

An important observation I made shortly after moving to Brodhead last August was that this is a community that cares about one another. When a family or individual is in need, you all work together to lend a helping hand. You all organize, support and attend benefits, bake sales, fund drives, etc. for no other reason but to help someone you care about. It is clear to me that that an important part of the culture here in Brodhead is a willingness to see the best in others and to help each other through difficult times. That is a wonderful thing, and a quality of this community that all should be proud of!

In the last few months, as part of the so-far-successful effort to start Family Promise in Green County, I have learned (not surprisingly) that such a spirit of care and compassion for others extends beyond Brodhead and throughout the area. Now if you are not yet familiar with Family Promise, I understand there is an article somewhere in this paper that can fill you in on some of the details. I commend it to your reading.

In short, it is a program to bring churches and community organizations together to care for families who are struggling in a homeless or near homeless situation. Churches would share resources of safe spaces, volunteers and food to meet the needs of families in need while they receive help in finding more permanent housing and/or employment. What I find most exciting about this program is that it serves as a great model of what it means to be a missional community.

In the Church, we often talk about striving to be a community in mission, or to live out a missional identity. What we generally mean by that is to recognize and act on the ways by which we can serve the mission of God's love and compassion for the world. It is about being a community that lives to share the grace and mercy of God.

There are many ways to live such a life, but I think it begins with two simple questions – What are our gifts/resources/passions? What are the needs

around us? In answering those questions honestly, we begin to recognize how we as God's people fit into the mission of God's grace already at work in our world. I truly believe that there is always a need in our immediate context and that each of us alone and all of us together are blessed with skills, gifts, assets, interests and passions to meet those needs. They are not always obvious, but they are there, and they are begging for us to discover them and make them a part of our lives in mission to the grace and mercy that we know as people of faith.

In the story of the group of churches that founded Family Promise in 1988, we see a great example of faithful people recognizing how they might serve God by serving the neighbor. They saw that there was a need among the homeless in their city of Newark, NJ – particularly for children and families. They dreamed of establishing a new homeless shelter in their city that would allow families to stay together, rather than women going off to the women's shelter, men to the men's shelter, and children into foster care. Their initial plan was to set up a building someplace and find the funds to operate it as a fully functioning shelter. Needless to say, they soon discovered what a challenge such an endeavor would be...so they began to ask the questions. They already knew the need, but in exploring their gifts and resources, they discovered that they had all that they needed to serve the mission that they were so passionate about.

Among them, were a dozen buildings that mostly sat empty during the week – their own church buildings. Among them, they had hundreds of volunteers gifted with a talent and passion for hospitality – serving those in need, cooking a meal, and simply being a loving friend to a stranger in need. They saw the need and they recognized what they already had to share. The result of putting it all together was a ministry and program that now helps people in need throughout the United States.

Family promise (or any other sort of mission for that matter) is a ministry and program that exists and succeeds for no other reason but to help

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someone that we indeed care about, but it also is good for us. Finding a place in the mission of God's grace and mercy helps us as we help others. It helps us to live more fully into the identity we receive by God's love and grace for us. By finding ways to share in God's mission, we become more aware of what God is doing in, through and around us every day.

So I invite you, whether you are part of a participating congregation or not, to consider joining the efforts of Family Promise. You have a gift that can meet a need. Likewise, I invite you, whether you consider yourself a person of faith or not, to consider how your gifts/resources/passions might serve the needs of those around you in any and all sorts of ways. Trust me; it will be good for you!

Grace and Peace,
Pastor Peder Johanson