

Ephesians 4:12-16 [4:1-6]

Theme: “Living Together in Unity, Amid Diversity, for Ministry”

2016 NCJ Conference Peoria, IL - Worship Leader (*Rev. Eric Swanson*)

7/15/16 9:15-10:15 a.m.

“LIVING TOGETHER... FOR MINISTRY”

e.g. **Wayne Clymer**, “When you are elected a bishop people will **say nice things** about you... (*that are not true*). And they’ll know they

- I thank you for asking me to serve as a bishop for the whole church... for saying nice things about me... and for inviting me to live up to expectations far greater than my abilities.
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e.g. When I was elected **1996 reception** was held at **Hennepin Avenue UMC**. “**We’re praying for you bishop and we’re not going to let you fail.**” Started to walk away, “**Oh it is not personal. We need you to succeed so our church will succeed and be faithful.**”

- I ask your forgiveness if I have **not met** your expectations, **said things** that hurt your spirit, **failed to respond** to a pastoral need, or **neglected to take an action** or **support a cause** that is dear to your heart. (*Let us pray.*)
- O God—our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing to you, Lord, my rock and redeemer. Amen.

“Living Together in Unity, Amid Diversity... for Ministry!”

On **July 13, 1787** The **Conference of Confederation of the United States** approved the Northwest Ordinance, formally called “An Ordinance for the Government of Territory of the United States, North-West of the River Ohio.

- It established **orderly** and **equitable processes** for the **settlement** and **political incorporation** of the Northwest Territory...
- that included lands beyond the **Appalachian Mountain**, between **British North America** and the **Great Lakes** on the **north**, and the **Ohio River** to the **south**, and upper **Mississippi River** on the **west**.

- This ordinance (*updated two years later in 1789*) **established the precedent** by which **the Federal government would be sovereign and expand westward** with the **admission of new states**
- rather than with the **expansion of existing states** and their established sovereignty under the Articles of Confederation. (*It also set precedence for the concept of **Public Doman lands.***)

e.g. When I moved to **Ohio in 1996**, I discovered the **Western Reserve** area looked a lot like Connecticut where I went to seminary. **That is because it belonged to Connecticut before this Ordinance!**

The **Northwest Ordinance** opened up a **vast mission field** for Methodist Circuit riders who followed people as they moved westward.

- Now, we have a **Hopewell UMC** in the East Ohio Conference that was begun in “**1785 (two years before the Northwest Ordinance was approved)** as “**First Methodist Work in the Northwest Territory.**”
- On **September 10, 1803** **Bishop Francis Asbury** attend quarterly conference at **Hopewell Chapel** and ordained **John Wrenchell** a deacon—the first Methodist pastor ordained in the Northwest Territory.

Friends, we have a legacy to celebrate! We have been “Living together... in ministry” for a long time.

This past **May**, a couple came into our conference office unannounced—met with Steve Court. They were not United Methodists but said,

*“This was in **my aunt’s attic**. **We’ve had it for years**. *We are moving and want it to be someplace meaningful. A retired pastor suggested we bring it to your office.*”*

- And they donated this **Circuit Rider saddle bag** from the **1800s**.
- It was used by the **Rev. Daniel Lambert** who was born in **1801** and died in **1872**. He is buried in Pike Cemetery, Knox County

Inside this Saddle bag was a Communion Set in the form of a tube.

- As **Rev. Lambert** traveled from town to town, he **preached** the gospel, **baptized** people with water, and **invited** them to **experience Christ in Holy Communion**.
- In doing so, he **unleashed** their **God-giving gifts** for ministry.

- They no longer belonged to themselves but belonged to Christ and His Body, the Church.

Friends, we have a legacy to celebrate! The gifts of those before us made it possible for us to be where we are today. (e.g. Marion Edwards)

In our scripture Paul describes a great “**gift exchange**” in the **Letter to the Ephesians**, where gifts are distributed for the mission of the church.

- That is, gifts were **not** for the benefit of the individual but for the community of faith and the salvation of the world. (*We bring out gifts in others.*)
- Each of our gifts are given by **One Spirit**, the Spirit of God in Christ.
- **Both our Unity and Ministry** derive... from our relationship to God.
- You might say, “At the foot of the Cross... and at the Empty Tomb... **we find unity... and we find our ministry!**” (*Can't have one without the other.*) **(e.g. Baptism—find unity and ministry)**

The **gifts** are given to “**equip God's people for the work of serving and building up the body of Christ.**” (or the Church).

Vs 16 “The whole body (*Church and its Ministry*) **grows from (Christ)**, as it is joined and held together by all the supporting ligaments. The body makes itself grow in that it **builds itself up with love** as **each one does their part.**”

And, when each one does their part, the Church is at its best. Look at this **video clip** of how you explain what you do when you are a pastor.

e.g. **Video Clip**... Pastor J. John

Don't you love the work of the Church?

I love this United Methodist Church because each congregation is an “Outpost” of the larger church. Unique in our context... Unified in our witness and ministry.

I love this church because of its doctrine and polity... its Christology, Ecclesiology, and its Missiology. (*We do not separate **Christ** from His **Church** and its **Mission**.*)

I love this church because we give ministries away. We believe God's love is **not** just for us, or people like us, our **local church**, **annual conference**, **jurisdiction** or even **The United Methodist Church**.

e.g. **Brandeis and Boston College**

I love this church because we are a missionary movement with...

- A “**sent clergy**”... who are willing to serve where needed.
- An **empowered membership**... who are living out their baptism.
- A “**worldwide governance**”... rather than being national church.
- A “**radically inclusive ecclesiology**”... that believes we are not saved by the correctness of doctrines or social positions. We are saved by God's grace alone!

We want sinful people in church. Isn't that why WE are there? (*No wonder we have problems with Unity, Amid Diversity*)

e.g. At any moment I have 15 or so churches in a deep theological argument... **color of carpet or where the piano belongs**. Used to think it was about our **low, sinful nature**. NO! It is **our high, sinful nature** that gets us into trouble. We imagine the church like the very best it can be. After all, this church is for God!

Perfect Church in **West Virginia** (Iowa)... Love your church like a grandchild... don't try to fix it!

I've never really believed in the Great Man or Great Woman theory of leadership. You know, where history is written about how individuals who make great changes. From my experience, there are different roles to play, but the gifts of everyone in the room are needed for real change to occur. (*Like everyone in this room*) **Why would God give everyone gifts, if only the gifts are a few are needed?** I tend to agree with...

Wallace Speers, wrote, *"The success of Christianity does not depend on the brilliance of a few great men (or women) or upon dramatically impressive actions. It is rather a tidal wave of cumulative power, created by the combined belief and action of countless ordinary people like themselves, gathering momentum as it rolls along until, through overwhelming mutual convictions, it lifts everything in its path to new heights of beauty and perfection."*

Had it not been for the people of God using the gifts of God... you and I would not be Christian today. For the saints of old were equipped... they did the work of ministry... and they built up the body of Christ... which is the Church.

That is our responsibility today... "to equip the Saints"

- To help each person use the gifts God has them.
- So each person might be able to meet the challenges of life
- And together we might make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Aren't you thankful that those who have gone before us, left a legacy for us to follow?

e.g. Annie: Special star... Band of heavenly angels singing...

Our lesson is about the Unity of the Church and how God provides for the building up of the Church through the saints.

It is interesting that here is Paul... In prison... and he writes from his cell to encourage others to "lead a life worthy of their calling"... and to understand that their gifts are from God "to equip the Saints" for building up the church.

This letter was probably a circular letter that went to different places where early Christian groups had formed. The people to who read this letter came from different backgrounds and nationalities... and yet God called them; redeemed and forgave them; and put them in a Body guided by the Spirit and filled with individual gifts.

Unity of the body of Christ

Ephesians 4:12-16 (CEB)(11 *He gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.*) 12 His purpose was to **equip God's people for the work of serving and building up the body of Christ until we all reach the unity of faith and knowledge of God's Son.**

- God's goal is for us to become mature adults—to be fully grown, measured by the standard of the fullness of Christ.
- As a result, we aren't supposed to be infants any longer who can be tossed and blown around by every wind that comes from teaching with deceitful scheming and the tricks people play to deliberately mislead others.
- Instead, by speaking the truth with love, let's grow in every way into Christ, who is the head.

The **whole body grows from him**, as it is joined and held together by all the supporting ligaments. The body makes itself grow in that **it builds itself up with love as each one does their part.**

Ephesians 4:12-16 (NRSV) (11 *The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers,*) 12 to **equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,** 13 **until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God,** to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. 14

- We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming.
- But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.