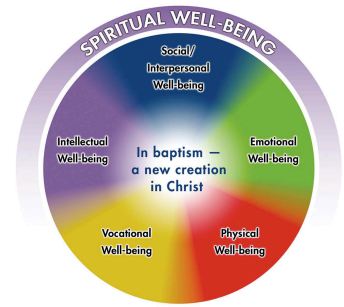


Porch Sitting

From the Bethany Lutheran Church Health and Wellness Cabinet

“Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do.”

– (Philippians 3:17)



Copyright 1997 InterLutheran Coordinating Committee on Ministerial Health and Wellness of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

There appears to be a revival in porch sitting these days. The front porch is a uniquely American architectural element, developed originally to distinguish American homes from British architecture. For generations raised without a front porch or with television as the dominant evening activity the idea of sitting out in front of your house on summer evenings may seem quaint beyond belief, but as I drive through our neighborhood I have noticed more comfortable chairs appearing on porches, even small ones. It is noteworthy, considering that since the middle of last century we in the United States have become more and more people who withdraw to the back yard, if we get out of the house at all.

Porch sitting, according to Wikipedia, is “a leisure activity that can be a direct or indirect form of social interaction.” It was once considered a status symbol. Porch sitting was even advocated in the cure of TB. In addition to bringing couples and families together in the fresh air in a relatively quiet activity that promotes conversation, it provides an opportunity to observe your neighbors and interact with them as well. Its utility as a community building and security enterprise has even led to it being purposefully incorporated into some modern “planned” communities.

And, really, you don’t even need a front porch to do it. People “porch sit” on stoops, steps, grass, low walls, and there are some who have incorporated lovely landscape areas in their front yards that feature what is still called lawn furniture. As one report broadcast on National Public Radio noted, it’s not a place, but a state of mind. How widespread is this? If you search the internet you find the Professional Porch Sitters Union, which has locals in all fifty states and twenty countries. They claim to be the fastest growing union in the U.S. We are members (Denver Local 321).

Jean and I have found that just spending an hour together on the porch as the day cools provides a lovely opportunity to catch up with each other after a hectic day. Both of us have fond memories of sitting out front with our grandparents, and the sense of comfort and family unity it brought us. And we are meeting more of our neighbors this way. People wave, smile, or even stop briefly and exchange pleasantries with us. One neighbor we met through our porch sitting even stopped to gift us some extra tomato plants she had to give us a head start on our container gardening.

Being out front as the neighborhood children bike and play gives us a feeling of connection with that generation, and has even given us an increased awareness of opportunities for service through our conversations with others. As the Porch Sitter’s union founder, Claude Stephens in Louisville, says, “When you are on your front porch you are part of your community. When you are in your house you aren’t.”

The idea of porch sitting embodies many of the discussions we have had in this column on physical, emotional and spiritual health. As an activity that promotes balance it provides connection with others and time to slow down from the busy pace of lives full of activity, schedules and obligations. Time out provides spiritual succor. We are, after all, commanded from earliest tradition to keep some time holy and unscheduled. So the health benefits of an activity such as porch sitting are numerous.

It is about finding time. And we all need that. So give it a try. If I see you on the porch I'll wave so you will know it's me. – Peace and health, Jack Lindsey.

© 2010 Bethany Lutheran Church, Denver, Colorado – To request permission to reprint this column call 303-758-2820 or navigate to <http://www.bethany-denver2.org/about-us/contact/>