

**MESSIAH'S MISSION FOCUS PART 2**  
**Acts 2:42-47**

**October—Mission Introduction Month**  
**October 12, 2014**  
**Pastor Nathan J. Thompson**

This past Sunday I introduced for you the first word of Messiah's new Mission Focus—which is "Seek – A Spiritual Journey Through a Jesus Filled Life." Messiah is a church where we welcome the seeker; are sensitive to the seeker; do our worship and ministries which reach out and makes sense to those who seek.

The second word in Messiah's Mission Focus is "Connect." As we welcome those who are seeking; as we reach out to those who may be all over the map as far as questions about faith and the church, Messiah's mission is to help provide places where people are able to easily connect in significant relationships and opportunities.

It is important to understand however that this step and transition from seek to connect is very difficult for most people. It is difficult because as friendly as we may think we are, it is a major step to break into church friend relationships which may have been developed over many years.

And in a small community like ours we also have the relatives, school friends, those who work and farm together, the firemen and auxiliary, those who have kids our children's age, and many other things. How can someone even try to connect into a group like that?

One other important consideration about connecting; Charis and I attended a conference this past summer where we heard a speaker who wrote a book recently about all the introverts in our society—nearly half the population.

An extrovert like me often can't understand why there are many people who are actually afraid of crowds and groups of people at church; why some head for the exits as soon as church is done rather than have to talk with people; interact with people.

Fellowship for some people who don't know others is a dirty word. Even for us to be a friendly congregation can be intimidating. Some people actually may not like to be greeted; shaking hands; passing the peace; having to make small talk.

Studies have found that this is one reason why some of the big mega churches are appealing to certain people. There they can more easily slip in without people noticing; they can more easily hide in the corner; they can remain anonymous for a longer time.

That is why it is important that we at Messiah, you and me, realize that a small rural church can be the most intimidating church of all. And then add to that the fact that people may know things about us and about our past—no wonder church can be difficult for many.

When my three children were young one of their favorite toys were Legos—especially our two boys. Over the years through Christmas and birthday gifts, and through some hand-me-downs from other relatives, our cloth Lego bag became very large with lots of different pieces.

There were many shapes and sizes along with additional pieces where you could install doors if you were building a house or building. There were parts to make tractors, cars, people, barns, fences, trees and shrubs.

Our boys would spend hours (and I would often sit on the floor and join them) creating what they considered to be major building masterpieces. The amazing thing was how you could snap on and connect these pieces in new and different ways each time we spread them out.

In a similar way this is also Christ's mission at Messiah. Jesus is calling us as his church to open up and offer opportunities where new people can easily snap on and connect to various groups, ministries, friendships—and ultimately for them to connect in faith and growth in God's love.

Acts 2:42-47 talks about this mission for Christ's church; it talks about how these people *"devoted themselves...to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."* It says that *"all the believers were together and had everything in common."* It says they *"broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people...And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."* It is important that each person is able to connect in Christ's church.

Now this mission and calling is very different today than it was 50 years ago. Back in the 1960's and 70's churches simply needed to put out their sign, and most Scandinavian Lutherans (or other denominations) would find their way to that church and would join.

People back then mostly knew the church routine; they understood how to join and get involved; they understood and felt comfortable with organs, hymns and liturgy; they entrusted some authority and wisdom to a pastor's sometimes rambling sermons; and they thought it was normal to have robes, stoles, colorful garb (some even thought this is Biblical.)

Yet through these past 50 years major changes have happened among people and their understanding of, and relationship with, the church. Denominational loyalties have waned and increasing numbers of people no longer attend a church just because it is Lutheran.

People today are often more leery of joining a church as well as any organization; many like country western and rock music and can no longer relate to traditional church music; following clergy abuse and scandals some have lost trust in pastors; and in this day of information technology many don't want anyone telling them what to think more or less believe.

The sad thing is that as our world has been changing, most churches have not. In fact, some pastors and theologians have insisted that the answer is to become even more like the church in the 60's; do even higher liturgies like the 18<sup>th</sup> Century—their thinking is we just can't let the world and culture ruin our sacred traditions.

Yet as a result many churches, as well as denominations, are losing people by the droves. On the other hand there are some churches in every denomination, as well as many new and independent churches, that are reaching new people and are growing—some are seeing amazing growth.

What is the key? While most of them have decided to be 21<sup>st</sup> Century churches that are open to new music and less formality, one of the biggest keys is that these churches usually offer multiple ways for people to get connected.

Most have moved beyond pastor centered churches to places that really follow Martin Luther's understanding of the "priesthood of all believers." They lift up people's gifts and empower them to use them in ministry; some even list ministers and pastors on their staff and volunteer lists where only one or a few are formally ordained.

Some of these churches are empowering people to connect at coffee shops, in sporting opportunities, as young Moms, in various serving opportunities. Some of you may remember Alicia Davis—a pastor now at the Substance Church with some 2500 members (most under age 30). Their people are connecting with others going rock climbing; running marathons; biking together on bike trips; doing multiple kinds of service projects in various communities.

It is as people connect together with believers in Jesus; as we get to know people and really listen to them; as people know that we care about them and their needs; as people see that church is far more than simply sitting in a worship service; as people see that Christians are "real" people; it is often then that they are more open to coming to know Jesus and his love.

Messiah's mission, then, is to be a place which offers an environment where it is relatively easy for people to connect. So how do we do that? First of all we need to be aware of the; pray about people we know; find creative and innovative ways where people today may be motivated to want to connect.

Perhaps some of you young men could offer an opportunity for other young men where you go shooting as a group at the Elk Lake Preserve; perhaps you young mothers can have a support group that meets in someone's home which talks about the challenges you face each day—perhaps some older Moms and teens could offer free babysitting for anyone who attends.

Perhaps some of you middle age people can go to a play or a dinner theater together—invite some new people you don't know to go with. Perhaps some of you older people can go out for a "widows meal" each month (some already do); reach out wider in inviting others to quilting; have a regular coffee time with men who are widowers. Get your thinking cap on—there are certainly many more creative ideas than these.

Messiah's mission is "Seek – Connect...A Spiritual Journey Through a Jesus Filled Life." Needless to say, being a place where people can easily connect is mandatory for Messiah to remain a vital church in the years to come. Next week we will focus on Messiah's third Mission Focus word—don't miss it.