

What does it mean to be community? We know as we look at our congregations there is a lot that happens in the parish community both in mission and ministry and there are many individuals apart from one's parish who are active in a variety of communities.

But what about us as a Diocesan community, what does that look like? The Commission on Mission and Development has pondered that question over the last few years and continues to hold that question up as we do our work.

We believe by building relationships, in offering support (financially, educationally, and prayerfully) and by journeying with others into the wider world we form Diocesan Community. Together we are building stronger congregations, forming disciples and doing the work of the Kingdom.

The Rev. Mike Tess, Vicar of Good Shepherd in Sun Prairie and I are looking into the issues of hospitality in a multicultural world. We started asking questions such as: How are our congregations in truly welcoming those who come from different parts of the globe? What does the word welcome really mean and specifically how do we show it? Is our community really open to all in our neighborhoods? Do we know who are neighbors are and if they were to come into our churches what would they see and feel? Would this be a place they would truly feel welcomed into?

Often times we think we know the answers to the above questions, but we don't really ask the people affected and we fall prey to our *Midwestern Niceness* where we say what we think the people want to hear. What we need to do is be honest about where we are. Some of us have never even had the conversation about welcome (do we mean the first view of when a person arrives or do we mean helping people become part of the community – making it their own community)? Has the conversation been started and then stopped because other things took over? I know there are churches reworking their hospitality ministry and examining what it does mean to welcome the first Sunday and the 29th Sunday of a visit. It doesn't matter where you are on asking the question what matters is the conversation is happening on a regular basis and includes a variety of people.

Along with asking questions Mike and I will be attending a conference later this summer to explore hospitality in the Latino communities with an eye toward creating welcoming multicultural communities here in the Diocese of Milwaukee. The city of Sun Prairie has begun to look at these issues in how they form and continue to form community in an ever changing world. One of the ways they have engaged the people of Sun Prairie is through a City Book Read. Mike gave me the book Seedfolks by Paul Fleischman about a month ago and after I finished it I bought all the copies I could from Amazon. It is a wonderful little book that looks at the issues of fear, racism, poverty, apathy with hope, care, support, transformation. We can't do it all but we can make a difference in some way. Together these small acts can make big things happen.

I walked back there that evening and checked on the beans. They'd picked themselves up and were looking fine. I saw that she'd made a circle of dirt around the other three plants. Out of nowhere the words from the Bible came into my head: 'And a little child shall lead them.' I didn't know why at first. Then I did. There's plenty about my life I can't change. Can't bring back the dead back to life on this earth. Can't make the world loving and kind. Can't change myself into a millionaire. But a patch of ground in this trashy lot – I can change that. Can change it big. Better to put my time into that than moaning about the other day. That little grammar school girl showed me that. Seedfolks p. 15

This summer and into the fall we would like to offer a Diocesan Book Read about community and transformation. As I indicated I have purchased about 80 copies of the book Seedfolks by Paul Fleischman and would be happy to give them to parish communities (It is available on Kindle as well). Our desire is for people to read it sign their name and then pass it on – it will take an hour or so to read. This is a book that is written for young readers which makes it perfect for our middle to high school students to join in the conversation. What we are asking and hoping for is for discussions to take place across the diocese and for people to share their thoughts on our Diocesan Book Study blog site. Our Book Study blog site is new so be sure to go the website or you can access it through a link in the E news.

On the blog site we will have:

- Questions posted for you to respond to and please post your own questions for others to respond to.
- Share with us how you have invited others into the conversation especially our younger members of the community.
- Share what seeds have already been planted and what are some possibilities for new growth

We know it will take many more voices together to begin to make strides in truly being community that welcomes all. We hope together we as a Diocesan community can begin to have conversations and to address these and other questions in a safe and loving way.

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