**Soundings Project CLMPI Pre-Meeting Work (2020)**

The Soundings Project at Baylor University is engaged with a wide range of congregations, and the struggles of 2020 have affected them in different ways. Two of our congregations—a small town, rural church and a large African American congregation in the suburbs of a large metropolitan area—are examples of how vocational loss and grief also have led to creativity and faithful, traditioned innovation.

Before the pandemic, the small church had been experiencing some difficulty engaging in a project simply because it questioned whether it was up to the task. This lack of confidence became even more pronounced once the pandemic took hold. The church closed its doors; worship went online. Communication about their project stopped altogether. The church began to question whether it would be able to participate in the Soundings Project at all.

The Soundings Project director met with the congregation’s working group and offered encouragement and a strategy for reimagining their participation in the project. Coming out of this meeting, the congregation has not only been encouraged but actually sees its participation in the Soundings Project as an opportunity for *revival*; the project team has been shifting from a mindset of surviving to thriving. Although the team is still working out the details of its calling in the midst of a pandemic, the members have renewed hope and even excitement for the project.

The large congregation has long been pursuing its vocation of loving God and neighbor in its community. Yet the congregation has been grieving for decades the violence and racial injustice that have become so pronounced in 2020. Out of this grief, the congregation has been deepening relationships with community partners and facilitating conversations about systemic racial and ethnic divides. It has hosted webinars, participated in a march for justice, and organized trainings in cultural intelligence and bias. Much like the small-town church, this congregation sees the present-day challenges as an opportunity to deepen its engagement with its vocation, in this case responding to injustice in the world with love of neighbor animated by Divine justice. The congregation hopes that other churches will be able to learn from its example both in its particular community and beyond.

These two congregations, from different contexts, illustrate how Soundings Project partner congregations are responding in hopeful ways in the midst of loss and grief.