



Community of Christ
Historic Sites Foundation

Abolish Poverty, End Suffering: Community of Christ Heritage Day

Sunday, September 21, 2014

Prelude & Gathering

Congregational Life (Announcements)

Prayer for Peace

Welcome and Call to Worship:

While welcoming the congregation, the worship leader should introduce the annual Heritage Day service and the “Abolish Poverty, End Suffering” theme for the service.

Scriptural Reading: Doctrine & Covenants 163:4a

“God, the Eternal Creator, weeps for the poor, displaced, mistreated, and diseased of the world because of their unnecessary suffering. Such conditions are not God’s will. Open your ears to hear the pleading of mothers and fathers in all nations who desperately seek a future of hope for their children. Do not turn away from them. For in their welfare resides your welfare.”

Introduction to the Opening Hymn:

In many ways, this scripture came to life for Harry Fielding, former president of seventy and the author of our opening hymn “My Savior Said that I Should Be.” Harry shares his story:

The genesis of those words arose from an experience I had in Haiti, driving along a deeply rutted and pot-holed dirt road. Two young children who should have been at school were trying to earn a meager living by using their hands to push loose stones into the potholes and begging for a few coins from the passing motorists. As I wound down the window of the car to give these young children a couple of loose coins, I looked into their faces and somehow those two young faces became transformed into the faces of my own two children. I cannot begin to describe the pain and sense of inadequacy that I felt at that moment and my sense of connection with the entire universe.

***Hymn: My Savior Said that I Should Be, CCS 589**

***Invocation**

***Response**

Our Shared Experience in Helping Those Who Suffer

The section below includes three stories from Community of Christ heritage that reflect our faith community's call to "Abolish Poverty, End Suffering." Consider having a narrator and three individuals share one story each. Historic images of Emma Smith and Charles Neff are available on the Foundation's website (www.HistoricSitesFoundation.org) for use in a slide show or to pass around the congregation while the stories are being shared. For comfortable pacing between readings, sing a verse of "Leftover People in Leftover Place," CCS 275, between each of the stories.

Narrator:

Over the past 180+ years, members of Community of Christ have lived out Christ's mission through all five Mission Initiatives. The initiative "Abolish Poverty, End Suffering," is directly connected to both our past and present times. Historically, our community experienced the struggles of living in poverty. Early church members knew what it was like to be poor and hungry, at times barely able to provide adequate housing and food for their families. Their neighbors referred to them as "lickskillet poor" — "Lickskillet" being an irreverent term used to describe someone left to lick the last remnants from a skillet after others had taken everything else of substance. In fact, a small settlement just outside of Independence, Missouri, was first called Lickskillet at the time the early church members began settling in the county. As a people who have experienced hunger and suffering ourselves, it should be easy for us to exhibit compassion and empathy for those who still struggle amidst poverty, starvation, and times of crisis

Today we will share three stories from our shared past that demonstrate how our faith community has lived out Christ's call to "Abolish Poverty, End Suffering." Between each story, we will share as a congregation in singing a verse of *Leftover People in Leftover Place*, CCS 275.

Reader One: Relief Society

In 1842, in the upper room of the Red Brick Store in Nauvoo, Illinois, women and men met to organize the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo. According to its charter, written by Emma and Joseph Smith and several other women, the society aimed to support the community in a variety of ways from providing for the poor to helping to correct the morals of the community when needed. Nauvoo's women saved pennies to assist in the construction of the Nauvoo Temple. They arranged for motherless children to find homes, and they donated wheat used to feed needy families. Gardens were plowed for elderly members, blankets were donated for bedding for those in need, and schooling fees were paid for the children of several members. It was a community where the women encouraged one another to strive to carry out Christ's mission by fighting against injustice, lifting up the poor, and helping to build God's peaceable kingdom.

Note: An image of the Red Brick Store and/or Emma Smith (president of the Relief Society) could be shown or passed around while the above story is being shared.

Congregation shares in 1st verse of *Leftover People in Leftover Place*, CCS 275

Reader Two:

World War II was a difficult time for church members and non-church members alike. Wilhem Kreisle of Nuremberg gave a pair of shoes to a slave laborer struggling to survive during the war. For his act of compassion, Kreisle was arrested, tried, and sentenced to the Dauchau extermination camp. During the next four years, he endured the threat of being ushered into a camp death chamber.

Youth in the church were also making difficult decisions during this time to help those who were suffering. Georg Sofke, a child living in Germany during the war, shares his experience:

“In 1942, when we were in the third year of World War II, a young Polish couple moved into the same house in which we lived. At that time I was only eleven years old. Both husband and wife worked, so I rarely saw them. About a year later, the young wife had her first baby. Since my mother was also employed and I was always alone after school, I tried to spend my time with this young couple whenever they were home. We became good friends. When the child was about a year old it suddenly became sick and died. My mother could not get off work to go, but I went to the funeral which was held one morning before school. On the way to the church I met my teacher, a former major in the army and a member of the Nazi Party.

Later, at school, he made an example of me before the whole class. He pointed to me and said, ‘Look at Sofke there. He calls himself a German. I don’t suppose he’s noticed we are in the fifth year of the war, for it seems he attends the funeral services of his enemies.’ I knew only too well that we were in the war, for I had already lost my oldest brother in the senseless endeavor. But I had learned the commandment of the Lord, “Love your enemies,” and in my home the word of God was held in greatest esteem.”

- *Georg Sofke’s testimony appears in Norman D. Ruoff’s, Testimonies of the Restoration (Herald House, 1971): pgs 120-122.*

Congregation shares in 2nd verse of *Leftover People in Leftover Place*, CCS 275

Reader Three: Charles Neff

Like the early church members in Kirtland and Missouri, former apostle Charles Neff knew poverty. While growing up in Stillwell, Kansas, his family suffered the effects of the Great Depression. Charles’ father’s job was cut to part time. As a result, the family supplemented the loss of income with a “big truck garden.” The entire family contributed to the maintenance and sale of the home grown produce. Charles learned at a very early age the connection between human dignity and a self sustainable life. He said, “I can remember that during the days when the government program gave away surplus food, my father was too proud to stand in line, so he sent me... Our being spared physical hunger meant accepting charity. I learned then, and have been reminded many times since as I traveled the poor countries of the world, that being hungry means humiliation.”

Charles Neff drew upon his childhood experiences in Kansas to connect with impoverished people while on church assignment in the Philippines, India, Nigeria, Kenya, and South Korea. In the 1970's he helped found Outreach International in response to the pain and poverty he witnessed in the Philippines. Under Neff's leadership and the support of the church, Outreach International emphasized the need to lift up the poor by alleviating poverty, encouraging self-government, and improving health and education. In many ways, the early goals of the organization and the church members who supported Outreach International was the mission initiative of abolish poverty, end suffering.

Note: A photo of Apostle Neff could be shown or passed around the congregation (for those who did not know Neff) during the telling of his story.

Congregation shares in 3rd verse of *Leftover People in Leftover Place*, CCS 275

Narrator:

These are just a few examples from our church history where we can learn how early church members passionately answering the call to support Christ's mission. What do you think future historians will be highlighting in our own lives and time of how we answered Christ's call to "Abolish Poverty, End Suffering?"

Small group activity

Invite the congregation to divide up in groups of 3-5. Reflect on the questions: "Like the early members of our church, when have you felt called to help someone in need?" or "How is our congregation answering the call to 'Abolish Poverty, End Suffering?'"

Scripture Reading: Matthew 25:35-41

Morning Message: Sermon or two or three testimonies based on Matthew 25:35-41

Disciples Generous Response:

Both individuals and the congregation is invited to designate all or a portion of an offering for the Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation in an effort to help preserve and share church heritage for future generations. Donations may be sent to: Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation, P.O. Box 338, Nauvoo, IL 62354. If individual donors wish to receive a receipt acknowledging their tax-deductible donation, please indicate as such when submitting the donation.

Offertory Story:

Throughout Community of Christ history, we have demonstrated empowering examples of generosity. As we lift up the mission initiative of "Abolish Poverty, End Suffering," we are called to help those who hurt, feed the hungry, support compassionate ministries, and respond in times of crisis. One story from 1830s Kirtland, Ohio stands out as an example of an early church member helping those in need.

Jonathan and Caroline Crosby moved to Kirtland, Ohio in January 1836. They had little money and moved from family to family until they were able to find a place of their own. Jonathan described their small home as "a cold place to live in winter, a loose floor, and

none over head.” Caroline gave birth to a son and soon became very ill and unable to nurse, perhaps due to having little to no heat in their small home. Jonathan begged for milk from the neighbors. During this time Jonathan was able to find a construction job working on Emma Smith’s home. Eventually, the Smiths ran out of money in which to pay Jonathan, but he continued working on the home anyway. One night, while Jonathan and Caroline crawled into bed starving, they discussed their condition and decided to ask “Sister Emma” for help. Jonathan worked several hours at the Smith house the following day, but could not work up the courage to ask for charity. Emma noticed something was wrong and asked Jonathan if he and Caroline had enough provisions at home. He confessed that they were without and had no money. Emma responded by giving him a twenty-pound ham and a sack of white flour from her own storage. Caroline later wrote that Jonathan came home “rejoicing, considering it a perfect God send... nothing ever tasted half as good.”

This story exemplifies Community of Christ's timeless calling to help those in need. Today, we have the opportunity, like Emma Smith many years ago, to model compassion and generosity for future generations.

Blessing and Receiving of Mission Tithes

***Closing Hymn: *The Spirit of God like a Fire is Burning*, CCS 384**

Note: A Heritage Day service would not be complete without the historic hymn “The Spirit of God Like a Fire is Burning” written by W. W. Phelps in preparation for the dedication of the Kirtland Temple. This hymn is near and dear to the heart of every Latter Day Saint and written during a time when early church members were living in poverty. Truman Coe, a local protestant minister who lived in Kirtland while the Saints were building the temple shared that the women especially, were giving up the “necessaries of life.” At this time, “necessaries” were defined as the essentials of life such as food, clothing, and shelter. The women were giving up their family’s food in order to feed the workers. Women were sewing and mending clothes for the workers. Multiple families living in small log homes – were giving up much needed space in their homes to house the workers. Truman Coe described the homes that many of the church members inhabited as “a grotesque assemblage of hovels and shanties... few of these cabins were fit for human habitation.” Surrounded by poverty and suffering in Kirtland, W.W. Phelps pens one of our faith community’s most treasured hymns!

***Sending Forth/Benediction**

In the benediction and/or sending forth, incorporate the service emphasis of church heritage and the theme of “Abolish Poverty, End Suffering.”

***Response Postlude**