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Pentecost 20 B – October 10, 2021

“What’s the Mission?”

Read: Mark 1: 14 - 20/Memorize: Mark 1: 17

Rick Warren begins his famous book, *The Purpose Driven Life* with this sentence: “it’s not about you.” Central to his understanding of God’s call is that we are to serve others. That led me to thinking about us stepping out in faith.

I came here in 1973, about two years after a split in the congregation. It had been very painful and damaging. It almost destroyed the congregation. By 1979, things were looking better but there was still tension. That year congregations were being asked to help resettle Vietnamese and Laotian refugees.

A nearby congregation asked us if we would help resettle the brother of their family. They explained that he spoke fluent English and had a master’s degree in computer science. We thought how could we go wrong?

We submitted paperwork only to find that he had been resettled. Instead, we were asked to resettle a family of eight. We felt challenged, yet that decision brought us many great blessings, perhaps greater for us than for the family we resettled.

All of a sudden, we all had to work together to provide for this family. They literally had only the clothes on their backs. We got to introduce them to Jesus by our actions and words, which would lead to their baptisms. Service always changes you as well as those you serve.

We stepped out in faith again in 1993, when we began Little Lambs. We felt God strongly calling us to do this. It would become one of our most effective outreaches. Families came and found a warmth here that changed their lives and us.

Sometimes, it was the child who led the parent. You can ask Christa Schneider about that. Her little girl, Rachel, asked to come back after graduating from preschool. Christa remains a member. Rachel is entering pastoral ministry. We have touched

almost 500 families. For about 60 % of those families we helped them meet Jesus through their children.

Our next step in faith would happen in the late 1990's. Our 5,000 square foot building was bursting at its seams. When we did Christmas food baskets the boxes were stretched across the pews because that was the only space we had. We had so many people and activities that it was hard to carry them out in our small building. We had to build.

Our vision for the build was to use this enlarged building as a ministry vehicle to touch lives. We would provide a space where people could meet, families could gather for celebrations and lives could be changed by meeting the love of Jesus. What a wonderful blessing it has been to so many.

We estimate that we, and more than 25,000 other people from the community, use it each year. I often have people asking me to thank you for the blessing it is that we allow them to share this space. Some have come to share our worship space as members.

This is our fourth campaign with the Lutheran Church Extension Fund. This campaign is focused differently. It's focused on getting us beyond the building, which is something our leaders have talked about. In the materials from LCEF, they asked us to set aside ten percent of gifts received to bless others. LCEF is reminding us that we want to be looking beyond ourselves as we serve God.

That's why we're partnering with Habitat for Humanity. We have committed \$30,000 to them to be the major sponsor for the home that is going to be built here in Canandaigua. Why did we do that? We did it because Jesus says to "love your neighbor as you love yourself."

The Campaign is challenged to come up with an idea for a big, hairy, audacious goal. It something that seems impossible to do, especially on our own. That's why we reached out to Habitat. We have people who love to serve. Partnering with them enables us to help a family.

This mission helps us all be involved in being a blessing for our neighbor, Christine. We don't know her and her son, yet, but we'll get to know them. We'll be able to use our gifts of time, talent and treasure to serve her on God's behalf.

This decision got confirmed when we talked with Habitat. They said they wanted to build a home at 59 Buffalo St. We can go on a mission trip within 2 ½ miles of our building.

I know we already serve in our community in many ways. We support CCIA directly by praying, giving food, birthday bags and contributions. Our Christmas food baskets bless 55 families each year. Our rummage sales and Christmas Treasures Bazaars are a great blessing to many.

Beyond our community we participate in Operation Christmas Child. As adults and kids we have made many contributions to Lutheran World Relief to provide tools, animals, medical supplies and quilts for shelter. These are all wonderful things, but they don't give us that face to face opportunity for mission work.

We wanted a mission project that would enable every one of us to be part of it. Some will build, some will pray, some will provide food, some will do many other things as a way of contributing. We'll invest our time, talent and treasure to bless a family with a safe, secure home.

Perhaps you know this story: One day a man was walking on a beach and he saw thousands of starfish that had been tossed out of the water by a storm. Then, he saw a boy throwing some back in the ocean. When he told the boy he could really not make a difference, the boy picked one up; tossed it in, then turned and said, "I certainly made a difference for that one."

Jesus said to "love your neighbor as you love yourself." Why didn't He say neighbors? I believe He's reminding us how important helping one person is. When we help one person we fulfill a part of the great commandment. The mission isn't building a home. The Mission is making disciples. We'll become more mature disciples as we live in obedience to Our Lord's command.

As we've been recruiting members to the campaign team, it is the vision of helping a family get a safer, more secure home right in our community that has excited everyone. We're putting a face and a name on Jesus' command to love our neighbor. We're doing it to serve them, our community and our God. God has placed us here to be a light to people. May God help us to shine that light brightly into the world!