**Why Church: Learning to Listen, Tell Our Stories, and Invite**

In 2019, the Minneapolis Area Synod secured an ELCA grant to launch a pilot project, known as “Why Church,” for short. The desired outcomes: “Congregations will be better able to discern how God is at work in their context and join in, more vital congregations will be seen as relevant by neighbors, and congregants will have learned to graciously invite friends and family into Christian communities that work for just and healthy neighborhoods.” A team of church leaders developed a curriculum, invited a select group of congregations into the pilot, provided them training in key skills, and assigned coaches to accompany each congregation. The pilot is now re-launching, in these waning days of Covid-19 precautions.

The expectations and tasks for participating congregations are:

* Build a “Why Church?” team of 3-5 people, including a pastor or committed staff or lay leader.
* Participate as a team in 3-5 skill-building sessions, as appropriate for each church’s goals.
* With guidance, develop a strategy & timeline to implement these practices in each context.
* Work with a team coach to evoke measurable change throughout the “Why Church” season.
* Contribute half ($500) of the participation and coach fees. (ELCA grant covers other half.)
* Understand: these new practices may require a congregational culture-shift, which takes time.
* Conduct an initial baseline assessment and periodic evaluations during the process.

Five congregations formed teams, attended the training sessions, and several began working with coaches. Then the COVID-19 shut down began. Now, starting in 2021, the initiative is ready for re-launch, tailorable to each congregation’s situation, and open to welcoming other congregations into the process. A new DEM in the Minneapolis Area Synod will join with the initiative’s contracted coordinator and coaches to refresh and renew the project.

These are the “Why Church” Skill-building Sessions

God’s Story and My Story

Plumb the rich depths of the biblical narrative to discover the stories that most resonate with your spiritual quest.

Discovering & Developing Your Story

Get in touch with how God has been active in your life and put that discovery into words that you can share simply and powerfully with others.

Listening with Curiosity and Courage

Learn the art of the one-to-one relational meeting, so that you listen deeply and inquire boldly, to learn what God is up to in another person’s life.

Extending a Natural Invitation

Combine what you know about another person, about yourself, and about God into a compelling invitation into Christian community.

Making a Plan & Leading Change in the Congregation

Lay out a concrete strategy and timeline for incorporating these spiritual practices into the life of your congregation.

*Contact “Why Church” Coordinator Rev. Susan Engh (*[*revsue@engh.casa*](mailto:revsue@engh.casa)*) for more information*