

# Called to Community

## A CALL TO JUSTICE

(*Hannah Terry “Missional Imagination” film*)

*In today’s film, we spend a few minutes with Hannah Terry, the pastor of a congregation that seeks to incorporate a neighborhood model of Church more akin to the communities created by the early disciples, and also Paul who comes from a more contemporary denominational model, in this case the United Methodist Church.*

*Watch “Missional Imagination”*

### **Questions for Reflection:**

- 1.** Hannah Terry’s church looks like herself and other faith leaders living in and among the people they feel called to serve rather than a campus that seeks to draw those people to come to it. She says, “Every day is an adventure. I get to be with people who are everyday trying to figure out ‘Where is God at work in our neighborhood?’ and then rejoin God there every day. So it’s a whole lot of living on the fly.”
  - A. How do you imagine the structure of their church fosters the creation of Christian community? How might it be hindered by it?
  - B. What kind of insights into people’s lives do you think they get access to?
  - C. If your church is more of a traditional campus-model are there ways you can still build relationships with your neighbors as you seek to “live with them?”
- 2.** Some see justice in punishing those who have wronged the poor. Some see justice in getting the rich to help pay the bills of the poor. Some see justice in changing the systems that keep people from being able to afford to pay the bills. In this film, another element of justice is articulated in terms of relationship. “What does it mean to be Church together when my friend is scared he’ll be kicked out tomorrow? But then I also realize we’re not in here to be saviors and pay people’s rents. So signs of resurrection include when I see this person smiling . . . who didn’t smile two years ago. And she shows up at church week after week after week (still doesn’t speak English) and yet welcomes us into her home, cooks for us.” So we could say there are various elements of justice:
  - retribution - which takes something away from those who took first,
  - reparation - which gives something to those who had something taken,

- rehabilitation - which works to reform those who have done wrong,
- restoration - which seeks to get all parties to help make right the wrong
- relation - which seeks to build relationship with those who have been wronged, even if we had no direct role in their victimization
  - A. What role, if any, does the Church, as a community of healing and resurrection, have to play in our society and communities in each of these elements of justice?

**3.** Terry says, "I would say that my vocation is helping spark missional imagination in others. Helping them to sense where the Holy Spirit is at work. [These three things are true:]

- God's already at work.
- God's always inviting us to participate with God in that.
- Get ready because God's going to surprise you."
  - A. Where do you sense the Holy Spirit is at work in your life and community?
  - B. How can your church be more active in naming, celebrating, and participating in the work of God?
  - C. What surprises you about what God is doing these days?

### **What if the Church ... lived more fully into its call to justice?**

It has always bothered me that the Church exists in such a disjointed and dismembered body. I have been richly blessed in my life to be active in Baptist, Episcopal, UCC and Lutheran faith communities. I am married to a pastor in another denomination than my own. My oldest son was baptized by a Methodist truck driver, my youngest by a Lutheran bishop. The Church has power in diversity, yet this diversification makes it difficult to speak with a unified voice or give a unified witness to the world. Mostly others just hear us arguing with one another.

In 2010, the pastors in my community started having breakfast together and asking the question, what would happen if our churches saw one another as collaborators instead of competitors? We knew there was much which could potentially divide us, things such as polity, social issues, differences in worship style and biblical interpretation. But one thing we all agreed upon is that God calls us to love our neighbor through concrete acts of service and that we could do that more powerfully together rather than apart. We came together across theological and

racial divisions to form “Bridge Ministry of Burton, Texas” as a unified Christian identity in town.

Our “Bridge” now has people from the various churches who serve together on six different ministry teams:

1. Seniors Ministry - providing a weekly meal and fellowship time for our elderly and meal delivery to the homebound
2. Children/Youth Ministry - providing a summer camp experience for children which is lead by youth mentors
3. Community Ministry - offering times for fellowship and worship for all in our community around meals on Good Friday and Thanksgiving
4. Helping Hands Ministry - doing minor home repairs for people in need
5. Manna Ministry - offering a weekly food pantry of canned goods, fresh produce and eggs as well as backpacks of food to kids at the elementary school each week
6. Thrift Store Ministry - providing low-cost household goods and clothes while also raising money to fund our other ministries

None of this existed a few short years ago. All of it happens in a town of 300 people (with a couple thousand people out in the countryside). Thirteen churches participate. None of it has revolutionized the world. All of it makes a difference for someone every day.

In our film, Hannah Terry says, “I’ve learned that God is very gentle and in the business of long-term walks with us. God wants to go on walks, not sprints necessarily.” This may be true, but it poses inherent problems for a society in which we have grown accustomed to rapid change and continuous innovation. The Church is uniquely positioned in many communities as a stable center for “long-term walks” as it has its own momentum which sustains its existence when so many other groups and businesses come and go. And yet, we often find it easier to get people energized around something new rather than sustaining something old.

Could it be that the role of the Church to be concerned about justice for our neighbors can only be fully sustained when we live into it together? None of the thirteen churches in and around our little town could do alone what we do together. We stumble at times, but with each passing year it looks more and more like we are in this walk together for the long haul.

There is an actual bridge in our town which goes across a major highway. One the north side of the bridge is a predominantly caucasian neighborhood which also

houses the schools, post office, bank, restaurants, baseball fields, community center, and various small businesses. On the south side of the bridge is a predominantly African American neighborhood which is much more economically depressed and houses no city-wide services. We intentionally chose the name “Bridge Ministry” because bridges have the power to connect what is otherwise separate, to unite what is otherwise divided. Our churches have claimed for themselves the role of “bringing unity to the community in Christ’s name.”

And it all started with having breakfast together and getting to know one another again.

Christ's peace,  
Rich Nelson

*P.S. For an additional film beyond the scope of this curriculum bundle that relates to this topic, consider watching Joyce Hollyday's “Doing Justice” at <http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/doing-justice>*

[WWW.THEWORKOFTHEPEOPLE.COM](http://WWW.THEWORKOFTHEPEOPLE.COM)