

EKvW- Listener group 5/27-5/29

Thank you for asking me to listen, to reflect and to give my feedback on behalf of our church to: "Mission today". It was a wonderful experience to be part of the rainbow of God's people from all around the world as we share in God's mission. We are living out Pentecost—despite differences and background, various languages and cultures, we are all gathered to worship God who sends us out into the world to proclaim the Good News (Luke 4).

We are all united in Christ through the Holy Spirit and sent into God's world (i.e.: our particular context). Using the universal Christian symbol, the cross, we gather to worship (horizontal beam) and then are sent out to be Christ's hands and feet in the world (vertical beam). We live at the intersection where the two beams meet – we are breathing in and fed by God's word and then to go into the world to spread Christ's love.

How do we live out: "Mission today"?

Every context is differently- for us it might be opening our church to the LGBTQ+ community or speaking up for BLM. Every church needs to find ways to live out the message. The purpose of the church is not only to worship on Sunday morning, but we worship in order to **be** the church during the week. Or as Emil Brunner said: "The Church exist by mission like fire exists by burning."

We in our church saw a need in our community and responded practically. Last year, during COVID, our church, Westerville Community UCC, opened its doors from Monday to Friday from 7:00 am to 6:00 pm for children in elementary school. We offered space and partnered with the local YWCA so that parents were able to go to work and their children age 5-10 were safe and looked after during the day. The schools were closed due to COVID, there was only online school, and parents needed to leave home to go to work and didn't want to leave their school age children alone at home. We provided safe space, free high-speed internet and trained teachers to supervise and help the kids learn in much smaller classes than any public school could offer. The kids also received meals during the day. Before and after the 'official' class time, the children played games, made crafts, played music or did homework. Our church saw this opportunity to reach out to the community and to spread God's love. We cared for those in need without 'evangelizing'- but people from the local community associated our church as a safe place for their kids and we had many interactions with staff and parents. Through offering hospitality and generosity, and conversations, we 'bridged' the gap and 'talked faith' without 'hitting the people with Bible verses over their head'.

As Christians, we are Easter people. We not only believe in the resurrection but count on in and live out the Good News of hope. Our faith is joyful, and we share God's love whenever and wherever we can. We are sent out (i.e. mission) to be ambassadors of Christ, and to spread love to our neighbors whoever

and wherever they are. We are sent out to be Christ- like, so that others can see God working in and through us. The Holy Spirit equips us to share the gospel, to work for peace and justice and to lift each other up as a beloved child of God. St Francis is supposed to have said: "Preach the gospel in all places, when necessary, use words".

However, I have noticed, that sometimes we in the UCC, are hesitant to use the 'e'- word. We shudder when we hear the word 'evangelize' and do not know how to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. We might learn from our international and ecumenical partners of how to better speak about our faith without being embarrassed. We might need to listen of how others are 'filled with joy and faith' and learn not to be "ashamed to share the gospel" (Romans 1:16).

In closing: Today on my Facebook feed, I read the following quote: which might serve as a summary of how Mission today could look like: "The question should never be:" Is this action left or right wing, liberal or conservative, socialist or capitalist? The question should be: Does this action, love my neighbor, look out for the interest of others, more than my own, manifests the fruit of the Spirit (Michael J Svigel, Department Chair and Professor of Theological Studies)

Thank you again for listening to my reflection on the international and ecumenical conference. It was a true honor to participate and to have a voice at the table.

Blessings to you all, as we live out what it means to be 'Mission today'

Rev. Dr. Sigrid Rother , UCC, USA