



September, 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)

THINK BIG!

"Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." –Margaret Meade

In looking at churches and their work in mission, I find myself both impressed and disappointed. I am impressed that so many churches are engaged in wonderful work—feeding programs, collecting items to be given to people in need, making things to send to our mission partners, and on and on. I am disappointed that despite the effort, energy and money that members of our congregations contribute towards making this a better world, I rarely see a congregation that truly thinks big.

For example: many people see global climate change as one of the world's greatest problems. To pick just one aspect of this: not only has the amount of CO₂ (carbon dioxide) in the atmosphere increased by 30% during our industrial period, but so has the amount in the ocean. This makes the water more acidic, making it increasingly difficult for marine life to grow shells. The rate of change now is ten times greater than the last time this happened, 55 million years ago. At that time, there was a major extinction of bottom-dwelling organisms in the ocean. The rest of marine life depends on shelled creatures as a key part of the food chain, so the impact on life in the ocean is likely to be catastrophic.

I see two primary reasons why this problem is not being addressed effectively. First, the rate of change is so slow, that it doesn't seem urgent. We're like the frog in the pot of cool water that is warmed slowly—we'll cook rather than jump out because we can't feel the warming. Second, those individuals who are deeply concerned tend to feel overwhelmed and helpless. Individual choices such as riding a bicycle, using compact fluorescent bulbs, or installing a solar hot water

heater can't solve this problem. 82% of U.S. greenhouse gasses come from burning fossil fuels. Transportation and industrial uses are the largest contributors, followed by residential and commercial. It will take political change, changes in policy, laws, taxation, and international treaties to make a big enough difference to mitigate this disaster in slow motion. By the time the problem has arrived, it will be far too late to solve it.

What if a church were to decide they were going to commit to making a significant difference. Perhaps they could create a series of teams: one to study the issues and explain them to their church in simple ways, with the intention of looking for a leverage point where they could make a real difference; one to consider political action that might make a real difference, one to look for a technological breakthrough that might make a real difference, one to think of ways of influencing public opinion that might lead to real change, one to look at potential partnerships or linking of various groups or significant individuals that could lead to more effective action, one to think outside the box and to propose new avenues of influence, one to be focused on prayer, and so on. Once one of these teams came up with a proposal that really makes sense, the whole church could get behind making it happen. There are plenty of millionaires and billionaires around who would be happy to support effective action for climate change if a church could demonstrate a compelling case.

To show that this isn't just a pipe dream, you may recall that former Seattle Mayor Greg Nichols issued the US Mayors Climate Protection Agreement on Feb. 16, 2005, the day the Kyoto Protocol took effect. Since then, 425 mayors, representing nearly 61 million Americans, have signed the agreement, and the US Conference of Mayors unanimously endorsed the agreement. So I am impressed at how much influence one dedicated and creative person can have.

I have given quite a bit of detail here just to flesh out how such a project might be considered, but this is just one of a great many big projects a church might choose to take on. War, racism, hunger, AIDS, mental health—there is no lack of big projects that could be engaged.

Of course, there is no guarantee that a church would be successful. But one of the gifts of working for God is that we can trust that we are in service to something larger than ourselves, and give our hearts to the effort without being concerned about short-term results. There is tremendous power in this kind of collective effort. You may have seen how ants, when faced with a gap or a small stream of water no single ant can cross, will form a bridge of their bodies that the other ants can walk across safely. We too, by knowing that we are members of the body of Christ, can accomplish things no single individual could achieve.

Or as the Sufi poet Rumi put it:

“Start a huge, foolish project,
like Noah.”

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

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