

# Focus on Faith: 'Where is your church?'

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A number of years ago, a salesman dropped by our church office to sell advertising. To make his pitch, he told us how he had walked up and down State Street, stopping in many of the shops to ask, "Can you tell me where First Presbyterian Church is located?"

"It's stunning how most of the shop owners have no idea," he told us.

We bought his product.

It was a yearly program of direct mail that delivered postcards to homes within our zip code. After twelve months of seeing no noticeable increase in visitors, we canceled the program.

Yet the issue persisted: where is First Presbyterian Church located?

Geographically, this has been an identity issue ever since our founders sold their first plot of land to the Roman Catholics and moved a block up the hill to the current position. A church building loses its public visibility when it moves off the beaten path.

In recent years, the Presbyterians have identified ourselves as "The Church on the Hill." That's where we are, after all: just above Our Lady of the Snows on the corner of School Street and Stone Avenue.

As I say to my good friend Monsignor Quinn, "We keep a watchful eye on all of you." He replies, "And in turn, we look up to you!"

All joking aside, in a very real sense our Presbyterian congregation knows exactly where we are: we are a church in this community, with a dedication to make this town as strong as it can be. We are committed to work for the well being of all its citizens, whether they are Christians or not.

This vision motivates our mission. Our Presbyterian family claims the reformer John Calvin (1509-1564) as a founding saint. A trained attorney and able theologian, Calvin was also a strong advocate for public health, pressing for effective hospitals and the first sanitary sewer system in Geneva, Switzerland. He believed religious faith must serve the public welfare, and not be a retreat from the challenges of this world.

I am proud to serve a congregation that believes the same thing. Folks in our flock provide meals for the homeless in Scranton and offer assistance to new immigrants to our nation. They offer compassionate support for those in the middle of life's transitions. When The Gathering Place was beginning, we were honored to provide space for community classes before the organization found a home of its own. Many people also know about our free community concert series which begins its eighteenth season this fall.

It's all part of the same mission: to serve God by serving our neighbors.

And on the weekend of Sept. 23, we will deploy our members around the village to do a multitude of hands-on service projects. This is the third consecutive year our congregation will hold a "Worship Through Service" weekend. You may see us around town in bright yellow T-shirts as we spruce up public playgrounds, landscape the Abington Community Library, make quilts for the homeless or lead music therapy for the residents of St. Joseph's Center. These are just a few of our projects. If you have suggestions for others, let us know.

This annual program stretches us. It pushes us beyond the comfortable walls of a sanctuary and into the world God loves. By serving and striving to make a positive difference, we find our hearts enlarged – and we form a deeper connection to our neighbors.

We would love to have anybody join us in this weekend of service, whether you're part of a church or not. In particular, we offer a special invitation for the religious communities in our area to roll up their sleeves and join us in this work.

Where is the Church on the Hill? Right here, doing what it can to make a difference in the community.