

The Christian life is summarized by three primary and inter-related relationships: love for God, love for brothers and sisters in Christ, and love for neighbor. Just a few of many texts which make this point: Luke 10:25-28; John 13:34-35; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:11.

The following story from another congregation illustrates missional dynamics which can happen when these three relationship areas are integrated in congregational life.

Joe and Jane (not a couple) responded anonymously to an open invitation to join a new small group for those desiring to work on their own issues in a supportive context. Through gathered and personal worship experiences, the Holy Spirit had been prompting both to risk facing their issues. When they saw each other at the first meeting, they wondered how it could work because they had been on opposite sides of a heated, and still simmering congregational conflict.

After sharing life stories, the group began working on personal issues. In the process, passion and spiritual gifts were discerned, and callings were clarified. Joe and Jane ended up with greater appreciation for each other as brother and sister in Christ. They realized a mutual calling and planned a seminar to help youth make wise choices in the early dating years as foundation for later decisions about marriage.

Feeling more affirmed and focused in his congregational involvement, Joe became freer to take risks in mission. One night in the grocery store parking lot, he came upon a young couple (Jack and Jill) in a heated shouting match. Joe intervened. To make a long story short, Jack needed a job and Joe had been searching for an employee.

The employer/employee relationship lasted a year. In telling the story, Joe reflected that prior to the healing, personal affirmation and clarity of call he experienced in the support group, he would have walked away from such a situation.

Jack, a recovering substance abuser, began attending worship services and a new support group for men. Over that year he brought

four friends to various congregational events. He also brought his gifts: a profound understanding of God's grace and forgiveness, the reality of living life one day at a time, and how to rely on the resources of his faith. Joe, in his role as a Christian employer, was a blessing to Jack in helping him learn life skills and a new trade.

We engage in missional activity in our natural relationships for one simple reason: *We love because God first loved us* (1 John 4:19). Even though it is not our motive, it is important to realize that those to whom we reach out have significant gifts to enrich the body of Christ. Jesus frequently accepted ministry from those he ministered among. He sent the disciples out to do the same: to receive from those they ministered among (Luke 10:1-14). Missional ministry is mutual, if we are willing to recognize our own areas of weakness and need. The Jack's and their friends in our community have so much to offer us.

Joe and Jane experienced transformation in a small group. They still had differences, but they learned how to talk and work together, despite their differences. When groups begin with those with whom we are comfortable, we can limit the Spirit's healing work.

44 participated in last Sunday's congregational dialogue (10 via statements submitted in advance). The Spirit enabled us to form our individual mission statements into a common statement for each of the four tables (attached to this message). The four statements are being merged into one proposed mission statement by a task group on Oct. 18. Please pray for continued Holy Spirit direction in this effort. The proposed statement will be discussed on November 13.

If you missed your small group session focused on spiritual gift discernment, or are not in a small group, please attend one of the options listed in this message (also in Oct. 16 bulletin). -Gary Martin

Looking Ahead: "The Spread of the Gospel"

Oct. 16 9:30 a.m. *Blurring the Boundaries* Acts 10:1-29, 44-48 Brian
 Oct. 23 9:30 a.m. *It was in Antioch...* Acts 11:19-30 Gary
 Nov. 5 Retreat: *spiritual gift discernment*
 Nov. 13 11:00 a.m. Congregational Dialogue: *Mission Statement*
 Gary's projected in town schedule: Oct. 23-26; 30; Nov. 5-6