



The Bethany Window

The Monthly Newsletter of Bethany Lutheran Church
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You keep using that word. I don't think it means what you think it means. (Inigo Montoya, The Princess Bride)

We Christians use words that mean something slightly different in the church than the rest of the world. "Member" is one of those words.

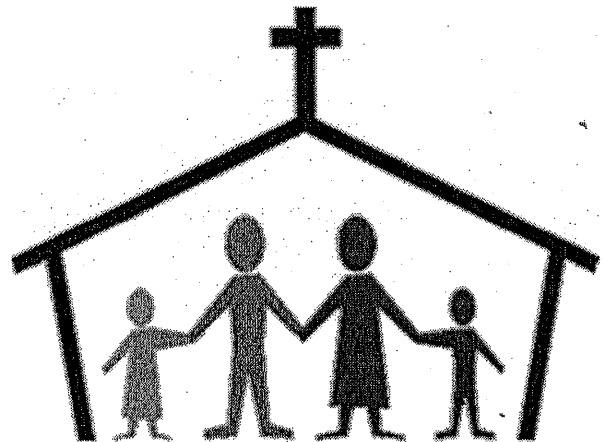
Our church constitution must identify a member in some way. Ours says that a member of Bethany is a baptized person who attends at least once per year and gives one contribution of record per year. Of course there are exceptions for illness, hardship, college, and military. As you might imagine, this does not do justice to God's view of a member. Baptism and faith make us members of the one holy catholic and apostolic church. Participation of a certain level will maintain your administrative membership in a congregation, but membership in the kingdom is not about minimal participation on Sunday morning.

As it is, there are many members, yet one body. ²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." ²² On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; ²⁴ whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, ²⁵ that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. (1 Corinthians 12:20-26)

If you are part of the church, then Jesus does not view you as a member of an organization. He regards you as part of his very self. Your hands are his, and they serve and heal in his name. Your face is his face, and it reflects love and compassion in his name. Your feet, despite any callouses and poorly maintained toenails, are the

beautiful feet that carry the good news. Your mouth is to speak the truth of Christ. So when you are lost, you are missed. When you suffer, it is Christ who suffers with you. When you sin, it reflects on us all. Membership is to be part of a body, not a club.

As we start the new year, we have some membership responsibilities to consider. First, all members of Bethany are encouraged to attend our annual meeting on January 28 immediately after worship. The meeting is short but important, and gives each of you an opportunity to have a say in the direction of our ministry, our finances, and to sure up some administrative details. Second, but more importantly, be a member as Jesus calls us to be. Be generous and compassionate. Be loving and kind. Be prayerful and mindful. Be faithful and intentional about how you will live out your faith in every part of your life.



Almighty God, by the love of Jesus Christ you draw people to yourself and welcome them into the household of faith. May we show your joy by embracing each other as we bear your creative and redeeming word to all the world. Keep us close together in your Spirit, in the breaking of bread and the prayers, and in service to others, following the example of Jesus Christ, our servant and Lord. Amen. (ELW Additional Prayer for The Church, p. 75, slightly adjusted)