

Core Strength Sermon Series
Commitment to Outreach
Nov. 16, 2025
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Welcoming. Generosity. Authenticity. Engagement. Curiosity. These are five of the core values that our Faithful Planning Team identified for Crestwood. They didn't lock themselves in a room to come up with these. They heard them from you as you filled out surveys, participated in workshops, and talked individually to team members. The administrative board voted enthusiastically to accept the Faithful Planning Team's final report, which included these values.

There's one more left to talk about, and it's the one the team heard most often from the congregation. There are several things that define Crestwood – our hospitality, our desire to be a good neighbor, our beautiful campus, our mediocre preaching – but the one value that was brought up in almost every setting was our commitment to outreach. When I interviewed for this job in 2009, this was one the one value the search team bragged out. Crestwood is committed to outreach.

Are we? You know, a church can say anything they want about themselves but that doesn't make it true. Sometimes churches are guilty of projecting an image that doesn't hold up to scrutiny or having a discrepancy between who they think they are and who they really are. Every church says they are friendly. Every church thinks they are friendly. But have you ever been to a church that wasn't friendly? I know I have. Just because we say it doesn't make it true.

So, is Crestwood committed to outreach? I believe we are, and I'm going to tell you how I know. It's going to sound like I'm bragging about Crestwood, and, to be fair, I am because we have a lot to celebrate, but hold on, because after I make my case, I want to tell you why I think there's plenty of room for growth. I said when I started this sermon series that these values are both descriptive of who we are and aspirational for who we are called to be. This may be the value we do the best, but God is always calling us to be more.

So, let's pull out our outreach resume, and let's start with the budget. Every year, we commit a minimum of 10% of our operating budget to outreach, which includes our denomination, global and national causes, and local non-profit organizations. That means a minimum of 10%, and often times much more, of your giving goes to outreach. This year, that's about \$86,000 that's going out those doors. And the cool thing about our budgeting is that, if giving is over what we expect, like it is this year, more money goes to outreach!

But that's only a fraction of our commitment to outreach. A few years ago, we were blessed with a generous bequest from Mildred Cox, a fiery little librarian who, it turns out, had both a lot of money and a generous spirit. We took her roughly \$1.8 million gift and started a granting process, through which we take the income earned by her gift and give it away to local non-profits who are dreaming big. Last year, we gave away \$224,000. This year, we're proposing to give away almost \$230,000. Are we committed to outreach?

Hold on, our resume has a page two. Throughout the year, we offer additional outreach opportunities, both hands-on and donation-driven. Rather than me naming them, I want you to do that. What are some of the ways we serve others throughout the year, either by giving funds, making donations, or using hands and feet? Let's hear it!

- We raise money and help build a Habitat House – we've done over 40 of those.
- We have a close partnership with Glendover Elementary across the street, and several times a year we collect school supplies and food to keep their Family Resource Center stocked.

- Souper Bowl of Caring
- Disciples Women's Ministry monthly outreach project
- Recently, some of our members helped do some work at Arbor Youth Services
- Greenhouse17 Shop and Share, sort grocery donations
- And this time of year, we are providing Christmas gifts for 181 kids through our Angel Tree
- We're collecting funds to fill 400 food boxes for the Nest
- We're asking you to bring in hats and gloves to put under our Mitten Trees to give away to those in need
- We raised money and participated in the Crop Walk to combat food insecurity
- We are helping serve a meal at Nathanael Mission next Thursday
- We are volunteering monthly with Lexington Rescue Mission to help sort clothing.
- We stock a Blessing Box at our Children's Wing entrance for anyone who needs food.
- Our Bridge Fund helps people meet their rent payment or keep their heat and lights on.

And did I mention that the building we built in 2001, which houses a gym, several classrooms, two youth rooms, a large gathering area called Chalice Hall, an industrial kitchen, and bathrooms with showers is called the Mission Center? That's because we see that space, not as ours to own, but as a gift from God that we are meant to share. That means that every group that uses that space, from AA to Parkinson's support groups to scouts to Glendover basketball, uses that space free of charge. Commitment to outreach? Check.

Ok. That's a lot of good work right there. But let's not break our arm patting ourselves on the back. Yes, we are doing some extraordinary things, but here's my question: Why? Why do we do these things? You might say, "Because they need to be done," and you would not be wrong. There is so much need out there and we have been blessed with the resources to help meet it. But so have plenty of other organizations who have charitable goals. I know local banks who give away tens of thousands of dollars a year, just like us. So, what makes us different from a bank or a grocery store or the Lions Club?

Well, you're in church, so you better know the answer is Jesus. Our mission statement says that one of the ways we connect people to God and each other is "serving God through serving others." All our other core values can be done inside the walls of this building. But a commitment to outreach calls us to see God, not in the stained glass windows, but in the soup kitchens and domestic violence shelters; to hear God, not in the beautiful music, but in the cries for help emanating from our community. As Jesus says in the passage I read, we are called not to be served, but to serve, to give our lives for others.

"Serve God through serving others." What's important to note is the relationship in this statement between God and other people. We are called to serve each other, not out of pity, but out of compassion. The word "compassion" literally means "to suffer with." To have pity on someone is to look down on them from a position of power. To have compassion for someone is to look at them as equals, from a position of solidarity and kindness. We all are made in the image of God, and therefore when we serve someone else, no matter how destitute or unclean or different they are, we are serving God.

Thankfully, God does not call us to serve perfectly; God only calls us to serve. I've messed up on many a mission trip and Habitat build. On one trip, I was tasked with carrying a bunch of cinderblocks to a house we were building. Obviously, the project leaders trusted me with the important task of carrying cinderblocks and left operating the power tools to the amateurs. I carried about 30 cinderblocks to the left side of house, which was great, except they

were supposed to go on the right side of the house. Maybe I should have been using a power tool instead.

If God only used perfect people, nothing would ever get done at this church. We're all imperfect. But guess what? God still loves us and still wants to use us. A Bengali poet once wrote, "I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy." When we give, when we care, when we serve, we do so with the joy of knowing God loves us and God is using us – us! – to make a difference for someone.

For me, the ultimate reason we are called to serve is that we live in a world that needs serving, a world that needs to see tangible reminders that God hasn't given up on us yet. The need around us is so overwhelming that it can paralyze us from doing anything. But every small act of service we do makes a difference far beyond our effort. We may not see the difference, but we trust God is working through us. It's important we remember that our service will have a positive impact far beyond our imagining. The church needs you to be a part of fulfilling our vision and mission, of living out our values. More importantly, the world needs you.

Our General Minister and President, Sharon Watkins, was a World Council of Churches convention in Brazil. She was talking with Pastor Clement Mputu, Vice President of the Disciples of Christ in the Congo. She said he looked straight into her eyes and told her about the six million people who have died in the Congo war. Six million. "Doesn't anybody even care?" And then she said he stopped and waited for an answer.

There is a world out there that needs to know God is real. There are people out there who have given up hope that God cares about them. As Gandhi said, there are people who are so poor they only see God in a piece of bread. Do we have any bread to give? Do we have any hope to give? Our core value is commitment to outreach. Our mission statement says we serve God through serving others. The world is waiting to see if those are just words on a page or if we really mean it. Are we willing to share our bread, to share our money, to share our time to serve those who feel forgotten? They are watching us, and they are waiting for answer.