



Bridges of Hope: Reflections on the Power of Partnership

2024 LENTEN DEVOTIONS

Week 6
(March 18 – 22)



Monday, March 18
PINE LAKE CAMP PARTNERSHIP

Ben Koehler: My name is Ben Koehler. I'm here at Pine Lake Camp in central Wisconsin. We got the opportunity to partner with Outreach for Hope and Hephatha Lutheran Church of Milwaukee, to bring in some folks for our family camp program. And that's a really neat program. People get to stay in a cabin all with their family group, and they get to participate in the camp activities. And we built this wonderful community. Lots of strong connections, you know, sang the songs together and prayed together.

And a handful of the participants who came from Hephatha were interested in coming a couple of weeks later when we had our youth camp program. You know, and that's all for kids, super high-energy. You stay in a cabin with your peers. And so, we got to that week. And we had a cabin leader who was completely fresh to this experience - and she had a whole mix of campers in the cabin, you know. So, we've got some urban and exurban, suburban and rural campers, kind of all mixed together in one group. And she came to us and said, "Wow! This must just be what the camp community is" - because she had never seen 13-year-olds who had that kind of spiritual depth, and that kind of graciousness, and communal sharing with each other... you know, participating in the Bible studies, and singing the songs at camp and praising God. And we said, "Oh no, [laughs] you may not know that these campers coming here, you know, some of them have already experienced this family camp program. And many of them are already very connected to ministry in their home setting. And so, their church back home is what feeds that spirituality in them!" And that was just a great moment for us, and it just showed that we are so filled with joy. And we love the experience of bringing in people who have never experienced worship in a natural setting like this. But we are a richer and stronger community when we bring in new people and new perspectives, and when we get to build that community together!

PRAYER: Creator God: You continuously reveal to us your beauty, and you desire your creation to know your goodness and love. Thank you for how you nudge us and show yourself to us in the goodness of your creation, and most importantly, help us to see your artistry and splendor in each other. In your 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.*

Tuesday, March 19
HEPHATHA LUTHERAN, MILWAUKEE
& ASCENSION, WAUKESHA “KNIT WITS”

Donna Savin: Hello! My name is Donna Savin, and I'm a member of Ascension Lutheran Church in Waukesha.

Jeremiah 29:11 says, "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'"

I received a call from Pastor Chris asking about seed money for an education program. And that was actually the first time I ever heard of Hephatha Church. So, I did my research, and I went on Google. And I looked up Hephatha to find out what kind of ministries they were involved in. And the one thing that really stuck out to me was the Strong Baby Sanctuary ministry.

Our congregation has a ministry called Knit Wits, and we make all types of baby items: hats, blankets, booties... So, I thought it would be really great to share this information with the group from Knit Wits. And looking at Google, it showed that there was a room with baby items for families in need. I do not know how to make baby blankets, but I do know how to make hats. So, I brought this to the group of people that were meeting, and asked if they would be interested in sharing some of the items that they had made. The response was overwhelming. A lot of the women in that group make baby blankets, and baby blankets were needed for baptisms. When the babies are baptized, babies are wrapped in the blankets and baptized, and the blanket is given to the family as a remembrance of the baptism. I make hats, as I said. The ladies made blankets. We shared them with Hephatha.

In January, we met at a local restaurant, and invited the [Hephatha] parish nurse, Chris, to come and share about the ministry that she does. It was very interesting to hear her background, and how she's involved in the church, and calling people into ministry as well. Not only did she share about her experience at Hephatha, but she also talked about how important it is for people to share... for people to come alongside of each other. Very wonderful! We had such a great time, and the women that came to the restaurant really enjoyed hearing about Hephatha and how it has made a big difference.

So, my question to you is, what are your gifts and talents? Everyone has them. You are given them to share, not to keep for yourself. So, this Lent, think about ways in which you can share with other people. Thank you!

PRAYER: Come, Holy Spirit. Fill the hearts of your faithful, and enkindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit, and we shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the Earth. Oh God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant by that same Spirit, we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

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Wednesday, March 20
GREATER MILWAUKEE SYNOD, ELCA
“ME TO WE”

Pastor Matthew Short (Assistant to the Bishop for Evangelical Mission):

When I think of this Lenten theme, "Bridges of Hope: The Power of Partnership," I am reminded of every time in my life where I have been profoundly blessed. Anytime I moved from a *me* understanding, to a *we* understanding. Moving from the hyper-individualized stuff that we just seem to drink in the water of the broader culture, to that collective understanding that we are in this together. Anytime I've crossed that path, I am blessed by it.

I think of, in 1999, when I traveled with my campus ministry in college to Papua New Guinea, a place I had never been. And with the naivete to think that somehow, on this accompaniment trip - even though our pastor had taught us about accompaniment values - to think that somehow, we were bringing Jesus. And then, to be met in the middle of the path after a long day's hike, to a place that a plane couldn't reach, and to have in the middle of the path the Sunday school kids from that village, each holding a piece of paper and standing in rows, that spelled out, "We welcome you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." In that moment, the Spirit led me to move from a *me* to a *we* understanding. And every time that's happened in my life, I am blessed by it.

I'm thinking today, particularly the passage in the Bible that says, "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." Today, I'm celebrating the fact that I am individually a member of a much larger body, anytime I am assuming that there is a place God is not. And I assume that God is on my side of that equation, every single time I am surprised by moving from *me* to *we*, and understanding that God shows up in the collective, in the body of Christ, in all the ways we are connected across time and space. And so today, I am celebrating with you all. And I invite you to think, as a part of this devotion: When is a time that you have moved from an understanding that put you at the center, from *me* thinking to *we* thinking, and how has that blessed you?

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Thursday, March 21
ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN, MILWAUKEE
& GALILEE LUTHERAN, PEWAUKEE

Nancy Day (St. Paul's): Galilee Lutheran Church in Pewaukee and St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Milwaukee have been partners for well over 20 years. Galilee has supported St. Paul's outreach through many changes over the years. It all started with providing a meal at our monthly community night and helping with programming - doing skits and relating Bible stories to the children.

Later, a clothing ministry called Kim's Closet was started after our Neighborhood Minister passed away, and we continued what she was doing out of her home. Galilee members supported us by collecting clothing and helping at the monthly closet night. Again, as life has changed, we have pivoted to a daytime event that we call Kim's Table. Each month, we provide a bag lunch, hygiene kits, socks, and a featured items such as t-shirts or towel sets or maybe hooded sweatshirts.

Our dear friends from Galilee continue to support us today. This past summer, we did a joint project of making fleece tie blankets for our neighbors who come to Kim's Table. Each congregation set a goal, and worked on the blankets in July, August, and early September. Galilee had a theme of "why not tie knot?" and asked members to visit the blanket table before and after worship to simply tie a knot or two. At St Paul's, we gathered on a Saturday morning and completed several blankets, and then had blankets available to tie on Sunday mornings. As we were making the blankets, we took time to pray for the person who would receive it, asking God to keep them warm and safe over the winter months. By September's Kim's Table, over 60 blankets were completed. Several friends from Galilee joined us at Kim's Table to hand out the blankets, along with the bag lunch, socks, other clothing items and hygiene packs. It was a beautiful day, and our neighbors really appreciated the blankets! While we didn't make the blankets together in the same space, we felt very connected as we worked towards the same goal.

Thank you, members of Galilee Lutheran Church, for your help with this project and keeping our community warm and wrapped in prayer! Our partnership with Galilee Lutheran Church has been strong and powerful. We can do more together than alone.

PRAYER: Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace: where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is discord, union; where there is despair, hope; where there is sadness, joy; where there is darkness, light.
O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

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Friday, March 22
UNITY LUTHERAN, MILWAUKEE

Pastor Kevan Penvose: Hello! I'm Pastor Kevan Penvose here with Unity Lutheran Church in Milwaukee.

Here at Unity, we have a member of our church named Cindy. And Cindy has been feeling a little disconnected. Because she was always an active worshiper - but since the pandemic, her schedule has changed, where she now has commitments to babysit on Sunday mornings. But thankfully, with our online worship, she continues to be in worship online, and she continues to look for ways to connect. And, keeping our eyes and ears open... well, Cindy has found ways to build bridges between her place of employment here in the neighborhood, and our church.

Cindy works in the office of Humboldt Park School, just a few blocks from our location here. It's a K-8 MPS school, and they have been fabulous in supporting our food pantry ministry. For the last several holidays, their students, parents, and school community have put on a food drive and blessed us and our neighbors with an abundance of food donations. Most recently, Cindy helped make a connection with the school principal and myself, to help us get together and meet, and start planning as our congregation is going through a strategic visioning process. And we could talk together, and invite the principal into teaming with us, and thinking about how we can together make an impact in this neighborhood.

And then, another idea came up! Well, Humboldt Park School has an after-school camp and a summer camp. And every August their building has to go through a deep cleaning process, and their program director for their camp is looking for space to use. And so, we got in touch with their camp director. And just making all those relationships and ways that we can partner together with our local school to help our neighbors.

PRAYER: Compassionate Lord: May we love our neighbor as we would want to be loved, so that we can continue to strive for that which we are called to embody: faith, hope, and love. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

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