Words too much, do you must

Although the above sounds like Yoda-speak, it was the essence of a phrase that came to our rector, Rev. Lisa White-Smith, while driving on her long winter commute to Epiphany Episcopal Church in Plymouth. She couldn’t shake these thoughts, and shared them with us that day at our weekly staff meeting. I remember it well, because it was experienced by all of us around that table as a Holy moment, birthing a unified “yes!!” as the Spirit seemed to quicken our hearts individually and collectively. And, unlike so many other ideas and inspirations that quickly lose steam, this one did not, and continues to this day.

During that staff meeting, once we were all inspired and on board, we excitedly brainstormed about how this might be fleshed out. This is a congregation that has service, outreach, and love of God and others in its DNA. The first time I drove into their parking lot, there was a sign in front of a garden that showed a running tally of produce donated to interfaith ministries. It was right next to a sign with our mission statement, “Manifesting God’s love in the world.”

During that initial brainstorming, we decided to begin this focus on Maundy Thursday. Rather than symbolically washing feet, we decided to try incorporating some tangible real-time service. At Church of the Epiphany, our Maundy Thursday service is in the context of a meal with scripture and song. We read the propers interspersed with eating and table discussion. As a part of the Peace/Offertory, we chose to designate four areas where folks could do some work for the kingdom. The following projects were our first undertaking:

- Making Sandwiches for those experiencing homelessness in our area, in connection with Allan Law, aka “The Sandwich Man.” [www.363days.org](http://www.363days.org)
- Rolling bandages for African medical clinics through Global Health Ministries [www.ghm.org](http://www.ghm.org) (Rev. Doug Cox, the executive director, is a wonderful resource and ministry partner for these events. [DougCox@ghm.org](mailto:DougCox@ghm.org))
- Making Birthday Bags for our local food shelf, which contain cake mix, frosting, candles, and party favors/candy to host a child’s party
- Writing notes and drawing pictures for our homebound and our deployed military
We allowed 30 minutes for the work. As you can imagine, this is only possible if each station is highly organized and ready to go. We then gathered in the church, and presented our offerings to the Lord, followed by a Form 2 Eucharist and stripping of the Altar. It was a powerful experience for so many.

It was so successful that we devoted one Sunday a month during the summer months to “Hands-On.” We try to change up our partners in ministry each time, broadening our vision and understanding of what mission can look like. Our protocol on those Sundays is to gather in the church and have a prayer, hear the Gospel, and offer peace as we make way to our work area. We spend 30-40 minutes working, and then re-gather, bringing our offerings. We have communion and are sent out.

Because the Hands-On service is so labor intensive on the front end, we have now committed ourselves to doing it quarterly, or whenever a team is passionate about a ministry in keeping with our mission of “Manifesting God’s Love in the World.” They then take on the organizing and implementation with a team of volunteers. It’s a beautiful way of inviting others to be co-ministers, as well as keeping our congregation open and wondering what the Spirit might be up to among us. It has become very popular in our diverse population and we are always hearing, “When is the next Hands-On Sunday? We love that service!”

During one of the first Hands-On Sundays, I was in the group who were making sandwiches for The Sandwich Man. We would write post-its with words of encouragement and affix them to each sandwich bag. I was working alongside Ben, an 11-year-old parishioner. He wanted to show me how he was writing his notes. I looked at them and each one had the word “YOU” in all caps and much larger than the rest of the writing. I asked him why that was and he said, “Because I want the person who is hungry to know that they are the most important part of all of this!” Indeed! I am grateful for the Bens of the world who will lead the way.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to our ministry team if you have questions or would like to implement your own “Hands-On Sunday.” It is a blessing to serve this congregation as an intern, and these events will always be a part of my understanding of what “doing church” can look like!

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