

PASTORAL PONDERINGS — No Volunteers in the Church

“So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.” Ephesians 2:19

Dear Friends in Christ,

Volunteer! I have looked diligently through the chapters and books of the Bible and have not found this word anywhere. I find the “members of the body” language in I Corinthians 12; the “members of the household of God” in Ephesians; “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s people” in I Peter 2. There is “vine and branches” language and “friends” language in John; there is “disciple” throughout the Gospels; there is “holy city” and “bride” and “kingdom” and “saint” in Revelation. But nowhere is there the word volunteer!

So where do we get the idea that there are volunteers in the church? Our Book of Discipline states “It shall be the duty of the pastor and of the members of the church council by regular visitation, care, and spiritual oversight to provide necessary activities and opportunities for spiritual growth through individual and family worship and individual and group study to connect faith and daily living, and continually to aid all the members to keep their vows to uphold the Church by attendance, prayers, gifts, service, and witness.” The only place in the Discipline that the word Volunteer appears at all is in relationship to short-term mission (Volunteers in Mission), working under the authority of regular missionaries. Even that use is probably incorrect, as our outreach may take us beyond the walls of our local church – members extending their service.

The point is this: when we take membership vows in the church, we become working members of a local arm of the body of Christ. Our vows bind us to attendance, prayers, giving, serving, and witnessing. We are not volunteers; we are members. A volunteer comes and goes at whim; a member has a stake in the outcome of the activities of the organization. **THERE ARE NO VOLUNTEERS IN THE CHURCH!** The pastor may be the paid professional in the church; the duties of the pastor are to train, teach, lead, encourage, explain, support, model. (The list in the Discipline is over two pages long.) Nowhere does it say the pastor is to do the people’s work of ministry. Nowhere does it say the pastor is to summon a volunteer!

We are all in this together. None of us is a volunteer. We are all workers in the vineyard of Christ. Our real payment is in the spiritual growth of those who are drawn to Christ by the grace and power of the living God, and in the blessing that God bestows upon those who are faithful to this calling.

As we begin another year of working together, let us remember that we are members of the body of Christ – there is no volunteer among us!

Yours in the love of Christ and of his Church,

Pastor Ginny Hoch