

Dear fellow soldier in Christ,

Recently I heard a friend describe his six-month tour of duty in Afghanistan as a Marine. He described the long hours of boredom and isolation in the bleak landscape punctuated by moments of adrenaline producing action. The soldiers were only able to contact home about once a month by phone for ten minutes. The toughest fight they encountered was the feeling of loss over all they were missing at home. Reminders of home that came in the mail were at the same time helpful and painful. There were times for each member of the unit when the sense of loss and isolation was so profound that they began to despair. The only thing that kept their hope alive was their relationships with each other and the words of encouragement they exchanged as they waited to go home.

The church of Jesus Christ is in much the same condition as the US Marine Corp in Afghanistan and Iraq. We are a group of strangers placed together by a power greater than ourselves for a purpose determined by that greater power (Eph. 2:11-22). We are living in a war zone, far away from our home (Phil. 3: 19-20). We are engaged in a fierce battle for our own lives and for the lives of others who are still being held captive by Satan to do his will (Eph. 6: 10-18 & 2 Timothy 2: 24-26).

While this is the way that the Scriptures describe our condition, all of us regularly struggle to believe that this is our situation. Rarely do we get out of bed in the morning and think to ourselves, "I am at war today." Usually we get out of bed thinking about the tasks and pleasures that occupy those who live in peaceful communities far away from the terror of war. We do not view our brothers and sisters in Christ as fellow soldiers and necessary comrades in a fight for our lives. Verses like Hebrews 3:12-13 are almost incomprehensible to us. "See to it brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness."

But you see, if the Bible is true, then the reality that you and I live in, regardless of how we feel or think about it, is one of war. None of us will survive this war alone. We desperately need to be with each other for the purpose of encouraging one another so that we will not become a fatality in our great war with sin, the world and the devil. One day we will be home but we need each other if we are going to make it there safely.

In River Hills Community Church we aim to facilitate the necessary contact between those Christians who have been "assigned" to our "unit" in several ways outside of Sunday worship. We are working to motivate and equip families to intentionally engage in encouraging one another through Family Worship. It is our ambition that every person that is thirteen or over be a part of one of our intergenerational; inter-gender Discovery Groups that meet throughout the week in various homes. Additionally we are seeking to develop ways of putting older Christians together with younger Christians in one to one "mentoring" relationships.

However, none of these "organized" efforts will be of any effect unless each of us takes seriously the fact that we are in a war and view one another as necessary companions in the struggle. I want to urge you to make every effort to turn your home into a "foxhole" and to join with other Christians in a Discovery Group to form a "platoon" so that none of us becomes a casualty in this conflict.

Fighting with you,