

Community Church of Issaquah
January 21, 2023
What Is My Role in the Church?
Rev. Vincent Lachina

There is perhaps no great misconception than to assume that the pastor of any church or any denomination runs a one -person show. It is true that ministers are in a unique position after having answered God's call to ministry. The job of a minister is to shepherd the flock, meaning that we take a leadership role and work toward helping a congregation grow in its knowledge of the Lord and in the responsibility of a church to do God's work. Trust me, I never in my wildest imagined it would be such a rewarding and at the same time, challenging call. Someone once asked me how I liked flying solo as a pastor. I laughed quite loudly at such a false conception. In truth, a pastor or minister of any variety is truly one among many. Let me explain.

I love what Paul said in the Scripture we had read for us today.

For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ and individually members one of another. And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly.

Paul pretty much hit the nail on the head with that clarification of the role of each and every follower who has

chosen to be a part of a faith family of Christ. The bottom line is this: we are many people who belong to one body – the church. And to add to his clarification, Paul goes on to tell us that each of us has a role in the one body of Christ, the church.

In my last ministerial role in a local congregation, I preached this often. When a person came to answer the invitation to join our church by faith or transfer of letter or any other reason, one of the questions they were always asked was, “God has given you a gift. What would you like to do here in the church to exercise that gift?” Most often, individuals would have to pause and think about it. I would explain that every person in the church has something they can contribute to the church and the question was simply, “What do you have to give to this church? What would you like to do?” That was never a question about finances but about answering God’s calling to be the church. Some would chose hospitality, some yard work, some music, but each one found something they could do and were recruited to serve.

Today, I often see or hear the phrase, “Don’t just GO to church. BE the church.” That is a wise admonition for all of us. Paul’s use of the term ‘body’ to describe the church and its members is perhaps one of his best illustrations. Each of us has a body, and in our bodies there are parts that have a unique function. Ears to hear. Noses to smell. Tongues to taste. Hands to cook or type or a million other things. Eyes to see. Throats to swallow. That is how our bodies work. If we are missing one of the body parts, we don’t function at 100%. The very same is true for the

church. If we have someone in our congregation who hasn't yet found a place of service, the church doesn't function at 100%

Each of us has a specific thing we can do to keep the body of Christ, the church, functioning. Laughingly, I would say perhaps the role of the pastor is being the mouth. Yet I know that my role in the church is very definite. I am called to preach the Word of God and pastor the people. Am I the only one who does that? Definitely not. Have you given much thought to the life of Jesus and how those around him who formed his faith network all had a role in building his Church? The disciples are probably the most prominent among all those who are talked about in the Bible, but there were so many others, most of whom are not called out by name or purpose.

From the very basic functions of life to the setting aside of being called to be an apostle, Jesus's world was filled with people he needed to make his body of faith whole. We don't hear much about the women who were his followers, but who do you think did the cooking, the cleaning, the washing? They had an important role which I think they felt honored to do. Who were those who supported Jesus and his work through their financial giving? Who recorded the life and messages of Christ and his followers? Who were sent on missionary journeys to spread the word? The list is infinite, but each one had a specific role to play, just as you and I do.

At the core of this message today is a simple hope that each of you would stop for a moment and ask yourself,

“What is my role in the church? What can I do to make this congregation better?” I don’t know the answer to that for each of you, but I know for certainty that each of you has a very significant contribution to make to the Body, the Church. When we engage in some self-inventory, we are likely to come up with something that we can do to contribute to the well-being of this Church.

The first step is to determine what role you could play that would help to build a stronger congregation. The second would be to ask yourself, “Am I doing that now?” The purpose of this questioning is not to embarrass or shame anyone, but to give each of us a time to step back and examine what we are gifted to do and how we are using that gift. As Paul said, “Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly.” The passage lists some of the personal investments of life for those hearing the words which may nor may not be what we can do in our lifetime.

Paul told the early church builders what he is telling us today. “If you’re a prophet, then prophesy; if a servant, then serve; if a teacher, then teach; if a leader, then lead; and the one who shows mercy, do it with cheerfulness.” Each of us must answer our own calling of God to use those gifts we have been given for the glory of Christ. When I felt God calling me to do something in the church, I wasn’t exactly sure what that would be. I knew that since I briefly played a tuba and the music was in the bass cleft, and I couldn’t sing worth a penny, I wasn’t called to be the Minister of Music. I felt that since I hadn’t taken my hope of being a creative writer very far, I was sure then that I

wouldn't be a preacher writing sermons. Besides, I didn't know the Bible well enough to even think about writing a sermon that had any meaning.

But having a strong desire to teach, I thought perhaps my best option would be to be a Minister of Education and even teach Sunday School (as long as they gave me materials I could rely on). For the early years of my life in ministry, that is what I did. In high school I taught Sunday School to 8 year olds. I served my first church calling as a minister to the deaf and taught sign language classes at the church and my college. In seminary I found myself as a houseparent for a children's home, teaching boys how to face life without the support of parents or a strong family. As a missionary, I taught young women in both Catholic and Muslim schools the subject of religion in preparation for their big final exam to qualify for graduating from secondary education. In my missionary days between school terms in East Africa, I wrote Sunday School materials for youth. Was that the end of it? Not even close.

I served as a youth minister, a denominational leadership consultant and magazine editor, a founding pastor of a new church, pastor of a growing church, and a chaplain. Now here I am again doing this preaching thing. What's the point in telling you all that? Simply to let you know that when we are called to be a part of the Body of Christ, we might not be locked into one way of using that gift of grace. You – each of you – were given a gift in your life of some talent or ability. And when God led you to become active in a church, it was God's hope that you would use those gifts

for His outreach into the world. Each of us has a different gift. Are you celebrating yours? And are you using yours for the Body of Christ?

It's easy for us to fall into the role of pew inhabitant, and every church has that. But God calls us all to do more than park and pray. If we are to put the mandate, "Don't just go to church, be the church" into action, There is work required. We join a congregation and become a member because we believe that body can be a supportive and caring faith family. And when we join, we should be ready to volunteer for some specific investment of our gifts. Do not think for a moment that as one single person you do not or will not make a difference. That is not true. Every Body of Christ is made up of members who come one by one.

What is your role in the church? I'll give you my opinion. Your role is to be a volunteer, to be a leader, to be a supporter, and most importantly, be a worker. If the body of Christ is symbolic of your own human body, you will definitely want all the body parts to work as best as they can. So, let me ask you as I used to ask those who came to my church, "What is your talent or gift? And how do you want to use it here in this church?" From outreach to music to teaching to mission work – the list is endless. There is much to be done, so roll up your sleeves and let's do it. Are you ready?