“Know Thy Neighbor”
The Courage to Be in Community
In Light of Paul Tillich’s Sermon, “You Are Accepted”

<table>
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<th>Sin/Separation/Alienation</th>
<th>Grace/Reunion/Community</th>
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<td><strong>Self:</strong> Self loathing, inadequacy</td>
<td>Healthy pride/ self-esteem</td>
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<td><strong>Others:</strong> Hostility, violence, Lack of empathy</td>
<td>Feeling loved and connected Giving and receiving</td>
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<td><strong>God:</strong> Hard or easy desolation* Distant from God</td>
<td>Consolation* - close to God Accepting God’s acceptance</td>
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* See Ignatius’s “Examen” as a devotional exercise

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To be a part of the Christian community, to have the mind of Christ who emptied himself into the form of a servant or slave: Let each of you look not only to your own interests but also to the interests of others … Philippians 2:4

“Sometimes at that moment (of despair, guilt, fear, etc. over our separation from self, others, God) a wave of light breaks into our darkness, and it is as though a voice were saying: “You are accepted. You are accepted, accepted by that which is greater than you, and the name of which you do not know … Simply accept the fact that you are accepted!” Paul Tillich, “You are Accepted”

“… courage (is) the self affirmation of being in spite of non being … faith (in God’s acceptance of us) is the basis of the courage to be.” Paul Tillich, The Courage to Be, pp 172, 173

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Reflection on the Newtown tragedy: One day I was having some trouble connecting with the internet. I couldn’t do my e-mail or web searches. I was feeling separated from others - cut off - and a little desperate. The computer said that I had a “connectivity problem.” What an apt metaphor for our current social condition.

In a way “social networking” has brought us closer together, but isn’t it ironic that we can “connect” and be in touch instantaneously and simultaneously with dozens of “friends” on Face Book and not even know the people next door?

There is a tension in our society between the value that we place on respecting one another’s privacy and the importance of knowing something about our neighbor. In fact, you could say that we need to “know our neighbor” before we can “love our neighbor” and we are often quite literally strangers to one another. If the Lanza’s neighbors in Newtown had known the family better might someone have recognized that there was a very disturbed young man there? Of course, any kind of meaningful action would involve a whole shift in social norms about when and how to intervene if you do sense a problem.
Nevertheless, could future tragedies be prevented if we knew and cared more about the people around us? Without being invasive might we pick up on problem situations even as we enjoy a richer sense of community with one another? In our demand and respect for privacy we have moved away from trusting community. How might we “reboot our social modem” to get reconnected and to create or recreate those ties for true “homeland security.” Could we as people of faith have the courage to recreate our communities?

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Discussion: Think about your “neighborhood” - a few homes or apartments in either direction of where you live. How well do you know your neighbors? Do you talk with them “over the fence;” visit one another; socialize together; know something about each other’s families, interests, and needs? Would you like to know them better? How might you go about that? (Story of a 1950’s “progressive Halloween party.” It was a time when we knew and enjoyed each other as neighbors, even helped each other sometimes with home projects, and where our mothers always knew where we kids were!)

How do you feel about “privacy?” How much do you need? How would it work for you to open your home for a neighborhood gathering? How comfortable are you with “inviting yourself” into the lives of your neighbors?

How to create “ safe boundaries” that are both secure and open? How to be radically - and responsibly - welcoming in our homes, churches, schools, etc.

How about a “core curriculum” that offers a common ethical framework of civility and collaboration for groups of people who choose to embrace such shared values.

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Potential Ideas and Resources for “Neighborhood Enrichment”

- From Center Church “Vital Signs” workshop: How to move from “friendliness” to “befriending” our neighbors. Begin with fellow church goers, esp. new comers. Develop our own list of guidelines/suggestions. Train and support those who really want to try this.
- Faith Based Community Organizing “One-on-Ones” (www.Gamaliel.org)
- Form neighborhood Faith Formation Support groups where possible
- Study Circles “Busy Citizen’s Guides,” Pomfret, CT on Violence, Racism, etc.
- Link with existing organizations and renewal efforts through CT Conference UCC, Christian Activities Council, Hartford Seminary, Community Organizations in Hartford, etc.
- New York Conference “Casting Your Nets” - a wealth of resources