

Have you ever had a problem getting your printer connected to your computer? It can be quite frustrating when they're not on speaking terms, and you have an important document to print. After hours of getting nowhere I usually do what I should have done in the first place—ask for help. We are so fortunate at Ken Mawr to have several people who work in the I.T. field who know their way around computer technology issues. They have come to my rescue many times, sometimes coming to the church to solve my problem. “Everyone Has Needs and Everyone Is Needed.”

This is just one example of how the church depends on the skills of the entire congregation to maintain the integrity of our mission. The church staff cannot possibly do all the work of the church alone. We have to draw upon our team of volunteers to accomplish all the work that needs done.

I remember how thirty plus years ago a new church start up in Butler County was struggling. I attended a meeting where we tried to determine how to give them the funding and resources to enable them to grow. We discovered through an evaluation that the pastor was doing all the work by himself. He was the worship leader, the preacher, the pastor, the bookkeeper, the custodian, the marketing director and the fund raiser. Unless he was willing to share some of these responsibilities with members of the congregation the church would never grow and perhaps not survive. “Everyone Has Needs and Everyone Is Needed.”

Paul said, “*As a body...has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ*” (v. 12). The ideal church is made up of a variety of different people filling different functions. Each one is unique, but they are all connected. Paul illustrates this with different parts of the human body. “*And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be?*” (vss. 16-17). Each part, though different, is dependent on all the other parts.

Wherever you have a group of people you also have personality conflicts. Inevitably there will be someone you don't like very much, or someone who doesn't like you very much—someone, of course, who is completely different than you! (Wink, wink) This can lead to discord and problems in the group. This was exactly the case in the Church at Corinth. There were folks who thought they were better than others. They were not hospitable and as a result the love of God was not very visible. Therefore, Paul reminded them that

although they weren't all the same, they *were* all the body of Christ. And the only way they could be the body of Christ was to stick together.

We don't often get to see Paul's sense of humor but the picture of a foot withdrawing from the body because it can't be a hand, or an ear resigning from the body because it can't be an eye, is so ridiculous that it's funny. The picture of a body made up of nothing but eyes, or nothing but ears, when you think of it is amusing. The idea of the eye discussing with the hand that it won't be needed or the head telling the feet "You're not needed," sounds like utter foolishness. What Paul describes are things that would never happen in our physical body but that did happen in the body of Christ at Corinth.

But what is so obvious for our physical bodies is not so apparent within the church. There is something in us that tries to make the Christian life a Lone Ranger kind of experience but there is no such thing as isolation in the church. All the pictures in the scrapbook of the church are group photos. The more mature we become in Christ the more we realize that throughout our entire life we will continue to need each other. We complement each other, we challenge each other, we comfort each other, and we disagree with each other. Within this context we find our Christian identity, our ministry to and with one another, our growth, and our support. The church is the place where "Everyone Has Needs and Everyone Is Needed." We share this common denominator.

I remember when I graduated from seminary and we moved to Beaver County there were three, maybe four, churches in an area ministry spread out around the county and served by a pastor named Ed Poole. Of course, Ed couldn't be four places at once on Sunday morning, so he recruited a seminary student to help him cover the bases. The churches agreed to share the pastor and student in this way. But on some Sundays, it was impossible for Ed or the student working with him to be on time for every service. They compensated for that by having song leaders who led the hymns, made announcements, and took up the offering—things like that. One of the churches had a man who was, to put it gently, a bit obnoxious. His personality and Ed's clashed. But if ever his small church had a problem with the plumbing or heating this same man was the first one on the job to help with the necessary repairs. And as it turns out I learned that he was very supportive of Ed's ministry and the juggling act he did to keep four small churches going—even though he didn't always show it.

Just as the church needs unity to survive, so do the other areas of our lives. The people in our families are not all the same. Those we work with are not all the same. This is true in schools, in the neighborhoods where we live, and in places of recreation. So then, how do

we maintain our unity and our individual differences at the same time? How do you get people who are suspicious—if not downright hostile— of each other to work together?

David Berdish, an organizational-learning manager, spent his career wrestling with that question at Ford Motor Company. In his role as a change agent at Visteon Automotive Systems, Ford's parts-manufacturing company, Berdish helped usher in production and manufacturing changes that helped turn the division around—from \$50 million in losses to \$175 million in profits. But it took five years. And he didn't do it alone.

He had to get engineers and accountants, and union and nonunion factory workers, to stop flinging accusations at each other and start solving problems. He had to get them to start trusting each other. "Trust equals speed," Berdish says. "Once people stopped worrying about what the other guy's agenda is, we could make changes much more quickly. But building trust takes time, especially in a company as big as Ford, where there are a gazillion years of baggage associated with where you're from, what you look like, or what you do." ("Trust for a Change," *Fast Company*, December 1999, *Homiletics*, January 2001).

So, the way to bring unity to a diverse situation is to get people to *trust* one another. But, as Berdish found out, trust takes time. Before you can build trust, you must get people together. Too often times we live our lives in a vacuum. We go somewhere, do what we have to do, then go home. We resist opportunities to mingle, to encounter other human beings who we do not know. I wouldn't expect us to build a trust relationship with someone we are riding with on an elevator for just a minute or two. Nor is it possible to relate to everyone we encounter where we shop. The church, however, is the place where we come for fellowship. We come here to enhance our faith and to join in mission with others who share a common tradition and common values.

We schedule coffee times, lunches, dinners, breakfasts, and special events that give people an opportunity to get to know others in the faith. Our annual meeting in a couple of weeks is yet another opportunity to be together in a gathering other than worship. Avoiding these kinds of gatherings is a way of denying the church a very important resource: Yourself. Let's remember, "Everyone Has Needs and Everyone Is Needed."

Only a few votes can be very important in a local, state or national election. It is no less true in the church. It is essential to hear from every voice, to acknowledge every idea, to include everyone who is connected to this congregation. Sometimes the greatest ideas come from those we least expect. To exclude them or deny them an opportunity to express

themselves only holds us back and inhibits us from seeing a bigger picture or having a broader vision.

Our society is changing. The once predominantly Scottish, Italian and German immigrant communities in western Pennsylvania are changing rapidly into a more diverse population. Diversity forces us to embrace cultures and customs that may be foreign to us. It challenges the customs and traditions we know and observe. It is much easier to remain in cozy, familiar circles than to interact with people who are different from us. But change is inevitable. To resist it is to remain in isolation from a world that is full of opportunities and creativity, full of people with wonderful gifts, talents and wisdom to offer us.

In the body of Christ what affects one member is felt by all. One of the great insights into the nature of the Christian church is shown in Paul's reflection in verse 26 where he says, *"If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it."* This happens automatically in our physical body. For instance, when an infection in our hand spreads throughout the body the whole system feels the impact.

Interestingly, I have observed this same principle at work in our own fellowship. When a clergy friend of mine came as a guest to an Officer Retreat a number of years back, he distributed a questionnaire which included this question: "If there was a crisis in your life or your family, do you think the church would be supportive of you?" After the surveys were tallied my friend, and our guest for the day, came to me and said that each person answered in the affirmative and several of them wrote "absolutely." That response from those church leaders showed they had learned the truth of what Paul wrote. In the church we share with one another both our joys and our sorrows, our gains and our losses. This binds us together in one body.

It's sad when we gather in this place to say farewell and commend a member of our church to the Lord. There is always an emptiness, a void, a loss of talent and personal presence. The church is changed when this happens and is constantly challenged with bringing new people into our fellowship. However, the new folks won't stay unless they are given the opportunity to contribute their spiritual gifts to our ministry.

This church like any church will remain strong and vital in its mission as long as we believe that "Everyone Has Needs and Everyone Is Needed!" Amen.

(Thanks to Keith Wagner for sermon suggestions)