Outreach Center Network News Letter

December 2015

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Moving Forward

This past month, St. Paul’s Lutheran church in St. Louis called me to be their pastor and the pastor for the blind. This word, “Call” is an official request by a congregation to serve in some form of ministry. Because it is done by a congregation, it is understood that it is actually God at work through his people.

During the past year St. Paul’s has heard me speak of the outreach centers for the blind and the wonderful outreach they do. To support this work and the audio podcasting I am doing, they officially called me to this ministry. I have accepted this call and will be installed January 10, 2016. So what does this mean? Does anything change?

It means that the ministry work is not a dream or personal work. It is recognized as important and part of God’s kingdom work. This means your work is important and significant—so much so that a congregation is going out of its way to provide a pastor to you.

Does anything change? Perhaps. What else would you like Blind Ministry to do for you?

Thanks.

Pastor Dave

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A Christmas Devotion

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

Christmas tells the story of our God entering our world. He entered our world to change it, to change us, to forgive, accept and utilize us!

Why are stories so important? I would like to tell a story to explain the importance of stories.

I heard this story several years ago and it stuck with me. It was a sociologist who said, "We need to live our religious stories more, but in order to live them, we need to know them. The sociologist related the episode of a girl named Ruby. Ruby, during the time of segregation, was always escorted, first by car and then by federal marshals, into the school to keep Ruby safe. Every day, as she got out of the car, escorted by federal marshals, people would speak and yell racial comments to little Ruby. For she was not of the same skin color as every one else there. Every day Just before entering the school, Ruby would stop, bow her head, and then go in.

The sociologist finally asked Ruby, "What are you doing when you bow your head and why?"

She said, "Well, when I stop and bow my head, I say a little prayer, and this is the prayer that I pray, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing."

Ruby obviously understood the power and meaning of story. She understood that when Jesus was hanging on the cross, He prayed, "Father forgive them." When the people were jeering and hurling insults at him, He forgave them. And that story stuck with little Ruby and gave her the strength to do the same thing, to forgive them. It was not just a model for her. Ruby understood the story, that Jesus forgave her and he was now helping her forgive others.

The Christmas story can be your story. Jesus our God, came into our world; born like us, lived like us, suffered and struggled like us, died for us. We know he is always with us. Even as God helped Mary, Joseph and the shepherds so he will help you.

Pastor Dave

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This Month’s Focus

Last month I shared an introductory letter. The letter gave a general concept of an outreach center as a safe community for people who are blind to gather, to invite others, to encourage and support one another.

In order to accomplish this centers were established with five core values. A core value is something absolutely necessary to survive. For human life some core values would be to eat food, drink water and breathe.

With this in mind one of the core values of an outreach center is to show human care and compassion. This is primary because a person who is blind has not experienced this in their life or, if they have, it was a long time ago. Whether it is true or not, people who are blind feel marginalized by society.

People who are blind are also concrete in their thinking. An idea or concept is understood much better when it can be experienced through the senses of touch, smell or taste. Words are words; Kindness however, is something a person who is blind can see.

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Outreach Center Holiday opportunities

In that December is very busy for congregations some centers do not meet. Others combine November and December gatherings early in December, thereby avoiding the busy holiday itself. No matter what your practice there are several things you can do as a center and as leaders.

1. People are more open to be prayed for during the Christmas season. Therefore go out of your way to contact people who are blind and tell them you are praying for them. Ask if they have anything specific he or she wants included in your prayers.
2. This is a great time of year to both be a blessing and remind people of the blessing that Christmas is. Remind people that we give gifts on Christmas because God started the practice of giving when he gave his son to save us.
3. People who are not involved with God or church are more receptive to an invite during the holiday season. So if your outreach center is meeting, go out of your way to invite people who have not come or who quit coming.

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Spotlight on a Center

Little Rock Arkansas

The outreach center at Little Rock started in April 2001. It is hosted by First Lutheran. It has 38 to 45 blind/visually impaired at the monthly meeting. The support group members enjoy the socializing, meals & meetings. Each year the outreach center board meets and makes a schedule of events and guest speakers.

Bay City Michigan

Russell Zimmermann wrote:

We started the outreach center in June of 2012. We meet the 2nd Friday of each month at the Good Samaritan Rescue Mission in Bay City, Michigan. We usually have speakers come in to speak to us and I arrange for them. I also invite close to forty people each month and we get about fifteen people on average each month. We are not sponsored by any church. The Good Samaritan Mission is run by Baptists and the couple that started the group with us got us a space in the Mission.

Occasionally we have meetings just to talk about things that are important to us. We also have a picnic in the park in July and a Christmas party potluck each year. The people I invite come from all sorts of ways.

My greatest joy for our group is that we have a couple who come fifty miles each month to join us at our group meetings. They have told us that our meetings are the only time they see him smile.

We advertise in the Senior Citizen paper in the county and the Bay City Democrat paper. I also keep my ears open for people I encounter at the hospital during my chaplaincy visits.

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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, thoughts or suggestions, please post them on the blind ministry email list.

Pastor Dave