



A Note from the Pastor's Corner

As you probably know by now, our Missional Church Team (MCT) is making preparations to help us embark on a project under the rubric of 'Missional Church' that is unlike almost any other church-related projects you may have known. But before we get to the project overview, it would help to review what we mean by 'missional' and, therefore, why this is important.

The Church in America has, for the most part, become isolated from the community around it. Many congregations have taken on mission projects "over there" – either in a foreign land, a different state, or somewhere other than in their own backyard. Some have engaged their own local community in works of mission.

Mission projects almost always take the form of "we have something you need" – be it food, clothing, money, building materials, etc. As good as these works can be – and, believe me, I am in no way suggesting those works be dropped (I have organized and lead such efforts and know first-hand the good that can come out of good works) – they result in unequal relationships.

The one that is receiving what the other is giving is in the social position of, in some way(s), subjugating their self to the giver. Such a relationship is based on the perceived need that is being filled, and so it implies a dependency of the receiver on the giver. The person supplying the needed resource very often expects the one whose need is met, even if only partially or temporarily, to express their gratitude. And then the transaction is complete.

A missional effort, on the other hand, is one that creates relationships with no other end expected. The relationship is equal.

Believe me. Most people know when they're being manipulated or strung along. The worst thing we could do is try to convince someone we're interested in them as a person and when we think 'enough' time has elapsed, ask them to come to church. And when they decline, let that relationship come to an end. That scenario is a common occurrence. It does significant damage to the image of the Church and pushes that person ever further from the Church.

Now, it would be silly for me to say nothing else is involved in missional activity other than finding people to have a relationship with. There really does have to be a reason for anyone to want to establish a connection with another. But, for what we are trying to accomplish, it can't simply be about offering friendship to the friendless. Doing so is pretty much the same as offering food to the hungry, money to the impoverished, or clothing to the naked. It results in an unequal, and therefore, less than open and honest relationship.

In our case, our MCT has decided to respond to the article in June's Witness that spoke about the very high incidence of smoking among women of child-bearing age in Oswego County. As the result of a meeting with representatives from the County Health Department, we will partner with them to deliver their smoking cessation and smoking prevention programs.

It's a partnership that pleases us both. The Health Department has all the resources they need – except for people. We have the people – but little else. They will supply the training necessary to facilitate their programs, the advertising, and supporting materials and we will supply the people with the heart, attitude, and orientation to not only deliver their message but also to [potentially] establish personal, one-on-one relationships – relationships that may evolve into friendships. It is genuine friendships that change lives.

When the other person comes to know that we truly care about them as a person and not just as some 'potential recruit' for our church and that they can trust the one they have become friends with, they will let it be known if and when they feel like entering into a more personal discussion.

What that can lead to is referred to as 'friendship evangelism'. If you think it sounds like it might take some time to get to that point, you're right. But getting there helps develop that part of your spiritual life that will allow you to acknowledge and accept a person on equal terms for who they are. For Jesus, that was easy. For many of us, it will be difficult.

Feel free to contact Lynn, Randi, or me to learn more – or to become part of our Missional Church Team. Amber Eisinger has already felt moved to do just that.

Grace and peace, Pastor Bud