

Christians in Culture—

A Lesson from Sen. Barack Obama: Membership Matters

If you are hoping to read an editorial on the current race for the white house, you will be disappointed with what follows. If you are wondering if Pastor Sims is going to do something stupid—and very un-LCMS Lutheran like—by openly endorsing a particular political candidate, don't you fret. As much as the title might lead you to believe, this article is not actually about politics. It's about a valuable lesson we can learn from someone (who merely happens to be a politician) about church membership.

Unless you have been in a coma, or stranded on a desert island for the last three weeks, you probably know that Senator Barack Obama has taken some heat from TV and print media, talk radio commentators, and even from some members of his own political party over the church that he is a *member* of and its pastor whom he himself has referred to as a “spiritual mentor.” Many of the church's teachings and statements made by its pastor have been referred to as “racist” and “inflammatory”; labelled “hate speech.” I will not argue whether they are or are not—that is not the point of this writing.

What happened when these issues came to the public's attention, however, is the point of this writing. Senator Obama distanced himself from Trinity United Church of Christ and the Rev. Jeremiah Wright by saying things like, “All of the statements that have been the subject of controversy are ones that I vehemently condemn. They in no way reflect my attitudes...” and “...judge me not on the basis of what someone else said, but on the basis of who I am and what I believe in; on my values, judgment...” (Barack Obama. **On My Faith and My Church**; Posted March 14, 2008). But what of the fact that many years ago a younger Barack Obama came forward in a church service, standing up with the congregation confessing that, in effect, ‘I believe what these people believe. I stand with them in a confession of faith’? What of the fact that he has been, and still is, a *member* of that church for over twenty years?!?

The lesson for all of us is this: When it comes to the church (*and* larger church body) you belong to, you can't have it both ways. You are a member or you are not: membership matters. We may never find ourselves in such a well-publicized dilemma. However, I often speak with people who say things like, “Oh, I know that my church teaches _____ . But, I don't really believe that.” Seriously? Then why are you a member? When someone says, “I'm a *member* of _____ church.” They are saying, “I'm with them!” “I believe what they believe and teach.” In other words, membership matters!

So, *members* of Oklahoma Ave. Lutheran Church (LCMS), what do you *and* your church believe and teach? If you have any questions, I would welcome a conversation. I also invite you to visit our larger church body's website @ www.lcms.org.

Pastor Tim Sims
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