

## Sermon for January 22nd 2017 Christian Unity

This is the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Actually it has been a week of prayer for all the changes that are happening, especially as our neighbours to the south have semi welcomed a new President. We need to trust this unknown future to our known God. I heard President Trump say “May God bless America.” God is there with them, may they be willing to receive God’s guidance.

Prayer: Holy One, be with us as we reflect on the scripture message you have sent today. We are grateful for this inspiring message for our work together. Continue to guide us as we discern your will and intention for this community of Christ’s followers. May the thoughts and words that we share be your message for us today. Amen

*“ There’s a Spirit in the air telling Christian’s everywhere  
Praise the love that Christ revealed living working in our world.” VU # 582*

*There’s a Spirit* in the air here in this church. Many people have been working very hard on a Shared Ministry agreement and we have a first Draft composed from the working groups. Four teams have been working since October to create separate parts for the document. I think it is exciting that so many have contributed their creative ideas and others have worked hard to put the pieces together. Today the teams will meet to check out their work with one another. An amazing work in progress that you will see soon. February 12 all will be revealed for your comments and questions. We continue to seek God’s guidance, as we do this work.

God sent a clear message to us today! The reading from the letter to the Corinthians, felt like it was directed to us.

*“ Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose.” 1 Corinthians 1: 10*

In the scripture passage, Paul helps the reader to discern the common mind and purpose that animates Christian faith and life as a life lived in relationship or communion with God as revealed by Jesus Christ. Paul’s call for “ no divisions among you” shows the purpose of God’s work in Christ, reconciling the world and bringing peace.

Paul claims a theology of the cross that is life affirming. The gospel is given in the cross as self-sacrifice, giving oneself up in response to and care for the other, the cross as bearing the burdens of others — not as self denial and resignation, but in joy and thanksgiving. The theology of the cross helps to shape how we respond to others, how we listen to each other, how we discern what to do, and in what spirit we may make decisions and undertake actions. Christian faith; a way of life grounded in the theology of the cross. Christian faith is a way of life. This leads to the theology of the church as a new covenant, a new people, a new society. Paul is clear that the expression of God’s saving love is not in human wisdom but in the cross of Christ, the awesome manifestation of the way and power of God. The church will have one voice and one mind when it recognizes, as Paul did, that the cross, the world’s symbol of foolishness, is God’s power.

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Paul goes on to comment that some people say they belong to Apollus or some belong to Cephas. Sounds like *I am Anglican*, or *I belong to Gabriola United*, or we did it this way in *St. Martin* services, or *I 'm in the United Church and we like..... !!* All of you know what divisions have felt like around here. You are all making an effort as best you can to move past the differences and move towards one community of faith. No one is expected to change their primary affiliation, that connection will remain. I have seen a shift as you have become one congregation, sharing the gifts you have in common.

Paul's words can help us to discern that even those who differ with us are brothers and sisters, and can help us deal with those who differ with us, in a spirit of care and compassion. We understand that there are differences between us but we also share so much in common. Our faith in God, and Jesus Christ enables us to be together as one body. One community with different members, different gifts to contribute, different interests to share. If you think about your siblings it puts this into another perspective. My brother, Paul, and I are very different but I still love him very much. Sometimes our Christian brothers and sisters are even easier to love and respect.

Christian unity does not mean uniformity. Christian unity cannot be commanded, it must proceed from "discerning the body". Jesus is the leader who has brought us together. Christians are united in the same mind and purpose as followers of Jesus Christ. When we think about the wider Christian community expressed through many different denominations and churches, it stretches our imagination. No wonder it is hard for the secular society! So let's think about this community and our work here.

This is the Statement of Purpose in the Shared Ministry agreement :

We, the congregation of St. Martin of Tours (Anglican Church) and the Gabriola United Pastoral Charge (United Church) who have the approval of our respective Church bodies, recognize the advantages of working together in a common community of faith.

This new relationship will challenge and enable us to live more purposefully and completely as Christians: it will foster inclusiveness, tolerance of differences, wider perspectives of understanding, acceptance of discomforts, a willingness to learn and to grow together in our common faith, and a commitment to care for each other. A Shared Ministry provides an opportunity for us to grow both spiritually and in our ministry. We seek to be a positive example of ecumenical relations on Gabriola Island and beyond.

Our Mission Statement:

We follow Jesus Christ, worshipping and serving in love and joy.

We open our minds, hearts and doors to the world (October 2016)

Unity and power are found in simplicity. We are called to be of one mind, spirit and purpose. God is faithful in providing for us each day. In the priesthood of all believers, it is in working

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together with God's wisdom guiding us that we are best prepared for the task God gives to us. We are called by God to be involved in this Shared Ministry together. May we remember that we are a Christian community of faith working with God's help and guidance. We are not alone, God is with us. Thanks be to God.