

Ministering Disciples: Acts 2:42-47

Norwalk Christian Church, June 28, 2015, Year B, Proper 8, Disciples Together Series

Acts 2:42-47 -- ⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Move 1: Marti

They've experienced Jesus' resurrection and in Acts 2 the apostles are out with the Holy Spirit sharing Jesus' teachings. Ministry is happening while they eat with people and pray with people. And as more people devote their lives each day to Jesus, churches are forming.

At the time of Acts 2, mostly due to society's view on justice, Christian churches were forming as intentional communities. People were no longer working for themselves, they were now working for the whole. Ensuring no one went without, everyone had enough. With glad and generous hearts they broke bread together. Knowing that around this table is where the real ministry happens. It's where hearts are known. It's where joys are shared. Around the table is where we come together.

We were going to tell you how important it is to minister and love on each other, but then we realized that this is one thing this church does best. You know how to be ministering disciples.

Move 2: Part One: Marti

We've been here a year, and from the moment we arrived, we've seen you in ministry to us, to one another and to this community.

From our first day meeting you, you were in service. Preparing our yard, helping us move into our home. Ministering and loving on us. We've seen our youth perform service projects. From cleaning church closets, organizing and labeling yard sale items, raking leaves at member houses, stock our local food pantry, mop the floors of a downtown Des Moines homeless shelter, and that doesn't even include the services and ministry they did while on mission trip or while counseling at camp. Our children love service projects. They love having the ladies from the Prayer Shawl ministry include them in finishing a few shawls. They love making cards for the card ministry. They love knowing they are a part of this church. Big and small, we've all got ministry skills to share.

Move 2 - Part 2: Travis

When I think of “ministering Disciples”, I think immediately of our Pastoral Partners, led by Don Darnell. I think of the ways they have sent notes of encouragement to our church family or stopped in to visit when someone is in the hospital. One morning Randy Williams sent us a message. Teresa was going to be alone for one of her first Chemo treatments, and he asked if Marti or I could stop by and visit. We were unable to go, but Don Darnell stepped up, went to the hospital, and sat and chatted with Teresa while she had her treatment. That’s ministry.

I’ve lost count of the number of mornings we show up at the church around 8:30am, and the parking lot is filled with cars of those who have met early in the morning to do work at the Christian Conference Center, always led by Arnie Becker. Many of these same people along with others have given up weekdays and weekends helping others around our church, too. When word got out that Mary Coon, our longtime nursery attendant, needed some yard work done, Kathy Pierce organized a crew and got the job done. The same thing happened when word got out that Kristen Loftsgard’s house needed some repair work and painting. I took a group of guys down there, and they took over and made it happen...especially Gary Fox! Kristen shared with us what a blessing you were to her family.

Then there’s all the ways this church stepped up this last year to contribute to ministry opportunities through the ministerial association. When asked to donate to Operation Warm Coats, you gave above the amount needed. Then you donated twice to the Food Pantry, bought School Supplies. We ran out of Angels on our angel tree, and many of you were complaining because you didn’t get to help. We had to go find more people to give to. Our youth were able to go shopping for Angel Trees with donated money and pick out items they thought their peers would appreciate getting for Christmas.

And I will never forget the conversation I had with Nicole Butler. While dropping her son Josh off at school last year in Laramie, Wyoming, she met his roommate, Khalifer. She learned his story, that several years ago his 3-year-old child past away, then his wife had--and beat--cancer, and then he was laid off after 11 years at his job. Now he was going to school, away from his family for a year, so that he could provide for them in new ways. He was very homesick, but was going to ride it out, because he didn’t have enough money to go home for their Christmas break.

Well, Nicole and her big pastoral heart wouldn’t let this happen. She told me the story. She told lots of you the story. She told our Outreach Committee the story, and our church ended up buying Khalifer, whom we had never met, a plane ticket to go home for Christmas. This family, who lives in California was touched forever by Disciples ministering from Norwalk, Iowa!

Move 3: Travis

But here’s the thing. These stories we’ve witnessed this past year are part of a long, long tradition of this church. You are the latest expression of a congregation that has been in ministry to this community for many years.

Our former minister Rev. Val Johnson, whom we laid to rest last year, was instrumental in creating the Norwalk Ministerial Association. And you may not know, but he requested that all his memorial money--over \$5,000!--be given "to help people". His family decided the best way to do that was to give to this church's Net Fund, which provides a safety net for people in our church and community in need.

I wrote a newsletter article last month about the long history of "Faithful Women" in ministry in our congregation. (If you haven't read it, read your newsletter! ;-)) Women's Circles from the very beginning of our congregation, like the Jenny MacAfee Circle which just held their final meeting, have been instrumental in our ministry. It was faithful women who raised the funds by selling Handkerchiefs to purchase our first parsonage in 1899 for the pastor and family to live in. They've honored high school graduates, provided educational and service opportunities for the community at large, funded ministries, organized fellowship--such a long legacy of service.

Some of you have shared stories of how this church stood beside you when you were going through unimaginable hardship, through grief and loss. Margo tells about how you stood beside her family when both of her granddaughters were born as preemies, as well as, recently, when her nephew Jacob had his foot amputated.

I've heard stories of how this church has, for years, opened your doors to Boy and Girl scouts, and now to Community Cares. How you have hosted weddings, for those a part of this church or those with no connection, how you have gone out of your way to show hospitality to families holding funerals and memorial services. And how this church has, for decades, run the Meals on Wheels program, providing food to people all over this community.

We could tell stories all day! From the past, from our present--so many stories of Disciples in ministry together.

Move 4: Marti

This is a legacy that continues. The early church grew daily, because people saw them working in ministry together. You see the symbolic Disciples' chalice each week with the St. Andrew's Cross. St. Andrew is associated with laity and evangelism. Ministering to others is not a radically new concept. It's something our heritage values and depends on. And something that the early Christian church in Acts knew well. May we continue to find ways to minister to our community, letting the great welcome of Jesus be known. One great way that's coming up is our Norwalk 4th of July parade. Our church members will be the ones marching with glad and generous hearts, not in perfectly formed lines, but praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.

Let us now prepare to come before Christ's Table, as we sing 413: Take Our Bread, a song about giving our gifts of ministry to Christ, so that they can be blessed and shared with our world.