

# Workshop at Convention

## “Listening to the Listeners: A Congregational Love Story”

The Rev. Dr. Susan E. Richardson, with Ms. Rachel Holland, Mr. Jack Dalton, Ms. Paula Alekson, Ms. Charin Cetkowski, and Ms. Patrice Lavanture

There are many times in life when we either don't feel heard or heard only in certain ways. Sometimes it's understandable, but in not feeling heard and thus not hearing ourselves, we can too easily forget God's invitation into the fullness of our God-given identities. In the words of Irenaeus of Lyons, "The glory of God is the human person fully alive." Being heard helps us claim ourselves, our stories, and the presence and delight of God in them. We hope that our Christian communities are the one place we may be invited into that fullness. But old congregational habits, assumptions, and loss of the belief that the best is yet to come can create barriers. And storytelling without responsible story-listening can devolve into partisanship, gossip, voyeurism, and worse. Story listeners need to be accountable for how they are touched, transformed, and for how they borrow faith and courage from the storyteller. Then in the witness of the story listeners, we who hear them are changed too. Deeper connections that can only be described, not as merely liking each other, but as *agape* appreciation, evolve. The effects emanate outward into all aspects of the functioning of the community.



The Rev. Dr. Susan E. Richardson

Such practices lie at the heart of birthing God's new work at the core of the church. Yet they demand and deserve intentionality and careful handling. This workshop will offer specific congregational practices that may be adaptable in your context or inspire further ideas. It is hoped that they will help enable a better balance of voices, accountability of the listeners, healthier awareness of the creation of community that puts listening at its core, and the ability for us to hear not only those within our walls but the newcomers who, as Gospel stories show, often bring fresh insight into God's new work, toward the hope that the best of the church still lies ahead.

**Workshops will be on Saturday, March 3 at 9:45 a.m. in the Grand Ballroom.**