

Sermon: Called to Serve

Slide #1

Today's topic is "Called to Serve."

[Insert your own illustration.] One day when I was flying on an airplane, the man sitting next to me asked, "Why do people have so many problems?" and he responded to his own question by saying, "Oh, it all boils down to self-centeredness, doesn't it."

Wow, how interesting—he had a point. You can call it what you want, but it is old-fashioned self-centeredness, pride and ego.

We care only to maximize our pleasure and minimize our pain. Who cares about people dying from hunger, experiencing sickness, languishing behind prison bars—as long as our lives are content to our own satisfaction, that is all we care for.

However, when we say we are Christians, we are not talking about self-serving Christianity, but serving Christianity and serving disciples.

This is what we call servanthood in discipleship, or following Jesus all the way in true discipleship, which is foundational and central in Christian life and ministry.

"Living in Jesus all the way."

First—why servanthood? Because Christ through the church is the hope of this world and Christian servants are the hope of the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven.

God has called us to servanthood—this is not negotiable. We are called to maintain and improve social conditions of society for the Kingdom of God. We are commanded to create new social values, based on biblical principles.

We are commissioned to become change agents through serving Christianity.

We follow Jesus in humble and loving servanthood, as He Himself was the humble Servant.

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Matthew 20:28 (New International Version) says: "Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." And He was obedient even to death on the cross for our salvation.

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Philippians 2:5-8 (New International Version) says:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,  
but made himself nothing,  
taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man,

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he humbled himself  
and became obedient to death—  
even death on a cross!

Therefore, Christian servanthood is not only serving Jesus, but serving with Jesus. It involves not just being servants of Christ, but being servants with Christ.

[Insert your own illustration.] But let's be honest. Who wants to be a servant? I want to be a leader. I am so into leadership that I have completed a doctoral degree in leadership. We all want to be leaders.

However, the more I study, I am convinced that as Christians and as disciples of our Lord, our ambition should not be leadership, but servanthood. Therefore, our task is not to grow leaders, but to make disciples who will follow Jesus.

Your call as a disciple is likewise a call to servanthood.

Do you place your Master's will ahead of your own?

Does your heart respond with compassion at the sight of needy people?

Do your actions speak louder than words?

Or do we act as if we were Levites and priests on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho?

In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him halfdead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he

saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have'" (Luke 10:30-35).

Levites and priests wanted to be leaders, not servants.

Like Levites and priests, it is possible to serve in church for a lifetime without ever being a servant.

There were thinking only, If I stop and help this man, what will happen to ME?

They had forgotten why they were chosen to be leaders.

However, the Samaritan was thinking, If I don't stop and help this man, what will happen to HIM?

Imagine yourself watching a school play. A very dark stage and a little girl standing there with much fear and anxiety when suddenly, with a loud noise, a huge smokescreen covers the stage and a man appears. The man looks like he's from outer space. This little girl becomes more frightened than ever, scared of this man-like creature. But this man approaches the little girl gently and asks softly, "Tell me, little girl, what was one of the most exciting things that's ever happened in human history?" The little girl thinks about it for a few moments, and replies, "God came and visited us." The man asks again, "You mean Jesus—the God of the entire universe,

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the Creator?" "Yes," she says. The man is surprised but excited and asks her, "What did you do, how did you celebrate His visit?" She takes a long pause and says, "We killed Him." We killed Him! When God came and visited us, because He did not fulfill our expectations and grant our wishes, we killed Him.

Dear brothers and sisters, how do we respond to His daily presence in our lives?

Are we expecting fringe benefits from being a Christian, yet we are not willing to follow in His footsteps?

[Insert your own illustration.] A friend of mine, who is an atheist, once challenged me by saying that Christians are self-serving and inwardly focused people, who expect eternal life and a golden crown without following their Master.

Is that true? Are we waiting for the second coming of Christ because of His promise of eternal life and a golden crown? Is that all? I hope your answer is No, we are waiting for the Christ who

loved us and gave Himself for us.

Let us not forget why we are chosen to follow Christ.

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John 15:5 (New International Version) says:

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

Therefore, in this life who we are, is not the important question, but rather to whom we belong—because that will define who we are.

Servanthood—Jesus’ style is therefore not trying to imitate or be like Him. It is about letting Him transform us and make us more like Him by the power of the Holy Spirit.

So the question is not WWJD: What Would Jesus Do?

But: Are we walking with Jesus daily?

We must dwell in His will and follow His commands, teaching others to obey everything Jesus commanded us. This is biblical social evangelism.

As we share Christ’s love with the community, we begin to knock down the barriers between churches and communities at large.

Through faith-in-action Christians demonstrate servant leadership. We are to work for changes in societal challenges that bring an end to discrimination against race, gender, age, socioeconomic status, etc.

By Christ’s model of compassionate service and love, we can lead people to spiritual transformation.

According to Dr. Ronald Sider in his book *Churches that Make a Difference*, holistic ministry is a door to trusted relationships in relief operations, individual and community development and structural changes.

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Relief—“It involves directly supplying food, clothing or housing to someone in urgent need.”

It is like giving someone a fish. Mother Teresa once encountered a reporter who questioned, “Mother Teresa, isn’t it better for us to teach how to fish, rather than giving fish?” Mother Teresa

responded, “My people cannot fish.” When you recall the people that Mother Teresa served, they were simply dying in the streets. They were physically unable to become self-sufficient. Many were crippled, paralyzed, and dying. Mother Teresa brought them to the sanctuary and cleansed them, clothed them, fed them, and shared the love of God without preaching a sermon.

Relief ministry is something from which we, as providers, should not expect any return in benefits. There are times when churches will not engage in relief ministry because it costs the congregation financially, and they do not have “quality baptisms” as a benefit. We should not engage in relief ministry in order to plant a church or increase membership; it is simply to meet people’s physical needs.

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Individual development includes transformational ministries that empower a person to improve his or her physical, emotional, intellectual, relational or social status—it is teaching how to fish.

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Community development renews the building blocks of a healthy community, such as housing, jobs, health care and education—it is providing fishing tools.

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And structural change means transforming unfair political, economic, environmental or cultural institutions and systems—it is to make sure that everyone in the community has equal opportunity to access the fishing pond.

The church ought to become a voice for disenfranchised people in our society; disadvantaged and disassociated because of race, gender, age, educational background or socioeconomic status.

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The mission of the church is “outreach” because God came from heaven to earth; therefore, we ought to proactively reach out to our community. Each church should provide at least one of the previously mentioned four types of holistic ministry in their community to meet the needs of the people. And it takes a commitment to provide holistic ministry. All things require a commitment to invest our time and resources.

This is why the Gospel is both proclaiming the good news and demonstrating the love of God. It is a balanced outreach that involves a proclamation of the Gospel as well as a demonstration of God's love and concern for every soul. It is about seeing and ministering to the whole person. Especially in the 21st century, the Christian experience and holistic ministry is more important than ever before.

According to traditional evangelism strategies, churches argue and confront others over biblical findings and act like the Greeks: if I am right, you must be wrong.

1) Speaking through the logical mindset to prove the Bible speaks the truth, 2) somehow through the conversion experience their behaviors will be changed, and 3) finally the convertees will be welcomed into their fellowship.

However, most people today are committing their lives to religion or churches through friendship, I will say fellowship, and by mingling and influence their behaviors are transformed, and as a consequence they develop a stronger commitment and accept Jesus as not only Savior, but as Lord of their lives.

First, we witness Jesus as a model example of the holistic approach. He deals with each one of us as a whole person, just as we were created in the same manner.

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Ellen White indicates in her book *Education* (p. 15), "When Adam came from the Creator's hand, he bore in his physical, mental, and spiritual nature, a likeness to his Maker. 'God created man in His own image,' and it was His purpose that the longer man lived, the more fully he should reveal this image—the more fully reflect the glory of the Creator. All his faculties were capable of development; their capacity and vigor were continually to increase."

Therefore, through Jesus' ministry we bear witness of a genuine holistic approach toward humanity, especially people who were marginalized, disadvantaged and disenfranchised from society. They were the poor, the sick, the unclean, all cast out as sinful people.

Jesus expanded the Kingdom of God to places, people and cultures that the Jews had never considered God to be interested in.

According to Matthew 11:2-6, when John the Baptist was being held in prison, he began to doubt his conviction that Jesus was Christ the Anointed One, the Messiah. John sent two of his

disciples to Jesus, asking, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"

Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me."

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Jesus was simply reminding them of the Messianic job description in Isaiah 61, and readdressed the Messianic Kingdom in a different way than John the Baptist and his disciples had expected. Rather than through the violent overthrow of the Roman Empire, it was coming from person to person as the blind, outcast, sick and captives experienced for themselves the life-transforming Good News of the Gospel. For Jesus, making a difference in people's lives was part of His work as the Messiah. His approach to ministry was holistic.

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In Matthew 9:35, "Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the Kingdom and healing every disease and sickness." Here Jesus mingles with people by visiting the towns and villages where the people are, teaching the good news, and healing people who are in need.

He grieved over the multitudes of people who were helpless and brought hope to their lives by ministering according to their needs. Through this compassionate service Jesus was able to build a trust relationship.

Therefore, the purpose of holistic ministry is not only to proclaim the Good News, the Word of Salvation, but also to demonstrate the love of God to people who are in need.

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Ephesians 2:10

"It is God Himself who has made us what we are and given us new lives through Christ Jesus; and in ages long ago he planned that we should spend our lives in helping others."

Service is not an option in Christian servanthood.

We were created to serve, saved to serve, called to serve, and commanded to serve God and His people.

Now, let's talk about being Christian disciples.

Who are disciples?

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There are four views of discipleship:

1. Learners—listen, mediate, understand, act, and teach others
2. Committed believers—follow Christ as disciples
3. Ministers—radical discipleship with the call to ministry
4. Converters—make Christ Lord of their lives

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What are disciples supposed to do?

- John 12:26

“Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My father will honor the one who serves me.”

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- 1 Peter 2:21

“To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, which you should follow in his steps.”

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Once a person becomes a disciple, he or she is to follow Jesus.

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What does it mean to follow Jesus?

- Matthew 20:26-28

“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

We obey and serve our master.

Therefore, the church is to serve the Lord and serve others.

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How do disciples follow Jesus?



- Matthew 16:24-26

“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?”

We must learn to deny ourselves.

Embrace His will for our lives—whatever that may be.

However, we often become rebellious.

God, it is not fair! I want to be educated so I could have a good paying job and would like to achieve much glory and honor. This is not fair! Must I give up my will, be in self-denial, or self-sacrifice?

Who says Christianity is fair? It is not.

God, the Creator, came and died for us, for His creatures, sinners—is that fair? No, it is not.

[Insert your own illustration.] When we as a family decide to buy something, we often ask: is this what we need or what we want? Mostly, of course, we need, not want. But once in awhile, my beloved son Joshua, struggles with need and want when all his classmates have a certain game console he wants, not needs. And usually I say to him, “Son, get used to it. Life is not fair.”

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What is the result of following Jesus?

- Mathew 4:19; Mark 1:17

“Come, follow me. I will make you fishers of men.”

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- Colossians 4:3-4

“And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.”

We must become fishers of men, disciple-makers.

This is not an easy task.

I learned that the most difficult thing in this life is to change peoples’ minds.

[Insert your own illustration.] As director of North American Division Adventist Community

Services, I could come up with all kinds of plans and programs, but who gets the job done?

People. How do you convince them?

But we really don't have a choice here. Fishers of men, this is who we are.

We are called to transform our community and make a difference in individual lives.

We must bring Kingdom values and principles into this world.

And we ought to live by Kingdom values and principles.

Not just to keep the dos and don'ts, but to understand the deeper meaning of God's will.

Let me ask you, why don't we spend money on Sabbath?

People often answer that question by saying because we spend money during the last six days, so we don't spend money on Sabbath.

If that is your reason, we should not drive and eat on Sabbath. In fact, we should stay home, play dead or have meditation with St. Mattress all day. I know some of you are thinking that is not a bad idea.

We don't spend money on Sabbath because of social justice. When both rich and poor do not spend money on Sabbath, they all become equal in the eyes of society.

We must teach our children Kingdom values and principles; not just lists of dos and don'ts.

When we begin to live by biblical principles, we will truly become the salt and light of this world.

Can you imagine?

- The community in which you live being genuinely thankful for your church?
- City leaders valuing your church's friendship and participation in the community? Even asking for it?
- A large number of your church members actively engaged in and passionate about community services?

Can you imagine?

- The community actually changing because of the impact of your church's involvement?
- Many in your city, formerly cynical and hostile toward Christianity, actually praising God for your church and the positive contributions your members have made in Jesus' name?

1 John 1:1-2

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.”

People need to see to believe.

Touch, taste, smell, hearing and sight are intricately involved.

A friend of mine, who is a rabbi, once said that Christians have understanding of the absolute truth, but have not earned the right to share that truth.

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Do you hear him? We have not earned the right and privilege to share the truth. Because sometimes all we do is talk about the good news, without demonstrating the good news.

We must move our faith from:

Anxiety to committed

Fearful to courageous

Lonely to connected

Needy to fruitful

Confused to focused

Protective to productive

This is why I believe that we are chosen to be part of the remnant movement, moving from preoccupied self-absorption to radical and sacred self-giving.

This is the movement of faith, IN the real world and TO the real world.

Non-Christians are challenging us, by asking:

Are you real? Real Christians?

Let me tell you about the Kids Care ministry in Houston, Texas.

One Sunday in 1980, Mrs. Carol Porter was having a birthday party at a local McDonald's for her nephew. She noticed several children playing around McDonald's big trashcan. She wondered why the children were playing around it, and soon found out that they were not playing at all—they were looking for food. You see, the shocking truth was that on an average day, about 9,000

children in the city of Houston have only one meal per day. This was not a story about children overseas; this was here in the United States.

She was compelled to do something about this problem, but she didn't know where to begin.

She decided to put together a pot of soup and some sandwiches and went to the section of town where people were abandoned, due to socioeconomic and immigration status.

She was not a rich lady, but she was committed to serving the Lord and His people who were in need. And she was consistent—every week she was there to help people.

To make a long story short, her ministry is now supported by several local churches, for-profit organizations, and the public sector. She is sharing over 25,000 meals per month with community support. Her efforts were recognized by the Clinton and Bush administrations and UNICEF.

She is a Seventh-day Adventist. Now she is teaching people how to read, obtain a GED, train for jobs, etc.

The commitment of one person to serving the Lord and the community made a difference in people's lives and the well being of an entire community.

It was not about her ability, but availability.

This is why Jesus commands us,

“Come to me,” in Matt. 11, “Learn of me,” in Matt. 11, “Believe in me,” John 8, “Follow me,” in Luke 9 and “Abide in me,” John 15.

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“Come to me,” especially all who are heavy laden (Matt. 11:28). As people in need, regardless of whether it's physical, social, mental or spiritual, we must come to Jesus in daily devotion. He promises forgiveness, hope and assurance in salvation. We must come to Jesus in daily life, not just once a week, only on Sabbath as systematical and mechanical religious practitioners, but as committed disciples.

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“Learn from me.” Jesus proclaims, “I am meek and lowly in heart and you will find rest unto your souls” (Matt. 11:29).

The command indicates building a relationship between God and His people. Knowing God,

being connected with Him, not just worshipping God out of fear of punishment.

John Milton said, “The end of all learning is to know God and out of that knowledge, we love and imitate Him.” It is to know God, not just know about God and people.

We must learn of Him; not just about Him. Sometimes I feel like we know too much about Him, but don't know Him personally. Do you know Jesus Christ, not just about Him? Are you connected with Him, not just relating to Him? We are not saved by understanding an intellectual concept of dogmatic doctrines, but saved by Jesus Christ, period plus nothing.

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“Believe in Me.” Jesus states on several occasions that He is God (John 14:1; 11; 17:21,etc.) and we must believe that.

People throughout human time continually seek God; however, many end up with their own philosophy of life without finding God the Creator, Redeemer and Judge. It is the duty and responsibility of Christians to bring souls to Christ, and to rejoice in being part of the Kingdom of Heaven.

We must believe that He is our Savior and Lord of life, and must live our lives accordingly. Our belief must influence our behaviors. There are times when we behave like non-Christians, who are not affected by Christian beliefs. If our belief does not influence our behavior, we need to recommit.

Jesus is our Savior and Lord of our lives. We cannot make Him either way we want. God died for us—died for our sins. This is why salvation is not something that we obtain, but retain. We don't achieve salvation.

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“Follow me.” It is the greatest calling over all. It is an honor and privilege to be part of God's mission, His purpose. But sometimes the cost of discipleship is too great to bear, so many leave Jesus to follow his or her will, life ambitions and desires of self-fulfillment.

People come to Jesus willing to accept Him as Savior of their lives, but meet challenges in accepting Him as the Lord of their lives. Self-denial and self-sacrificing love is not as easy as it seems.

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1 John 3:16-19 says, "By this we know love: that Jesus laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our hearts before him."

By following Jesus we know whom we belong to and whose we are.

We must follow Jesus. If we say there is no God:

1. There is no absolute moral code
2. Nothing has absolute meaning or value
3. No right and wrong
4. Death is the great reality
5. We do not have hope, love, mercy, etc.

We will live to just maximize our pleasure and minimize our pain.

But there is a God. Jesus Christ is the Creator, Redeemer and Judge.

[Insert your own illustration.] I was baptized in 1991. While I was growing up, my mother's side of the family was Buddhist and my father's side was Roman Catholic. Religion was philosophy for me, not something that you die for, no salvation issue.

God led me to an Indian man who was an Adventist. He began to share Ellen G. White's writings and my wife and I decided to read the Bible to compare her writings. During four years of searching Scripture and much prayer, we became convinced that men did not write the Bible.

You see, men cannot write the Bible: we are too selfish, self-centered. There is no way we could write about this unconditional love, mercy and grace.

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"Abide in me." As God lives in us by the Holy Spirit, we must live in Him. As God the Creator He is above us, as God the Redeemer He is with us as Immanuel, and as God the Judge He is in us as the Holy Spirit.

We must abide in Jesus Christ. We are not talking about resting in Him or having Sabbath afternoon lay-activities. We must keep steadfast love for God, in spite of all the challenges in life

and influencing factors of this world.

I pray every day that God will protect me from temptation and deliver me from evil. We must focus on Jesus, every single moment of our lives.

When we obey these commands, the church will become a lighthouse, instead of being a social house or refugee shelter.

The true church is where people feel genuine love, caring and healing.

The true church is where disciple-making is the central work of the Christian.

The work of the true church is bringing men and women to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, helping people grow in His knowledge and likeness.

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This is our mission. Our duty.

This is why Christ's ministry is the heartbeat of Christianity.

Without this mission, Christianity is nothing but heathenism.

Church without a mission is nothing but a social house, social gatherings.

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A true church is what the Apostle Paul calls "the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12).

Are you a disciple?

A disciple with total dedication, total commitment and total obedience.

Let me tell you about some individuals who influenced me.

Florence Nightingale once wrote in her diary: "I am thirty years of age, the age at which Christ began His mission. Now, no more childish things, no more vain things."

Years later, near the end of her heroic life of service, she was asked the secret of her ability to accomplish so much for the Lord. She replied, "I can give only one explanation, and that is this: I have kept nothing back from God."

That is exactly what Jesus is talking about in this passage—keeping nothing back from Him.

When the famous surgeon Howard A. Kelly graduated from medical school he wrote in his diary:

"Today I dedicate myself, my time, my capabilities, my ambition, everything to Him. Blessed Lord, sanctify me to Your uses; give me no worldly success which may not lead me nearer to my

Savior.”

Through holistic ministry, we could give people new hope, motivation, dignity and self-esteem.

Outreach ministry through social services could heal the scars from past negative experiences and relationships.

Therefore we need to pray for God’s intervention in the holistic ministry that we are planning for our community. By listening to God’s guidance, listening to the challenges of the people in our community, and looking for an opportunity to serve and connect, we will truly experience the genuine fellowship of the Kingdom of God.

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Closing prayer