

00:00:08 Eliana Maxim

Welcome to the SeaPres Podcast, a podcast from the Presbytery of Seattle that invites you into conversations about issues and topics that are meaningful to the Church and its people.

00:00:30 Scott Lumsden

Welcome to the SeaPres Podcast. We are heart to talk a little bit about the partnership that we have with the presbytery of the coast in Colombia, so my name is Scott Lumsden and I'll be kind of hosting and facilitating this conversation and with me is Tali Hairston, Eliana Maxim, Maggie Breen, and Paul Kim, who all went on the trip recently and we just wanted to give a little bit more background. And kind of have a little more conversation about basically looking at the eight years that we've had this relationship with the Presbytery of the Coast.

00:00:55 Scott Lumsden

So, Eliana maybe you could start us off, tell us a little bit about the nature of this of this relationship, and I do use that word intentionally because this is not some kind of dismissive partnership where we kind of send money occasionally and then get together for fellowship. This is way, way, way deeper. Give us a little bit of background on the history of this...

00:01:24 Eliana

Sure, so it's interesting because from the very beginning when we set out to explore this relationship and Tali was there from the very beginning.

00:01:36 Eliana

We were very intentional about the language that we were using to describe what we were seeking.

What we wanted to do was we wanted to steer clear away from some of the previous models of international engagement and the word that we kept coming back to and everything that was describing our relationship was mutuality.

And it was a mutuality around learning from each other mutuality of relationships, a mutuality of respect and resources and what we've discovered is that over the years that has allowed us to free ourselves as the Northwestern Church of some of the bondage that we had about our preconceived notions of being the ones who had it all...

Either financially or knowledge-wise, and allowed us to move into spaces of wondering and curiosity and asking questions.

And that has led to some really authentic relationships and the ability to build on them into something that is much more sustainable.

And actually, it's going to bless our mutual churches, our presbyteries, and the communities in which we reside, which are so vastly different Seattle from the Presbytery of the North Coast of Colombia is very, very different, and yet we are together because of our relationship, we're able to bring benefits to both presbyteries.

00:03:18 Scott Lumsden

And this was a very meaningful trip, given the fact that... so just the timing of it.

With the pandemic and the fact that we haven't seen one another in a while, I think one of the trips was cancelled a year ago obviously.

And so this was, this is a very meaningful trip, and those relationships have endured and grown over the years, and I'm wondering Tali if you can talk a little bit about your involvement and what those relationships have meant for you as well.

00:03:53 Tali Hairston

Yeah, thanks Scott.

I think Eliana really hit it on the head there with the with the idea that we through the pandemic attempted to maintain relationships with our churches and pastors.

And to have that shared experience together through the pandemic.

And it was important.

It was important to return and connect again in person face to face the incarnation being present with each other.

And having that opportunity knowing that this really has always been connected to the work of our pastors with their pastors, and in many ways we were as staff facilitating those relationships and the structure of that after being away from each other.

For you know this time it was about reconnecting those structures that allow for our pastors here and there to continue to connect in their congregations, to continue to connect to each other, build those relationships, and maintain those relationships.

So much has changed in us and in them.

We can't assume that things were as they were before. And the phenomenal reality is things have changed there like they have changed here and so we attended to that while we were there, we were able to observe that and discuss that and to share, and both to lament and celebrate things that have changed.

Realities that have changed.

It was interesting to hear from them about those changes and to learn from them.

What are those kind of perspective differences that they have now that they didn't have before?

And how that might be fed back into our relationship here and there so we can continue to connect in substantive ways, as Eliana said.

And my call is not to be the international missions leader, so that's not what God called me to, and because of that these kinds of engagements we had in our last trip are helping to make sure that we sustain the kind of relationship that we all felt called to when we began 8 years ago.

00:06:31 Scott Lumsden

And as someone who hasn't been on this trip but has kind of felt the impact in the conversations that you all have had and throughout the year, not just when you know the opportunity arises for people to visit one another, but it's a very different feel as someone even who hasn't been to kind of hear the way this is talked about and the authenticity of relationship and the mutuality.

It's very impactful.

00:07:11 Tali Hairston

Well, that's something Maggie had a chance to see. This was her first time and you (Maggie) talked a lot about that.

00:07:17 Maggie Breen

I did talk a lot about that because it was really important to as the newcomers I have never been and it really was obvious to me as someone who was showing up for the first time the trust and the affection that had been built over these eight years and that was a product of the time that had been put in.

You know before we went and I was asking Tali, you know what's this going to be like?

He said, well, we'll spend some time catching up with our friends and we spend time right, and that just seems to be kind of a character of this thing that you know you would sit together and eat together and catch up.

Kind of over the small moments of their lives, you know.

And that was just really obvious to me, and it was obvious to me then.

When Tali talks about, you know, looking at what had changed that there was this kind of container of trust and affection for each other that could hold those conversations, right?

Like, well, who are we now after two years of a pandemic?

Uhm, we trust each other enough to be able to have those conversations, right?

And what we've been missing, what do we need?

So, it was really obvious as a newcomer that so much time and energy and love had been put into building this relationship, and that really was exciting for me because it aligns so much with what we're trying to get after as part of this Thriving (Congregations) Initiative, you know, trying to get after this idea that it's by spending time with their communities that we that we build trust and can start to learn from each other about each other, and how to be in community and to the future.

You know, so it was a very moving experience for me.

Everything that I had kind of thought it would be and more, yeah.

00:09:11 Scott Lumsden

Paul, you've been on the trip before.

What was impactful this time around for you? What did you notice?

00:09:19 Paul Kim

Yeah, this is now my fourth time being there.

I missed the last one that happened right before we went to lockdown.

So, like we've been talking about, it's been really important to see each other again in real life, not over the screen and to nurture those relationships. But some of the things that I saw were the definite changes in each other's lives and each other's communities.

There are things happening in the Presbytery of the Coast that are just really exciting, that evidence some change.

Then some development in their own work and as Seattle Presbyterians, we've engaged conversations around thriving congregations.

It was exciting to share how we've changed and how what we're doing in our own context and to have the as Maggie said to basin or the container of the relationship hold those conversations was really impactful to watch happen.

00:10:22 Scott Lumsden

Along with the personal sharing and the relationships, there was also that there were also the things that were going on in each other's presbyteries and there's a real mutuality here that we have the opportunity to update some folks on.

One was that they requested they're very curious about the Thriving Congregations Initiative, and so you all had a chance to share that, and then the other side of this is that they extended an invitation to the Presbytery to be a part of a very groundbreaking study.

00:10:58 Tali Hairston

Let me let me see if I can kind of just go a couple steps back and talk about a conversation we had with our Colombia task force.

And our Columbia task Force was in a conversation about what could we invite our friends to similarly, like when you invite your neighbor over for tea, right?

Or, you know, when you invite friends over to have time together, what could we invite our friends to?

What are we doing that we can invite our friends?

So, we're like, why not thriving congregations?

It's something that we're invested in as a community here in the Seattle Presbytery.

You know we're up to 18 participatory congregations.

What would it mean to invite them to be a part of that and the task force said yes, let's do that. Right? And like similarly our friends in Colombia had something they were doing that was really exciting for them around a research project on developing a theology of reconciliation from those communities that had signed the peace accord.

And we can go into more detail about that.

And Eliana you have some of that history that you could share about that, but it was really two friends who were excited about what they're doing, and we shared it with each other and invited each other over and said, do you want to participate?

So, while we were there, we presented on Thriving Congregations.

And since our trip, and we've developed this idea, plan of how we could participate in a research project on developing, really what's called an interdisciplinary approach to a theology of reconciliation.

00:12:41 Eliana Maxim

I think the invitation for us to participate in this research opportunity is one that speaks into, really a universal brokenness that we experience as human beings, is the violence and the disrupture of human dignity in all sorts of places.

And what the Reformed University, which is part of the Presbyterian Church of Colombia and the Presbytery of the North Coast, is inviting us to do is they want to visit three different communities that are in three different states along the coast in Colombia that had land set aside and given to them to create communities of nonviolence and peace.

The interesting thing is that these communities are made up of former combatants.

These are former guerrillas, paramilitaries who for many, many years Colombia has been involved in a civil war for over 50 years.

These folks were in armed combat trying to affect change, social change.

They have made a commitment to create these communities of peace and reconciliation where they are determined to bring about social change in a peaceful manner, they've laid down their arms and they've taken up plows and brickmaking and education and all sorts of different endeavors.

Now, it could sound very idyllic and almost like Nirvana.

There's a lot of pitfalls along the way, a lot of challenges.

And what this research wants to do is five years after the signing of the peace accords let's go back and visit those communities.

How have they maintained a sustainable community during those five years?

What do they need to continue to be successful?

Will they be successful and what can we learn from them?

And as remote as that may sound to us here, living in the Pacific Northwest, we have our own communities of violence and we don't need to go any further than just the last two weeks of what we experience through gun violence in this country.

What does it take for us to lay down arms and take up something else in order to achieve social change we're all desperate for?

Whether it's a depressed, bullied 18-year-old or if it's a disgruntled worker or if it's an indoctrinated white supremacist.

What is it that we need to study and accomplish as a community in order to bring about that kind of nonviolent movement, and more importantly, what can we as a Church do in this process?

What's our role?

Where are we?

I think most of us would agree that for the most part the Church has been pretty silent when it comes to this kind of transformative work around violence.

We like to, you know, go and attend protests and all that, but there's something more, oh gosh, incarnate that we need to be doing as a Church and I think this research is going to give us an opportunity.

00:16:20 Tali Hairston

We're going to learn.

00:16:21 Eliana Maxim

Yeah, exactly!

So, we're going to learn something from our siblings, hopefully together, yeah.

00:16:25 Maggie Breen

Yeah, listening... do listening deeply, right?

That's the thing that wants to do all of this.

How does the Church, how do we show up to listen deeply to how people make sense of their experience, right?

00:16:37 Tali Hairston

Amen.

00:16:40 Speaker 4

Yeah, that was exciting.

I got so excited.

Sorry you can't see me on podcasts but I'm like, yes, preach Eliana!

00:16:47 Eliana Maxim

I'm hoping that well, not me, WE'RE hoping 'cause this has been such a collective effort... we're hoping that these are seeds that are being planted both here in our Seattle Presbytery as well as in the Northwest Coast Presbyterian Columbia that will all lead us to be more authentically the Church that we've been called to be in our communities.

Regardless of what our building situation might be, or whether or not we have the right prophetic pastor leading us.

But how do we make our faith communities all of a sudden take action and say, yes, I want to learn.

I want to experience.

I want to listen.

And we're hoping that at the upcoming presbytery meeting that we will have an opportunity to engage in that kind of conversation and see what is it... what do we need to do in order to move in that direction?

00:17:46 Tali Hairston

That's an amen.

00:17:47 Scott Lumsden

That is.

00:17:48 Tali Hairston

Can I just, 'cause you know, Paul, me, and Maggie went: when we do this work, when we were on the trip, when we were there... there was this sense that we were not just returning after the pandemic, but that this is a pivotal moment for the Church global.

00:18:13 Scott Lumsden

Well, and I think for me too it just underscores the fact that as hard as this pandemic has been, there have been ample opportunities for us to slow down and learn and reorient ourselves.

And that is actually harder work than we sometimes are willing to admit, and it is very hard for...

It might be individually a person can do it, but we're talking about collectively how a community slows down and takes notice and finds a way, finds a mode of listening more deeply to both the joys and the pain and the uh, that community brings. And it has to inform our life in church or Christian community and if it doesn't, we're not really paying attention.

So I'm super excited about the opportunities and thank you all for kind of sharing about those.

00:19:31 Scott Lumsden

Any closing thoughts from anyone?

00:19:35 Paul Kim

Well, I was going to say that we spent years in mutual relationship developing the friendship.

And I think Tali talking about this pivotal moment is now where we're sharing in mutual work - substantive work together in the thriving congregations, but also in the research projects.

So, we're maturing in our relationship in this way, and I think that's really exciting.

Today we were talking to German and he used this phrase, and I wrote it down because it was impactful: "to dignify the relationship and working towards understanding the value of the Holy Spirit in each other".

And I think that's what we're doing and I'm really excited about the trajectory for our relationship together.

00:20:25 Maggie Breen

Well, I wrote down exactly the same phrase, you know?

Yes, and Eliana is saying that she did, too, and I've noticed that's coming up also in our thriving work in the presbytery, as we get together and realize that we're asking the same questions.

That we're not alone.

That there's a power there that the Spirit's showing up and that also happened with the Colombian folks right, that we might be in different parts of this continent but we're asking similar questions about the role of the church in community.

00:20:54 Scott Lumsden

Well, and I pray for that kind of listening to the Spirit's leading at our presbytery meeting.

00:21:03 Scott Lumsden

So, thank you all for this conversation.

00:21:07 Tali Hairston

Thank you, Scott. Thanks, everybody.

00:21:10 Eliana

Thank you everybody.

00:21:10 Maggie Breen

Thank you.