

## **NEWS FROM LYNNE PABST**

### ***Our Certified Christian Educator and POINT Partner***

#### **Talking About One Another**

Last week I suggested that “We are all God’s Children and One in God’s Image”. I then proposed that the way to teach our children this was to put into practice the understanding that “God created all in God’s image”. Our everyday actions and our everyday language are what our children see and hear. Therefore, we must make certain that the belief, “God created all in God’s image”, is embodied by everything we say and do.

For this week, I want to focus on language. When speaking about language the passages from James 1:26 and 3:5 probably come to mind about bridling one’s tongue and how such a small member of the body can have a big impact. Most commonly it is interpreted as -- we should not say harsh words or use harsh tones. But it is more than that. Our tongues through the use of this thing called language create mental images which may not always be in line with God’s image of God’s creation.

Babies are born wired to communicate and develop a language to facilitate communication with those around them. They are not wired to a specific language. They learn the language to which they are exposed. We also know that the first language they learn is the easiest for them to use. As a child ages, it becomes more and more difficult to learn another language. For this reason, it is important that children from an early age are modeled language supporting healthy mental images of people as loved by and created by God. We want their first language to be “God created all in God’s image” because it will be more difficult for them to learn it later on. Two simple practices can support this. The use of person-first speech and person-centered speech. While my examples below are provided in English, person-first and person-centered speech can be applied in any language.

Person-first speech always puts the person first. My husband as a prison chaplain was a pro at this constantly correcting me when I would slip. If I asked, “How were the prisoners today?” He would say “The people in prison were ...” When talking about them, he would say, “The people who made bad choices.” If you simply call them “prisoners”, they are dehumanized and become someone different. If they are people who are in prison or made bad choices, then they still are human just like me and simply live somewhere else or made different choices than I. Well not all children have this close relationship with prisons like mine did, so let us look at some more common illustrations. Instead of saying “I have an African-American friend”, say “a friend who is African-American”. Instead of saying “Geisinger hired a new Asian Doctor”, say “a doctor who is Asian.” Instead of saying “a wheelchair bound child”, say “a child who uses a wheelchair.” Instead of saying “A Mexican Family moved into the house down the street”, say “a family from Mexico”. Putting people first reminds us that they are people and people are made in God’s image.

Person-centered speech shows our love for our neighbor as we love ourselves. Take time to get to know the person and how they identify themselves. Sometimes we make assumptions based on looks and behavior which are not how that person identifies. Probably the simplest one for us to work with is what name do they like to be called. My daughter is “Lynny” to anyone in her birth family, but cringes when anyone outside the family calls her that having identified publicly as “Lynace”. We have probably heard someone say, “Don’t call me Mr. Smith, that was my father.” It might be that that Doctor in the above example does not identify as Asian but identifies more specifically and prefers Korean. Did we take the time to find that out or did we just assume and attempt social correctness? There are many other ways people have identified with certain descriptive language. The only way we can become aware of these preferred descriptors and use appropriate person-centered language is to have conversations with the person and get to know the person. Once that happens a friendship grows. When this happens, it is so much easier to see the image of God in a person and let the image of God in us shine.

I challenge you this week to think about your language. It may be harder for us older folks to change our language but if we immerse our children from birth in “Created in God image” language, they will find it much easier to embody. Therefore, it is well worth the effort and because we too are created in the image of God, we can change our ways.

Here is another book I found which you might find useful:

Fox, M. *Whoever You Are*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1997.

**Blessings and Peace!!!**