

Christian Family Sunday May 8th 2016



Ut omnes unum sint: That all may be one

A Reflection by Peggy Jensen

Based on John 17: 20-26

Prayer: Loving God, be with us now as we try to understand Jesus prayer that all may be one. In our relationships with family and church family it is not always easy to be together as 'one'. Open our hearts and minds to your word for us today. Amen.

Ut omnes unum sint: That all may be one

This quotation from the Gospel reading we heard today, is part of the United Church crest. The Latin words *ut omnes unum sint* that surround the symbols on the crest mean "That all may be one" and are taken from John 17:21. They are a reminder that we are both a "united" and "uniting" church. This phrase appears at the bottom left corner of the United Church crest. I want to give you a short history lesson.

The United Church was inaugurated on June 10, 1925 in Toronto, Ontario, when the Methodist Church of Canada, the Congregational Union of Canada, and 70 per cent of the Presbyterian Church of Canada entered into a union. Also joining was the small General Council of Union Churches, centred largely in Western Canada. It was the first union of churches in the world to cross historical denominational lines and received international acclaim. Each of the founding churches had a long history in Canada prior to 1925. The movement for church union began with the desire to coordinate ministry in the vast Canadian northwest, and for collaboration in overseas missions. Congregations in Indigenous communities from each of the original denominations were an important factor in the effort toward church union. Right relationships with First Nations continues to be an important focus of the United Church, as well as the Anglican Church of Canada.

The United Church continues to be a "uniting" church. Dialogues between the United and Anglican churches of Canada have happened several times since the original United Church union. They have started up again recently. I wanted to share this bit of United Church history because I think it is an ongoing story of Christ's church in our world. . You have been living the denominational conversation between the Anglicans and Uniteds, by engaging in this community of faith together.

When Jesus was praying for his disciples: "*to be one as the Father and I are one.*", Jesus never imagined the fracturing of his followers! At the time of the Protestant reformation The Holy Catholic church became the Roman Catholic Church and Protestants, to put it simply. We are all rooted in the same faith but like a large tree, the branches have grown outwards in different directions. Yes, the denominations have differences but they share much more in common. It is really important to remember that we have the same heritage. As children of God, and followers of Jesus Christ, we are all part of the Christian family.

When you think about your family of origin, you have inherited some characteristics. You are unique and different from everyone else in your family. Where you came from and where you are now, all influence the person you have become. If you have married into another family you start to take on some of those characteristics. I am thinking about family traditions. Family traditions change as the times and living conditions change. As our families expand through marriage and grandchildren, many things change. One funny example may be: “When is the right time to open Christmas presents?”

Kris and I were married in 1993. His 3 children and my 2 boys were in their late teens, and early 20’s so we didn’t all live in the same house. All of the family get along well, but it helps that they live in different parts of the country. Personally, it has taken a great deal of work to make our marriage work. We were very different people when we met, but I know we have grown together. Kris has his unique love of tractors and bag-pipes, that will never change! We understand each other and enjoy life together. Relationships take work, all the time, but it is worth it.

Pause and think about your church family. How has it changed over the generations? The people in the family have changed, some move on and some new people come. These relationships contribute to the changes in your church family. Spiritually you change, as you broaden your understanding of faith through other perspectives. Worshipping and studying together can strengthen your faith. This church family changed a lot when you decided to live together. In some ways this is now like a second marriage, a blended and blending family. Two families from different circumstances decide to be together, two denominationally distinct congregations come together in one church. You are getting to know each other quite well and you see the many things you have in common. It takes some work and patience to figure it all out. There are common faith threads that help you to grow together. The blessing is that that you are connected through God’s love.

Often people accept all the life changes around them but they expect the church to stay the same! Why does everything have to change? Why are church changes harder to accept?

After the service, few weeks ago, someone said to me: “Thanks for teaching us new hymns.” Now that was a wonderful gift to me. This was a positive comment about change. I know I am the catalyst of change right now. I am trying to move carefully but I make mistakes and missteps. I am your Interim minister. This is a time for transition and change. We have work to do together, like the conversation next week, discovering “**who we are now.**” This is an important piece of the work that we need to do together.

I read this reminder about interim ministry yesterday: “*The congregation is helped to gain perspective on its past and to focus on its future. The overall goal is to bring the congregation to a condition of health, unity and readiness to move forward under the leadership of a new pastor.*” Temporary Shepherds p.144.

I want to lift up one word UNITY. Unity is not uniformity.

“We must not think we require uniformity in language, liturgical practice, and worship style, in order to have unity as a faith community. Unity is enriched by diversity. The unity is deepened when we dare to notice and reflect upon ways in which forced uniformity has destroyed faith and community.” Gathering Pentecost 1 2016 . p. 74

There are several ways that we are learning about our unity as a faith community.

Ut omnes unum sint: That all may be one. This prayer of Jesus (in the reading from John) speaks of the relationship between himself and the Divine, and of his relationship with the others. Jesus prays that all may be one, as we are one. Jesus continues to try to explain the disciples that God the father and Jesus are one.

“As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us.” John 17:21

The relationship we have with each other is through our relationship with God and Jesus Christ. We do not have a singular explanation of what that means to each of us individually and that is okay. We bring our unique selves to this Christian family of faith.

Remember: unity is not uniformity! Unity is being one together, and one with the Creator.