



THE BRIDGE

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WITNESSING CHRIST AMONG US

By Rev. Pete Reuss

Pastor Marsha, near the end of an adult forum, walked to the window. She turned to the room. "Scripture is clear. God has called us out of these doors to be in the world. Look out there at the woman pushing a stroller down the sidewalk. How can we respond?"

Richard chimed in first. "I see a woman who needs to hear about Jesus. I want to get out there and tell her my faith story so she can believe."

Mary replied, "From the age of that stroller I suspect this woman needs some financial help. She needs to know that we have a food pantry here that can help feed her and her family."

Ron piped up, "This church really needs young families with kids. Maybe I can go convince her to come to worship sometime! Wouldn't it be great to have a baby crying in church or another kid in Sunday School?"

Sarah looked thoughtful. "I see a child of God. I want to know her name. I want to hear her story. She looks like a neat person."

Bishop Delzer has clearly articulated his desire for congregations to move outside their walls to engage in the community around them. Richard, Mary, Ron, and Sarah provide different mindsets that exist as people venture out.

Richard and Mary fit into an old concept of how the church has interacted with the world. The assumption is that the people in the church have something that people in the world need. Ron thought, "I have Jesus, let me bring Jesus to her," without knowing a thing about her or the ways that God had already

worked in her life. Mary thought, "I have money, let me help her with food" without having a clue as to whether the woman with the stroller wanted or needed financial assistance. Without realizing it, both Richard and Mary's ways of interacting assume an 'us' and 'them' perspective. 'We' have something 'they' need. It does not allow for equality in the relationship. 'We' will always be the patrons; 'they' will receive what we have to offer. It's a way for 'us' to feel good about doing things for other people without ever having to get too close to them.

Ron fell into a trap of desperation. While Richard and Mary focused on the woman's perceived needs, Ron focused on the needs of the congregation. He had little concern for the woman, her story, her wants, or her desires. People 'like her' were needed to keep attendance up and finances stable. The church wouldn't survive without 'new people.' She became a means to an end.

Only Sarah looked out the window and saw an actual woman, a person with a real life and a history, a person with real joys and sorrows, a person with real gifts and real needs. She saw a child of God worthy of a relationship. Sarah didn't have an agenda. For her, loving her neighbor meant walking alongside her neighbor and knowing her neighbor.

How can we truly get to know our neighbors, not as objects for us to do something to, not as people who will 'save our church,' but truly as Christ among us?



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