VOLUME 33 | ISSUE 1 JANUARY 2025

NORTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD
MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Gaining Strength Together: The Journey of NEPA Synod Cohorts

Following the Bishop's Conference in the fall of 2021 with Rev. Doug Hill (author of "Cultural Architecture"), the Synod launched its first Gaining Strength Cohort. This cohort, while initially similar to the cohorts happening across the country in the ELCA, turned out to be quite different. This cohort was comprised entirely of pastors from the NEPA Synod instead of pastors around the country. This gave the cohort the opportunity to develop deeper relationships that could continue to be supported and built up over time and in a mutual context.

While this 1st cohort was finishing in October 2023, a 2nd cohort was launched. The 2nd cohort was the first cohort to include Deacons as well as Pastors. A 3rd cohort was launched in April 2024. While each cohort has its own character based on the individual participants, there are some key similarities. Cohorts meet for a period of 18 months. They have 4 in-person retreats (fall and spring) with Zoom check-in meetings in between the retreats. Each cohort has about 10-14 Rostered Ministers in it.

They work through many of the key principles of "Cultural Architecture" with Pastor Doug facilitating the retreats. Additionally, they discuss the Enneagram, Clifton's Strength Finders, organizational intelligence, cultural transformation, and the state of the church at present. More than that, the retreats provide intentional time to connect with one another and with God. Each day centers on Scripture and provides time for contemplative action. How can we lead congregations if we are not taking the time to practice waiting on and listening to God ourselves?

A few of the current cohort members shared their gratefulness to have time to think about shared values, contemplative action, and their own God-given strengths. Pr. Inge Williams was "also grateful to do some deeper reflection on who I am, as a child of God, knowing that we glorify God by living into our individual gifts and strengths rather than spending energy trying to 'fix' ourselves."

Pr. Samantha Drennan shared three key take-aways she has experienced through the Gaining Strength cohort:

1) Seek to maximize strengths rather than focus on shortcomings - since I have begun to do this, I have experienced significant positive changes in my call as well as in my life in general.

2) Embrace contemplative action - as we make decisions for ourselves or for our faith communities, we must integrate contemplation and action. Before acting, make time to discern what the Spirit is already doing in, through, and around us.

3) Surrendering all outcomes to God - easier said than done sometimes! And, a vital component of the process.

The Synod is grateful that these Rostered Ministers have embraced this opportunity, are willing to be present with one another, and are being bold in leaning into the Spirit in their own lives and places of ministry.

There has been so much interest in participating in these Gaining Strength cohorts that the Synod anticipates launching another 1-2 cohorts in 2025. One of the hopes is that one of the cohorts will bring together congregations who have multiple Rostered Ministers on staff so that they can participate simultaneously. If you are interested in joining one of the upcoming Gaining Strength cohorts, please reach out to DEM Dcn. Kat Tigerman at kat@nepsynod.org.

Submitted by: Deacon Kat Tigerman, NEPA Synod Director of Evangelical Mission

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