

## **SERIES: "I Am a Church Member"**

*"I Will Be a Unifying Church Member" – Ephesians 4:1-6*

Today we begin a message series based on the chapters of the book, "I Am a Church Member" by Thom Rainer. Today we start by looking at unity in the church and how each of us can be a unifying member.

Many years ago, there was a Peanuts cartoon strip where Lucy demanded that Linus change the TV channel, threatening him with her fist if he didn't. "What makes you think you can walk right in here and take over?" Linus asks her. "These five fingers," says Lucy. "Individually they're nothing but when I curl them together like this into a single unit, they form a weapon that is terrible to behold." "Which channel do you want?" asks Linus. Turning away, he then looks at his fingers and says, "Why can't you guys get organized like that?"

As we begin our series on I Am A Church Member, I want to talk about the importance of being a unifying church member and the importance of maintaining church unity. Indeed, a united church is a force that is terrible to behold against the powers of darkness. Likewise, a disunited church is impotent and ineffective - in fact it can even be detrimental to the cause of Christ because of its tainted witness to the world. In our Gospel today, Jesus said in John 13:35 "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." I believe that many a sinner has been turned away from Christ because believers in the local church failed to love one another and unite for the cause of Christ.

### **I. WHERE DOES UNITY IN THE CHURCH COME FROM?**

God has given us a wonderful gift. He has called us to be his own, and he has given us unity in the Spirit. This unity, this oneness, is not ours by birth, as though we were all from the same family, nor is it by friendship, nor even is it simply by membership in our church or Synod. No-we could all be friends, even family members, and members of the same church, and still not share in the oneness of faith in Christ.

This oneness, this unity, is a GIFT, something we have from Christ. The possession of this gift is ours already, not something we need to try to get, but it is something we are told to use and build on. That is your starting point - whether you are the newest member here, or the one who has been here the longest - we are all united in Christ. So, let us look on each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, and not as strangers, or worse yet, opponents of each other.

In our first reading Paul says, be completely humble and gentle; bear with each other patiently – Be a model of repentance and forgiveness. Patiently dealing with one another, with a fellow sinner redeemed by Christ, we seek repentance and forgiveness. That is what Christ preached. Repent and be saved. Forgive those who have sinned against you.

However, do not think for an instant that this is going to be easy. It's against what the devil, the world and our own flesh wants to do. The devil seeks the opposite of peace: discord, anger, jealousy, mistrust, dissension, self-righteousness. The world regards some people as much more important than others, and wants you to do the same. Repent and turn from these divisive ways. And your own flesh will tell you to compare yourself with others, with you always coming out looking better. Paul and Jesus tell us today: Live as brothers and sisters in Christ – not as enemies. Forgive one another as Christ has forgiven you.

### **II. WHAT UNITY IS NOT**

- a. Unity is not mere union – not just names on a church role – membership doesn't bring unity.
- b. Unity is not a product of human effort, but divine empowerment (Acts 2:46 KJV & 4:31-32)
- c. Unity does not always mean there is complete agreement with one another either. Our unity comes from Christ and what He accomplished on the cross for us...

### III. WHAT HINDERS UNITY

Simply put: we do!

- i. The uncontrolled tongue - (James 1:26, 3:3-12)
  - 1. Gossip
  - 2. Slander
  - 3. Grumbling & Complaining
  - 4. Backbiting

(Illus. T.H.I.N.K before you speak) Is it **T**True? Is it **H**elpful? **I**nspiring – Does it build up? Is it **N**ecessary? Do we need to say it at all? And finally, are my words **K**ind?

- ii. A Critical Spirit (One thing to disagree, another to constantly question decisions that people make)
- iii. An unforgiving heart (Stores up a record of wrongs for future remembrance)

### IV. WHAT DOES UNITY PRODUCE (v. 23)

Paul continues in chapter 4: “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism...”

- a. One Church = Won World. Unity in the church points people to the truth of God's love and plan to redeem humanity.
- b. Unity enables the church to win the world to Christ because when we are unified in Christ...

Every person you meet on the street, at work, in school, on the golf course – anywhere – fits into this group. God has loved EVERYONE. Jesus died for EVERYONE. Isn't everyone worth OUR concern? Isn't every soul worth the effort it takes to share the gospel? Yes! You are not alone in your efforts. God has called all Christians to be united in the spread of the gospel – this bond of peace. Sharing God's peace with those around you is a wonderful mission for it is a mission blessed by Jesus and guided by the Holy Spirit. We remember the old television show and now there have been two movies: “Mission Impossible.” God sent His Son Jesus into this world to do the Impossible Mission, that is, to save us all. The mission He gives us may also seem to be Impossible. But he tells us to go ahead - Share the message of peace through faith in Jesus, and leave the really "impossible" part up to God. The Holy Spirit will strengthen you to share the message of Jesus. As he has promised he will then do the work of bringing people to faith through the message you have shared. What a joy for all of us!

Over these next 4 weeks, I am going to ask you to be part of these sermons by offering your thoughts and ideas about what is important for Mount Olive members to promise as members of this congregation. When people become members of MOLC they sign a Welcome Covenant. As I mentioned in the March Family Meeting that it was time for a new Member Covenant, one that was written by all of us...