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## Lutheran Woman's Quarterly Magazine

### Who Is My Neighbor and What Does This Mean?

By Alice Schuman

**Opening Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, show us who our neighbors are. Help us to be sensitive to their needs. Empower us to do all we can to reach out to those in distress in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.



The tenth chapter of Luke relates the occasion when Jesus was having a conversation with one of the many legal eagles who had been trying to discredit Him. The inquisitor wanted to know what Jesus believed must be done to inherit eternal life. Jesus asked the man what he thought. The lawyer quoted two passages from Scripture that command believers to love God completely and love their neighbors as themselves (**Deut. 6:5** and **Lev. 19:18**). Jesus confirmed that this was indeed correct, if the lawyer would be able to keep the commands.

Read **Luke 10: 25-37**.

Jesus told this parable to illustrate how God saves us. We compare to the beggar on the side of the road, beaten and helpless, unable to save (“to justify”) ourselves. When we look for salvation from friends, family, or other individuals whom we expect would be obligated to help us, we are disappointed. Salvation instead comes from the one source that is not obligated to help us at all — Jesus, who is motivated to save us solely based on His mercy and compassion for us.

Jesus compares to the Samaritan; the complete stranger compares to the non-believer. Before we even hope for help from Jesus, He comes to us through His Word and

### Lutheran Woman's Quarterly

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saves us. Jesus continues His mercy for us by bringing us into the church, where we receive continued healing and the assurance of our salvation through the hearing of the Word and the reception of the sacraments.

What was our condition before we were saved? Read **Romans 5:6-10**.

What do you think? Does a friend need to be “open” to the Gospel before you can talk to her about Jesus? Explain your answer. How was the lawyer hoping “to justify” himself? The application of this parable to our lives is found by considering what Jesus has done for us. The lawyer had hoped to limit his need to love his neighbor by defining his neighbor in legal terms: those whom he might be expected to have a personal obligation to help. But God’s command for us to deal with others is not based on what others do for us or who others are to us, but based on what the Triune God has done for us.

- **Luke 6:36** – Be merciful, just as...
- **Matthew 10:8** – Freely you have received...
- **Colossians 3:13** – Forgive as...

Jesus defined the good neighbor as anyone who has mercy on another, even as God has had mercy on us. He taught that when others need help, whether emotional, physical or financial, it is our privilege to show the love God has had for us by addressing the needs of our neighbors that have come to our attention.

Let’s not forget that a neighbor doesn’t necessarily live next door to us, and doesn’t have to look like us, and doesn’t have to share our values or worldview. The Samaritan took care of a man who was a complete stranger to him, a man from a culture that despised his own culture and rejected his worship of God. All these things didn’t make any difference — the Samaritan still saved the wounded man.

### **Meeting Our Neighbor’s Emotional Needs**

The Samaritan noticed the wounded man and reached out to him. Part of what he did for him was physical and financial, but surely just by approaching him and putting his arm around him, by speaking to him in a kind way, he was giving him the emotional support the man needed.

There are so many occasions when our neighbors experience ups and downs that we can share. As Paul says, rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

### **Read Romans 12:15**

In the Book of Ruth we read about Naomi’s neighbors sharing her great joy at the birth of Obed, the child of her

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daughter-in-law Ruth and her new husband Boaz. Naomi was a woman who had suffered many losses (her homeland, her husband and two sons, her other daughter-in-law), but whose life had now come to a turning point toward better times. Her neighbors celebrated with her.

- What are some ways we can increase the joy of our neighbors when good things happen to them?
- How can we show that we share their joy?

Lazarus was a good friend of Jesus, as were his sisters, Martha and Mary. Jesus came face to face with Mary.

### **Read John 11:33-35**

Jesus is our example of mourning with those who mourn. Women and men of our time have to deal with many difficult losses.

- What are some of the losses our neighbors encounter?
- How can we show our concern for our neighbors who are experiencing losses in their lives?
- What are some practical ways LWML can address such needs?

### **Meeting Our Neighbor's Physical Needs**

What do the following passages have to say about how God is at work in us?

- 2 Corinthians 9:8
- Ephesians 3:20
- Philippians 1:6
- Philippians 2:13
- Colossians 1:9-10
- 1 Thessalonians 1:3
- Hebrews 13:20-21

Throughout Scripture, the Holy Spirit makes it clear that God is at work in us when we offer physical comfort to those in need. Our good deeds are the manifestation of our Father's love at work within us, the result of the faith He has given us. We keep this in mind when we consider the result of our good deeds for our neighbors, which Jesus describes in **Matthew 25:35-40**.

- What are the implications for our rich society in a world of neighbors who are near starvation?
- What can LWML women do to carry out a compassionate ministry to the suffering in our own communities, our country, and our world?
- What are some of the things we have done in tragic emergencies like the tsunami that wreaked havoc in Asia and the hurricanes that ravaged the southern USA?

Meeting Our Neighbor's Financial Needs When the Samaritan left the injured man with the innkeeper, he made a down payment on the cost of his care and a commitment to take care of any other charges on his return. He did not hesitate to dig into his pocket. The early church figured out a way to take care of the financial needs of its members: Read **Acts 2:44-45**.

There are situations today when the church opens its purse to pay for the special needs of its members. Often we have found other ways than a direct subsidy to provide community support for those in financial need.

- What responsibility do we have to support legislation and government policies that assist poor people?
- What commitment to feeding the hungry or clothing the naked are we making?

**Closing Prayer:** O Lord, bring to our remembrance Your gracious generosity to us. You gave Your precious life for us while we were undeserving sinners. We pray that You would make us generous also. Help us to find time in our busy schedules to spend with those who need company and consolation. Help us to find ways to meet the physical and financial needs of the poor. Help us to find coins to fill our Mite Boxes™ to support ministries that reach out to spread Your Gospel in the world around us. Lead us and help us to follow where You lead. In the Name of Jesus Christ, the Greatest Giver, Amen.

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