

“Stories of our Local Mission”

A Sermon Shared with the Congregation of St. Andrew’s United Church
for Sunday, October 16, 2016 - STEWARDSHIP THIRD SUNDAY

Scripture Readings: Jeremiah 31:31-34

Luke 18:1-8

(by The Rev. Dr. Bill Steadman)

We have heard just some of the activities and partnerships that are part of what we call the Mission of St. Andrew’s United Church. Rhodine shared her experiences with the Community Kitchen, and we have been involved in supporting local community gardens. Natasha spoke to us of the outreach through the Out of the Cold program and our connection with APANO (The Aboriginal People Alliance of Northern Ontario). We also are working with the Social Planning Council to support a drop in centre known as “Noah Community Hub.”

There are those who wonder why we even use the word “Mission” today. It is fraught with overtones that are less than desirable, even hardly Christian.

One of the ways that we can, in part, reclaim that word is that we need to see “mission” in its original intent. For too long the church has seen mission as something we do for others (or worse, *to* others) where in reality mission is not up to us at all.

Mission is something that belongs to God, and we are partners with God’s intent. That is why the United Church motto for the Mission and Service Fund is “God’s Mission; Our Gifts.” We respond to the initiative of God.

But there is something else important to note and remember. We have spoken about “local mission” today for all mission, like all politics, is local. Let me be clear – I am not saying “mission begins at home” in the way that some would proclaim “charity begins at home.” That is simply a way of suggesting that we not reach out to others at all.

Mission begins at home reminds us that doing God’s work involves the whole world – here and elsewhere. It took the church almost 2,000 years to realize that in terms of its organization and structures, but all mission is local. It impacts a local area and our home experience, not just overseas.

It was 1910 in Edinburgh, Scotland where the Commission on World Mission met. Leaders of the Christian Church from around the world met to discuss emerging understandings of mission as the church transitioned into the 20th century. This gathering led to the establishment of the International Missionary Council, which eventually joined with the World Council of Churches in 1961.

That Commission established the concept, new at the time, that Mission is a world-wide experience. Why was that unique? Until then mission was seen as what a church does “somewhere else,” or for “other people,” but Edinburgh established the truth that mission is everywhere where God’s love and truth, God’s desire for justice, is made real -- wherever

that takes place, on whatever continent, in any country or community. Mission was from that time forward understood to be an experience we all share; it simply took almost 100 years to fully understand what that decision meant as churches sought to live that truth in their structures and organization.

The impact of that union of the World Council of Churches and the International Missionary Council is stated succinctly and clearly in the record of proceedings from the 1961 World Council of Churches:

Those involved claimed that with the joining of the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches: "The old distinction between 'sending' and 'receiving' churches begins to break down. All churches are more clearly seen as partners, on a plane of complete mutuality, in the common responsibility of making Christ known, loved, and obeyed throughout the world." (The New Delhi Report: The Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 1961, p. 55)

We today have spoken about local partnerships and local interests as a reminder that we share in God's world as people on a journey, and what we see as mission is not we doing something for others, but we and others working together for opportunities of hope and justice for all. Partnership does not depend upon, or get defined by, who is in charge, but in the mutual opportunity that we seek together. We are invited to share as partners with Christ as we live God's mission in our world and in our community.