

2 Corinthians 9:12-15 New International Version (NIV)

¹² This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. ¹³ Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. ¹⁴ And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. ¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Romans 12:3-21 New International Version (NIV)

Humble Service in the Body of Christ

³ For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. ⁴ For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; ⁷ if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸ if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

Love in Action

⁹ Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. ¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. ¹² Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³ Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. ²⁰ On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.
In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

We make vows when we profess our faith and join a church: We promise to:

- 1) Renounce wickedness, Reject evil powers, Repent of our sin, Resist evil, injustice, and oppression.
- 2) To remain faithful members of Christ's holy church and serve as Christ's representatives in the world & to receive and profess the Christian faith as contained in the Scriptures of the Old & New Testaments.
- 3) "To **confess** Jesus Christ as Savior, put our whole **trust** in his grace, and promise to **serve** him as Lord."
- 4) To be loyal to Christ through The United Methodist Church and do all in their power to strengthen its ministries;

And furthermore, our final vow I will discuss today is: To faithfully participate in its ministries by our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness."

- 5) It's always been about Choice. We choose God's way, we choose to use God's way, to trust God's way, and we choose whether or not we represent that we have chosen to use and trust God's way. We join others and choose we choose a specific church as our aWay team...to help us

Membership in a church assumes you have a personal relationship with Jesus – who you know has saved you and calls you into a deeper walk in faith – and in service to others. You can serve and learn to love God without joining a church. When you find that God is good and that the message of the cross and Jesus Christ is meant and meaningful to you, ask Jesus into your heart. When you find that you want to go out into the world in mission and ministry with a particular community, then make the decision to join with them and commit to build each other up for the sake of Christ's mercy!

The vow 'to faithfully participate in a church's ministries by their prayers, their presence, their gifts, their service, and their witness' carries the logic of particularity a step further by insisting that one's Christian commitment be lived within a particular local community. By the grace of God, one moves closer to perfection — within a circle of specific relationships, problems, and challenges.

As Christians, we are called to love God and our neighbor. We believe that God calls us to "do justice and love kindness" (Micah 6:8). We may speak passionately about battling drug addiction, human trafficking and capital punishment. We may be moved by Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream of racial equality. As Christians who live and work in particular places, we engage our faith where we are in the place with the people around us. We are each challenged – and we are challenged as a church to respond to the pain and lost-ness of the world around us. This takes sacrifice just as the different sacrifices made by God's people at the temple.

The Holy Spirit has challenged and stretched congregations in countless ways, and many have responded faithfully, witnessing to the mercy and justice of God. In concert with the other vows, this final vow to support the local church in concrete ways reminds us that the mission field begins with our own neighborhood.

The greatest witness of the early Methodist circuit riders was going from church to church to invigorate the congregations in the ministry they carried on in the preacher's absence. When the pastor wasn't there, the church still went out in mission and ministry to meet the needs present in their neighborhood.

Of course, it is never confined there. There are many who have not yet seen and heard the Good News of the Gospel. There are those displaced by wars in foreign countries, health concerns, and lack of fresh water that we can resolve. Even these needs are best addressed along relational lines, in local ways. Money and goods may be given and sent, laws and resolutions passed, but ultimately, someone must go and be church in their midst, offering their prayers, their presence, their gifts, their service, and their witness. As such, the United Methodist membership vows call us to make the world our parish one neighborhood at a time.

Let's look at all the actions we are to take from today's scriptures: [see above]

Doing all that is a sacrifice. Lowering one's own priority and lifting up another's. That's what church is, that's what love and mercy are. When we pledge our prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness, we are putting something bigger than ourselves ahead of us. That's what the saints that have gone before us have chosen, and whenever they have – here, down the street or anywhere – when we offer Christ's acceptance and forgiveness – when we show people we value them as God does, that's where revival happens, that's where rejuvenation takes place.