

## ***Summer Socks & Sandwiches*** **Mountain Ear, Thursday 29 May 2014**

Some say that a person is not really a Nederland “local” until he or she survives three windy winters. I’m not there yet, but in my first nine months, I have had two doors blow off their hinges, and I’m ready for the next snowstorm!

Others think the summer presents the more difficult test. For my own situation—as much as we all love having tourists come through town—I don’t know how I’m ever going to preach louder than the umpteen motorcycles that blare by the church every Sunday morning. Perhaps we’ll just have to sing more hymns in the key of Harley.

Some of us are looking forward to the many friends returning to their summer cabins. Others are thrilled to get back to biking and climbing, hiking and gardening. Children and teenagers, of course, are most excited about no school.

As fun as summer may be for kids away from the classroom, many folks in town are worried about our young people. Across the country, neighborhoods are discovering that many of the kids who receive free and reduced lunch at school, don’t have access to that food in the summer. Lower income families have to press harder, or youngsters simply go hungrier.

In response to that situation, NCPC is joining with St Rita’s, the Ned Food Pantry and other local organizations, to start the Summer Socks & Sandwiches program. Whereas the Pantry is open the first and last Thursday of each month (and each Saturday), we are inviting the community to share lunch in Chipeta Park on the middle Thursdays, June through August. We’ll have games children, music and activities for teenagers, and bagged lunches for anyone who wants to join.

I get the sense that everyone agrees that it’s a good idea to help and spread joy to the youngsters. But what about that “anyone”? Does that really mean “anyone”, as in, “even them”?

Nederland seems to appreciate diversity and inclusivity very well, and so, in order to make this family-friendly event truly open and welcoming for all, we will be ready to help any of the summer campers with socks, backpacks and hygiene products, as well as fire safety information and trash bags for their campsites.

*“Oh jeez, Hansen, don’t you know that transients bring trouble? This will encourage them, and endanger us! The Drainbows will just take and vandalize! We’d do better to just give them bus tickets to somewhere else...”*

I understand that plenty of locals have legitimate concerns, because plenty of you have had bad experiences. However, many of us working on the Summer Socks & Sandwiches program also have this crazy idea that kindness actually works. It’s not easy, and it’s not automatic, and it’s not guaranteed, but the outreach programs that work best around the country, rely on relationships. Our summer camper issues are not going away, so instead of hostility, let’s try to offer compassion with charity, and find solutions while engaging in each other’s lives.

If campers see Nederland as a community of caring families, and if locals can move past the negative language and us-vs-them attitudes, and if we can listen to and value each other’s stories, radical changes could happen! For instance, together with feeding kids and giving teens some things to do (about which everyone seems on board), we think this program can offer invaluable partnerships.

Perhaps locals and summer campers can work together to clean up public parks and open spaces. Perhaps we can learn more about the root causes of what brings people to Nederland, so that over the long term we can help find more just ways of fixing the system. Perhaps by simply respecting these temporary neighbors, we might even engender less vandalism, shoplifting and violence.

More to the heart, we think of Summer Socks & Sandwiches as an investment in an ongoing peace project. We cannot solve or serve every problem. But we can work to heal our town’s ever-present conflict, and we can aim toward some wholeness to people in need. If that succeeds, maybe it’ll blow your doors off the hinges too.

(If you want to help, with donations or by volunteering your time, or if you have questions or concerns, please contact Hansen at [ncpcpastor@gmail.com](mailto:ncpcpastor@gmail.com) or at the church phone, 303-258-3579. You can also share your thoughts at the Board of Trustees meeting, 3 June in the Community Center.)