

Do we, as God's children, Christ's church, believe that God is calling us to be together- together in worship, together in prayer, together in relationship, and together in purpose?

Jesus had a dream for His Church 2000 years ago- a dream to love, care, and extend His grace and truth. Jesus prayed that the Church would be together. Jesus prayed that the Church would be One in our mission and ministry. Our call then, as we come together, is to be the expression of Christ and Christ's dream today!

I found a series of poignant questions on a church website called *ChurchTogether*: "What would it look like if there was an agency that was able to pull all the different sectors of society to make our culture better? What would it look like if we were able to pull people from a variety of different sectors of society to work towards a common goal? What would it look like if we could do more than just fill children's tummies with food, also enlightening them with values that could change the trajectory of their lives? What's the answer to the deep needs and hurts of many in our community? What if there was a place that was so radically committed to loving people with the unconditional love of Christ that a whole community could be changed? The answer to all of these questions is Jesus and his Church."

So, how about it? Do we believe that Jesus is the key answer to the problems that people, our society, and our world need? Do we believe that Jesus can bring the healing and health our lives and world needs? Do we believe that Jesus is our hope? The great commandment and the great commission are all about loving people as God does. Love is best expressed in shared relationships. What is our part in this? We are loved by God and called by God to partner together to help establish the kingdom of God here on earth as it is in heaven. There is no singular person, group, agency, or particular church that can fully accomplish all that God wants to accomplish here on earth. We need each other.

Good thing for us, we know of several examples in which people coming together as a team, as one, has proven to yield really good results. Teamwork success stories are not just motivational anecdotes; they are blueprints for building a team that can achieve the extraordinary.

The story of the Wright Brothers is a testament to teamwork. Wilbur and Orville Wright, through their shared vision and relentless collaboration, achieved the first successful powered flight. Their teamwork success is a reminder of Henry Ford's words, "Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success."

Apollo 11's moon landing in 1969 is an extraordinary example of great teamwork. This monumental achievement was the result of countless team members working together towards a common goal. On a project this extensive, teamwork is of course paramount,

but this particular story embodies Jim Stovall's quote, "Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision" perfectly.

Walt Disney and his team of animators created some of the most beloved characters and stories. This success was rooted in effective teamwork and the belief in the immensity of what they could achieve together, even if not completely clear at the time. As Orben once said, "Teamwork is the ability to work as a group toward a common vision, even if that vision becomes extremely blurry." Sometimes, to be successful, a team must persist through adverse, unsure times to reap their rewards.

Under the leadership of coach Vince Lombardi, the Pittsburgh Steelers became one of the most successful teams in NFL history. Lombardi's famous teamwork quote, "Individual commitment to a group effort—that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work," was exemplified by his team. (*Covenant Commitment Card*)

The Beatles, one of the greatest music bands, showcased the power of working together. Their collaboration, creativity, and ability to work as a team led to a new era in music, echoing Ken Blanchard's words, "None of us is as smart as all of us." A band is a great example of the downfall that arises when teamwork flails; as soon as one member does not pull their weight, the whole band, and their output suffers.

Michael Jordan, often hailed as the greatest basketball player, emphasized the importance of his team in his success. He lived by the belief that "Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence win championships." This notion was echoed by legendary football manager Sir Alex Ferguson during his reign at Manchester United. Both of these sporting icons reiterated time and time again that effectively, there is no "I" in team.

Helen Keller's achievements, despite her disabilities, were made possible with the help of her teacher, Anne Sullivan. Their story is a powerful example of how teamwork can overcome even the most daunting challenges, embodying Helen Keller's own inspirational quote about teamwork, "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."

These examples of teamwork remind us that great teamwork is about more than the sum of its parts; it's about shared vision, mutual respect, and the collective pursuit of a common goal. As Napoleon Hill rightly said, "It is literally true that you can succeed best and quickest by helping others to succeed." This is the essence of teamwork, where every team member contributes to the larger picture, making the impossible possible.

A rowing crew that is off rhythm will go in every which direction and never reach its destination. In order to be an efficient team, all members must row in perfect sync with one

another, moving the boat in the same direction. The same rule applies with the church. The great commission (mission) is clear, and the great commandments (goals) are set but they are not able to be achieved when all of our team members are not lined up and working towards the same mission and goal. Alignment as ONE is the key to the church's success. Jesus knew it when he prayed to God. He also knew it would be hard to accomplish it, which is why he passionately asked for God's assistance and support in the journey for the Church.

Let's think about this now. When we are ONE, a team, we have the ability to achieve the extraordinary and make the impossible possible. If that doesn't get your juices going, I don't know what will 😊. Think now about our ONENESS being powered by God, who makes the ordinary extraordinary and turns can't into can, unable into able, and impossible into possible. God with us- us together, as ONE, with God- is the unbreakable and unstoppable force God intended from the beginning and continues to seek and demand today. And there is not a doubt in my mind or my heart or my soul that this unbreakable and unstoppable force is exactly what the world needs more than anything right now.

And I am not alone in that belief. On Thursday morning this past week I attended a prayer breakfast with about 50 other clergy and faith leaders in Lynchburg. It was hosted by the mayor. Do you know what we prayed for first? Unity. Unity in our fellowship together as God's children. Unity in our call to serve God's mission, not only at church, but as church living in our community every day. Unity in zip codes. Unity in color. Unity in economics. Unity in love. Unity in response to tragedy. Unity in compassion. What we prayed in hope of and assurance in was "When we are ONE" God will be revealed in the most sure and powerful of ways and with God revealed, we can't help but be better and do better as a community. This is the number one prayer of our cities faith leaders and rightfully so, because it was also Jesus' prayer for us in the churches inception.

"The Spirit always finds a new way of breaking out in the church. God will always find a way; all God needs is willing hearts." (Phillip Yancey, author, theologian) You heard it here. God will find a way to do what God needs to do here at First Presbyterian, in Lynchburg, around the world. The more willing hearts there are committed and connected and engaged to God and one another, the faster God's commission can be witnessed and commandments fulfilled and the better off we will all be.

Those of us who attend church could find more appealing ways to spend Sunday morning. Many often do on a regular basis. We make the effort to come together though, not because we have it together but because we share a common need, a need for God. Families are flawed, difficult to transform, and full of eccentric characters, too, but few people entirely give up on their families. Why do we stick it out then? We stick it out because we value what we hold in common, and in the process, we learn to think less about our own needs and more

about others.’ (adapted from Phillip Yancey Interview) This servant leadership and selfless approach is one of the characteristics Christ embodied most.

In the Book of Acts, the writings about and from the early church are primarily about community. A minority of people living in a Jewish culture in the broader Roman empire decide that a first-century prophet named Jesus has the answer to life’s problems. What do they do? They band together to encourage each other and meet each other’s needs. It’s that simple, and that complicated. The church begins as a kind of counter-culture, a coming together of like-minded people who commit to each other, and in doing so, become a model for the culture around them. One of the many things we can learn from this is that any movement, and what a movement it was (still is actually), has great difficulty sustaining itself apart from community.

Another reflection from Phillip Yancey offers us this thought. “Saint John of the Cross, who wrote, “The soul that is alone...is like the burning coal that is alone. It will grow colder rather than hotter.” I believe he is right, and I have seen that truth borne out again and again. The Christian faith should come with a warning label: Do Not Attempt to Practice Alone. The church is like a body comprising many parts. We need each other for balance, for correction, for sustained life. Worship involves submission to a “Higher Power,” and it also involves a kind of submission to a group of fellow-believers that include crying babies and fumbling senior citizens, stuff-shirts, and tattooed teenagers. Do that for a while, and you find your faith becoming less self-centered.”

When we are ONE: with God, with one another, in mission, in ministry...

When we are ONE: with a shared vision, mutual respect, and the collective pursuit of a common goal to embody and reflect the life of Christ in all we are and do...

When we are ONE: willing and ready to do whatever it takes to connect and engage for the benefit of all God’s people...

When we are ONE: God’s kingdom will be much more present here on earth as it is in heaven...

Good things will happen when we are ONE! Mighty things will happen when we are ONE!
Extraordinary things will happen when we are ONE!

It is just that easy! And maybe it is just that hard too. However, it’s Jesus’ prayer for us. It is God’s will for us. We got to try. We got to do our best and give the rest to God. Let all God’s people say, Amen.