

## Partners

We were fewer in number than usual – this group of clergy and lay leaders who have met regularly by Zoom on Tuesday afternoons for mutual support and exploring how the Church may become better after all we have learned during these chaotic, disruptive times. Something happened early in the meeting that electrified those next fifty minutes. We would like to believe it was the Holy Spirit.

What if we were to find a way to network congregations ready to tackle some of the urgent challenges like growing unemployment and sudden loss of income – not just among our members but in the communities that we serve?

Acts 2 & 4 inspired conversation about an ethic of abundance. What if economic inequity was not God's intent? What could happen if we realized that we – together – have all that we need, and the challenge is how it is distributed so that no one goes hungry or homeless due to a pandemic related job and income loss? What kind of ideas come to mind?

Ideas began to pop like movie theater popcorn.

What about a mobile food pantry?

How about mobile showers, mobile laundry service for those families newly evicted and forced to live in cars or on the streets?

What if empty nesters shared their unused house space with people who needed just a short season to work, save up and find a place to reside?

Could we create an online clearing house where those who would share could connect with those who had need? One participant remembered that he had written a program for a similar initiative and could resurrect that.

What if individuals and congregations could provide short-term employment?

What if some would share tools that sit unused with those who could do work with them for a little extra money to make ends meet?

Who would need house painting and who among the unemployed painters might meet that need?

What if some of us could teach sewing, canning or other cost-saving skills and ways to begin micro-businesses?

What if congregations baked items and sold them through food trucks?

How about a program to employ supervisors for a large room with a few children engaged in activities and following CDC guidelines so that some parents could go back to work?

It snowballed from there. One participant came up with a name: Project Acts 4:34-35. Another suggested that a church could hire new seasonal employees now and qualify to pay them through a Paycheck Protection Program loan.

After the brainstorm began to slow, we realized that what we had just done could be done in every congregation. Let the holy imaginations of faithful disciples Jesus loose!

Of course, ideas are not worth much if none of them is realized and sorting through them and prioritizing them could prove daunting. What if after the brainstorm, participants could choose one thing that could be done quickly without too much complication – something focused outward, something that could make a positive difference now as a first step. And might it be better if it were something that could foster partnership not only within the congregation but between them?

So, we came up with a challenge to invite you or someone in your congregation to host a Project Acts 4:34-35 brainstorm session. Invite a facilitator from outside (a skilled volunteer) to help encourage the positive flow of ideas so that they do not get snagged in too much detail or reasons why something cannot work.

If just five or six or more congregations would do this, imagine what could happen if those who participated could come together in a larger Zoom gathering hosted by our Region to hear those great ideas, to pray for and celebrate the ideas that are being tried. It could be the start of something that restores hope and gives focus and energy to our life as disciples of Jesus while making new friends with those who are asking not for a handout but a hand up.

I recall clicking on the END MEETING button, sitting back, and letting out a prayerful sigh. I said aloud, “Thank You God!” and meant it.

We record these gatherings and post them unedited and unlisted on a private YouTube channel. This last recorded gathering is listed [here](#).

We meet Tuesdays at 3 pm and you are most welcome to participate. Next week we will see what kind of follow up there has been to the ideas discussed. We will encourage and pray for each other because putting holy ideas to work can be hard though rewarding work.

May God continue to bless you and lift your spirits. The best years of the Church are ahead of us.

Gratefully yours in Christ,

*Bill Rose-Heim*

Regional Minister and President