



Bridges of Hope: Reflections on the Power of Partnership

2024 LENTEN DEVOTIONS

Week 1
(February 14 – 16)



Ash Wednesday, February 14 **OUTREACH FOR HOPE**

Pr. Chris Manke, OFH Executive Director: Hi everyone! I want to welcome you to our new year of Lenten Devotions without Outreach for Hope. Our theme this year is "Bridges of Hope: Reflections on the Power of Partnership."

Now, obviously, we'll be sharing a variety of stories from our different Ministry Partners about what it means for them to be partnered with other congregations and people, the relationships that are formed, and the depth and power of what that all means, as people get to know each other, and relationships are formed. So, we'll be hearing some of those stories as we go through our Lenten series. But it's also a chance for us individually to think about how God is at work in our own relationships, God is at work in the partnerships that we have created with one another, and what that means to walk together as partners.

In my 28 years of ministry, I've been blessed with lots of different partnerships, in so many different ways. Whether that's church staff working together on all sorts of different things in ministry; churches working together as partners; maybe that means El Salvador or Tanzania, two of our Synod partnerships. But in so many different ways, those partnerships have really changed me. Along the way, I've seen life in a whole different way through other people's eyes. I love that word, 'accompaniment.' Walking together. As we walk together, we start to see the world in a whole different way through each other's eyes. It helps us to be better people. It helps us to not only see the world differently, but to understand it differently - which I think is a greater sense of what God is calling us to seeing the world, from God's perspective, through each other. Those chances where I've really had to do that has been powerful to me.

One of the things I realized when I took on this new role, almost four years ago now, as the Executive Director for Outreach for Hope, was how I had in a lot of ways been living in a bubble. My ministry was in a certain area, Wauwatosa. And it was really focused on that one community, that one church community. As wonderful as it was and is, I started to realize that the world is a much bigger place. I'm getting to go around the synod, preaching at different churches all over our synod, all of your churches... That's just been a wonderful experience. Really seen God's work in lots of different ways through all of you. It's really helped me to expand my understanding of what it means to be in ministry in a much greater way throughout our entire synod, and all the varieties of ways that we do that. Truly getting a deeper sense of that. That word, accompaniment, really is about walking together. Trying to understand that it's not about my way, which often we'd rather have, right? But when we agree, sometimes maybe even disagree, we take on a whole different role. We take on that role as partners, as being in a relationship to help ourselves understand the world in a much deeper way.

I love the way Paul talks about the Church, as many members in 1 Corinthians 12 - that, "Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many... If

one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together." We are the church. We are many members coming together to form the body of Christ. The beauty of what it means to be the church - often struggling, but also caring for one another, walking together, supporting each other, lifting up each other, being in relationship with one another and partnerships so that we are strengthened as the whole church bringing together and proclaiming God's goodness in this world.

So, as we think about this theme over our next many weeks throughout Lent, you'll have chances to hear stories of relationships and partnerships through our various Outreach for Hope ministries. But I'd really like you to take some time to reflect on your relationships, your day. You'll notice at the end of these videos that there's some reflection questions for you to take a minute, and just think about your day. Think about your week. Think about what God is doing in your life, in your corner of the world, so that we can all grow and understand that we are walking together as God's people. I pray that this is a blessed experience for you as you go through Lent - taking a chance to reflect and think about what God is doing in your life, in your relationships.

In conclusion, I pray that you will have that greater sense of fullness as we think about our relationships. Reciting the words from Paul's letter to the Ephesians chapter three, "I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with the fullness of God." God's blessings as we begin our Lenten journey together. Amen.

PRAYER: Oh God, our loving Creator and Giver of all good gifts: Bless our ministries, strengthen our faith, and grant us a spirit of Christian stewardship, so that we may give generously of our time, talents and treasure to spread Your kingdom here in our churches and throughout the world. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Using the daily devotional practice of St Ignatius in his Examen, take a moment to reflect on today's devotion...

- 1. What thoughts, questions, and feelings come up for you?*
- 2. Invite God's Spirit to speak to you about your reflections and also what is happening in your life today.*
- 3. Notice any feelings of thankfulness, retrospect, repentance, and renewal.*
- 4. What is God encouraging you to do with these thoughts and feelings?*
- 5. Ask God to lead you today and into tomorrow - guiding you towards something particularly important.*

Thursday, February 15
HEPHATHA LUTHERAN, MILWAUKEE
& HOPKINS LLOYD COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Pr. Mary Martha Kannass: God bless you from Hephatha Lutheran Church, and greetings to everyone who is a part of Outreach for Hope. We're sharing today about a really important part of our journey of building bridges in our community, which is our partnership with Hopkins Lloyd Community School, located just three blocks away from Hephatha. We've had the opportunity over the course of time to be a part of that school site, being a community school, having the opportunity to keep the school in place, and additionally having shared ministries. Laresha and Ruby and Lavonica here, Hephatha members, also went to Hopkins Lloyd School and in some fashion have worked there over the course of time. It's a bridge that we're so honored to be a part of in our community. Laresha is a Hephatha member, leader, Sunday School teacher, work ministry -- you name it, she does it-- assisting minister. And she is the Community School Coordinator at Hopkins Lloyd School, where she once was a student.

Laresha Love: Yeah! So pastor gave my introduction for me. I am a faithful young member at Hephatha Lutheran Church. Also Community School Coordinator over at Hopkins Lloyd Community School, where "we don't give up - we Eagle up!" And a few things that the church has been able to bless us with at the school is Strong Baby Sanctuary, that is held up every third Tuesday of the month. So families from the community and our school, can come together in one space and learn how to take care of their babies, get the resources that they need. Our families travel from school on Mondays over to the church, for Cooking with COLE. So, teaching families how to cook lead-free, giving the families resources, groceries, whatever they need. It's been provided there. We also are able to host our holiday programs here, like Christmas programs, Black history programs, we do other events here as well. Pastor always tends to try to share gifts with the kids. So that's one thing that I know the kids are really, really grateful for here from Hephatha. Just a small few things that we do here that we've brought over, back over to Hopkins Lloyd Community School.

Lavonica Love: I am Lavonica Love. I am a member of Hephatha. I also work for Hopkins Lloyd with they FAST program. FAST stands for-- the acronym, it's for Family and School Together. So as a Community School, it brings everything together. So we work with the children and work with the families. Help empower the parents, so that they can have a better relationship with their kids and with the families. And how to be leaders, and how to fight for their families, and help raise better children.

Pr. Mary Martha: The best thing about our connection with Hopkins is the opportunity for us to build these bridges with people who truly care about the church, the school and the community. That's Ruby. That's Lavonica. And that's Laresha.

Ruby Johnson Harden: Hi, I'm Ruby Johnson Harden. I am a member of Hephatha Lutheran Church for over 50 years. But I also went to Hopkins from 1968 to 1975. And then as I became an adult, I put my children in Hopkins. In one particular year, I had to fight hard to keep Hopkins open. I did not want them to close the school because it's right in the center of the neighborhood. And I was also the Parent Coordinator there at the time, until the job phased out. And I still go up to Hopkins and I still participate at Hopkins. I now have a seven-year-old grandson that goes to Hopkins. And in the future, I plan on another grandchild going to Hopkins. It's just something that you have to do. Fight and work for Hopkins, and Hephatha.

Pr. Mary Martha: Hephatha and Hopkins Lloyd Community School are anchors here on Locust Street. Outreach for Hope, you are an anchor for our congregations and our ministries in the Greater Milwaukee Synod. So we want to say thank you and God bless you on your Lenten journey! May we all be anchored in God's love and continue to build the bridges that God calls us to build.

All: Amen!

PRAYER: Great and Gracious God: We offer our gifts of time, talent and possessions to you as a true act of faith, to reflect our love for you and our neighbors. Help us to reach out to others as you have reached out to us. Amen.

Using the daily devotional practice of St Ignatius in his Examen, take a moment to reflect on today's devotion...

- 1. What thoughts, questions, and feelings come up for you?*
- 2. Invite God's Spirit to speak to you about your reflections and also what is happening in your life today.*
- 3. Notice any feelings of thankfulness, retrospect, repentance, and renewal.*
- 4. What is God encouraging you to do with these thoughts and feelings?*
- 5. Ask God to lead you today and into tomorrow - guiding you towards something particularly important.*

Friday, February 16
GRACE LUTHERAN, KENOSHA & L'ARCHE

Pr. Jonathan Barker: Hello! It's Rev. Jonathan Barker down here at Grace Lutheran. And I am so grateful that, over the last... about six months, we've been able to partner with a L'Arche group that's forming here in Kenosha. Sister Leah, brother Carlos, brother John have brought this amazing group, and now many other people have joined as well. And this group has been a tremendous blessing for me. My mother took a fall at our house last October. She ended up breaking six ribs. And a couple days after that, we had our L'Arche meeting, our community night. And the whole group came around me and prayed for my mom, for healing. And brother Carl lifted up her ribs in prayers very specifically, one of the most powerful prayers I've ever heard. And so not only am I grateful that we can be a big family here, at this L'Arche group that's partnering here at Grace, and we can welcome each other in so many different ways. But the prayers have just been such a transformative thing for my life. And not just the prayers, but the hugs and the joy and the fellowship that happens here each week.

[Fades to new scene.]

Leah: So, we're here at our monthly community night L'Arche meeting, where people with and without disabilities come together to create community. Right, Carlos? And we talked about 1 Corinthians. There are many parts, but one body. Those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable. And the parts we think are less honorable, we treat with special honor. And then you wrote this today, Carlos [reads from written notes] "Well, sometimes I have not been considered indispensable. My people have been put away. We have been despised and rejected by most." Right, Carlos? "L'Arche was my family's dream." And then you asked the group and our friends here, "What made you come to these meetings? What is it like to meet me? I'm so tall and I don't speak. What makes you want to come?" What else would you like to say Carlos?

Carlos: [Smiles. Uses AAC letter board to spell response.]

Leah: "I have big God dreams. Thank you for joining me and my people." [To Carlos] Good?

Carlos: [Smiles and taps the board in agreement.]

Leah: [Puts the board down.] Alright! Amen.

Carlos: Amen!

[Fades to new scene.]

Pr. Jonathan: Sister Dottie, would you like to talk about what being part of L'Arche has meant for you? What you have experienced, maybe, how you met the Holy Spirit, but also...

Dottie: I do believe they were almost ready to carry me out on the second session that I came to [laughs] - because I realized that Carlos is able to put his thoughts down on paper, or the board there, or possibly later he's gonna learn more on the computer. So that just... I couldn't think of anything that had happened to me for such a long time, as the impact that [non-speaking people] have language. [Signs] I didn't know, see? I needed to find out. So, it's opened up my world. Wow, when have I ever felt so energetic?! [Smiles]

[Fades to new scene.]

Carlos: [Spells on letter board.]

Leah: "I am so welcomed here." Yeah? [Smiles and laughs.]

Carlos: [Grins and taps the letter board in agreement. Sits back as Leah puts the board down, chuckling along with her.]

[Fades to new scene.]

Leah and John: [They stand facing the L'Arche meeting participants, who are sitting on chairs arranged in a semi-circle. Next to them, Dottie provides sign language interpretation. They start to sing.] I have arrived. I am home. In the here, in the now.

L'Arche members: [Singing] I have arrived. I am home. In the here, in the now.

Leah and John: [Singing] I am sacred, I am free.

All: [Singing] I am sacred, I am free.

Leah and John: [Singing] In God's unity I dwell.

All: [Singing] In God's unity I dwell.

PRAYER: God of Peace: As we attempt to discern where you will lead us, help us to remember that none of us has all the answers. Teach us how to truly listen to one another, so that we may work together to turn our diverse ideas into a shared path towards your Beloved Community. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Using the daily devotional practice of St Ignatius in his Examen, take a moment to reflect on today's devotion...

- 1. What thoughts, questions, and feelings come up for you?*
- 2. Invite God's Spirit to speak to you about your reflections and also what is happening in your life today.*
- 3. Notice any feelings of thankfulness, retrospect, repentance, and renewal.*
- 4. What is God encouraging you to do with these thoughts and feelings?*
- 5. Ask God to lead you today and into tomorrow - guiding you towards something particularly important.*