

How many of you have seen an orange car this week?

Does anyone *have* an orange car?

I know orange cars have the least depreciation of any color of car...
but it seems we aren't seeing very many orange cars.

I'll come back to that later...

Our reading today is from the Letter of Paul to the First Corinthians. Corinth was the capital of the Roman province of Achaia, a center of commerce and shipping. Paul characterized the Gentile Corinthian believers as having been devoted to idols. The city had two dozen temples, altars and shrines.¹ His companion, Sosthenes, may have been the Jewish synagogue official mentioned in Acts 18.

First Corinthians isn't Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth - another one is presumed lost. Paul has known the Corinthians for about 3 years when he writes this - from Ephesus. Paul writes because he has received reports about divisions between the Corinthian believers, and that other letter.

Our text is actually a detail-packed opening to this entire letter. The address, or salutation in verses 1-3 is Paul's typical salutation - Person A, person B, and greeting. So here we have: *Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours;* ending with greeting, Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ - and this is the same formulaic closing Paul uses for every salutation in his letters.²

Verses 4-9 make up the Thanksgiving, the part of Paul's letters that introduces the themes for the letter. A thanksgiving is also a prayer - but this one is different. Often Paul gives thanks for the love, faith and support of the community to which he writes. Here, he gives thanks to God for the grace and gifts God has given the Corinthians.

¹ Walter J. Harrelson and Donald Senior, eds., *The New Interpreter's Study Bible*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003, p. 2035.

² *Ibid*, p. 2036.

Specifically, he mentions the gifts of speech and knowledge, which have apparently contributed to their division. The Corinthian church is a mess – with many disagreements about the Lord’s Supper and much more. But, Paul focuses instead on the fact that they are called by God and have everything they need.³

For Paul, being in fellowship – in Christ and with others - implies “social interaction and participation as a believer.”⁴ The Christian life means living in community, and using those gifts to call others to know God’s love and grace.

This word speaks to us, today. We are called to use our gifts to get the word out in our community – to call people to be a part of a community of faith, to worship and do good in many ways.

We “get the word out” within the church with our weekly eNews, monthly Messenger newsletter and worship announcements. We also reach out into the Geneva area.

We reach out for several reasons:

- We reach out to educate and inform people about the church - the who, what, when, where and why of what’s going on.
- We reach out to invite people to be involved in worship and in service.
- And we reach out to build up or increase people’s faith.

It’s important for each of you to know about our other forms of communication, so you are knowledgeable when you talk to people about the church. So, here’s a rundown on how we reach out:

- 1) **Newspapers:** I send press releases to and design newspaper ads for the *Daily Herald* and the *Kane County Chronicle* at Christmas and Easter. Sometimes they publish those press releases as stories.
- 2) **Facebook:** In addition to our Facebook page, I used two different kinds of Facebook ads in 2019: I bought ads to boost certain posts, and we also had large colorful Facebook ads that were free with our postcards at Easter and Christmas.
- 3) **Postcards:** Postcards go out to Geneva area residents at Easter, Christmas, and in the fall. You may have received one last December. I also use postcards to invite people back, by sending them home at Easter and Christmas services.

³ *Sermon Brainwave* podcast #703, Jan. 11, 2020.

⁴ *The New Interpreter’s Bible, One Volume Commentary*, p. 789.

4) **UMCG Website www.genevaumc.org**: The main way we reach out to new people is through our website. It is primarily designed, with careful research, to provide information for people who are looking for a church, or looking for information about this church.

5) **Geneva Chamber of Commerce**: Did you see the church name on one of the snowmen signs out in front of the courthouse during the Christmas season? UMCG was one of the sponsors of the Christmas tree lighting last month.

6) **Radio**: Last year we received a UM Communications Community Impact Media grant for \$750 of radio spots. I choose to use WERV, the River, 95.9, in Aurora because it has high listenership in Geneva. In December, I wrote the commercial, went to their studio to record it, and then the 30-second spot ran 20 times in the week before the Cantata. At no cost to us!

This year, a new effort is **New Mover postcards** - sending out postcards to new people who have moved into the community, inviting them to visit.

I hope you can see how important it is for each of you to be aware of our communications so you know what we're doing when you talk to people.

- If someone asks if we sent out a Christmas postcard, you can say, "yes."
- You can direct them to our website.
- You can tell them to look for our newspaper ads at Easter and Christmas.
- And you can point them to our Facebook page anytime.

You should also know that even with all these efforts, research shows that most people come to worship because they are invited by a friend or relative – that's us! Last week Pastor Rich called them FRANS – friends, relatives, acquaintances and neighbors. We want to be intentional about inviting people:

So - here are my top 4 tips for inviting people:

1- **Recycle** your worship bulletin – but *not here!* Keep it in your car or bag until you can give it to someone when you invite them.

2 – Today you have a **smaller card** you can give to someone to invite them over the next few weeks.

3 – **Tell people** what your passion is here – what means the most to you. Share with them the many ways they can be involved in helping others in the community through UMCG.

4 - **Keep inviting** them every so often, even if they decline at first. They may have a change in their lives that will make them more interested.

We are so blessed to know that on any Sunday, we may have the opportunity to show our warmth and friendliness by greeting new people.

Now, back to the orange cars. This week, be on the lookout for orange cars.⁵ You might be surprised that they are out there – and there are quite a few if you look. It's kind of like when we are aware of God's action in our lives, it enables us to see more of it.

And, just like with those orange cars, be on the lookout for opportunities to invite a friend or relative or someone you meet to something here at UMCG. Invite them to the ASP Chili Cook-Off, or to come and make plastic bag mats on Monday, to go to a small group, sing in the choir, or come to worship. Invite their kids to our Youth events or the children's Mardi Gras party in a few weeks.

You are well equipped, as Paul said, with speech and knowledge, your own experience, AND, now you have a card AND your bulletins to share - as we invite others to join us here. May God bless us all as we seek to share God's message of love and welcome -- as we work on *getting the word out* - to others we meet. Amen.

⁵ Rolf Jacobson, "On Orange Cars and Gratitude for Preaching Another Year," *Dear Working Preacher*, November 17, 2019.