



Epiphany Paper #4: *Accompaniment in Action*

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.

V. ACCOMPANIMENT IN ACTION

St. Augustine wrote, "It is solved by walking." Accompaniment bears fruit when we truly walk the road together. The Accompaniment Values come into play when we have to make decisions, share resources, recognize expertise, tell stories, and build networks as we engage God's mission.

As North American Christians, we recognize that these are areas of life together in which asymmetries of power are often present – and therefore, in living out Christ's mission of reconciliation, we are called to pay special attention to them. When we are attempting to walk with Christ and our brothers and sisters in accompaniment, it is important to ask questions about how our work is shaped in each of these areas. Learning to ask the Questions about these areas of our work together helps us to engage Accompaniment in Mission more effectively and honestly.

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>

Resource sharing

- **Resources include:** money, time, job and travel opportunities, access to decision-makers, family connections, housing and building facilities, expertise, legal status.
- **Some of the challenges:** In a situation where we are reaching out to the community beyond our church walls, we'll often have to think carefully about how to share resources, and to receive resources, with the people we meet in a way that respects the whole community, and doesn't lead to undermining relationships or self-sufficiency.

Resource sharing questions:

Who makes the decisions about the resources?

Who is not involved in the conversation?

Are all the resources identified?

Expertise recognizing

- **Expertise includes:** a special skill or advanced education, cooking and child care, knowledge of local situations and customs, political acumen, cultural and artistic gifts, "street smarts."
- **Some of the challenges:** Recognizing expertise is complex in relationships where power is unequal. Those with money and power are frequently acknowledged as experts, while those with other gifts go unrecognized and their expertise unused by the community.

Expertise recognizing questions:

Whose expertise is sought out, valued, used, and paid for? Whose expertise is not being welcomed and valued?

Storytelling

- **Storytelling includes:** sharing and listening to stories and experiences of others, with cameras, computers, journals, public-speaking, sermons, books, bulletins, and more.
- **Some of the challenges:** In relationships where power is unequal, our understanding of other people's stories is shaped by those who have access to the tools of the media – including the press, books, computers, and more. It is important to think about how our representations of others' stories might be shaped by our own cultural preconceptions. Are we representing other people in our stories as they themselves would see their own lives?

Storytelling questions:

Who gets to tell the story?

Who has access to the tools and platforms of storytelling?

What stories are not told, and who is expected to be silent?

Whose stories are valued and important, and whose stories are ignored?

Network building

- **Network building includes:** meeting and making connections with people; creating connections over time and space which will help support a sustainable

community; developing relationships between individuals, resource holders, and organizations.

- **Some of the challenges:** Everyone has a network, but not everyone's networks are equally powerful. It's important to consider connections to people, resources, and organizations as something to be shared with all members of the community, and strategically building bridges between less powerful and more powerful actors.

Network building questions:

Who has contacts with powerful or wealthy organizations or people, and how do those contacts benefit those who hold them?

How are those without such contacts disadvantaged?

How can we develop connections that will benefit less powerful members of our community?

Decision making

- **Decision making includes:** political legislation, vestries, congregational councils, committees, clergy, and individuals who hold power or resources.
- **Some of the challenges:** It's very typical in any organization for just a few powerful "insiders" to make the real decisions. It is a special problem for small organizations, where it becomes "just the way things are done." Many voices are unheard and unsought in this situation. Committing to transparency and negotiation, taking seriously the needs and suggestions of all who will be affected, can be a new situation for a community.

Decision making questions:

Who is involved in the decision making process?

Are there a few insiders who make the decisions?

Who benefits from the decisions?

What is the process, and can it be made more inclusive, open, and accountable to all?

Take a moment and think about the outreach ministries of your own congregation, your mission trips, or mission partnerships. . . Which of these areas did you most connect with?

Resource sharing

Storytelling

Decision making

Expertise recognizing

Network building

How might you incorporate these ideas into your present work in mission and outreach in your parish?

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.