

## Building a House for God Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

God comes to people's lives by going where they live and work. This is played out in the stories of our readings today. God's people want to build God "a building" and try to confine Him. In the first reading, God acts surprised at this gesture when He replies that He has never needed man's help to find a headquarters. God wants to be wherever His people are. Of course we know that God belongs to more than just one people. God would rather be a mobile phone than a home phone.

Another interesting line is made in our first reading for our consideration. God deems it more important to build His people a house than have *them* build a house for *Him*. God's house is one that can not be built with human hands. God's house for King David would be one not made with cedar but made of the lives of generations of people that would walk in the same faith that David did.

I was reminded of this when I recently talked to a local Moravian pastor of the Christian Faith Moravian Church in Deforest, WI. Pastor Kurt said that the reason that the Moravians are such a small denomination in the U.S., less than a million members, is that they came to America not to build churches, or to create another denomination, but to bring Christianity to those who did not have it.

Headquartered in Herrnhut, Germany, they became the first Protestant Church in the world and became a people with a strong mission emphasis. The Moravians became a missionary church and took God with them wherever they went. They are involved in mission work in over 40 countries. This mission emphasis is attractive to The Episcopal Church. Episcopalians don't emphasize missions like we used to and we have much to learn from other churches that do. Likewise, Pastor Kurt wanted to talk to me about how we do our liturgy, for he found that the people of his church are hungry for it and Episcopalians write liturgy very well.

At General Convention last week a vote was made stating that The Episcopal Church should enter into full communion with the Moravian Church because of the mission heritage we share and that together both churches can further fulfill the call of Christ to be one. To be in mission together is "to know Christ and make Him known" as it is written in Trinity's Vision Statement. On a local level Trinity endeavors to restore all people to unity with God and each other as we follow that vision.

That should be the primary mission of the church: Restoring all people and unifying people to God and each other. Do you think there is enough work for us as Christians in restoring and unifying? Trinity has been struggling with that mission on and off, for 164 years. Our goal is to always make visitors feel welcome. We want strangers, as the apostle Paul wrote, to hear the message of peace brought by Jesus. We want those near to God and those far away to be brought together. The

hostility of human differences as far as God is concerned has ended. There are no longer strangers and foreigners to His promises: His covenant of peace is for everyone. God built us a house for all to dwell within and He started that house with a foundation that has lasted 2000 years. What an exciting opportunity for us to live in such a house. This is the house that Jesus built. It is big enough to hold us all.

In a time of foreclosures, homelessness and an even greater need to belong, the church's role as a mission partner is crucial to who we are. It is vital that the Episcopal Church become more active in mission work. General Convention just voted to approve \$3.5 million in spending to evangelize the US Hispanic population. As we seek to partner with our diocese on how we can become an inviting, welcoming and reconciling family, what ways might we improve mission outreach?

We have begun to get more organized in greeting visitors. That's a good first step. Lending a hand in orienting new people to our worship service is crucial. Another step though small, is to help people get to the right page so they can follow the service. The All Saints Cathedral in Milwaukee inspired ribbon markers for our prayer books and hymn books. This is a project that even children can do.

Last year we started visitation teams to go to visitors who wanted more information about Trinity. We need to go in twos. There is training available. It is a simple way of inviting people to be one with our church family. The more often a visitor returns to a worship service, and the more contact from members, the more likely they will join that church. The statistics are well documented.

There are many ways to bring healing to a person. I experienced that by the many gestures of phone calls, cards, and emails offering prayers. We are already going outside of our walls to offer compassion and support to people we know. It is just a tiny step further to reach out in the same way *to those we don't know!* They too need compassion, healing and a place to call a spiritual home.

Perhaps a monthly healing Eucharist for the community in the evening can bring us new friends. Would you help read, lead and feed those who come? Perhaps you might bring a friend with you to Jesus' family here or at a gathering in your home.

I personally am reaching out by starting ride-a-longs with our Janesville Police Department. It's a small way to go out and invite others who are hungry, who are hurting for a touch of God's hand. I think many are just waiting for us to cross over to them from our deserted places where we have been resting. May God continue to grow His church into a holy temple in the Lord, in which we are all the spiritual support beams and doorways for a house for God. AMEN.