

Ephesians 4:1-16  
Matthew 28:16-20

### Building the Body in Love

Jack LaLane died this week. He was 96 years old. LaLane was a body builder, a chiropractor, a nutritionist, a fitness expert and a motivational speaker who owned gyms and hosted his own TV show from 1951 to 1985. He exercised two hours every day and lectured America on the importance of fitness and eating right. He was worried about a flabby America and he was known for his can do attitude, his jumpsuits and a darned good set of biceps. I remember that once in a while when I was a kid, I watched his show and did the exercises. Since he lived to 96 and that is a powerful marker, I'd have to give him good marks for practicing what he preached. I read on Wikipedia that at age 54 he beat out a 21 year old Arnold Schwarzenegger in a body building contest.

Today we are reading about body building in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Paul isn't talking about weight resistance training; no Paul wants us to build up the body of Christ. Paul isn't talking about the flesh and blood of the resurrected Christ. Paul has this way of referring to the church, the whole church, as the Body of Christ and Paul also calls local congregations the Body of Christ. The local

congregation we know best is Ark and Dove and since tonight is the congregation meeting, I would like to take the time today to use Paul's Fourth chapter of Ephesians to evaluate the strength of our body.

Paul implores the Ephesians and all churches to maintain unity of spirit and unity of faith. He urges us to equip the saints, build up the body of Christ in love and speak the truth in love.

One of the strengths of Ark and Dove is your willingness to work every three years on self examination, evaluation and long range planning. You take the time to look over your church and you ask the hard questions. What's working well and what needs tinkering? What were our successes and our oops? To what do we aspire for the next three five or ten years?

It may be that we are not as good at celebrating successes and goals accomplished. Ark and Dove flexed some muscle this year when we hosted the winter relief homeless shelter , in our multiple adult small group offerings, in our Taize, Easter Sunday, Christmas Eve and many other worship services like prayer station Sunday. In 2010 Ark and Dove accomplished the long standing goal, decade long goal of calling a full time Associate Pastor. We

enthusiastically voted to extend the call to Michelle Hwang at our special congregational meeting of April. You know what – that’s a big deal. Previous Associate Pastors had been half time or a bit over; but this year you made the leap. Would you just turn to you your neighbor in church right now and say congratulations?

Interestingly enough, the congregation made the decision to call a full time associate pastor because we realized we weren’t doing everything we wanted to in the area of what we then called Spirituality. We wanted an Associate Pastor to help us build our faith and the faith of our children. I say this is interesting because ten years later in our newest Long Range Plan we have identified Spiritual formation as one of our four top goals for the next two to three years along with Mission and exploring Alternative Worship.

Now when it comes to Spiritual Formation, you all are by and large very good about attending worship. Worship is a place where we build our faith and so this is significant. Most protestant churches have Sunday Morning Attendance that equals 40 to 50% of their membership and we have nearly 200 in church every Sunday which is over 74%. It’s not 100% but 74% is well above average. I

commend you for that because you have been consistent over the years.

But Paul calls us to speak the truth in love and so we need to consider where on the Spiritual Formation charts ( if there are such things ) we fall short. Judging by what you tell us, most Ark and Dove members are not reading the bible on a daily basis and most Ark and Dove members are not setting aside 5 to 15 minutes a day for prayer and meditation. Oh yah we are good at the hail Mary emergency last minute quick e-mail shorty prayers and they count ; but we are not going long and deep often enough in our prayer lives. I have to say that you can call two or more associate pastors and a youth director to boot; but if you don't make the time to read the bible and pray with God on a regular basis, then you will be perpetually listing Spiritual Formation on your long range plans. I know, we are a busy group of people with mountains of commitments. Boredom does not seem to be our sin or challenge. Keeping that in mind, it may be that the only time in the day we going to find the time to pray is first light. I am sure there are more things we can do as a congregation to support prayer and devotions at home, but in the

words of Harry Truman, the buck stops here. Only you can decide to change your prayer life.

A part of Spirituality, a part of spiritual formation is stewardship. Again under the heading of speaking the truth in love; Although I seriously doubt that anywhere near a plurality of our congregation truly tithes our gross income to church and charity, we must acknowledge and we must celebrate that we had a break out, door busting, whopping good stewardship effort this fall and for the first time in recent memory the Session had to meet to discern about where to put money instead of debate where to cut money in our mission and ministry. It was an awesome Session meeting two weeks ago and we look forward to discussing specifics tonight after the Pot Luck. We moved the marker forward.

Every Sunday Ark and Dove dedicated Sunday School teachers who have spent hours preparing Christian learning experiences for our children and youth. We have a very nice and consistently successful Logos Youth Ministry program We offer multiple summer youth trips, Thursday evening children's choirs, a youth band and oodles of scouting opportunities I don't subscribe to the theory that children and youth are the church of the future. I

believe that children and youth are the church now and that every ministry we offer builds up the body of Christ now. In these ways we Equip the Saints. We do a good job with our children and youth and I am heartened by the recent discussions at the Logos Board about expanding in some form to year round youth ministry. You know outside of Arizona and Florida there are really no growing Christian churches that don't have meaningful and successful children's and youth ministry programs.

Our Long Range Plan also calls for Ark and Dove to work on systems of engaging and equipping and there are two sides to this goal. One side is we want to help people discover their spiritual gifts and answer their call in the way best suited for them outside or inside the church. Two, we have 27 teams under six Ministries and most of them feel like they could use more hands or more leadership. We have not yet perfected a method or manner for connecting members who want to give of their time with teams and team leaders who would like to welcome them and in fact this seems to be a perennial weakness of our church. There are lots of informal moments where the Spirit moves and people get connected but when you get to be a church of 268 adults and well over 100 children and younger youth;

you really do need a system to make sure that people aspirations and ministry needs don't fall through the cracks.

Paul calls the body of Christ to maintain unity and to buildup the body in love. I am grateful for the ministry of the Deacons who go out of their way to stay connected to our whole community. Sometimes when people are going through stuff they want air and space for their life and you have to respect that and sometimes people want to be contacted. The deacons spend time at every meeting talking about the members and families of our church and they do work hard to stay in touch.

The values of maintaining unity and Building up the Body of Christ in love have lead us to a interesting place in this church. We are rather two sided on accountability. What do you with your fellow church member or fellow church leader who has committed to get a task done and then falls short? Well we are the church of course and people face stuff and therefore we must be understanding. The vast majority of us are not paid to be church workers or leaders and we have obligations in other parts of our lives that must be tended. Sometimes we just have to let our church commitments slide and since this is the place where we come for refuge from all the other

crazy things going on in our lives, we expect our fellow Ark and Dovers to let things slide. I mean the last thing we need is more stress. Here is the pickle – member A has a crappy week, a lousy month and a stressful quarter in his or her life. Yup we understand. We are the understanding church. The problem is member B over here – has just balanced his or her life - its going, but they really don't have time for anything else. When member A lets things slide, even though they said they would get her done, member B gets stuck carrying member A's work. After a couple of months B is frustrated with A. After six months B is pissed at A. Month seven, B quits team C and says the hec with it and we have a major gap in a team or ministry. Unity has a hole in it. People aren't feeling the love and Body Building turns to flab. You replicate the AB problem on Team C in seven or eight or twelve places in our church and you are looking at a typical year. On certain days, the nitty gritty details of church life get real exciting.

The church must be understanding. Members must be loving and supportive of one another and part of being understanding, loving and supporting actually is accountability. The tasks we undertake at church are not volunteer work; they are ministry. Conversations

about accountability need to take place in this church. It is something on which we need to focus; but remember Paul's advice in Ephesians 4, In the church, in the body of Christ, you need to speak the truth and you need to speak the truth in Love.

We need every member in church to be involved in some aspect of church leadership but more important than that we need every member to be thinking about how they do their ministry with extraordinary doses of love. We need a little more balance. As a whole we need to move from an attitude that the church will understand if I cut corners to an attitude of I am going undertake this ministry with special care so that people are touched unity is undergirded and the body is built up in love. Bishop Schnase of the United Methodist church argues in his book *The Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations* that little touches of love and compassion make a huge difference in the life of a church. When people go out of their way to do even little things just right or with great care, it sends ripples of goodness into the church and helps to build the body. So I think maybe we need a shift from they will understand, in fact they must understand if I don't do this to they will really appreciate it if I do this really well.