



Date: July 19, 2015

Title: "Collaborative Missions"

Scripture: Genesis 18:1-8

A little over a hundred years ago something entered the financial market that revolutionized not only the economy but impacted the lives of everyone. It was called "credit." An early 1900's innovation, credit grew in a way that changed everything. Imagine buying a house or car or a college education without credit!

Within the last ten years, something new has entered the financial market that analysts are predicting will affect our lives in the coming century as much as credit did in the last century. It's called Collaborative Consumption (or "trust economy" or "sharing economy") will affect our lives in the coming century as much as credit did in the last century.

One evening Leah and Kevin were about to feed their dog and then go out to dinner. They discovered they were out of dog food. So they had to stop everything, run out to buy dog food, come back...After dinner they talked about what had happened. "What if we could have quickly hired someone to do that for us?" Think of the last-minute chores that throw your entire event off course. Or think of the time you invest in errands: cleaning the kitchen after a party, doing laundry, driving your kids to soccer practice. They invented "taskrabbit". Launched in 2009, it's based on the idea of neighbors helping neighbors. There are now over 4,000 rabbits in the U.S., with 5,000 on the waiting list. So far, 12,500 loads of laundry have been cleaned and folded. But the number one task they are hired to do is...assemble Ikea products.

Airbnb, Onefinestay, or couchsurfing, match people who have an extra room with people who need a place to stay: in-law-suites, your kid's room who just left for college, vacation homes.

Why would people prefer to stay in someone's spare bedroom or vacation home rather than a guaranteed know-what-you're getting room at the Hilton? Of the 44 percent of U.S. adults who are familiar with the sharing economy, 86 percent say it makes life more affordable, 83 percent say it makes life more convenient and efficient and 78 percent say it builds a stronger community.

So it's often cheaper, for one thing, but that isn't the major attraction. It's the experience. "We arrived at my host's address; she introduced us to her neighbors, took us to the corner pub, pointed out two or three great little restaurants nearby." The

“secret sauce” of the Collaborative or Sharing Economy is using the power of technology to build trust between strangers.

The biggest effect of this will not be financial or economic; the biggest effect will be on trust between strangers. People are no longer consuming to keep up with the Joneses; they’re consuming to get to know the Joneses.

People want to be empowered to make meaningful connections, connections that enable us to re-humanize. It builds a stronger community. The real power is not economic but building of trust.

At Pleasant Hill Church we’ve been doing that for thirty years. When you came to this church, to you everyone here was a stranger. “Is this a safe place?” you wondered. “Are these people who would add to my life or do I need to be on my guard around them?” Cautiously...or recklessly, depending on your style, these strangers became community for you, some of them becoming friends closer than family.

We’ve always known that we can’t keep that trust locked here in the sanctuary. Trusting only the people we know and who think like us turns a church into a members-only gated club. Christ has called us to increase trust throughout the world. At PHPC, when we developed our ministries with outsiders we looked for something more than a project we could support with donations or an issue we could state a position on. We looked for occasions to help people that gave us opportunities to build community with them, to develop trust with them, to have face-to-face experiences together.

It wasn’t a charity thing; it was a neighbor thing, built on relationships. When we built those houses, it wasn’t the design of the kitchen or the material for the roof, it was the family going to live in their first home of their own. When we went to the Gulf Coast after Katrina, we came home with the names of Paul Buisson, Keneth Garner, Efen Samaniego, Pat Byrd and Brother Martin on our lips and their stories in our hearts. When we return from Guatemala and Honduras and the Dominican Republic, the names of people we encountered are now in our prayers.

When we felt God’s call to address homelessness in our suburbs, we invited the families of Rainbow Village and Family Promise here into our church home. Again, it wasn’t charity; it was “collaborative neighboring.” If you’ve been in this church on a weekday afternoon or evening in the past three and a half years, chances are good you’ve run into a homeless child in the Rainbow Village after-school program or that child’s mom taking a class on life-skills or a Family Promise family having dinner during the week this church served as their home. The *issue* of “homelessness” became homeless *people*, and then they became just people, part of the friends we’ve made here at church.

Sometimes they became more than that. As we got to know them, some of them became heroes. Like Gabby, for instance. A group of frightened men (I know they

were frightened, because I was one of them.) volunteered to spend an evening playing with Rainbow Village kids because, well, when does a homeless kid have a chance to let down their guard and just play? And most any child can use a strong adult male as a friend. We got to know Gabby, who was one of those kids.

You'd think those kids would cautiously keep their distance. Not Gabby. If a newcomer was in the room, Gabby would start a conversation. If a game was being played, Gabby was in. She and I were in intense competition in a "Build the Tower" contest. "Terrific move," I admitted as Gabby strategically placed a block on the tower. She looked me straight in the eye and shrugged. "I'm terrific," she explained. And she was absolutely correct. So are her brothers, Jonothan and Jayden, and her sister, Alondra.

I want you to meet Gabby's mother and hear her story: Johanna Reynoso.

Although they are moving into their own community center facility, we will continue our relationship with Rainbow Village. Lynette Ward, the Director of Graduate Program for Rainbow Village wants to speak with you for a moment.

Andy tells about Family Promise.

Most churches have a missions component. At PHPC, we make missions personal, with face-to-face contact with real people. That's Collaborative Consumption, Pleasant Hill style. It's also called "sharing economy" or "trusting economy" — the innovation that will change the next century is a variation of something Pleasant Hill has been doing for thirty years.

Sometimes the atrocities around the world make headlines; often they're buried by Donald Trump announcing for the presidency. The plight of refugees has become a world crisis. Could Pleasant Hill Church respond in a collaborative way?

Three years ago, several church leaders met to consider sponsorship of a refugee family here in Duluth. Leaders of PHPC sprang into action. "We can do that!" exclaimed Dave Huffman and a team of others.

It took a lot of trust because we had a lot of questions: If we sponsor a refugee family, what if they can't find employment? Or are not all that interested in working? How will they find transportation? What if they become financially dependent on us, and need us permanently? "We'll figure it out," said Dave and the team. "Let's do this!"

So we did, providing an apartment, fully furnished. Watching the children's knees almost buckle when they saw their first bedroom, hearing the mother gasp when we turned on the light of their new kitchen. We shepherded them through medical exams, acquiring Social Security Cards, finding the adults jobs and enrolling the kids in school finding them a car, then most courageous of all — teaching them to drive it!

It worked. The driver's ed. volunteers reported an amazing effect on their prayer lives. And the families became self-supporting. So the team approached our session, "Can we do it again?" And they did. A second refugee family.

By now they've done this so often, the session said to stop asking permission, just go ahead. Six months ago we thought it would be cool on our 30th anniversary to have sponsored 30 refugees. We almost hit that number exactly, except ____ and ____ gave birth this summer, pushing our total to 32.

To us, refugees are not just a world-wide problem. They're people, people God calls our neighbors, and 32 of them have become our neighbors...and our friends. I'd like for Dave Huffman to introduce them.

Dave: "They are: names. They all live in the Proctor Square Apartments except for that first family, the Lan's, who are proud owners of a new home. (show picture).

BTW, I look forward to introducing our next refugee family, who are expected to arrive in another month or so.

Intro David Lian or alternative.

What we're doing here at Pleasant Hill Church is more than just church work among the poor; it's a new kind of ministry. It invites meaningful relationships with neighbors. It builds trust among strangers. It empowers ordinary people like us to do extraordinary good things. It multiplies the love of God in our world.

This ad for Airbnb wants you to book a room in someone's home instead of a hotel next time you travel. I believe it expresses God's invitation to you. For Christ's sake, engage with a stranger in an offer of trust. Meaningful, trusting interaction with strangers is not a spectator sport. If you want a better world, you have to be engaged. God's army for peace and goodness is an all-volunteer army.

"Is man kind? Are we good? Go see. Go to their windows so you can understand their views. Sit at a table so you can share their taste. Sleep in their beds so you may know their dreams. Go see. And find out just how kind the he's and she's of this mankind are."