

The Call to Service

May 28, 2006

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James 1:17-25

Although the Worship Committee did not set out to make it so, May worships at Hyattsville have, all by themselves, turned into focus on service. On May 7 we celebrated disability awareness. May 14 spotlighted our youth and last week we turned our attention to Colombia, remembering our sister church in Sincelejo and looking at one thing we could do to support efforts to diminish and put an end to the violence in that war-torn country. When the Worship Committee realized the service theme that was emerging, we decided to round out our call to service this Sunday with the brief words I will offer followed by the premier showing of a DVD on the Warm Nights ministry expertly crafted by our own Gonzalo Accame.

As I prepared my sermon this week, I recalled an episode of the Twilight Zone I watched as a boy and have seen in reruns several times since. The segment began with a session of the United Nations in which diplomats were discussing the dual crises of war and poverty facing humankind. An urgent message was brought to the Secretary-General with the news that ships from outer space had just landed and that their leader was on the way to address their gathering. An extraordinarily tall humanoid alien walked into the meeting and telepathically communicated their people's purpose in coming to Earth. He said they were dismayed by violently we treated one another and our inability to share resources in a way that would allow everyone on Earth to have enough food and drink and shelter. He further communicated that his people were able and willing to help Earth increase food production, better the lives of all inhabitants and eliminate war. He said it was all laid out in a book that he gave the Secretary-General entitled "How to Serve Man," though it was in a language that no one could read or understand.

Desperate for a solution, the United Nations voted unanimously to let these people from a distant planet help solve Earth's problems. Many months passed and the impact was just as the aliens predicted. There was food enough for all, basic human needs were met and war vanished. Thousands of Earth people, amazed by the new and more equitable society these people helped us create, accepted the alien's invitation to experience first hand their way of life by traveling to their planet. Meanwhile, two linguists worked long and hard to translate the book given to the United Nations. Just as one of the two was getting on a space ship to visit this utopia, his coworker came running frantically to tell him that she had discovered how to translate the book. Terrified by her finding, she blurted out to him that instead of a blueprint for social change, "How to Serve Man" was a cook book and that the aliens were fattening us up as a new food source for their alien diet.

Well, our Service Committee has a different kind of "serving" in mind when it tries to encourage all of us to be involved in serving the needs of our society. They are encouraging us to follow the teaching of James, who says that our faithfulness in following the gospel of Jesus is measured much more by how we live out our faith than what we hear and think about the good news of Christ. *"Be doers of the word," James writes, "and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing."*

It is the Service Committee's goal to help us all be better doers of the Word by providing information on how each of us can be involved in voluntary service opportunities. Some of those ways, listed on the Service Committee brochure posted in the foyer, include:

- Community Place Café, where we take turns with other churches in the area to prepare and serve food to those in need on the first Monday of every other month.
- Jubilee Association of Maryland, which provides community residential housing services for adults who have developmental disabilities.
- Ten Thousand Villages, a Mennonite Central Committee-sponsored retail outlet for third world artisans.
- Mennonite Voluntary Service of Washington, DC, which places long-term volunteers at various area ministries, many of whom worship with us.
- International Guest House, a joint project of Allegheny Mennonite Conference and Hyattsville Mennonite, aimed at serving international guests in need of housing and fellowship.
- Remanso de Paz Sister Church Group, which leads the congregation in ways to support our sister church in Sincelejo, Colombia.
- Hospitality and service for individual families in need who have come to us through contact with church members or through our ministries.
- The Anabaptist Peace Center – Washington DC, a new peace ministry rooted in the Anabaptist tradition which seeks to engage in education, action and ecumenical cooperation to encourage Jesus' call to peace and justice.
- Christian Peacemaker Teams, which sends out short-term peacemaker delegations into crisis settings around the world. Several people from our congregation have participated in CPT delegations.

We also engage in other informal and ad hoc ways of providing services to those in need and, occasionally, new opportunities come along. Just the week before last we received an invitation from North Baltimore Mennonite Church to expand an asylum seekers network they began to Washington, DC, where many people seek asylum. This opportunity would involve establishing a house for such individuals to live while they seek asylum. The Service Committee will soon take up this

request and see if it is feasible for Hyattsville and if there are any individuals who feel called to give leadership and guidance to this new ministry possibility. We cannot do everything that comes our way, but we do seek the discernment of the Spirit in determining if God is calling a new ministry into being.

I want to close by naming one more ministry opportunity, one that I did not mention earlier—our participation in Warm Nights. You will hear more about Warm Nights in the video I mentioned earlier that we will show now. Please give careful thought into how you might engage in any of these opportunities or new ones you might want to create.