

The ELCA Lifelong Learning Partners Conference at Spirit in the Desert Retreat Center was a new experience for me. We spent three days together around the conversation of Ministry at the Margins. The margin is not “us or the other”, but the place where we meet the other. When we talk about ministry with “the marginalized” we are talking about the person, when we talk about ministry “in the margins” we are talking about the place. We talked about the margins as places that are fluid and moving.

Our conversation began with Diane Jacobson leading us to reflect on the margins through a couple of Bible stories. The first text was from II Kings 5:1-14 (15-27). This is the story about Naaman who was healed of his leprosy. In this story, Naaman was the person on the margins. This story redefines the margins for us. Naaman was a “great man” and the servant was the opposite of that, “a little girl”. In the end, Naaman’s flesh was restored like the flesh of “a young boy”. The prophets were almost always calling the power of the Kings into question in the Old Testament. Here Elisha told him to do a simple thing, but Naaman was expecting a great thing. We discussed how Naaman’s own expectations (as ours often will) hindered the possibilities for his healing.

Our second text was from Luke 8:42b-48 (40-56). This is the story of the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years. She had no money because she spent all that she had on physicians. The woman in the story was the person in the margins. She touched the fringe (the margin) of Jesus robe for healing.

We spent some time in discussion using “Liberating Structures”. While most group meetings or learning events employ the structure of speaker or expert teaching and the group listening and learning; Liberating Structures invites the entire group into the learning model. There are multiple structures that are available for you to use at no cost. There is certainly one or more that will work for your next meeting. I invite you to check out the variety of liberating structures on their web site: [www.liberatingstructures.com](http://www.liberatingstructures.com).

I think the most valuable take-away for me was the modeling of liberating structures in a learning situation. That and all the great minds that converged on the desert for this excellent lifelong learning event! The greatest gift I can pass along to you is to invite you to check out the liberating structures web site.