Message from the Moderator – 2024

I recently listened to a podcast discussing the desire for meaning and purpose, particularly how many individuals seek fulfillment from their workplaces instead of traditional sources like family, church, or social gatherings. There's a valid debate about whether creating workplaces that fulfill life's purpose is treating the symptom or the disease. Nevertheless, the discussion highlighted that the highest purpose may lie in serving others. By re-narrating work as service, we can infuse it with meaning. This conclusion from a secular podcast on workplace culture struck me as both profound and self-evident.

The term "service" carries complexity, and it is no small irony that AMC's service committee remains defunct. Throughout church history, service has been marred by colonial and imperial motivations, where economic assistance came with expectations of conversion, loyalty, and gratitude. As we confront our settler history and recognize our historic complicity in the displacement of people, it is understandable that we may recoil from service, fearing that even our best intentions might lead to harm.

Service can also fall prey to pride, judgment, and guilt, as the pious often measure their faithfulness by their deeds, counting salvation points in comparison to those of others. In a world rife with judgment, it's natural to shy away from service, fearing that altruism might camouflage self-interest.

Service may also mask exploitation, where those called to serve endure low wages, long hours, and poor working conditions. Service workers, although essential to smooth operations, are often undervalued and overlooked.

Despite these complexities, the belief that a meaningful life is one dedicated to service is inescapable. It is a central message of Jesus Christ. The virtues in an upside-down kingdom include love, non-violence, generosity, graciousness, and forgiveness—all of which require at least two people to come into existence. We cannot seek to embody our theology without engaging in community, and we often experience great joy through acts of service. This past year, AMC has emphasized service to others as central to our purpose.

We held our first overnight retreat at Camp Koinonia, enjoying two nights of connection through shared meals, games, and outdoor adventures like cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. I look forward to the next retreat following our upcoming AGM, where we will continue to serve one another with food and in conversation.

We sent many of our youth to Matthison Island as part of a collaborative venture with the Altona Bergthaler Church to lead a week of summer camp for local kids, strengthening our long-standing relationship with this community. Youth reflections emphasized the profound impact this experience had on them.

We have actively participated in the monthly community meal by coordinating the serving team for two events, and our relationship with Friendship Manor has deepened, highlighted by enjoying soup prepared by residents as a gesture of reciprocity for AMC members supporting their food co-op. It brings me joy to see that some residents view AMC as a welcoming space.

Our congregants and pastor are also actively involved in the Steps Toward Reconciliation Committee, working to implement recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

We celebrated the baptisms of two young people and dedicated a new baby, reflecting our commitment to sustain one another for lives of service.

Our tradition of hosting a serene Candlelight Christmas Eve Service continues, drawing members from neighboring congregations and the wider community.

However, this commitment to service starkly contrasts with our financial reality. AMC is at a pivotal moment in its history and has encountered a breaking point. Leadership has reluctantly recommended reallocating nearly all donations to external organizations into a surplus category, recognizing that our historical giving is only sufficient to cover fixed operating costs. Should we receive additional donations by the year's end, we plan to allocate the surplus at the congregation's direction and with an everlasting hope that we can continue to have a positive financial impact on the institutions that support us and in which we are invested. While financial resources can facilitate action, in an upside-down kingdom, financial security may not be essential for discovering purpose through service and, inevitably, being served by others through acts of reciprocity.

My invitation for AMC in 2025 is to continue finding joy in service and striving for justice and peace in our local and global communities.