

Superordinate Goals

What do Pearl Harbor, the launch of Sputnik, and 9/11 have in common? They were all events that unified a nation divided by political and cultural divisions of their times, and galvanized that nation to put aside those differences and take action toward common goals. Before each event, the country had descended into petty bickering about social and political issues, with gossip and innuendo about the adherents of opposing views commonplace. Before the Japanese naval forces attacked Pearl Harbor, the country was starkly divided concerning whether to enter World War II to aid our allies who had already been battling for two years. We decided as a nation to join the fight, even partnering with our ideological opponents, the Soviets. Several years later, the launch of the Sputnik satellite by the Soviet Union horrified a nation as we realized the Soviets had gained a huge edge in the ability to rain down nuclear destruction on us. This led to John Kennedy's famous pronouncement that the US would put a man on the moon and bring him back safely by the end of the decade. Prior to 9/11, the US had faced the ordeal of a contested presidential election decided by the Supreme Court, and the political discord ran deep. But with the horrific attacks on that fateful day, the nation once again came together. With the occurrence of each event, the country put aside differences, both minor and major, and united behind a common, **superordinate goal**. Psychology tells us that **superordinate goals** are goals that people who normally oppose each other may unite to accomplish because cooperation is necessary for mutual success or survival.

What does this have to do with our church, you ask? It's clear that mainline Christian churches around the country are facing tremendous pressures from secular influences, and a great many have developed internal strife as a result. In our current media climate, being Christian is seen as out of step with the modern cultural views. Christians are accused of being bigoted, intolerant, hate-mongers by many non-Christians (and some who claim to be Christians). It's no wonder that most denominations are losing members at an alarming rate as the "brand" is devalued in the minds of many people. Christians as a group are facing difficulties paralleling those of the US prior to Pearl Harbor, Sputnik, and 9/11.

But while we face the mounting pressures from outside, we also face problems within our own, individual congregations. We all know church members who are dissatisfied with decisions or events that occur in our church. It's likely that every member has a disagreement with some change, policy or decision. We hear the grumbles, notice the absence of

former attendees. We see the dwindling attendance figures listed in the weekly bulletins. We hear about the church being strapped for cash. The list goes on and on. But what we may not realize is that we aren't unique in our plight. Other organizations, even secular ones, face similar problems. Anyone who has ever held a job knows that complaints are commonplace. Every employee thinks they know how to run things better than the management team. Changes in the job are resisted, decisions are questioned, even though the complainers and questioners don't have all the facts on which to base their disagreement. It becomes a reflex action to distrust, disagree, and dislike. So, just as citizens of our nation prior to Pearl Harbor, Sputnik, and 9/11, we bicker and complain, and some even become so disillusioned that they leave, either moving to another church, or ceasing attending any church.

So what's the solution? Do we wait or pray for a catastrophic event to unite us behind a superordinate goal? Do we stay silent and do nothing? Or do we decide as individuals and as a group known as Mariner United Methodist Church to look inside ourselves and realize that our differences really aren't that great. Look at the definition of **superordinate goals** again: Goals that people who normally oppose each other may unite to accomplish because **cooperation is necessary for mutual success or survival**. Isn't our survival as Mariner UMC more important than our differences and disagreements? Isn't our common love of Christ enough to rise above our internal, worldly problems? **James 4:1-10** tells us that there were disagreements even in the early days of the church. James makes it clear that friendship with the world makes one an enemy of God, and that God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. His ultimate solution is to humble ourselves before the Lord, so that He may lift us up in honor. We can continue to grumble and bicker, and undermine the foundations of our Christian faith, which only leads to our destruction, or we can unite behind Christ and overcome our differences, knowing that's the path to success and survival. And as some read this they're thinking, "Yes, but it's them, not me!" It can be hard to swallow our pride and forgive perceived slights. It's difficult to accept change or direction we don't agree with. But the scriptures are full of passages telling us to do just that. We can be part of the problem, or part of the solution. We don't have to agree on everything, but we must remember to put Christ above our earthly concerns. Only by working together can we succeed. I choose to humble myself and follow Christ. Will you? ***Let's make following the Lord our superordinate goal.***