

A HOME FOR ALL  
Acts 11:19-30  
September 13, 2009

There is a Peanuts comic strip that shows Charley Brown with a bow and arrow. He takes the bow and shoots the arrow at a tree. He, then walks over to the tree and draws a bulls eye around the arrow.

For some that comic is a representation of how they live their lives. You go with the flow and where ever you wind up, that is where you are supposed to be.

That philosophy may work for free spirited folks but it won't fly for an organization. Whether it's a business, a sports team or a church, there are needs to be a defined, a sense of purpose, and a vision of what you would like to achieve.

Last winter a number of our members met at the Birmingham Conference Center to plan for the future.

What is our vision? What are some goals we want to set for the coming year? I thought we had a productive time together.

Some of the goals we set have been met, like this Visitor Brochure and the web address on our outdoor sign. Other goals like getting a screen for the Sanctuary and starting a new "K" Group are moving forward.

One of the things we did do that day was develop a new mission statement for our church. It has been on the front of every bulletin for months. Even though it has been in place for close to 9 months, I have never really spent much time with it in worship.

Since this is Rally Sunday, a day we have invited members to come back home, as well as friends and neighbors to join us for worship, I thought it would be good to spend some time looking at our vision. For our members it's important that we are all on the same page. When we understand where we are headed we can use our unique gifts to try to move our church towards our goals.

For our guests, it's good to hear what this church is about. If our mission resonates with you, then you might decide to join this church.

Can you get your bulletins out? Let us read together the statement under the church name. **“We strive to be a church home that reflects the diversity of our community, that gathers to praise God, and scatters to serve others.”**

**“We strive to be a church home”**

Let's look at what it means to be a church home. When you think of home what comes to mind? For me home means familiar, comfortable surroundings. When I am at home I can relax and be myself. There is also a sense of safety being at home.

How did Dorothy get back to Kansas? She clicked her heels together three times and said, “There's no place like home”.

I have a friend that is leaving on a land/sea adventure that begins in California and ends in Australia. The whole trip will be about 45 days. Though he and his wife will have an amazing time, I'm sure there will be great relief when they make their way home.

Though a church can never be a home, it can still be a place where we feel safe and secure. As a church home, Beverly Hills United Methodist Church can offer an environment where people can be themselves.

The goal is to have everyone feel a sense of belonging, that this is a place where one feels loved and appreciated.

Being a church however doesn't automatically mean you are a church home. It takes effort to create that sense of home. This happens with the attitude of the members as well as participation in fellowship and study opportunities.

**“that reflects the diversity of our community.”**

Though we have a Beverly Hills address, our community is Beverly Hills, Birmingham, Southfield, Lathrup village, maybe even parts of Franklyn and Bloomfield. When you look at the demographics of this area you will find a

diversity of people - African American, Asian American, Caucasian, Middle Eastern. You name the ethnic group and there is representation.

Right now in this country over 90 percent of all churches are homogeneous. Everyone is of the same race. That many make sense in areas where there is little or no diversity, but there should be some churches in our area that are diverse.

Our Scripture Lesson was about the church in Antioch. Like most early Christian Churches, the Antioch Church was comprised of Jews that had decided Christ was the Messiah they were waiting for. As you heard the Gentiles, the name given to non-Jewish folks, listened to the good news about Jesus and decided to be Christians. In a sense, they became members of first church Antioch alongside the Jewish Christians.

Antioch was the first diverse church. Following that example, I believe the Lord is calling this church to be a multi-ethnic church. Thankfully we already have diversity. The goal is to celebrate that diversity, do what we can to expand it, and to let the community know what we are doing. Is diversity our main focus? Though key to our unique identity, it is not our primary goal. Ultimately our purpose is to make Disciples of Christ. Whether it's this church or any church, we must be about bringing people to Christ.

Having a diverse church home however might allow some people to be more receptive to hear the good news.

And speaking of the good news, the next part of our visions reads: "that gathers to praise God". We place a high importance on worship. The goal is to have a worship experience that is uplifting and meaningful. Given the diversity of cultural backgrounds, as well as ages, that is a challenge. Whether it is the music, or using a video screen, or using testimonies, we will strive to have a high quality, Holy Spirit led worship.

One of my own personal goals this year is to form a Worship Planning Team. This group would work with me in planning our Sunday morning services.

From the very beginning of the church, the focus was not only inward. Besides fellowshiping and worshipping together, the church reached out to

serve a hurting world. As you heard, the Christians in Antioch took a collection to be taken to Jerusalem to help those suffering from famine. This function of the church ties to the last part of our statement: **“and scatters to serve others”**.

This church has a proud history of being missionally involved. The goal as we move forward is to find more opportunities for us to be in mission.

Studies have shown that for 20 and 30 years, the one thing that really captures their passion about the church is serving those in need. We preach about serving others, they want to do it! One ministry this happens through is Habitat for Humanity. We have all heard about Habitat and I know some of you have been on a build.

As I shared last week when talking about BHAGs, (big, hairy, audacious, goals), I hope to have our church involved with a build next summer. Personally I have been trained to be a site host. I spent a Saturday this summer working with a team doing some inside work on a house. Ken Dowell was also there.

That house, 184 Elm Street in Pontiac, is one of two houses built by the Circle of Faith. Today at 4:00 p.m. this house will be dedicated and the keys handed over to the new owners. This family has put in hours of their own sweat equity as well as thousands of their own money.

If you would like to be there for this service, let me know and I can give you the details. Besides our physical labor, one way we can always help Habitat is by our contributions. I recently was notified about a serve cash shortage for the Oakland County Habitat. They are asking for special contribution to help weather this storm.

I am asking you to consider putting some extra money in the offering plate this morning. If all of us were to put in a few extra dollars that would certainly help the cause.

There you have our mission statement. Clearly it is not chiseled in stone. Over time it will probably be changed. I invite you to read together the statement with me.

Before we do that I do want to thank my daughter Connie for helping me with the PowerPoint. The houses that were on the slides actually belong to our members. I invite you to join with me.