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*"...that they may be  
encouraged in heart*

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Dear Friends,

A few weeks ago, I was unpacking boxes of books from my last move. I have all sorts of books and resources spanning nearly 30 years of seminary and ministry. All those youth ministry books that we thought had all of the answers reminded me that there are no simple answers. All those leadership books reminded me that people have to be called to use their gifts in order for them to grow as leaders. And all those Christian Education planners, notebooks filled with curriculum and ideas, reminiscence of a very different time.

A group in the Northwestern Ohio Synod is reading a book called *The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Christian: Following Jesus Where Life Happens*. The Rev. Dr. Michael Adam Becks reminds us to start with listening.

Listen to the community. Listen to your people. Listen to the needs, the pain, the joys and the celebrations.

As I began one of my calls, I was approached by someone who said we needed a widow's group. I asked some questions. It seemed like a good idea. I took the list of names she gave me and began making phone calls. The seven women on my list didn't want a "widow's group". They had made contact with each other and were filling their own needs as they arose. They formed their group, worshipped together, shared in devotions and cared for one another.

In almost every call, I have been told there was a need for a youth group. As we resumed in-person Confirmation class this year, I began to explore with my five middle schoolers what they wanted or needed. They have leadership development in 4-H. They get service projects at school. They have social in their sports. They do not have a lot of time they are willing to give to a church that they are not sure they need. But the one idea that came up was to offer a pancake breakfast once a week for the High School students. Nothing big, just a time the kids can drop in for breakfast before school. And so it begins.

As we gather to plan, we share a Bible story. In our planning we pray. Instead of sneaking God in, we are living our faith as we reach out into the community.

The Diakonia Program of the ELCA is another great way of helping our leaders grow. "Diakonia is a call to discipleship. The invitation is to live our lives for Christ, to commune with other Christians, and to undertake theological learning that will mature our understanding of the Word and carry that learning to others in love and service." For more information, check out [www.diakoniausa.org](http://www.diakoniausa.org).

There are many and various ways to grow leaders. As we explore new resources to help our people live out their lives of faith in their daily life, may we each remember to begin with listening.

Have a blessed Lent and Holy Week.

Peace,  
The Rev. Juli Lejman-Guy, President