

## ***Christ-Centered, Biblical Foundation of “Comm-unity”***

Our commitment is to become a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive community grounded in the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Our desire is to be faithful to the God who was "in Christ reconciling the world to himself."<sup>1</sup>

God's love is constant and eternal. He freely created the world as an outpouring of His love. "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."<sup>2</sup>

Jesus Christ is the revelation of God's love for the world. In perfect humility and compassion, God became human to seek and to save the lost, through Jesus Christ. "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."<sup>3</sup>

This fact is at the center of Christian faith. The Holy Spirit awakens people to the reality of God's love for the world in Christ. "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father – the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father – he will bear witness about me."<sup>4</sup>

We see the compelling vision for diversity in the kingdom of God, from Genesis to Revelation. We see God working to redeem a people for himself, from every tribe and tongue and nation – colorful and diverse. The church's pursuit of diversity reflects the Bible's description of the kingdom of God - a diversity of people to be born again into a new family for a holy and righteous God.

As the Father sends the Son into the world, so the Son sends believers into the world with the message of reconciliation. Knowledge of the gospel leads to confidence in God's love. Jesus Christ is our hope in life and in death. Knowledge of the gospel also leads to humility. Since Jesus Christ is the truth, Christians are freed from the illusion that truth is our possession. We belong to Jesus; he does not belong to us.

Can there be a more fulfilling unity than us all being united with Christ? This world can create false or separate unities under the banners of nationality, ethnicity, the colors of our skin, socio-economic status, or party lines. But nothing our culture offers can compare to the joy of being united with the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Despite living in a racialized society, through Christ we see that racism is not biblical, nor is it of God.

The gospel resists every form of ideological thinking that conflates the will of God with our own interests and agendas. The sovereign love of the Spirit of God frees us to confess our complicity in structures of injustice and oppression, to become generous conversation partners, to welcome and learn from those who are different from us, to comfort those who have or continue to struggle because of the hatred and bigotry that has existed in this country and the world, and to take comfort that we love because God first loved us.

As Christians, we bear witness to the mystery of Christ in words and actions.

We seek reconciliation across all the boundaries that divide us because Christ reconciles sinners to God and has broken down the dividing wall that separates people and communities from one another.

We seek peace because Christ is our peace and calls his people to be a community of peace. We seek justice because Christ is our justice and calls his people to do justice. We seek freedom because Christ has set us free and calls everyone to live in this freedom.

We seek inclusion because Christ's atoning sacrifice is for the sin of the whole world and because God's plan is to gather up all things in him.

We praise God for the vast diversity of creation and for fulfilling the promise to bless all the nations by including them in Christ: "I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *2 Corinthians 5:19*

<sup>2</sup> *1 John 4:9-10*

<sup>3</sup> *Colossians 1:19-20*

<sup>4</sup> *John 15:26*

<sup>5</sup> *Revelation 7:9*

## **What is diversity, equity and inclusion?**

*Diversity* is the representation of all our varied identities and differences as humans, collectively and as individuals. Diversity means more than just acknowledging and/or tolerating the range of human differences that exist. It is a set of conscious practices that seek to understand and appreciate the *interdependence* and *interconnection* of God's creation: humanity and the natural environment.

*Equity* seeks to ensure fair treatment and equality of opportunity and access to information, participation, and resources needed for success. Tackling equity issues requires an understanding of the root causes of outcome disparities within our society and institutions, based on past and present laws, policies, and practices of exclusion - often justified by physical differences. Equity is only possible through agape love.

*Inclusion* builds an environment of belonging by actively inviting the contribution and involvement of all people; where every person's voice adds value, and no one person is called upon to represent an entire community. Inclusion ensures that people of all backgrounds, identities, abilities, perspectives, and beliefs have an equal opportunity to belong, achieve, and contribute to their communities. An inclusive institution promotes and sustains a sense of belonging; it values and practices respect where all people are recognized for their inherent worth and dignity, talents, beliefs, and backgrounds.

The topic of "diversity, equity, and inclusion" often stirs strong emotional responses. Almost all people have some discomfort discussing topics of racism and would rather avoid it altogether. Many become immediately defensive or evasive when the topic comes up. We tend to deny that racism remains in our society, which negates the experiences of people of color as well as other marginalized groups.

Any true and healing discussions on this topic must allow for an acknowledgement of the pain and suffering caused by the intentional exclusion from participation in this democracy and the violence perpetrated against whole people groups over different periods of time. Otherwise, it becomes a "this is what diversity means to those of us who are not directly impacted by racism." There exists in the US a deep and abiding need for reconciliation.

It will be difficult for any organization or community to have meaningful, productive discussions about racial inclusion and reconciliation without a fact-based understanding of the roots of exclusion and racism and without a clear intention of acknowledging the pain, inequities, and barriers caused by racism and exclusion and the deep feelings of isolation, disrespect, disregard, and hurt that many students and their families feel who have experienced racism or exclusion in their own lives.

While we can agree that the Lord wants all people to live in harmony, He never said it would be easy. The Bible shows us the ideals of Godly behavior, but we know that we often fall short of those ideals.

Appropriately addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion in Christian schools and congregations is one of those areas in which we too often fall short. So much so that we seldom, if ever, directly address the topic. As Christians, we must be part of the solution. It takes courage to get past our defensiveness and discomfort, so we can begin the process of identifying issues and creating solutions in the broader communities in which we live and work. To be sure, the issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion are reflective of the larger society in which we live. You need look no further than the current headlines to realize that we still have a racial problem in this country. No matter what you may think of it, it is a problem.

Whether consciously or unconsciously, we have all been impacted, we have all been harmed, not only by historic and continuing racist violence and discrimination, but also by the damage done to our sense of community and our sense of togetherness and belonging. Racism and the hatred, fear, prejudice, and even violence it may cause, denies our human connections and confuses the identity not only of so-called "people of color," but also of those who are considered "white."

**Any serious study of American history reveals patterns of oppression and persecution of certain "groups" that persist to this day, even though sometimes in different form or degree.**

It is inaccurate to imagine our society, our schools, or ourselves as somehow completely free from all the prejudices, biases, and stereotypes of the past. As Christian ministers, educators and service providers, we have a responsibility to present Godly principles that address these issues not only in the classroom and in the sanctuary, but also in the community and the world. The people of God have a special role to play in showing the truth of God's love and grace.

### ***Why is biblical diversity important?***

The Christian vision of diversity is based upon two fundamental doctrines of Holy Scripture: (1) the unity of the human race, and (2) the universality of Christ's church on earth. God teaches us in Holy Scripture that the human race is one, with merely superficial differences of color, hair texture, eye shape, etc., through the diversity of God's creation, having different talents, gifts, and beauty. We are one humanity - multiethnic, multinational, and multicultural- united in that humanity regardless of our gender, nationality, national origin, culture, socio-economic status, language, or religious denomination.

Paul preached to the Athenian philosophers, "From one man God made every nation of the human race, that they should inhabit the whole earth" (Acts 17:26). It is within this greater context of unity that humanity's diversity rightly appears. Human diversification receives its first mention in Genesis 1:27, where the text announces the creation of the one human race: "So God created the human race in his own image . . . male and female he made them." The text's singular term, "human race" (Adam in Hebrew), is specified as diverse in gender, male and female.

The scattering of the human race is a theme that recurs in the Genesis narratives. After naming Noah's three sons, Genesis tells how "from them came the people who were scattered over the earth" (9:19).

At Babel, in response to humanity's monocultural attempt to live in defiance of God: "as one people speaking one language," the Lord scattered them over the earth (11:6-8). It is precisely these scattered and alienated peoples that God calls to faith and repentance through the gospel's ministry of reconciliation.

Out of the multi-listings of Genesis 10-11, God chose one family, Terah's, and one person, Abraham, to be a blessing to the world. As God promised him, "all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:3). Such blessedness does not obliterate the diversity of the peoples.

That was the mistake of some of the early Jewish Christians, known as the Judaizers, who sought to make Gentiles into Jews before they could be received into the church as Christians.

Rather, the blessedness of reconciliation affirms the validity of a multitude of cultural expressions. The Hebrew prophet Joel proclaimed that in the latter days God would pour out his Spirit "on all people," so that "your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions." This world-wide embrace of the Holy Spirit reaches over all barriers of nationality, ethnicity, class and gender, a point made emphatic by God's message through the prophet: "Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days" (Joel 2:28-29).

It is fitting that this text, so rich in its multicultural implications, became the key text for the Apostle Peter's sermon at Pentecost, when people of some fifteen language groups first heard the gospel preached in their own native tongues (Acts 2:8-12, 16-21). Significantly, the Pentecost event did not involve a miracle of hearing, whereby each person was made to understand one language, but a miracle of speaking, whereby the apostles preached in many languages to the gathered crowds.

As people from various people groups, classes and conditions come to faith in Jesus Christ, he reconciles them to God the Father and therefore to each other. The Body of Christ, therefore, has an inherent and God-given diversity. Elements of this diversity are also experienced at the local, congregational level.

As Paul wrote to the divisive Christians at Corinth, "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts . . . so it is with Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:12).

Paul himself experienced a rich and blessed diversity in the church of Syrian Antioch, where for the first time Jewish and Gentile Christians worshiped God together on equal footing (Acts 11:19-26).

The Antioch church's multiculturalism is dramatically displayed in the names of its leaders as listed in Acts 13:1-2, including "Barnabas" -- a wealthy Cypriot-born Jewish Levite; "Simeon, called Niger" -- a black African proselyte to Judaism; "Lucius of Cyrene" -- a Greco-Roman from North Africa"; and "Saul" -- a Tarsus-born Jew raised in Jerusalem, known by the Greco-Roman name Paul.

The Book of Acts emphasizes the cultural diversity of the Antioch church, because it was here that the disciples were first called Christians (11:26). The newly coined term, meaning "Those of Christ," was invented to describe these believers in their unprecedented mix.

This is in keeping with the Great Commission, in which Jesus commands his church to disciple all the *ethnoi*, literally from Greek, all the "people-groups" of the world (Matthew 28:19). Hence, the new term, "Christian," stands as a powerful testimony to the reconciliation of individuals and cultures in Christ.

Christ tears down the walls of hostility that divide Jew from Gentile, making former enemies into friends and equals in the faith (Ephesians 2:14-16). This fundamental redemptive equality is well expressed in Galatians 3:28, where the apostle writes, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Even the surpassing unity of final redemption can be expressed in Scripture with language celebrating the multicultural and multilingual heritage of the redeemed. Accordingly, in the Book of Revelation, "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language" stands before the throne of God and the Lamb, singing praise (7:9).

For Christians, the practice of multicultural diversity is motivated by love for God and therefore by love for other human beings. Since God is the Father and Creator of all, his love rests upon all, even upon those who reject him. He therefore calls Christians and Christian communities to imitate his love in its world-wide embrace. Some cultures have been more deeply impacted by the Christian gospel than others.

Nevertheless, within every culture and every age, some patterns of living are rooted more in human sinfulness than in Christ. These sinful patterns do not provide an excuse for Christians to despise the people who practice them. Rather, even while hating sin, we must love sinners, just as God has loved us despite our sins. This calling presents an ever-present challenge to the Christian community and requires the conscious cultivation -- both individually and communally -- of the Christian virtues of humility, discernment, courage, justice and love. In our effort to rise to these challenges, God offers us his ever-gracious help.

Multicultural diversity and solidarity, then, is to be embraced by the Christian community. Christians have a special obligation to demonstrate the reality of Christ's culture-transforming love. In obeying God's mandates and allowing His Holy Spirit to lead us, we discover His creational blessedness as human beings reconciled to God and to each other because of Jesus Christ our Lord.

#### ***Matthew 25: 34-40***

**<sup>34</sup> "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. <sup>35</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, <sup>36</sup> I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' <sup>37</sup> "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? <sup>38</sup> When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? <sup>39</sup> When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' <sup>40</sup> "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'**

## *The Unity of Humankind*

**Genesis: 9:18-19:** <sup>18</sup> The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan.) <sup>19</sup> These were the three sons of Noah, and from them came the people who were scattered over the whole earth.

Through most of human history the concept of race did not exist. Before the 1500's, Africa was simply a continent. We know now that Africa is the birthplace of the 1<sup>st</sup> human beings. And Acts 17:26 says that "from one man he created all the nations throughout the whole earth." And through Adam and Noah, we're all related. In the Bible, there is only one race - the human race.

The Scriptures tell us that there were three brothers who survived the flood with Noah and after they moved out of the house (the ark), they began to repopulate the earth. From these three sons of Noah came all the people now scattered across the earth. These three brothers have the same blood and the same father.

**How absurd is it to create a notion that there are people groups who are separate, as though they are different species, with different blood?**

After the Flood, people came to be grouped by tribes, languages, territories, and nations. First from Adam and Eve and then from these three brothers come every person on the planet. There are no races. As people spread out over the earth, they began to group in different areas and then began to develop customs, languages and cultures based on common experiences. Pigmentation and other physical changes occurred as people adapted to climate and environment. God loves diversity.

Yet, these slight physical adaptations did not change the basic genetic similarity between individuals. In fact, it is entirely possible that a man born today in Botswana may have more in common genetically with a man born in Finland, than that same man born in Botswana has with a man born in Zimbabwe.

In Genesis chapter 10, you will see the geographical movement of these three brothers and their descendants. **It would be a mistake to take our modern-day prejudices and apply them to that era.**

To say that Japheth's descendants became only European would not be true, since Japheth's descendants crossed the Mediterranean Sea to the coast of Greece and the island Cyprus, and countries in Eastern Europe, but also to modern Turkey in the western part of Asia as well as parts of Iran. To say that Shem's descendants became only the Jews would not be true, since Shem's descendants populated parts of Syria, modern day Iraq, parts of modern Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and modern-day Iran. To say that Ham's descendants became only African would not be entirely true, since all people came from Africa, and though some of Ham's descendants moved back into northern and eastern Africa, others moved into the middle east, as well as southern Europe and Asia.

Ham had four sons: Cush, Mizraim, Put and Canaan. The descendants of Cush moved into Ethiopia. One of Cush's descendants was Nimrod, who founded an early kingdom in the Mesopotamian lands of Babylonia and Assyria, where he built the cities of Nineveh and Babel. In the Hebrew Old Testament Mizraim is the word for Egypt, the birthplace of the first great civilization. Mizraim's descendants also moved to the island of Crete in southern Europe. Ham's son Put and his descendants moved into the area today known as Libya. Ham's son Canaan and his descendants moved into Palestine in the Middle East and parts of Turkey, in west Asia.

In Matthew 1:1-16, there are five women mentioned in the lineage of Jesus. Mary the mother of Jesus was a descendant of Shem. Three of the others: Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth were descendants of Ham's son Canaan. Bathsheba, the only other woman mentioned, was the mother of Solomon. In the word Bathsheba: "bath" is the Hebrew word for daughter. "Sheba" is a descendant of Cush. Her name means "daughter of Sheba." Which means daughter of a descendent of Cush.

So, check out Jesus, our Lord and Savior! In the Lord's veins flowed the blood of all people. And he shed His blood so that all people can have eternal life.