

# Session 7:

## Where Do We Go From Here?

### GUIDING QUESTIONS

What makes for vital Christian communities in the Pacific Northwest, and what does this mean for our congregation? How does what we've learned and discovered during this class impact how we do ministry in our congregation?

### PREPARATION

- Handout (1 side): "Quick Tips for Doing Ministry in the Northwest"
- Candle and other items for altar/worship area
- Copies of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* or other resource for reading and singing
- Whiteboard or newsprint and markers
- Paper and pencils

If you've created lists of the gifts, yearnings and needs of the people in this region over the course of the class, have these posted on the wall as people enter.

### WELCOMING ACTIVITY

5 minutes

Throughout this course we have been talking about how "things are different out here." Have participants share their name and one tip they would offer to a pastor or congregational leader moving to the Northwest from the Midwest.

### OPENING WORSHIP

5 minutes

- Light the candle in your worship area.
- Bring to awareness the "gifts, yearnings, and needs" sheets representing the people of the Pacific Northwest. (If you did not record these, create a summary poster of characteristics.) Ask participants to silently and prayerfully reflect upon the people represented by these.
- Offer prayer, asking God for openness and direction for your congregation to minister creatively in this unique region.
- Read or sing ELW 715, "Christ, Be Our Light"

### INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY

10 minutes

Distribute the handout, "Quick Tips for Doing Ministry in the Northwest." These are suggestions compiled by the Salmon Nation project participants after study and reflection on our region. Ask participants to read it and mark the three tips that are most important for their congregation and add any other tips that they come up with.

**LARGE GROUP  
ACTIVITY**  
15 minutes

Using a whiteboard or newsprint to tally results, figure out which “quick tips” were selected most frequently by group members. List additional tips they came up with. Reflect together on the meaning of these findings for your congregation.

**LARGE GROUP  
DISCUSSION**  
10 minutes

Recall the salmon analogy from Session 2 regarding the adaptations the salmon makes between fresh and salt waters. In the same way, the church needs to undergo changes to minister in a vital way in our unique setting. As Salmon Nation group member Jim Norlie reflected,

*Those changes the salmon undergo between the fresh water and salt water occur in the mysterious depths, where no one can witness or record them. From there it's off to the cold, deep ocean where still more mystery awakens and strengthens them for their journey and eventual return. All this happens with no immediate outcomes to measure. And yet, the things that happen in the deep make all the difference later on.*

*So it may be with the changes God's people and God's church undergo as we adapt to regional realities and changing times. There is mystery in the way God's Spirit works in us, and we give ourselves over to this creative, necessary, God-directed change which is shaping us even now.*

Ask participants to respond to the following and record their responses:

- What are the aspects and activities of your church that speak to the yearnings and needs of people in this unique setting?
- Based on what you've discovered in this class about spirituality in the Northwest and your congregation, what two or three practices, emphases, or attitudes would you like to see emphasized or added?

**PLANNING FOR  
FOLLOW-UP  
ACTION**  
5 minutes

See if one or two items rise to the top of the list. Explore how/if to implement these changes. What might you need to drop from your congregation to focus on these things?

**CLOSING**  
5 minutes

Have participants share one thing they will take with them from this course. End with a prayer of thanks for the people and experience of this class.

# Quick tips for doing ministry in the Pacific Northwest

(Suggested by "Practicing our Faith in Salmon Nation" project participants)

- a. Read *The None Zone*, ed. by Patricia O'Connell Killen and Mark Silk or *Sacred Landscapes in Tension*, ed. by Jan Shipps and Mark Silk (Religion & Public Life Series, AltaMira Press).
- b. Know that ministry is tough out here; don't take it personally.
- c. Don't assume that people – even the ones in your churches – know much about Lutheranism, the Bible, or Christianity.
- d. Pay attention to the wild salmon; they are a barometer of the health of this bio-region.
- e. Listen to and elicit the stories of this place – and of your congregation. Then proclaim them.
- f. People out here are thirsty for God, and our rich liturgical and theological tradition can help quench that thirst. Explain things, but don't water them down.
- g. Ministry can be lonely out here. Cultivate a community of colleagues for prayer, discussion and support. Meet regularly.
- h. Intentional, regular faith practices such as grace before meals, scripture reading, retreats, and service to others are important for you and your congregation to connect to God's presence. People may need basic instruction in how to do these.
- i. Although small in numbers, the church in these parts can and does make a difference in its service to and advocacy for "the least of these."
- j. Proclaim in this nature-loving place that God is in, with, and under all of creation.
- k. The Pacific Northwest is further along the post-Constantinian/post-Christian trajectory than other U.S. regions. Value this! We are on the cutting edge of ministry.
- l. Concern for creation and ecojustice can be meeting grounds for your members and those outside the congregation.
- m. Don't equate church attendance with faith.
- n. Offer a peaceful refuge, community, a connection to the earth, a strong moral center and opportunities to serve others.
- o. Ask questions. Listen.
- p. Let awareness of the natural world influence your worship practices.
- q. Take time to learn the history of your place. Read Timothy Egan's *The Good Rain*.
- r. Identify your watershed and ways to protect it.
- s. Take a hike – and let the natural world speak to your spirit.
- t. Free your preaching from theological jargon.
- u. The Pacific Northwest has a history of importing its culture from "back East." Cultivate and support uniquely Northwest cultural expressions in your congregation and beyond. Dig for them.