

LET'S BE NEIGHBORS

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The primary objective before all of us is better living. That is the hope and ambition of virtually every living human. Better living has been described in various ways in different times. Some of our people simply call better living "eating higher on the hog." Others use the more eloquent expression popularized in recent years by national leaders who refer to better living as "the more abundant life." Whatever expression we may use to describe it, all of us are seeking ways and means to better living.

The place of a person's abode is the key to better living. The home is the headquarters around which all events revolve, whether it be the boxcar home of the hobo or the mansion of a millionaire, or something in between, like the rest of us have. Although it is traditional that we take pride in our humble background, I am sure that none of us wants to return to the hardships that went with our earlier days and the more primitive housing of the pioneers. In some states, politicians not born in log cabins need considerable nerve to campaign against a politician who was born in a log cabin. At the same time, I don't believe I ever heard a candidate for public office promise that we would return to log cabin living as a way of life, even during the recent years of severe housing shortages.

To be good citizens, it is our responsibility to take part in the improvement of our community. We should help our neighbors to make a

community that justifies all of us taking pride in it. It should bolster our self-respect, provide comforts, conveniences, culture and inspiration.

This matter of self-respect and pride is particularly important so far as our boys and girls and young people are concerned. A tremendous amount of juvenile delinquency, both in the cities and in the rural areas, is directly traceable to poor home and community background, resulting in a lack of pride or self-respect on the part of the boys and girls.

Countless thousands of boys and girls have left the farm to take jobs in congested cities because they saw little opportunity for providing better facilities and additional comforts for their own families if they remained in the country. Fortunately, that day has passed and there is a much better outlook for developing happy homes in our rural communities. There are many thousands of rural homes which have every convenience and some even more conveniences than city homes occupied by families of similar income.

Farm people are justified in taking pride in the fact that they have produced the raw materials which have made the United States as a whole the best fed, best clothed, and best housed nation in the world. Yet it is no credit to our rural people that they have given of their best to the cities and in thousands of cases kept only the barest necessities for their own comfort.

As one writer says, children are the greatest export crop on the farm. The sons and daughters of farmers have throughout the history of

this nation moved to town and become tradesmen and professional workers to make the United States the greatest industrial nation in the world. It is probable that this will continue. There is little doubt that the majority of the people will continue to live in the cities. Thus they will control through their votes many of the policies of our nation. It is vital that our boys and girls go to town with a good background, a happy outlook on life, and knowing that there is opportunity for them and their families whether they live in the city or in the country.

There is something about farm life, living close to nature and the growing of things, that develops Christian character and citizenship. Democracy takes its roots in the soil. It is important that we provide our farm boys and girls with ~~adequate housing~~ that will cause them to take pride in their homes and in this nation. It is important that they have a well-balanced outlook and understanding of happy home relationships. The future of America depends to a very large extent upon how well rural America lives.

A good house will contribute much to the family's happiness by saving time in the management of the household. Less time spent in maintaining an orderly home may give the family greater leisure time for the enjoyment of better living that it will be able to plan and provide. It may permit more time to be spent in increasing production on the farm, and it may permit more time to be well spent in recreation for the family and the individual members of the family.

Since 1941 the value of power machines on the farms in this country has just about doubled. But according to a recent publication of the United States Department of Agriculture, 25 per cent of the farm homes are still too crowded. There are three million tractors on our farms, twice as many as in 1940, but we still have no electric lights in 48 percent of the farm family dwellings. There are now 10,000 self-propelled combines in operation in this country, but 72 percent of the farm women are without running water in the house. Ninety percent of the small grain crop is seeded and harvested with tractor drawn machines, but 84 percent of our farm family dwellings are still without adequate bathroom facilities in the home. Thirty-five percent of the corn acreage and half of the corn crops are now harvested with mechanical corn pickers, but 35 percent of all farms are lighted by kerosene lamps or other similar inadequate facilities.

The point is simply this, that thousands of farm families have found the ways and means to finance the mechanization and modernization of their farm production, but have not found ways to provide the conveniences of better living for their families. We have achieved the means to an end, but our vision of the goal "better living on the farm" ~~that we are working toward~~ often is obscured. We have too many farming areas which are being operated from a production standpoint with 1948 tractors, but on which the home and community life is still maintained on a basis that was obsolete 30 or 40 years ago.

We know that such out-of-date standards and inadequate community life need not exist --- not if the people who live there want something better and are willing to work for it.

Had I delivered this talk two years ago, it would have been a discussion of a theory for building better rural communities. Today, it is based upon demonstrated proof that the building of a better community life in our rural areas is possible, practical and urgent.

I would like to cite for you some concrete examples of how our publication has co-operated with other institutions and individuals to encourage hundreds of rural neighborhoods to become better neighborhoods. It is a report on a successful experiment in community development.

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In doing this, it might be well to tell you briefly what The Farmer-Stockman is, since some of you may not be familiar with it. The Farmer-Stockman is a monthly farm magazine, published at Oklahoma City, with a branch office at Dallas. We have a circulation of nearly 300,000 farm families, about 50 percent of whom live in Oklahoma, about 45 percent in Texas, and the remainder in other states. We consider our publication a trade magazine whose job it is to provide information, inspiration, and some entertainment for the farm families who subscribe to it. We serve as a medium through which research data and other useful information available from agricultural experiment stations, agricultural colleges, government agencies, and similar sources are passed on to farm families who can make

practical application and benefit from the information.

Our staff members travel continually over our territory to assemble and prepare such information. In our observations, we found that progress had taken a heavy toll of community life throughout our rural sections. Not so many years ago farm people were extremely dependent upon one another. It was necessary that farm people be good neighbors in order to get along. That was more of an asset than we perhaps realized at the time.

The coming of paved roads. Consolidated schools with bus transportation. Movies within convenient driving distance. High-speed automobiles and pick-up trucks. Radios at home. These and many other similar conveniences give the modern family an independence that often causes them to lose the close contact that had previously existed between them and neighboring families. Community centers, county schools and many community churches disappeared. The spirit of neighborliness has disintegrated. Folks live near each other, but do not know each other. They live close together, but are drifting farther apart. Frequently, they are no longer neighbors in the true sense of the word. In fact, many neighborhoods have completely lost their identity as ~~an~~ individual communities. *We discussed the problem with farm people and agricultural leaders.*

Our unanimous conclusion was
~~It was our thought that rural people could~~ enjoy this progress that was taking place and still retain the highly desirable elements of neighborliness and a good neighborhood. With this in mind, we enlisted

the co-operation of the Extension Service of the A. and M. Colleges of Oklahoma and Texas to develop what we have called the Rural Neighborhood Progress Contest. Cash prizes ~~were~~^{will} offered by The Farmer-Stockman as a further incentive.

We found the Extension Service ready and willing to co-operate in such a program because it involved the application of the teaching that the Extension Service has been promoting for many, many years. It also employed the methods they have found to be most successful. These are teaching by demonstration and encouraging people to do things for themselves.

It is our hope that efforts such as these will make farm life so attractive that more of our farm youth will be inclined to remain on the farm rather than to seek other means of earning a living in congested cities.

We left the definition of the neighborhood up to the local people in co-operation with their county agents and home demonstration agents, but we excluded towns and cities.

We had neighborhoods participating in the contest ranging from a dozen families to more than 100. The areas ranged from eight or ten square miles to 150 square miles in the wheat-growing sections.

Our observation of the progress made by the various communities, however, demonstrates that the most successful programs were carried on by rural neighborhoods composed of 30 to 60 farm families living adjacent

to one another. This seems to constitute a practical unit for rural activities of all kinds.

In order to organize the neighborhood and include all groups, we required that a neighborhood progress club or committee be set up, including at least one man, one woman, one boy, and one girl, each coming from a different family within the neighborhood. They held the offices of chairman, vice-chairmen, and secretary. Other officers were named as the neighborhood saw fit, and as their own neighborhood program demanded.

Progress was recorded on the basis of a detailed analysis made of the neighborhood at the beginning of the year and another at the end of the year. This work was done by the people living in the neighborhood, with the guidance and assistance of the county extension agents. The points on which the neighborhoods are scored include 10 separate divisions. They are:

1. Progress in Soil Improvement and Conservation
2. Progress in Livestock Improvement
3. Progress in Crop and Pasture Improvement
4. Progress in Farmstead Improvement
5. Progress in Farm and Home Equipment
6. Participation in Schools and Educational Activities
7. Participation in Church and Other Religious Activities
8. Progress toward Better Rural Roads and Communications
9. Participation in Group Activities
10. Progress in Original and Unique Neighborhood Activities.

In order that you might get a picture of what a neighborhood can accomplish, let me review, briefly, what was achieved in the prize-winning neighborhood for Oklahoma. It is the Goldsby neighborhood of McClain County.

When Goldsby neighborhood entered the Rural Neighborhood Progress Contest in January, 1947, only three neighborhood activities were carried on. There was a home demonstration club, an annual Christmas play, and an annual box supper to support the play. Other than these things, no community events had been held in more than 11 years, not even church or Sunday School.

The Goldsby Neighborhood Progress Club was organized, with 43 families. Meetings were held at the schoolhouse every other Wednesday evening during 1947. At each meeting, reports of the committees were called for. New projects and events were planned.

At the beginning of the year, the Goldsby neighborhood listed as things they did not have, but wanted, a church, a Sunday School, a school kitchen, a community building, complete with stoves and chairs, electric lights for school yard, a community park, a one-variety cotton program, a cotton insect control program, a soil fertility improvement program, livestock disease and parasite control program, farm and home buildings painted, mail boxes painted and lettered, community and farmstead roads improved, a 4-H club organized, telephone service extended to more homes, highway signs to be erected, organize a junior neighbors club, start a rodent control program,

and to provide entertainment for neighboring families.

That was quite a small list - by thousands of other rural communities have want to do. Just a sample of the work they did.

These things they set up as goals, and at the end of the year, by working together, they proudly looked over the list and checked off each item: "Achieved." In addition, they added other projects from time to time that helped to make Goldsby's progress outstanding among many progressive neighborhoods participating in the 1947 program.

The families of Goldsby community are justly proud of results of their work, and readily agree that the tangible accomplishments and the neighborly spirit they have developed are greater in value than the awards which prompted them to begin their ambitious program.

"What we have accomplished this year can be done by other communities, and must be accomplished so that there can be a better America," the Goldsby committee stated in its final report to the judges.

The Goldsby neighborhood adopted the motto "If you want a better neighbor, be a better neighbor." They had this motto printed on stickers, and everybody in the neighborhood put one on his car to let the world know they were moving forward as a neighborhood.

Following is a list of the communities that have - about 15 in all - of the same type.

A similar program of community development was carried on by the Uhland community, on the Hays-Caldwell county line south of Austin.

The Uhland community was the \$1,000.00 prize winner in Texas last year. This community had some advantages that Goldsby did not have. Uhland had

three strong churches and an active Farmers Grange. Its activities were built around these groups, but again it was demonstrated that there is life in the rural communities, if it can be harnessed and hitched up to a definite program.

The variety of things that can be accomplished by rural neighborhoods when they start moving is almost endless. Most of the neighborhoods surprised themselves and amazed everybody else at what they were able to achieve when they began working together. Let me summarize briefly what some of these Texas neighborhoods did in their progress program:

Maxey, in Lamar County, built a community center that housed 148 meetings during the year. In Smith County, Prairie Lea organized a new Methodist church and improved housing for every home in the neighborhood.

In Anderson County, three churches of Slocum community combined efforts to sponsor a youth encampment and a family life education program was carried on.

Bishop's Chapel, in Jasper County, built a new community church and organized boys and girls work for the first time. They also brought in an all-weather road and electricity.

In Tarrant County, both churches of the Whites Chapel community were greatly improved, as were homes and roads in the community. Tigertown in Lamar County built a new parsonage, remodeled the church, and landscaped

the grounds as part of a general community program, that also included a major livestock sanitation plan.

~~Down~~ in Milam County, the Forest Grove community cut their own trees to make lumber, converted an abandoned school house into a community center, improved the church grounds, and gave the building a general overhaul in a workday.

Those are some of the things that happened in Texas. I could cite a similar ~~lengthy story from Oklahoma~~ ^{lengthy story from other} communities.

~~We feel that~~ this entire program is simply an application of local leadership to a definite plan for improvement of a rural neighborhood by the people who live in it. The Farmer-Stockman has carried on many different types of promotional programs in the past, but we have never sponsored any project which has produced as much in the way of positive tangible and lasting results as this neighborhood program has accomplished.

It involved nothing new in the way of approach. Every item on which the neighborhood was scored is one which has been promoted in various ways by various institutions for many years.

In tackling the problem of rural community development, there seem to be three major steps to take.

First, the community --- not just one or two individuals but the community --- should make a complete survey of all physical, biological,

social, economic and other factors affecting the area. An intelligent and objective study of all facts is necessary if an effective program is to be built. The tendency is to guess that there are 30 families in the community, but a survey brings exact facts.

Second, draft a community plan and basic program. Some definite objectives must be set up, objectives that are conceivably within reach. They should be set by a group. Impossible goals should be omitted. Don't undertake everything at once.

Third, distribute responsibility for the plan among the people of the community. One person can't do everything, but everybody can do something. People often amaze themselves at what they can do when they have opportunity. Good leadership is that which provides the opportunity for others to work, and then follows up to see that they do work.

The key to success in building better neighborhoods is an organized effort by the people to do the things that they know they ought to do anyway. Such efforts will bring about a community unity, a spirit of co-operation that does not now exist in many rural communities.

The Rural Neighborhood Progress Program has the distinct advantage of providing something worthwhile for every community which participates, in direct proportion to the effort the people there put forth to make their own neighborhood a better place in which to live. Every neighborhood which won a cash prize achieved a program of its own that exceeded

~~in value many times the amount of money which the contest offered them.~~
~~What has been done can be done again in many other communities.~~

Last summer I had the pleasure of participating in a program for county school superintendents in northeast Missouri. Because all of these factors that relate to rural community life are so closely interlocked, we naturally drifted in our discussion to the question of whether rural people will attend church in town. The conclusion was that although rural people can do so without embarrassment or apology, the fact remains that most of them will not go at all if they cannot attend with other rural people. This does not discount efforts made by a few town churches, but it does mean that if we are to reach rural people, we must have churches that fit their problems and needs.

Progress has dealt the rural church a stunning blow. Progress - better roads, consolidated schools, more convenient transportation, radio, daily newspaper delivery - has left many rural churches gasping for life.

Nobody would wish to diminish the progress, any more than he would think of trading the family car for a surrey with the fringe on top. The church must join the parade of progress if it is to regain its rightful place of first importance in the rural community and in individual lives.

The world still needs the true-to-the-Bible preaching that attracted farm families to the old-fashioned brush arbor, but brush arbor accommodations won't cause the world today to turn to the thing it needs

most - the gospel of Christ.

People are hungry for the old-time religion, but they want to get it in modern, attractive and comfortable surroundings.

The dilapidated, run-down, unpainted church with a stove that won't heat is a poor indication to non-Christians of what Christianity has to offer. Even Christians find it less attractive than a dozen or so competing activities.

The old-fashioned religion is just as good today as it ever was (and is needed just as much), but to assume that facilities that were good enough for grandfather are good enough for today is horse-and-buggy thinking. Grandfather wanted the best he could get for his church, and today's man and woman and boy and girl demand the best that today has to offer.

Rural people are more prosperous today than ever before. The argument that neat, comfortable churches can't be afforded is a subterfuge and evasion. Total cash receipts from farm marketings of crops, livestock and livestock products ^{now} totaled almost two billion dollars ^{2.9 billion} ~~in 1947~~ for the state of Texas alone, nearly four times what it was in 1938. From that, figure your own estimate of what the rural churches should receive.

Many rural communities have no church services, or only occasional services, because contributions are too small to support a trained pastor living on the field. A pastor cannot support himself and his family and

maintain the necessary automobile on \$50 or \$100 a month. If you think he can, try it yourself. Or maybe you have tried it.

Rural churches must interest their young people. Young people demand action. If they don't get interesting, inspirational programs in their home communities, they are no longer bound to stay within their communities. They are easily attracted to nearby towns, with their theaters, honkytonks, and other questionable entertainments.

Fund Church members who sit at home clutching their dollars and cherishing their memories are driving rural young people to the towns and to the devil.

Active church leaders who recognize the needs of young people and supply the friendly fellowship and wholesome enjoyment that can be found in church activities are developing new leadership to help carry on the work of the church today and tomorrow.

Consolidated schools mean better educational opportunities for rural pupils. They ride farther, walk less, and learn more. Perhaps the trend should be toward some sort of church consolidation. One strong church is better than two or three weak ones.

Most farm families can travel 15 miles in less time today than they could travel two miles 25 years ago. The rural church today must serve a larger area if it is to attract a sufficient number of members to support

an active program, and to develop enough trained leadership to keep it moving.

Transportation is a key factor in the growth of towns, communities, schools and the like. Rural schools have been kept going by consolidating into larger units as transportation made it possible. Dr. Henry G. Bennett, President of Oklahoma A. and M. College, made a statement to me recently that has a bearing on this point. Some 40 years ago he was county superintendent in Choctaw County, Oklahoma, and had the responsibility for laying off the school districts. The poor roads, the creeks, rivers and hills, plus the slow travel by foot or on horseback, were the determining factors. He laid out 40 districts in that relatively small county. Then he said, "If we were doing it now, with today's fast buses, good roads and other conveniences, we probably wouldn't lay out more than four or five districts."

Churches, too, need to look to the matter of bringing together enough people to build a strong church. Although some people don't like it, the fact is that the one-room school is disappearing. It is quite possible that the one-room church will also disappear from the rural landscape. Will something better take its place? You hold the answer.

The rural minister need not be one whit less a man of God because he can also be a community builder, a rural life engineer and a rural statesman. We expect our ministers to know more than we know. To do that, the successful rural minister must at least have a working knowledge of the soil, crops,

livestock, farm machinery and the other things that go on around the farm.

The rural preacher of today must be a man with his feet on the soil, because that is where the roots of freedom grow. We are in a tremendous conflict between atheism, communism, and Christianity. It has been traditional in America that our greatest champions of freedom -- freedom of speech, freedom of religion -- have come from the rural areas.

High production and good prices on the farm are the dream of every good farmer. But these things are not the real goal. They are not the real objective toward which we are working. Good yields and good prices should be regarded as the means to provide us with better living.

If any part of the world is to remain free, it will be because the leaders from rural America make it so. Rural America is the foundation of Democracy and the rural church and country school are the bedrock upon which it rests. We cannot let either crumble.

Democracy is the best form of government because it means a free people. A good neighborhood is a democratic neighborhood. It is also a progressive neighborhood. It all begins with good neighbors. We believe that we are helping rural people build better neighborhoods in which to live, and thus we are making a real contribution toward a better America and a better world.