

**I CORINTHIANS 12:12-21, 26,27  
THE DACHSHUND DILEMMA**

**God is here! As we His people meet to offer praise and prayer.  
May we find in fuller measure what it is in Christ we share.  
Here as in the world around us, all our varied skills and arts  
Wait the coming of His Spirit into open minds and hearts. Amen! (CW 532, v1)**

Dear Brooklyn Lutheran Members and Guests.

Twelve months ago our congregation was excited and well on its way into a year of celebrating our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. By mid-January we had already observed Baptisms done here over the years, and we were gearing up for the next month's main event – the celebration marking the February 8, 1959, very first Service held as Brooklyn Lutheran Church. A lot of wonderful things happened last year, not the least of which was our work with Parish Assistance of our Synod. These last days the leaders of our church met again with Rev. Paul Kelm to pave the way for revitalization of our church.

What can be done to stem the tide of church number decline, which is being experienced by virtually every church and denomination? What can be done to get a congregation growing and keep it in sustained growth mode? Here are a few suggestions which have been given. (I don't know how many congregations have given them a try!):

1. Offer free frequent flyer miles with every visit!
2. Or how about this one?--reclining pews!
3. Every fourth week raffle off the offering!

4. Open a Starbucks franchise in our church lobby! (My mom's Mount Olive Church in Appleton, Wisconsin, is doing something like this for between and after Services!)

What does it take to revive a church? How can a church that is stumbling along recapture the joy and enthusiasm that once gripped its fellowship? Our lessons for the day suggest three elements that must be present if a church is to be the vital body of Christ God calls us to be. If any of these three are missing, a church--regardless of its size, the beauty of its building, or the affluence of its congregation--is in trouble.

**(slide 1)nnThe first of these elements is this--the church must have a clear understanding of what it is about.** When Jesus began His ministry, the first thing He did, as we heard in the Gospel lesson this morning, was to announce His mission:

***“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed and announce the acceptable year of the Lord.”***

***The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.*** Do you possibly have a consumer's attitude? Yes, Christ served YOU – a poor, blind, oppressed captive of Satan. Jesus has set you free – not for a life of running wild doing your own thing. He has freed you to serve His God and Father and one another. We need to repent of our self-centeredness which has replaced that which is to be our first love – God, and then loving our neighbor as ourselves, loving them into faith and heaven.

From His baptism, to His death upon the cross of Calvary, to the day of His Ascension back to heaven, Jesus understood what He was here for. Before going back to heaven, He commissioned us His church to carry on: ***Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19-20.)*** The question is, how have we maintained this focus? In our Church? In our families? In our personal lives? What is our purpose as members of the Church of Jesus Christ today?

A parish assistance pastor of another denomination makes this disturbing observation: ***“It seems to me that the church in our generation suffers its most shocking lack of power from the failure of particular churches to define their reason for being.”*** This congregation counselor went on to tell about a four-page “Church Information Form” that his denomination used to send out. The first three pages were concerned with statistical information. Usually churches have little difficulty with these, he said. The last page, however, led off with this question: ***“What is the particular mission of your particular church?”*** The counselor said he sat in on many of these sessions with church officers and never were they able to answer this question with intelligence and conviction. “Most . . . do not even know that there is such a thing as a mission for the local church,” he said. When his committee prodded the officers for an answer, about the most we could hope for was, “to minister to our people.” The counselor concluded with frustration, “That much could be said for the Elks Lodge.”

What is the mission of our church? Is it not that the Spirit of the Lord is upon us?! Has He not anointed US to preach Good News to poor souls who feel their sin? Hasn't Christ sent us to proclaim freedom to those imprisoned by the fear of the grave and hell?! What a blessed privilege and responsibility is ours to restore sight to those who have been blinded by Satan to the one true God and His way of salvation in the cross! To think that you and I can release repentant souls oppressed by sin and a bad conscience with the words: "I forgive you and God forgives you!" What a wonderful and high purpose you and I have for living! What a grand opportunity we have to pool our efforts and resources in what we call Brooklyn Lutheran Church, West Lutheran High School, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod – and auxiliaries such as Lutheran Institutional Ministries Association (LIMA), Christian Life Ministries (holding their annual meeting today at St. Croix Lutheran High School) – WELS Kingdom Workers, and so we could go on and on!

I wonder if we realize just how powerful we potentially could be. But first we need to define our mission. Jesus called His followers salt . . . He spoke of His kingdom members as lights to the world. What He was saying is that we should be having an impact on our surrounding culture. A vital church understands its mission.

**(slide 2) The second thing that a vital church must have is a sense of unity and fellowship.** In our lesson from I Corinthians, St. Paul writes, *"The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ . . ."* The church at Corinth was made up of people from both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds. Some had worshipped idols. Some were slaves, some free. Paul knew that they could not effectively serve Christ if they were torn into little cliques, and didn't get their act together morally and doctrinally. So it is with the church today. If we are to be effective in winning people and influencing society, we need unity. We need to think of ourselves as one family. One body.

There is fascinating story that comes out of the D-Day invasion of World War II. It involves our army's 101st Airborne Division. Shortly after midnight on June 6th, 1944, elements of the 101st parachuted into the darkness of France. Their mission was to link up with one another, then secure the key bridges and crossroads for the soldiers who would land on the beaches later that morning. As often happens in war, things didn't go as planned. Heavy cloud cover and poor visibility forced planes to scatter before they reached their drop zones. As a result, soldiers were dropped miles from one another all over the French countryside.

In the early morning darkness and confusion, General Maxwell Taylor, commander of the 101st Airborne, found himself all alone in the pitch black. When he spotted another soldier groping his way through the darkness, he demanded the individual identify himself. It was one of his troops, just as lost and frightened as he. The two were so overjoyed to find each other they put aside military protocol and hugged one another. "It was at that very moment I knew we were going to win the war," said General Taylor. When a general and a private understand that they are one, they are ready for battle. That's important to being a winning football team, or an efficient office, or a productive manufacturing plant.

And that's a critical lesson for the church. We make it through life's difficult times by holding on to one another. A vital church is one that understands its mission in the world, at the same time caring for the members of its flock – caring enough to be here each Sunday when humanly possible, greeting and praying for one another and visitors, working together to build this church and God's Kingdom. Towards this end, knowing God's Word and standing together on it is critical. Don't let society tell you what to believe about and from the Bible. Get yourself into Bible Class. Read the Meditations. Call your pastor to dialogue points of doctrine that you don't understand or wonder where we get that from in the Bible. Then we can stand together and work shoulder to shoulder to spread the Good Word of God.

**This brings us to the final element in a church which senses itself on a mission: (slide 3) Each person knows that he or she has a ministry to fulfill.** As St. Paul tells us: *"All of you are Christ's body, and each one is part of it . . ."* *Some are the eye, some the ear, some the mouth, some are the feet . . .* Paul speaks of the various gifts or vocations as parts of the body. But one thing is clear--everyone has his or her role to play, and no part is more important than another. Simon Peter started out as the head spokesman and leader of the church at Jerusalem. Yet there would have been no Simon Peter leading the church if there had been no humble brother Andrew to lead Simon to Christ. Some of you may never occupy an exalted leadership role in the church, but your life may touch the life of another whom God will use in a great and splendid way.

St. Paul was probably the second most influential person who ever lived, after Christ Himself. Wonder how effective Paul would have been, had it not been for Barnabas, who had that marvelous gift of encouragement. When Saul of Tarsus claimed Jesus Christ had turned him around, the disciples in Jerusalem refused to believe it, or accept him. They gave him the cold shoulder. You can understand their feelings. The Jerusalem disciples thought Saul had joined the spy business. They suspected their arch-persecutor of adopting a deceitful ploy. By becoming an undercover agent in Christian guise, he would discover the followers of the Way. They feared he would send them to prison or to death, but Barnabas believed the best about Saul. Taking him to the leaders of the Jerusalem church, Barnabas vouched for his conversion. He documented the validity of Saul's transformation by reporting his public preaching of Christ in Damascus. Because the apostles knew Barnabas and trusted him, they accepted Saul.

How grateful I am that there are persons in our church family with the spirit of Andrew--the spirit of evangelism, and Barnabas--the spirit of encouragement. Each of us has a gift that Christ can use in the building of His kingdom. This is no dead shrine. This is the body of the living Christ. We are all parts of it. I am just one member of the body. My role is no greater than yours. When each of us feels that we have a calling to fulfill, we will see great things happen in this church. In the great hymn "The Church's One Foundation," we sing that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church of Jesus Christ. We can become that kind of church--militant and triumphant--when we recover our sense of mission and ministry, and when we realize that each of us has a part to play if we are to be God's people in the world today. Growing out of our meeting with Parish Assistance representative Pastor Kelm these past days is a potential new framework in which each can find their unique role in serving God at Brooklyn Lutheran. My prayer is that it might be so!

The biggest barrier confronting many American churches today is what might be called the "Dachshund Dilemma." You've been wondering about the theme for this sermon, and waiting to find out what it could possibly mean?! The "Dachshund Dilemma" is derived from an old poem about dachshunds--dogs that are long of body and short of legs. The poem goes like this: (slide 4)

**There was a dachshund, once so long. He hadn't any notion  
How long it took to notify His tail of his emotion.  
And so it happened, while his eyes were filled with woe and sadness,  
His little tail went wagging on because of previous gladness.**

This is a good description of the plight of many churches today. Is this possibly us? Are we still wagging our tails, not so much because of what is going on in our church now, but because we remember 30-40 years ago when the congregation was made up primarily of young adults and the church was filled? "*And so it happened, while his eyes were filled with woe and sadness, his little tail went wagging on because of previous gladness.*"

How do we deal with the "Dachshund Dilemma"? How do we revive a church whose better days are in the past? We accomplish that by remembering the answers to these questions: What is our mission as a church? Why do we exist? It's on your bulletin cover each Sunday, isn't it? Let's read together here: ***We exist to use the Gospel of Christ to win the lost and to nurture believers, all to the glory of God.*** To this end, let us each in unity and fellowship, strive to use the unique gifts the Holy Spirit has given for the furtherance of God's Kingdom and this congregation. Amen!

**Hark! The Church proclaims Her honor, and Her strength is only this:  
God has laid His choice upon Her, and the work She does is His.**

**Onward, then, without despairing! Calm we follow at His Word.  
Thus, through joy and sorrow bearing faithful witness to our Lord. Amen. (CW 530 - v1,5)**