

Missions Celebration 2011

This is the pitch — the part of my job where I ask you to prayerfully consider your mission pledge for this year, to prayerfully consider where you will serve.

Show of hands of those who think they have this message memorized.

It usually goes something like this:

- We need to take care of the needy
- Pick a place to serve — there are 44 missions which Hyde Park supports — more information is in the 2011 Missions Book
- Fill out your pledge card
- Write a check
- Go to brunch

You know the message because many of you live it. Heck hundreds of you have the red T-Shirt to back it up — just look around!

So let's start with a thank you. If you've served in missions — donated money — prayed — helped out someone in need.

Stand up so we can all express our appreciation. (applause)

This year we are asking something different. We are asking you for more.

Be More, Serve More, Love More — Change the World

(Videotape) (“Change the World” runs:)

Are you willing to change the world? Jesus cared for the broken, the sick, and the poor, and if we want to be like Jesus, so must we.

When I see that video, I think of my friends James and Brandy. They are members of Hyde Park — very involved in serving anywhere they are needed — in fact they were serving — James in the parking lot ministry, Brandy at the Alternative Christmas Market, and both of them on Second Saturday — before their new member class was over. James, a retired Marine, is not afraid of hard work.

James will tell you — serving is just part of being a disciple. Those who know him say his solid beliefs are inspiring, while the rest of us may be questioning, James and Brandy express unwavering faith.

Like all of us, James and Brandy have their “How I found Hyde Park story.” A friend told them about Hyde Park’s Open Arms Ministry. Turns out — two of our most loyal servants needed to be served. James and Brandy were struggling — going through hardships most of us cannot imagine. At Hyde Park they found a hot meal and a group of people who welcomed them. And now they are serving in the Open Arms Ministry that first served them. When things began to turn around for them and they moved into an apartment, the first thing they wanted to do was invite Matt and me over to bless their home.

I would introduce you to them right now — but they are in their DBS class — Their leader Susan Johnson-Valdez did want you to know she calls them ambassadors — living proof of the impact the Open Arms ministry can have on the marginalized people it serves and church members, and an example of how they can become one and the same.

I am proud to be a part of a congregation which embraced Brandy and James and invited them to participate fully and to share their gifts in service.

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I’m also proud to be a part of a congregation willing to try out some innovative ways of inviting people to serve in missions.

Take a look at this photo — it’s from our Chevy Missions Drive last May. It’s a great shot — looks like it could be an ad for Chevy. But this group in front of the cars was checking out serving and not just checking out a new ride.

Doris Lewis was a part of the group. Doris, why don’t you come on up and we’ll tell them about it.

Here’s how it worked — We invited about 20 Hyde Park young adults out on a Saturday morning to drive around Tampa and tour a few of the missions we support.

Chevy provided the cars, the food, and a check for each mission.

Doris Lewis took the tour:

Let’s be honest Doris — if I called you and said “Hey get up early on Saturday and drive around Tampa with me and visit missions — you may not have come...”

Doris responds. Cool evangelism

What did you learn?: Doris responds.

The Chevy Mission drive was not only successful for Hyde Park — Chevy liked it so much they are taking the missions model around the country. How did Chevy pick Hyde Park? Actually our church member Darren Richards came up with the idea — he says he's always looking for ways to make his marketing and public relations job more meaningful.

As you consider "Be More, Serve More, Love More" this morning I realize asking for "more" is a lot. Where could you possibly find time on the calendar for one more thing? Maybe "More" won't mean more/quantity. Maybe "more" will mean more "quality" as in the way Darren approached making his job "More Meaningful" and blending the two.

Folks, we are not the first to struggle with Jesus' command to love our neighbors as ourselves, and to care for the poor. The message of taking care of the poor is repeated over and over in the Bible — for those of you who like statistics, there are more than 200 references to caring for the poor. Jesus directly involved himself in the world's brokenness and so must we.

Let me tell you about another couple in our church who were looking for "more."

These new folks recently shared how they were able to go from making missions fit in their schedule to making their schedule about missions. The "tipping point" came during a sermon — at their former church in North Carolina where the preacher said: "You could be overwhelmed by all the good that needs to be done into — Inaction."

You could do nothing or you could take one more step — buy one manna bag — show up for one Second Saturday.

For my new friends their next step was building a business based on: Be More, Serve More, Love More. They recently opened a bakery in Hyde Park; their purpose — not to make money and accumulate things but to honor and give Glory to God. They came to me for employees — they interviewed and hired dishwashers from the guests who come to Open Arms each week. They told me they have a special place in their hearts for those who have lost hope. They want to offer people a fresh start, a second chance.

Their names are Todd and Carol Binkowski — the serving jobs they are filling at their new bakery are jobs they do around Hyde Park. Carol works with the Junior Choir and serves in Small Blessings. Todd and their son, Robert, serve

food and scrape plates and wash dishes each week for the homeless at Open Arms.

So imagine the look on the faces of our folks who were interviewing for jobs when they discovered that their new "boss" would be someone who had been serving *them* food and washing *their* dishes for months in Open Arms.

This is what it means to serve more; to make serving with the attitude of Christ a way of life.

More? Does Christ really want more? Yes, as Rita read in our scripture this morning, he wants **all**, all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength; and He wants you to love your neighbor as yourself. Only you know what that will mean for you in your life. As for me, I'm inspired by these stories today of Mireya and Iyari, of Brandy and James, of Doris and Darren, and Carole and Todd. I'm inspired to offer myself more completely to God and His service. And to give more to His Kingdom's work.

On Thursday I had a surprise visit from someone I knew as Mac. He wanted to tell me how he has turned his life around and thanked me and this church for helping him, encouraging him, and holding him accountable. He said he's a new man with a new beginning. He's going by his given name of Merv now, and he asked for our prayers as he looks for a job counseling youth, something he went to college for and used to do years ago. He was even interviewed on TV this week. I told him I'd hold up his business card this morning and ask you for your prayers. And at next year's Mission's Celebration, I told him we'd be ready to hear a testimony from him of how he really had changed his life and was committing himself to change other's lives. That's how changing the world starts, one person helping one person.

Jim, will you come now and tell us about another person from our church who felt called to love more and is changing the world?