

A Unified Church

How it stays together--how it is divided

Part 2: The Basis of Our Unity

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Part one of our discussion considered Christ's prayer for unity recorded in John 17. In this most sublime prayer we receive Christ's innermost thoughts for His church. His concern for their unity weighed heavily upon His heart as His journey to Calvary loomed. Two points are found emphasized in Christ's prayer: unity with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and unity with the Apostles' doctrine. That is, spiritual and doctrinal unity.

We seek doctrinal and spiritual unity so that "the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me" (John 17:21). A visible unity results when we are in harmony with the Apostles doctrine, and with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This unity is actual, practically seen by the world. It convinces them of the truthfulness and power of the Christian message. Thus, true followers of Christ will not choose to separate themselves from the organized body of Christ--His visible church--in any way, shape, or form. To do so would show the world a fragmented picture having no beauty to offer its fragmented society.

The Basis of Our Unity

As a global movement, made up of people from “every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (Revelation 14:6), the Seventh-day Adventist Church prayerfully and actively works to assure that an unbelieving world can see the grand truths for this time. Without the church’s worldwide and unified organization, this prophetic movement would disintegrate. It would amount to little more than patterns of local options, spurious ideologies, and powerless fuzzies. Such a witness would lead only to confusion.

Our ability to carry forward our Bible-based mission, vision, and values, with strength and credibility, to large extent will depend on our unity of action. How shall we convince the world that we have a message that makes a difference in lives, and is able to heal wounds of division, if we ourselves are seen traveling in different directions? God’s gracious leading through our history shows three major factors which have greatly contributed to our worldwide unity:

1. Our distinctive and biblically based doctrines and lifestyle. Even though we are a Culturally diverse people, Adventists everywhere in the world hold the same doctrines and embrace the same lifestyle. As a movement, we have manifested a unique and distinctive personality. We have been able to accomplish this because of our adherence to the simple teachings of God’s Word.
2. Our sense of the mission God has given. Out from the disappointment of 1844 came the clear leading of God to share a special message to a dying world. As the early advent believers prayerfully turned again and again to their Bibles, trying to figure out what had gone wrong, God opened to them truths for just such a time. They understood the fulfillment of prophecy, and accepted the call to distinctly share the everlasting gospel of (Matthew 28:18-20), in the context of the three angels messages of (Revelation 14:6-12). If we will remain united and committed to this mission, as a body of people drawn from all nations, we will

see God's work on earth accomplished. We will rejoice for having the privilege of working together with Him.

3. Our unique church polity (organizational structure). Human organization always has its limitations. But the stability of the church, the doctrinal unity and purity, and the equitable distribution of resources for the purpose of accomplishing our mission, is a reality. Why is this? Because of our unique structure of uniting local churches, conferences, unions, and divisions as part of the General Conference.

These factors, together with the Lord's blessings, may explain why the Seventh-day Adventist Church is growing all round the world. There are, however, disturbing indications that our unity as a people is being threatened. To this we turn in our next installment of "A Unified Church."

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE: Mike and Jayne Lambert have served throughout the NPUC, including Montana, Idaho, and Oregon. Elder Lambert is presently pastor of the Stateline Church, in Milton Freewater, Oregon.