is built upon giving and receiving trust as we grow together.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. . . . whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it. 1 Cor. 12: 12, 24-26

We are one body, with many members, all interdependent upon one another in joy and suffering. How does this interdependence affect the way in which we relate to one another in Christ's reconciling mission?

Inclusivity God calls us to include everyone in the mission of reconciliation, yet we know that all communities exclude someone. In accompanying one another, we look to see who is excluded, and why, and commit to change community structures and habits that can exclude people without any deliberate intention. For those who experience exclusion, as well as for those who are "inside," it takes great effort and courage to continue to attempt to build relationships across boundaries. Inclusivity requires self-reflection and honesty about our own communities and relationships.

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he said, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, 'What is written in the law? What do you read there?' He answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.' And he said to him, 'You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.'

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?' Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend."

*Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?’ He said, ‘The one who showed him mercy.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do likewise.’ **Luke 10:25-37***

Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan, the one excluded, who has compassion on the other who has been injured. How does exclusion and inclusion affect our relationships and our communities as we engage in God’s mission?

Vulnerability Vulnerability and Empowerment taken together are an important key to accompaniment in God’s mission. In our culture, vulnerability often seems to be weakness, but Jesus shows us that vulnerability – openness to relationship, giving up power – is God’s way of redemption. We enter God’s mission through vulnerability, just as Jesus became vulnerable to us and with us.

Empowerment As we accompany one another, we struggle to recognize and name power as it affects our relationships. When we recognize that relationships have asymmetries of power, and struggle to balance and correct those asymmetries, we are working to Empower ourselves and one another. Learning to go of power – to become Vulnerable – is an act of empowerment, as is recognizing and standing up to power that hobbles people in their walk through life.

*‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.’ So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. **2 Cor. 12:9***

The power of God is made perfect in weakness. What does this mean for us as we engage in God’s mission through relationship?

Sustainability Often we imagine our relationships as simple and self-sustaining. In fact, relationships are complex, and connected to other relationships and commitments, and require much attention over time to sustain. The Accompaniment Value of Sustainability means that we recognize that any given relationship will require an intentional commitment of attention and time to build up all those who are involved. In a mission project context, sustainability means embedding the project or work in the community as a whole, so that the project doesn’t depend only on one or two people, and can continue over time.

*After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. **Luke 10:1***

*I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. **John 15:15***

*Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ **John 20:21***

The Gospels are full of Jesus’ work in creating a sustainable community of disciples, with leaders empowered to carry on his reconciling mission. How can we learn from Jesus’ commitment to teach, walk with, and give responsibility to his disciples?

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.