

Team Faith

A sermon preached by
Gene McAfee

At
Faith United Church of Christ
Richmond Heights, Ohio

On the
Third Sunday after the Epiphany
January 27, 2019
Installation of Officers and Recognition of Ministries

“And God has appointed in the church . . . forms of leadership. . . .” – 1 Corinthians 12:28

I'd like to begin my sermon this morning by asking you to reach for a pencil and find a spot on your bulletin where you can make a list.

And having done that, would you please write down the following names: Linda Brooks, Gail Yusko, Mary-Ellen Vogt, Phil Juarez, Kathy Lorentz, Jill Dugovics, Kelly Holtz, Ed Jacquet, Betty St. John, and Marilyn Wilson. You can also write my name, as well.

With the exception of Kathy Lorentz, our assistant treasurer overseeing payroll, the folks I've named for you are the members of MLC, our Ministry Leadership Council. We installed them a few minutes ago and prayed for them as part of the liturgy. I asked you to write down their names just now so that you can continue to pray for them throughout this coming year, as they serve our church on your behalf. Keep this bulletin somewhere near where you pray. If you pray during your daily devotions, tuck the list of names in your book of devotions. If you pray with Scripture, keep the names tucked inside your Bible. If you pray when you walk, as I do, fold this bulletin up and tuck it in your coat pocket, so that you can pray for these folks, by name, as individuals and as a council, for the welfare of our church, to the benefit of the world, and to the glory of God's name.

Because, in the final analysis, God has appointed them as one of the forms of leadership for Faith Church. We may have chosen them, but God appointed them. God appointed them because they said yes to the voice of the Holy Spirit calling them to service. God appointed them and it's our job to pray for them. We pray not that they will do what we want them to do, but rather that they may hear clearly what God is calling them to do on behalf of this church. They are part of Team Faith, the captain of which is Jesus Christ, the head of the church; and

like all teams, the members of MLC each have specific gifts for which they were asked to serve, and I would like to mention very briefly a few of them to you.

Linda has been a member of this church for decades, and she was president when you called me to be your pastor. She knows what it's like to help lead a church through times of transition and uncertainty. She knows how turbulent things can get, and she knows that we're in a much better place now than we once were. So if you become anxious about our present or our future, talk to Linda; she can reassure you.

Gail, Jill, and Marilyn were members of the search committee who recommended me to all of you fifteen-plus years ago as their candidate to be Faith's pastor. They, too, know what it's like to sail through stormy seas. They know what it's like to shoulder a heavy responsibility requiring discernment, judgment, and the ability to listen and be responsive to people's concerns. They also know what it takes to make courageous and not universally popular decisions, and that gives them impeccable credentials when it comes to keeping us on track.

Mary-Ellen, Phil, and Ed have each been attending Faith for more than twenty years; among them, they have most of a century of experience with our church, serving it in various capacities. That kind of deep knowledge is invaluable when it comes to helping people see the big picture.

Betty St. John is one of the two remaining founding members of this congregation; Bernice Barris is the other. Betty is also the most senior member of MLC; she is well and truly one of our church's elders. Her knowledge of Faith Church is unsurpassed, and her dedication not only to our church, but also to our community and our church's role in it, makes her a virtual library of information and insight.

And the youngest member of the group is Kelly Holtz, the only member of MLC who can say that she was raised from infancy in this church. Kelly has grown up with Faith as Faith has grown up with her, and both have weathered chance and change to emerge strong, dedicated, and ready to be a new church for a new era.

Those are the folks who will be helping us be Faith Church for the coming year. I asked you to pray for them a while ago and I am asking you again. Pray for them and talk to them. Support them and help them think creatively and outside the box. Show them by your words and by your actions that you appreciate them and are grateful for their willingness to serve.

No one knows better than a pastor how much teamwork is required to keep a church alive and spiritually healthy, especially in a time of growing secularity and marginalization for the mainline church. I've offered a few words about the members of MLC this morning, but Team Faith is made up of far more people than just those serve on our council.

When you walked through the door this morning and were greeted by someone genuinely glad to see you here, you encountered Team Faith.

When you arrived at the sanctuary, and entered this sacred and sometimes intimidating space, you were assisted by an usher, another member of Team Faith.

The first voice you heard welcoming you to worship was that of the liturgist, another member of Team Faith.

And I could go on and on and on. If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a team to run a church. That team is headed not by me or by Linda or even by all of MLC, but by the Holy Spirit, who apportions gifts as that Spirit chooses, and then calls each and all of us to use those gifts for the good of this place and every place. You and I are the earthen vessels in which the treasure of the gospel has been made flesh, and it's a privilege and an honor and a joy to be part of that team.

The game we're playing is called redemption, and although it's serious, it's meant to be played with joy. It has only one rule, and that is the rule of love: love of God above everything else, and love of neighbor as we love ourselves. Playing by that rule means, ultimately, that we'll win. We may suffer in the short term, but in the long run, with God as our strength as well as our guide, we'll win. You and I will not live to see that victory in our lifetimes, but we believe that we are on the winning team.

So, welcome, all of you, to Team Faith.