

I AM A MEMBER

Week 5: The Gift of Belonging

We were not designed to live in isolation: created in the image of a communal God – the Trinity – living alone is against our nature. God created us to live in and work toward right relationships – with Him, and with each other, with our neighbours. This is God’s plan, purpose, and gift to and for us! We are to love, care for, and belong to each other. This is the same symbiotic – mutual, cooperative, interdependent – relationship that our bodies have: it is how God meant for the Church – the Body of Christ – to be.

Thom Rainer, in his book **I AM A CHURCH MEMBER**, makes the point: *“When we receive the gift of salvation, we become part of the Body of Christ.”* When Paul writes about the gifts of the Spirit – in 1st Corinthians 12:27-28 – he says this: *“Now you are the body of Christ, and individual members of it. And God has placed these in the Church.”* What this means is that along with the gifts of the Spirit, we also receive the gift of adoption, and the gift of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit: we are given the gift of belonging to God; to the Church. (Gal. 4:6) That’s right: membership in the Body of Christ, the Church, is a gift from God. As a gift, it is not a legalistic obligation or duty. It’s not a right or entitlement. It’s not a ‘club’ or exclusive privilege. It is a gift. A gift we should treasure with joy, be thankful for, and not take for granted.

Today is World Communion Sunday – the Sunday on which we share in the meal that unites us, not only as sisters and brothers in Christ here at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Brampton but with Christians around the world! We are part of a bigger, universal Church – a fact that we celebrate today with our members from other countries – and, together, we enjoy the gift of belonging not only to God through the Church, but also to one another.

Q: How does knowing that the gift of salvation and the gift of belonging to Christ through the Church are related apply to your own membership at St. Andrew's?

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Week 4: United in Love

As a coach and manager of a baseball team for several years, I coached some pretty average teams; but one year we won the Atlantic Championship! How? Aside for a few players, the team that won was the same team that didn’t. The difference was that year we were united as a team – we all had one goal, one plan, and one rule: “there is no ‘I’ in team!” I know it’s an old cliché but it’s true: we were weaker as a team when we weren’t united. That summer I learned that unity is important; it’s critical – and it’s hard to do.

Similarly, how can a body function if its parts hold a grudge, resent, dislike, even hate another part? Say the eye sees something dangerous ahead but the feet – or legs, arms, hands – refuse to listen to the warning: the body would break down, or worse. I know both these analogies don’t match the importance of the role of the Church, but the point is the same: unity is vital to the health – and functioning – of any team or body; the Church is no different!

Thom Rainer, in his book **I AM A CHURCH MEMBER**, writes; *“Unity in the Church will not happen if members have unforgiving hearts.”* Paul thought and wrote a lot about the Church and how it is to function, and over and over again in his Letters, he emphasized the importance of unity and how it depends on and is the responsibility of every Church member: you and I are to contribute to and ensure that the Church – the Body of Christ – not only functions, but is as healthy as it should be.

Yes, just like parts of a body that are different, with different gifts, we are each necessary to the whole body: made up of imperfect members who, together, make the body work. To do this we must love one another unconditionally, forgive each other as Jesus has forgiven us, and, *“above all, clothe [ourselves] with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”* As members we are to be united in love.

Q: To Paul, unity in the Church is a sign of our love for God and for one another: are you doing your part?