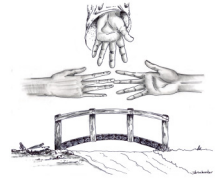
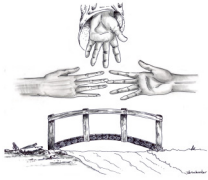


# Cross Over the Bridge

## The Privilege of Service



The story goes that when Bill W. was newly sober and struggling, he found that he could stay straight only by telling as many "other drunks" as he could find that alcoholism is an illness, and that recovery is possible with the help of a Higher Power. Bill had no luck in persuading person after person of his message, but at least he was still straight. It began to dawn on him that maybe God was using this service work to help him, not them. Still, he sure wished that someone would get on board with him. That's when he met Dr. Bob, hopeless drunken doctor, and, as it turned out, co-founder with Bill of AA. In a long list of reluctant prospects, Bob was the worst yet. After Bill told him his story, Bob thanked him politely and said something like, "I sure appreciate your time, but I'm afraid a lot of people have tried to help me, and none of them have succeeded. I'm a hopeless case. I don't even really want help. But good luck to you, anyhow." Bill looked surprised, then laughed. "Sorry if I gave the impression I'm here to help you. This is for me. You're keeping me sober today!" The rest, as they say, is history.

It took me longer to understand this than it did Bill, but over the years I've had to admit that when God nudges me to help someone, and I make the effort, I get at least as much as I give. I may go in thinking that the great me will help you, and you'll be so grateful, but I will come out grateful to you, for teaching and energizing me. Along the way I've learned some painful but helpful lessons. Lessons like, no, you are not called on to do everything. No, not everyone is going to like the idea of being helped, and we aren't ready till we're ready. No, you will not always feel thrilled to be serving, it's not always fun and easy. Yes, there is such a thing as trying to do too much, and sometimes you can be most helpful by hiding out, regrouping, and helping yourself for a while. And yes, as often as not, you are the one who needs the help! And when you need, you should ask! And, it's not about forwarding my agenda. I don't know about you, but not one of my most happy and satisfying times of service have been my idea. When I had a chance to support the recovering community in a treatment setting, and join in recovery myself, it was Joe's, Connie's, and Brad's idea. Helping start and sustain cancer support groups was immensely satisfying, and it was Mary's idea. When I'm having fun helping clean up and fix up God's house, I'm glad Bob had the idea to ask me to join the Helping Hands group. The excellent experience of getting to know confirmation kids was Jim's idea. Being included in the new Bringers of Hope visitation ministry was Dale's idea.

One thing that tells me our church is healthy and growing in the Spirit is the support and encouragement from our staff for us members doing service. Right now all of us are helping Pastor Rod by giving him a sabbatical. So, we are helping ourselves by helping a leader who helps all of us! It will be neat to see how God makes this work together for good when Rod returns. Pastor Karen has, and will be given, the wisdom and strength to meet the challenge. Folks have stepped up to help with the visitation ministry while Rod is away, and that help flows both ways, too. I've always known that a lot of informal caring and support happen in our church community, and yet the Bringers of Hope program has already given me a window to see this even more clearly. It's amazing.

As I write, I'm seeing a memory snapshot of last week, during Vacation Bible School. It's a picture of little kids in the hallway, changing classrooms, holding hands with bigger kids, middle school big sister and brother volunteers. Chatting as they walk along together. In particular, one little guy, looking up into the eyes of the older brother whose hand he is holding, as they walk along. I was the oldest kid there, and yet suddenly I felt very young. It's like Jesus says. We are all God's kids together, and we are all better when we love and help and show kindness to one another.

If you or someone you know needs help to cross over the bridge, contact the pastors.