

Paying Attention

by Pastor Helga Jansons Director for Evangelical Mission

A Poem: "TURNING TO ONE ANOTHER" by Margaret Wheatley

There is no power greater than a community discovering what it cares about.

Ask: "What's possible?" not "What's wrong?" Keep asking.

Notice what you care about. Assume that many others share your dreams.

Be brave enough to start a conversation that matters. Talk to people you know. Talk to people you don't know. Talk to people you never talk to.

Be intrigued by the differences you hear. Expect to be surprised. Treasure curiosity more than certainty.

Invite in everybody who cares to work on what's possible. Acknowledge that everyone is an expert about something.

Know that creative solutions come from new connections.

Remember, you don't fear people whose story you know. Real listening always brings people closer together.

Trust that meaningful conversations can change your world.

Rely on human goodness. Stay together.

There is new energy and enthusiasm across our synod. It seems as if people are eager to serve and become involved in ministry, particularly as leaders. One example of this was when in the space of less than two hours I invited people to attend a three day Ministry Coaching training in Seattle and one person after another said yes. We now have eight people trained to coach lay leaders and pastors especially in the area of stewardship and discipleship. Similarly, I asked ten people to lead three different workshops at Synod Assembly and all of them said yes.

What does this mean? I think it means people love to use their gifts and to develop their own competence and skills. They want to help others, and we are multiplying leaders across the synod. After all, our synod's purpose is to Equip God's People for Ministry. Connecting to the poem: we value community, people care and can care together, are brave enough to learn from others and to see things differently, and to become an expert about something they can share with others. Coaching, for example, includes a relationship of trust and meaningful conversations, so that we can grow and new things become possible.

As I travel around the synod I hear about surprising ministries. Sometimes it comes from an interest or passion as for Pastor Inger Hanson at Shepherd of the Mountains in Jackson, WY. Her dog Hobey, is the source of her creative evangelism. On St. Francis Day the church members offered "Pet Blessings to Go" in three different locations including on a hiking trailhead where church Facebook photos show blessings of horses and dogs that received treat bags and most of all rich conversations about what a church can be. I heard about this ministry during a Ventures for Growing Stewards workshop led by Kristin Koskella (Net-Worker in Southern Idaho) and myself in Pocatello, ID, when we talked about what stewardship means. I knew it was so much more than finances, but pet blessings had not occurred to me!

One way to lift up new ideas of what is possible is by encouraging people to tell their stories. One of my goals is for each church to have at least one Mission Interpreter who is given the authority to inform the church about where their money goes, thank people for their stewardship and also to encourage others to tell their stories of how the church is making a difference. Stories are being posted on our synod website for all to read and share.

I am so glad for our EWAIID Synod Mission Plan using the Net-Worker model. We have four Net-Workers who can pay close attention to the dedication, competence, creativity, passion, energy and vitality in ministry around the synod. By focusing on those things that are working well, it helps them to grow. New life is God's future for us all!

