

Partner Families Make Good Neighbors

Robert Frost writes in his poem "Mending Wall" that 'Good fences make good neighbors'. This may be true, but before we consider erecting a wall, it would be important to ask, as the poet suggests, what we are walling in or walling out and to whom the wall may give offence. Note his spelling of the word "offence". Fences may be intended to keep animals and children in a confined area or to mark a border or may simply be part of the aesthetics of landscaping.

There are all kinds of walls throughout the world. The Great Wall of China is one of the Seven Wonders of the World. The infamous Berlin Wall captured the world's attention both during its construction and destruction and oftentimes in between. Most adults today could tell you exactly what "Checkpoint Charlie" was. The Wailing Wall in Jerusalem is a well known place of mourning and religious ritual sacred to the Jewish faith and revered by many other religious traditions as well.

Sometimes we erect walls in our own minds and hearts, too. The wall of suspicion about another person's behavior or motives may cause us to avoid someone who appears a little different from ourselves. Fear of the unknown or mistrust may lead us to fence ourselves off emotionally or physically from others. It hits us where we live and our response may be more telling of who we are than of who the 'other' is. We see this reaction sometimes in what has come to be known as the "NIMBY" factor. Not in my backyard may even be the response in some communities to the proposed construction of Habitat homes in their neighborhood, but I am here to tell you that Habitat homeowners, the people we call Partner Families, make good neighbors!

I live in the Sawyer subdivision of Sturgeon Bay. There are five Habitat Partner Families in our neighborhood. In fact, I was the Sponsor Family for one of those Habitat Partners. It has been very gratifying to watch this head of household maintain and steadily make improvements to her home and yard, to watch her family prosper. I suspect that initially there may have been some resistance to clustering homes in this neighborhood, but the people have proven themselves to be good neighbors and good friends. We never doubted it would be any other way. For those who did, all I can do is quote the late President Ronald Reagan, "Mr. Gorbachev, bring down this wall!"