

WHAT'S INSIDE



WELCOME

For this edition, we asked our contributors to reflect on the theme of "Unity in Diversity" which is one of the historic distinctives of Churches of Christ.



CAPTIVATING. UNUSUAL AND BEAUTIFUL

Colin Battersby draws on memories from his 8 year old self sitting in church in Katanning.



GRAFTED

Tania Watson asks how the distinctives of unity and diversity hold up for us as a movement today.



BEYOND TOKENISM

Andrew Menzies shares how our theme plays out at Stirling College.



GOD'S ECOLOGY

Jono Vose demonstrates how leaving behind segregation within the church can have wonderfully surprising results.



A BETTER BANQUET

Dennis Ryle gets our mouths watering in, 'A Better Banquet'.



CURIOSITY, DIVERSITY AND INSECURITY

Jon Bergmann asks if notions of 'culture making' leave room for healthy dissent.



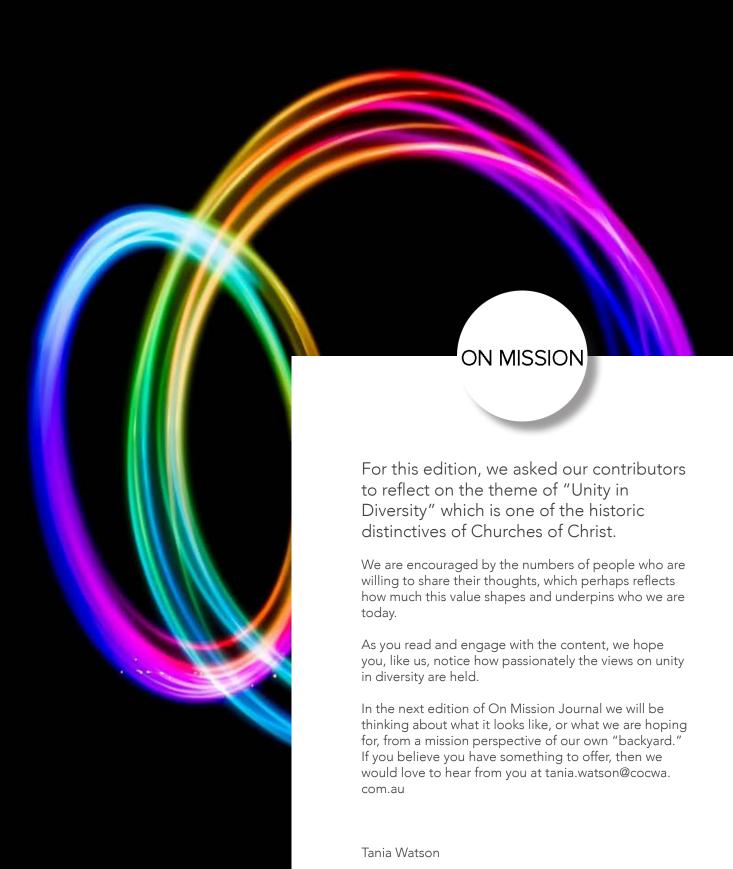
APPLES AND ORANGES

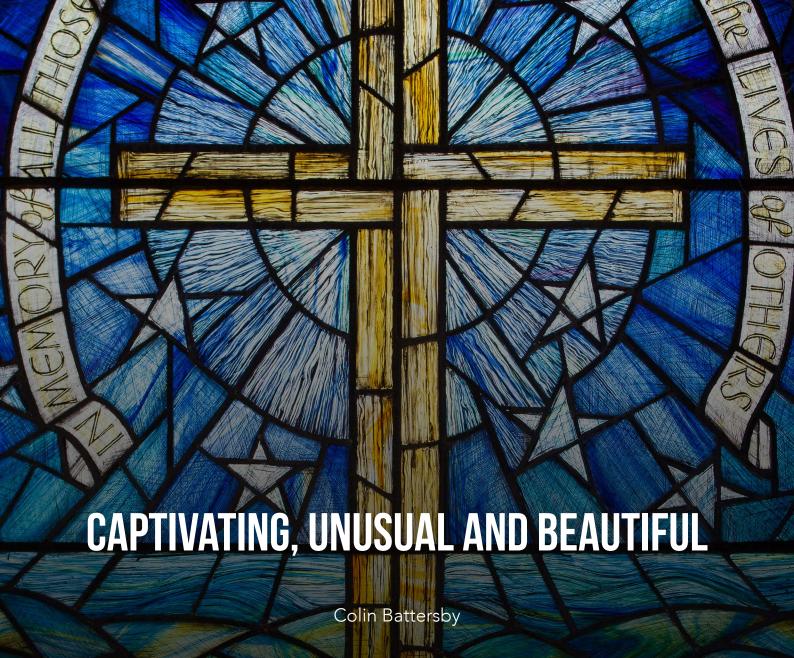
David Van Leen shares how our theme impacts Bethanie as an aged care provider.



THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT THROUGH THE BOND OF PEACE

Stephen Smith realises we could be so much more in, "The Unity of the Spirit Through the Bond of Peace."





As a young kid, growing up on a farm near Katanning, every Sunday involved the same morning ritual.

Our family of six would frantically pile into the old Ford station-wagon, navigate the gravel road into town and head for the local Uniting church on Taylor street. Once parked, Mum would subject us to her last-minute inspection for facial-crumbs and untucked shirts before being corralled into an empty row near the front of the Gothic-inspired building.

Like many 8-year-olds, I became an expert at inventing new ways of amusing myself in the pews. From flicking through hymn-books to counting bricks, the Sunday service offered many opportunities to escape boredom. "I REMEMBER BEING FASCINATED BY THE STAINED-GLASS WINDOWS THAT TOWERED ABOVE ME. I COULD SPEND MOST OF THE MORNING GAZING AT THEM. THEY WERE CAPTIVATING, UNUSUAL AND BEAUTIFUL."

Each window included a bright mosaic of distinctive patterns fused together by strips of lead. Each piece of glass, oddly shaped and coloured, provided me with another clue to solve these wall puzzles. As the morning sun rose higher, shafts of light would shoot through the entire window opening, illuminating the biblical story and leaving me mesmerised.

As a kid, it was my best distraction - and more importantly, it kept me out of trouble!

This childhood memory provides a useful analogy as we consider the theme of unity and diversity within the church and its importance for revealing God's kingdom narrative. Just like these stained-glass windows, God's church is made up of many pieces - distinct voices and different lived-experiences. There is not one single expression of the church that can tell the whole story of God's kingdom at work here on earth. We need each other to complete the picture. The beauty, mystery and wonder of the church is found not only in its unity but in its diversity, when illuminated with the light of God's love.

Sadly, the notion of unity is often misunderstood in the church. Unity does not mean conformity or uniformity. Instead, it is an acknowledgement and appreciation for what makes us different and what we hold in common. It goes beyond mere tolerance of difference towards an intentional listening, learning and receiving of the unique gifts God has placed in others. It requires a posture of humility and an openness to enter into the lived experience of others, without consuming or controlling another's identity. Sadly, the church continues to normalise the experiences and voices of the powerful, over and above those on the margins. We often speak of our "shared unity" in Christ, but only when it's convenient to do so. As a white, middleclass, educated, able-bodied, married man, my lived experience tells me that I am prone to certain cultural blind-spots. I need others in my world with different lived experiences to deepen my understanding and appreciation of God's inclusive kingdom.

Like the strips of lead that connect each piece of stained glass, there are liminal spaces, "in-between spaces," where the church can discover the divine necessity of difference. When we move beyond our own "echo chambers" and begin to acknowledge and embrace difference, our established beliefs and assumptions are disrupted. This kind of cognitive dissonance can be uncomfortable and disorientating, but it is essential for our lifelong journey of discipleship. Jesus consistently made the disciples feel uncomfortable by crossing cultural and religious boundaries. He talked with a Samaritan woman in the middle of the day; he healed a lame man on the Sabbath; he allowed a sinful woman to wash his feet with her tears; and he ate in the home of a greedy tax collector.

As we cross into vulnerable, liminal spaces to encounter "difference", God reveals (as he did for the disciples) our human brokenness and seeks to transform our hearts within a context of inclusive community. We shouldn't fear or feel threatened by difference or retreat from it. God is big enough to hold all of the broken pieces of our collective stories, identities (and ministries) together. His powerful light can shine through every culture, every community and every person, revealing a kingdom story that is captivating, unusual and beautiful.

Here are some recent expressions of unity in diversity that, like my 8-year old self, might provide you with a worthwhile distraction!

Friends of IMA-WA

Surrender

Australians Together

Common Grace

AMUC community



About the Author

Colin Battersby

Colin Battersby is the W.A. Partnership Coordinator for Global Mission Partners.



GRAFTED

Tania Watson

The Church is a single Body, made up of many parts, with Christ as the Head and Source. This is one of the central convictions that has shaped Churches of Christ. We share this image, this hope, this ideal with the broader Christian community. It's what we all recognise whenever we confess the Apostles Creed.

So, what is it that makes unity and diversity particularly distinctive for Churches of Christ? Two things stand out in my reading of our origins. Firstly, we see unity and diversity expressed in the relationship between the founders of our movement, Stone and Campbell. These two people who debated and contended with each other, who held to very different theological, doctrinal perspectives, were so gripped by the image of a united church that there were prepared to set aside their differences, joining together so as to make Christ's prayer actually true in their time. Recounting this story never fails to thrill my heart and my imagination.

Secondly, we recognise that Churches of Christ emerged in the denominationalism era where each group were concerned to define and differentiate themselves from one another. We look back and see that this often had the effect of excluding people from Christ rather than welcoming people into Christ.

In our time, denominationalism continues but without the hard lines of the past. Today, people find it easy to worship in all kinds of churches. It's not uncommon to find that people worship in different kinds of churches from week to week depending on what they are looking to experience or how they want to engage with God and with His people. Which raises another question for us to consider, especially since we have no creeds or doctrines that define our movement.

"IN CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIA, DO WE NEED CHURCHES OF CHRIST?"

My answer is "Yes!" I have sometimes thought, "What would happen if Churches of Christ no longer existed in Australia? Would it matter?" Again, I think that the answer is an emphatic "Yes!" Here's why ...

Denominations are founded upon agreements that relate to doctrine and structure. Whereas for Churches of Christ, our regard for the autonomy of the local church means that we are bound together primarily because we choose to do so. We are not naive to the reality that belonging to COCWA serves our westernised sense of independence. This however, does not, in my view, take anything away from the sheer glory of being a part of a network of people who can form an Association of churches, sometimes, and even in spite of what can be quite diverse views on matters of theology and doctrine.

We recognise that autonomy is both a great strength and a potential weakness. In my mind, it's all a matter of choice to play to our strength and to embrace the opportunity to agree to disagree: with all of the love of Christ that He has so freely given to us. For this reason, I believe Churches of Christ is essential in the Australian environment. We have the opportunity to be a robust community of churches, living examples of what it means to walk in humility, grace, peace and love.

But ...

Unity in Diversity risks being nothing more than an ideal that we hold in our minds. Which means that it can be all too easy for us to default to defending our ideals.

In Christ's Church, unity in diversity must be more than an ideal. In Christ, it has substance.

I was thinking about this last Sunday as I participated in communion. In the sharing of bread and grape juice, I participate with others in recognising that I am grafted into Christ with all those who also call on the name of Christ as Saviour. Woven together with Christ as the Head and Source, we look at one another and recognise Christ in each other and so then, as Paul says, how can we then say to each other, "I don't need you!" (1 Corinthians 12:21)

I love Eugene Petersen's translation of Ephesians. These words call us out to be the mature, united yet diverse church:

"We take our lead from Christ, who is the source of everything we do. He keeps us in step with each other. His very breath and blood flow through us, nourishing us so that we will grow up healthy in God, robust in love." (Ephesians 4:15 & 16)

Amen!

"WE TAKE OUR LEAD FROM CHRIST, WHO IS THE SOURCE OF EVERYTHING WE DO. HE KEEPS US IN STEP WITH EACH OTHER. HIS VERY BREATH AND BLOOD FLOW THROUGH US, NOURISHING US SO THAT WE WILL GROW UP HEALTHY IN GOD, ROBUST IN LOVE."

(Ephesians 4:15 & 16)



About the Author

Tania Watson

Tania Watson is the Executive Minister for Churches of Christ in WA



BEYOND TOKENISM: EMBRACING GENUINE DIVERSITY

Dr Andrew Menzies

A couple of years ago I participated in the Australian Institute of Company Directors main, week long course. It covers all of the general aspects of company directorship including finance, strategy, risk and good governance. It is very expensive (for those of us in full-time Christian ministry), but when I think of the cost of bad governance it was a bargain!

There were several different presenters on the various topics, however throughout the week there was a clear, recurring theme: without diversity a Board has a far higher risk of making poor decisions because it has a narrower perspective. Without both genders involved in decision making there is imbalance. Without a range of racial and cultural backgrounds there is imbalance. Without a mixture of skills there is imbalance. Without a range of ages there is imbalance. And on it went.

Theologically, diversity is a basic intention of God for humankind, especially those who follow Christ. We see it in the people Jesus selected and taught (look at the range of followers he called and collected, including several women some of whom were the first messengers of the resurrection). We see it in the teaching and parables he used (old widows, a 'good' Samaritan or an unwise son). We see it in his approach to the religious authorities and their practices that he challenged (which often disadvantaged women and the poor). We see it in the special value he gave to children. We see it in the poor, disabled and imprisoned folk he set free.

We also see diversity in the early church. At Pentecost people spoke in the tongues of many nations as a prophetic statement of where the Gospel was about to go to. All tribes and ethnicities are included in the vision of God and must be included in our imagery of heaven, or we are simply in error about what our eternity will be like. These examples cited however, do not mean that adopting diversity was easy for the early church. It wasn't. In fact, it was a big wrestle and needed careful dialogue, meetings and even a Council (in Acts Chapter 15). This Council discerned a theology of what the Spirit was doing and also resulted in Paul being commissioned to specifically reach Gentiles (thank goodness or most of us would be excluded from the Kingdom of God because we aren't Jewish).

Such firm a Biblical foundation however does not mean that we all practice diversity well. We are formed within a specific cultural moment and many of us come from patriarchal ethnic backgrounds. This means that we are prone to a certain bias, which oftentimes results in us being less than diverse. Acknowledging this reality is a good start for more positive change and inclusion. As a movement we are the church of Christ so we should, always set our sights on the life, teaching and example of our Lord. Jesus must be more important than anything else. Everything else is secondary.

Paul developed the consequence of Christ's sacrifice and resurrection for his Church in Gal 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

As a college, like many churches, we have taken diversity very seriously. While having female members

of the Board, Faculty and student body for many years we have recognised that things can easily default away from our preferred, diverse future. We have a clear preference for equal gender representation on the Board and Faculty, which we have achieved and strive to maintain. Student numbers of both genders have been equal for years. We have started to prosecute a case for female graduates who sadly do not seem to get senior ministry employment opportunities like their male counterparts (this is often received well by other Senior Minsters but rarely is anything actually done there are isolated exceptions but a major challenge remains). As a College, approximately 25% percent of our students are born overseas. We are planning for that to increase. We are also busy developing future faculty members who bring greater diversity (both through tutoring and research opportunities).

However, there is one thing that we are not trying to do. We are not trying to be politically correct! We are not trying to tick boxes, meet quotas, or look superior. We are trying to live up to our part in being part of Christ's vision for the Church: people of every ethnic group and tongue giving glory to the Lord. We are so grateful for our growing diversity both for its' increasing mission effectiveness and the richness of the learning community that we are becoming.

IN GAL 3:28, "THERE IS NEITHER JEW NOR GREEK, THERE IS NEITHER SLAVE NOR FREE, THERE IS NO MALE AND FEMALE, FOR YOU ARE ALL ONE IN CHRIST JESUS."



About the Author **Dr Andrew Menzies**

Dr Andrew Menzies is Principal of Stirling Theological College – University of Divinity.

GOD'S ECOLOGY

As I reflect on how we can learn about the Creator by observing the created order, one of the things I notice immediately is biodiversity. That is, the variety of plant and animal life in a particular habitat. In ecology, diversity is not just desirable and important, but is the key to sustainability.

If we bring variability into our ministries, we begin to see some really interesting patterns and changes. Let me give you an example. I walked into one of our Kids' Ministry rooms during one of our PM services and I could instantly tell that the faithful volunteer serving that night had reached the limits of his goodwill look in his eyes and his disheveled hair told the story. He was trying his best, but the fifteen upper primary kids had broken him. These kids had Sunday morning sporting commitments, so they attended the evening service's kids program. He and his wife had jumped in with enthusiasm to teach kids the bible and introduce them to Jesus. It was a great plan, but fifteen Sundaymorning-footy kids just weren't excited about sitting around a guitar, singing songs about Jesus and doing forty minutes of craft. The couple graciously finished out the month and didn't come back: although the welcome team had found its newest members!

With a gap in the roster needing to be filled, I dove in; prepared (or so I thought) from twenty years of youth and children's ministry experience. I was confident I could turn the ship around. By the end of the month, I was just as ready to join the welcome team.

Drastic measures were needed; this was clearly a moment for a paradigm shift, and something had to change. I was going to be out of volunteers or I would lose my sanity. So, we combined the primary age with the 0-5 year olds.

The change was dramatic.

Suddenly, this group of 'ratbag' kids were showing gentleness, taking leadership, listening, singing along with the little kids' songs and having fun doing it. Surrounded by their little siblings, they matured. They also had a purpose, they had a role in keeping the youngest ones safe, helping them with their activities and playing with them. In doing so, they developed maturity, responsibility and discovered the joy that comes with purpose and helping others.

In many of our church programs, as in schools, there is segregation around age groups that creates uniformity; kids, teens, young adults, working adults, retirees. This trend often spreads into other aspects of how we do church. We can easily default towards uniformity; ending up worshipping in churches that fit our own echo chambers; mirroring our own ethnicity, culture and socio-economic bracket. This is actually a real problem.

Uniformity doesn't equate to unity.

It can feel like unity, until we face a divisive issue and we lack the ecological diversity which we see mirrored all around us in the created order. In the coral reef; the wetlands, the desert; all of these systems have hugely diverse features which facilitate survival, even under threat. When threats appear, uniformity will let us down every time. It is not our similar interests, our tax bracket, our shared politics, our skin colour or the composition of our families or that unites us. We are united by Someone who is the epitome of unity in diversity; a Triune God.

As we mature in our faith, if we don't have diversity we can become overly concerned with our own preferences, and we tend to concern ourselves with our own growth. One of the hallmarks of maturity is learning how to hold our own deeply held theological, cultural, political, generational view-points lightly, for the sake of those around us; being open to and genuinely curious about theirs, especially if they are different. There is nothing like having to reorient our preferences to help nurture the faith of youth and children to help us remember what core business is, and confronting us with our own bias.

When we encounter diversity; the invitation is to embrace it. This includes diversity in theology, politics, maturity of faith, culture, philosophy, age and gender. Diversity is critical to our own growth and flourishing.

So here is my challenge: if you look around you and see a bunch of people who look, speak and act just like you, it could be time to radically change how you do business.

Perhaps you can join the kids team, serve at the seniors group or connect with the local indigenous community. Taking affirmative action is important if we are going to be saved from the prison of uniformity and the dangers of stalled growth.

THERE IS SOMETHING POWERFUL ABOUT CROSSING THE ROOM TO ENGAGE WITH SOMEONE WHO IS DIFFERENT THAN OURSELVES.

We all love those precious moments when we see a young child connecting with a great grandparent, for example. This is one of the reasons that I am so grateful for the church; at its best, it is a place where all are welcome. My own growth has been nurtured by the robust diversity of my own community, and for that I will always be grateful. Over time, I have realised that my role is just to play my own part in God's ecology; I show up with my own stories and ideas, and share them with those around me, making space of the stories and ideas of others; of all ages and stages. I am so thankful for the children, teenagers and adults who have shown me what it means to walk in unity.



About the Author

Jono Vose

Jono Vose is the Families Pastor at True North Church and the Leadership Developer at Kids Vision. He is married to Cate and has two sons Elijah and Zeke. Jono has over 20 years of experience as a Pastor and Teacher, and loves surfing and board games.



Dennis Ryle

I grew up on the fifties and sixties standard cuisine of meat and three veg.

Bread and butter pudding was a special treat. Amongst our neighbours in the housing estate, you could bet the fare would be the same. We knew it was, because we were in and out of each other's homes all the time. There was unity and it was uniform.

Church life was much the same. There was a regular, predictable pattern to youth programs, Sunday School and church services.

YOU COULD SET THE CLOCK TO THE TIME THE OFFERING WAS TAKEN UP, AND IN WHICH ORDER CAME THE BIBLE READINGS, HYMNS AND PRAYERS.

And it wasn't just in our gathering, but almost any Churches of Christ in Adelaide (and, I am told, further afield). There was unity and it was uniform.

Life moves on amidst great cultural shifts.

Unity is no longer defined by uniformity. Indeed, it is enriched with diversity.

Food wise, we now enjoy the French influenced South East Asian cooking of Vietnam alongside the nuanced flavours of their northern Chinese neighbours and the aromas of the celebratory Iranian dishes offered in warm welcome. Indian curries and African recipes vie with Mexican and Brazilian enticements. All this can happen in the same street on any one day where hospitality is celebrated and shared. Unity is deepened by diversity.

Church life can be much the same. My own tribe, steeped in the traditions and witness of the Restoration Movement, has access to freedoms of expression based on simple faith in Christ, mutuality in ministry, a passion to share good news that works towards its fulfilment and accessible public worship. We strive to find peace and harmony, from engagement with those who remain on the stately yet informal "order of service" kind of church life through to those who find fulfilment in lively free expression, all based on principles that foster expectancy that serves and inspires rather than expectations that can disappoint. We strive to enhance unity through our diversity.

But it doesn't always come off.

Even as I ponder, notice is coming through of the cancellation of the 2019 Global Gathering of Churches of Christ in Swaziland due to "internal tensions among Churches of Christ in southern Africa." Within Churches of Christ, here and elsewhere, answering the call to give witness to unity in Christ remains a challenge. We are passionate about the matters of faith that drive us to a diversity of faith's expression in worship, service and mission. Such passion can divide unless it is equally invested in receptivity and welcome of those whose commitments, out of an equal love for the way of Christ, are differently focused or directed.

Gary Holloway, secretary of the Global Gathering writes:

Many still have the mistaken notion that unity is based on agreement on "issues." This is a misunderstanding that plagued our movement for some time. Almost 150 years ago, we faced other issues and questions that threatened to divide us. In that setting, one of our leaders wrote:

IF A PEOPLE PLEADING FOR THE UNION OF ALL CHRISTIANS CANNOT MAINTAIN THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT IN THE BOND OF PEACE IN THEIR

OWN LIMITED COMMUNION, AND PEACEABLY DISPOSE OF ALL SUCH QUESTIONS AS ARE MENTIONED ABOVE, AND A GREAT MANY MORE, THEN THIS PLEA FOR UNION IS AS RIDICULOUS A FARCE AS WAS EVER PLAYED BEFORE THE PUBLIC.

(Isaac Errett, Christian Standard 1869: 213)

Errett's language is strong, but his warning is still timely. We must constantly plead for the unity of the Spirit and allow freedom on other issues. It is Christ who makes us one and we dare not divide his body. It is Christ who makes us one – not in spite of ourselves but because each of us is unique in Christ and each of our faith communities is unique in Christ with its own special spices, flavours and characteristics. We bring ourselves to a huge smorgasbord, a banquet of celebration and intimacy as we explore each other's unique contribution to the service of the body of Christ and our witness of Christ's binding love to the world.

Whether we do this through engagement with ecumenical bodies, common cause for social justice in the form of food banks, chaplaincies in schools, prisons and hospitals, combined prayer meetings, reaching out to refugees, listening to our indigenous forebears – we can witness to the unity to which Christ is constantly calling us.



About the Author

Dennis Ryle

Dennis Ryle is concluding 22 years of ministry at Wembley Downs and "refiring" after 45 years of ministry in Victoria, Canberra, South Australia and Western Australia. Dennis and Jenny will continue to live in Perth and serve the Church at large.

1. Holloway, Gary, ChristiaNet, April 2018 Issue 17



CURIOSITY, DIVERSITY AND INSECURITY

Jon Bergmann

I would like to begin by offering two overarching thoughts.

The first comes from a Church History lecture I sat in during my undergraduate, where the lecturer boldly proclaimed that "unity does not equal unanimity plus uniformity!" His point was that to be unified in a church context requires neither complete consensus nor complete homogeneity. A simple and yet confounding truth. My second point is lifted straight from the writings of St Paul – namely that there exists between us no social, ethnic, gender or (dare I say) even theological distinctions that remove from us our identity as the "In Christ" community (my paraphrase of Galatians 3:28). Simply put: we are all one in Christ and there is no distinction that exists which can usurp this reality.

It has been my long-term project to create a sense of diversity within the church. My goal however has not been around ethnic or gender diversity (although these are critical and worthy goals) but on theological, intellectual and spiritual diversity.

I was raised as a Roman Catholic and at one point, only a few years ago, I found myself simultaneously pastoring in a Baptist Church, teaching at a Pentecostal Bible College whilst finishing some postgraduate work at a Catholic University. Now I am a Churches of Christ pastor. On the one hand you could say I was confused (and you might not be far from the truth!) but in another sense I was immersed in a rich sense of diversity of thought, from a range of beautiful traditions. As a relatively free-thinker I have always found myself on the outside-of-the-inside, if that makes any sense to you. I was on the "inside" by virtue of the fact that I loved Jesus very much, but I was firmly "outside" the norm because my naturally curious mind caused me (and still does) to ask questions that make other people uncomfortable. Curiosity doesn't just kill the cat – it can do irreparable damage to anyone seeking a deeper experience of God even from within the confines of the church, it would seem.

Allow me a moment of scepticism before I offer some thoughts on how me might begin to breed a more diverse ecclesial space.

It seems to me as though many churches today have homogeneity (and with-it consensus) as their ultimate goal. It is often wrapped up in the language of "culture-making". The underlying goal is subtle yet pervasive: to create a group of people who all look, think and act according to our established "culture". Now, culture in and of itself is not a bad thing, but our understanding of culture must be strong enough to incorporate dissent, enquiry and curiosity – even when it makes us feel uncomfortable. This is not an opening of the doors to heresy or the establishing of a theological free-for-all but rather an understanding that the spiritual and theological process is organic and endlessly evolving. We might rest on our core orthodox proclamations: that Christ died and was raised; that we are united with him in discipleship; that our sins are forgiveness and that we are part of the heaven-on-earth project, but outside of these central motifs (and even sometimes within them) there is an opportunity for each person to express their Godgiven uniqueness of thought and action as a blessing to the Church.

Is it possible to have a united mission, but many different roads to get there?

I think the answer must be: yes.

There are so many challenges that we need to overcome as the body of Christ in order to be able to embrace true and authentic diversity, but let me finish by outlining what I think is probably the most difficult one for us, and therefore the one that should be our initial focus.

WE MUST RID OURSELVES OF INSECURITY.

Insecurity is an entirely unattractive quality in general, and I'm sure we can all identify its unusual expressions even within our own selves. On an ecclesial level, insecurity is a dangerous bed-fellow. Insecurity claims that our faith is fragile and so one wrong thought or doctrine could easily undo all of the rightness. Insecurity says that diversity of thought and practice is too complex and messy and so we must prescribe what is appropriate. Insecurity says that we must maintain control; of our image, of our reputation, of our congregation, of their souls...

Insecurity is threatened, or perhaps even terrified, by true diversity

Can we exist together in unity even if we can't always reach consensus? Can we exist together even in the melee of cultural, emotional and spiritual eclecticism? Can we open our churches to new and exciting conversations about the world which is evolving all around us without feeling as if we need to maintain a sense of control? Can we still walk together alongside those we disagree with, those who look nothing like us, and even those we dislike?

I think so. I think this is humility. Perhaps the requirement for genuine diversity to break free in our lives and churches is for us to replace insecurity, with humility.



About the Author

Jon Bergmann

Jon Bergmann currently serves as a Teaching Pastor at Westcity Church and is the Director of Vose Training. He is married to Nina and they have three wonderfully tyrannical children. He is passionate about the role of the imagination in theology and church, and wonders what it could look like if the church truly embraced its role as creators of beauty and stewards of the future.



APPLES AND ORANGES

David van Leen

Gus Potokalos, the patriarch in the movie 'My Big Fat Greek Wedding,' gives a speech at his daughter's wedding. It's one of my favourite quotes in the whole movie. "You know, the root of the word Miller is a Greek word. Miller come from the Greek word "milo," which is mean "apple," so there you go. As many of you know, our name, Portokalos, is come from the Greek word "portokali," which mean "orange." So, okay? Here tonight, we have, ah, apple and orange. We all different, but in the end, we all fruit."

For some reason (perhaps it's my warped brain) I see this quote linking to the Churches of Christ notion of Unity in Diversity: where we are all individuals, yet we can all be one; where our church congregations look vastly different and worship God in different ways, yet at the core there are fundament beliefs that unite us. But how does this catch-cry and fundamental belief of Churches of Christ impact an Aged Care provider such as Bethanie?

I believe the answer is founded in Scripture and lived out through our mission.

In 1 Corinthians 12 it says:

12 Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For we were all baptised by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. 14 Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. 15 Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 19 If

they were all one part, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, 24 while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, 25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.

Bethanie is part of the Body of Churches of Christ in WA. Founded back in 1954 by a group of concerned and visionary people who wanted to care for the aged, and since that time we have grown to be one of WA's leading Aged Care providers. We may not be a hand or an eye, but perhaps we are a toe or finger helping and ministering to people on a daily basis. We are different to Churches, we are different to Global Mission Partners, we are different to Warwick Stadium and the list can go on, yet we can be united. We have a mission that links us to Churches of Christ in WA. Even within Bethanie we have unity with diversity: our staff are a hugely diverse group, with many differences in culture and background. Within our client group, we have a hugely diverse range of past occupations, family make-up and beliefs. Whilst we are diverse we can be seen to have unity. So what drives our unity?

My personal belief is that our mission, "to demonstrate the love of God..." is the answer to our question, and at the heart of our mission is the link to another Churches of Christ catch cry, 'In Essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty and in all things love'. An annual staff survey highlights that the reason people come to work and continue to work for Bethanie was that they cared for and loved our clients. So what unifies us as an aged care provider even though there is so much diversity? What unifies us to Churches of Christ even though we are not an eye or hand – God's Love – As John 3 says, 'for God so loved the world' – not the young, not the same as me, but the world – everyone, all people, all apples and oranges...and that is what unifies us.

'IN ESSENTIALS UNITY, IN NONESSENTIALS LIBERTY AND IN ALL THINGS LOVE'



About the Author

David Van Leen

David is the Coordinator of Chaplains for the Bethanie Group. David is married to Roxanne and together they have 3 children. David has served in ministry positions in Churches of Christ in WA and Queensland.



The Churches of Christ has always had a deep heart for unity.

A core tenet of the restoration movement (of which Churches of Christ was born from) has been the notion of restoring simple, uncluttered Christianity. Over the years this restoration plea has been the basis of a hope of unity among believers who bring with them different traditions, perspectives, and approaches to ministry.

However, despite Paul's urging (Ephesians 4) that we pursue "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace", and Jesus' prior prayer for unity (John 17), our humanness has often resulted in us experiencing a mere pale shadow of the unity we might hope for. Jesus' words directly link our Christian unity to our effectiveness in mission, and we still often wonder why as believers, our missional efforts so often lack a significant impact on the world.

Our call for unity centres on a return to simplicity, for being Christian disciples without religious clutter and denominational trappings; for using simple biblical names to describe believers and groups of believers. This has taken various forms around the world over hundreds of years. One of many elegant examples of this takes place on the American frontier. In 1794 a group met in Surry County, Virginia led by Rice Haggard and James O'Kelly. They called themselves simply "Christians" to the exclusion of other names and eventually drew up "Cardinal Principles of the Christian Church." They were:

- **1.** The Lord Jesus is the only head of the church.
- 2. The name "Christian" to the exclusion of all party and sectarian names.
- **3.** The Holy Bible is the only creed and sufficient rule of faith and purpose.
- **4.** Christian character is the only test of church fellowship and membership.
- **5.** The right of private judgment, and the liberty of conscience the privilege and duty of all.
- **6.** The union of all Christians to the end that the world may believe.

It is understood these leaders did not intend these as a formal creed but, in general, they do express the outlook of the O'Kelly - and many other groups - seeking to rediscover uncluttered, simple Christianity.

Within the restoration movement unity has never been about organisational structure, but fellowship. Movements are powered by contagious ideas and strong values and not buildings, clergy and hierarchies. Consequently, with the autonomy of each local church to select their own leaders based on their assessment of Christian character, individual churches have developed their own flavour and emphasis. This has been a strength of the movement as churches and leaders have learned to value the differences in others while cherishing what is core, essential and simple.

Churches of Christ has not sought to achieve a uniformity of structure, belief, and practice across the movement. Our ultimate authority is the Scriptures, not the post-biblical traditions or hierarchies of the church that have accumulated. Over 70 years ago A.W. Stephenson, a previous Principal of what is now known as the Australian College of Ministries wrote,

"JUST WHAT KIND OF UNITED CHURCH DO
WE WANT? WE ARE NOT ANXIOUS TO SEE AN
AMALGAMATION OF ALL DENOMINATIONS
INTO ONE BIG ORGANISATION — A KIND OF
BUSINESS MONOPOLY WITH SOME GROUP OF
EXECUTIVES RUNNING THE WHOLE BUSINESS...
WE SEEK UNITY IN CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP,
BUT SAVE US FROM THE CURSE OF THAT
SQUEEZING, BUSINESS ORGANISATION THAT
ACCOMPANIES DENOMINATIONALISM".

(Stephenson, 1946:18)

In Churches of Christ, unity has never been based on uniformity. Nor has there ever been an imagined hope for a single organisation. Rather a mutual fellowship who share a passionate love for Jesus, a courageous pursuit of Biblical integrity, and a belief that every member is called to be a minister and missionary who will pursue the calling of God.

The Apostle Paul, in Ephesians 4, urges us to unity as an essential part of our calling. He then gives us a discipleship path to follow:

I THEREFORE, A PRISONER FOR THE LORD, BEG YOU TO LEAD A LIFE WORTHY OF THE CALLING TO WHICH YOU HAVE BEEN CALLED, WITH ALL LOWLINESS AND MEEKNESS, WITH PATIENCE, FORBEARING ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE, EAGER TO MAINTAIN THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT IN THE BOND OF PEACE.



About the Author

Stephen Smith

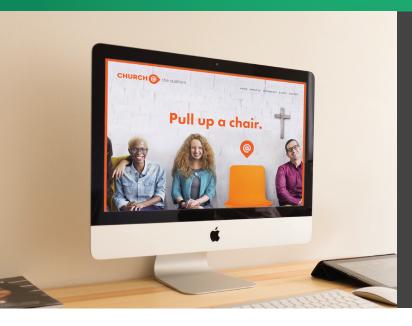
Stephen Smith is the Principal of the Australian College of Ministries.

Stephenson, A.W. (1946). One Hundred years of Churches of Christ in Australia. Austral, Melbourne.



Does your church need a website?

Would you like one for half-price?



Quality websites at a fraction of the price.

Churches of Christ WA is working with **Helium** Digital Marketing to assist individual churches create functional, user-friendly websites.

CoCWA will provide the \$1450 (ex gst) toward each website. For a standard One Day Website, the participating church will only need to pay \$1450 (ex gst).

A complete website in just one day!

The Helium team will set aside a whole day to work exclusively with each church to build a stunning website in 8 hours. By the end of the day, your website will be ready to go live.

Your new website will be mobile-responsive, search engine friendly, unique to your church and easy to maintain. We'll also provide website training on the day.

This offer is limited to 8 churches and will be taken up on a 'first come, first served' basis.

Email Tania to express your interest: Tania.Watson@cocwa.com.au







