

Living Out Our Mission©

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Deuteronomy 6:1-9, Matthew 28:16-20

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Today is such an exciting day in the life of the church! Finally, summer is over and it's time to get back into our full schedule. Yes, it's nice to have some time to slow down (although I'm not really sure that happens in the summer anymore!). School is out and vacations begin. So, we suspend Sunday School for the summer too.

It's not that we, as the church, think teaching about faith isn't important all the time; but since we are small, our teachers need a break, need some time to recoup and re-plan.

I hope you are all as excited as I am about this fall kickoff! We have some great things planned for all ages. We take this teaching the faith business pretty seriously, don't we? And we should.

We heard the Deuteronomy text read this morning, a command from God for the people of Israel whom God had saved from slavery in Egypt – to teach the story to their children and their children's children – passing it down from generation to generation. And the Jewish people still do that today. Every year at Passover Observance they tell the story, repeating it all, reciting what happened in Egypt – how God, through Moses, led them out after all the plagues and death; how God parted the Red Sea when the Egyptian soldiers were coming upon them, saving the Israelites; how God fed them with manna in the wilderness.

It is their story of faith; their story of their relationship with God who saved them. It is a story that should never ever be forgotten. And it is told every year by new generations as if it happened to them personally.

And then we hear Jesus' commandment – known as the Great Commission – to go out and make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them about all that He taught. And – did you hear – teaching them to *obey* all he commanded.

And so we have the commandment from the Old Testament to teach our children. For the Jewish story is our story too. We Christians have our deep roots in the stories of the Old Testament. For the promise of the Messiah was an Old Testament promise and Jesus own roots came from those strong men and women – like David and Ruth.

It is so important for us to take this teaching – this passing on the faith to our children and to each other as adults seriously. What could possibly be more important for every part of our lives?

Have you taken time to reflect on our Mission Statement lately? You may remember that the Strategic Planning Team and Session met and reworked our Mission and Vision statement recently. We will be voting on these in a congregational meeting soon so it would be good for you to be considering it.

A Mission statement should be concise enough that the people who are living it can also say it easily. Would you turn to the cover of your bulletin and find where it says Our Mission? Let's say it together.

I'll start with: Holly Presbyterian Church is ...

"A joyful family of faith that nurtures knowing, growing, sharing, and serving as followers of Christ within our church, our community, and around the world through peaceful and loving relationships."

Does that ring true to you? Do you feel we are a joyful family – a family of faith? A family that nurtures knowing, growing and sharing faith with our children and our friends and others?

In our Vision Statement right underneath the Mission, we say in bullet two that our Vision is to share the good news of the Christian faith with each other and beyond the church.

Sometimes we think sharing the faith is difficult. I'm excited about the new study based on the movie ***God's Not Dead***. I'm leading a young adult group right now and Shaun is leading the teen group. It's about learning how to defend what you believe; sorting out what you do believe about God and being able to say it with conviction.

Today we start up again with teaching about the Bible and our faith. My daughter, Annie, who has been serving for several years as the Spiritual Director for Children, Youth and Young Adults wrote an article to share with parents. I want to share some of it with you.

She wrote:

How do children learn about God? How do they learn about what the Bible is telling us? Do they learn it from home or friends? Perhaps. But just as one wouldn't necessarily go to an art teacher to learn how to properly make a quiche, we can't depend on the world around us to teach our children about God and faith. More times than not, children learn about God in Sunday School; in Church; by being a part of a community that is focusing on the subject.

Mimi Bullock, a part time writer for ministry-to-children.com, says that children get the following 5 aspects from being in Sunday School:

1. Sunday School helps children respect, appreciate and utilize the Bible.

2. Sunday School teaches children how to navigate the Bible.
3. Sunday School gives kids a chance to ask questions.
4. Sunday School develops a community of believers.

Why do you think schools use the classroom method? Not just to reach more children, faster. Originally, it was because in a classroom setting, kids were more likely to help one another and push each other along in their growth. A community of children, worshipping, learning the Bible and discovering God together creates a bond that a single study can't accomplish. Sunday Schools are the Petri dishes for the future church.

5. Sunday School plants spiritual seeds.

Mimi reveals that "some of her greatest revelations concerning God's love and plan for her she received quietly in Sunday School. Sunday Schools are like plant nurseries, they may look unimpressive at first, but under the soil, miracles are happening."

Annie also shared that while she hopes she teaches about faith, about God to her children at home – she knows with their busy lives that she falls short of that task.

But she says she is confident that they are learning and growing in the faith because of the things they learn in Sunday School with committed teachers who love and care for them. They are in a community of faith in those classrooms, growing together as friends who know Jesus.

And that is another important aspect of our living out our mission. There is another part of that mission statement – the last part of the nurturing, knowing, growing and sharing. It is **servicing**.

The church needs people who are willing to give their time and their love and use their gifts that God has given them so that there are teachers helping, nurturing the faith that is growing in our children. The church needs you to take part in that job of sharing.

Every person has something they do that could be shared with a child. Our rotation workshop is a perfect program for people to get involved in.

A story in the Bible is shared in different ways. One Sunday, someone might read the story to them. Another Sunday, someone might help them do a craft that has to do with that same story. And then, they might learn it by using the computer – which we have several of in our computer lab down in the Gathering Place. They can do skits and drama, play games ...

The beauty of it is that if you love to do just one of those things and you can only commit to one Sunday ever so often, it's perfect! The lesson is laid out so easily and you get to choose what you want to do with the children. But, we could use regular teachers as well as sometime teachers!

Right now, we need more people to sign up for a Sunday to do what our Mission Statement says we do – to joyfully nurture knowing and growing, sharing and serving within our family of faith.

I'm excited about this fall. There are so many opportunities to get involved – many ways to serve. Every team needs more team members. And every person who is a member of the congregation has something to offer somewhere.

I invite you to prayerfully ask God to show you how you might help nurture the faith with our children or teens or adults; to look at the teams and see where you might fit. We have lots of fun while doing the ministry of the church – a joyful family of faith!

The thing is, when we teach and when we serve on a team we are learning and growing as well! Never done it before? There are others who will help you. You will build more friendships, strong bonds, deeper faith and many blessings!

As I was thinking about that Great Commission that Jesus gave the disciples – you know – to go make disciples (that is teach the faith, help people get committed to following Jesus), baptizing them, teaching them all his commandments – it struck me that the word Mission is there in that word Commission.

I looked up the definition of commission. One definition is: to formally choose someone to do a special piece of work. Jesus formally chose his disciples to go and make more disciples, choosing them to do the same.

Out of that task then, comes the Mission – doing the work of Christ, whom we follow.

May we be mindful of living out our Mission. May each person be committed to doing our part, for it is then that we are the most alive, most vital church, obeying the commandments of Jesus.