

Sunday, January 18, 2009 Ephesians 4:1-16

An Introduction to the Series on Membership Vows

It is my hope by now that most of you have begun to get the idea that the emphasis of my ministry among you is not about numbers. It is not about how many people come in the door – although it would be great to have a full house, even overflowing every week but that is not my focus. My goal is not to prosper our finances here at Cherry Hill UMC although finances are important as we seek to reach the world for Christ. My goal is not to make the Bishop or the District Superintendent happy, nor for that matter, to make you happy either; although I would hope that each of you would find in me faithful to the One who ultimately matters most, Jesus Christ – our soon coming King.

The goals of my ministry among you is to enable Spiritual Growth through a Christ-centered approach to Worship, Prayer, Study, Mission, Small Groups and Financial Stewardship. I want all of us to have a closer walk with God who has been revealed in the person of Jesus Christ and who continues to instruct and encourage us through the power of the Holy Spirit. Through that instruction and power, God is calling each of us to Go and make Disciples for Jesus Christ. So, my goal ultimately is to help grow the Kingdom of God here on earth and in heaven.

That being said, next Sunday we will embark on a series of messages that speak *specifically* to Membership Vows for United Methodists but are integral in the life of every *growing* believer.

In addition to the Profession of Faith in Jesus Christ as Lord, the Holy Trinity, the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection of Jesus from the grave, for many years the membership vows of the United Methodist Church have included the following for folks joining themselves to a particular community of faith. “As a member of this congregation, will you faithfully participate in its ministries by your prayers, your presence, your gifts, and your service?” As of General Conference 2008, the words, “and Witness” have been added.

Over the next five weeks we are going to address each of these and how they relate to our journey with Christ and the call of every Christian – every Christ follower, to multiply – to make more disciples.

In the United Methodist Primer, under the sub-title entitled “Our Commitment to Be in Ministry” the word “Be is highlighted with a Capital “B”. The paragraph suggests a state of being – the act of being. While many upon hearing or even reading the vows may glide over this “state of being”, simply reading them as referencing a loyalty to our church from an institutional point of view – what happens within the church; is NOT sufficient.

Each week, printed at the end of our Order of Service, on the back of the bulletin, you will find the words, “The Church Scatters to ‘Do’ Ministry”. Some of you may wonder exactly what that means; if not in general terms, at least what it means for you as an individual. Over these next five weeks leading up to Lent, we are going to explore what it means by “The Church Scatters to ‘Do’ Ministry” and how our Prayers, Presence, Gifts, Service and Witness, taken beyond church attendance and Sunday participation expresses God’s love for the world.

These five tenants of membership are foundational, I believe, as we live out our faith and seek to be disciples of Jesus Christ who go out, who scatter to the ends of the earth to duplicate ourselves so that the world might know Jesus as LORD.

As we quickly approach 175 years of ministry here at Cherry Hill, it is my goal to lead this church not to numerical or financial prosperity but to real spiritual health as a church that is actively engaged in ministry to the world. As I dare to speak on behalf of God, I think God desires this to be a place where when folks do walk in the door for the first time, they not only see a quaint historical building but quickly discern that Jesus Christ is alive and the people here are dedicated and prepared to demonstrate his amazing love. It is my goal that it would be a foregone conclusion that the business of every person here at Cherry Hill is to

duplicate themselves – to make disciples of the One who died and rose for our sake.

As Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus, the purpose of the work is to help us mature in our faith, to grow up in Christ and as Christians have unified witness to the world. It will be a challenging, intentional journey; one not for the faint of heart. There may be some who will not be in agreement all of the time on every issue. In fact, I fully expect that to be our reality but when you disagree with me I would urge you to contemplate that disagreement and try to discern where it lies – Is it with me or is it with the Word of God? Either way, I hope that as we grow together, as we contemplate who God is and what the call upon our life really is, that we will do so with grace and love.

The Christian walk is not about feeling comfort and security. It is about growing, stretching and drawing ever closer to Jesus who loves us and not only died for us but lives again. The Christian walk is about a reckless love; God's love for us. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son that whosoever believes in him shall not die but have eternal life."

Our task as church is to move beyond the comfort and familiarity of this place and to demonstrate our faith in an unpredictable world that is in desperate need of God's love. It is our task as the church of Jesus Christ to Pray, to be fully

Present, to Give sacrificially and with joyful hearts, to Serve the Lord with
Gladness and to be a Witness of His unfailing love.