



December, 2011

Called by God and sent by the Living Christ, we the Northwest Regional Christian Church intentionally engage with one another rejoicing in our diversity and shared gifts, deepening our spiritual life, building true community, acting courageously in ministry and mission, and sharing God's good news with a fresh voice and a new song. We seek to "do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God." (Micah 6:8)

EVANGELISM

And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation." —Mark 16:15

My experience with Disciples in the Northwest is that evangelism almost seems like a dirty word to us. It's what those *other* Christians do—you know, the obnoxious ones. We're too shy to be evangelists.

But what we should realize is that the word evangelism comes from Greek roots meaning "good news." If we have good news, we should be willing to share it. In fact, we should be excited to share it! And the good news of Jesus Christ is as good as news gets.

As Disciples of Christ, we are called to share the Good News. It is an essential part of our role as Christians. The word gospel, too, means good news, and so sharing the Gospel and sharing the Good News are synonyms.

Now every time I visit a new church, I listen to hear what the good news is that is preached and communicated by that church. Is it that the Book Club is meeting Thursday night? Is it that we raised \$483 through the bake sale? Is it that Jesus Christ died for our sins? Is it that our God is a loving God, forgiving, generous, welcoming us home with open arms? Is it that this community welcomes me as a child of God? Is it something else? Or do I even hear good news at all?

To share the good news, we need to be clear within ourselves what the good news is. We need to be able to share it with people who don't know it. In order to do that, we need to be able to share it without using churchy language, or canned speeches. In fact, we're

usually best off by remembering the sentence attributed to St. Francis of Assisi: “Preach the Gospel at all times. If necessary, use words.” But still, there is a time when talk is necessary.

I go to many churches where the people are very friendly. Churches often use the word welcoming to describe themselves. But being welcoming is only half of our responsibility. We also need to be inviting. The days when we can say of churches, “If you build it, they’ll come” are over. We need to invite people. Invite our friends. Invite new acquaintances. Invite strangers. Invite neighbors. And we need to invite them by communicating good news.

We don’t need to go to foreign lands to act as missionaries. We need to recognize that we are living in a post-Christian culture. We can’t assume that people we meet have ever heard the good news of Jesus Christ. Sadly, that’s often true even for people who grew up Christian. I meet many people who have been wounded by the church, who wear the scars of their childhood encounters with it and want to stay far away. I meet many others who say, “I’m spiritual, but not religious.” But there is good news these people are longing to hear. If we don’t tell them, who will?

How can we change our church’s culture from a culture of reserved politeness to one of sharing and invitation? How can we empower every member of our congregation to know they are called to be witnesses “from our doorsteps to the ends of the earth?” There are plenty of practical answers to these questions, from Bible study and education to having practice sessions in sharing good news with one another. But what is most important is that we ourselves remember the good news we have been given; reflect in gratitude on how much richer and fuller our lives are because of that; and realize that we have the possibility of loving and serving our neighbors by sharing that gift with them.

How can we change our church’s culture from a culture of reserved politeness to one of sharing and invitation? How can we empower every member of our congregation to feel called to be witnesses “from our doorsteps to the ends of the earth?” There are plenty of practical answers to these questions, from Bible study and education to having practice sessions. But what is most important is that we remember ourselves the good news we have been given; reflect in gratitude on how much richer and fuller our lives are because of that; and realize that we have the possibility of serving our neighbors by sharing that gift with them.

View the entire blog at <http://musingsonmission.disciplesnw.org/>