

## *Worship at Work Sunday*

Most of us drive to church on Sunday mornings. We get in our cars in the neighborhood we live in, and we park in the church's parking lot and walk toward this building. The only neighborhood we're conscious of once we arrive is the one that looks like the church's buildings, and the people in this room.

But the church has a larger neighborhood too, people who live within a few blocks of here. The church is their neighbor...or not. One of the best questions I know for thinking about how well the church is doing its work is this: If this church closed its doors tomorrow, who would miss it, other than its members?

We've been working—and there is still lot more work to do—to make the church a better neighbor. To make this property a safe place for anyone who walks through its campus during the week. To welcome people who come to one of the Second Harvest food distribution events that happen here during the week.

And this year especially, to come alongside families at Rosemary School, the elementary school that is just a few blocks away from here on Hamilton Avenue.

Perhaps you already know that every week this winter and spring, a team of 25 trained volunteers has been sitting with kindergarteners and fourth graders at Rosemary School and reading with them. We are hoping not just to improve their reading skills, but to help them learn to love reading. Almost 90% of Rosemary School's 515 students qualify for the free lunch program. About 75% are learning English as a second language—which means that for most of them, their parents cannot read with them at home in the language they are learning at school.

You know how important reading is. The ability to read is makes the difference in how you learn every other subject. Experts who plan for future prison needs use third grade reading rates as a predictor of how many people will later spend time in jail. Reading has the power to lift our imaginations, open up new worlds and new possibilities—for all of us.

Our Worship at Work project today is an extension of this effort to share the joy and the value of of reading with our neighbors.

Several years ago, some creative person started the project of installing little wooden boxes in front yards, to hold books for neighbors to share. "Take a book, leave a book" was the motto written onto these boxes. The idea has now spread across the country; there's a whole system of "free little libraries" in neighborhoods in many states. Every little library is painted differently; each holds different kinds of books, supplied and exchanged by people who live nearby. These libraries have become gathering places; they've started conversations among neighbors about books and reading, and then other things.

Only...these free little libraries show up mostly in affluent neighborhoods, places where residents can afford these beautiful little structures in their front yards. Our project—today and over the next few months—is to build free library boxes and install them in neighborhoods where they would never be likely to show up otherwise. In the neighborhood across Hamilton Avenue, which has had problems with gangs and drugs. The other neighborhoods in Campbell where people live crowded into not-very-nice apartments too expensive for one family to rent by itself. These are the neighborhoods where the children at Rosemary School live. These are the church's neighborhood.

There are three parts to this project:

- First: building the library boxes; that's what we're doing today.
- Over the next couple of months, we'll be making relationships with property owners in the neighborhoods, talking with them about permission to install the boxes on a corner of their land.
- Finally, we're taking on the responsibility of maintaining those little libraries—keeping them filled with books, noticing what kinds of books our neighbors like to read, repairing the boxes if they get vandalized or damaged.

If you'd like especially to be involved in one of these later pieces of the project, make a note on your attendance card this morning before you leave it in the offering plate at the back.

Today our work is to be a neighbor.

Today our worship is to be of use.

### *To Be of Use*

by Marge Piercy

The people I love the best  
jump into work head first  
without dallying in the shallows  
and swim off with sure strokes almost out of sight.  
They seem to become natives of that element,  
the black sleek heads of seals  
bouncing like half-submerged balls.

I love people who harness themselves, an ox to a heavy cart,  
who pull like water buffalo, with massive patience,  
who strain in the mud and the muck to move things forward,  
who do what has to be done, again and again.

I want to be with people who submerge  
in the task, who go into the fields to harvest  
and work in a row and pass the bags along,  
who are not parlor generals and field deserters  
but move in a common rhythm  
when the food must come in or the fire be put out.

The work of the world is common as mud.  
Botched, it smears the hands, crumbles to dust.  
But the thing worth doing well done  
has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident.  
Greek amphoras for wine or oil,  
Hopi vases that held corn, are put in museums  
but you know they were made to be used.  
The pitcher cries for water to carry  
and a person for work that is real.