

In her Weekly Word from September 27, Pastor Barb Holzhauser from Martin Luther LC talks about our One Church Experiment. *It is an excellent summary!*

Recent conversation has made it apparent that we need to revisit what the One Church Experiment is all about. One of the things that happens with any new thing is the human tendency to “get the cart before the horse” and jump too far ahead. Especially when we’re engaged in a process where we don’t yet know the outcome. People have a really hard time with “process” because it is full of unknowns - we just want to know what’s going to happen! We are uncomfortable with “process” and fight the adage “trust the process”.

But, truth be known, the Holy Spirit still invites to do just that — trust that God is at work in the midst of the unknown. I heard someone once say, “What is the next best thing? Do that first before anything else.” It’s important to note that any initiative taken by the collaborating congregations will be chosen by the congregations themselves. Yes, there are factors at play that are “pushing us” toward certain inevitabilities, but that is for *all* of us to wrestle with . . . together.

Those elements will become clearer as we do the work! Again, the goal of the One Church Experiment is to form collaborative ministry sites that are proclaiming the gospel by sharing mission, ministry, ministers, and money. These vital connections (aka relationships) are needed to empower the witness of the God’s people in this time and place.

For over a century every church has been an “island” – something that the polity of the ELCA reinforces by its governing documents. This has led to a sense of isolation from our faith neighbors at best, and a sense of “competition” at its worst. The fact is that God has ONE church in many locations.

There’s a distinction between “congregations” (the way we’ve been *organized*) and “Church” – that body that God brought to life in the world (a living *organism*). The church is a gathering of people – Luther used the word “assembly” when referring to the church. The church is a collection of “assembled believers” who join the work of God’s Spirit in the world. To summarize what several Lutheran scholars have noted, *“In every new day the imagination of an organization and renewed wisdom are needed to effect the church’s mission.”* In other words, the church is at once reformed and reforming, constantly reinventing itself for opportunities in a new era of mission and ministry.

The One Church Experiment is a modern-day invitation by God to explore what it means to be the church today. With any good experiment we anticipate outcomes. The hope is for things to happen that will strengthen ministry, however we are not necessarily tied to those outcomes if they do not.

At minimum the hope is that there will be:

1. Clear and shared mission and vision
2. Empowered laity
3. Partnerships for rostered ministers
4. Improved relationships among the collaborative partners and members.

Bonus outcomes might include:

1. Increased adaptability
2. Deep relationships with the surrounding community
3. More energy and resources for missional work in the world
4. A deeper witness to God's redeeming presence in the community.

The One Church Experiment is basically a living "laboratory" where new and exciting possibilities for the church can be lived out right here and right now.