**July 27, 2025 Engaging the Community 1 Corinthians 9:19-23; Mark 4:35-41**

**“Let us go over to the other side.”  Mark 4:35**

**“I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.”**

**1 Corinthians 9:22**

Have you ever considered what it means to venture to the “other side”? Jesus Christ provides an excellent example by not confining his mission to one specific location. He instructed his disciples to cross over to the other side. Throughout the Gospel, there are many instances where Jesus highlights the path of his mission, even passing through unfriendly communities. Our mission for revitalization mirrors that of Jesus and his disciples after his resurrection. He commanded them—and us—to go out into all parts of the world to proclaim the gospel.

**As we plan to revitalize our church, we need to refocus on our community**. What strengths do we have in reaching out to those around us? How can we effectively publicize our church within the community? With numerous competing faith communities in Park Forest, what strategies can we employ to attract people to our church?

I envision us becoming an externally focused church once again, where our effectiveness is measured not by what occurs inside our church, but by the impact our members have on the community. We should engage with our community through truth and grace, sharing good news and performing acts of kindness.

I truly believe that if we can rediscover our enthusiasm for being the people we were at our baptism—serving as salt for the earth, shining light in the darkness of our community, and reflecting our Heavenly Father through good deeds and love for all of God’s children—then others will recognize us as Christians by our love. Our actions should set us apart, just as the people of Antioch recognized the disciples and called them "Christians" (Acts 11:26). We should strive to be influencers in our community through our love and actions.

Crossing to the other side may not be easy, especially given our usual tendencies. Many of us are not naturally inclined toward evangelism or activities like going door-to-door, as Jehovah's Witnesses do. Even with Jesus in the boat, the disciples felt scared when a storm arose during their crossing. I believe many of us can relate to the fear of approaching others to share God’s love and invite them to church. We may encounter apathy, rejection, and hostility.

However, let's reflect on Jesus' words: "Why are you afraid? Don’t you realize I am in the boat with you? I am the one who told you to go to the other side!" We need to cast aside our doubts and have confidence that we can succeed because Jesus assured us, "I am with you until the end of the ages" (Matthew 28:20). With Jesus by our side, let us move forward and reclaim our community for Him!

**Paul’s letter to the Corinthians emphasizes the effectiveness of mission work. He underscores the importance of being creative and adaptable**, stating that he became "all things to all people" in order to win them for Christ. This concept, illustrated in 1 Corinthians 9:22, exemplifies adaptability and empathy in spreading the message of Christ.

**Paul's willingness to embrace diverse cultures, backgrounds, and perspectives highlights the importance of meeting people where they are—**both physically and spiritually. He illustrates the value of walking alongside others in their faith journeys, understanding their unique challenges, and fostering bridges of understandingand compassion by being "all things to all people."

Though Paul’s world may differ from ours, we also live in a diverse community. Therefore, true revitalization requires a shift in perspective—from focusing solely on inward maintenance to embracing outward mission. We are reminded that the essence of the gospel is not about comfort, but about courageous love that crosses boundaries and welcomes those on the margins. This encourages us to see every person as our neighbor, every encounter as an opportunity for grace, and every challenge as an invitation to grow in faith.

**This calling invites us to leave behind old patterns and embrace new ways of connecting with others**. It may involve stepping outside our comfort zones, risking misunderstandings, or having difficult conversations. Yet, it is precisely in these moments, on the “other side,” that God’s transformative power becomes most evident. Our willingness to engage, serve, and love sacrificially serves as a living testimony to Christ’s presence among us.

**To foster creativity, we must think outside the box and adopt new approaches**. This can include: (a) hosting community events such as free health clinics, food drives, and back-to-school fairs; (b) partnering with local schools to provide support and resources; and (c) opening our church building for community use, including youth groups and art classes.

**By addressing the needs of the local community, our church can establish itself as a vital cornerstone in the area.**

As we seek new ways to connect, let us pray for the spirit of boldness and creativity that Jesus promised and sent to the disciples (Acts 1:8). This will empower us to make a meaningful impact in our community. The Lord desires for us to make a difference right where we are, and He wants us to be agents of change in our community.

**Revitalizing a church is not an immediate process; rather, it is a journey filled with opportunities for growth and change.** Change is vital for growth, and new times call for new approaches. We must embrace change to foster growth. By highlighting our church's unique strengths and addressing its challenges creatively, we can build a vibrant community of faith.

Let us encourage one another, celebrate every achievement, and recognize that our efforts—though they may sometimes feel small and overlooked—contribute to the larger movement of God’s Spirit within our community. **May our church be known not just for its physical structure, but for its open doors and welcoming hands**.