

Delaware-Maryland Synod

Listening Posts

October – November, 2013

Summary of Findings

Background Information: There were 12 “Listening Post” sessions held throughout the synod on 4 Saturday mornings in October and November, one in each of the conferences and an additional session in the Delmarva Conference. These 3 hour sessions were facilitated by Discernment Team members following the same script and outline which included Bible Study (Ephesians 4), a summary of the discernment process, an overview of the role of the synod and small group discussion around 3 key questions. The questions were designed to match questions asked in the synod-wide survey. In total, there were 152 rostered and lay participants averaging 13 people per session.

Below is a summary of the most frequent responses and discussion items. It is presented in two formats. First, you will find is a summary of the overall comments shared in response to all 3 questions. Second, there is a listing of the most frequent responses to each individual question. Lastly, included is a list of suggestions, ideas or issues that may be of value but did not fit into one of questions directly.

A. Overall Responses:

- **Synodical Communication** was the single most frequent response from every Listening Post. Participants expressed concern over not being informed of activities or issues of the synod or of other congregations. They also identified need for transparency and support from the synod office. Many expressed that the website, emails, and mailing systems need to be improved and asked for help in carrying synod information to the congregational members.
- **Conduit for Resources:** Nearly every Listening Post session identified the desire for the synod to provide access to resources. This includes sharing and teaching around materials and programs, especially in areas of stewardship, evangelism, education, discipleship, and senior care. This was lifted up in many of the sessions as a process for sharing best practices between congregations.
- **Linking Congregations:** Many of the participants emphasized a desire to feel connected with other congregations primarily for support and encouragement but also for exploring shared ministries. This was expressed in a couple of different ways; some wanted congregations of the same size linked, some wanted geographic areas linked more, and some saw value in very different congregations linked (urban/rural, older/younger, large/small, etc.) In addition to the support model, there were also many who wanted to see congregations sharing ministries between linked congregation such as youth ministry, community outreach, social ministry, etc.

- **Strengthening Lay Leadership:** Many participants saw a great need around helping congregational lay leaders develop both their skills and faith. The most frequent suggestions for this was to help congregations:
 - a) identify their vision and mission
 - b) analyze their context/community for greater impact
 - c) deepen the faith, discipleship of the church members

- **Youth and Young Adult Ministry** was a frequent response by participants. This was expressed in two different ways, one as a synod level ministry that links congregation based ministry and the other as a more integrated model that helps congregations reach their youth when they don't have a youth ministry. Many also expressed the need to learn how to reach and attract young adults in their congregations.

- **Social Justice and Diversity Issues** were also frequent responses. This captures both the need for the synod to lead ministries among the poor and needy, immigrants, etc. as well as helping each congregation to engage in these ministries. Tied to this is the need to understand and embrace the diversity of our culture and geographic territory. Also included is the desire for help to engage in international ministries to people in need.

- **Call / Candidacy Process:** Many participants expressed concern that this system appears unclear as to how it functions. Concern was also expressed around how to support clergy and other leaders after the call is in place and how to help resolve issues when conflict arises.

B. Responses by Question *(ranked in order of response frequency)*

1. Question 1: What are the top three ministries in which our synod should engage in the next 5-10 years?

- Engaging in our Neighborhood / Context (diversity, ecumenical, understand needs, evangelism)
- Clear two-way communication link among congregations, and between synod leadership and congregations
- Youth, young adult & family ministries
- Social justice, needs of the poor, hunger, crime, immigrant ministries
- Lay Leadership / Discipleship training, support
- Other multiple responses: campus ministry, worship support, stewardship (and financial) support, evangelism (unchurched) support, senior ministry, call process, ministry resource center

2. Question 2: What would be the single best action our synod could take to support congregations in carrying out God's mission in the world today?

- Improve communication
- Operate as resource center to share best practices, programs, etc.
- Link congregations with each other for support and ministry
- Revise the call process including more transparency, responsibilities, roles, more grace/less law.
- Help congregations uncover their mission/vision
- Other multiple responses: Education Events, Train Lay leaders, renew and/or start new congregations
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3. What is needed to make congregation effective in ministry?

- Lay leadership training and support
- Best practices sharing and partnerships with other congregations
- Communication within and outside the congregation
- Help to discern their mission, vision, strengths and needs, assessments, etc.
- Discipleship support, training, focus – growing the faith and dedication of the membership
- Prayer
- Stewardship and help with giving, financial issues, resources
- Other multiple responses: youth ministry, young adults ministry, outreach to the community, evangelism, Bible study, financial support

4. Issues, Comments, Ideas

- Rural vs. urban, Baltimore vs. rest of synod (multiple responses)
- Have one member of each congregation trained and supported as Link or Liaison to/from the synod (multiple suggestions)
- More opportunities for Synod-wide gatherings with greater impact than small gatherings (multiple responses)
- Improve Synod Assembly, process for electing bishop (multiple responses)
- Sharing across synod lines – resources, pastoral candidates