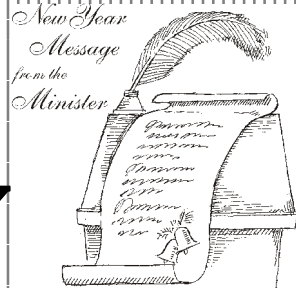


**FROM
PASTOR
NIELSEN
JANUARY
2011**



Dear Friends in Christ,

My family and I thank you for greetings, gifts, and good will shared with us this Christmas season. People sometimes think that I must have to work extra hard during the Christmas season, but really Christmas at Peace Lutheran Church seems much more like fun than like work. Thank you all for sharing the joy and peace of Christmas with me and my family.

Last month I wrote about worship. Worship is the most foundational Christian action. But another fundamental action of Christian living is Membership. Worship is about believing. Membership is about belonging. Worship is about our relationship to Christ. Membership is about our relationship to the Body of Christ.

There have been many who have agreed with Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones who said, "Jesus is cool. It's the church I can't stand." There are many in our world who claim to be Christian but who want no part of the church. They despise "organized religion". But is disorganized religion really an improvement? What they really don't like is trying to get along with people who disagree with them. What they really want is a religion that never challenges their opinions, never asks for their sacrifice, and never holds them accountable for their life.

It is true that being a member of a church is hard at times. There are disagreements and challenges. There are obnoxious people. As Tony Campolo said, if the Church is called to be the light of the world (Matthew 5:14), then we shouldn't be surprised if it attracts a few bugs. It takes work and sacrifice to make a church work. So I am not surprised that some people want to skip out on the whole church scene. There is something attractive about being a church of one.

However, an independent Christian is an oxymoron, a self-contradiction. Christ Jesus calls us into community. By baptism, we are connected both to Christ and to his body, the Church. The Bible is written to a community of people, not to separate individuals.

How else can we fulfill all the "one another" commands of Scripture: love one another (John 13:14), honor one another (Rom. 12:10), accept one another (Rom. 15:7), serve one another (Gal. 5:13), carry one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2), submit to one another (Eph. 5:21), bear with one another and forgive one another (Col. 3:13), teach and admonish one another (Col. 3:16), encourage and build up one another (1 Thess. 5:11), spur one another on toward love and good deeds (Heb. 10:24), confess your sins to one another and pray for one another (James 5:16), and many others?

So why join a church as a member? Simply because Jesus calls us to commit ourselves to one another as a community, as members of his body. Joining a church is the simplest way to answer Jesus' call to community.

But what if you can't find a church that really fits you? If there is a serious lack of churches in your community, you should start a new church. But in most Nebraska communities, include Deshler, there are already enough

good churches. No church is perfect. Most are far from perfect. Thank God for that or else you and I wouldn't be welcomed.

So what do we do? We choose the church we feel closest to geographically or theologically or spiritually. Then we love that church and let that church love us. We remember that we need the Body of Christ and that the Body of Christ needs us, all of us.

What is expected of church members? Everyone has something to share and members are expected to share something of themselves in the life of the church. What can members expect of the church? The church cares for all its members. We urge members to let the pastor and others know when there is a need for prayer, counsel, or support. We want to be there for each other.

We have over a hundred members of Peace Lutheran Church who show no signs of interest in our congregation. Perhaps we should remove them from membership list to encourage them to seek membership elsewhere. However, we don't like to give up on anybody. If we have any hope that they might return to active membership in our congregation some day, we keep them on our membership list. That is because we are family.

As members of one another, we are all about building friendships in Christ. One of the ways we do that is by having fun together. In the interest of building our sense of community, we would like to have a fellowship evening around a talent show as members share a song, a skit, or some other talent that shares a smile or inspires a heart. Come join us for a night of sharing talents on Friday, January 14.

Also, this month we will hold a meeting to vote on our congregation's membership in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. I believe it is important for a congregation to be

connected to the wider church. Lone ranger congregations are just as bizarre as lone ranger Christians. Christianity is a team sport. Going it alone is not an option.

The question is: Of all the branches of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, which branch will best connect Peace Lutheran Church to the rest of the Christian Church and to God's mission in the world. Some believe it is still the ELCA and others believe it is now LCMC. Neither the ELCA nor LCMC are perfect. This month on January 9 we will meet together to decide which direction Peace Lutheran Church will go for now. Who knows what the future will hold? Thanks be to God we know who holds the future.

Yours in Christ, *Phil Nielsen*

WEDNESDAY NIGHTS **"THE TRUTH PROJECT"**

This past fall the Adult Bible Class on Sunday morning began discussing The Truth Project, a video series presenting the conflict of worldviews in our world today. Now that discussion is moving to Wednesday evenings as we continue to look at the topics of history, sociology, law, and labor. We will meet at 7 PM to look at a provocative half hour presentation and then talk about issues raised by the presentation for the final half hour. All are welcome. We begin January

