



Seeking unity with one another through change

Our parish is exploring the options for our future worship and social life. The opportunity for change can bring new improved things and also loss of things that were meaningful.

One of the last things Jesus said on the night of the Last Supper was, *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another."*

With the benefit of Google, we can find that 'one another' appear over 100 times in scripture, 59 times in the New Testament: Be devoted to one another (Romans 12:10), Honour one another (Romans 12:10), Live in harmony with one another (Romans 12:16), Build up one another (Romans 14:19, 1 Thessalonians 5:11), Accept one another (Romans 15:7), Care for one another (1 Corinthians 12:25), Serve one another (Galatians 5:13), Forgive one another (Ephesians 4:2), Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Ephesians 5:19), Look to the interests of one another (Philippians 2:4), Show hospitality to one another (1 Peter 4:9), Pray for one another (James 5:16), Encourage one another (1 Thessalonians 4:18) and more.

When we come together in unity, with God, with Our Lord and with one another, the scriptures tell us that God will command a blessing on us. As it says in Psalms, "How good it is, how pleasant, when the people dwell as one." The Church is the visible picture of God's glory on earth. If we are not living in unity with each other, we are not creating a faithful picture of who He is.

In day-to-day family and work life, togetherness is essential for us to reach our goals, whether big or small. By coming together and pooling our resources, we can tackle bigger tasks and overcome more obstacles. When we have unity in our faith life, we can achieve more than any of us could on our own.

God rewards our collective efforts and commitment to 1) to build each other up, 2) to value every person, and 3) to keep what's important, Jesus's mission. If Jesus prayed for unity in the Church, then it must be important. He prayed that the whole church be unified around the mission of spreading the Gospel. We live that mission through our participation in liturgy, sharing connection, and serving each other in our community. It was never about buildings, they are the physical hub we use to carry Jesus's mission.

As humans, we tend at times to form groups or stick to our self-interests, self-comfort, not liking change, being a bit tribal, or falling short in some way of the example set by Jesus.

The decision to change from one parish/two churches to one parish/one church is inevitably going to bring out differences in what we individually want. It is inevitable that things are not going to stay the same. We have the choice to pray and hold fast to the ideal of accepting change and loving one another in a collective choice for unity whichever option is made. As scripture tells us, unity commands a blessing on all of us from God (John 17, The prayer of Jesus).

As tribal as we can be at times, we know that we were created by God for one another, and the great diversity that we are, is what enriches our lives.

We need to be committed. The first commitment is to build each other up. What a difference it could make if we commit to encouraging those around us, especially those share the same view to accept a new view, or to encourage those who differ from us, with affirmation and support. Jesus didn't seek to please himself. He didn't limit his associations to only certain groups of people or certain locations. Jesus went out of his way to associate with those outside his circle.

A second commitment is recognizing the value of every person. All parishes, all churches, are made up of a broad range of personality types. Inevitably, people will sometimes see others as difficult. But the value of a loving community is that while we may disagree with others, or have different traditions, as we have seen elsewhere with merging parishes or churches, strength and joy can come of it. We must never forget that Christ died for those outside of 'our group' too.

A third commitment for growing a unified parish, is keeping our focus on what's really important, the mission of Jesus. He asks that we become one as He is one with the Father (John 17).

We're here today from all walks of life, different family size, different social standings, political affiliations and ethnicities. We're rich, we're poor, we're young, we're old and everything in between. Despite our past or present situation and feelings, when we gather at His church, we can choose to put all that aside and come together as one family to worship God and serve Our Lord.

Let us pray in thanksgiving that we can gather in one unified space to worship. Let us pray that we never lose sight of the vision that Jesus has for each of us that we may love one another, perfected in him, as one Body of Christ. And let our prayer then become, "Lord, heal any divisions in our parish that we may rejoice in the perfect unity of your Church, and help us move together, in service to each other, as one community, to eternal life in your kingdom. Amen".

"Lord, bless our plans and decisions to merge two churches in one parish through the combining, integrating, and unifying of parishioners, structures, liturgy, outreach and resources to serve each other sustainably with the message of Jesus. Amen".

"Help us reach new levels of unity, maturity and the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13).

And to use the most repeated one another verse, let us love another as Our Lord loves us.