

## Witness: Attitude, Actions, Atmosphere, Ministries

At the 2008 General Conference, the Discipline's vow of membership was changed to read: To faithfully participate in its ministries by their prayers, their presence, their gifts, their service, and their witness;

In adding the "witness", I believe the General Conference felt that it was important that each of us demonstrate our faithfulness through our witness. By witness, I am not talking, and don't think they were talking, about standing before you and describing my faith journey. Our faithful participation through witness involves our interaction, possibly subtle, with others. It is all about "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine"

I want to describe my feelings about this important 2008 addition. So Witness: A. A. A. M.

A is for attitude. What I mean by attitude is that sense of being that emanates from me in interacting with others.

I hope the attitude that emanates from me is love, acceptance and caring. But the reality is that the attitude people sense might be something very different.

An example of perceived attitude differences involves our dog Benjie. When we are going on errands or coming to church we will take him outside for a couple minutes before leaving. Benjie is fine and displays normal behavior. But if we are planning, for whatever reason, to take him with us, it is whole different behavior. Benjie will roll over onto his back and force us to come and pick him up and take him outside. At least once, Benjie has gone and hidden somewhere outside. Benjie can sense a different attitude in us. I imagine a zoologist, or animal psychologist could explain the behavior, but I feel that something about me, my attitude, is different and causing Benjie to behave differently.

Intellectually I want to be accepting of all people regardless of how they are different from me. I want to be loving and caring of other people. But I am not sure that is what emanates from me. Maybe I am coming down with a cold, or something has caused me to be upset. I imagine there could be many things that would cause me to project an attitude that is contrary to my desire.

I have always had trouble remembering names including the names of some cousins and offspring of nieces and nephews. As a teacher for 38 years, I always had difficulty in remembering the names of my students. I think there is a really possibility this problem of mine affects the attitude that others perceive.

I need to work and pray that I can overcome my lack of alignment with the me I want to project. I admit, this might not be easy for me to do, but I think I should work on this aspect of witness. Do you feel this way too?

A is for action

In James chapter 2 we read: <sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, <sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? <sup>17</sup> So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. <sup>18</sup> But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith.

I would state this idea in a slightly different way: If I have a Christian faith, then I believe it is my responsibility to show that faith through the actions I take in life.

The actions that I do may be small. If I see someone coming to a door, I will try to open the door for them. If someone drops something, I will try to help the person with it. The action I take may be to extend a hand in fellowship to another person.

I think the witness actions that we take can be contagious. A person sees what I do and decides that they want to emulate what they have seen in me. This would be a fruitful witness and I hope that most of my witness actions are positive in nature.

Even a small action can be contagious. Consider the action of the boy in John 6. His small action was to share his bread and fish. His action may have caused others to share their food as well. And if this sharing is what caused the feeding of so many, isn't the contagious nature of his action a miracle?

If my action is contagious, my little light will become stronger and larger.

I think most of my witness actions are probably small actions, but once in while I might take on something that has a greater impact on those who see my witness. These large actions might include teaching a class or taking a leadership role in an activity that will help other people.

We don't always see the results of our witness. In the children's time, I mentioned my grandson Nathan's action of collecting tabs from aluminum cans for the Ronald McDonald house. He could not have known how his actions would have helped us as a family, his family. In 2013, he was killed by someone driving a car while under the influence of heroin. For 2 weeks Nathan was in a coma while family members remained by his side as a constant vigil. When not in his room in that vigil, family members often went to a room in the Ronald McDonald house where we could get a few hours rest.

My actions, small or large, positive or negative are a witness of my faith. I hope most of my actions are a positive witness of the Christian faith I profess. As I look around this congregation, I believe I am talking to the choir as I feel we are a congregation filled with Christian witnesses. Congratulations! As Jesus said in a parable about the man with 5 talents: "Well done, good and faithful servant"

Just as we have a witness through our displayed attitudes and our actions, a congregation has a witness as well. To be a vital congregation we need to display a positive witness within our community. As a result I want to spend some time talking about our congregational witness.

A is for atmosphere

The atmosphere of a congregation is a complex and dynamic composite of the individual attitudes of those of the congregation. The atmosphere of a congregation is part of its witness of a composite Christian faith

I think that most congregations want to be known as a friendly and caring congregation. The impression of how friendly and caring a congregation is could be dependent on who is present in the congregation at a particular time, the nature of the attitudes of those present and how those individuals react with others

A visitor comes to a congregation and interacts with several individuals and because of the attitudes of those individuals leaves feeling that it is not a welcoming congregation. Hopefully this visitor will not base a decision on this one visit but will return again. Another visitor comes and interacts with a different set of individuals and, again, because of the attitudes of this group of individuals leaves feeling that it is a very welcoming congregation and wants to visit again.

The extreme case is one in which a single individual can falsely color the perception of an entire congregation. I can remember a story of a person telling me of visiting a congregation and after some discussion is told by a member that he does not think this person would be happy in the congregation.

Here at Lake Street, each of us contributes in some way to that atmosphere of this congregation. Granted some individuals have a greater impact on that atmosphere than others.

I have been a member of this congregation since 1971. During those almost 47 years of membership, I have felt a friendly and especially a caring atmosphere. Has it been constant? Of course not. Have there been times when I have not been truly proud of the atmosphere we projected? Probably! But generally, I am proud of the atmosphere we have projected. As members of this congregation we all need to work to maintain an atmosphere of which we can be proud.

M is for ministries

As a congregation, we witness to our faith as a result of the ministries that we develop. These ministries are the congregational “works” James mentions.

Lake Street UMC has a proud history of “works”. When we first joined this congregation, Lake Street had a ministry of a Christian preschool that lasted until the Eau Claire school system changed how it included young children. I don’t remember the numbers, but we had probably over 100 adults participating in the Bethel Bible series and many year later we had a large number of individuals participating in the Disciple Bible series. We continue to have adult classes of various types. We have had several preaching mission events such as a preacher from England, a lay witness mission event, and several other occasional preaching mission events. Later on Dr. Ostenson, provided an endowment to promote an annual preaching series.

We have had a long history of music ministries. We have had a number of different singing groups: children’s choirs, youth choirs, several adult singing groups. We have had a few instrumental groups including a recorder ensemble, a praise band and a bell choir. Each of these ministries contributed to our worship experience and our congregational witness.

While I don’t remember the details of the early caring ministries of my membership here, I know that such caring ministries were present. I became truly aware and proud of our caring ministries since the early 1990s. We helped in the initial formation of a homeless ministry that eventually became Beacon House. We had a Steven Ministry group that morphed into the Lake Care ministry that was developed by Rev Kruse when we could no longer support a Steven Ministry group, We had an Aids care team.

I don’t remember a lot about our mission ministries for the first several years at Lakes Street except to celebrate the medical missionary efforts of Birney and Edna Dibble or the educational missionary efforts of Elizabeth Clark. I became more aware of our missionary efforts after my involvement in the VIM event going to

Kentucky around 2005. After that wonderful ministry, this congregation helped develop a local mission event that has been going on in different ways for many years.

In recent years we have been developing new types of ministries. Some of these are a combination of caring and awareness ministries. Some of these ministries were initiated and developed by small groups of individuals. We have had a confirmation program for special needs individuals, We have had events to allow individuals to learn about what it means to have a special need. We have had ministries to have this church be dementia friendly, to learned about depression, to try to have this congregation be more accessible to those with special needs. We are currently contributing to the development and implementation of IM church.

We are trying to develop a ministry of inclusiveness by creating the following statement:

We embrace all of God's children as persons of sacred worth regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, national origin, culture, tradition, physical or mental ability, sexual orientation, gender identity, or any other difference real or perceived, and welcome all people into the life of this congregation.

I truly believe in the importance of developing an atmosphere that includes every one regardless of who they are or what problems they have

I know I have left out some of our important ministries because I know the list goes on. However, I believe we need to witness as a congregation to this community in new and different ministries. We need your ideas about ministries.

In Mark 6:6-8 we read:

He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits.

Jesus was sending out his disciples 2 by 2 to do ministry. In Luke's account the number sent out 2 by 2 was 70 or 72. Is it possible for 2 of us to develop and carry out some sort of ministry on behalf of this congregation? Is it possible to witness to the faith of this congregation through multiple small ministries? If several of you have an idea of a ministry, discuss this with some of the ministry teams or the church council.

Is it possible you have an idea for one or more ministries this congregation might attempt but don't have the expertise to accomplish it, discuss this with others. As I was thinking about this topic, one area of ministry came up in my mind

I am a student of some of the physical sciences and a mathematician and have absolutely no expertise in the social sciences. Yet my grandson was killed by someone on heroin which is a social issue. I began thinking about two sorts of ministries. Yet, the reality is that I don't have the expertise to follow through.

First, could we develop one or more ongoing ministries to learn about all kinds of addiction so we can understand and help those who are addicted or even help prevent addiction? Granted, I am mostly interested in chemical dependencies, but there are other forms of destructive addictions

Second, could we develop one or more ongoing ministries to learn about the impact an addicted person has on those around him or her and find a way to help this group of people? I have never had any sort of chemical dependency and yet my life has been impacted by someone who did.

What ideas do you have for ministries that might allow this congregation to witness? Explore your ideas. The Christian church and this congregation of the Christian community could use your help to prepare ministries for our future witness as a congregation. Our church witness through our ministries is not just a job for church leadership, it is a job of all of us. Every church member and friend is part of our congregational witness.