

## Love your neighbor--yes, your actual neighbor

By Heidi Schlumpf

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When my husband and I moved into our house, a neighbor brought us homemade chocolate chip cookies to welcome us to the neighborhood. Later, we learned that the neighborhood hosts an annual block party and a mini-music fest each summer--not to mention occasional "wine nights" for the women and "beer nights" for the men.

Although it may sound like we live in Mayberry, the folksy but fictitious town of "The Andy Griffith Show," we actually live in the big city of Chicago.

We have been lucky to find such a welcoming, friendly neighborhood, though not all the neighbors in my 20-plus years of living in the city have always been so, well ... neighborly. There was the young man with whom I shared an apartment wall, who had a penchant for loud music with a strong bass that I could literally feel in my bones. Then there was the family with the barking dogs across the street from our condo.

Pets and their excrement, loud music or leaf-blowers, unkempt lawns: such are the problems that must have prompted the saying that "fences make good neighbors." And while it's true that everyone needs a little peace and privacy, I worry that fences may make good neighbors, but not good neighborhoods.

Of course, the Scriptures remind us to "love your neighbor as yourself." The phrase is found twice in the Gospels, in Mark and Luke, both times in response to questioners trying to trip up Jesus. In both cases, Jesus responds by quoting the law that comes from the Hebrew scriptures: "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18).

In Luke, Jesus' response is followed by the parable of the Good Samaritan, which makes it clear that your neighbor is not just your "own people," but much broader than that. The message that Christians are called to extend love to those beyond our own families, friends, race and ethnicity, city, town or neighborhood is definitely one that needs to be heard today.

Yet, I think we also need to be reminded to love the folks who literally live on either side of us, on our block, in our neighborhoods. Sometimes it's hardest to love those we didn't overtly choose to be in relationship with: our family, our colleagues, our neighbors.

There's a lot of talk these days about "finding your tribe." It's the new lingo for "community" with an emphasis on finding people who really resonate with you, who provide that feeling of connectedness, especially for those who feel disconnected. This is a good thing; it's important to have close friendships with people who "get" you.

It used to be that a neighborhood automatically provided a source of those friendships. Communities were pretty homogeneous, full of young families, or farmers, or Eastern European immigrants. People could count on their neighbors being their "own people."

But, despite persistent racial segregation, many of today's neighborhoods are more diverse, with people living next door and down the street from folks they may not have much in common with. Their kids may not go to the same schools; they have different houses of worship. Neighbors have different values, different hobbies, different worldviews.

In some ways, maybe the Samaritans of today live closer than ever.

In Hebrews, the author repeats Jesus' commandment to love your neighbor, emphasizing that "the one who loves another has fulfilled the law." How can we love our neighbors?

It starts with getting to know them. Do you know your neighbors' names? A little bit about them? Their phone numbers? With people moving so frequently, it can be hard to keep up with everyone, but this is a first, basic step.

Neighbors don't have to be best friends, but there are some obvious things people who live in the same neighborhood can connect about: their homes, their gardens, and nearby businesses, restaurants, parks. Our neighborhood uses a Facebook group to try to keep in touch and communicate. People post messages like "Did everyone get the message that the electric company is shutting down power this morning?", along with requests for babysitters or recommended dentists.

If you're up to it, organize an activity for your neighborhood to bring people together. One family in our neighborhood hosts an annual Hanukkah party; another plans the music fest. Many cities and towns allow neighborhoods to close off the street for block parties.

If that seems overwhelming, remember that it can be the little things that are really important in relationships. Our neighbor usually snowblows our walk before we can get out to shovel it; we, in turn, get his mail when he's traveling. Another neighbor coordinated meals for a grieving neighbor who lost a parent. Or it could mean practicing (or praying for) patience to accept the little grievances that come with living in close proximity with one another.

Such neighborliness was just how things were done in Mayberry--and probably in real neighborhoods of that generation, too. Although the world has changed, the challenge to "love our neighbors" is even more important today

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After reading the articles, write a response on a separate sheet of paper in which you address the following questions. Write in paragraph form. Don't just make a list.

- What is the author's purpose for writing her article?
- What is Schlumpf's main claim? What types of evidence does she use to support her claim?
- What points in the article stood out to you? Why?
- Do you agree or disagree with her?
- What connections can you make to the article? (e.g., personal connections, connections to other texts)