

Witness to Reconciliation

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One thing I've learned in my old age is that our God works in mysterious ways His wonders to perform.

Go back with me, will you, to Hope Church in 1956. We had just called a great young man from Iowa called Marion DeVelder. He came with all the zest and passion of making the church relevant and to make it grow. When he arrived he urged us as Hope Church people in 1956 to grow our church, to expand our church, to reach out into the community.

We came up, about a year later, probably about 1957, with the idea that we needed to build an educational wing. We had a vote in the congregation like we always do, even today and lo and behold, the church was split right down the middle, 112 votes for the educational building and 106 against. So, a committee was formed. And 4 years later the committee had not come up with any solution. And so they disbanded and a new committee was formed. Anyway, this committee were go-getters and within 6 months they had a plan, they had a budget, they had an architect, they had a builder and were ready to go.

Well, those of us that had really been against the idea, we thought it was too much expense for a building that was only going to be used one day a week, on Sunday. So, those of us who had voted that way and saw it beginning to happen, we formed a group that searched in Holland for ways in which we could use our daycare center the other 6 days.

At the same time there was a wonderful organization in this community called Church Women United. And boy that was a great thing. They had a wonderful migrant ministry for when the migrant workers were brought up here to pick the berries. They had built a day care center out on Berry Street and they had a chapel. They also had a regular program for the migrant families in the evening. Our doctor, Dr. Boersma, Vern Boersma, came one evening every week and listened to their health needs and their medical needs. We were all very much involved in that migrant ministry.

After the summer was over, we decided on the board of Church Women United that we should be working all year round, not just in the summertime. And so we began to hunt for ways that we could be of service to the community. Carol VanPutten, who was a Hope church member and also worked for the Bureau of Social Services, told us

they had a need for some volunteers to come in and help them with the families they were working with. And so we started a program called HANDS. Help and Service.

The very first thing the department of social services asked us to do was to be with a young 16 year old girl who had two small children but had never learned to read and write. And so, they were about to put the children into Foster care because she wasn't keeping good care of them. I said "I'll take that. I'd really like to help with that." Fifty years later we were still friends when she passed away a Christian.

We decided that the next 6 months we would be their helpers. And within 6 months we had 6 more calls like that for other women to go into the homes of mothers who were not doing well and help with the care of the children. We didn't have any women who had that much time to give to it and so at the end of the 6 months Carol VanPutten and I decided that what this community needs is a day care center for low income people. Now we took this need of the community to the group who were looking in Holland for ways to use our educational wing the other 6 days of the week and they were all for the idea for starting a day care center.

We got permission from the consistory and we had our license given to us. The wonderful thing was that we knew the black women north of Holland in the black church and we knew the latino women through Church Women United and so we hired several black aides for the classroom, and we hired two latino women to be our teachers. We filled in with Dutchmen and had a great group.

Hope church got behind it hook, line and sinker. They really, really were enthusiastic about this day care center. They provided the transportation that we needed and they provided the produce from their gardens with which we fed the children. They really came together as a powerful support group for the daycare center.

We started at the beginning of summer with having these people, all the teachers and aides and everybody come together and it was a melding of the most unusual group. The black people, the latino people and the dutchmen, (which I have always been amazed with how well they all got together) all working with the children in the classroom. A lot of little black children, little latino children, little white children. And talk about a melding of people who don't usually live together! But it was a beautiful, beautiful assimilation of children and staff and their parents. We had to have 51% of the parents on the board so the parents also were melded with our church people. And it was just a beautiful sight to see happening.