

The Four Pillars of the Church

4. Service

1 Corinthians 12:4-7

This morning I am completing the sermon series on the Four Pillars of the Church. The four pillars are named in the vow of church membership. We ask new United Methodists if they will support the church with their prayers, their presence, their gifts and their service.

We ask members to commit to supporting the church with their prayers, their presence, their gifts and their service because committed support in all four of these areas is essential to have a strong, vital and healthy church. You lift the church to new heights when you support it with your prayers, your presence, your gifts and your service.

Christ is the foundation of the church. The pillars of the church are those members who are anchored in Christ and who lift the church with their prayers, their presence, their gifts and their service.

We talked about how important prayer is. Prayer makes a difference. The prayer support of the church members makes huge difference to the church. Those who pray for the church are pillars of the church.

We talked about presence. When the church gathers, something wonderful happens. Christ comes among us. A sacred moment is created. Your attendance at the gathering enhances the sacredness of that moment. Your absence diminishes that sacredness. Those who are present as often as possible are pillars of the church.

Last week I talked about giving—giving money. When you give to the church, you get something from the church. You are fed the word of God, which is just as vital as groceries. The more you give to the church, the more the church can give to you. Those who are generous in giving money to the church are pillars of the church.

This morning we are talking about supporting with your service. When we talk about supporting the church with your service, we are talking about giving your time to the ministries of the church.

Last week I talked about how it embarrasses people to talk about money. Well, that's not a problem this week. People are not embarrassed to talk about time. And most of them will say, "I don't have enough." You know, since they changed the day from 26 hours to 24 hours, there really isn't enough days. Just kidding.

The truth is that people have just as much as they have always had. There are still twenty-four hours in a day, aren't there? I don't believe that has changed. We shouldn't be saying we don't have enough time. We should be saying that we are trying to do too much.

I'm perfectly aware that when I talk to you about giving more time to serve in the church, it means you will have to give less time to something else. It's a matter of priorities.

Have you heard of the acronym JOY? You probably have. It is a simple way of stating what a Christian's priorities should be. It stands for **J**esus, **O**thers, and **Y**ou. Put Jesus first, others second and yourself third. Those priorities bring joy. What are your

priorities? Most of us would say something like this: **Work, School, Children's activities, Leisure, Church.** Now, what kind of acronym does that make? I have no idea. I just know there is no joy in it. We need to prioritize.

I heard one preacher say that church members ought to give a tithe of their time to the church. There are twenty-four hours in a day. A tithe would be 2.4 hours or two hours and twenty-four minutes. There are a few people who give that much time to church-related ministries. However, there aren't many who can give that much time.

There are a few more who give 2.4 hours per week. And then there are a few more who give 2.4 hours per month. I would hazard a guess that most of the work of the church is done by church members who give about 2.4 hours a month to work in church ministries.

Then there are the church members who are like baseball pitchers. There are pitchers and there are catchers. What's the difference between pitchers and catchers? Well, catchers play every day. Pitchers come in every now and then. Pitchers work hard while they are in the game. But then they have to rest. Catchers just keep on going, day after day, game after game. You have to have both to have a winning team.

Some people give their time all at once. They spend a week at UMass. Or they go to Sager Brown in Louisiana and spend a few days at the United Methodist Committee on Relief organizing and packing the supplies there to be sent to victims of disasters. They do a lot of good in a matter of a few days. Then they come home and they need to rest before they take on another job.

Other people are down here at the church pretty regularly. They are helping fold and mail newsletters. Or they are visiting a homebound or nursing home member, or they are at choir practice each week, or they are doing repairs around the church.

You have to have pitchers and catchers in the church. You have to have the people who give it their all every now and then, and you have to have those who in there day after day or week after week, keeping the ongoing programs and ministries of the church going.

Those are the pillars of the church—the people who give from 2.4 hours of their time a day to 2.4 hours per month, or they give a week here and a few days there. They are the ones who lift the church. If the church is a powerhouse of change and service for the cause of Christ, it is because that church has a lot of people who are giving the work of the church priority. They are giving their time.

The ones who concern me are those who never get in the game at all. There are lots of different reasons some church members don't give any time to the ministries of the church. Some are valid reasons. Some aren't.

One reason that people give me that bugs me is this one: Nobody ever asks me to do anything. That's not true. Somebody has asked you to do something—Jesus.

If you have been baptized, if you are a Christian, Jesus has called you to do something. He has called you to do something in the church.

What has he called you to do? Well, have you ever noticed anything about the church that bothered you, maybe something the church doesn't do very well or doesn't do at all? Guess what. Jesus is calling you to do something about it.

Do you remember the children's story about the king who had a big rock put in the middle of a major street in his capital? Then he sat at a window in his castle to see what would happen. Well a man in a wagon came along and saw the rock, and he

shouted, “How could this be? Somebody needs to do something about this.” And he turned his wagon around. A group of women came along, and when they saw the rock, one said, “Why hasn’t the king sent someone to take care of this?” This went on all day, until late in the afternoon, when a man coming down the street saw the rock. He took off his coat and proceeded to roll the rock to the side of the street. The king had the man stopped and immediately declared that he was the new prime ministry of the kingdom. The king was just looking for someone who was willing to do something to solve the problem, rather than waiting for someone else to do it.

1 Corinthians 12 tells us the Holy Spirit has given each of us different gifts, so that all the work of the church can be done. It takes all of us working together to do the work Christ has given the church to do.

So, what is your gift? There are lots of ways to find out what your gifts are. But probably the best is simply ask this question: “What needs do you see that nobody else seems to see?” When you are bothered by something in the church, it is probably the Spirit of Christ calling you to do something about it.

Don’t wait for someone to come and ask you. You come to me or someone else in leadership in the church and say, “Here is an area of weakness in our church, and I feel that Christ is calling me to do something about it.” I have had several people do exactly that since I have been here. I had someone just a couple of days ago who came to talk to me about some concerns. I asked her if she was willing to work on dealing with those concerns. She said, “If I lift up a problem, I ought to be willing to be a part of the solution.” That’s exactly right. We talked about how she could work to solve that problem within the structure of the church.

Don’t be a lone ranger and try to solve a problem all by yourself. But talk to the church leaders. I’ll guarantee you that we will do what we can to help you do the work that Christ is calling you to do.

But it all starts with making the church a priority. How much time are you willing to give to the church? I want you to write it down. Can you give the church 2.4 hours a day, or 2.4 hours a week, or 2.4 hours a month? Or can you give the church one day a week or a month? Or can you give the church one week per year?

Where does the church need to improve its ministries? How can you use your time to help your church be a stronger, more faithful servant of Christ?

Be a pillar of the church. Lift the church with your prayers, your presence, your gifts and your service. Give the church your time.

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