

May 2004, *Equipping*

Praying for Unity



“...that they may be one...” (*Jn 17:11*), prayed Jesus during his final week. Those prayed for were believers in Jesus then, as well as the believers that were to follow; as Jesus put it, “those who will believe in me through their word.” (*Jn 17:21*) That would include us.

Jesus’ prayed vision for his followers in their life together in the world is summed up in the word ‘oneness.’ What did Jesus mean by ‘oneness’ in this prayer? What kind of unity is implied? Unity is not necessarily a positive goal in and of itself. The story of lemmings who run pell-mell into the sea illustrates a not uncommon form of unity among humans.

The oneness that Jesus prayed for was rooted in his relationship with his Father. His vision was that his followers would experience, with one another, something of the oneness that he enjoyed with God; so Jesus prayed that his followers would be “*one as we are one.*” (*Jn 17:11*)

Connectedness, relationship and love are the desired qualities, rather than sameness or uniformity. Such unity we cannot plan, organize or otherwise pull off. It is given by God. It is a gift. It is a oneness that is big enough to accommodate diversity and strong enough to survive disagreement and conflict. It is a unity already established for all who are in Christ, but is yet unrealized; hence the call to prayer.

What may happen when we pray for oneness?

We may become more aware of the fractures and divisions in the body of Christ. Caring enough to pray may sensitize us to hidden fissures as well as open dis-connects.

We may become sensitized to unity-destroying feelings within ourselves set against individuals or groups within our church.

Our commitment to the church may grow from my congregation to our congregations to our national body of churches and beyond.

We may grow in our experience of the breadth and length, the height and depth of God’s love.

Others “may believe that you have sent me,” as Jesus said would happen when his believers become one.

As we prepare for Assembly 2004 in Winkler, let us pray for oneness. Who knows how God will answer our prayers?

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