

Unity in the Spirit

Dave Peterson, Pastor, Memorial Drive Presbyterian Church, Houston, TX

Some have expressed worry that the Fellowship of Presbyterians is fueling division and disunity in the PC(USA). Yet division and disunity have been our way of life for the past 40 years. Those who now cry, "Please stay, it is unfaithful to go," are expecting us to continue the current insanity of doing the same thing over and over while expecting a different result. Please understand that we are simply choosing to say, "No more!" to this form of pseudo-unity that simply masks deep divisions.

The existence of the world's 38,000 denominations suggests that unity is impossibly difficult by human effort. We believe there must be a better way to demonstrate the unity of Spirit. Instead of fueling disunity, the Fellowship is pressing hard in search of a different form of unity.

We do not believe that tolerance produces unity. While there is value in tolerance, history does not offer much promise that tolerance unites people.

We also do not believe that fellowship equals unity. Fellowship broadens perspective but it is not synonymous with unity.

Regulation most certainly does not produce unity. Regulation controls disunity but does not resolve it.

We do believe the Holy Spirit is the author of unity—not the General Assembly, the World or National Council of Churches or the efforts of their councils and committees—only the Holy Spirit of God.

We also believe the role the saints play in unity is like-mindedness—that is, seeking the mind of Christ—to *have the same mind in us that is in Christ Jesus* (Philippians 2:5). We humbly acknowledge that no individual or group can presume to know the full *breadth and length and height and depth* (Ephesians 3:18) of Christ's mind and heart. What we do know is that it is broader, wider, deeper and higher than any one of us can individually comprehend (Romans 11:34-36). And yet we do believe that Christ does make His mind known to us through the scriptures illuminated by His Spirit. These scriptures, embodied in the life of Jesus lead us forward.

The Holy Spirit's work in unity is more like an art than a science. The Spirit works like the Composer and Artistic Director of the great symphony and chorus we call the Church. In heaven and on earth the saints and angels make music according to His composition and His direction (Revelation 4). To each is given an instrument and a voice.

Unity is possible only as an outgrowth of faithful obedience in rehearsal and performance. Only He knows the fullness of the score. Only He knows how the notes, rhythms and pauses fit together. Faithful obedience requires each individual musician, and each section of the orchestra and chorus, to obey His direction, bringing the part of the score they understand to life—respecting others, and not commanding others to play instruments or parts they do not know, or to sing notes they do not understand (Romans 12:3-7).

The Fellowship is a community of musicians who find themselves in a part of the orchestra where we can no longer play faithfully or effectively. We do not seek to silence the music others feel directed to make. We leave it to the Artistic Director to correct the musicians and conduct the score. We only seek to follow the direction and play the notes we have rehearsed. We believe it is imperative that we play

the part of the score the Spirit has directed us to play without compromising integrity. While no one can see the whole of God's activity, we can see with clarity the parts He has called us to play, and through our association with the Fellowship, we intend to live faithfully as the Spirit enables us.

We believe this in no way compromises the unity of the Body. Instead, it respects the Body's complexity and contributes to the fullness of the Spirit's mysterious and glorious work. History will tell whether this is an act of self-deception or of faithfulness to the One true God whom we seek to serve.