

# “Genuine Love: A Pastoral: Report from the 35 Housing Meetings”

Sermon Preached At Foundry United Methodist Church

By Rev. Dean Snyder

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Romans 12:1-10

John 15:12-17

Let us pray. Warm our hearts oh God by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit. Open our minds and our spirits. So that we might know you and serve you. Amen.

A little more than a year ago when Jane I first came to Foundry church we had thirty five house meetings. We were hosted by thirty five households in this congregation who invited neighbors, who are members and participants of Foundry to their homes to meet Jane and myself and to give us an opportunity to get to know you.

From Annapolis, Maryland to Gainsville, Virginia. We met thirty five evenings and afternoons with Foundry folk to listen and to get to know you. And I want to report this morning on some of what we learned from those house meetings and how they might influence the ministry and mission that we do here together at Foundry.

We asked several questions during the house meetings. Two of them were these: What is most meaningful to you about Foundry church? and What is one thing that you would change if you could about Foundry? We heard a lot of answers but when we asked the question of what was most meaningful about Foundry church there were three things that we heard over and over and over again.

Those three things are these first of all worship and music. People told us again and again that when they came here to Foundry for worship and sat down for worship there was a sense of God's presence here; and that it was mediated through our worship and through our prayer and especially often through our music.

The second thing that people told us was most meaningful about Foundry was our church's mission. People told us again and again that it is meaningful and important to be part of a congregation that is deeply engaged in mission to the world around us here, in our community and also globally.

We have some sixteen mission groups and then we have mission activities in our community, interfaith and mission activities that we support. We are a missionally oriented church, and even those folk at the house meetings who said that they personally right now were not engaged in a particular mission said it was still important to be a part of a congregation that was engaged in mission and where mission is important.

The third thing that people told us over and over again was that it was important that we are an inclusive congregation where everyone is welcome and included and especially it is meaningful and important that we

are a reconciling congregation. Some people told me they came a long way to part of a church where everyone is welcome and included.

So the first thing that Jane and I learned out of the house meetings was that we've come to the right place because these are things that we care about, spiritual, rich worship where we truly come to open our hearts to allow ourselves to encounter the spirit of God and then out of that worship to deeply engage the world in mission and to witness to the world that all of God's sons and daughters are God's people.

Worship, music and mission inclusivity, being a reconciling congregation. These are the most important things to us. Then we asked this second question, what might you change about Foundry if you could? We got quite a few answers here, too. Everything from more parking to fewer commercials during the worship service.

I brooded for a long time about what we heard in response to this question what might you change if you could. I thought about it for several months, and then last spring I came up with a list of suggestions about how we might strengthen our church life in response to what I heard in answer to these questions at the house meetings. I shared it with our church staff who wrestled with it for a couple of months and affirmed some of what I brought to the table and perfected other parts of it.

After we as staff had worked on it for a couple of months, I took it our OCC, our Operations Coordination Committee, which is a group of key elected Lay Leaders in the congregation and they wrestled with it for a couple of months and affirmed some things and developed some other things. Out of that process we came up with five focuses to concentrate on in the year 2004, so that we might strengthen our church life together, and those are what I want to share with you this morning.

I share them with you for two reasons. One is that if we are going to focus on these things to strengthen our church life, we will need the commitment of you, the people of this church. We will need people. We will need people who decide to give more of their talent and their gifts and their leadership in helping to develop these ministries. I'm also sharing them with you because in order to make them happen we will need your financial support.

They represent an increase in our budget and next Sunday is Stewardship Sunday when we ask and invite you to pledge, so I'm hoping that you will want to support these focuses in our lives together with your tithes and your offerings. The text for these focuses is from Romans 12:9 Let Love Be Genuine. Let love be genuine. Here they are five focuses in our life for next year. Five ways we like to strengthen our witness in our life together.

Focus number one is strengthening our congregational care for one another, strengthening our care for each other. During the house meetings I heard what I came to think of as a vague longing for a deeper sense of belonging. A longing for a deeper sense of belonging. People said to us things like this, "You know I would like to be more involved and I'm not blaming anybody that I'm not more involved and I know I ought to do something to become more involved but it's hard for me to figure out how to become more involved."

A longing for a sense of deeper belonging. Let love be genuine. In 2004, we would like to find five people who will commit themselves to help develop stronger small group ministry here at Foundry. We will send them away with Reverend Whitten to be trained and then we will provide them with the resources they need

to strengthen our neighborhood bible study, to strengthen our share and care group and other small groups within our church.

We really can't belong to this many other people. We really can't belong to this many other people. The sort of pattern that Jesus established was that we can belong to about twelve other people. So all of us need to be part of some small group where we not just work together but where we also study with one another, where we pray with one another and where we are nurtured by one another.

So one of the things that we want to do next year is to strengthen our small group ministry so that we all belong, and we want to strengthen our Stephen ministry program. I would like to see it be the normal thing that whenever anyone of us is going through a difficult patch in our life that it be the normal thing for us to have a Stephen minister, someone whose been trained to listen, to be non-judgmental and some one whose been trained to pray with us.

I would not like to see anyone in this congregation go through a difficult stretch in our life without someone else who would meet with us on a regular bases during that time. Listen to us and care for us and pray with us. For that to happen we need people who would agree to give a portion of their time and talent to administer our Stephen ministry program and people who will be Stephen ministers. Let love ne genuine.

We also want to strengthen our support for new members. I would like to see a trained team of people who will sit down with every new member and who will talk to them about two things, first of all what do you most need to receive from this congregation and secondly what is it that you most want to give in the way of service?

I would like that trained team of people to talk regularly for six months to a year with our new members to make sure that our new members really become incorporated, included in the life of the church, that they are having an opportunity to grow and to be involved, an opportunity to give of their talents and their service.

We have other plans that we believe will strengthen our congregational care for one another. It is essential for mission. It is essential for mission. We can't always be given of ourselves without making sure that we're taking care of ourselves and growing as well. Our service to others in mission has to come out of the over flow of love that we experience and that we make real in our relationship to one another. I think of this every time that I fly on an airplane.

And they tell you that if the pressure drops in the cabin and the oxygen mask falls down that the first thing that you should do is put the mask on yourself so that you can breathe before you start taking care of someone else. It's the same way in the life of the church, that we need to nurture ourselves and make sure that we're taking care of ourselves spiritually and that we're caring for one another or after awhile as we give ourselves to the world around us in service we will just burn out.

So our number one focus for the year 2004 is that we continue to worship together and to serve in mission and to be an inclusive congregation is to ask the question of how we can take care of ourselves and each other better. Let love be profound, let our love for one another be real because we know each other and we sit in the same room, share our lives together , pray for one another, let our love be more and more genuine.

And then there's other things that we hope to do in 2004, one is to continue to strengthen our ministry to children and to families. I wish my kids were young again so I could raise them in Foundry church. This is the kind of church where children should grow up. They see everyone included where they know what the kingdom of God really looks like.

We want to strengthen our communication among ourselves and also to the world around us so that people know what kind of church this is, what kind of congregation it is so that the people who are not members yet, who really belong to us, to the spirit of this congregation can find us. You know when a president was attending this church people heard about Foundry all over the place.

We were in the newspaper all of the time, we were in News week. And now we need to make more effort to get the word out as to who we are and what our values, our deeply cherished beliefs are so that those people around us who don't know about us can find out about us and come join us.

And the other two things we want to do is to support our staff better including providing for continual education for our staff, we really don't do that now and continual education has been such an important part of my journey that I think it's really important for all of us here on staff to have the opportunity to continue to develop our understanding and capacity for ministry.

And the last focus is to focus year around and stewardship education especially in helping us understand our spiritual gifts so that we might deploy them for the sake of God's mission and ministry. I've been sharing these focuses for next year with some with some of our church leaders in various meetings and folk had responded by saying that this is an important investment in the future of our church.

It's important that all of us experience a deeper sense of belonging for our future as a congregation, that to invest our time, talent and resources this is a good investment. And that's true but there's more to it than that. This is what it means to be followers of Jesus Christ. This is at the heart of what it mean to be followers of Jesus Christ. This is my commandment Jesus says that you love one another as I have loved you.

This is my commandment he says, that you love one another, that you care about one another, that you listen to one another, that you share one another's burden, that you encourage one another, that you pray for one another. I've been reading a lot lately about the doctrine of the trinity in the life of the early church. It's not a doctrine that we talk about a lot because it's so hard often for us to understand.

Three in one, one in three. But here's the meaning really of the doctrine of the trinity. That God is love, that God loves God's own self. And that when we manage to get beyond the business of our lives and all of our struggles and efforts to love one another, that we come to participate in the very being of God. The early church fathers and mothers use to say that God became human in Jesus Christ so that human being might become God.

God became human so that we might actually be joined to divinity. To our love for one another. This is eternal life, and our love for one another as Christ love us we live eternally. So I am asking you to prayerfully consider your membership and participation in Foundry church and your giving of your time, talent and in your financial support for our mission and our ministries.

We've been give a special gift, a church where God is truly present, a church where we have history and tradition where it's expected that we will be in mission to the world around us and a church where we affirm that every one of God's creatures, everyone of God's daughters and sons has a place at the table. Let us continue to grow in love. That our love become more and more profound.

