

**INSIDE:**

+ **Loving Our  
Neighbors**



A Publication of the Ellis County Ministerial Alliance  
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**HOW ARE YOU  
LOVING YOUR  
NEIGHBORS?**





ONE is the official publication of the Ellis County Ministerial Alliance (ECMA) which guides its mission, content, and theme. The ECMA encourage submissions from ECMA congregations. Photographs, stories, testimonies, and other submissions should be directed toward your church leaders or sent via email to

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## Editor's Note:

In the Bible, Jesus teaches us to love our neighbor as our self. We asked our writers this month to describe a time in their lives when "loving your neighbor as yourself" was especially challenging.

## 'Love Your Neighbor' Becomes a Local Public Dispute

*Reverend Celeste Lasich*

*Hays First Presbyterian Church*

Jesus' teaching on "Who is our neighbor?" became a locally public dispute in June. Whom do we fear? Whom do we trust? Who is allowed voice and vote to influence public policy? What does it look like to claim to love those Jesus called neighbor, while at the same time labeling them a "threat"?

On June 24, a group calling itself Ellis County Patriots presented what was advertised as "Understanding the Threat: Strategic and Operational Training & Consulting on the Threat of the Global Islamic Movement" at the Uptown Fox.

I first learned of this training during Hays 2nd Annual Juneteenth



These are two examples of the posters that protestors displayed at the rally in downtown Hays on June 24. (Submitted photo)

event at Municipal Park. The deep concern shared among participants at Juneteenth was the potential impact of such an event on our Muslim neighbors and friends. Would Muslim students,

business owners, families and professionals feel welcome and loved in our community knowing that "strategic and operational training" to "understand the threat" of their religion, and by extension their very being, was a public event?

I attended the training at the Uptown Fox with Moussa Elbayoumy, Kansas board chair for CAIR, the Council for American Islam Relations. Moussa works diligently with interfaith and other groups to build relationships and understanding between Muslim and non-Muslim Kansans.

He came to Hays to provide correction to the misrepresentations of Muslim faith he has heard in previous events with this title. In fact, global Islam was

## ***'Love Your Neighbor' Becomes a Local Public Dispute (Continued)***

never mentioned at the event. Had there been an opportunity for questions, as had been advertised, I wanted to ask, why this divisive and inflammatory title? What purpose did it serve?

After the training, Moussa and I were interrogated by supporters of the speaker about our patriotism, our residency, our religions and our right to disagree with the opinions expressed. Those who applauded the speaker and interrogated us are also my neighbors. That is a challenge and yet an essential of my faith. Another essential is to be in solidarity with those who are vulnerable, not because I am "Marxist/communist/socialist." I seek to follow in the radically inclusive Way of Jesus.

I observed Jesus' question, "Who acted as neighbor?" as the cornerstone for the community response that drew around 200 people to peacefully rally across the

street from that training, with many signs proclaiming Gospel values of love and welcome. Our neighbors are not only those who were born near Hays. Our neighbors don't all vote the same or share the same legislative priorities.

LGBT folks are our neighbors. Many of our neighbors of every skin color believe Black Lives Matter. Some neighbors have Black and Brown skin. Muslims are our neighbors, as well as people of other--or no--religion. Those who participated in the rally affirmed the value of standing in solidarity against labeling any group of people as a threat.

I chose to attend the rally, as well as the training event, wearing my clergy collar and rainbow stole. I was surprised how many people thanked me for being present as clergy. I grieved with far too many of them as they shared the pain of being kicked out of their churches and even their families. I ended up

being among the last to leave because people urgently wanted to talk about faith, hope, reconciliation and Jesus.

The Samaritan whom Jesus called "neighbor" was part of a group labeled by His people as a threat. The very notion of a "Good Samaritan" was inconceivable, until Jesus redefined neighbor for all time.

In the story Jesus told, the religious leaders saw a beaten man and walked by on the other side of the road. Perhaps they prayed or felt pity and believed they were in the right. Jesus' challenge to those who follow Him now is to love like the Samaritan did with risk taking, self-giving love. It is not easy, and still Jesus' challenge for those who claim His name is to go and do likewise.



*The Rev. Celeste Lasich is the pastor at First Presbyterian Church in Hays.*

**"DARKNESS CANNOT DRIVE OUT DARKNESS; ONLY LIGHT CAN DO THAT.  
HATE CANNOT DRIVE OUT HATE; ONLY LOVE CAN DO THAT."  
- MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.**



**“IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, LOVE IS MORE OF A VERB THAN A NOUN. IT HAS MORE TO DO WITH ACTING THAN WITH FEELING. THE CALL TO LOVE IS NOT SO MUCH A CALL TO A CERTAIN STATE OF FEELING AS IT IS TO A QUALITY OF ACTION.” - R. C. SPROUL**

## ***The Difference Between ‘Loving’ and ‘Enabling’***

***Brandon Nimz***

***Unite Ministries***

Over my years in ministry work, there have been many situations that have forced me to grow and become better at loving others. One prolonged case that was extra challenging occurred during the last few years.

An individual that I was working with through the ministry had multiple mental illnesses that he refused to get treated, along with a poor sense of boundaries, a manipulative personality, and a superiority complex.

The real challenge when it came to figuring out how to love this individual well, though, was that he wanted me to make him the center of my universe—such that I would answer all of his needs, stresses, and concerns the second such issues

occurred, regardless of what else was going on in my life.

This was this person’s understanding of “love” and “friendship,” and like most of the rest of his worldview, it was centered on him and his importance.

Underneath that worldview were two even deeper root problems—this individual refused to accept any responsibility for his own life, and underneath that, this individual refused to relate to God and to the actual reality around him.

While the individual’s paranoia and other mental illnesses may have made it difficult to relate to God and reality at certain times, it was something the person was fundamentally unwilling to do even when he was capable.

Every attempt to drive

this person towards truths and away from many of the lies that he frequently created and spoke about would be firmly resisted. In fact, the person earnestly wanted me and others to affirm the very lies that he came up with, and he considered attempts to point him to truths that conflicted with how he wanted reality to work to be “unloving.”

What was heartbreaking to me and hard about this situation was that many parts of this individual were obviously broken, and while many of his desires were very unhealthy, they were largely based on real underlying human needs.

Though this person said he wanted someone to love him and care for him as a friend, he really wanted someone he could manipulate into doing the



## ***The Difference Between 'Loving' and 'Enabling' (Continued)***

things he didn't want to do for himself.

Still, underneath that was an actual desire to love and be loved, which is both common and healthy. Though this individual said he wanted to help and serve others, he actually wanted to be praised for how excellent he was in character, knowledge, and action. This need for praise, though, was partially because of his deep insecurities underlying his superiority complex.

Underneath that even further were both a need for affirmation and a desire for purpose and meaning in community—which are both common and healthy.

These are just a couple examples of this individual's desires, but in all cases the way he wanted me to answer the surface desire was unhealthy, and it would be unloving to this individual, to me, to those around me, and even to God for me to enable this individual by

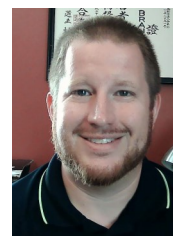
giving him what he wanted in the way that he claimed was "loving" to him. However, in each situation this individual's underlying human needs were real, and it would be unloving for me to simply ignore those needs. How could I help out with those needs when the person was unwilling to approach God in any way and was unwilling to accept responsibility for his own actions and his own life? The answer in this case was that I really couldn't—only the Holy Spirit could.

That was a hard realization for me. I could reach out, I could share truth occasionally, I could provide occasional direct assistance in situations that weren't enabling. But, ultimately, if this individual wouldn't reach out to God or operate in reality, there was nothing more I could do besides pray for him.

I also prayed for myself—that the Holy Spirit would help me hear His direction whenever this individual reached out to me. It was

too difficult for me to tell in some situations what was loving and what wasn't. I also had to realize that this individual wanted to take time from my family and others that would cause me to love others in my life less well, so I had to pray and ask God for discernment frequently.

Since this individual tried to make himself the center of my universe in most of our interactions, the main way I could love him best was to sink into God and more aggressively keep God the center of my universe. Only from a place of being truly centered in Jesus would I be in any position to let love and truth flow out in a meaningful way to this individual. That, for me, was ultimately the answer—to love others best, I, myself, must first be centered in God.



*Brandon Nimz is the leader of Unite Ministry in Hays.*

## ***Asking the Right Question—How Well Do You Love God?***

***Reverend Shay Craig***

***St. Andrew's Episcopal Church***

***St. Michael's Episcopal Church***

Have you ever noticed that any time we try to explore the idea of “loving your neighbor as yourself” we immediately jump down the rabbit hole of defining “neighbor” or explaining what is meant by “as yourself”? Well, just maybe the pivotal word in that sentence is, in fact: Love.

C.S. Lewis once said, “Love is not affectionate feeling, but a steady wish for the loved person's ultimate good as far as it can be obtained.”

What if what we are expected to do is not adore, or aspire to, be affectionate with, or even like our neighbor, but to wish for--to earnestly and honestly wish for--her ultimate good?

That changes things, doesn't it? And, I believe, it moves to the back burner the problem of who is my neighbor or how do I love myself.

If loving someone simply requires that you wish for their good, then you don't have to get along with the

guy in the next cubicle; you just have to hope he gets the recognition he deserves. And you don't have to agree with the way the neighbor is using her property; you just have to hope she gets the money she needs from it.

Now, it doesn't leave us completely without responsibility. If what I want for my neighbor is his ultimate good, I am not likely to serve him a beer if I know he is in recovery. And I have to withhold my opinion on my friend's new boyfriend and hope that he will give her the respect and love that she deserves. This “love your neighbor love” is nuanced, and it takes a little thinking.

So, let's take Lewis' definition of “love” for the purposes of this exercise. Now, who is your neighbor? Well, who would Jesus say is a person you should not wish good for? Or, put another way: Who would Jesus tell you to curse?

If your answer is “no one,” then you are reading the same Bible as me. So, your neighbor is everyone. Our job is to “steadily wish for the ultimate good” of everyone we know. And their job is to

wish that for us.

Which bring us at long last to the question under consideration this month:

When has loving your neighbor as yourself been particularly challenging? My answer is: When my faith is tested. When I forget that God will provide for me what I need, and that God trusts me to help provide for others from what God gives me.

When my neighbor is competing with me for a job. When my neighbor is winning at Monopoly. When I believe that I can't get what I want if they get what they want. Then I don't “consistently wish for the good of my neighbor.” Then I wish he or she would roll doubles and get sent to Jail.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the kindly man who comes along, realizes, insightfully, that lying in a ditch with nothing is not the victim's “ultimate good” and intercedes to offer him, not just a leg up, but a room and a bath and a meal. In short, we know he spent some of his own hard-earned cash on the unfortunate stranger.

We don't know if the

## ***Asking the Right Question (Continued)***

Samaritan liked the man in the ditch (we can presume the man in the ditch did not like the Samaritan; most people didn't), but we know that the Samaritan realized that part of "loving" this stranger, part of "desiring his good" meant that he had to give up something himself. He had to give from his scarce resources, with no hope of remuneration, relying entirely on the belief that there would be enough, both to help the stranger, and for the Samaritan to get home safely himself.

This is the challenge.

When Jesus asks us to hope for the success of our neighbor, we are very willing to do it, as long as it doesn't cost us anything.

We have to give from our own resources, make sacrifices on our side to extend that good will and Godly love.

God provides everything we have. God gives us the gifts we use to earn our living, the weather to grow our crops, the good sense to marry someone who loves us, and the loving community of Church to stand by us in times of trouble. God gives

us everything.

So, when we withhold the abundance God has given us from someone we could help, then we are saying we don't believe that God can or will do it again.

So, I guess, what it comes down to is not how well do you love your neighbor, but how well do you love your God?



*The Rev. Shay Craig is Vicar of St. Andrew's and St. Michael's Episcopal Churches in Hays.*

## ***Make Good Choices in Keeping the Greatest Commandment***

***Becky Rogowski***  
***First Presbyterian Church***

It's the greatest commandment in the Bible: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind; and love your neighbor as yourself."

Jesus calls us to love the people He's surrounded us with, in the same way He calls us to love Him. In fact, the verse continues and goes on to say that "all the Law and the Prophets hang

on these two commandments."

Loving your neighbor carries a lot of weight. It also poses the question of "who." Who is your neighbor? Is it the person who lives beside you? Well, sure. But I believe loving your neighbor goes far beyond the people we often believe to be our neighbors.

Someone is your neighbor based on proximity. So perhaps your

neighbor is the barista who takes your order every morning or the guy who sits in the cubicle next to you. Sometimes your neighbor is not someone who is based on routine proximity to you, but rather an instant where God brings two of his creations together to become neighbors who love and care for one another.

Whatever "neighbor" looks like to you, we are called to love our neighbors as ourselves.

## ***Make Good Choices (Continued)***

I have had a few instances in my life where I have seen this play out. Sometimes I've even been on the receiving end.

When I left home for college, I was on an independent streak. I chose a college that nobody from Hays was going to. I wanted to be "free" of my hometown. That was a good, solid, and independent plan until reality hit.

The school I chose was small, and most everyone already knew each other. I went from knowing EVERYbody to knowing NObody. I was so uncertain who my "neighbor" was. Was it my roommate? Was it my suite-mates? The people on my dorm floor? The entire dorm? My sorority sisters? My professors?

It soon became obvious, but those first few days were very nerve-wracking. I soon had classmates, and my sorority sisters became my friends. The people from my dorm became people to eat and share conversation with. Did I have a lot in common with all of them? No. What we did share was being

away from home for the first time. We needed each other.

My first teaching job as an early childhood special education teacher took me to the inner-city--an environment very unfamiliar to a farm girl from western Kansas.

My first-year class will always hold a special place in my heart. It represented diverse populations and children living in circumstances I had only read about. I became their safe place, and they became mine. I had once again moved to place where I didn't know anyone. I had little free time and felt I owed it to my new career and the 24 amazing little people who called me teacher. I learned so many things from them that year. I wouldn't have called them "neighbor," as I didn't live in their neighborhood, but I loved them dearly and was quite protective of each and every one of them.

I have seen my own children on the receiving end of this, as well. One of my daughters attended a basketball game at a nearby school, and none of her

friends was there. She felt very alone and sat by herself for awhile. It wasn't long before an acquaintance of ours, another young girl, approached her to come sit with "her" group of friends. She quickly introduced my daughter to her friends, and all had a great time. I will never forget this young girl's generous heart.

I also think about the many times I have witnessed people "paying it forward." I know of people who have sent anonymous gift cards to others who were in need of help and might not accept it otherwise. I have seen it in checkout lines at the grocery store when people were short on money. I have seen it in coffee shop lines. People helping people. People doing the right thing. Do they have to? Absolutely not. It's a choice. The fact that it's our greatest commandment? Even better.



*Becky Rogowski is the Generations in Faith Together Coordinator at Hays First Presbyterian Church.*