

NEAL Notes

November 2009



NEAL 2009 - Here are some more of the comments of what was liked best or a memorable moment about the weekend from 2009 NEAL Attendees:

- The Marist House is a beautiful place to gather. It is quiet and tranquil. Nice that everything was contained in one building.
- Wonderful presentations by Curtis Brown.
- Learning people's faith stories is important.
- Liked air conditioning in meeting rooms.
- Saturday evening Healing Service and laying on of hands was meaningful.
- Music by Rev. Annie Britton and Eric Vandervort was spirit filled.
- Wonderful, caring small groups are a blessing.
- Good library and book selection
- Meeting and fellowshiping with other Christians.
- Joyful singing, small group sharing, sharing your faith.
- Each time I leave NEAL, my experiences of caring and sharing with others is almost overwhelming. It gives me a spirit recharge that holds for some time.

Note: Each evaluation sheet has been reviewed. We appreciate the time, efforts, and comments provided. Although some are easy "fixes," some are under consideration, and some are a little more difficult to resolve. We will do our best as we make preparations for 2010.

EXTENDING HOSPITALITY

Practical Suggestions for Inside Your Doors

- Bathrooms need higher toilets to accommodate people with physical challenges. They also should have a grab bar.
- If you expect to engage adults with young people in diapers, install a baby changing station.
- The same would be true of a playroom. It needs to be neat and clean with safe toys to play with.
- Remove a back pew, if you don't have side rooms off the sanctuary, to make room for a wheel chair and/or add a rocking chair for parents with small children.
- Entryway needs to be neat, clean and welcoming; so does the outside of your church.
- Do a walk through of your church taking note of what needs to

be cleaned, what needs to be painted and where things need to be picked up and put away. Clutter has a way of accumulating. Gives the impression you don't care about the way your facility looks.

- Take attendance. You will never know or remember who is missing if you don't.

- Ask Newcomers to complete a "Guest Card". It can be used for follow up by the Pastor or your Welcoming-Hospitality-Evangelism Team.

Announcements

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NEAL 2010

"Fueling the Flame of Faith"

August 6-8, 2010

**The Marist House
Framingham, MA**

Need to be fueled or refueled? Need a little jumpstart to get you back on track? Next years focus is "Passionate Spirituality" and it may be just what you need and your friends may need it too! Join us for a weekend of inspirational presentations, music, singing, worship, small group discussions, fun and fellowship!

Watch for an early bird registration form Program costs remain the same for 2010 - \$140 per person, \$100 commuter person!

●●● **"Passionate Spirituality"** exists when faith is lived out with commitment, fire, and enthusiasm. It is the conviction that God can make a difference and the energy to make it happen!

●●● **With heartfelt sympathy** – NEAL holds Wanda Greaves in prayer. Her mother died. At a time when words are hard to find, may Wanda and her family know God's comforting presence, faithful love, and the peace that passes understanding to carry them through.

●●● **NEAL ALPHABET!!**
Can we put together the whole alphabet? Did you take a letter from the altar in NEAL 2009? Did you decide on a word for that letter? Wanna share? Email laityrus@yahoo.com and see if we can build a NEAL Alphabet by January!

●●●●● **NEAL Polo Shirts** are still available. A Christmas gift? A shirt for next year? The Assembly of the Laity Polo Shirt comes in various colors. Check out the "downloadable" form and information at NEAL's website. The polo shirt is also "modeled" by members of the 2009 NEAL Media Team in our group picture!

***New England
Assembly of the Laity***

www.assemblyofthelaity.com



Next NEAL Notes –
January 1, 2010

Chairperson's Corner

Putting "Others First"

I was asked to write an inspirational message for the 2nd NEAL Notes. I might say I've been unsuccessful. As I sat and contemplated last year's focus of "Others First," I began to think about the many ways in our lives that we do this and would like to share some of mine with you.

It's Sunday morning. The phone rings. It was Rich Hughen who announces he is 5-10 minutes away from my home. They live in Maine and I in Connecticut. He and his wife had decided to come and pick up the camera he'd left at the meeting the day before. It's 9:30 am and I needed to get ready for church. My house looked like I'd not been home for days, I hadn't, and I was certainly not ready in any way to receive guests. It's amazing what you can do in 5-10 minutes. I could have met them at the door, handed them the camera, and imply that I was busy and didn't have time to visit. Instead I welcomed them in. Putting "Others First" means taking time to do something even when you have other things that need to be done.

This past week our faith community made a commitment to participate in the Putnam Great Pumpkin Festival. It was a town-wide event and we were going to sell Pie Slices and Stew. First, two of our dedicated individuals involved in the planning and implementing of the event found out that a very close friend had passed away and the funeral would be on Saturday. It meant no one to make the stew; no one to help set up or clean up. Ever been in that situation? Then in the midst of pie baking my mother's caregiver calls to make sure I can check in on Mom who had her ears cleaned that morning and she was in a lot of pain. I was starting to get angry because of all of the distractions and interference of getting ready for the event. When asked others jumped in to help and the event happened. Putting "Others First" means being a supportive community when a death or other situations happen or an older adult needs care; even when it creates a tremendous inconvenience in getting ready for a church event.

I am reminded that God's Grace is extended to us daily and as Christians we have a responsibility to extend that grace to others, even when it is at an inconvenient time.

As Community Resource Coordinator for Interfaith Human Services of Putnam and the Salvation Army, I see a lot of people in need. I've always kept this responsibility separate from my church life, until recently. Over the years I've worked with a family who has had many difficulties. I've gotten to know their family life quite well. They were raised in the Catholic Church and did not want to go back; yet the children were asking religious questions they couldn't answer. For whatever reason I got the feeling they needed to be connected into a faith community and invited them to the Putnam UMC. They came. Putting "Others First" means getting out of our comfort zone and inviting people we meet and greet to come and worship. When was the last time you did this?

Benedictine Monks lead a very monastic and contemplative life. When they opened the monastery up to events that "Put Others First", that life took on new meaning.

When we "Open Our Hearts, Our Minds and Our Doors" to welcome others outside our doors and we put our focus on them instead of ourselves, life takes on a new meaning. In the Book of Hebrews we hear "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it."

In Bishop Weaver's Partners in Ministry he shared a story entitled "How's The Temperature of Your Coffee Hour?" If you've not seen it, it bears repeating, and I offer it, in abbreviated form, for your reflection.

At the Pastors' Assembly this past summer, Rev. Jack Johnson, Executive Director of the Mass Council of Churches talked about his experiences when visiting many different churches on Sunday because of his position. The pastor often invites the congregation to "coffee fellowship or chew and chat time". Jack reported that the coffee may be warm but the atmosphere of welcome is too often chilly or downright cold. Following worship regular members of the congregation head for their friends and leave visitor's standing alone. Oh well, if there's no one to chat with, chew a little more and head home. Most likely they won't come back. Putting "Others First" means spending less time visiting with friends, at least until the newcomers have left church.

According to Igniting Ministries, Rethink Church, to help a newcomer feel comfortable it is important to engage them in welcoming conversation. Implement the "circle of ten" rule. Anyone, member or guest, who comes within ten feet of you will be greeted. Also consider adopting the "circle of three" rule. You will not talk to other "members" for the first three minutes after the service. It takes guests about three minutes to exit the church following worship and they need to be engaged before they go out the door.

Smile. Offer your hand for a handshake. No hugs with newcomers. Introduce yourself and ask their name. Let them know you are glad to meet them. Ask if they live close by and what they do for a living. Ask them to take a few minutes before they leave to fill out a "guest card". It only takes a spark to get a fire going. Putting "Others First" only takes a smile and a handshake and welcoming conversation.

How does your life reflect Putting "Others First"? What is the welcoming climate of your faith community when newcomers visit? Is it one of Putting "Others First" or ushering them out the door?

Come. Our Hearts, Minds and Doors are always Open. Regardless of where you are in your life's journey you are welcome here. Come, no matter who you are you are welcome here. Come, we will put "You First".

Kathi Peterson

Chairperson, NEAL