



The Chimes

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Modesto Church of the Brethren

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Continuing the work of Jesus. Peacefully. Simply. Together.



Walking the Walk, However You Can By Elizabeth Sholes, Director of Public Policy, California Council of Churches

I always tried to pay attention to Albert Einstein's sarcastic comment, "I love humanity. It's people I can't stand!"

For years I've heard people sneer at those of us who do social justice work saying that is precisely what we do - ignore the people. Then they add (as if they were experts) that if we *really* knew the people for whom we advocated, we'd hate them. The final kicker is, if we're working to find solutions to homelessness, the opposition will snarl, "So how many drifters have you taken into *your* house?"

Well, now I can answer that last question: twenty-two. Plus, three dogs and one cat. Oh yes, a toad that lives in an aquarium. Some stayed inside temporarily, some lived on either the front porch (the police asked us not to do that) or in the backyard in a sheltered gazebo or the garage. Others came to dinner for the holidays and still others come over to visit and share food.

Do I like all of them? Yes, actually, I do. Even Speedy. Speedy is pretty hapless because he has no idea how to be polite. I've given up doing much more than feeding him because the biggest success I've had in five years is to make him stop saying, "Yo!" Mama!" when he sees me. That's all I'll ever get from him. It's enough.

We are not called to like everyone who deserves help. I freely admit I do judge some actions more than others. I don't interact with people who hold arguments with other people I can't see. I don't tolerate drug use at my home ever, and I do push sobriety where I can.

My one demand is that, over a period of time, they get signed up for the programs we have, as advocates, fought tooth and nail to obtain for them - food stamps, health care, basic minimal income. If I'm giving out money, they need to make that effort so I can give out less. I agree with folksy, progressive radio commentator, Jim Hightower: "Money's like manure, he said. "You gotta spread it around." When people have basic benefits, my own fertilizer goes further.

This all started with a very simple act - I let homeless people use our address for their mail. This is life altering for them since with an address for their mail they know when they have to update their records, know they have benefits at all, and prevent loss as reporting changes occur.

We get our own first class mail at a P.O. Box anyway, but it was such a simple thing and has made an enormous difference for all those people.

Having protection from the vagaries of both homelessness and being out of touch has made a difference. A lot of them are Vietnam vets, have worked, and are too old to find employment anymore. A few have disability income finally, one is on Social Security, and others have applied. Others have gone home to family, and still others have VA or HUD housing. All of this happened because they had an address.

I come by this outreach honorably. During the Depression years, my grandmother fed "hoboes and bums" in the backyard in exchange for some work. At some point one of them carved a simple figure on the gate - a curled up cat - telling other such men that "a kind-hearted woman lives here." Well I don't have the sign, but everyone knows who we are, including the police who look away because our corner of the universe is calm, peaceful, and clean. Our neighbors love the men living in the backyard and hire them for weekly clean up and small jobs.

I can walk my extended neighborhood and see people I don't know who know who I am. When I had a medical crisis (that turned out to be nothing but was temporarily very painful) I was surrounded by care from everyone we'd helped. We are a community. I consider them my friends. I'm afraid of no one because no one would let anything happen to me.



Obviously what helps this along is that there is a public bathroom a block away that is open 24/7. I don't think I have a solution for that where such things don't exist. But I'd probably rent a porta-potty or buy a compost toilet - it's really not too much to do.

But if I did nothing more than make sandwiches and hot soup or cold drinks depending on the weather, just sharing our front porch mailbox would, to them, have been enough. We morphed into the living situations. It's not for everyone, but it works for us. There are, however, totally possible solutions we can offer.

How life changing would it be if churches put up cubbies with numbers that become "apartments" in the public records to give homeless people an address they can access during business hours? They would keep their social services, have a contact if they got ill, and otherwise just make stability in a small way where otherwise the system rolls over those who are already just barely scraping by.

How hard is it to put out a water station and plastic cups (plus a waste basket) in the heat of summer days? How hard is it to have "cup o' noodles" and insulated cups for cold weather?

Homeless people give back. Recently an entire field got cleaned up because a friend who leaves home baked goodies for the people who camp there got harmed. She does cat rescue work, leaves food bins to make it easier, and those bins got stolen. She got REALLY mad and took them back forcefully from the new homeless man who'd taken them.

The other homeless people who saw what happened rallied around, drove the thief away, and then cleaned up every inch of the mess he (mostly) had made. She was amazed. I told her - they did this for you. They know what good you do for animals and for them, and they wouldn't tolerate the decay of their fragile community stability that teeters on the kindnesses you show them.

I am adamant no one needs to repay me, but they DO have to "pay it forward" to others in harm's way. They do that - I've seen it repeatedly. But they also bring me presents. I have a gorgeous scarf one gave me, bracelets, a bird feeder- things they found, nice things they salvaged - to say thanks. I treasure them. And no - these things aren't stolen. You'd be appalled at what people throw away. The homeless are masters of finding and salvaging what others merely toss.

They are smart, funny, kind, and engaging. Yes, some have mental health issues, now with Medi-Cal, largely under control. Some have records, freely disclosed and, from me, not judged. They work hard both at keeping body and soul together and keeping our neighborhood clean and crime free. Being poor is the hardest work there is, and they put their shoulders to the wheel, day after day.

Arrests for illegal camping are almost non-existent in our area because if they are rousted, they can temporarily leave their things in the backyard while they move their sites. Nothing is more stupid than the 'cat and mouse' ticketing of homeless for sleeping outside and making them move their stuff, then ticketing them if they can't. Then comes the warrants for their failure to appear (they have no transportation to court or work details), then jailing them for 3 days only to have the cycle repeat.

Just giving them a place to store things while they relocate has cut down on the cycle and let them get legally placed.

One woman a block over - I dislike her far too much to consider her a neighbor - hates the homeless. She has made as many as 52 calls in one night to the police claiming one man - ONE - was doing terrible things in the alley by her house. These are all lies. Why isn't she cited for false police reports? She's a homeowner. That's why. When my homeless friend asked her why she was so angry with him (he had permission to sleep several houses down from her) she said, "Because I'm a CHRISTIAN!"

Seriously. She said that.

She has called the police on us, to no avail, for giving access to our own property. She has filed complaints that we are messy and lowering property values (thanks to the homeless men, our house is lovely - neat, trimmed, clean, raked.) So, her brand of "Christianity" does not prevail, thank goodness. I see her peeking down my driveway from time to time, so I recently put a sign in the front window, "**Matthew 25:40 Lives Here.**" For some reason she hasn't been by since. Wonder why...

"As ye have done to the least of these..." That is the crux of what faith teaches me. No rules, no ritual, no rites will matter so much as that one directive. Walking the walk on whatever level you can is all we are asked to do. It's amazingly simple to find a way to be kind. And guess what? You get back friends. Who knew?

From Luella: I've read and reread this article many times. It speaks to my soul. Challenging? Yes. Impossible? Maybe not.



Upcoming Sermon Topics

September 2 - What We're Talking about When We Talk about Calling - This Labor Day weekend we'll consider the ways in which a calling from God can influence our vocation. Surprise no. 1, vocation is about a lot more than work, so even retired persons have a vocation. Surprise no. 2, God calls everyone to a vocation, not just those called to ministry.

September 9 - What We're Talking about When We Talk about Stewardship - Do you look at stewardship as a sacrifice or an investment? What does it mean to be rich? What does abundant life look like? We'll look at these and other related questions with help from a special guest, well sort of.

September 16 - Guest Speaker, Robert Aguirre

Sunday Morning Study

Sunday, September 2 will be the final Sunday morning study using the Rob Bell videos. Even if you haven't been attending these sessions, you're invited to join us for this final week, you may however need to bring your own chair. (Those who have been attending know what I'm talking about.)

Pastor's Schedule

(When in Modesto) Monday & Wednesday through Friday -

In office 8:30 to 11:30

Tuesday - Pastor's Sabbath. Other times by appointment, contact me by email at mfletch21625@aol.com or by phone at 313-303-1227.



Aug. 28 - Sept 9 - in Modesto

Sept. 10 - 16 - vacation

Sept. 17 - 18 - Working from Southern Cal

Sept. 19- Oct. 21- in Modesto

Oct. 22 - 26 - Working from Southern Cal

Oct. 27 - Nov. 6 - in Modesto

Pastor's Roaming Office

(Check church's Facebook page for updates)

Pastor's Roaming Office is an opportunity for anyone to chat in an informal manner about what is happening at the Modesto COB. For serious concerns setting an appointment would probably be better.

I would welcome suggestions as to locations and times to conduct these gatherings.

Friday, August 31 - 3:30 pm - Starbucks, 1800 Oakdale

Saturday, September 1, 8:30 am - Mr. T's Donuts, Tully and Standiford

Wednesday, Sept. 5, 6:00 pm - Panera Bread, 3401 Dale Rd

Friday, Sept. 7 - 1:00 pm - Michael's Pizza - 500 N. Carpenter



Young Adult Gathering

All young adults of the congregation are invited to join me Thursday, August 30 at Buckhorn Bar B Q in the Vintage Fair Mall anytime between 5:30 and 8:00 to socialize and discuss organizing a Young Adult ministry.



Childcare at the church will be provided and a MODCOB Happy Meal will be served to the children who are there. If you will be using the childcare, please RSVP so we know how many meals we need.

If you're not sure if you qualify as a young adult and you haven't yet cashed a Social Security check, come on out and join us. It never hurts to have a few "wiser" persons to provide some insight and help organize.

Hope to see a lot of you there on the 30th.

University of La Verne Visit

On Sunday October 14th representatives of the University of La Verne will be visiting and sharing with us about the new sacred space at the university. This presentation will take place in the sanctuary at 9:30.



Keep Linda Bustle in your prayers. She had major surgery at Stanford on August 22.

Rejoice that Ava, Bill Johnson's granddaughter, was able to go back to school after her brain surgery. She will receive radiation treatment in the future.

Celebrate with Maddy Beth that she has been adopted by her stepmother, Robin.

Renee Gokey is happy that her mother has found housing.

Keep Maryco Graff in your prayers as she is now confined to a wheelchair. She may appreciate visitors, but call first.

Rejoice with Rachel and Josh Gilstrap-Katen as they are expecting another child in March 2019.

The congregation was happy to have Laura Hay in worship after her summer as the denomination's Youth Peace Advocate.

Veronica, a Family Promise guest, gave thanks to the congregation for their hospitality and asked for prayers for her search for housing.

The Christian Ed Commission is rejoicing that the last Family FUN night welcomed 15 children with their parents.

Kelly Gepley, going into her third week of teaching 6th grade, is glad to have only 34 students now, after having over 40 last week.

Keep the Roy family in your prayers, as Dana is dealing with pain after an auto accident.

Pray for John Heisel, who will be undergoing a heart valve replacement.

Keep the Search Committee in your prayers as they continue looking for our permanent pastor.

Deacon On Call for September

Jim Martinez

September Greeters

Sept 9th Fran Adkins & Rita Matthews

Sept 16th Donna Heiny & Pat Royer

Sept 23rd Maddy Beth Harty & Gracie Roberts

Sept 30th Terhesa Gamboa & Eddie Hernandez



News from Fellowship & Recreation:

Just letting you know Faith Bites will resume at 6 PM on Wednesday, September 12th. For that evening our guest chef will be Deborah Gowans with the help of Peggy and Sandy. Come join us!

Please come join us on Sunday, September 16th for our All Church Picnic/Homemade Ice Cream event. We will gather in the courtyard for pulled pork sandwiches and we are hoping you will bring a salad. We also are asking

those of you with an ice cream freezer if you would churn up a freezer of ice cream to share. Watch for signup to let us know you're coming and a signup for ice cream freezers.

We have some fun planned as well; be thinking of who you would like to challenge to a balloon toss. We are also going to see who can make the largest bubble.

Hope to see you Sunday September 16th at 5:30 in the courtyard for great food and fun. **Please don't forget to sign up!!!**

From Fellowship & Recreation

From the Personnel Committee:

We are looking for volunteers for office fill-in when Jill is gone or ill. Volunteers that we have at present are: Stephen Reddy, Terhesa Gamboa, Linda Owens, Elaine Forcier, Karleen Daniels, Gayle Hernandez, Linda Sesser, Karen Cosner, and Bill Johnson. If you feel that you can spare 4 hours at a time filling in at the office, primarily to answer the phone or receive packages, please let Jill know by calling the office at 209 523-1438. Your time spent would be much appreciated.



Do you have an announcement you would like the congregation to see on the big screen, before Sunday worship begins? Please send any announcements to the church office at office@modcob.org by Wednesday evenings. Thank you!

The Condensed Calendar



Monday-

Tuesday-

Wednesday-

Thursday-

5:30pm Young Adult Gathering/Buckhorn BBQ
At Vintage Faire

Friday-

Saturday-

Next Sunday-September 2nd
9:30 am Sunday Morning Study
11 am Worship

September 3 Labor Day/ Office Closed
September 8 Walk to End Alzheimer's/
Graceada Park
September 9 Annual Conference Report
September 12 6pm First Faith Bites
September 16 5:30 pm Church Picnic
September 20 Sr. Ministry Event-Forcier's
trip to Zion, Bryce Canyon,
Arches, and Grand Canyon
September 22 First Day of Autumn
September 28 6pm Family FUN Night



*Articles and photos for
the next issue of
Chimes are due by
Thursday, September 6.
Use article name in the
subject line and email
to: chimes@modcob.org
The Editor thanks you.*



October 14-21 Hosting Family Promise
October 20 Sr. Ministry Event: Trip to
Knight's Ferry and Oakdale
Cheese Factory
October 27 5pm Harvest Festival