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Sharing Space Audio.mp3

DATE

March 1, 2022

DURATION

34m 53s

3 SPEAKERS

Speaker1

Speaker2

Speaker3

START OF TRANSCRIPT

[00:00:00] Speaker1

Andy he wrote that song in the last year. We're so lucky to have such talented musicians, aren't we? Yes. Those for you, while you were busy making sure your guitar was OK. I know I'll keep an eye on it. Well, gosh, it is good to see you all. It feels like pieces of my heart are back in the right place when it's not just the ten of us or 12 of us who love each other, but we're getting a little tired of having Julie light the chalice every week. So. So this is actually the final Sunday in our winter message series. Spring is coming. This is yes, let's cheer for all good things today. Right, spring. But this is the final Sunday of winter of our winter message series neighbors and helpers. And I personally, I've loved this series. I've actually heard from a lot of you that you've enjoyed it as well. So if you hated it, speak up and let me know, because right now I'm thinking that we might make this something of a regular practice. Maybe once a year, maybe every other year that will continue to invite some outside voices to speak to our congregation, to share our pulpit and talk with our neighbors about their experiences living right here in this local community that we share. I hope that building these connections helps weave a stronger net between our spiritual community and the various communities that are around us, that we can all be better neighbors and helpers to each other.

[00:01:48] Speaker1

Hopefully, our trash cans don't catch on fire, but for anything that any of us might need whenever we need support in the years ahead. And, you know, one of our intentions for this message series all the way back in the summer, which does feel like a long time ago of 2021, when our lay leaders and our ministers, as we do every summer, we got together to dream up our plans for worship for the coming year. And one of our intentions, as we thought about the connections we could make in this series was also to consider our responsibility to each other as neighbors. What does it mean to look around at our world? And realize that we do have the power to do something on behalf of someone else, to support someone else. What do we do with that power? And how do we use it well and responsibly? I believe, personally, that everyone holds some kind of power. And yet power is a touchy subject for many of us because, well, it's powerful, it can make things happen and it can be dangerous. Think about that third rail on a subway track. If you've ever been in the city, seen a subway station, there's a sign with a big electric lightning bolt on it that says, Don't touch, stay away. It's a metaphor for those big, powerful subjects that come up in our politics, the third rail, right, the third rail, the powered rail literally moves things forward. But you don't want to approach it without understanding how it works.

[00:03:41] Speaker1

Power can be scary. And power can be dangerous. And right now in our world, we see big. Terrifying, sad examples of that. We see it on our TV screens, on our phones. On our social media feeds from halfway across the world in Ukraine. We see how when people hoard power. When people use their power, their God given power to dominate, others to control. To take more and more and more and more. We see that that kind of power destroys lives. Literally. It destroys whole communities, it destroys whole peoples. Power can be used to hurt and harm. And that can happen to anyone, it can be used to hurt anybody. We know that this is true. And yet we also know that there are patterns. And those patterns only get more clear when we have the courage to be curious, to look around at the world, to ask around to our neighbors. We know that there are people and communities and circumstances that mainstream America, whatever that is, does not want to see and recognize. We know that there are systems of power that we can fall into without realizing it. And that if we're not paying attention, sometimes we can end up on the wrong side of history or at least on the side, that doesn't really match our values. So this question came up as we planned this message series about power. About what it means to hold it responsibly, not to hoard it, not to control with it, and also not to disavow it and pretend we don't have it, but rather to share.

[00:05:53] Speaker1

To share power within our communities, to hold power in partnership. To ally with each other and to leverage the privilege that we have, the power that we have to pour into places that need support in any given moment. You know, this concept of recognizing our privilege has come up in nearly every one of our conversations with these community partners this winter, whether privilege for you looks like racial privilege or gender privilege or socioeconomic privilege. It comes up over and over, not because it's some PC buzzword, but because privilege is a form of power. Privilege is a form of power that we can lend. To others and share and use for good. If we have privilege, we can use it to heal and to try to make things right where they've gone wrong. Knowing our neighbors, knowing people who have different experiences in life than we do. Asking questions about how things work in our society and why. Taking an honest look at who we are connected to and disconnected from and why. It all helps us use the power that we have for good. It all helps us share our space. Well. And treat each other well and resist the temptation that we see how dangerous it can be, the temptation to turn each other into enemies or obstacles or ghosts. Right, people, we don't see at all. Knowing our neighbors may seem like a small place to start in a world with enormous problems.

[00:07:51] Speaker1

But knowing our neighbors has to come before loving our neighbors. And loving our neighbors truly does lay the foundation for peace. And so we're going to connect. With two local communities today. The second is the one that we planned originally, which I will tell you about in a moment. But the first is the Saints, Peter and Paul, Ukrainian Catholic Church. They are the closest Ukrainian community center to us, they're just down the road about 15 minutes that way. On the north side of Phoenixville. And they hold two two services, they hold mass twice each weekend, one on Saturdays in English and one on Sunday mornings in Ukrainian. So you know who's in charge in that church? So the Ukrainian speakers, we have never met them before. But after a week like this one, I have a feeling. That they are scared. That they may have loved ones, family and friends. Who they are terrified for their safety. But even if they don't have a personal connection, a relationship to someone in Ukraine. That it is their land and their home. I'm going to make a modest donation today from our Minister's Assistance Fund to an international aid organization in the name of Saints Peter and Paul Ukrainian Catholic Church. And we'll deliver a bouquet of sunflowers to their community this afternoon along with a card. That I'll put outside by the coffee table for any of you who wish to sign it after the service.

[00:09:48] Speaker1

It's just one small way. Of letting our neighbors know that we see them and that we care. The second community that we will connect with today. Is the one that we already planned. A community that also represents a sometimes touchy subject. The subject of poverty and economic inequality. Now, many of you know, I've heard many of you say, you know, the statistic that Chester County ranks on average as the wealthiest county in our state. But averages are tricky things. High numbers pull up low numbers. The minimum wage in Chester County is still \$7 and 25 cents an hour, just like it is across our whole state. And economic inequality is a significant problem right here in towns and in neighborhoods all around us. So for our final message in this series, I'm going to share with you a conversation I had earlier this week with a woman named Cathy Farrell. Cathy is a case manager at St Mary's Franciscan Franciscan Shelter for Homeless Families. This is a shelter that WellSprings has partnered with for years now, and we will again next month to provide a week of meals for the families that they support who live at the shelter. And as we think about the power we all have and the power we can all share, let's remember that there are opportunities always all around us. I'll ask Chris to play the clip, and I'll invite you to listen in on a bit of our conversation now.

[00:11:35] Speaker2

Well, Cathy, thank you so much for joining us. I really appreciate you taking the time to talk to our congregation as part of this series. You know, we're starting every conversation I have with one of our guests. I'm starting by asking a little bit about how you became our neighbor. The series is called Neighbors and Helpers. So I'm curious just to hear a little bit about you to start. Are you from this area originally? And then what made you want to join the organization you do and do the work you do now?

[00:12:01] Speaker3

I actually grew up in Delaware County. I lived a large chunk of my adult life in Chester County, and now I live in Philadelphia. I've tried. I'm trying all the counties, apparently. I was raised Catholic. And part of me has always liked helping others. So in my adult life, I've had many career changes. My last career was I was a teacher. I got my teaching degree with 11 children and I decided to go out on my own and tutor and I was doing that and that freed me up to do some volunteering. So I volunteered with Home of the Sparrow, which is another nonprofit, if you're familiar with them.

[00:12:43] Speaker2

Do they serve primarily families, experienced domestic violence, or is that this part of?

[00:12:48] Speaker3

That's part of it. They also women. One of the big programs is that women reentering society after prison, and they also work with older. It's all women working with women who are having trouble staying in their own place. They have a program where they put women together and they can share a place, and they also have eviction prevention. So it really got a love of working with people there and decided to make a career of it. So that is when I joined over here at St. Mary's.

[00:13:27] Speaker2

And you look ahead.

[00:13:28] Speaker3

Now go ahead.

[00:13:30] Speaker2

You said you live in Philadelphia now.

[00:13:32] Speaker3

Oh, Roxboro. Yeah. Oh, OK. I'll say forty five minutes, but I start early and leave early to accommodate the traffic getting back and forth to Roxbury.

[00:13:45] Speaker2

Up until last year, I actually lived in South Philadelphia, and so, you know, I do. I do the Schuylkill Expressway as our friends and our enemy. Yeah, no. When you were a teacher, were you teaching in Delaware County, Chester County, Philly? Different places.

[00:14:02] Speaker3

I was teaching throughout Chester County. I had I held several long time. I didn't get my teaching degree until I was about thirty five or thirty six and I was doing long term substitutes, but I found that I really enjoyed working one on one. I have a reading specialist certification and was working more and more with one on one with kids, and I really decided I like that one on one, and that's when I went out on my own to run my own tutoring business. So I did that for ten years and I was still doing that here when I was part time. Now I am full time, so I have shelved my tutoring for the time being and focus just on this job.

[00:14:41] Speaker2

Yeah. So the shelter where you work focuses on on families. It's a family shelter. So I imagine you still get some of that one on one work with kids and with young people.

[00:14:51] Speaker3

Yeah, it's it's all families here. You have to be a family and that the family could be any composition of a family. We have largely it's women and children, but we've had men with children. We have both parents with children, we've had grandmothers with children. It's whatever the composition happens to be because we know in this modern day and age the composition of the family is not your traditional nineteen fifties.

[00:15:16] Speaker2

Let's say I always leave it to beaver. Yeah, yeah,

[00:15:21] Speaker3

Absolutely no pearls or anything like that. So every everybody is in the same situation in that they're all homeless, but everybody's in particular situation is very, very different for the families who come here. And but the only thing that they're all looking for is housing in the long run.

[00:15:42] Speaker2

Yeah. Well, and that was a little bit of my next question was just that. I'm curious to hear a little bit about the families you serve at St. Mary's and if there were common threads in their stories about how they came to need housing. But it sounds like you feel like there aren't so many common threads, except that they need housing, that people are coming from all different circumstances and situations.

[00:16:03] Speaker3

Yeah, I mean, we have some women who a lot of them are leaving bad relationships, unfortunately, and it doesn't mean I mean, a lot of times when we talk about domestic violence, we think just physical abuse. But women are leaving for many, many reasons these days along with, you know, mental abuse, verbal abuse. And some of them reach the point, especially when they have babies. We have quite a few women who come through with babies and they have to leave that horrible situation. So this is kind of like a haven for them then with the pandemic. A lot of things changed in that way in that we have people who just couldn't afford to stay in their places, so we have

[00:16:47] Speaker2

A job loss or losing ours.

[00:16:50] Speaker3

All those things, and especially at the very beginning, that has kind of waned a little bit. But for instance, we had a couple who the guy had a great job. The woman was looking working on her nursing degree. And when the pandemic hit, that was it. They couldn't afford nursing anymore, and he lost his job. So everybody's different in how they arrive. But like I said, in the end, everybody's just hoping to move forward and hopefully be housed when they leave our program.

[00:17:20] Speaker2

Yeah, I saw on your website, I think it referenced eight weeks and I wasn't sure if that's like a standard. Is that how long housing services are available in general and why that number?

[00:17:32] Speaker3

No, although we're affiliated with the county. Ours is a private program, and many programs do only allow you to stay eight to 12 weeks, which is what ours is. Now, that's not hard on the firm because if somebody would get into the housing programs in Chester County, there's two main housing programs. There's rapid rehousing and they're Section eight housing. If you get put into that while you're here and you're trying to find a place sister role, allow you to stay while you're working through the ins and outs of finding a place. And it's very, very difficult. Probably since the pandemic started to even find houses, people are not renting to lower socio economic people. People don't want to work with the county. There's just so few places and prices have just continued to rise and rise and rise. So, yeah, it's been very difficult for people.

[00:18:29] Speaker2

Yeah. A couple of years back, I had a conversation just privately with I can't remember her last name, Kelly, who runs Open Hearth, which is another social magazine.

[00:18:39] Speaker3

Yes.

[00:18:41] Speaker2

And I would. I was surprised when I was just out of college. I lived in Washington, D.C., and I worked at an agency where we would hear all the time about the long waiting list for Section eight, for the housing vouchers. And so I assumed that was where the rubber met the road and Chester County. And Kelly said, It's really landlords. It's really, unfortunately, it's discrimination. You know, it's the landlords don't want to rent to people who have a housing voucher, even though it's guaranteed payment. You know what a housing voucher represents is that the county is paying most of your rent, right? But yeah, she she mentioned that then you know, she she said, if anybody in your congregation as a landlord owns a place that they rent, please encourage them to look into taking housing vouchers because that's that's where the rubber meets the road here generally.

[00:19:26] Speaker3

Absolutely. And nobody wants housing built in their neighborhood. It's it's not. It's not in my neighborhood type of thing. So it's very difficult. It's very, very difficult. And for Lake Neighborhood in phoenixville at one time, which was boarded up windows and things like that before, you know, gentrified again, the prices then were so inexpensive. St. Mary's has been in business for thirty five years. I think now they always were able to find housing until the gentrification, and now prices have just skyrocketed. And it's, I will almost say the word impossible to get a apartment of any kind for any of our people in phoenixville and the surrounding areas,

[00:20:12] Speaker2

Which is where you're located, right?

[00:20:14] Speaker3

Yet we're right in the center of of phoenixville.

[00:20:18] Speaker2

Well, when when the families that stay with you are able to find secure housing, what does that pathway out of homelessness typically look like for them? How does that how does that usually happen?

[00:20:29] Speaker3

Well, they try to do several. We have, we call it a program here. They have several things that they're supposed to be doing while they're here achieving finding a job. If they don't have their benefits, we help them get their benefits in place, getting their kids into school, daycare, whatever the case may be, getting all those things almost like getting your ducks in a row. And then hopefully once they do get housing, which takes, it's not like they come in and they're put on a housing list. It takes several weeks. We are working with many, many nonprofits as well as the county, and we have to make sure that things are kind of lined up for them because the idea is for them to be successful. The Rapid Rehousing Program is when you're picked up in the Rapid Rehousing Program, you get a referral and then a locator works with you and the resident here, and the locator and myself are looking for housing the way that program is. Once you find a place, they set you up and they pay approximately 70 percent. You pay the first, third and the other 30 and they help you get in there. Then, over six months to a year, they start to pull back. And the idea is for you to be independent. You're also receiving case management services, going through their checking in on you, making sure the last thing they want you to do is get the end of that period and fail. So the idea is for you to get more independent each and every month, and that's why it's critical that they find some kind of a job and get their kids into whatever schooling that they need.

[00:22:04] Speaker2

You know, I think sometimes I know that when I have talked to folks throughout my life, like I said in my previous work experience and also in my congregation, I think everyone obviously wants to end homelessness once there to be an end to poverty. And there is this sense, though, of resignation or hopelessness about it. I think a lot of people have a have a feeling that somehow the problem is too big, that it's totally unsolvable. So I'm curious as somebody who works directly with families, as somebody who's been in different parts of the social service sector, it sounds like too. Do you think homelessness is a solvable problem? Let's just say even in Chester County and and where do you think we need to start if we want to solve it?

[00:22:47] Speaker3

Well, the housing crunch is probably the number one thing. There needs to be more housing available, lower priced housing available, but when I say that I'm not talking about some of the things that some of the people who come from us leave roach infested, rodent infested, horrible low income housing. So there has to be this physical building zoo's physical places that are there for our families. And I don't mean just here. I mean, in general, I will say Chester County does a fantastic job of working with their people. I work with other counties to and they don't have a lot of the people coming together like Chester County does. And this county works very hard to get people off the street and into something into some kind of housing, no matter whether it's a shelter or whatever the case may be the pandemic. They started putting people in hotels just for safety reasons, and they're still in there. We still have between that and that's the big flood that we had.

[00:23:54] Speaker2

Ida Yeah, I just got an email about that this morning from Chester County partnership to end homelessness, saying that there's still 30 families or something like that in hotels because of IDA. Yeah, yeah.

[00:24:03] Speaker3

So there's there's approximately, I think, 50 families in hotels right now between IDA and lack of housing and, you know, people rotate in and out. I would love to say that I'm very hopeful that housing could be resolved, but I'm not sure because a lot of people see people who are homeless and look at them like they're for lack of a better word, lepers instead of people who have hit hard times. Many people are one paycheck away from losing their housing. And I think people forget about that. So I'm hopeful. But I don't know that there is a resolve to this because in our country in general, I don't know that enough people care to make that solution like something that they can work toward. There are a lot of really, really dedicated people who want to solve it. And again, Chester County, in my opinion, does a great job and they do the best they can. But there's just so many people out there who are struggling and people who are hungry and just it's it's horrific, really, and it's just not fair that anybody in this country would be living the way that are a lot of people have to.

[00:25:22] Speaker2

Not at all. Not when we have so much, when some people have so much.

[00:25:25] Speaker3

Right, right. It's so uneven right now.

[00:25:29] Speaker2

Yeah. Well, I appreciate I appreciate you sharing this with us, Cathy, because that is, I think, part of part of what we're hoping to do with this message series and part of what our community is hoping to do in general. I have talked a lot in this series about how if we don't know somebody who experiences a particular issue, we tend to think of it as an issue. It's something we see on the news. It's something we debate about what's the right policy, which politician do we like and their views on it? But all of these issues affect our neighbors. There are people that live in our area and there are people without any sharing anything confidential. There are people in our congregation who've been close to losing their homes, who we've been able to support with our emergency fund to pay their rent for a month or two. And sometimes that's all people need. There's a, you know, there's a job loss or there's a crisis issue and they just need a couple of months of support. And so this is this is an issue that affects people that we know even if we may not recognize it because there can be so much stigma around it. Like you said, people don't want to walk around saying, I'm afraid I'm going to lose my house or I'm afraid I'm going to lose my apartment, so.

[00:26:32] Speaker3

Right? And you know, and then the hunger issue to people will put the money to keep the place because they want their family off the street, then their children are going hungry. So it's such a complicated thing. But when people like you and your congregation are interested in asking the questions and want to be involved in some way, that helps so much. And we have so many churches that support this particular, our shelter, particularly, I know they help other ones, but I don't even know how many churches because there's such a huge amount of them. And it's because people like your congregation who are interested and want to know and say, Hey, what can we do to help? You know, so that's a wonderful thing.

[00:27:18] Speaker2

Yeah. Well, I know we're actually signed up to provide the meals for your families. I think the first week of March. So anybody in our congregation?

[00:27:25] Speaker3

That's a wonderful thing. It really is so helpful, right?

[00:27:28] Speaker2

Yeah. Anybody who wants to cook or if you're like me and you hate cooking, I signed up last time around and I bought the bread and I bought the snacks for the kids for school. So that's just an extra trip to Wegmans. That's pretty easy.

[00:27:39] Speaker3

So I'm not much of a cook, but you know, if there's a night that something's missing, I'll put something in the crock pot. Yeah, I can do that.

[00:27:49] Speaker2

Mac and cheese is my favorite thing to cook from a box, unfortunately. I love that. Oh, Cathy, is there? Is there anything else that we didn't talk about that you'd like our congregation to know, especially about, about the whole topic, but also about how we can support our neighbors who are experiencing homelessness?

[00:28:10] Speaker3

Well, I guess I would like to say coming from the heart, if you see someone and you think that they are in some kind of trouble, whether it be financially or they look hungry or their children are looking disheveled, reach out in a friendly manner and say, What can I do to help you? And I know that's not always easy. I mean, I can't say that I've done it every single time that I should have but reach out. And if you have the dime or the the box of juice boxes to spare, donate. Give your time, give your money, give whatever you can. Because that's what makes it go round when people want to be involved and help their neighbor the best way they can. And I think there's a lot of that missing in the world today, sadly. So I just I love when people can come together and help one another. That's that's like my greatest joy, especially when it involves children, because they're the ones who actually suffer the most in these situations. Yeah.

[00:29:15] Speaker2

Thank you for that, Cathy. Thank you for taking the time to talk to us.

[00:29:18] Speaker3

I've enjoyed it and I'm glad that you reached out. I'd love to be able to talk to people and tell them what our mission is and where we're going with everything.

[00:29:28] Speaker2

Well, Cathy, thank you.

[00:29:34] Speaker1

Some of you might know the name father, Gregory Boyle. He's a well-known Catholic priest. He's the founder of the world's largest gang rehabilitation program called Homeboy Industries. And he gave an interview back in 2016. Where he talked about the pressure that people of good faith feel knowing that there is suffering in the world, the pressure that we feel to save the world. And he says, you know, we get that all wrong. Because saving the world is impossible for any of us. By its nature, it's completely overwhelming. And it leads to nothing, he says, but a hernia. That's the word he used. It leads to burnout and guilt and hopelessness, which eventually means throwing up our hands right and giving up. But Father Boyle says when we savor the world. When we savor the whole world, even the parts that are confusing or that we don't understand. When we savor the whole world. We generate love. We find that love is generated inside of us. Maybe loving our neighbors is at the core of every major religion for a reason. Maybe loving our neighbors is truly the key to making these big, hard changes that we're going to need to make if we care because they are big and complex and scary and risky changes.

[00:31:20] Speaker1

But then again, what wouldn't we do for someone we love? Father Boyle says I talk for that reason a lot about kinship. He says I say no kinship, no peace, no kinship, no justice, no kinship, no equality, we've become focused, he says, on peace and justice and equality. When the truth is, none of those things can happen unless there is some undergirding sense that we belong to each other. That we belong to each other. And he says the good news is if we focus on kinship. The byproduct will be peace. And justice and equality. In the end, Father Boyle says all mature spirituality is about tenderness. That's the mark of a mature spirituality, because tenderness and love is the connective tissue. That's the only thing that joins us together. And so, friends, wherever you are, if you're here blessedly in this room or if you're joining us from somewhere far away today, I hope you feel our sense of kinship. Our sense that we know and belong to each other. And I hope that you will continue to feel in these days ahead, that might be scary. That might be overwhelming. I hope you feel at the same time the sense of joy that comes from savoring.

[00:33:09] Speaker1

All of the gifts. Of our whole human family. Amen to all of us. And may we all live in blessing. When I invite the band to come up and all of you to join me, if you will, in the spirit of prayer. God of our hearts, own language. Presence that gave us this life. Presence that is with us. Even in the moments when we feel alone and scared. We pray this morning for safety for all people. We pray for the miracle of hearts that turn to tenderness. We pray for the miracle of soldiers who look in the eyes of citizens and see human beings. We pray for the miracle of strength of people who resist orders to do horrible things. And we pray for the strength closer to home to take an honest look around us. To see the humans in our human family right nearby. And to take comfort in our kinship connections. To remember how beloved each one of us is. And to remember that that beloved us always includes us as well. For the prayers, I've spoken out loud and for the prayers that all of us are carrying on our hearts this morning, we say amen.

END OF TRANSCRIPT



