

THE IMPORTANCE OF MISSION GROUPS

Sandy Fisher

Sept. 4, 2011

As the time drew closer for me to come and speak today, I wasn't sure I was going to be able to be here. Most of you know that two weeks ago, my dad here in Lynchburg was in serious condition and we didn't expect him to live. He was suffering from extreme dehydration, pneumonia, severe weight loss and delirium. He was not able to sit up or stand on his own, or even feed himself. A week ago, he was released from the hospital and placed in a re-hab facility. Since then, he has steadily and daily healed into a healthier mental and physical condition, and the rapid changes in him have been amazing, to say the least.

Most of you also know of the debilitating disease I got from a tick bite in mid-May during our annual Day of Caring. The tick bite illness caused me to have weakness and chronic fatigue in the three months prior to my dad's illness. This, naturally, curtailed the amount of energy I had in order to take care of my parents, who are both in their nineties.

I bring up these two incidents in my life to better illustrate a point I want to talk about today, which is the importance of belonging to a mission group in our community. Belonging to a mission group is part of the process of giving back or sharing some of the gifts that have been given to each one of us. We all have so much, in one form or another. Being in a mission group can be an opportunity to pass on some of those blessings to others.

Our mission groups undertake a variety of objectives such as promoting peace and education, the nurturing and education of children, and providing help for those with addictions. The Crofters Mission Group, a new mission group started by Don Morrison and Curtis Harper, has the objective of providing fresh vegetables for Lynchburg area residents. This ministry plans to partner with Camp Kum Bah Yah,

by using the area next to the camps' fenced-in garden to grow fresh vegetables. The healthy food produced by this mission group will be given to Lynchburg families who need supplemental food assistance.

The objective of the Chrysalis mission group is to provide a refuge for persons of any spiritual background seeking a place for rest, renewal, prayer, or meditation. People come to stay with us for many reasons. They come to visit family members here in Lynchburg, they come to write books, take sabbaticals, and attend group seminars. Teenage work groups come to volunteer their time and energy to improve our gardens and campgrounds. Some people come simply to be housed nearby while their children attend camp here. Next year, with the advent of Kaye Edwards' retirement from the Disciples Home Missions, there is a possibility that the Children's Worship and Wonder program will be centered here, at the Church of the Covenant. If that happens, the Chrysalis Mission Group will have the opportunity to provide hospitality to people from all over the United States who come for training in this very special program for children.

I wanted to mention that I've noticed lately a growing frequency of "the return" to the roots of the Church of the Covenant. The Cosby family started the camp, bought the land surrounding it, and started the church; all in the name of children. They wanted to secure a place that children would always have to come and play and to connect with nature. It took years to purchase all the pieces of land that now comprise the 40 some acres of Camp Kum Bah Yah. But through vision and persistence, it was accomplished. Children have always been the first priority of the Camp and the Church of the Covenant. This church was actually established to be the spiritual support of Camp KBY (the camp came first, the church came second) and I am so happy to see the blossoming of new children's ministries within it. Kay Edwards and Mike Buhler have established the Lodge Mission Group that will cater to children and their parents by providing a breakfast coffee-house atmosphere for the parents while their children play safely nearby. Alys Hickcox, Rachel Wilson and Evi Kaiser, along with Kaye and David Edwards' support, are meeting once a month as a mission group to work with the vision of establishing a small outdoor pre-school.

The pre-school would be centered in the Youth House but most of the time the children will spend their days outside, exploring and playing in nature. This concept is crucial nowadays, because of public education authorities cutting the physical education programs that allow children to be outdoors, connecting with nature. Nature is a part us, of our well being. We need it for our physical, mental and spiritual health. Studies show that if children are introduced to nature and are outdoors as much as possible, they live healthier, happier lives. I am excited to think that we are, more and more, placing children as the core mission of this community.

Mission groups do many things. They benefit the greater community in many ways by providing services and support. But seldom, if ever, do we talk about what belonging to a mission group does for us, each individual member. Members of a mission group aren't just individuals involved in an organization. They are a part of the whole; an interlocking piece to a complete puzzle. We create bonds with one another in our groups that make us close, like family. We develop a deep caring for one another; a close tie that comes from the sharing of our life's journey through our accountability reports with one another. In other words, we get to know each other beyond Sunday morning worship.

This special bond has never been so evident to me as in the last few months, as I recuperated from the illness caused by the tick bite, only to be hit with the responsibilities of taking care of my ailing father. The support I received from the Chrysalis Mission Group members was phenomenal. Guests came and went, scheduling was done, rooms scrubbed clean, visitors were greeted, laundry folded and emails answered....most of the time without my even knowing about it. My group took on the burden of doing my work, coordinating with each other, and purposely not bothering me with the details so as not to worry me. When I was too weak to take care of myself, let alone anyone else, they took care of me. And if that wasn't enough, they even brought me dinners so I wouldn't have to cook.

You know, if you've ever had any regular meetings to go to, you know there are times when you just don't feel like going. Well, with me, there have been times when I felt like I just couldn't do one more meeting. I'm tired, I want to skip out on the

next Thursday night group and just stay home. But I attend, and without fail, I always feel better, I'm excited, and reinvigorated when I leave the meeting. I am happy to be there, thankful to be a part of this wonderful, supportive group of mission oriented people. I am blessed with their friendship.

As we move towards the Church's recommitment Sunday on October 2nd, I encourage you all to think about joining a mission group if you haven't already. It is a fundamental part of this church. It is what we are all about, helping the outward community for the benefit of all, which may even include yourself.