

“Unity in the Body of Christ”

I Corinthians 12: 27-31; I Corinthians 13: 1-8

Rev. Ed Hoekstra

What is unity? Unity in itself is neutral. Being ‘united’ in gossip and having a spirit of judgement against others is a bad unity. Being ‘united’ in dispensing love to others as Jesus did, is a good unity. Unity in love for God and others is a positive thing and it brings healing to the world. Unity coming out of fear and hate, may give people a sense of righteousness, but it creates division. The church is the body of Christ where we learn to build unity in friendship and love.

Church or country club? Do you view the church as a country club where one pays a fee and services are provided? Certainly we receive benefits by being part of a church, but those benefits come more deeply as we learn to imitate Christ who was much more about giving than receiving. In our consumer culture, we tend to see the church as consumers. When you look for fault you can find it quickly because the church is composed of human beings. We do not like putting a mirror up to ourselves because we quickly see the imperfections and wrinkles. The church is not a service for you to consume. It is a place where we serve. When we come to serve we are in line with joy, healing and wholeness. The church is Christ present in the people – you could say that it is an organism of love. There is no perfect church. As soon as you join it, it is imperfect.

It is important also to remember that some churches are a better fit for you than others. There are various reasons why people join certain churches and not others. To join a church out of a country club mentality/consumer perspective is off-track. The church is not only about my personal preferences. We tend to vote according to our personal preferences. The church is about all the needs of people, not just your needs.

Unity - not uniformity. In I Corinthians 12 Paul writes about how everyone is important in the body of Christ. Diversity is important to make us whole.

Love is the basis for everything we say and do. In I Corinthians 13: 1-8 we read about the kind of love the church is to practice. In the church, everything we do and say is to be based on love.

Do not be a divisive force. Gossip destroys. If you have a problem, go to the person first.

God's gift of unity: Unity is a gift from God. Theologian Henri Nouwen writes that Jesus desires for us to seek our unity in and through him. When we direct our inner attention first of all to God to whom we belong, then we will discover that in God we also belong to each other.

An intimate relationship between Christ and the Church: In the late German Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s theology, there is a close, intimate relationship between Jesus Christ and the church. In his famous letters from prison Bonhoeffer spoke of Jesus as “the man for others.” And in parallel fashion he wrote succinctly that the church is truly the church (you are the church) only when it exists for others. In the same way as Jesus lived his life completely for others (even unto death on the cross), so the church is to serve God by serving the world of need.

What are you doing to promote unity in the body of Christ?

What do you want to start doing?