

Shalom!

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Learning to Be Good Neighbors

IT SEEMS FAIRLY obvious that the Church ought to be a good neighbor. After all, Jesus told us that the two most important commandments are to love God and love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Yet, being a good neighbor is often difficult, especially when the neighborhood in which we live (or a particular church is located) is changing demographically and/or the neighbors are “different” from us.

That’s part of the state of affairs that Brethren in Christ U.S. is seeking to address in the fifth goal of its Project 250 initiative: “Growing to reflect the demographic changes in our communities.” Project 250 is a set of goals and objectives for the denomination in anticipation of the 250th anniversary of the Brethren in Christ Church in 2028—six short years away. (See page 11 for a list of Project 250’s five major goals and their objectives.)

I was able to get access to the summaries of the results of the MissionInsite demographic study for the ten-mile radius around my home congregation. While I confess that I don’t completely understand all the analysis, here are a few tidbits of the information I gleaned: 1) Retired people like myself comprise the largest individual segment of the population around my church (large retirement centers and 55+ housing developments). 2) Whites will remain a significant majority (more than eighty percent) well into the future, even though the numbers are expected to decrease somewhat as more Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians move into the area. 3) About sixty percent are in profes-

sional/technical or sales/service occupations, and the percentage of people living in poverty is well below the state average.

Taken together, these data points suggest that perhaps it’s okay if our church continues on the same course. But is that the right thing to do when we know there are many others within ten miles of our church who need Jesus and a faith community? And, given our demographic realities, just how do we go about reaching out with integrity to people who are different?

This is a question that has plagued our congregation for many years, and I suspect it’s a question for other congregations as well. The objectives for Project 250’s fifth goal seem to focus most on involving more women and people of color in our congregations, especially in leadership. They are worthy objectives, and definitely ones I support, but might there be other preliminary work to be done, like addressing some of the barriers? For example, do our people understand and fully support the denomination’s robust affirmation of women in ministry at all levels of church life? Or, do white people understand what we need to do to welcome and fully include people of color? “White culture” is so entrenched that it will take intentional work to loosen its hold on power.

I raise these questions not to critique the goals of Project 250, but to challenge us to seriously consider all of the implications of neighboring and “growing to reflect the demographic realities of our communities.”

Harriet S. Bicksler, editor

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New Possibilities for Community Engagement

By Jennifer Lancaster

AS WORK CONTINUES toward addressing the five priorities of Project 250, much attention has been given to the area of demographics and community in 2022. Brethren in Christ U.S. has partnered with third party data provider, MissionInsite, and the subsequent relationship has revealed varied demographic realities in the communities we serve and opened new possibilities for community engagement.

To best recognize the importance of what it means for churches to be neighbors and to neighbor well, I am drawn to the idea that neighborliness contains deep truths that are both timely and relevant in our congregations today. While neighborliness may not be a cultural fad—in fact, it has likely been

replaced by staunch individualism—Christians are called to love our neighbors. Rooted in the gospel mandate to love God and neighbor (Mark 12:29-31), we have a non-negotiable obligation to lean into knowing our neighbors. Why? Because my identity, and yours, is bound up in the fabric of the neighborhood.

Recent conversations on neighboring have led me to consider the following questions:

Who is our neighbor?

One answer to this question is found in the MissionInsite reporting. Each Brethren in Christ U.S. pastor will receive a QuickInsite report for their congregation. This report provides data on a variety of demographic indicators, including population, income, and racial/ethnic diversity within a community. Overall, the report will show readers high-level analytics representative of the community their congregation is in.

Another answer is found in the way(s) the church goes about discerning its mission and vision within the context of neighboring. We ought not under-value the role of discernment here, though it has been done in the history of the American church. Too often, discernment is disregarded and replaced by notions that are both prescriptive and exclusionary. One need not travel far down the road to encounter examples of this. Lest we not be trapped similarly, it is imperative that we know the narrative of our place. What does discernment look like; what does it yield? “Discernment is not the freedom to choose who our neighbors are like any other lifestyle or consumer choice in American society today. Discernment is about hearing, submitting to, and participating in the Holy Spirit’s leadership in the circumstances of daily life.”¹

Who are we?

The “we” in this question includes the make-up of an individual congregation. In creating relationships in the communities we serve, it is important to look internally and ask who are the folks that attend the church. Further, a commitment to the place and peo-

ple a church serves is paramount to enacting neighborliness. Authors of the book *The New Parish* call churches to recognize both a sense of “radical locatedness” and “dynamic relationality” as it relates to its presence in the neighborhood,

Radical locatedness: One way to be attentive in the community is to assess your congregation in relationship to its place. Asking if your congregation is a neighbor-making space might be a helpful first step. Put another way, “It is coming to know your neighborhood and becoming one of its characters.”² If you have never thought of yourself or your congregation in this way, take a moment to be curious about the stories told about your place.,

Dynamic relationality: Likewise, an attentiveness to your congregation and its relationship with people (i.e., neighbors) can greatly reduce fragmentation experienced within our broader culture. Creating and restoring relationships within the community is one function of the church body that can lead to shifts in culture. If done well, broken relationships can be righted and the body of Christ can expand,

How do we neighbor well?

When this question is asked, a shift occurs. Reading the MissionInsite reports beyond numbers and data opens a space for community narrative. Moving from knowledge of the quantitative to embodiment of the qualitative, individual people and the stories they tell allow us to learn new aspects of community life. Undoubtedly, there are stories we need to learn more about. In doing so, a new relationship might be possible. When we understand neighboring as a practice, it can lead to meaningful expressions of community and build sustainable change.

Imagination

Listen to the stories of neighboring in this edition of *Shalom!* Collected here are instances from across the denomination that demonstrate how the church is out there loving its neighbors. From rural to urban, Brethren in Christ churches, each in their context, use their giftedness to be a light in



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their community. In turn, that light leads to transformed lives and neighborhoods.

Assess the ways your congregation already neighbors well; celebrate it! Begin to envision new practices of neighborliness. Spend time walking in your neighborhood. Talk to local residents and businesses. Be intentional about your place.

Allow your MissionInsite reports to serve as a guide to building relationships in your community. By using the MissionInsite re-

porting to make data-informed ministry decisions, you are allowing data a seat at the leadership table. Share reports with your larger church staff and with your church board.

Notes:

¹Dwight Zscheile, “Who Is My Neighbor? The Church’s Vocation in an Era of Shifting Community,” *Word & World* 37, no. 1 (2017): 36.

²Paul Sparks, et al. *The New Parish: How Neighborhood Churches Are Transforming Mission, Discipleship and Community* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 136.

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Donut Wars?

By Chuck Salter and Emily Reese

DONUT WARS: DUNKIN’ Donuts or Krispy Kreme? Glazed or cream-filled? Everybody has an opinion. Most people are happy to tell you what they think about donuts. What in the world does this have to do with the church? Let’s connect the dots (or perhaps the donut holes).

When words like “outreach” or “evangelism” come up in church leadership conversations, often the focus turns to programs or events that are more attractional than relational. To be clear, events can have potential missional impact, but the challenge becomes building relationships beyond our own members’ households. The Brethren in Christ U.S. Project 250 initiative, led by Jennifer Lancaster, seeks to help Brethren in Christ U.S. churches do just that, using the tools available through MissionInsite.

Every church must continue to deepen relationships with people already connected to its mission. In *Get Their Name: Grow Your Church by Building New Relationships*, Bob Farr, Doug Anderson, and Kay Kotan point out that every church has two mission fields. The first seems obvious: we deepen relationships with people we already serve (already connected) and who know the love of God. The danger is for our mission focus to become so inwardly directional that we miss the second mission field entirely. The authors suggest that “[T]his second mission field is to take God’s love to the people we don’t already know and who are not already Christians (the unconnected). . . . This is because every time we raise the flag to take care of

ourselves, we must raise the flag nine times to remind us to take care of someone else.”

Make NO mistake, it IS about relationship building. In years of working with local churches, we have never met with any leadership team that declared “we don’t want to know our neighbors!” In truth, church leader responses are just the opposite. We want to know our neighbors. But knowing “about them” is very different from cultivating relationships and making friends. We want to be GOOD neighbors. Jennifer’s recent workshops have highlighted the importance of neighboring and leveraging MissionInsite data to build relationships more effectively in our communities.

In Acts 17:16-18, the Apostle Paul finds himself in Athens (not a particularly friendly community for the Christian church then. Paul could have looked for people who were like-minded, but he didn’t. The text of the Amplified Bible (verse 17) reads this way: “So he had discussions in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place day after day with any who happened to be there.” Notice that Paul goes where the action is. He speaks with Jews and Gentiles. He goes to the marketplace, the center of community activity, day after day after day. It’s a relationship-building habit Paul models for the early church.

Now for the twenty-first century donuts story.

Chuck was meeting with a men’s group in a small church several years ago. A great group of guys, most of them had been in the

church for many years. The church had an “internal” reputation of being very friendly. In fact, that was his experience when he visited initially—warm, friendly folks who seemed genuinely happy they had joined them for worship. Chuck says:

On this Monday evening as the men’s group of about seven men gathered, I had brought donuts from the Dunkin’ Donuts shop nearby. The Dunkin’ Donuts store was so close to the church you could almost see the roof from the church parking lot. Dunkin’ Donuts was a busy place—you could say a sort of modern day “marketplace” not unlike what Paul might have experienced in Athens, at least in the diversity of people gathered there especially on weekend mornings.

As we sat drinking coffee and eating donuts, one of the well-intentioned older men (most of us were older) said, “You know Golden Griddle Donuts (name changed to protect the innocent) are much cheaper and even better. That’s where we get OUR donuts.” People nodded their heads in agreement. I was stunned into silence. IT WAS NOT ABOUT THE DONUTS! Let the donut wars begin! I said with as much calmness as I could muster (and it wasn’t easy for me), “But guys, Dunkin’ Donuts is in our back yard! Some of our folks even eat there on Sunday mornings. Our neighbors gather there throughout the week. It’s a great opportunity for us to

make new friends.” The silence was deafening. Folks smiled politely, essentially patting me on the head and figuratively sending me on my way.

Chuck was hoping to raise the flag nine times to remind us that we need to take care of others. We need to build networks with others in the community. We need to get their names; we need to know and love them. Then, we have the chance to share our story, the Gospel story, with them. It’s no secret that most people connect with churches when they are invited by a friend.

Donut wars. It’s not about the donuts. It’s

about our neighbors gathered in the marketplace. It’s about the new friend you make, over a latte and a Krispy Kreme hot glazed (now you know Chuck’s secret preference). Let’s bless our friends in the marketplace and wherever they gather. That’s contextual intelligence in ministry. That’s the “art of neighboring” that we want to cultivate.

Chuck Salter is a United Methodist clergy person and Vice President of MissionInsite & Ministry Advancement at ACS Technologies. Chuck was one of the founders of MissionInsite and served as its President before ACST acquired the company in 2019.

Emily Reece serves on Chuck’s team as Strategic Consultant for MissionInsite & Ministry Advancement. She has applied MissionInsite to her ministry of church planting and congregational vitality for more than a dozen years. Together, they consult with churches, judicatories, and other MissionInsite partners to maximize use of the tools in this powerhouse demographics platform. Chuck lives in Columbus, Georgia. Emily resides in the Indianapolis, Indiana, area.

Two Bishops’ Perspectives on MissionInsite Tools

By Bryan Hoke and Rob Patterson

BRYAN HOKE:

A few years after starting at a new congregation and moving into their surrounding community, I learned about an upcoming way our congregation hoped to serve some individuals in need in our community. Our plan was to make soup, put it into smaller containers, and then give them to a free medical clinic in our area that served a group of individuals who had very few resources or access to basic medical care. I was excited that we were involved in this concrete way to show love and wondered more about the ministry with which we were partnering. I was shocked to learn the mobile clinic was only a few miles from my house and served a group of people whose children attended the same elementary school as my daughter. I had been learning about the area and meeting my neighbors over the previous couple of years but had no clue just a few miles away there was this type of need.

Yes, I was newer to the community, but I had been there long enough that I likely should have been aware of this group of people in my backyard who had concrete needs. Gratefully, others were aware and so I was also enlightened. That’s one way that can happen. Another way to help know our community, its people, and their needs is to use tools which pull together overarching demographic information. A tool like that isn’t a replacement for person-to-person contact,

but it can help congregations know where to look to best form those relationships and continue the mission of Jesus to those around them.

One congregation wonders about creating a new after-school program to serve families with whom they already connect through their preschool. But if they focus on only one school district, will they miss the bulk of families they already serve? A demographic tool allows them to plot the addresses of those families and see what school district is predominant.

Another congregation has a growing food distribution ministry. Are there certain areas where the majority of recipients reside, so that if we focused our efforts in those areas, we could serve a majority of people who are most in need? A tool which also has general income data helps them understand this more clearly.

As congregations, we desire to reflect the demographic realities of our communities. Are there certain people and language groups living close to our congregations, but who we may not be able to reach through the types of worship gatherings we offer now? By using demographic data, we can learn about our communities and clarify how the Holy Spirit may desire the congregation to move next. The data can show to whom we can go and serve at their point of need and potentially begin a new worship gathering or

relationship group in a different language.

Many congregations and individuals are very aware of those around them. Others might only know a certain segment of their communities. When combining the information demographic tools can provide with how the Holy Spirit is moving our collective hearts, we just might get clear direction and next steps to the neighborhood or front door of the person Jesus desires us next to love and serve.

ROB PATTERSON:

“Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Jesus of Nazareth).

Two of the most recognizable, respected, longest-running, arguably best-loved television programs aimed at children give a lot of attention to neighbors and the neighborhood. If I begin with an opening line, you’ll likely be able to hum the tune: “Oh, who are the people in your neighborhood?” (*Sesame Street*, 1969 to the present) or, “It’s a beautiful day in this neighborhood; a beautiful day for a neighbor. Would you be mine? Could you be mine?” (*Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood*, 1968-2001).

The questions posed in those songs resonate with a biblical theme of neighbor. The greatest command is to love God wholeheartedly. The second greatest command is to love our neighbor as ourselves. The *Sesame*

Street song makes a point of highlighting the occupational diversity of our neighborhoods, and the worth of a person as a person. Mr. Rogers is broader and more proactive, stating emphatically, “I have always wanted to have a neighbor just like you; I’ve always wanted to live in a neighborhood with you.”

Brethren in Christ U.S. is employing MissionInsite to assist with answering the questions, “Who is in my neighborhood?” and “How can I be your neighbor?” Using the vast resources of modern demographic mapping, we’re able to catch a glimpse of people who we often don’t see. Polish anthropologist Alicja Iwanska wrote that we tend to treat our fellow humans as scenery, machinery, or people. With hardly any debate, her assertion is commonly affirmed. People pay a lot of money to watch actors and athletes

put on a show. Tour buses routinely drive through Lancaster County, PA to view the Amish. Likewise, the usher, trash collector, cashier, bus driver, and most others in a service economy are often nameless, faceless, dispensable components of the social machine. Sadly, even within a congregation, it is possible for our brothers and sisters to be relegated to the category of scenery or machinery. MissionInsite should help us to heed the instructions on the old railroad crossing signs: Stop! Look! Listen! Who are the people in our neighborhood?

MissionInsite has the potential to greatly enhance our ability to be a neighbor. Much of the demographic information answers the question of who, but it also provides insight into the how. Where are the gates, doors, windows, and other entry points allowing for

meaningful engagement? How do I access the story behind the door? In my own life span I have witnessed the transition from house-to-house visitation, including by doctors and salesmen, to shopping malls and various forms of telephone socializing, to the digital age of social media and commerce. The command to love our neighbor is eternal; the human need for community is constant; the best way to do those things is fluid. May God give us wisdom, strength, and perseverance as we partner with him in advancing his kingdom on the earth in our generation.

Brian Hoke is bishop of the Atlantic Conference of Brethren in Christ U.S. and *Rob Patterson* is bishop of the Allegheny Conference.

Engaging with Changing Community Realities

by Chad Frey

THIS ARTICLE’S CRUX, like the rest of Scripture, hangs on the Great Commandment (Matt. 22:37-40) to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, and mind, and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. In other words, loving the Lord and loving our neighbors isn’t up for a debate among followers of Jesus. Yet it isn’t always clear who our neighbor is, or what is required of us when we encounter them. For instance, on one hand the Great Commandment seems to push us far beyond loving only the neighbors who are physically near us. But on the other hand, if everyone is your neighbor, then no one really seems to be.

Since 2004, I have had the privilege to be a member of Harrisburg Brethren in Christ (HBIC) church. Our congregation consistently asks questions about how to faithfully love God and neighbor in a diverse urban context. On any given Sunday, you can find us worshipping in an old car dealership off Derry Street in Allison Hill, a diverse urban neighborhood just a few miles from Pennsylvania’s State Capitol Complex. While our church building is in the city, many in our congregation come from rural and suburban as well as urban contexts. Considering the diverse array of people represented in our com-

munity, and the wide range of places where God has put them, it is necessary to nuance the ways we talk about following the Great Commandment and how we put this into context. Where we all live and work profoundly shapes how HBIC aspires to share Christ’s love and serve the needs of our local and global communities. Suffice it to say, this zesty mix of people and places makes for many catalytic conversations about how to faithfully love our neighbors.

What follows are five snippets from what we are learning at HBIC as we sketch out “neighboring” as a particular practice of how we can love people and our local neighborhoods:

1. *Start where you are.* Regardless of whether you find yourself living on a farm, cul-de-sac, or in a row home; neighboring begins by being intentional about knowing and interacting with those around you. When it is informed and animated by the Spirit, neighboring can turn strangers into friends who can be united across great differences by the grace of God. It can engender the fruits of the Spirit in our lives, our homes, and at our work. In short, neighboring has the powerful potential to engage us in the

work of God to make the earth a little more like it is in heaven.

2. *Love people for who they are.* How we go about neighboring reveals to us (and others) not only how we think about the Great Commandment but also how we understand the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). Neighboring is not a church growth tactic that turns people into targets to hit for conversion quotas, nor is it an assimilation scheme to get those around us to become more like us, thinking, believing, and doing the same things we do. Rather, neighboring helps us love people because they are made in the image of God. We practice neighboring because God’s grace is seen not only in our personal salvation but also in the renewal of our neighborhoods.
3. *Take the Great Commandment literally.* Metaphorical love for metaphorical neighbors leads us to very abstract conversations that aren’t helpful. To get “unstuck,” we launched a six-week book study on *The Art of Neighboring* with about twenty-five people who are trying to take the Great Commandment literally and then discuss what it means to love our neighbors where God has placed us. As

you can imagine, this can be awkward and messy work, but it has helped some of us develop more skills for ambiguity when we encounter difference and diversity around us. It has also reminded us that we don't have the corner market on the Kingdom of God as our eyes are opened through neighbor-ing to see how God is at work in unsuspected places.

4. *Work for justice in changing neighborhoods.* Neighbor-ing must be practiced at more than just an interpersonal level where it can too narrowly focus on building warm relationships with individuals who live next door. For neighbor-ing to be truly transformative, we must take seriously that not only might our neighbors also be our enemies, but that there are powerful systems and structures that have created and continue to sustain, and perpetuate injustice, violence, and poverty. Toward that end, we are beginning to merge the demographic data coming out of our denomination's Project 250 initiative with other research projects to investigate where HBIC's local neighborhood has come from, what is affecting it now, and where it is headed in the future. The data has been a welcomed tool to help us in-

crease our understanding of our local neighborhood and how it is changing so we can better love, care and serve our neighbors where they are.

5. *Keep a prophetic imagination.* Keeping our neighbor-ing practices focused on how we can be more responsive to the changing environments that our neighbors are experiencing has helped us prophetically imagine what the Kingdom of God might look like, as opposed to centering how HBIC could more closely mirror the trends around us. We must never use demographic realities to justify being monocultural. Simply saying that our congregations reflect the community around us doesn't take seriously how our neighborhoods have been engineered to produce the resulting demographic realities resulting from systems and structures at work in our place. (For instance, one only needs to consider how federal red-lining practices carved out areas in Harrisburg for funneling resources for economic development into some neighborhoods and not others based on race and ethnicity.)

These are just some of the neighbor-ing lessons we are learning along the way as we

engage the changing realities of the communities around us. We have much more to learn, and we don't have all the answers, but it isn't about that anyway. As a prospective member at HBIC recently shared with our congregation when they were inducted into membership one Sunday morning, "I'm here because you tell your story [of Christ at work] and love your neighbor."

Chad Frey has attended the Harrisburg (PA) Brethren in Christ Church since 2004 when he bought a home and moved to downtown Harrisburg. He has also served as a youth and young adult pastor at Dillsburg, Millersville, and Pequea Brethren in Christ Churches. He has worked at Messiah University since 2000 and received national recognition by the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Programs, U.S. Department of Education and Corporation for National Community Service (CNCS) for a variety of K-12 community engagement initiatives aimed at improving student achievement. Chad loves the city of Harrisburg and how his congregation prophetically imagines "the earth as it is in heaven." When he is not in the office strategizing new ways to leverage technology for community partnerships, he is most likely at a downtown coffee shop with his dog Everest.

The East Dayton Fellowship: A Neighborhood Church

By Zach Spidel

"**THE EAST DAYTON** Fellowship—A Neighborhood Church." That's how my congregation is identified on the invitation cards we use. That identifying phrase serves both as a fair description of who we are and as an aspiration we're still striving to fulfill.

"A Neighborhood Church" fits our church because such a large portion of our worshipping community lives within walking distance of the building. Our ministries, likewise, mostly serve our physical neighbors. For instance, the new Narcotics Anonymous meeting in our building was launched here precisely because our neighborhood has recently become home to a plethora of sober-living houses but had no local NA meeting

within its boundaries to which the residents in those houses could walk. Now, an average of eighty people converge on our building each Friday night for a candle-lit, reflective version of a NA meeting; many of them arriving on foot.

On Thursday nights, one of those local sober-living ministries I mentioned hosts a meeting of all their members in our basement. Our largest ministry, however, takes place during the day on Fridays. In partnership with a local non-profit, we provide hundreds of meals to hungry neighbors and open up a large clothing closet in our basement for those lacking adequate clothing. Pantry items are available on a limited basis, prayer



and friendship on an unlimited basis, all of it offered in the name of Jesus. Once again, the folks showing up are, for the most part, our literal neighbors. A good number of those neighbors have become volunteers and some of them have become full and trusted partners in the ministry.

These neighbor-partners are each at different points in their journey with Jesus, but even those who have not come to trust him yet find themselves welcomed in his name and included in his work. They are no mere passive recipients of some paternalistic "char-

ity,” but active participants in the true charity of God. These neighbor-partners illustrate how our church strives to be not merely *for* our neighborhood, but also *of* it.

We strive for this because, in Jesus, God became one of us out of a desire to provide salvation for us. We are called to extend the incarnation—to make Jesus tangibly available to our neighbors. This beautiful work has set us on a journey to become more and more what we say we are on our cards. We’re trying to listen to and follow Jesus closely, knowing that he is the one who can teach us how to become the good neighbors we know we’re meant to be.

The reason I mention all this here is that I take the goal at the heart of this issue of —*Shalom!*—“Growing to reflect the demographic realities of our communities”—to be a summons to this journey. I commend the goal in just these terms—as a summons for our congregations to engage, get to know, and to truly become good neighbors for our neighborhoods. I also wish to caution us against a possible interpretation of this goal that its language might occasion.

Before I began the church planting work here eleven years ago, I did some demographic research on the area and felt, thereby, as if I had come to know some important things about this neighborhood. I read about how to target ministries to specific “populations” and thought of the folks here in terms of the demographic categories into which such analyses place them. I made a five-year plan and tried to follow through on it based

on this abstracted, statistical sort of analysis. More than a decade of ministry here has led me to believe that this approach was unhelpful in many ways and unworthy of Christ in some.

Demographic analysis can tell you about income brackets, rates of divorce, average sizes of households, racial and ethnic identities, and countless other things. All this knowledge about your neighborhood is not, however, the same as knowing your neighborhood. Two people can look identical in a demographer’s spreadsheet and be crucially and quite obviously different to anyone who knows them both well as persons. This holds true for neighborhoods as well. Knowing a neighborhood well involves the adoption of a humble, open, patient, engaged, and loving posture—a posture we learn from Jesus. It involves risking yourself, getting involved, admitting how much you don’t know, being willing to look the fool as you learn, and staying committed through difficulty. It means surrendering a posture that demography as a discipline can produce in us—the posture of would-be experts who seek to craft ministries with managed outcomes on the basis of what is ultimately a reductive knowledge, a knowledge that reduces people and their communities to the terms that can be captured in spreadsheets.

The most important things about your neighbors are not things that demography can tell you. They are things that cannot be known apart from the slow, painstaking, and personally risky work of loving them. Love

knows in ways demography cannot, and it is love’s knowledge that is needed if our congregations are to serve their neighborhoods well.

Maybe your church, like mine, is in a poor, mostly white, urban neighborhood. You cannot, from these demographic facts, conclude that our approach to ministry is the one you should take. You would have to get to know the people—the real, particular people—who live near your church. Perhaps you have a neighbor who is lonely with a gift for music but no one with whom to share it. Perhaps this neighbor is meant by the Spirit to be the seed of a music tutoring program in your neighborhood. You wouldn’t know that apart from getting to know that neighbor!

So, when I read the goal to which this issue is devoted, I don’t read its invocation of “demographics” to be an invitation to think “demographically.” I read it not as invitation to dream of a church that is diverse in some abstract sense, with the right numbers of the right “populations” in the right proportions served by ministries crafted to attract such abstractly conceived populations. Rather, I read the goal as an invitation to throw ourselves into the good and joyful, the slow and difficult, the exciting and frustrating work of loving those real, concrete persons whom God has seen fit to give us as neighbors.

Zach Spidel is pastor of East Dayton Fellowship, Dayton, OH.

The Neighbor Next Door

By Jason Oberholser

HOW CAN CHURCHES be more attentive to the needs of those around them?

The Freedom of Nations Church, located in the Four Corners region of the US, is positioned in a strategic melting pot of various demographics. Our church and community are filled with Native Americans, Hispanics, Anglos of European descent, the elderly, middle aged, young children, rich, poor, middle class, educated, uneducated, etc. A lot of effort is made to appeal to the Navajo

culture, which comprises one of the larger populations in our region. The MissionInsite tool offered by Brethren in Christ U.S. was a valuable resource for our congregation as it confirmed certain thoughts we’ve had about our region. It also revealed areas where we can be more accommodating to those who might find themselves on the fringes of the social scene in our community. For example, the education level for adults in our region is mixed, meaning that approximately half of

the adults have had a good education and the other half haven’t had as much. To avoid making assumptions that could create social divides, it’s important to look beyond the numbers and statistics to see the people for who they are and the various dynamics affecting their lives.

Stigmas can so easily be created by our society towards people who are deemed “uneducated.” As a church body, Freedom of Nations Church recognizes that a person’s

learning style can affect the level of education they acquire; higher education may not be pursued by an individual if a program isn't accommodating to their learning style. We have learned that this doesn't mean that less educated people are any less intelligent. Many of our friends are very smart. It just means that they have a different preferred method of learning and retaining information. Some students obtain information best by reading a book or listening to a lecture, while others learn better by interactive storytelling and hands-on demonstrations,

I believe churches would do well to study their audience's learning styles and develop patterns for them not only to learn, but also to share what they are learning with others. Our church focuses on techniques and traditions that best accommodate the learning styles of those in our circles of influence.

The Navajo culture has a rich heritage of learning via oral communication and storytelling. Even today, the people tend to put more weight on a phrase that's been orally passed down from generation to generation rather than a quote they read in a book. Their language has a word called "Jini" which means "it is said." This phrase is often used to describe important information that has been passed down orally by some unknown ancient one. We endeavor to capitalize on their learning style as we introduce them to the greatest story ever told. We as a church want our Navajo friends to have an intimate and personal relationship with the God of the Bible. Instead of saying "Jini," we long for them to say, "God says!"

Freedom of Nations offers very little monologue preaching in group settings. Instead, our teaching sessions are conducted in a dialogue format. We enter each teaching time with the assumption that not everyone has already read the offered Bible passages or book. Volunteers are called on to read the scripture passage out loud. The facilitator presents a summary/introduction to the Bible passage/topic at hand and then invites the group into a dialogue on the subject. Key questions are interjected to keep the group on track. Scripture passages are often read in multiple languages to accommodate those who have various "heart" languages.

We believe that being sensitive to our peoples' preferred learning styles does three

things:

1. It demonstrates that each person's voice is valuable no matter how educated they are or how they see themselves in society.
2. It encourages people to learn by actively participating rather than passively absorbing information that may or may not make sense to them.
3. We desire to present a model that's easily reproducible. We recognize that most of our leaders won't go off to Bible college or seminary. We want our emerging leaders to learn in a way that makes sense for them. While our fellowship groups might focus on oral communication as our primary method of learning; we also work to include those who desire to go more in depth through reading. For example, when our groups study a book of the Bible, we often offer study guide materials for those who love to read. The emphasis and focus remain on what God's Word is saying to us.

As a community of believers, we also value the work that others are doing in our community to reach people where they are. It's easy to look at the large number of high school dropouts as being lazy and careless, but those prejudices fall when we have empathy towards the person. I'm grateful for my colleague and pastor of Broken Walls Fellowship, Denise Conway, who serves the undereducated population in the Four Corners region by providing tutoring resources that assist them in getting their GED. This assistance opens further opportunities for education and employment for her students. She has had the opportunity to celebrate with more than 120 graduates over the past ten years. Denise could easily complain about the number of students who decide to short-circuit their high school education; instead, she has dedicated her life to providing a solution to the problem.

Being aware of varying demographics in a geographical area allows the church to be more effective in reaching out to the community. Do you have an accurate picture of the demographics in your community? If not, I encourage you to use MissionInsite and other tools to discover them. Learn to recognize the unique ways that varying demographics could enhance your community. Then, use opportunities to connect with

your "neighbors" as a springboard for introducing people to a vibrant relationship with Jesus.

Jason Oberholser and his wife Rebekah serve as the pastoral couple for the Freedom of Nations Brethren in Christ church planting in Kirtland, NM

Editor's Notes

Corrections: On page 2 of the Summer 2022 edition, we incorrectly identified Bishop Lynn Thrush's hometown as Troy, OH. It should be Tipp City, OH. On page 11, the author's name should be Troy Gruder rather than Tony. Apologies for the errors!

Subscription renewals: At the end of 2022, we would welcome your subscription renewal if somehow it slipped your mind. The price for a one-year subscription is still \$20, with additional contributions welcome to cover the additional cost of mailing overseas and to each Brethren in Christ student enrolled at Messiah University. We also encourage you to include *Shalom!* in your end-of-year giving. Checks should be payable to Brethren in Christ U.S. and mailed to the editor (address on page 2). You can also renew online at bicus.org/resources/publications/shalom/.

Looking ahead to 2023: With all that's happening in the world and the church, there is no shortage of potential topics! Some possibilities: teaching peace, engaging in difficult conversations such as on the "culture wars," foundations for active peacemaking and a commitment to non-violence, and responding to Christian nationalism as Brethren in Christ. I'll be consulting with my advisers soon to make topical decisions. In the meantime, please contact me with your ideas for topics or if you would like to write for *Shalom!* (contact info on page 2).

Becoming Neighbors

By Timothy Diehl

IMAGINE YOU'RE sitting on a park bench during a busy time of day. You're enjoying the cool fall weather, admiring the leaves that have changed from dark green to beautiful reds and oranges. People walk by, some for exercise, others for pleasure. Some are walking their dogs (there are even a few cat-walkers); others are out with their kids. There's a lot of activity.

You glance at those who pass by you and you notice something odd: most refuse to make eye contact. In fact, you've started to notice that when people see you they make a point to walk on the other side of the path. For the first time you notice that quite a few folks are actually leaving the path to walk a bit further away from you—some even turn around when they glance your way. A number of the parents position themselves between their kids and you. Those few people who do look at you often do so with what appears to be a mix between pity and disgust. And even then, they quickly look away.

How would this impact the way you thought about yourself if this was how you experienced people in public on a regular basis?

As you can imagine, this is the lived reality of many people experiencing homelessness. I don't know about you, but I can often find myself engaging in these same types of reactions. The reasons vary. Perhaps your response is one of fear. Will this person hurt you? Or maybe you're embarrassed, wanting to do more to help, but unsure of what to do. Or you might be uncertain about whether to hand the person money or if they'll use it for drugs and so you just avoid the situation. Whatever the reason, this way of engaging with people strips them of their dignity and humanity, teaching them they are an object to be avoided or pitied, but not an image-bearer of God worthy of love and respect.

While it may be understandable that we respond this way, I would humbly suggest that for followers of Jesus this response is evidence that we (and I readily include myself) have been more deeply shaped by fear of the other, societal norms, and personal comfort than we have by the radically uncomfortable

and inclusive love of Jesus. Or to say it more bluntly: it's evidence that we still need to grow in our love for God.

Most of us have heard the parable of the Good Samaritan ad nauseam. Many of us have preached several sermons on it. So I won't belabor the point, but I would like to reflect on it in light of the question of how we can and should engage our neighbors in poverty. As you know, Jesus tells the story in Luke 10:25-37 after a legal expert asks about the greatest commandment. Jesus affirms that loving God and loving your neighbor are the two greatest commands in the law. The expert then asks for clarification about who he was responsible to love. Jesus launches into the story.

There are two things that stand out to me in this beautiful and convicting parable. First of all, I and most Christians I know instinctively respond to people experiencing homelessness as the first two individuals in Jesus's story respond to the wounded man. We "pass by on the other side." I'm sure you have good reasons for it. I know I do. I'm certain the Pharisee and Levite did as well. It doesn't really seem to matter to the point of Jesus's story, though. They (and we) failed to identify the man as neighbor and therefore miss out on the opportunity to love God well.

Secondly, this story is not in the end primarily about what you do but about the type of person you are becoming. Perhaps you've noticed Jesus's turn of phrase at the end. The man asks, "Who is my neighbor?" (v. 29). Jesus asks, "Who was a neighbor?" (v. 36). I believe that Jesus's primary concern in the telling of this story is not that we know how to respond in exactly the right way to those who are hurting (there is no one right way), but that we become the type of people who could rightly be called "neighbor" to the hurting. And by that Jesus means living as people who freely offer mercy to all those whom we encounter (v. 37).

If you'll grant me this interpretation, then allow me to offer some questions and thoughts for reflection:

1. What rises up in you when you see someone who is experiencing homelessness? Is

it fear? Shame? Judgment? Mercy?

2. Why that? What causes you to see them in that light? What is the story you are telling yourself about them?
3. Prayerfully imagine yourself walking with Jesus as you encounter this individual. How might Jesus respond?
4. When Jesus says, "Go and do likewise," what do you imagine he means?

One thing we talk about a lot at Water Street Mission is that if you've heard one story from someone experiencing homelessness, you've heard one story. Every story is unique—which is why Jesus doesn't hand us canned responses, but instead desires to transform us into neighbors.

If you'd enjoy hearing some of those stories of individuals who have experienced or are experiencing homelessness from their perspective, as well as how God is at work in restoring them, check out some of our resources at Water Street Mission at www.wsm.org/see-the-impact/. Hearing others' stories is a great way to allow God to begin to grow you into a "neighbor." Additionally, consider reaching out to your local rescue mission for a tour and to learn more about the work they are doing in your community to "go and do likewise."

Timothy Diehl is a former Brethren in Christ pastor who currently serves as a partner ambassador for Water Street Mission, a 115-year old mission in Lancaster, PA. Water Street's vision is to see individuals experiencing homelessness "Restored to be Restorers." Outside of the mission, Tim enjoys anything involving his family, theology, or basketball. He lives with his wife, kids and a tiny cat-dog in Wyomissing, PA.

Extending Peace to a New Community

By Richard McDonald

"We have God-fearing people. God-fearing people bring peace to a community and bring a goodness that sometimes you don't find elsewhere. I think the church is gonna be phenomenally successful there."

—Chino (CA) Mayor Eunice Ulloa, September 6, 2022, upon approving Gateway-Karis new church property

ONLY GOD CAN bring peace to our hearts. The Bible says Jesus is our peace (Eph. 2:14), and yet most people don't have peace unless they've made peace with him. A former Shia Muslim who put his faith in King Jesus said he had "something within me that was always at war with me . . . (but) that moment, when I made that commitment . . . it was yanked out of me and for the first time in my life, I felt peace."¹

We want to help bring that peace to the community in which we minister. People need hope, now more than ever, and only King Jesus can bring that hope. He's the "anchor of the soul," our very present help in a time of trouble. No matter what we face, we can say, "It is well with my soul!" However, many of the people in the College Park area, where approximately 6,000-7,000 people live and many more visit, don't have this hope.

Gateway-Karis lies in the middle of a changing demographic environment—Chino, California, is moving from being mostly white/Latino to having a large percentage of Asians, primarily from China, India, the Philippines, and other Asian countries. Our church demographic is approximately 60 percent Asian (primarily Chinese and Korean), with the remainder white, Latino and African-American (in that order).

Thus, we leapt at the opportunity Brethren in Christ U.S. has presented all member churches to use an awesome program from MissionInsite, and it's free! We have mapped our area and plan to send targeted mailers to local families for upcoming outreach events. We've had several events in the past that haven't fully reached into the demographic groups surrounding the church

that we wish to reach. This tool should help us minister more effectively in our new community, which lies less than a mile from our existing site.

"We want to reach out to first-generation people from China, India, and other Asian nations along with their children," said Pastor Peter Song, a second-generation Korean-American who grew up in Los Angeles and will become Gateway-Karis's senior pastor on January 1, 2023. "Brethren in Christ U.S. has provided this excellent tool we feel will help us reach these unchurched people groups."

Through the help of Jennifer Lancaster from the Brethren in Christ U.S. staff, we mapped our own church demographics, then worked with MissionInsite to map the College Park area, where the city of Chino on September 6 voted to allow us to move and establish a new site. Finally, we worked with Mission Insite to obtain a full mailing list of the area that gives us names, ages, a breakdown of household children age ranges, as well as ethnic background. Thus, we can now send out mailings targeted to specific age or ethnic groups.

"At some point, Christ's love grabs hold of you enough so that you love others more than your own comfort," said Paul Lehman-Schletewitz, Gateway-Karis's retiring senior pastor. "It's uncomfortable to deal with other cultures and other people groups' expectations, but seeing the lost won and the won redeemed is the greatest joy. 'Becoming all things to all people so that by all means I might save some' is worth the effort."

That's the goal we feel the Lord has given us: seeing the lost won and the won redeemed. We place a big emphasis on "reaching our neighbors," some of whom live in China. We've had a few couples from China recently apply for asylum as they become part of our growing Chinese ministry,

One couple who recently immigrated from China was baptized at a September baptism event held at some congregants' backyard swimming pool. It was very hard for us to go to church (at home), much less be baptized," said the husband, Chris.* "If

someone from the government found out I was going to (an underground) church, I would be arrested. In Chinese house churches, pastors no longer dare to baptize others."

His wife, Christine,* said "I just want to be baptized again and again and again; it was such a great feeling!" Both are now involved in the Chinese ministry at Gateway-Karis, less than six months after their move from China.

Another recent baptizee, ZhangYi Lai, has been involved in both English and Chinese Bible studies at the church. "I want to feel his peace every day," she said during a recent Bible study. "No matter if something good happens, or something bad happens, it's okay. I want to have his peace."

Reach the lost and disciple them. Now we get to extend that peace to a new community!

Notes:

¹Mohamad Faridi, interview on CBN, <https://www1.cbn.com/video/SAL249v1/muslim-trades-uncertainty-for-a-life-of-peace>,

*Not their real names.

Richard (DMac) McDonald serves as pastor of evangelism at Gateway-Karis Church in Chino, CA, and also works as manager of fixed income at a bank trust department in Southern California.

Project 250 Goals and Objectives

Brethren in Christ U.S.

WE ARE EXCITED by and energized to pursue the many priorities, objectives, and goals outlined in Project 250.

1. *Reaffirming Our Identity as a Community of Christ-Followers*

Our identity in Christ precedes every other aspect of who we are and what we are called to do as God's people. We are committed to keeping Jesus at our center, going directly to the Word of God for guidance, and teaching our core values as guiding principles for life and practice. Our objectives are:

- Increase understanding and awareness of our core values.
- Update the *Focusing Our Faith* book, including core practices.
- Have Brethren in Christ U.S. congregations use the core values and their supporting materials in congregational life.

2. *Making Lifelong Disciples*

We live in a post-Christian world, yet Jesus calls us to a lifelong journey of discipleship and to invite others into intimacy with Christ. We are committed to enabling our congregations to engage in this work by providing teaching and resources for those at all points of their faith journey. Our objectives are:

- Increase understanding and awareness of the nature of discipleship from a Brethren in Christ U.S. identity and perspective.
- Increase understanding and awareness of disciple-making principles.
- Have Brethren in Christ U.S. congregations develop a contextually-specific process "roadmap" for developing lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ.

3. *Multiplying Missional Congregations, Movements, and Leaders*

Our congregations are called to impact and invest in their own communities. We are committed to strengthening and multiplying leaders and congregations of all sizes to be healthy, thriving, and reproducing. Our objectives:

- Have Brethren in Christ U.S. congregations better understand the nature of healthy and reproducing congregations.
- Train assigned ministers in servant leadership and equip them to teach others.
- Multiply sites of missional vitality that draw people into a lifelong relationship of knowing, loving, and following Jesus.

4. *Increasing Global Awareness and Impact*

Brethren in Christ U.S. World Missions has been active in cross-cultural ministry for more than one hundred years and has helped establish a network of pastors, churches, and ministries all around the globe. We are committed to providing education about our global footprint and building relationships between our congregations and missionaries. Our objectives are:

- Have Brethren in Christ U.S. assigned ministers and congregations become more aware of the need for and challenges of cross-cultural ministry.
- Have Brethren in Christ U.S. assigned ministers better understand the global reality of the Brethren in Christ Church.
- Have Brethren in Christ U.S. congregations better understand and connect with our missionaries.

5. *Growing to Reflect the Demographic Realities of our Communities*

The communities that surround our congregations are diverse, and we want our congregations to reflect that. Additionally, we want to increase the number of qualified women and people of color serving in Brethren in Christ U.S. assigned ministry roles and governing boards. We are committed to providing resources, encouragement, and accountability as we grow in this area. Our objectives are:

- Have Brethren in Christ U.S. congregations better understand the demographic realities of their congregation and community.
- Increase the number of appropriately-qualified women and people of color

serving in Brethren in Christ U.S. assigned ministry roles.

- Increase the number of appropriately-qualified women and people of color serving on Brethren in Christ U.S. Regional Conference and General Conference governing boards.
- Increase the number of appropriately-qualified women and people of color serving/advising on the Brethren in Christ U.S. Leadership Council.

Reprinted from bicus.org/project-250/objectives/.

continued from page 12

should link directly with your global neighbors. These linking relationships are to be mutual. Each giving, each learning, each growing. Linking, like rooting, is relational.

While the book has much more to offer than place, rooting, and linking, these three basic concepts are helpful and easily incorporated into a way to think about church, a way to be present to place, a way to dig deep and to reach out, and a way to be intimate within our neighborhoods, but not isolated from other people and places. Many churches are already engaged in these ideas, but the book can help foster, refine and promote an intentionality that may be lacking.

While vibrant neighborhood churches can bring about godly change, even this informative discussion and the encouraging concepts must be submitted to the Holy Spirit so that we do not yield to "the temptation of technique." We can ask: Is God calling me to the neighborhood church? We can also ask: How is God calling my church to lean into its neighborhood? Then we can follow God's calling, and not just another book, on how to be the church.

Lois Saylor is an editorial advisor for Shalom! and attends the Harrisburg (PA) Brethren in Christ Church.

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BOOK REVIEW

Church as Parish: Place, Roots, and Links

By Lois A. Saylor

WITH WEARINESS FOR books about strategies for churches, I started *The New Parish*, by Paul Sparks, Tim Soerens, and Dwight J. Fiersen with apprehension. However, I found places of profound agreement which related more to outlook and overview than strategy, more to a theological mindset than a how-to mentality. In fact, they warn against the “temptation of technique” which the authors call a superstition for the modern age. Instead, authors Paul Sparks, Tim Soerens, and Dwight J. Fiersen encourage churches and believers to authentically commit to their literal neighborhoods and neighbors, or to their parish, and share how this transforms mission, discipleship, and community.

With books of this sort, I find it most helpful when there are take-aways that can stick and remain a part of one’s thinking regardless of putting particular plans into operation. The first and perhaps most fundamental idea is that of “living above.” This is when we live in one place, but our work, our shopping, our entertainment, and our churches are not a part of our geographical neighborhood. We live above and not into the place where we actually live.

The authors commend us to live in con-

nection with our neighborhoods, including the people, the shops, the businesses, the social life, the politics, and the land. In a critique of the modern church they reference social psychiatrist Christena Cleveland who “observed that when the church left its historical focus within the neighborhood it ended up becoming homogenous and consumer-oriented.” We “shop for churches” that match our “individual values and are culturally similar” passing dozens of churches on route to “our church.”

As an antidote to this individualism of “finding my church,” they look to the Trinity itself which is “an example of the paradox of individuality and community happening at the same time.” They also look to the incarnation saying, “If the nature of God as Trinity models your relational calling, then the incarnation of God demonstrates your missional calling to live into time and place.” We too live in a relational community of God, ourselves, and the church (a trinity), and we are called to live in an experiential community with our neighbors (incarnation).

The second take-away is rooting which digs into ways of becoming a part of your local neighborhoods, to not “live above place.” It propels the authors’ theme of “rela-

tional and located perspective.” Becoming an active and known member of your neighborhood allows you to both understand the needs of your community and to be an influence for the good with your neighbors. It creates relationships and partnerships of mutual enjoyment and benefit. However, while reading this I became concerned that rooting might cause homogeneous enclaves which can actually build barriers to “outsiders,” perhaps working to keep outsiders out. Unless you already live in a diverse neighborhood, rooting could be fraught with ethnic, economic, and educational divides becoming more ingrained. To the rescue comes the next foundational concept of linking.

Linking is the third take-away, and it helps to avoid the cloistering effect of rooting. Linking can and should happen with other local churches and with churches chosen to cross cultural and racial and numerous divides like rural/urban or religious differences. Linking should also happen with nonprofit organizations to partner in learning and mission. And finally linking should be global which again crosses all sorts of cultural, racial, and national divides. Global linking can include but should be more than missionaries coming to tell their stories. You