



## Ministry in My Community

“ . . . love your neighbor as yourself”

(Leviticus 19:18)

“Accept one another . . . just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

(Romans 15:7)

“ . . . better a neighbor nearby than a brother far away”

(Proverbs 27:10)

“ . . . who are you to judge your neighbor?”

(James 4:12)

**W**hen the lawyer put Jesus to the test concerning the way to eternal life, Jesus told him to love God and neighbor: “Do this,” he said, “and you will live” (Luke 10:25-28).

The message is clear. But it can also seem overwhelming. After all, we can't be responsible for all who are in trouble or in pain. We do not have the energy or the courage to love *everyone!*

If not everyone, then who? As the lawyer asked, **Who is our neighbor?**

### **Know your neighbors.**

Take a walk or drive around your community. What do you see? Who lives nearby? What are their hopes and hurts and needs?

You are bound to the people and institutions around you. You depend on the quality of nearby schools, shops, entertainment venues, medical facilities, and places of worship to set the tone for life in your community.

If children in your community are not safe from abuse . . . if single parents feel overwhelmed by daily tasks and obligations . . . if older adults feel lonely and abandoned . . . your life is diminished.

### **See your neighbors.**

Sometimes we do not see our neighbors as they really are. Sometimes we look the other way. Yet, if you open your eyes to the hopes, hurts, and needs of others, you will find many opportunities for service and witness.

Families with members with mental or physical disabilities long for a few hours of relief so that caregivers can get away for a brief time. Older adults often have talents and expertise to share but few places to do so. Young people want to serve God as peacemakers in a troubled world but are unsure where or how to start. Do you see them?

Children at home alone for long periods could use someone to call for help or reassurance. New residents are sometimes reluctant to venture into community or church activities when the regulars fail to extend a special welcome. Transportation to medical facilities can place a heavy burden on individuals and families dealing with extended illness. Do you see them?

### **Serve your neighbors.**

The word *ministry* means service. You can be in ministry in *your* community.

- 1. Look closely** at the people and institutions around you. Invite others in your congregation to see more clearly the hopes, hurts, and needs of people who live nearby.
- 2. Share what you learn** with others. Speak about your neighbors' aspirations and struggles with members of your church.
- 3. Take initiative** to make a difference. Lend a helping hand to groups working to provide services locally or to effect positive change in public policy. Invite others to help organize a self-help group or sponsor a community program to serve neighbors.
- 4.** Through recognition services, postings on church bulletin boards, and articles in the church newsletter, **encourage** members and leaders of your congregation to **affirm** persons who are living as good neighbors.
- 5. Contact** community organizations for information about needs and opportunities for service. Watch for articles in your local newspaper describing volunteer opportunities and “wish lists” for community service groups and charities. Check out the bulletin board

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at your local grocery store. Ask your pastor about programs sponsored by your annual conference. Call local organizations, such as Meals on Wheels, Second Harvest Food Bank, Habitat for Humanity, after-school tutoring and mentoring programs, hospices, halfway houses, The Red Cross, domestic violence centers.

- 6. Go online.** Many communities host websites where volunteers can find opportunities to assist others and where persons in need of your help can post a request. Excellent examples are **[www.volunteermatch.org](http://www.volunteermatch.org)** and **[www.networkforgood.org](http://www.networkforgood.org)** where all you have to do is enter your zip code to find countless opportunities for a wide range of service.

### ***Make a choice.***

Jesus said that the way to live is to love God and neighbor. You can know the neighbors in your own community. You can begin to see them and listen to them. You can work with them. Jesus told the story of the Samaritan who was a good neighbor, then instructed: "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:29-37).

*Lord, help me know my neighbors. Help me see more clearly their pain and longings. Help me keep from "passing to the other side." Help me show mercy and compassion as one way of loving you with all my heart and strength and mind. Amen.*

*Adapted from a leaflet written by Neil M. Alexander for Discipleship Resources.*