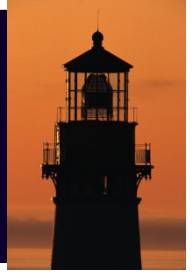


Lighthouse Keeper

Evangelical Congregational Church

November 2008



Starting to Reach Our New Neighbors



By Les Cool

It feels like we're starting over again.

My wife and I have just signed the mortgage paperwork for a new home on a new street in a new neighborhood in a new town near our new church. We feel somewhat disoriented. Everything is different from what we have been used to for the past thirteen years. The street names are all new. Directions to everything are other than what we have known.

The grocery store is new, the aisles foreign, nothing easily found. Each trip takes much longer than we would like. The Mall is on the other side of town. Our favorite restaurants are in another state. The auto center where we have had our car serviced is no longer close enough to access. We must find a new place.

Normal life brings a change.

Shirley will no longer ask how the church is doing as we stand in the checkout line. No more jokes about my name, "Pastor Cooool," with her southern drawl. There will be no more updated pictures of the children from the head cashier at our favorite grocery store. The fingers that guide the scissors through our hair will change. The interesting lives of the many people we have come to know will become memories. Now begin the long distant relationships.

Our neighbors are also new. We do not know them. They look at us as we come and go. They probably wonder about us. Maybe they will reach out to us. They should, you see, for they are not new. We are. This is their neighborhood. We are the outsiders, the poachers upon their claimed space on this planet. Will we be able to earn a place

in their lives?

It would be easy to stay stuck in feeling out of place, to continue to linger over the memories. But life has changed. The family across the street will no longer be dropping by with their traditional flan (yummy dessert) for the holiday. There will be no more baklava (think: honey soaked pastry) from Majid and his family. The kids across the street will no longer shout our names as we drive by their house. We will no longer be the people "in the know" that the new people on the street look to for assistance.



The flow of helping the lost has changed direction.

Or has it? We still know Jesus. We are still earthen vessels containing the amazing, life-changing message of the Risen Christ. And so, we should reach out to our new neighbors. It will be comfortable. It will be

awkward. But God has already gone before us and paved a way. We merely need a walk as He directs.

There is a pattern that works every time.

Prayer. Carol and I will begin to talk with God about our new neighbors. We see their houses, watch them come and go. We know enough about human nature to begin to pray. And along the way, God will open our minds and hearts to pray more intelligently for the individuals and families who are now our neighbors. Prayer begins the journey to meaningful relationships that yield opportunities to share Jesus.

Care. Carol and I will begin the slow work of moving into the lives of our neighbors. It would be easier to wait, hoping they would reach out first.

That may not happen. And so, we will ask God to show us how to gently move into our daily routines. Perhaps we'll cross paths as we walk our new streets, tend our yards at the same time or drag out our trash. God is faithful. When we ask. He shows a way.

Share. After relationships have been established, we'll trust God to arrange opportunities to speak for Christ, to share our stories and His story. This is not something we will have to force. We probably will not even have to make it happen. We pray. We watch and listen. God

sets the appointments. We merely speak when invited to do so. It is just that easy!

I'm feeling more settled.

Just thinking through the work that is ahead makes my head spin, leaving me feeling unsettled. But when I remember that the work is God's, that I have been invited to join Him in what He is doing, my racing heart is calmed. It's not my agenda. It's not my work. It is but mine to obey and serve.

I'll keep you posted.



Living and Loving Wherever God Leads

by Steve Holubec

New can be confusing:

It was the fourth of November, more commonly known as Election Day, and as I drove around the bustling streets of Ephrata, the rain started to fall. "Where is 137 East Main Street?" I wondered aloud. I quickly learned that a wrong turn followed by a series of one way streets can turn a miniscule mistake into a five minute adventure. The beat up Ford truck that sputtered along in front of me was not helping matters, allowing me the opportunity to consider the colorful vocabulary that comes to mind when frustration consumes the man behind the wheel. Ultimately, I found the parking lot of the church at which I needed to vote. As I climbed out of my car, I decided that the Ephrata Borough must have picked the most inconvenient place to hold general elections.

Of course, not making things any easier was the fact that this was my first time voting in the district. I thought of this fact as I walked in to vote. Further, this was not just my first time voting at *this* location, but in the past five elections—three general and two primaries—this was the fourth different place I had voted. In the past two years I have lived in two different apartments, sandwiched around a brief and humbling return to living with Mom and Dad, and currently rent a townhouse. For most people, an upgrade in housing means two things: more space inside the house, and more space between you and your neighbors. Taking away by brief return to my parents' homestead, I noticed that as my houses got larger in size, my neighbors got closer, with a larger number in a closer proximity. This is a problem if your goal is to have a yard big enough for Wiffle Ball tournaments, which happens

to be a passion of mine. On the other hand, it is an amazing opportunity if your desire is to shower your neighbors with the love of Christ, a greater passion of mine.

New can be exciting:

I remember thinking as I drove around my current development for the first time, "Wow, what a great place to do ministry!" Not only are there many people from both Akron Grace EC and our Day Care, but also many young families. For the first time I have a yard to take care of, grass to mow and, coming soon, snow to shovel. The mail comes to a cluster of mailboxes at the end of the road. All these things naturally lead to human interaction. As I had in my prior dwelling places, I started slowly getting to know the people living around me, but it was difficult at first because I was spending so much of my "free time" driving to the Boyertown area.



You see, there was a particular young lady who lived there who sported a diamond on her finger that was from me. I had vested interest. In spite of my distraction and time limitations, I still made time to smile and say "hello" to people as I walked or jogged (but let's be honest, mostly walked) through the neighborhood. Most people replied with a warm smile and a friendly "hello." With this slow start, some still look at me funny or refuse to make eye contact. But that's okay. This time I will be around for awhile.

A fresh baked loaf of banana bread for my single neighbor, who now lives along because her son

has graduated college and found a job, has opened the doors wider from “Hi, how are you?” conversations to ever-deepening ones.



New can be an adventure:

This ministry adventure has a new twist.

The woman from Boyertown now has my last name and, as we learn to do marriage, we are beginning to figure out how God will use us to influence our neighbors. The table and chairs and grill are away for the winter, but we already have plans for a Christmas open house. As we sit and look out into our back yard, we have also begun to imagine the possibilities of what God can do through our new life together.

Since I graduated college just six years ago, there have not been many constants in my life. New

places and new faces have forced me to learn how to maximize being single and being in ministry: lots of time with guys and not so much with girls (a worthy casualty of trying to live above reproach). Any time there is a constant state of flux it is easy to become discouraged, even introverted, but we are called to live out loud (Matthew 5:13-16)!

Now, Lauren and I will figure out how to do ministry as a couple, maximizing the benefits of full time vocational ministry while balancing our demanding schedules. As a couple, we can reach out to couples or singles, and gender is no longer an issue. But one thing remains the same: single or married, living in a small apartment or a 3-bedroom house, if God is at the center of our lives, we will draw closer to Him and the light of our lives will shine into the lives of our neighbors.



Your Story is Wanted:

The Lighthouse editor is looking for clips and anecdotes from your witnessing experiences. We can learn from one another. We can encourage one another. Feel free to drop me a line (revcool@ptd.net) or give me a call (717-859-2700). Together, we can accomplish so much more for the Kingdom of God.

Lighthouse Resources:

Mission America Coalition (www.missionamerica.org; click “Lighthouse Movement”) is committed to “Uniting Christians for Evangelism and Revival.” The Mission America Coalition (MAC) is helping mobilize Christian leaders and individual Christians to collaborate together to reach America with the love and grace of Jesus Christ. Their mission statement is “The whole Church taking the whole Gospel to the whole Nation—and to the World.” Through encouraging Christians to pray for, care for, and share Jesus Christ with every person, the Coalition emphasizes spiritual unity, evangelism, and revival. Check out its helpful website.

Evangelism Resources:

Evangelism Through the Local Church, Michael Green, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992.

Michael Green provides a comprehensive guide to every aspect of evangelism. Between the covers of this one book, you can begin to build the foundation for an effective evangelism program for your church.

5 Things Anyone Can Do to Start a Church, Phil Stevenson, Wesleyan Publishing House, 2008.

Phil Stevenson takes a rather simplistic look at the process of preparing a congregation for the work of planting a new church. Don’t let that scare you. In the reading, you will be exposed to a lengthy list of ideas that are immediately applicable to outreach for Jesus and your church.

