

Meadowbrook Congregational Church

“Meadowbrook 101”

Guest Preacher: Jody Scheller

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1 Corinthians 12:1-11

12 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. ²You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. ³Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says ‘Let Jesus be cursed!’ and no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit.

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

When I was asked by a fellow deacon to fill in for Rev. Ritter so he could attend the 150 anniversary celebration in St. Johns, I have to admit I had second thoughts. I wondered what type of message I could deliver to my Meadowbrook family that would be a meaningful one. After talking with Rev. Ritter and others from the congregation that have stepped in the past, the advice I received was this....Pick a topic you know and you love and go for it. So I put my thinking cap on and I came up with two areas where I spend considerable time and energy and those were this church and in the world of education.

Some of you may know that I am a faculty member at Schoolcraft College. Our winter semester just started this past week and we have new schedules, new classes, new and returning students and it is a very busy time. So what I thought about for this morning’s message was taking a look at how going to school and going to church can be similar and life-changing events.

At school our first class session usually consists of introductions and review of the syllabus – which is our contract with the students. The syllabus exposes the students to

what the course is all about, the expectations, assignments and examining how the course fits in the “big picture” for the students. So perhaps today we can put together a Meadowbrook “syllabus” to outline our learning and growth as a fellowship and how being part of a Christian community can have a significant impact in our lives.

So let’s look at our Meadowbrook Syllabus. Our syllabus generally starts with a **Course Description**: Maybe for our purpose here we can insert Meadowbrook’s vision:

”Our shared vision for Meadowbrook is a devoted nurturing community of Christian faith that is committed to support, sacrifice and participation of all our members and friends; building upon our core values of fellowship, teaching/learning, caring, faith and celebration of life within and beyond our church.” Our vision tells what we strive to be.

Pre-Requisites: There are no pre-requisites to worship here at Meadowbrook; although Congregationalists share with other Christian faiths a belief in Jesus the Christ. It is amazing to look at the varied backgrounds of those that worship with us. The number of “life-long” Congregationalists here at Meadowbrook is actually quite small.

Textbooks: As I mentioned with the kids. Textbooks are provided! There are hymnals and Bibles in our pews, a library by our north entrance and we are even on the web!

Next we take a look at the “meat” of the course – the objectives - or as I tell the students what they can expect as outcomes of the course. So what might we expect on our Meadowbrook journey??? We can expect...

To worship in an Open Christian service without judgment.

And Grow in Christian understanding.

We can expect to be challenged to put the ideals and love of Christ in practice in our lives, our homes and our daily work.

We can expect to find Forgiveness, heal wounds, gather strength when we are weary and eat when we are hungry (and we like to eat!)

We are encouraged to interpret God’s Word for ourselves – even if it turns out to be something we don’t want to hear.

We can expect to participate in fellowship opportunities rich in love,

And find acceptance - members and non-members alike.

We can experience opportunities to serve God, each other, and our community and

Embrace Congregational traditions.

But then we have to look at how we are going to achieve the objectives – how are we going to get there? There are varied **Methods of Teaching and Ways to Grow as a Christian here at Meadowbrook**: Students generally groan when they hear “Lecture” as a teaching methodology. Here in church we could consider that “lecture” our weekly sermon. We also learn through “Class participation” or activities we, as a congregation, do together such as singing and praying. There are some hands on activities such as serving and taking communion.

The scripture Jim read this morning talked about spiritual gifts given to us freely from God. Part of our teaching, learning and growth relies on how we use these gifts. We need to use our gifts not for our own personal benefit but for the good of the whole.

We may use our spiritual gifts in a variety of ways such as through service opportunities like serving meals at the Ronald McDonald House or building homes for Habitat for Humanity – at school we might call these “field trips”. Use of our spiritual gifts may come through participating in hands-on activities such as cooking meals for shut-ins, knitting prayer shawls or painting and creating an awesome environment for Christian Education for our children. Others may use their gifts by participating in our worship by ushering, being the liturgist, filling in the pulpit or even participating in a skit. We can use spiritual gifts as teachers to lead a Christian education class or discussion group. You may help use musical gifts and sing in the choir or perform an instrumental solo. Serving on a board, promoting stewardship and attending congregational meetings puts to use administrative gifts and helps our church to function. Certainly reading the Bible or devotionals could be considered our “home work”. Finally there is independent study between us and God. The teaching and learning methodologies are quite varied which make for a learning and growth experience.

The point that Paul was getting at in first Corinthians is that no matter what gift(s) a person has, these gifts are given to us by God. We are responsible to use and sharpen our gifts and we need to use them not for selfish or personal reasons but for the good of the church.

So back on to our next category in the syllabus...Grading Rationale: Students are ALWAYS interested in how they will be graded. What do I have to do to earn a 4.0 or “A”. Well the “grading” and judgment here at Meadowbrook and in our lives is not up to us. That’s up to our Creator at the end of our journey!

In our syllabus we talk about Student and Faculty Responsibilities and etiquette. Here at church we have responsibilities as members. These include things such as supporting the church – through attendance, financial giving, and giving of our time and talents. We must also support one another as a fellowship and be considerate.

Assignments: Assignments vary here at Meadowbrook. You can be as active as you desire.

Finally we get to a category called “Keys to Success”

I like this part of the syllabus because often we forget that WE are the keys to our own success.

1) The first key to success is to have a positive “can do” attitude. We all come from different places. In school many of the adults we see never thought they’d be back in school – especially with today’s uncertain economic times. Many are scared. Some are excited. Some are angry. Some students are there because their parents require them to be. Some are just “there”. Couldn’t we equate that to Meadowbrook? How many visitors, friends and members walk in our door anxious, ambivalent, nervous, happy or excited? How many thought they’d never walk through the doors of a church again? As members of a church we need to recognize that.

So what about that positive attitude? We know that we can talk ourselves into having a good day or good experience and being successful OR just the opposite.

My example at school is “Geez. I don’t want to go to school. I’d really like to sleep in. That class is so boring. I might have to do some work. Where in the world will I ever use this information?” Can we relate this to church?

But what if we turned the tables and said “It is so exciting to learn and grow. I love being here and participating. I feel part of a fellowship. I’m making new friends and I’m going to extend my hand in fellowship to others. Maybe I can help to make a difference...” We have the ability to call on God to give us guidance, help us to make good decisions and grant us joy and a positive approach in all we do.

2) The Second Key to success is to - Attend all class sessions and be punctual.

When talking about attendance I give the students a piece of advice.... And that is to never say to their professor “I wasn’t in class last week. I didn’t miss anything important did I???” The professor spent time putting together what they thought was a dynamic class session but nope that absent student didn’t miss a thing. I would imagine that our pastor and church school teachers feel the same way regarding our church attendance. Being present shows commitment and interest in the church. At Meadowbrook we can equate the second key to success not only to attending our Sunday worship but to board meetings, fellowship activities, social service projects and so forth. Yes, attending church and participating matters...

3) Our third key to success is to “Do your own lab projects. Work with your "study partner." Ask for help when needed”. - We each need our private time to talk to God (our lab project) and ask guidance. We need to know that it is OK to seek help through prayer and within our church”. Often when people are facing significant struggles – whether those be health, family or work concerns they don’t think (or want to) ask for prayers or some sort of assistance. Meadowbrook is a caring community and can be

one of great support. Ask for help when needed – and study or pew partners – it's OK to ask for help for others too!

4) There are additional keys to success that are discussed and expectations explored but as I wrap up my review of the syllabus with students and my message here this morning; I will have hoped to have put folks at ease regarding our journey together and instilled a sense of excitement and enthusiasm for what lies ahead. The final “key to success: is this - Enjoy the class – enjoy the journey and Have fun with it!” Enjoy your experience at Meadowbrook and make it what you need it to be. Some folks come for the spiritual guidance, solitude and worship experience alone. Others find the fellowship piece to be extremely important. Others come for our music. Many crave Christian Education and some desire to be involved in social outreach. The whole experience is here for the taking. We need each other, so that we can accomplish the tasks which Christ desires us to achieve. Invest your God-given spiritual gifts energies and abilities to build up Christ's body, the church. May you enjoy and experience the Congregational way of faith, freedom and fellowship. Amen.