

## “The Peace Corps of God” – Philippians 4:1-9

Our Divinity planning council has designated this weekend as our annual “time and talent” weekend. Why? Because as Lutheran Christians, we take seriously Martin Luther’s reformation challenge to become a “priesthood of all believers.” All Christians are called to Christ’s servant hood in the world, to the glory of God and for human fulfillment. We are all called to live our faith in our homes, in our workplaces, in our communities and the world in general, as well as in our congregations.

When he was inaugurated as U.S. president in January 1961, John Kennedy famously challenged Americans saying, “Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.” Less than two months later, he established one way for Americans to do that when he signed an order setting up the Peace Corps. JFK’s idea was to get thousands of people who were not professional diplomats, but just ordinary people with perhaps a particular skill set like teaching, agriculture, engineering, community organizing or whatever to fan out into the world to help people.

The Peace Corps celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary last year, as it continues to give us opportunities to serve our country in the cause of peace by working and living in developing countries. According to the Peace Corps website, in the half century since its founding, more than 200,000 Americans have joined, serving in 139 countries and making a difference everyday with innovation, creativity, determination and compassion. Their work in villages,

towns, and cities around the world represents a legacy of service that has become a significant part of America's history and positive image abroad.

My uncle served in the Peace Corps in the 1960's and 70's in Brazil and in Kenya, Africa. His management of large agricultural projects led to many more years in Africa working for American corporations exporting seed, fertilizer, and farm equipment to Africa. Uncle George speaks 6 languages fluently including Swahili.

Our own Laura Ramsey served in the Peace Corps from 2004-2006 in Eastern Europe. I've asked Laura to share how her Peace Corps experience helped prepare her for serving here. As you listen to Laura's story, think about how your personal mission as a Christian today can be described as being a volunteer in the Peace Corps of God? How can you use your time and talent as part of our Divinity Ministry in making a difference to those we serve?

(Laura's Story)

It has been five years since I completed my tour with the Peace Corps and there are few days I go without pondering where I would have been had I chosen to extend my tour of service with the Corps. I still remember the day I walked into the Country Director's office and waited with baited breath for him to get off the telephone. I wanted nothing more than to tell him what my next project was or how my current projects could be expanded. Instead I had to tell him I was going home a bit earlier than expected to tend to a family tragedy. My brother-in-law who had served on the Colorado Springs Police force had been shot and killed in the line of duty. Somehow being so far from home during this time was not as bad as some might assume

it to be. I had a host family worth “their weight in gold”. Besides, they were going through their own tragedies and could understand me even if my Romanian was not always conjugated correctly. The point is that I had a community who cared for me in that tiny village of Topala, Moldova and they had invested their time and talents in our vision for their community. I knew the Lord was with my family and that amidst the brokenness and sorrow – He wanted me to continue my calling.

So, what does this have to do with your commitment of time and talents to Divinity? It has a lot to do with you. Much like the children and parents who *dedicated* themselves to attending my English course at the local school (despite the school principal’s dislike for the idea) so too do you all *dedicate* yourselves to growing in your relationship with Christ through your service. Through developing this relationship with our Father it is the hope that you will more readily *answer your call* to the ministries within your congregation. Much like my counterpart, the mayor of Topala, who took it upon himself to *recognize his call* to initiate the water and community center projects for the good of the entire community.

There really was no guarantee as to how or even if my skills would be useful in developing the tiny village of 1,100 people where I worked. There is no guarantee that your time and talents will be used in the way you envision them to be used in this church community.

Faith in God’s ability to work through me is what blessed me with two wonderful years in the Peace Corps. It blessed me with opportunities like being called to work as a director of an all boy’s camp called TOBE (Teaching Our Boys to Excel). In a country that sports a

staggering unemployment rates, it was a wonder those adolescents did not lose faith in God let alone their country's will to see them succeed in life. Faith in God is what I pray has led you to this family of hope, healing, and prayer. Faith in God's works through you and your God-given abilities is what hopefully leads you to a more fulfilling life in service to others here at Divinity and the surrounding community.