

# Go And... Pray

## June 20th, 2024 Minutes

Number of Participants: 17 (as of 7:32 pm)

### **Welcome and Opening Prayer: Rev. Courtney Smith Westerlund, Rev. Menzi Nkambule**

- Introduction of team member Rev. Joe Graumann who was not present at the May gathering and is leading the discussion about our book. He serves at St. Stephen's, Woodbury, NJ.

### **Presentation and Discussion of *Joining God, Remaking Church, Changing the World* by Alan J. Roxburgh, Rev. Joe Graumann**

- If you need a copy of this book, please let us know! We have copies available for anyone interested in diving more into the material we discussed tonight.
- A summary of the book is also available on our page and was distributed to all participants via email

The Problem: the old is not working

- We need to look at the changes churches experience are an **unraveling**
  - The church was thriving and peaked in the 1960s and has been slowly declining ever since
  - In ever metric, giving, numbers, etc., the church is shrinking
- Nothing that has been tried has stopped or reverse the overall unraveling

The Opportunity: Holy Opportunity, let's listen to God

- What if we let God do the leading?
- What if we listen to what God is up to instead of focusing on what we think/do?
- God is at work and we need to take that seriously
- God sends us and participates in the world
  - God is acting. God is in our neighborhoods even if we are not
- Church is meant to be a living embodiment of the Gospel
  - It is all of our jobs to do this work.
- God is already out there, we just have to look for and discern where God is at work
- Our primary job is to listen.

Breakout Room Discussion

- What challenges does your congregation face?
- Where have you seen God at work in your everyday life recently?

The places God is at work are often more like birthday candles, little glimmers of light, as opposed to giant blow ups” - Rev. Judy Anderson

Listening: the only way we can figure out what God is up to, is by opening ourselves up and listening.

- Engage in Dwelling in the Word: optional for Luke 10:1-12
  - Read 2x and contemplate what stands out to you and where God is leading
- Listen to Neighborhood
  - Map it: literally or figuratively. Where do people gather? Walking vs. driving (parking)? Who is there? When is it busy?
  - Walk it: note who is present, who is overlooked, who needs help, what leaders are in the community?
  - Reflect on what you see, hear, and experience
  - This is challenging and requires us to go beyond our comfort zones

Discerning: is about being open to the Holy Spirit to move you and guide your thoughts and decisions and wondering

- Holy Curiosity
- Gather as a group and discern based on your listening step
  - First meeting: Dwell in the Word and share observations
  - Meet a second time: share something from the past week
  - Between second and third meeting - discern
    - Where is the Spirit inviting you? Where do you feel the pull of the Spirit? What would it look like to join and engage?
  - Third meeting: share and starting making a plan or action steps

Breakout Room Discussion

- How easy is it to meet people in your church's neighborhood? What are some challenges?
- What are some strategies you use to "connect to God"?

Do: put the rubber to the road

- The first part of doing things is waiting to see if anyone will show up or if this will work
- Try new things and be willing to fail
  - It might take a while for something to gain attention and for people to come
  - Keep doing things so long as you feel the tug of the Spirit
- Experiments that work
  - Simple, unstructured, flexible
  - Challenging and free of expertise
  - People-first: full of listening and partnership

Reflect: evaluate what you did, what worked and how it could be improved

- How do we communicate the event or the results in a way that gets people involved

Decide: make decisions together

- Schedule, budget, investment, communications, etc.
- How can you involve more people?

- Think about the process and share what you learned
- Repeat

It's a cycle: listening, discerning, testing, reflecting, deciding

Breakout Room Discussion:

- What groups in your congregation can be catalysts for innovation? Which ones might oppose it?
- Why does reflection help with innovation?
- Who are the leaders in your church that can help with *deciding*?

**Dwelling in the Word: Luke 10:1-12, 17, Rev. Judy Anderson**

- What stands out to you?
  - Peace to you
  - The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few
    - Realistic nature of this verse - this was a problem in Jesus' time just as it is today. This is nothing new.
  - Immigration: need for people to come and yet we don't welcome people with kindness
  - 72 others (who even has that many?!)
    - Yet it's also very honest about the reality of the work we do
  - Lambs in the midst of wolves - can elicit some fear as we step out into the unknown
    - Yet it's also very honest about the reality of the work we do
- Where is God leading you?
  - God sends us where God plans to go already
  - Keep on keeping on and know not everyone is going to love it
  - We tend to be hard on ourselves - people are still there!!!!
    - The people who are coming want to be there - if they are choosing you, they are doing so for a reason
  - Meet people where they are
  - Don't assume you know what they need, don't bring the stuff that isn't working
  - The Kingdom of God has come near - if this is true, what does this mean? There's a lot of room and grace in this

**Blessing from "Speak it Plainly", Rev. Menzi Nkambule**

- God sends and guides you with love

**Go And Planning Team:**

- Rev. Maristela Freiberg, Director for Evangelical Mission and Assistant to Bishop
- Rev. Jay Berry, St. Mark's Oaklyn
- Rev. Courtney Smith Westerlund, Messiah Oakland
- Rev. Danielle McCleary, St. Matthew Secaucus
- Lois Parrett, Abiding Presence Ewing and NJ Synod Staff
- Rev. Judy Anderson, St. Thomas Brick
- Rev. Dianne Lewis, Trinity Jersey City
- Rev. Menzi Nkambule, St. Matthew Jersey City

- Rev. Joe Graumann, St. Stephen Woodbury
- Jill Collict, Faith Hillsborough