

WHERE WE ARE – March 29, 2009

Partnership for Missional Church is a process we have begun that will enable us as a church to listen to God's specific call to us. The program is one that will take us through a journey of discovery over the next three years. To begin the following people were trained by members of the consulting team from Church Innovations: Doreen Hutchison, Lynn Walker, Elizabeth Holland, Lee and John Cheek, Dutch Pinkston, Peter Raifstanger, Dick Kelly, Francie Hills and me*. Eleven other churches are part of this process, three are from Connecticut and the rest are from our diocese with the closest being Christ Church/Trinity Lutheran.

Church Innovations, creator of Partnership for Missional Church (PMC), has developed the program we are using over the last 20 years. During that time they have refined the process and can now demonstrate what churches get out of this journey. I won't give you all the statistics. I was impressed by the fact that 75% of the churches that begin the process are still engaged over two years later. There is a high correlation (77%) between congregations who stay in and longevity of pastorate and there was a 17% median growth in worship attendance over a 5 year period in congregations who stayed in the process.

These are not the reasons for engaging in this process though. The real question we will be answering is: "How will we (as a people of God) be a sign and an instrument of God's future?"

As with any journey, before you begin you need to know where you are. During the first phase of PMC we will discover who we are, where we are, and what God is currently doing in our midst. The discovery process has three components. The Listening Leaders will be conducting interviews with members of our congregation and there will also be interviews conducted with community leaders. Soon you will be able to participate in the Congregational Timeline Event. We will take a look at the history of St. James before any of us were alive and our collective time at St. James. Additionally we are compiling data to create a population and demographic profile based on the towns we serve. We will profile financial, attendance, and membership information.

All of this work is nourished by scripture. Each day of our training we read and discussed Luke 10: 1-12. We will all have the opportunity to take some time one Sunday to participate in the most critical aspect of PMC, "Dwelling in the Word." I won't characterize this passage for you as I would like to encourage you to look it up and read it for yourself. I will just say that like all of the brilliant things our Lord Jesus said there is a lot to chew on in this reading.

Although the entire process is a long one, we will move through the first phase this spring. The Listening Leaders will conclude their interviews by May 20th. Please ask God's blessings on the discovery work we are doing and feel free to ask any of us to explain more about this if you have questions or suggestions.

*Steering Team Leader: Kathy Clausen, members of both teams: Doreen Hutchison and John Cheek, Steering Team members also include Francie Hills, Peter Raifstanger and Elizabeth Holland. Leader of the Listener Leaders is Lynn Walker, and other the Listening Leaders are Dick Kelly, Dutch Pinkston.