

There is No “I” in “Team”  
Amy Florence  
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Kirkland Congregational United Church of Christ  
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There is no “I” in team – but there is a “me.”

The team counts on “me” to participate. The team needs “me” to contribute the fullest amount possible. The team depends on “me” to follow through.

We all want to belong, to be a part of a team. This congregation is a team and this team gets a lot things accomplished. Just look at your bulletin, read the newsletter, or peruse the hallways of this building, and you will see so much activity it will make your head spin.

God is still speaking and these are examples of how we contribute to that conversation. That is at the heart of being a church community and it is at the core of discipleship.

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Legendary football coach, Vince Lombardi once said, “Individual commitment to a group effort – that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work.” It also makes a church work and allows us to get our message out. You might serve on a committee, or greet people as they enter the sanctuary. You might provide rides to church, or simply attend service. For me, I participate in choir and serve as one of the Deacons. I try to contribute in a way that promotes the promise that God is still speaking and in a way that uses my skills - to the best advantage for the church.

Ask me stand on a street corner preaching the Word to passersby or serve on the church’s finance committee and my first reaction would probably be to run the other way. Ask me to write articles for the newsletter - or organize a function as part of raising awareness of the church and its mission, well those I can do comfortably and with far better skill. Discipleship is not an optional part of being a Christian, but the Spirit helps guide us to those ways where we can be the most effective and empowers us in our commitment. Discipleship is leadership and as Lombardi put it, “Leadership is based on a spiritual quality; the power to inspire, the power to inspire others to follow.”

There is no “I” in team, but there is a “me.”

I started ballet classes when I was 4 years old and was already a fan of the Green Bay Packers. As odd as it may sound, these two seemingly dissimilar influences in my life were actually closely aligned. Discipline and teamwork were the focus for both, with an emphasis on personal responsibility to make each team perform at its best.

The Packers of the 1960s boasted a team of amazing contributors. Names like Nitschke, Anderson, McGee, Kramer, and Starr, were a part of my vocabulary and I grew up watching how each of these players brought their individual talents and skills to the field, and to their team. The players came to the field ready and willing to contribute, and Vince Lombardi knew and understood their unique gifts and how they would best serve the team.

It was December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1967 and the temperature was 13 degrees below zero at game time. The turf was frozen at Lambeau Field in Green Bay, and it was so cold that the officials could not use their whistles as the metal would freeze to their lips.

The Packers were playing against the Dallas Cowboys for the National Championship in a game that would go down in history by the name of "The Ice Bowl." I remember watching this game, being not only amazed by the harsh conditions, but inspired by the commitment of these players on the field.

Their mission was to win this championship. In the final minutes of the game, the Packers had the ball at third and goal and Bart Starr, fingers frostbitten, handed off twice to Donny Anderson. Both times Anderson slipped and fell on the icy field; the thermometer read 20 below zero. After conferring with Lombardi, Starr lined up with the team for a third down play. Each player had a personal responsibility. Starr knew the team counted on him to call the right play. Kramer knew the team counted on him to block. Bowman knew that he was responsible for snapping the ball to Starr without it being fumbled. While Bart Starr is credited with the winning touchdown on the quarterback sneak, I will always recall the feeling that it was the Packers, the team, that won.

"The measure of who we are, is what we do, with what we have," said their coach. For Lombardi and the 1967 championship Packers, there was no "I" in team, but there was a lot of "me" contributing to its success.

Now jump ahead to nearly a decade later, when I was privileged to be dancing with the local ballet company. Being part of a ballet company is similar to being part of a football team in that each dancer has his or her own unique talents to share. My talents were best suited for dancing with the corps de ballet. In the corps, there is no "I" in team, but there is a "me" and other people counted on me to know my part and perform the intricate patterns and footwork required of me.

That season's "Nutcracker" was particularly challenging for the company. We had a number of dancers become ill or suffer injuries and as the run of "Nutcracker" went on, we eventually ran out of understudies to cover parts.

It was the Friday night show, with only a Saturday matinee and the final performance on Saturday night to go. Everything seemed to be going smoothly during the first act as the corps waited in the wings for our entrance for the snow scene at the end of the act.

I remember my entrance and doing the one series of jumps that went into a quick run. Then I remember being on the ground in a heap. Like good corps dancers, my fellow snowflakes continued dancing, and I got back up to join in with them. When I took my next step, a sharp pain went through my right ankle, but I kept going. Each time I put weight on my right foot, whether it was a simple step or going onto my toes in my pointe shoe, that pain shot through my ankle. When the number was over and the curtain came down, we discovered that I had slipped

in oil that had dripped from the growing Christmas tree earlier in the act. My ankle was sprained and starting to swell. There were no more understudies - and there was no one to cover my part in Waltz of the Flowers during the second act.

At that moment, there was no “I” in team, but there was a “me” and the company – the team – counted on “me” to participate. The team needed “me” to contribute to the fullest amount possible. The team depended on “me” to follow through.

My ankle was iced and one of the company members, who was a physical therapist, taped up my ankle so I could put on my pointe shoes and somehow still manage to get up on my toes to dance. I finished out that evening’s performance as well as the Saturday matinee and the closing show on Saturday evening. While my role in “Nutcracker” was minor, I had made a commitment to the other dancers – to the team.

So what do football and ballet have to do with the church and discipleship you ask? As part of a faith community, we have a commitment to a spiritual team. The United Church of Christ has an extremely powerful message in its “God is still speaking” campaign. But it is only effective if we are speaking, too. We are called to be disciples, but in ways that use our talents, our skills, to spread the message. We are asked to make a personal commitment. Sometimes the task seems simple, and other times we know and understand that sacrifices must be made. We may be called to act with others - and we may be asked to step out on our own. The Spirit guides us on our various journeys - so that as God is still speaking, so are we.

I am thankful for the gifts God gave me. God counts on me to participate. God needs me to contribute the fullest amount possible. God depends on me to follow through. God asks me to be a disciple.

There is no “I” in team, but there is a “me.”