



March 2014 Message for Congregations and Lay and Rostered Leaders

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ –

May grace and peace be yours in abundance (1 Peter 1:2a).

In February I shared that I have been reading, and enjoying, Stephen P. Bouman's, *The Mission Table: Renewing Congregation & Community* (© 2013 Augsburg Fortress).

Over these next months, and relying heavily on Bouman's book as guide, I will be writing of several Marks of a Missional Congregation. Each brief article will include Scripture, questions for reflection and discussion, and a prayer. Perhaps your church council, adult study, youth group, coffee group will use these monthly writings as a time to engage in learning, discernment and reflection together.

A congregation in mission is always listening...to God and to the neighborhood.

From the very beginning of the gospel according to Luke it seems as if Jesus was always listening to others, drawing out their spiritual thirst and their hunger, responding with love and grace and truth. As a boy he is found listening to his elders in the faith. "After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions" (Luke 2:46).

Frequently we read in Luke's gospel that people didn't listen to Jesus. He reads the scriptures in his home church in Galilee and the hometown crowd won't listen (4:29). People are drawn to his public teaching and healing ministry and the religious leaders come up from Jerusalem to check out this Jesus (5:21). What they hear doesn't impress them. "Who does he think he is – the Messiah?"

Then one day, Jesus dines with friends and someone simply sits down and listens to him: "[Martha] had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying" (10:39). Mary listened and Jesus spoke. What did he say? What did she hear? We aren't told, but in the context of the deaf ears in Luke's gospel, I believe that Mary's listening was a graceful thing; her listening enabled Jesus to speak. We all know of Martha's busyness and that her tasks remain important. But maybe, like Mary's listening to Jesus, the most important miracles in congregations and in neighborhoods have their genesis in the silence and attentiveness of human conversation.

“The most effective mission strategies I have encountered have not been the ones with all the demographic bells and whistles and the embodiment of the latest process and strategic theories. They have been about congregations really caring and creating space and hospitality for the stories of their members and neighbors to be told. As it was for Jesus, to be in mission is to listen” (Bouman, page 41).

Read and Reflect: Luke 10:38-42

Discuss and Reflect:

1. What in this reading leads you to say, “I wonder about...”, or, “I noticed...”
2. Share an experience of a time when someone’s listening showed you great care and love.
3. How does your community of faith practice listening to God and to those in the neighborhood?
4. How does your community of faith practice listening in ways that create a space for people to experience Christ’s love and care?

Pray together: Direct us, Lord God, in all our doings with your most gracious favour, and extend to us your continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in you, we may glorify your holy name; and finally, by your mercy bring us to everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen. (Guidance, protection, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship: Pastoral Care*, p. 362)

The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13).

In Christ Jesus –
Shalom,
+Larry

The Rev. Dr. Larry Kochendorfer, Bishop
Synod of Alberta and the Territories
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada