

Complete Unity Class 2 — How churches are unified with one another

#tvcoc

Introduction

Last week's class was focussed on building unity in our local groups. This time we will discuss unity between groups.

“Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all of God's family throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more,”

(1 Thessalonians 4:9–10 NIV11)

- Paul commends them for loving other churches
- He can only do that if those churches would agree with his assessment
- The Thessalonians stand out as a church who love others churches
- What does the New Testament reveal about churches loving other churches and what can we learn from them?

1. Unity Demonstrated

Example 1 - Resolving Tension

“Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.” (Acts 15:1–2 NIV11)

- Time, energy and money were involved in resolving tension that had the potential to divide the churches.

“So the men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message. Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the believers. After spending some time there, they were sent off by the

believers with the blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them.” (Acts 15:30–33 NIV11)

Example 2 - Financial Support for Impoverished Christians

“Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the Lord’s people there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the Lord’s people in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them.”

(Romans 15:25–27 NIV11; see also 1 Corinthians 16.1-4; 2 Corinthians 8 and 9)

“Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality,” (2 Corinthians 8:13–14 NIV11)

- In several of his letters, Paul mentions a collection that was being taken among the churches for the benefit of the believers in Jerusalem who were facing economic difficulties.
- This collection was a demonstration of solidarity and practical assistance, with churches from different regions contributing to support their fellow believers in Jerusalem.

Example 3 - Connecting through people and letters

“I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me.” Romans 16:1–2 NIV11

- Looks like she delivered the letter
“Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts. He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here.” (Colossians 4:7–9 NIV11)
“After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.” (Colossians 4:16 NIV11)
- It looks like Tychicus is the letter courier
“He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.” (2 Peter 3:16 NIV11)
- Peter is familiar with Paul's letters which means they have been widely distributed
- Paul sends Timothy, Titus and others to help various church.

- Do your own Bible study on this to see how normative it was for those associated with Paul to travel to other congregations and encourage them.
 - While that was Paul as an individual, he was always embedded in a local congregational community and thus his loss was also a cost to the local church.
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2. Unity Suggestions

Before we look at some practical suggestions, let me offer a word of caution.

Loving other churches is not about making ourselves feel better. Loving other churches is about them, not us. It is not uncommon that we love other people in the way we like to be loved. While understandable, that's not real love. Christian love is about finding out what the other person (or church) needs and doing ones best to meet that need. We begin with discovering what they would find loving and then we proceed to the what, when and how of the practicals.

Speaking from a Thames Valley perspective that means Dorset finding out how to help SH&B to feel loved, or, South Bucks learning what would help Berkshire feel loved. I can say that Watford feel loved by Thames Valley because of the warm welcome given to our teens at recent services. Our Youth need to be welcomed, and the parents of our teenagers need that. Thames Valley have provided that, and the Watford members feel loved.

Now on to some ideas...

a. Do a gift inventory

- Make an inventory of the gifts and needs in your group. What do you lack, and what do you have? Lists of gifts such as those found in Romans 12 will give you a place to start.
- The gifts you have are a potential blessing to another group that does not have that gift
- The gifts other groups have are a potential blessing to your group

b. Exchange gifts

- Exchange speakers, musicians, people who can share specific faith/life-experiences

c. Combine for worship

- Worship together, whether as a whole group, sub-groups or individually.

d. Make the most of special occasions

- Make most of bank holidays and holiday seasons to spend extended time together

- At the all-Thames Valley events — such as the Wellington Country park service coming up soon — talk to people from other ministries, not just your own

e. Keep one other in mind spiritually

- Pray for each other's needs, hopes, dreams, vision
- Use technology to overcome the distance barrier. Fellowship and pray over zoom, on the phone etc.

f. Work on something together

- Work on a project together. Is there a combined project — like our annual gift for the poor — you could support each other on?

g. Eat together

- Practice hospitality, whether as a whole group or smaller units ([Romans 12.13](#); [1 Peter 4.9](#))
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Conclusion

- Let's remind ourselves that this is not simply a list of practicals that seem like a good idea to us. They are instead, hopefully, expressions of taking Jesus seriously. He prayed for unity,
 - "I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." (John 17:22–23 NIV11)
- He taught and lived a heart-level love,
 - "“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”" (John 13:34–35 NIV11)

Questions

- What other ways can you think of that would promote unity between our groups in Thames Valley?
- Could your congregation or group have a prayer and discussion session about how to help other churches feel loved?
- What is your personal part in this?

