***Who’s your neighbor?***

When I was the Diocesan Bishop of the Diocese of Quincy, I loved my Visitations. That meant that I went to each church in the Diocese twice a year: the Official Sunday Visitation and then one week night. One of the things that I always asked my priests was to tell me the names of the people who lived in the houses around the church, and to tell me which church these people attended. From time to time, we would knock on some doors and invite people to the parish. I was amazed at how many people in these neighborhoods had never seen the inside of the church or parish hall. I was not surprised to find out how many did not attend a church. That I have always been suspicious of church growth plans that do not include the leadership of a parish evangelizing/catechizing their own families and the people of their neighborhood and the people in the neighborhood around the church.

 I recently was blessed to be taking care of a parish that is growing, but I discovered that the people in the neighborhood had, almost to a person, never been inside the church. Some would say, “It’s a rough neighborhood. We wouldn’t trust some of those people.” That is all very true, but not a good excuse not to have some event just for the neighborhood.

 My hunch is that when St. Andrew said “Come and see” that his brother, Simon Peter, may well not have been on the top of the list of the “Church Growth Committee.” St. Matthew probably would not have been invited to be the Treasurer – Judas served in that role.

 Far too many churches today are engaged in a church growth plan that means taking people who are already Christians from other parishes, other denominations, and other Communions, and then boasting that they are growing. On a checker board there are a definable number of pieces. Simply by moving the pieces from one end of the board to the other is not growth. Thus, many churches today are engaged in checker board growth – simply moving the players around.

 Check out our families and our neighborhoods. Most of those “pieces” have never been on the Board.

**Go and get. Come and see.**