

HEARTBEATS- Staying Connected 11/8/2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

ONE AT ONE – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, November 9 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for those who are serving as active members of the military. Pray for their safety. Ask that God give them a sense of purpose and value about their work. Thank God for the freedom that their service brings to our country.*

One of the most important values in the Bible is that of hospitality. Individuals and even entire cities were praised or condemned because of their hospitality or lack thereof. In the Southwest California Synod, the synod in which I previously served before coming to the Pacifica Synod, I was often asked to teach congregations about hospitality.

That conversation begins with the idea of being a welcoming congregation. But most congregations confusing being welcoming with being friendly. Many congregations will describe themselves as being very friendly. And they are...with each other. That, however, doesn't always translate into being welcoming. Just because you are friendly with the people you know—the people with whom you are friends, doesn't mean that you will be friendly to those who come to visit your church.

And, by the way, the people who come to visit are not really visitors. They are guests. You have invited them, directly or indirectly to come, and they should be treated like guests. This is an important part of being hospitable. Think about what you would do for someone who comes to your home as a guest. Tell them where the bathroom is. Sit with them and show them how things are done. Many who come to visit are cautious and anxious about what will be expected of them. A friendly welcome and offer to be their guide for their visit can have a powerful impact on their impression of the congregation.

I have developed thirteen Principles of Hospitality and the "Tell Them Where to Go Principle" is all about helping people feel comfortable. Good signage is important, as is making sure that you let people know about the important places they may need in the church. Like bathrooms, or a family room or nursery if they have children. More than just telling them, the "OSH Principle" says to show them the places they may need. When you go to Orchard Supply Hardware (OSH) and ask for something, they don't tell you on what aisle to look. They take you to the item to make sure you are getting what you need. Churches need to do the same thing. The "Ebenezer Principle" is about using language they understand. One of our hymns, "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing," includes the line, "Here I raise my Ebenezer." Do you know what an Ebenezer is? Well, your guests probably don't either. And they likely won't know what the narthex, or sanctuary, or eucharist, or benediction is. Using more familiar terms like entry, or worship center, or communion, or blessing can help people to feel less out of place and more welcome.

Hospitality is not just a value raised up in the Bible. It is a gift that we can offer to anyone who visits our congregation. It has been said that the church may be the only organization that exists primarily for the people who aren't members. That includes those who come to us as guests. How we welcome them and treat them will go far to increase the likelihood of their returning and, more importantly, how we share with them the blessing that Christ has given to us.

In Christ's love,
Pastor Jeffrey