



## INWARD, OUTWARD | THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

### Living in Unity

September 13, 2020

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for Caring

### OPEN IN PRAYER

### OPENING QUESTIONS

What does “living in unity” mean to you?

If someone told you, they do not want any part of the church because of the divisions and conflicts they’ve experienced among Christians, how would you respond?

How have you handled conflict in the church, with other Christians?

### SCRIPTURE READING

Together Read Ephesians 4:1–6(NRSV) and note all the references to unity:

**4** I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup>with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup>making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup>There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, <sup>5</sup>one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup>one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

The focus of the sermon is “Living in unity as our proper response to the call of God’s unfathomable love. Our calling is to make every effort to maintain unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace, in order to welcome those who seek God’s restoring justice.”

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Why is living in unity the proper response to the call of God’s unfathomable love?

2. What in your words does it mean to make every effort to maintain unity? Does this mean maintaining the “status quo”? Why or why not?
3. How can we maintain unity in conflict?
4. The “bond of peace” is Jesus Christ himself whom Paul says makes the “two into one” meaning in Ephesians, Jew and Gentile, into one body in Christ. The image of the “bond of peace” is complemented by the image of being “sealed in the Spirit through one baptism”. What in our baptism speaks to living in unity?
5. Read Jesus’ prayer in John 17. In Jesus’ prayer he asks God the Father to make those who follow him one as he is one with God. He ends the prayer saying this will reveal to the world that he is the one sent from God. Our living in unity is not that we can have a refuge from the world, but to be a people sent into the world.

In our mission statement we are encouraged to remember that God seeks to bring restorative justice for all.

Here are two questions.

6. Can you think of some examples of how certain kinds of Christian community get in the way of welcoming those who seek God’s restorative justice?
7. What kind of unity enables or empowers welcoming those who seek God’s restorative justice?

### PRAYER

Take some time to pray Jesus’ prayer in John 17, when you come across Jesus’ words “I pray for...” insert names of people you know at First Pres and also names of people you know who may not be at First Pres, but need God’s restorative justice.



## INWARD, OUTWARD | THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

### Living in Love

September 6, 2020  
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Christian Formation

#### OPEN IN PRAYER

#### OPENING QUESTION

Share about a particular time or season in life when you felt particularly grounded, secure, loved. What were “marks” or characteristics of that time? How did that groundedness affect your sense of self, relationships with others, etc.?

#### SCRIPTURE READING

Together Read Ephesians 3:14–21 (NIV)

14 For this reason I kneel before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. 16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

#### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Ephesians 3:14–21 functions as an important hinge between a series of theological reflections on what God has been doing through Christ in the Church (Ephesians 1–3) and a series of exhortations on how the Church is called to live as a result (Ephesians 4–6). Why might it be significant that this hinge is a prayer?

2. In Paul's day, it was customary to stand while praying. But this prayer begins in verse 14: "I kneel before the Father..." What might this posture of praying tell us about Paul's feelings here?

3. In verses 16–19, what does Paul request that God do for the readers? Through whom will God do this? Out of what resources? And to what end (follow the "so that"/"that" logic)? The rest of the letter will focus on the Church's actions, but here it is the Triune God who is the primary actor. How might this frame how we understand the ensuing calls to live: in unity, in newness, for others, in the light?

4. Why do you think it is so important to Paul that we experience at the deepest level the love of Christ?

5. Imagine that Paul's prayer was answered in your life. What might that look like?

#### PRAYER

As you close, spend time sharing prayer requests and praises, offering these to God in prayer. Conclude by praying aloud Ephesians 4:14–21. Let this be a prayer for you personally and for First Pres—that as we enter this new season of life together, we would do so rooted and grounded in the love of Christ.