

Some Thoughts about Being "Companions"

- 1. Our global mission relationships take time to grow into true accompaniment. That is ... we walk with our partner seeking to step at their pace ... seeking to see and understand their present context.**

Accompaniment is the manner of ELCA's global mission relationships. It is characterized by "A walking together in solidarity that practices interdependence¹," honoring of each other's integrity and wholeness, participatory decisionmaking, and mutuality.

The concept of accompaniment calls for a fundamental change in the implementation of global mission. A primary reality of accompaniment is the mutual respect of the companions with whom mission is shared.

Accompaniment challenges us to overcome the donor-receiver model whereby the Northern partner assumes the role of the donor and the Southern companion that of the receiver.

- 2. The role of a bishop or president in each church is understood by most as a critical one ... to represent a wider set of concentric circles is viewed as of great importance.**

The synodical leaders set the tone and the manner of the ELCA's companion relationship(s) by establishing an early connection with the companion church and its leader.

In relating to and visiting the companion, be a spiritual leader who is prepared to pray, preach, preside, administer sacraments, share scripture, offer blessings and words of encouragement, and express solidarity and fellowship in Jesus Christ.

Conduct yourself in ways that show deep respect and ability to interpret differences in culture and tradition.

- 3. The role of the bishop or president goes beyond sending persons from our synod to another part of the world. It also includes providing oversight to a fabric of relationships and understandings.**

Connect with companions at the level of our common faith, honoring the companion's leadership and history as well as the ELCA's history and relationship(s) in mission with this church.

Respect the Christian faith as expressed in cultures that give more value to community in contrast to North American traditions of individualism and selfexpression.

Ritual Leadership - Understand the bishop's important ritual role in occasions that give public expression to shared fellowship and mission such as consecrations and installations of bishops.

- 4. Our relationships grow when we understand that gifts are being unveiled and offered to us through sisters and brothers in our companion churches. In my synodical ministry, it is helpful to ask what have I received as a gift that informs what I am doing.**

Be ready to learn and receive what the host wishes to share and plan.

Ensure the participation and public leadership of synod women clergy and leaders in visits to the companion.

Develop skills for setting boundaries and offering dignity in response to inappropriate gestures of requests by both companions and synod members.

- 5. Many will find it helpful to sharpen and define the purposes of each companion church visit ...**

both ways ... stewardship ... lay Bible study ... structured for mission etc.

Seek counsel from DGM if your synod visitors intend to serve in ministries or work.

Visit your companion with "empty hands."

Carry a bishop's travel kit with items that express the bishop's public office such as a bishop's fuchsia shirt (where expected), bishop's cross, Bible, and token gifts that symbolize the spiritual nature of the companion relationship.

Ensure the ritual leadership of a visiting bishop or church leader to the ELCA synod and its public events and special occasions.

- 6. In our society many of us seek to be doers (at least I do) in companion visits ... it is important that we seek to nourish both the doing and the being within us.**

The synod should find creative ways to rechannel the efforts of entrepreneurs whose activities destroy mutuality and do not serve the mission of the whole.

- 7. Groups from our synod seek to be a great gift and to learn much. Occasionally, one can be tinkering in something wider or deeper than we understand...keeping the ELCADGM Area Program Director up to speed with what we are planning/doing/hearing is of great help.**

Ensure that the purposes of visits are transparent and synod representatives are accountable as representatives of the ELCA and your synod.

Consult with DGM Area Program Director for critical information in ELCA's relationships with the companion church, its structures, and other partner relationships.

Become acquainted with any written agreements the ELCA (and other mission partners) have with the companion church.

- 8. Gifts carry great meaning beyond their apparent value. In some cases they become "cargo" with all kinds of expectations or "trappings" attached that are real or not real. As citizens of the U.S., many of us need lifelong learning to understand the complexities of this.**

Sharing of financial assistance should be done only after the relationship is well established through sharing of visits, ministries, communications, spiritual fellowship.

Financial projects should be undertaken in consultation with the DGM Area Program Director to maximize the effectiveness of the project within the overall strategies of the church and its international mission partners.

Financial assistance should be given to projects that do not create further financial obligations or budget burdens for the companion. Contributions should not be given to ongoing functioning costs such as salaries and operating budgets.

The bishop and synod leadership should be in communication with the synod's pastors and congregations, informing them of the synod's official companion projects and opportunities to participate.

- 9. A helpful response as a companion church is to grow in the understanding we have of each other's context ... to advocate and be aware of justice issues, crises or persecution means reading and discussion.**

Make advocacy a primary focus of your companion relationship!

Consult with DGM for information regarding advocacy efforts undertaken by the companion church and ELCA's advocacy by DCSLOGA.

10. Transparency is a twelveletter word that reminds us how valuable it is to have all the people who might be involved know what we are up to, what we are thinking or planning.

Be attentive to who needs to be informed or copied when communicating.

Know who in the companion's national office should be informed in what circumstances if your synod's relationship is with a small judicatory of a large church.

Inform appropriate staff at DGM.

Be transparent about plans for financial support with both DGM and the companion church's leadership.

An illustration might help

Joseph Campbell once said *Where we thought to travel
outward, we shall come to the center of our own existence.
Where we had thought to be alone, we shall be with all the
world."*

Presented to the Conference of Bishops by Bishop Gary Hansen, October 3, 2000

1. Global Mission in the Twentyfirst Century, Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Division for Global Mission, 1999, p.5.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America