

As to the Nurturing role of the Church: I cherish Sunday Worship as a place of refuge against the world and as a time to experience the presence of God in community. The fact that we are united in our worship is part of the magic. A controversy injected in the service tends to spoil it for me. I would prefer to keep Sunday morning for (what I call) worship and keep other agendas for other venues such as town hall meetings, the Bell, and our Web page. And we should have more town hall meetings.

As to the Prophetic role of the Church: In the last year I have come to recognize that what some people regard as prophetic teaching, others view as crackpot ravings. No way to tell for sure who is right, so I think we need another question. To me the question is how do we live our faith? And the answer is individually, different for everybody. How do we bring our individual faith journey's together and act as a Church? It seems reasonable that a Christian church might want to be involved in the things that Christ was passionate about.

Luke 4:18-19 (New International Version)

18 "The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed,
19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Matthew 25: 37 "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? 38 When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? 39 Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' 40 And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'

Jesus talked about a lot of things, but if we are going to be about His business, I think we need to consider causes that include the poor, the oppressed, the sick, prisoners.

I would kind of like us to be an activist church because we stand a better chance of having an impact on our community that way. But I would be perfectly ok if we decided not to be activist in terms of ballot issues et al, if we were to continue and possibly expand our activities that benefit the poor.

Semantically speaking, I object to the phrase "take a stand." To me when you say you are taking a stand, you are suggesting that your mind is made up, it's all or nothing, there is a line in the sand, and you are at war with anyone who crosses it. "No retreat, no surrender -- no prisoners taken! The Geneva conventions may not apply to enemy combatants!" If we allow our thinking to develop along these lines, the next thing you know, we'll be talking about casualties, body counts, and collateral damage. This is like the old-fashioned partisan politics that President Obama would like us to leave behind. With any luck we ought to be able to find a better way. A way where you don't have to lose for me to win, or vice versa. Win win should be our goal.

First, I suggest that instead of saying "take a stand on Issue X", we might say "lend support to the cause of Y." Support can be had in degrees. It is negotiable. Rational discussion is possible. You can support something without having to go to war over it. It's just a semantics issue, but I think it is important.

I was once a member of a church in which the Chair of Deacons made a speech in which he urged the minority who didn't like the way the church ran, to please stop trying to change it. Instead we were urged (lovingly I might add) to please just go find another church that was more to our liking. I was one of those wanting to see some changes, and it was not a pleasant feeling to hear that I could make my church a happier place by leaving. I don't think this will ever happen at Niles Congregational Church, but I devoutly believe that in conversations about issues and causes our highest priority must be to assure that everyone is heard and that their views are welcomed, valued, understood, and given serious consideration. I guess you could say it is extending the Open and Affirming policy to everyone and everything.

To this end, our first step should be to perfect the art of dialog. Before any stands are taken, or causes are supported, we need to have an open and confirming dialog on the subject. Evidence from recent town hall meetings

indicates we are getting better at this. So far, those who want to take stands have spoken up, but we haven't heard much from those who oppose the idea. If you are having trouble with the public forum, please find a way to make your views known to the congregation.

I believe unanimous consent should be reached before a cause is supported. By unanimous consent, I don't mean unanimous agreement on an issue. I mean that after the dialog process is complete, there is a substantial consensus in favor of the issue, and the people in the minority agree that their views have had a full and fair hearing, and are able to accept the church taking action without harboring ill will about it.