

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 2/20/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

ONE AT ONE – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, February 21 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, of former President Jimmy Carter entering hospice, take time to pray for those who do and who have served our cities, states, and nations. Pray that they may be guided by GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT in their leading. Ask that needs of people be their priority. Pray the good of the many be the guiding principle in their civil service as leaders.*

Some years ago, having just recently started serving a congregation, the council decided to evaluate me and set some goals for me for the coming year. One of their critiques was that I had not brought in any new members to the church and set a goal for me of bringing in ten new families in the next year. After a moment's thought, I shared that after only four months of living in this community, the only people I had come to know outside of the congregation were two of my neighbors and that both of them were church-goers. Further, ten new households would mean that I had to outreach to one new family every thirty-six days or slightly less than one per month. Nevertheless, I told them that bringing new families into the church was an admirable goal for the congregation and my counter proposal was this: I would bring in two new families and that each of them would bring in one in the next year for a total of twelve new households in our congregation.

Immediately, there was a look of panic on their faces and one lady said, "I don't know anyone who doesn't go to church."

"I'll be you do," I said. "Do you go to the same person to have your hair done?"

"Yes," she replied.

"Does that person have a relationship with a church?" I asked.

"I don't know," she answered.

"Find out," I said. "And what about the people who work in your doctor's office, or your bank, or where you shop, or others in your neighborhood? Who in these places might be in need of a connection with folks who know and love the LORD?"

Many churches think it is the pastor's job to bring in new members—just the pastor's. Studies show that only 5-6% of people who join a church do so because of the pastor, while 70-90% do so because of a family member or friend who brings them. While pastors are to invite people to come and see JESUS through the church they serve, the primary job of a pastor is to equip and encourage the congregation to create relationships with people who don't have a meaningful affiliation with a church and then invite them to come. The Acts of the Apostles in the Bible is filled with stories of people who weren't the leaders/pastors of the church, but who shared their faith and witnessing to the GOD who loves them and who they love.

Before JESUS ascended into heaven, HE told HIS follower to "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations." (Matthew 28:19) As a young person in the church, I was very intimidated by that command because I everybody I knew went to church and that meant I would have to go somewhere else in the

world where there were people who weren't disciples. And I liked where I lived and I didn't want to have to leave to be faithful to JESUS' call. Fortunately, I have since learned that JESUS' Great Commission from Matthew 28 is mistranslated. It isn't a command, an imperative, to "GO!" Rather that word is a participle and would be better translated as "while you are going," or "as you go." So, instead of having to uproot and travel to a new place to be faithful to JESUS' words (although you can), we should understand that while we are going to work, we should make disciples, or as we are going to run our errands, we should make disciples. That means that we look for opportunities to witness to our faith and tell others about JESUS. And the best way to do this is simply to make friends with those who don't have a connection to a faith community, develop those friendships, and then look for opportunities to tell them about what you believe, why you believe it, and invite them to come to find what you have already found in CHRIST.

By the way, I did with the help of my family bring in the two households I committed to inviting into that congregation, but no one else brought in anyone new.

In CHRIST'S love,
Pastor Jeffrey