

Amy's Email Epistle – Thursday, November 1, 2018

Dear Community,

Dietrich Bonhoeffer - Lutheran minister, and theologian, who lived during Hitler's reign in Nazi Germany - in reflecting on his ministry, his life, and the state of church in Nazi occupied Germany Bonhoeffer wrote in his letters and papers from Prison:

“The Church is the Church only when it exists for others...not dominating, but helping and serving. It must tell people of every calling what it means to live for Christ, to exist for others.” (Letters and Papers from Prison)

The Church in Bonhoeffer's time was succumbing to fear and the rhetoric of Hitler. Thinking of their own survival congregations and pastors were aligning themselves with Hitler. Some going as far as signing documents declaring Hitler the son of God. While turning a blind eye to the horrors of the holocaust. Bonhoeffer along with a handful of clergy dared to take a stand. Resisting the urge to turn inward his ministry looked outward searching for ways to help his Jewish neighbors, and others who were being persecuted.

Resisting the urge to think only of ourselves has always been and will always be the way of Christ.

I'm proud to be a part of this community of faith. First Christian has always responded to the call to reach beyond ourselves, to serve, to exist for others with yes. We have always been the yes in a sea of no's.

The board was asked to consider a proposal to expand our services for the 42 shelter guests living in our basement. Currently the shelter is open from 5 p.m. until 7:00 a.m. The guests are required to leave the church premises by 7:00 a.m. Most of the guests have nowhere to go. I've heard stories from guests about how difficult it is to stand on the side walk after the doors to the shelter are closed, it's still dark outside, it's cold and often it is raining and wonder where to go. With sore feet and aching bodies, carrying what little belongings they have the options are limited.

The number of people living in tents and in doorways downtown is at an all-time high. Literally hundreds. The resources that have been available are being stretched beyond capacity. Tensions are mounting. This makes it even more difficult for the shelter guests to find refuge during the day. It has become an urgent and critical situation that requires action.

The board approved a plan to open Koinonia hall beginning this Saturday to provide safe space during the day for our 42 shelter guests. It was a decision that needed to be made quickly in light of the urgent nature of things happening downtown. We take seriously the responsibility we have to make decisions on behalf of the congregation that keep with our community values,

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mission and ministry. We also know how important it is to communicate with the congregation what decisions are being made. In a perfect world we would have taken more time to have more input from the congregation directly. We pray for grace and forgiveness in moving so quickly. Trusting that this action is an action that is in alignment with who we are, and the ministry we already do in serving the houseless and vulnerable.

The board is confident that this is a solid, well thought out and will be well implemented plan. Selena Kilmoyer will be the point person. Selena brings years of experience and wisdom through her work with Bread and Roses, the Devoe street shelter, Warming Center, Code Blue emergency shelter and countless other experiences. She has the compassion, drive, wisdom, common sense and experience to make this a successful, life giving venture that will both honor the individuals it seeks to serve and hold the values of our faith community.

In the midst of overwhelming need it might seem as if this is not enough or perhaps too much. You might ask, "how can we only serve 42?" By providing day time space for our 42 guests we alleviate some of the stress on the Community Care Center, the Library and other places that serve those who are experiencing homelessness. We also will be helping to improve the lives of 42 people. That is no small thing.

This Sunday following worship service the board and I will be available to answer any questions that you may have. We will be making copies of the proposal available to the congregation as well. If you would like to talk to me before Sunday please feel free to call me or send me an email.

The peace of Christ,

Amy