

August 16/17, 2008

Living for Others: The Importance of Mission - *The Joy of Giving*

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Rev. Susan Bresser

That's my friend, Dean ... Dean Kirst. (show Dean's photo) He's Lutheran, but he secretly wants to be United Methodist. He's a pastor and currently serves Lakeview Lutheran in Madison. Many of you know, we go way back and many of you also know he's crazy. But he's very mission minded ... I like that about him. In fact, the two of us have had some mission experiences together. We've actually had the joy of sharing mission experiences with middle school & senior high youth. We do, seriously, believe in the power of ecumenical partnership.

This photo is from the CROP Walk, held every year in October in Madison. Every year at the CROP Walk, for the last many years, Dean and I have found one another among hundreds gathering to walk the walk. And then I get a Lakeview Lutheran CROP Walk t-shirt. Dean and I get our picture taken and then I get my picture taken with this big group of Lutherans. Those Lutherans ... they're very welcoming ... or else they're just desperate. In all seriousness, Dean's church has a phenomenal turnout for the CROP Walk ... adults, children, babies, grandmas and grandpas. It's obviously a mission they support and love.

Soon, in the life of this church, we'll be talking about the CROP Walk; inviting you to be a part of the one of the many ways we work to alleviate hunger in the world and our community. I think this year we'll have t-shirts so that Dean can wear one of ours!

We continue this weekend with our sermon series “Living for Others: The Importance of Mission.” Today we talk about the joy of giving, the joy of serving, the joy of missions.

Did you read the paper this morning? In the local section, I think, there’s an article on the Secrets to a Longer Life. One of the secrets: VOLUNTEER your time. According to the article, you contribute to the greater good. You have a sense of purpose. Makes sense. That seems to fit in well with the theme of missions and the joy of giving of ourselves and serving others.

In the life of the church, volunteering your time and your investment equals ministry. Why do we serve others? Because service to others is service to God.

The Outreach Committee of this church is the missions committee, helping to raise funds and awareness and participation for missions. With the help of the Outreach Committee, you have touched the lives of thousands and thousands and thousands of people.

One of the areas of focus is global missions. Currently we are supporting the salaries of 2 missionaries in Africa – Rachel & Dan Gabler and we offer financial support to an agricultural project in Zambia, run by another missionary, Paul Webster. We support an AIDS clinic in Monrovia, Liberia and this allows the doors to be open every day. In Eastern Europe we support the building and the growing of Methodist churches in Russia. In

the socialist country of Cuba, we support the building and the growing of Methodist churches.

We support missions in the nation, the state, the county and right here in Sun Prairie. Did you know that we help give children the opportunity to visit their mothers who are incarcerated at Tayceedah, Wisconsin's women's prison near Fond du Lac? Right now, we provide the funding. I hope we can, sometime in the future, provide the actual transportation. This is all coordinated through an organization called Madison Area Urban Ministry.

We support a health care clinic on the east side of Madison, which provides critical dental and medical care to the uninsured of Dane County. Did you know that there are 43.6 million uninsured people in the United States? There are 32,000 uninsured people in Dane County. These aren't the numbers of the underinsured ... right now we're just talking the uninsured. There's a waiting list at this clinic for services every day. It's called the Access Community Health Center. And some people say there isn't a national health care crisis.

Did you know that we filled 61 backpacks (full of school supplies) for families in Sun Prairie who do not have the resources to purchase the necessary tools for education? We partnered with the great organization Joining Forces for Families.

Did you know that we are becoming more and more active with the fabulous organization of Habitat for Humanity? Next Saturday, 16 crew members from the SPUMC will be building two houses in the Musket Ridge

neighborhood. There will be others from our church preparing and serving lunch. This is truly a program based on the kindness and love ... we're building houses for people we don't even know.

Next Sunday we celebrate Holy Hoopla. It's our end of the summer celebration, our church picnic, our fellowship on the grounds and everyone is invited. The Outreach Committee has asked that we take a special offering at Holy Hoopla for the Red Bird Mission in Beverly, KY, a United Methodist ministry that serves the fine people of Appalachia. Their medical center is in great need of infant and children's medication: specifically ibuprofen and Tylenol. They also need band-aids. Please respond to this plea and give generously to the Red Bird Mission. We will not only collect during Holy Hoopla; we will continue collecting items until the start of church school. There will a special box in fellowship hall where you can place your items.

There are mission programs in the life of this church don't come from the Outreach Committee, they come from YOU. Mission programs have grown because we are beginning to understand the joy in serving others.

Every Easter for last five years, the Family Ministries committee organizes the Easter Workshop. 100s of Easter baskets have been filled with candy, toys, pencils, toothbrushes, toothpaste and reminders of what Easter is really about for children at Westside School. Separation of church and state? There are no boundaries when it comes to disadvantaged children.

This same committee organizes the annual Advent Workshop, where specific Christmas gifts are made for people in need. One year families participated in making pillows for those living with the aftermath of Katrina. We shipped our pillows to a relief center outside of Slidell, LA. You would have thought we had sent diamonds, given the response of those who received a pillow for Christmas. How thankful people were ...and we simply offered them a pillow.

This year and last at our annual Women's Retreat, we collected boxes and boxes and boxes of women's undergarments and personal care products for Harbor House Transitional Housing in Superior, Wisconsin. The director of Harbor House is still talking about opening up one of the boxes and being overwhelmed by the number of bras she unpacked. They need these items to give to the women who seek shelter at Harbor House, and bring nothing with them ... but the clothes on their backs.

Cheri Hiller just returned home from South Africa. Her mission to the African continent was not church related (but I'm willing to bet that she would say it was very much faith related). Her mission was educational, providing education and services to AIDS orphans. Worldwide, it is estimated that more than 15 million children under the age of 18 have been orphaned as a result of AIDS. Around 11.6 million of these children live in sub-Saharan Africa. It is estimated that by the year 2015, the number of orphaned children will double because of the AIDS pandemic. Cheri may have real facts and figures because she experienced it. I simply went online. But even the numbers I find online are difficult to comprehend.

Cheri came to us, her church family, with a list of supplies and medications she was allowed to take to South Africa. You all provided her and her colleagues with boxes and boxes of children's medication and supplies and she is forever grateful and thankful for your contributions.

This past year several of our bible study groups and our LOGOS children and youth collected items for those serving in Iraq. We shipped cookies, magazines, games, candy, gum, socks, sunscreen, hand sanitizer, baby powder, chap stick, razors ... and the list goes on and on. We heard back from our friends in Iraq, thanking us for the gifts. Do you know, they share everything they receive with their brothers and sisters who are serving alongside them, because as one soldier writes: everyone wants to experience of moment of "wow, somebody thought of me today."

Coming up in the next few months, you are going to be introduced to a new mission program called Nothing But Nets. Malaria kills more than 1 million children a year. For just \$10 you can buy an insecticide-treated bed net, distribute it to a family and educate them on its use. We have told the Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church that we, the Sun Prairie church, will raise \$1,000 in the next year to purchase 100 nets. The Nothing But Nets campaign is receiving a \$3 million challenge grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The people of The United Methodist Church, the United Nations Foundation, the National Basketball Association, Sports Illustrated and other partners are all working hard to raise donations. The grant will match our contributions dollar for dollar up to \$3 million.

The neat thing about the mission projects we've been doing is that we have included our children. We are helping our children not only understand the importance of missions but also the joy of serving others.

Our daughter Eva is going to be a senior this fall. We've already started our college visits. Last week we were sitting in an admissions office, visiting a UW campus and the admissions director said to group of high school seniors: "sure, we're going to look at your ACT score. We're going to look at your GPA. That's a given, but it's not everything. What I'm really going to be looking at is how you fit into the world. How have you served others?" And he went on to say, "I want to know if you've been on a mission trip. I want to know if you've helped with organizations such as Habitat for Humanity, American Red Cross, your local food pantry." Eva leaned over and asked, "Don't we do all that at church?"

This admissions director said, "I need to know if you believe you're a part of the community. And I believe we gain that understanding when we provide service to others." I almost jumped out of my chair, "preach it, brother, preach it," but that would have horrified Eva, so I didn't. Colleges want to know if our children understand the concept of community. what better place to teach them, then in the life of the church.

I simply do not have enough time this morning to explain every mission that is active in the life of our church. Oh my goodness, there are so many: food pantry, red barn, garage sale, sr high mission trip, Summer Stretch, Java Notes, Blood Drives. We don't have time to talk about everything, but I might not have time to talk about every mission here at SPUMC, but I do

want to make sure I take the time to say thank you. Thank you for sharing in ministry. Thank you for giving. Thank you for serving others. If I've mentioned anything that you might be interested in, let me know. If you have ideas or suggestions, let me know. Let Scott know. Call the church office. Talk to our staff members. We'll help connect you up.

So, do we sit back now and say, "Good job, church, good job?" Should I say: Take a break? Put your money away? We've done enough? NOOOO ... We do good ministry, but we could do more. Help me help you focus on doing more.

Our scripture today Paul says God loves a cheerful giver. Paul was a Christian missionary who held firm to the values he learned as a Jewish boy: that God creates covenant with us. Living the covenant means caring for those who are in need and giving to those who have less. In the covenant with God, no one can be left out or left behind.

Why do we serve others? Because a covenant with God means that no one can be left out or left behind.

Thank you for the many, many ways you serve others. God loves a cheerful giver. Amen.