

The Eastern Synod has been a global mission companion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Guyana (ELCG) for over twenty years. Perhaps you have asked, as I have, what does it mean to be a companion? Why do we do this?

We have maintained this relationship in various ways. In recent years, Rev. Vivian Roberts served for two years in Berbice, New Amsterdam, Guyana. Rev. Dr. Peter Kuhnert continues to visit Guyana, at least annually, to provide mental health training and support. We have connected annually by sending a synodical representative to attend the ELCG's national convention and we have had the President of the ELCG attend our synod assembly.

It still begs the question, should we be in relationship?

When evaluating this relationship, cost is not a consideration. We have been blessed by "extra mile" givers, those people who support the Bishops' Company for Mission. The members of the Bishops' Company provide the funding required to support this relationship.

This fall, Rev. Riitta Hepomaki, Assistant to the Bishop and I went to Georgetown, Guyana to meet with, President, Rev. Conrad Plummer; Treasurer, Davy Ram; Secretary, Elocia Smith and members of the council, Rev. Leroy Nicholson, Rev. Amanda Singh and Rev. Shirley Jaundoo. Our goal was to connect and re-connect with the leadership and to deepen the understanding of our relationship with the church in Guyana. We were joined by representatives from the Florida-Bahamas Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) who also have a companion relationship.

I will confess that I went to Guyana with the view that perhaps it was time to end this relationship. As a church and synod, we have so many priorities and activities that we should and want to be doing. Perhaps this was one thing that we could relinquish? I came away from Guyana, from a very different perspective.

To assist us in understanding what it means to be a companion, and to help us to evaluate our relationship, Paulina Dasse, Manager for Relationship, Latin America and the Caribbean, ELCA facilitated the meeting together, with Rev. Jaime Dubon, Area Program Director, Latin America and the Caribbean. We talked about the values of companionship – mutuality, inclusivity, vulnerability, empowerment and sustainability.

We had an opportunity to share more about each of our churches – demographics, challenges and key strategic priorities. Together, we articulated our differences, what has created tension and what have been the highlights in being in relationship. Davy Ram shared how attending a youth conference in Florida over 20 years ago, connected him to the church and encouraged him to become a youth leader. If you attended the Eastern Synod Assembly in 2018, you will remember Rev. Conrad Plummer's powerful message of being neighbour in a Guyanese context.

Throughout the two days of meetings, we came to realize that while we know each other, we have an opportunity to build the relationship.

Often, when we think of the term, relationship, we think in terms of reciprocity. What can I get from you and what can I give to you. (How many times have we heard "win, win, win" when we hear national leaders talk about the new NAFTA and other trade deals?). Being a global companion isn't about winning or giving something to get something. It is about being in relationship. Accepting and loving each other for who we are, without conditions. Sounds like grace to me?

Knowing that we are called together to be Christ's hands and feet in the world, knowing that we are working to fulfil God's mission and to grow disciples, albeit, in different contexts and different places, is enough. Our national Bishop Susan Johnson summed it up best when she spoke at a recent Bishops' Company lunch. She said, global companions allow us to "live out our reality of being part of the global communion" and help us grow into a new reality, in which each church will always and at all times understand itself as one, being at both the giving and receiving end, learning from each other and adding value to each other."

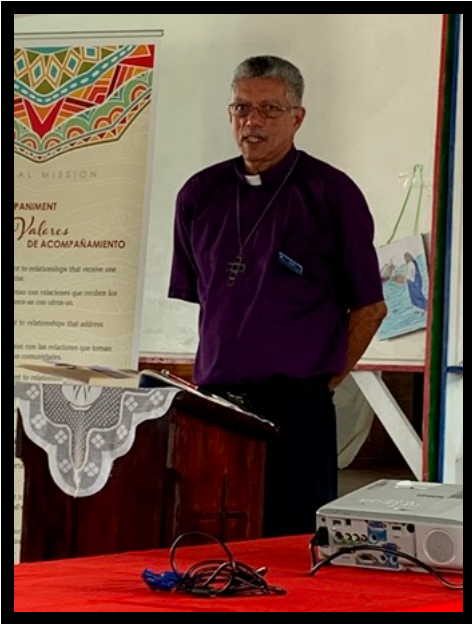
What's next? As a synod, we have committed to participate in quarterly conference calls where the purpose is simply to get to know each other better. We will work to build consistency in the relationship by identifying key contacts vs. just having synodical representation. We will exchange seasonal greetings, devotions and prayers. We will look for opportunities for more meaningful annual visits and exchanges.

We left Guyana, knowing that this was a relationship that we wanted to be in.

Lifting up the ELCG leaders in my prayers, continually reminds me that we do not do God's work alone. We are called together in this work. We are enough. We have enough.



Rev Riitta Hepomaki, Assistant to the Bishop (third from the right) and Laurie Knott, Eastern Synod Vice Chair (center) met with representatives from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Guyana and the Florida- Bahamas Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



Rev Conrad Plummer, President, ELCG



Morning devotions