

INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON MINISTRY DEVELOPMENT & LIVING STONES PARTNERSHIP:

Rich conversations about the challenges and opportunities of doing Christ's work in a 21st century world

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Early in February, at the La Quinta Inn in downtown San Antonio, Texas, there gathered 7000 cattlemen and 80 ministry developers. It was quite a juxtaposition. Those attending the International Symposium of Ministry Developers mingled in the lobby and hallways and elevators with tall men in cowboy hats, with most of our number speaking in quite different accents from that of the Texans. Just as the Symposium ended and the Living Stones Partnership annual meeting began, the cattlemen departed into the southwestern landscape and were replaced by cheerleaders, lots of cheerleaders, some buoyant and a few looking a bit tearful and stressed.

The International Symposium for Ministry Development last met in 1999. The 2015 gathering drew men and women from Australia, New Zealand, England, Scotland, Canada and across the United States. The Symposium focused on critical reflections about shared ministry. Shared ministry, or collaborative ministry, is a way of being church that enables the ministry of all baptized people--a full and meaningful partnership of laity and clergy. Shared ministry for mission calls all baptized Christians to be ministers of God's reconciling love in the world. Co-sponsored by Living Stones Partnership and the Ministry Developers Collaborative, the five-day Symposium served to establish and reestablish a network of communication and support for those engaged in the work of teaching and nurturing the baptized, and equipping them for ministry in their local settings. Participants met in plenary session and in smaller groups for reflection on the question posed by Symposium leaders: "What church does God's mission now require?" One of the members of the planning committee, Jane Cisluycis, commented, "It was an amazing thing to watch 80 virtual strangers come together and form a community. It may be English we were speaking, but, oh, the variations!"

On Saturday, February 7, began the Living Stones Partnership annual meeting, which convened until the following Tuesday. Seventy participants represented 15 dioceses and 3 seminaries in the U.S. and 3 dioceses in Canada, with 13 of these participants attending as visitors and guests from the various countries represented at the International Symposium. The Living Stones Partnership is a partnership of Anglican and Episcopal communities of faith engaged in mission and committed to the ministry of all baptized. In this gathering, emphasis shifted from the more general conversations of the Symposium to a consideration of nuts-and-bolts work back home. Representatives from the partner dioceses and seminaries gathered in groups of three, along with guests and persons inquiring about membership, to present case studies and to invite, not so much solutions as fresh insights and deeper engagement with the issues posed by each presenting partner delegation. Each of these small groups also included guests and other interested persons, who also shared thoughts and perspectives on their respective ministries. Quite a few of the case studies focused on new communities of faith, not all of which fit the usual definition of church. The gathering also benefited from the additional perspectives

shared by the international and domestic guests and other visitors.

In a day when mainline churches are facing many challenges, including diminishing numbers, participants in these two conferences affirmed that all across the globe there are abundant and hopeful signs of God's people being blessed into new directions.