



## Project Isaiah 43 Conference Events Summary

The Project Isaiah 43 conference events invited every congregation in the synod – not just small ones, not just ones without a pastor, but EVERY congregation – to send four people to a “World Café” style structured conversation around the “new thing” God is doing among us. There is no question that the Christian Church is in the midst of a paradigm shift. As the priesthood of all believers, your discernment of the movement of the Holy Spirit is crucial to us perceiving the new thing among us. Therefore, Bishop Barbins and your synod staff invited every congregation to join in this conversation.

There was a working hypothesis that was shared at the event (more details in a moment) that involved congregations working together. We started the conversations by inviting participants to share how they have experienced congregations cooperating in some way – and what were the positive things that came out of those experiences? At the end of the 20-minute conversation, participants were invited to write on sticky notes the key thoughts from their conversation. This “harvest” was then posted on the wall for all to see.

A review of the 250 sticky notes from this conversation surfaced the following key themes about the positives or benefits from the experience of congregations cooperating:



The sticky notes included over 100 examples of cooperation between congregations. A sampling of those includes:



Another 70+ sticky notes described the impact of this cooperation:



The second question asked participants to identify the challenges and obstacles to congregations cooperating because we all know they exist. There were 205 sticky notes harvested after this conversation. About a fourth of the sticky notes described

challenges in general to being the Church today. The prevalent themes around the challenges or obstacles to congregations cooperating were:



Bishop Barbins and the synod staff then shared more about the working hypothesis. They started by describing the difference between cooperation and collaboration:

Cooperation: helping someone with their goal; individual ownership

Collaboration: working together for a shared goal; co-ownership

Bishop Barbins called our attention to the biblical imagery around collaboration that the Apostle Paul uses in his letters - the image of the human body - and she led us in a time of Dwelling in the Word using portions of 1 Corinthians 12.

This brought us to the articulation of a working hypothesis:

What if God is calling groups of congregations - not just two, but four to six congregations - a collaborative or consortium - to be the body of Christ together in their communities? These consortiums or collaboratives of congregations

would have a shared mission and vision within their communities. They would be served by a staff of at least two pastors and potentially a deacon who would help shepherd the life of the consortium - and be led at least in part by a trained lay minister who could effectively and soundly lead worship when one of the pastors or the deacon could not be present. Each congregation would retain their name, identity, and worship time and maintain their own building.

Participants then engaged in conversation around this question: What possibilities may God be placing before us if congregations were to come together as the body of Christ and collaborate on the whole of their congregational life?

Of the 236 sticky notes harvested from this conversation, there were a couple dozen comments that expressed a negative view of this prospect. An equal number of comments provided some suggestions to explore or raised questions regarding how this could be implemented. Each of these comments will be explored as we continue to move forward.

The overwhelming majority of sticky notes (125) contained positive comments or described the positive impact such collaboration could bring. A sampling of these responses:



The conversation begun at the five conference events will continue at our Synod Assembly on June 1 as we engage in more “World Café” style conversations as part of Project Isaiah 43.

You can view the Miro board of the nearly 700 sticky notes used to arrive at the above summary by clicking this link:

[https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVKPvxmPE=?share\\_link\\_id=167419950736](https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVKPvxmPE=?share_link_id=167419950736)