

Greetings St. Paul Lutheran Church!

Happy Easter!



St. Paul is part of the Arlington Park Neighborhood. It's the only church in the neighborhood. If you cross Bahia Vista, you are no longer in Arlington Park neighborhood so we are on the very edge of the neighborhood. Where I live is also in the Arlington Park neighborhood. Last weekend there was a picnic for the neighborhood at Arlington Park (it's the city park off Waldemere St.) just a little south and east of the church. It was a beautiful day for a picnic. We sat at the picnic tables near the playground, ate hot dogs, chips, and dessert.

I'm not one that naturally likes to go to picnics and talk with people, but I know that is the best way to build relationships. So, one trick I have found is to not just show up but also help. I got there early to help set up. Having a project is often helpful to foster conversations. Now no one at the picnic attends St. Paul regularly. Some of them consider St. Paul their home church even if they don't attend often. Most know it's where they go to vote. Some families have attended our Christmas or Easter events for years. Some wave at the church every time they pass by and think of us fondly. It's kind of fun to hear what they think of us. They are very appreciative of all that we do for the community. Of course, I would love everyone at the picnic to attend St. Paul regularly but for whatever reason they don't, but I attend the picnic with the belief that God is active in their lives and they are children of God who God loves and I am just curious to get to know them better. I want to hear their stories. I wore my shirt that has St. Paul on it along with other architectural structures that are meaningful to Sarasota. It was a conversation starter. Sometimes I would say I attend St. Paul or sometimes I said I was the pastor. Each continued conversation in different ways. But there was one interaction that blew me away that I wanted to share.

There was a younger woman (for once I wasn't the youngest adult at an event) who was talking that she was creating a musical film. She often was involved in the Film Festival that is in Sarasota each year. She was born and raised in Sarasota. She is Jewish but not practicing currently. She found her community through her music and film making. Another woman was older than me and had attended St. Paul at times and was very open about her spirituality but may not claim Christianity, per se. So, three women, different ages, different faith expressions, yet all talking about faith and how we live it out. The young woman at the end of the conversation said, "I loved this." We all left feeling valued for who we were and who God created us to be and do in this world. I truly believe that's what God calls all of us to do in our lives and relationships even with those we don't know well.

As I said, I was blown away by this interaction. I'm very tentative of saying I'm the pastor because of negative connotations and conversations often stop when I say it. But with a little disclaimer in the conversation that I'm not trying to force anything, and just get to know people, it gave me more ways to talk about faith and space to share. I keep going back to the idea that evangelism is just changing people's assumptions about God and God's people. People want to have these kinds of conversations in, non-judgmental, just curious, kind of ways. I hope you can find people to have those kinds of conversations with during this Easter season.

Take care and God bless

*-PrAshley*