

Pastor Frey's July Letter to the Congregation

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he said, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, 'What is written in the law? What do you read there?' He answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.' And he said to him, 'You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.' But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?' (Luke 10:25-28)

In the third week of July Christians from area churches will gather together to reach out to community members in need through the 5th annual Mission Trip Birdsboro. Mission Trip Birdsboro is a local project intended to provide needed home repairs and maintenance to area homeowners who are unable to undertake the repairs or maintenance themselves. Many of the residents are elderly and cannot manage the home repair issues they face. Others simply do not have the resources needed to handle a problem with their home. Over a hundred volunteers from churches such as ours will bring their variety of skills and energy to the tasks in over 60 local residences.

The project results in substantial improvements in the lives of those involved. Homeowners receive valuable assistance in the maintenance of their homes. In some cases such assistance helps people, particularly low-income elderly residents, to remain in their homes. In other cases, families struggling financially, for a variety of reasons, are given vital support.

One element of this program should be lifted up. Mission Trip Birdsboro seeks to create a powerful sense of community among all its participants. Throughout the project volunteers are prepared to interact with homeowners in a positive and Christ-centered way. Religious leaders (including myself) serve as "listeners" who meet with volunteer teams and homeowners to hear their stories and check in about how things are going. In the evenings, when the work for the day is done, a service of worship helps volunteers relate their experiences with the mission being carried out on behalf of Christ.

On the last day of the project, Sunday, there is a large celebration meal. This meal is attended by volunteers and homeowners alike. It gives all the participants an opportunity to recognize and celebrate the work God has carried out in their midst. It is also an opportunity to acknowledge the powerful sense of community established through the project.

We live in an era characterized by breakdowns in community. The social media "communities" on the internet, which were supposed to connect people together, have driven them further apart. People barely know their neighbors let alone interacting with them. Too often we are self-segregating by where we live, the things we choose to do and our association groups into enclaves encountering only people "like ourselves." In this time, it is vitally important to bring people together in genuine communities that open us to those we might not normally encounter.

Jesus himself went about seeking out people not a regular part of his "circle." He encouraged his disciples to realize that it is not God's intention that people cut themselves off from people they perceive to be different than themselves. Jesus broke down divisions and based his sense of community on the principle outlined in the parable of the Good Samaritan. It is God's will that our interaction be conditioned by the transaction of care and concern between a giver and a receiver. In the interaction both are enriched and that is the foundation of Godly community.

I believe Mission Trip Birdsboro is a modern parable of community happening in our midst.
-- Pastor Frey