

**February 4, 2018**

## **Faith Without Works Is Dead**

### **James 2:14-26**

After recent freezing temperatures swept across the country, many churches opened their doors to set up temporary shelters for people without homes. Oak Lawn United Methodist Church in Dallas, Texas, is one of those churches. One of Oak Lawn's regular attendees, Billie Jean, asked senior pastor Reverend Rachel Baughman "if the church would be willing to open its doors temporarily to shelter her and her friends, some of whom sleep outside near the church." Working with area businesses and nonprofits, not only did the church provide a warm place to sleep, but it provided meals, entertainment, and conversation.<sup>1</sup> Baughman posted on her Facebook page a video of a woman singing "Victory Belongs to Jesus," and she wrote, "This woman and her children wanted to share this as a praise offering to thank God for the gift of hospitality she has received at Oak Lawn UMC."<sup>2</sup> The woman responded to an outpouring of love with a gift of praise.

Today's biblical text is about works that come from faith. The student book author writes, "Acts of love and kindness open our spirits to God's presence."<sup>3</sup> Faith and works build upon one another. Faith urges us to love and serve our neighbor and acts of love and service with our neighbor strengthen faith. And along the way, we sense the real presence of Christ.

When we serve our neighbors, we often see ourselves in a giving role, and we can be surprised to receive something in return. By opening up their church to those who needed a safe, warm place to spend the night, the people of Oak Lawn UMC received the gift of music and a word of encouragement and praise from a neighbor. While performing an act of love and kindness, the people of the church opened their spirits to God's presence and received love and kindness in return.

1. If you have served at a homeless shelter or your church has opened its doors to homeless guests, what was your experience?
2. How do acts of love and kindness open our spirits to God's presence? How do faith and works build upon one another?
3. How does being in a serving role come with expectations and assumptions about receiving something in return? How might we miss the presence and gift of Jesus Christ when we assume we are only there to serve?

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<sup>1</sup>From "Homeless Woman Saved Others From the Freezing Cold," by Michele Blood at FaithZette, ([lifezette.com/faithzette/homeless-woman-saved-others-freezing-cold/](http://lifezette.com/faithzette/homeless-woman-saved-others-freezing-cold/)).

<sup>2</sup>From Reverend Rachel Baughman's Facebook page, January 4, 2018 ([facebook.com/rachel.g.baughman?hc\\_ref=ARTa1lDdEUpzMlbMLCkrmf9RkqC\\_6\\_ocO97kW7nDqz39vP0AndHL8-gjBgE9U8ult4&pnref=story](https://www.facebook.com/rachel.g.baughman?hc_ref=ARTa1lDdEUpzMlbMLCkrmf9RkqC_6_ocO97kW7nDqz39vP0AndHL8-gjBgE9U8ult4&pnref=story)).

<sup>3</sup>From *Adult Bible Studies*, Winter 2017-2018, by Chuck Aaron (Cokesbury, 2017); page 73.