



Epiphany Paper #5:

Accompaniment Formation

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.

VI. ACCOMPANIMENT FORMATION

All of this does not come easily. Like so much in our spiritual lives, it requires commitment and discipline. Because we are broken, we need the help of God's Holy Spirit to continue to return again and again to God's reconciling mission. We work to develop the capacities within us to walk with our companions on the way, and to meet Christ on the

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>

road. It is the journey that transforms us, and it is on the journey that we recognize Christ.

We are formed for God's mission by challenging ourselves to grow cognitively, emotionally and spiritually. The areas listed below are particularly important in our formation of God's reconciling mission.

Prayer – We are accompanied by Christ on our journey. God is always there for us. A discipline of regular prayer engages us with God's presence and God's reconciling mission.

Empathy – As we grow in our compassion, in our ability to feel the pain and joy of our companions and of all those who share the earth with us, we move from pity to compassion, from compassion to empathy, and from empathy to radical solidarity with our brothers and sisters.

Asset-based thinking – We learn to see our companion and ourselves as people and organizations with many assets, gifts and strengths, and identify what these are. Acknowledging asymmetries of power in relationship, we work to recognize that what has been seen as negative can actually be positive, a strength and resource to contribute to God's mission of reconciliation.

Systems-based thinking – This process helps us perceive the connections and interdependencies between self and other, between groups of people, between people and the earth, recognizing asymmetries of power in relationship, and connecting the dots between our personal lives and systemic realities.

Hospitality – How can we move beyond a generic welcome to creating a space that our companions find truly welcoming, where their gifts are honored and expressed? Christ's mission of reconciliation is an intimate challenge to the way we live and to our fear of vulnerability.

Worship – As we worship together, we learn to accompany one another and to become more inclusive as we gather at God's table. The baptismal font reminds us of the source of our calling to God's mission. We are sent out in the ministry of reconciliation and love. We engage and celebrate the gifts of worship, prayer and music of all of our sisters and brothers.

Scripture – We learn about God's reconciling mission in the world, and what God has done for us as we read and study scripture together, hearing together the living word.

VII. CONCLUSION

We are walking down the road together, and we sit to share a meal with this neighbor and stranger who had joined us, rejoicing in our new hope and understanding. And then the stranger disappears, and we are left staring across the table at our companion. What do we do now?

Alone, there is little we can do. It is only with our companion, our fellow witness that we can go out into the world to share the good news.

In engaging God's reconciling mission through accompaniment, we work to equip ourselves and our companions for our call to share the good news and to serve our neighbors. It is easy to do, and there will always be very real challenges. But God invites us to the table, and then sends us go out with our companions to share and to serve. When we tire, our companions hold us up; when our faith is weak, our companions remind us of what we have seen and shared together. God gave us companions for this purpose. Together, we can continue to live out God's reconciliation.

Now think about your own calling to mission and outreach in the world, and that of your church. . .

Discussion questions:

1. What do you think accompaniment means in regards to your walk in God's reconciling mission?

Ephesians 2:14–18

For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to you who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father