Outreach Center Network News Letter

November 2015

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Reconnecting

I’m glad to be reconnecting with you and glad to help you all connect with each other and grow in ministry. First, a tiny bit about me. About half of my time is spent at home; caring for my family and all that goes on in the house. Part of my ministry time is serving part time at St. Paul’s Lutheran, a small inner city parish in St. Louis, Their goal is to rebuild and reach out into the community. This work is primarily on Tuesdays and Sundays. This congregation has encouraged me to once again serve people who are blind as they see my pastoral heart remains with the millions of people who are blind and visually impaired. To this end they are Calling me to be the pastor for the blind.

By the use of “audio podcast files” I provide a devotional thought weekly. In addition, many of you all have asked for help in networking, training and encouragement. To this end my services and this newsletter is being launched. Thank you for your encouragement, help and support.

Pastor Dave

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A Thanksgiving Devotion

You may use this at your Outreach Center, but do not forget to apply it to your own spiritual life.

“Be anxious for nothing, but by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.” Philippians 4:4

Some would say, "Give thanks? For what? For all the evil that is on the news? For the poverty, starvation and sick people all over the world? Give thanks for divorced and broken families? For my loss of sight?

Yes, the Bible verse says, "Be anxious for nothing but by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known onto God."

In fairness it should be told that these words of Paul were written in less than perfect circumstances. They were not penned in a castle after a full thanksgiving meal. They are part of a letter that Paul wrote from prison. He wrote to the believers in Philippi, a congregation, little more than a dust ball under the couch in a world of many religions and a world controlled by the strong arm of the Roman Empire. The members would soon know persecution. Their leadership was thin and unconvincing. There was really no certainty that the Church would last or that it would ever make it.

We who are part of an outreach center are in a similar situation, aren’t we. And this is why we give thanks, not to good fortune or luck, but to God!

We give thanks to God-- the God who promises to hear our prayers and supplication. The God who promises to raise us from the grave just as He did His own Son. The God who promises to supply all our needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus as Paul reminds us toward the end of this letter.

Do not be anxious but pray, and not just pray, but do so with thanksgiving. This does mean, give thanks, even for the bad, sad, ugly problems and hurts of life.

Why, and how?

Why? Because God tells us to do it! If that isn't enough there is more. If we don't give thanks, what will we do-- complain, grumble, feel sorry for ourselves? This assumes that life is suppose to be good to us, that we receive only good things, and that God shouldn't let anything bad happen to us.

Hmmm. I never saw that guarantee in the fine print, large print, Braille or on cassette. Actually the Bible says something quite different. It tells us that this world has evil. Ever since the fall into sin, the desires, thoughts and actions of men and women, you and me, are often for ourselves. This is why we see so much evil, hurt and pain in our lives and world. If there be anything good, it is because God has intervened and stopped evil from taking over this planet.

God instead of being fair and just decided to be kind and merciful toward us. If God were only just we would receive only punishment from him; just as a child who pushes his or her parents too far with his or her selfish actions. This is why we give thanks for and in everything.

We know that we have God's promise that no matter what happens God will provide for us, help us, support us because of Jesus. Even though things are gloomy and grim, we have God. This is why we thank God, for the help he is giving.

Pastor Dave

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The beginnings

The first center was established in Pittsburgh in 1999 and is still going today. It helped develop much of what formed the vision of an outreach center. From their work I developed a general letter I sent out to others to help others glimpse the vision of the ministry. Because you have this vision you have been able to continue ministry. Congratulations on a job well done. Here is some of that letter.

What is an Outreach Center for the Blind?

Did you know that there is a large population of blind people in your area? 4% of any population is blind and visually impaired. 95% of this group is unchurched. They are in every community through the United States—including in your area.

At first glance it looks like a group of people who are blind gathering together for a meal, made possible by volunteers of a congregation. A basic, simple devotion is done at the meal by the pastor and/or finally a blind leader once trained. A time of fellowship or mingling is present, allowing people who are blind to develop friendships and befriend one another.

The concept is simple: by providing a meal once a month a community of blind and visually impaired people is developed. This becomes a safe environment for encouragement, support and adjustment to blindness. This opens the door for spiritual conversations which always leads to sharing the gospel.

We will supply all of the necessary supplies and training that are needed. We do this in the format the blind leader and attendees need. We will also send a member of our B-Team (Best Team) who is a trained Blind outreach center director to train your congregation and your outreach center director about how to smoothly open an outreach center.

The primary focus and goal of a center is to share and show human compassion and kindness. This will later lead to sharing of the Gospel with people who are blind. The center, will show and speak God's love in a way blind people need. They also are helping to reconnect churches with people who are hurting in society.

So what is being asked of the local congregation?

1 A pastor who desires to reach people who are unchurched and who are in need of hearing the gospel. The pastor is not the leader but rather draws attention to the work which will encourage members to step forward to volunteer.

2 a congregation that is willing to open their doors for people who are blind and visually impaired to meet once a month for the meal. A room for the meal and possibly shelving for Braille books is needed so that those who come always know where to go. A dedicated room is not needed, just one that is consistently available each month.

3 Volunteers who are willing to provide service time to make the monthly meal possible: cooks; servers; drivers to pick up people. The more volunteers there are, the easier a center becomes. A rotation of service can then be set up so that volunteers do not feel burdened. A center can start with as few as 8 volunteers. 15 to 30 volunteers is most helpful.

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This Month’s Focus

In the upcoming months we will look at many of the concepts and principles noted in the introductory letter. this month however, I suggest viewing the general concept of an outreach center as a whole: a safe community for people who are blind to gather, to invite others, to encourage and support one another. This was the original vision of an outreach center. Have you shared this lately with others at the center? Do those who come know the vision? You might want to mention this at your next gathering.

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Spotlight on a Center

Andalusia, Alabama

The center director is Wanda Sasser Scroggins. She wrote the following about the center:

We do not have a sponsoring church. We consist of many different religious beliefs. However, after becoming a Director and accepting my role in the blind community our Outreach Group has excel in many areas.

#1. We meet twice a month at the Andalusia Public Library, on First and Third Thursdays from 1 to 3 pm. Free Resources are available. Most of us meet at a local place to eat before the meetings. This makes us high profile in our communities. We are no longer treated as space aliens. We are accepted as equals. We do have 7 guide dogs in our centralized area.

We have been in existence for 8 years. We have all grown together and are all considered to be high visible support people in our communities.

#2. Our Outreach Group has spun off several other support groups. Dothan, Fairhope, Prattville, Tuskegee, Montgomery; all in Alabama.

#3. We have created the “Extreme Experience Retreat” (EER). This year was the 6th Annual Retreat. We hold it at the end of September for four days. We had 100 Blind or low vision adults attending this years EER. This has been a very successful partnership with many different organizations.

#4. We created the first cyber/phone V I P Lions Club. The primary project of this Lions Club is financing and running the “Extreme Experience Retreat”.

At the outreach center, our common thread is “We Believe” by offering Independence and Hope. We devote our time, wisdom, and grace to all. This is why we all soar as if an Eagle. Our Actions speak of our reactions to Blindness. We are serving with Perfect Vision.

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Final Thoughts

In upcoming issues we can and will look at many of the same topics as well as others. If you have questions, thought or suggestions, please post them on the blind ministry email list.

Pastor Dave