



There's No Lack of Opportunity

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I've just returned from several days in the Midwest Region Conference (that's Iowa, Illinois and Indiana). The Midwest Region director, Travis Bodden, held several district gatherings across Illinois and Indiana this past week. I got to spend some time back in my home region and it was good to reconnect with so many friends from my growing up years as well as get up to speed on what's happening throughout the region.

Author

The weekly eNews is provided by CGGC Executive Director Lance Finley



I came away from these gatherings encouraged by what I saw and heard. I'm not naïve, the Midwest Region has its fair share of challenges. Its geography can present some difficulty for connection between churches. There are a large number of churches in very rural areas (think 5-10 miles outside of the nearest small village) where the population demographics continue to shrink. There are some of the same economic challenges found elsewhere across the country as industry and manufacturing has shifted or evaporated altogether. There are some real challenges and threats present.

That being said, I was overwhelmed by the endless opportunities for Gospel work. Even more encouraging were the number of stories that emerged from our brothers and sisters who are beginning to seize the opportunities before them to demonstrate and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Everywhere we went we found opportunities to demonstrate and proclaim the Gospel. There were communities with children and a host of opportunities to serve them and connect with them and their families. In some communities these children were in situations of generational poverty; issues like food insecurity, reading ability and safe and healthy interaction with adults are real needs and concerns.

We found communities with growing numbers of aging seniors and opportunities still abound. There can be concerns with food insecurity, companionship, service opportunities, medical concerns and other issues like home maintenance and repair. There is certainly no lack of opportunity to connect with the older population of our neighborhoods and communities.

All across the Midwest there are young families who have no examples of commitment in their families of origin, particularly commitment that lasts for thirty, forty, fifty years or beyond. You have young men who have no idea how to be good husbands and fathers. Young women who have no idea how to be good wives and mothers. They're hungry for someone to share with them and invest in them to help them change the trajectory of their family trees. There's no lack of opportunity here.

We found a host of other opportunities as well, communities dealing with drug abuse, addiction and overdoses. Communities facing bleak economic forecasts and challenges. Communities facing racial division and struggle.

Again, there's no lack of opportunity for Gospel work. I was so encouraged by the number of brothers and sisters who are beginning to seize the opportunity to do the work of the Gospel in their own context. They are making a real difference in the lives of the neighbors and fellow citizens in meaningful ways. They are making Jesus known in both their words and deeds. They are doing Gospel work in their communities.

A couple observations:

1. This rarely happens on Sunday morning or in the confines of the church building. This requires getting out to where people live, work and play while interacting with them on their turf. This isn't so much about getting people to the church building as it is getting God's people mobilized and sent out to the people of their neighborhoods and communities.
2. Church attendance can't be the end result of such efforts. We've often been guilty of making church attendance the end goal. We'll serve you in the hopes that you'll regularly attend our preferred house of worship. Making disciples of Jesus is the end goal. Some of the folks we're trying to reach will never be able to fit into our every-seven-days-gathered-at-the-same-place rhythm of church attendance and if we make that the main point, we'll miss the opportunity.
3. We're all different. Everyone has different gifts and capacities, and the same is true for congregations. You can't do it all, but you can do something. Have you found an opportunity to demonstrate and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ? You may not be able to address every challenge in your community, but you ought to be able to pick one that becomes a focal point. What are the opportunities before you and are you going to commit to championing one? What's one area where you and your brothers and sisters can make a difference?

Don't get overwhelmed. Get focused. Prayerfully seek out the one thing God wants you and your fellowship to take on as you seek to demonstrate and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the larger community. Don't miss the opportunity that's right next door or across the street. Our heavenly Father is sending us to seize the opportunities that are all around us.

Christ's Peace,

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