ABSTRACT

Unity: Helping a Congregation with Multiple Venues for Corporate Worship Experience Common Connection and Purpose

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This project addressed the need for Pioneer Drive Baptist Church to experience unity. Consisting of three components, the project lasted six weeks. First, a pre-intervention survey was given to randomly selected church members. Second, participants in each of the two corporate worship venues at Pioneer Drive Baptist Church were required to listen to a six-week sermon series on unity. Third, a post-intervention survey was completed by participants evaluating their understanding and experience of unity after hearing the sermon series. The purpose of this project was to lead Pioneer Drive to a better understanding and experience of unity.
Unity: Helping a Congregation with Multiple Venues for Worship

Experience Common Connection and Purpose

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my life. It is my hope to lead healthy churches that will nurture their faith and equip them for ministry of their own. The chief witness who has cheered on this race is my wife, Elya—you have encouraged, challenged, and provided compassion in all the right ways. Without your support this journey would not have happened. Thanks for all the sacrifices you made with three young children to enable me to serve the Lord and his church in this manner. I’m thankful for the union that we have and the journey we are on to help others experience union with God and with one another.
DEDICATION

To my family, Elya, Sam, Sarah, and Savannah
CHAPTER ONE
An Introduction to the Project

Problem Statement

Churches need to experience unity. Unity is a gift of the Holy Spirit that binds a church together with a common connection and purpose. Unity defines the relationship between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Jesus prayed for the unity of his disciples, and the pastoral epistles include numerous teachings to maintain unity along with examples of what unity looks like in action. Congregations can have a reputation for division both among church members and in their communities. Even further, churches that have multiple venues for corporate worship are often characterized as several churches rather than one unified church.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this project is to lead Pioneer Drive Baptist Church (hereafter, PDBC), a church with two venues for corporate worship on Sunday morning, to grow in their understanding and experience of unity. To accommodate differing preferences for worship styles, the church launched a contemporary worship service called The Gathering in 2005. The existence of two worshipping congregations with two different venue-preaching pastors has led some to assert that the church is two, not one. This project aims to delineate unity in such a way that members of PDBC understand and experience biblical unity through the experience of a common teaching text and sermon series in both corporate worship venues.
A unified connection and purpose characterized healthy New Testament churches. Often, churches hold a false understanding of what true unity looks like because little theological reflection is given concerning biblical unity. This project aims to recover a biblical and theological perspective concerning matters of unity that ultimately helps church members understand their common connection and purpose to one another all the while maintaining two venues for corporate worship.

**Definitions**

*Church:* The body of baptized believers that covenant together to worship God, love one another, and serve the world by making disciples of Jesus. For the purpose of this research, members of the church are those members who have committed to join a local church.

*Corporate Worship:* Honoring God through the experience of praise, prayer, songs, silence, and sermons with other believers.

*Multiple Venues for Corporate Worship:* Churches that have different corporate worship services on the same geographical campus held in different rooms with different worship instrumentation. ¹

*Venue-Preaching Pastors:* Churches that have different pastors who both preach at the same time on the same campus in different corporate worship venues.

*Unity:* A gift of the Holy Spirit that enables a church to experience common connection and purpose.

¹ Pioneer Drive Baptist Church holds traditional services referred to as Celebration at 9 and 10:30a.m. on Sunday mornings that meet in the Sanctuary along with contemporary services called The Gathering at 9a.m. and 10:30a.m. which meet in the church’s Conference Center. This project addressed the unity between different worship venues on the same campus, though research could be studied concerning the unity of the identical services at different times yet sharing the same venue.
Common Sermon Series: Sermon series that has the same sermon series title, graphics, and preaching emphasis.

Common Biblical Text: Sermon that has the same biblical text for preaching.

Rationale for the Project

Division characterizes the world as conflict and strife are at the forefront of global headlines every day. From the political conflicts of nations to the confusion of different languages to the juxtaposition of the rich and poor, or strife between men and women; the world knows division. Furthermore, conflict laces interpersonal relationships regularly with angry outbursts, passive-aggressive weaponry, grudges, and betrayals. The experience of conflict leads many to turn inward, giving up on relationships with others who are different and underscoring divisions on both the macro and micro level. Conflict is impossible to escape; we live in a world at war with one another; from the interpersonal to the global level.

Sadly, the church can often mirror the world with similar divisive tendencies. Local churches can be segregated from one another based on race, nationality, socioeconomic level, theological distinction, age, or denominational affiliation. Drilling further, within the church divisions can manifest based on the economic tension between the haves and have-nots, the strain between the genders, the pressures of different generational expectations, differing theologies, and stylistic preferences. These divisions can cause the church to split into factions with one side warring against the other, imitating a conflict-laden world. Conflict and division are neither the vision of Jesus, nor the foundation of the church.
With the leadership of the Holy Spirit, Jesus’s followers organized into what we call the church. Karl Barth writes “What the Church is: the congregation is, or exists, where and in so far as it dares to live by the act of its living Lord. The danger menacing the church: the congregation fails to exist when, and in so far as the foundations of its life are shaken by its own sin and errors.”2 The church called and formed by Jesus can fall into its own sin and error which causes division. Barth continues:

The visible sign of the danger which menaces the Church is the loss of her unity. Her unity stands and falls with that “event” which is the “gathering” of the congregation by the Word and the Spirit of her Living Lord, Jesus Christ. If this divine activity is even partially checked, the congregation itself disintegrates, and congregations fall apart.3

The division looks like the rest of the world, not the church of Jesus Christ. Therefore, a church's unity is of paramount importance.

Juxtaposed with the modus operandi of a conflict-laden world, Jesus envisioned his followers, inspired by his love, loving one another. He prayed for his followers to experience unity amid the world’s strife and division. John 17:20 records his prayer; “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”4 Jesus’s gift to the believer is the presence of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; John 14:26). One of the gifts of the

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3. Ibid., 72.

Holy Spirit to the believing community is unity (1 Cor 12:13). Unity is embedded in the character of God and therefore of critical importance for the local church.

Scripture gives pervasive evidence concerning unity. Jürgen Moltmann writes, “the church participates in the uniting of men with one another, in the uniting of society with nature and in the uniting of creation with God.” The church, ought to illustrate and demonstrate the reconciling, uniting work of God in the world. Karl Barth describes the church’s formation and consequence:

the congregation is a result of a process by which certain people are differentiated from others, and are drawn into fellowship with one another by Jesus Christ, through a common experience of Divine Mercy, which is also Judgment, and of the Divine Judgment which is also Mercy, a common experience of gratitude towards God, and a common desire to serve their neighbors, which leads them to the discovery that together they have a mission to the world outside.

Because of the Holy Spirit, people are united with a common connection to one another despite their differences, along with a common purpose to fulfill in their ministry to the world outside. When connected, the church unites over against the world to bear witness to God’s reconciling work in Jesus Christ.

In response to an ever-changing culture, North American churches have launched many different ministries to meet the spiritual needs of people. One such approach popularized over the last twenty-five years or so has been the development of multiple styles for corporate worship. These churches often offer one style that is more traditional, led by a choir and/or orchestra, while also offering another corporate worship service that is led by a band and feels less formal. Due to personnel considerations, budget


constraints, building limitations, or missional emphasis, some churches began holding corporate worship services in different venues. These different venues might have a different instrument, preacher, or sermon than one another. Some might even broadcast a preacher’s sermon to another on-campus venue.

When churches offer different styles for worship, different texts for sermons, and different leaders organizing the music and preaching of the Word, some assert that these congregations are indeed multiple churches—divided and not unified. On the surface, these different venues only seem to highlight the divisions of the world, allowing the church to rally around different instruments, pastors, and personalities instead of lovingly deferring to one another. Others will point out the necessity for different worship venues is symptomatic of different generational expectations of church.

In Fall 2005, two staff members from PDBC began exploring the possibility of a service that could especially serve the needs of young adults. Originally the idea was to offer that service Sunday evening for a focused age group. When approached with the idea, however, church leaders jumped at the opportunity to hold a “contemporary” service on-campus Sunday morning. Many were motivated by mission to start a service to reach people who were not Christians yet, while others wanted to satisfy the appetite of church members tempted to leave PDBC for the up and coming mega-church across town that had already been attracting some of PDBC members.

Within months, the contemporary service, called The Gathering, was launched in the church gymnasium Sunday mornings at 10:30. Under the leadership of the Single Adult Minister as well as College Minister, volunteer teams for set-up, tear-down, hospitality, and technology were formed, and a Worship Leader was called to lead the
new service in praise. Starting out with many youth and college students, the service slowly grew, and within two and a half years The Gathering moved into a 250-seat facility originally designed for youth and college students. As The Gathering continued to grow, it attracted the young and old, rich and poor, as well as the lost and saved to the point that a second morning service was launched in Fall 2012 to accommodate current and future growth. In the years since, with continued growth, PDBC has been considering building a new facility to allow for expanded growth opportunities for The Gathering.

Currently, PDBC offers two services for The Gathering on the south end of the church campus in the Conference Center on Sunday at 9:00 and 10:30 am. The researcher, John Whitten (Lead Pastor – The Gathering), serves as the venue-preaching pastor for The Gathering, and a worship team leads the congregation in praise. The more traditional worship service, called “Celebration Worship” also meets at 9:00 and 10:30 am in the church sanctuary and is led by Senior Pastor Stan Allcorn alongside a choir and orchestra. Currently, the church averages 1,100 in worship, with around 780 in the traditional venue and 320 in the contemporary venue each week with a total membership of 2,500.

On occasion, the Senior Pastor from the traditional venue and the Lead Pastor from the contemporary venue preach a common series that utilizes similar themes and the same biblical text. Two to three time per year the Teaching Pastor from the contemporary venue preaches in the traditional venue, although the Senior Pastor has only preached in the contemporary venue once in twelve years. The worship leaders from the different venues do not have any overlap and do not meet to plan similar songs or emphasis for corporate worship.
Although the church holds corporate worship in two different venues, church leadership comprises a mixture of worship attendees from both venues since the nominating committee strives to strike a balance between the different worship venues in filling leadership positions. Additionally, Sunday School classes, small groups, along with gender, familial, and age-based groups are constituted by people who worship in these different venues.

Over the years, many guests have expressed curiosity as to what unifies PDBC, inquisitive as to why the church has two venues and two preaching pastors. Many outsiders, including other ministers, will quip that the church is composed of two churches. PDBC members have a feel for how it works and many would maintain that the church is unified, although many would not be able to articulate what characterizes a unified church.

Unity is the issue at hand. Are multiple venues for corporate worship proof of division? Is the church simply bowing to market pressure? How is unity defined? Many think that they understand unity, which typically looks like one church worshipping in one building, listening to one pastor, at one hour, with the same instruments. What if the experience of multiple venues for worship was not an expression of division but rather a result and affirmation of unity? Could a unified church be united in mission to love their neighbors enough to hold two options for worship that connect with different types of people? The hope of this project is to help PDBC grapple with a true, biblical understanding and experience of unity by presenting a common sermon series about unity in both corporate worship venues that fosters a greater connection and purpose among congregants.
Research Questions

Churches need to experience unity. Unity is a gift of the Holy Spirit that unites a church with a common connection and purpose. Congregations can have a reputation for division both among church members and in their communities. Even further, churches that have multiple venues for corporate for worship are often characterized as multiple churches rather than one unified church.

This project aims to delineate unity in such a way that members of PDBC understand and experience what is unity and is not. The inquiry into the effectiveness of this project will be guided by the following two questions:

1. What effect does a common sermon series on unity, utilizing a common biblical text in both venues for corporate worship, have on the participants’ understanding of unity?
2. What effect does a common sermon series on unity, utilizing a common biblical text in both venues for corporate worship, have on the participants’ experience of church unity?

Significance of the Project

As noted above, the theme of unity pervades Scripture, theology, and the church. Lack of unity mirrors the nature of the world and does not portray a unified, loving God. Many church members and leaders struggle to understand and experience true biblical unity.

Experiencing unity has the potential to positively impact the church in worship, fellowship, evangelism, discipleship, and mission. As churches discover a true
understanding of unity, they will grow in their understanding of God, develop a greater sense of connection to one another, experience the fellowship God desires for the church to share, and more accurately bear witness to the one, true, unified God.

With many churches having multiple worship options in one venue, multiple worship options in different venues, and with the emergence of satellite churches, a clearer understanding of unity is necessary. By providing a solid theological framework, this project grounds the issue of church unity biblically in such a way that other churches who have different worship services, venues, or locations could utilize the findings from this research to improve their own connection and purpose. Additionally, any church struggling with unity could discover that preaching about unity on Sunday morning could aid in their church’s sense of common connection and purpose.
Unity characterizes the relationship between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The concept of unity is found in the covenantal relationship between God and Israel, Jesus’s relationship with his disciples, and the disciples’ relationship with one another. Foundational for understanding the relationship between God and people, unity brings believers together and proclaims the gospel to a watching and often hostile world.

Six aspects of unity will be studied: (1) The foundation for unity, from Deut 6:4–5; (2) unity as a vehicle for God’s mission in the world, from John 17:20–24; (3) the importance of unity in healing divisions that occur in the church and building the church up in godly wisdom, from 1 Cor 1:10–17; (4) affirming diversity within the unified body of Christ, from 1 Cor 12:12–16; (5) the virtues that foster diversity and hold the family of God together, from Eph 4:1–7, 11–16; and (6) the beautiful symphony that is created when the church works together in unity, from Acts 2:42–47.

*The Foundation for Unity (Deut 6:4-5)*

Deuteronomy 6:4–5 states, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.” This passage is known as the *shema* because of the first verb in v. 4 that means “to hear,” which in the Hebrew language essentially means “to obey.”¹ As one of the most important symbols of Judaism, the *shema* served as Israel’s “pledge of allegiance,”

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figuring prominently in public worship and private devotional practice.² This passage serves as a foundation for understanding God’s unity and the necessity of God’s people to worship God alone.

_Ehad_ is the critical word in v. 4 and typically represents the cardinal number “one.” In half a dozen instances in the Old Testament, however, the word is functionally equivalent to the word _lbaddo_, which means “unique, only, one.”³ The purpose of this statement is not to answer the question, “How many is God?” Instead, the author is addressing the question, “Who is the God of Israel?” and Israel is supposed to respond, “Our God is Yahweh, Yahweh alone.”

Verse 4 can be interpreted in several ways, but two common renderings of the last clause are: 1) “The Lord our God, the Lord is one,” or 2) “The Lord our God is one Lord.” The first stresses the uniqueness or exclusivity of Yahweh as Israel’s God, stating “Yahweh our God is the one and only Yahweh.” Option 1 takes the noun _ehad_ (one) to mean “unique” or “solitary.” Option 2 focuses on the unity or wholeness of the Lord, functioning as a witness to the self-consistency of the Lord, who is not wavering and who has a single purpose or objective for creation and history. Both options for interpretation overlap to provide the basis for monotheistic faith—in other words, the Lord is a unity, but beyond that, he is the only God.⁴

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⁴ Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 163.
The author could have written v. 4 as a reaction to Israel’s neighbors, who had a similar name for their god, asserting that the deities were not interchangeable.\(^5\) Yahweh is not the brand name of a cosmic corporation with many franchises; rather, God is one God, Israel’s God, and Yahweh is his personal name. Israel’s God was not some unknown deity.\(^6\) Christopher Wright expounds on God’s familiarity in the ancient world: “‘The Lord our God, the Lord is One’ is also a declaration combating the potential poly-Yahwism reflected in names such as ‘Yahweh of Sinai’ (Deut 33:2; cf. Judg 5:5; Ps 68:9), ‘Yahweh of Mount Paran’ (Deut 33:2; Hab 3:3), ‘Yahweh of Edom’ (Judg 5:5), and ‘Yahweh of Teman’ (Hab 3:3).”\(^7\)

A second possible interpretation of v. 4 focuses on the oneness of Yahweh that is reflected in a unity of will and purpose. Israel’s God is not inwardly divided; at the deepest level, Yahweh is one. God is consistent, faithful, and true within. The harmony of God’s purpose for the world is grounded in the ultimate reality of God’s own being.\(^8\) Daniel Block notes concerning v. 4: “[the \textit{shema}] is a declaration of the integrity of Yahweh, a reference to his internal consistency and fidelity, that is, morally and spiritually God is one. God’s ‘oneness’ is the unity between desire and action, between intention and execution.”\(^9\) Although a significant case can be made for the second interpretation, Block’s argument is convincing for the first option: “‘Yahweh our God,  

\(^{5}\) Biddle, \textit{Deuteronomy}, 125.  
\(^{6}\) Block, \textit{Deuteronomy}, 186.  
\(^{8}\) Ibid.  
Yahweh is the only one’ or ‘Yahweh our God, Yahweh is the one and only.’ This interpretation is consistent with the first commandment that Israel worship only Yahweh, and absolutely avoid all other spiritual allegiances.”

The *shema* lays claim to the necessity for Israel’s total devotion and obedience. By reciting the *shema*, the Israelites were declaring their complete, undivided, and unreserved devotion to God and asserting that they would not be seduced by the gods of Canaan. It was not strictly a monotheistic confession but a declaration of allegiance and affirmation of commitment. The emphasis was that Yahweh alone was God in covenant relationship with Israel and that Yahweh was one, not many.

Verse 5 states: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” The author begins with the inner being, then moves to the outer being, the whole person, and ends with everything a person claims as their own. God is first and expects total commitment and dedication. The word *ahab* means to love and refers to a covenant commitment demonstrated in actions that seeks the well-being and pleasure of one’s covenant partner.

In Hebrew thought, the word *leb* (heart) is often referred to as the mind or seat of thought, and in this case, it serves to encompass the totality of a person’s inner being.

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15. Ibid., 183.
Nepes (soul) refers to the invisible part of the individual, which includes the will and sensibilities. Mod (strength) means “power”—physical, economic, and social strength. The Shema states Yahweh’s claim to exclusive and unique status, and obedience to God is a radical decision of the will involving “all one’s heart,” one’s whole life, and “all one’s soul,” to be carried out without reservation or limitation (“all one’s might”).

Theological Reflection (Deut 6:4–5)

Deuteronomy 6:4–5 contains two important implications for church unity. First, God is the only God and requires complete loyalty and worship. Of all the gods of the nations, Israel’s confession is that they worship only one God, Yahweh. A common worship of the same God along with a common loyalty and devotion to God serves as the unifying foundation for God’s people. The church must recognize that unity starts with loyalty to God. Moltmann explains, “The unity of the triune God is the goal of the uniting of man and creation with the Father and the Son in the Spirit.” Further study will reveal the importance of the church’s embodying unity as a witness to the “one” God based on the unity God desires within the Godhead and in relationship with people.

Second, God requires wholehearted covenant love and devotion from his people. Deuteronomy 6:4–5 is an affirmation about God—he is “our” and God “our God” is “one.” It is also a call for commitment to God, to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” The Israelites were to teach their

18. Wright, Deuteronomy, 194.
children to love God and they were to write the shema on their hands, foreheads, doorposts, and city gates. God’s people are to love him first, alone, and above all else. Living with a wholehearted love for God honors the first commandment, “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exod 20:3). The proper response to the “one” God is a singular love in return as the church honors, and bears witness to, the one true God through her singular love and devotion.

Unity as a Vehicle for God’s Mission (John 17:20–24)

John 14–17 is known as the Farewell Discourse, marking the end of Jesus’s earthly ministry after the Last Supper.19 Chapter 17 contains what some commentators have called the high priestly prayer, although Ben Witherington notes this is not a priestly prayer but a prayer of dedication and consecration of both Jesus and his followers.20 The intercessory prayer for Jesus’s disciples and those who would believe in him is the longest of Jesus’s prayers.21 John 17 contains seven petitions at the end of Jesus’s ministry, all of which pertain to his earthly mission, his return to the Father, and his preparation to turn over the gospel to the disciples. Although the prayer in John 17 is challenging to subdivide, these seven petitions can also be called movements within the discourse:22


1. Glorification in mission, vv. 1–3
2. Christ’s return to glory at the of the incarnational mission, vv. 4–8
3. Protection of God’s representative to the world, vv. 9–15
4. Holiness of God’s representatives in the world, vv. 16–19
5. Unity in mission, vv. 20–26
6. The disciples to reach their destiny, v. 24
7. A reality prayer, vv. 25–26.23

The focus of the following section is the fifth petition. Jesus prays for his disciples and their followers (all believers) to have unity in mission (17:20–23) and the unification of all believers amid a troubling world. He links unity and mission, revealing that mission “must be central to all discussions of unity.”24 Verse 20 begins with the verb εὐχόμενος, which means, “I pray.” The appearance of this verb signals that there was a major shift in the concern that Jesus has for his disciples as they faced their future mission and ultimate destiny.25 He names those for whom he is about to pray, but his intercession is not just for his disciples. He looks to the result of the disciples’ mission and prays for all those who will believe in him through their testimony.26

The main idea of the fifth petition is that Jesus’s disciples are to communicate the saving message to those who would come after them. The good news was not intended to be held exclusively (μονον, “alone”) by the first disciples but was to be be shared with

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24. Ibid., 105.
25. Ibid., 204.
succeeding followers. This prayer serves as a mandate to mission and to making new disciples.27 Parallelism occurs in vv. 21 and 23, both of which have four parts. The pattern for v. 21 follows:

1. “just as you, Father, are in me”
2. “and I in you”
3. “that they also may be in us”
4. “that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.”

Verse 23 follows:

1. “I in them”
2. “and you in me”
3. “that they may become perfectly one”
4. “so that the world may know that you sent me”

Verses 21 and 23 contain a similar concern for unity that is rooted in the relationship between the Son and the Father. The effect of the parallel structure is to add emphasis and seriousness concerning the believer’s unity.28

In v. 21, the words hina (“that”) and kathos (“just as”) are followed by hina (“so that”). The same connective occurs in the same order in vv. 22–23.29 The final two clauses in the parallelism argue for the point at which oneness is to be understood. “Believing” or “knowing” God’s love is the point of the oneness, which is the message

27. Borchert, John 12–21, 206.


29. Borchert, John 12–21, 205.
that the disciples both then and now are to present to the hostile world. God sent Jesus, and Jesus now sends the disciples into the world.  

The relationship between the Father and Son serves as a model for the oneness of the Christian community, “you are in me and I am in you.” Unity is modeled in the unique relationship of the Father and Son portrayed in the \textit{pros ton theon} ("toward God") and the \textit{theos en ho logos} ("the Word was God") of John’s prologue (John 1:1–3). This does not mean that the unity between the Father and the Son is the same as that between believers and God. The Father is in the Son and does the Father’s works, and the Son is in the Father—the two are one (John 10:30), yet they are distinct. The disciples’ unity is not merely a unity of love, but unity is predicated upon the reception and mission of the revelation imparted to the disciples by the Father through the Son.

Oneness or unity in the fifth petition is rooted in the idea of “indwelling” in the Godhead. The major picture of the indwelling is illustrated by the vine and branches (John 15:1–11). Since the world is hostile, Christians are to remain connected with the vine; thus, a healthy branch that remains connected to the vine bears fruit, even amid turmoil. The relationship of believers with God is based on a community who together experience a oneness with God. Paul Minear remarks, “A natural consequence of the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{Borchert, 206.}
  \item \textit{Borchert, John 12–21, 206.}
  \item \textit{Ibid.}
  \item \textit{Morris, The Gospel According to John, 734.}
  \item \textit{Andreas J. Kostenberger, John, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 497.}
  \item \textit{Borchert, John 12–21, 206.}
  \item \textit{Ibid., 207.}
\end{itemize}
witnesses being ‘in us’ is that the world is enabled to believe that ‘you have sent me.’ This is necessary if the hostility toward the Son, as represented by the Passion Story (which follows immediately), is to be accompanied by faith that he is, in fact, God’s Anointed One.”

“That the world may believe” in Jesus is the focus of the Christian message. Unity is essential for Christian witness, because a disunited Christian community denies by its behavior the message that it proclaims. Display of authentic love among believers is of equal importance to the experience of genuine unity. Genuine unity provides a compelling witness to the truth of the gospel to a hostile world.

In v. 22, Jesus refers to the glory that God has given him. Jesus’s glory consists in his function as the Revealer of God displayed through every area of his life. Jesus has given his followers the glory that the Father gave him, and the disciple's glory must be understood as acquired from the glory of the Godhead—which glory is not something innate in Jesus’s disciples. The petition for unity is reinforced again in v. 22 that “they may be one as we are one.”

Jesus has conveyed to the disciples God’s presence and way of life so that they can be spiritually united with each other and with him, receiving his glory. At the same


time, he intends to communicate that the way to true glory is the way of the cross. As Jesus’s followers continue his mission, he wants them to share in the glory that has been a trademark of his ministry, which will include the cross. His statement foreshadows the disciples’ paths that will entail lowly service and suffering on behalf of others.43

Jesus prays in v. 23, “that they may become perfectly one.” The point of the indwelling in vv. 21 and 23 is that the disciples be brought to complete oneness for mission. Christ indwells believers as the Father indwells him, and the indwelling is purposeful, looking for the disciples to be perfected into one. Thus, the unity of believers is to communicate to the world.44 This happens because unity results from being taken into the unity of God. Once unified, believers will be able to bear witness to the true identity of Jesus as the sent one of God. Without unity, believers cannot give authentic, credible testimony to the Father who is united with the Son and the Spirit. When believers are secure in the Father’s love, they will be able to express and proclaim the Father’s love to a dark and hostile world.45

Verse 23 references a spiritual unity rather than an organizational unity. To “become perfectly one” in the Greek is literally means “that they may be completed into one.”46 This oneness, however, has an outward expression to it that is a connection the world can see, touch, and taste.47 The witness of the church’s united life is not merely a

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43. Kostenberg, John, 298.
45. Kostenberg, John, 499.
confirmation of the revelation of God in Jesus, but it is also a sign that the object of that revelation is being achieved. In other words, unity displays God’s love for humanity.48 Verse 23 states the purpose of unity, which is “that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them.”49 The unity that marks the church now is a sign of the final unity coming at the consummation.

Theological Reflection (John 17:20–23)

Jesus’s prayer in John 17:20–23 had strong implications for John’s audience as well as for the church today. This text conveys four significant reflection points for church unity. First, John records Jesus’s emphasis concerning the importance of unity among Christ’s followers. Because the community John addresses was struggling with unity, Jesus’s petition for unity among his disciples would have been an appropriate and applicable exhortation. According to Witherington, divisions and disunity were evident in the Johannine epistles, especially 2 John.50 “That they may be one” (John 17:21) is the burning issue for John—for him, disunity is a denial of faith. Unity is essential for Christian mission, as Craig Van Gelder explains, “Jesus prayed that they may be one as we are one. The social context of the church is to be treated as sacred space. Every part of the church must be zealous for the life, health, vitality, and unity of the whole.”51 Thus,


49. Witherington, John’s Gospel, 271.

50. Ibid., 270. The Johannine community was divided over their Christology, namely the necessity of Jesus Christ coming in the flesh. For more in the divisions in John’s community, see Raymond E. Brown, The Epistles of John, The Anchor Bible Series (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1995), 47–85.

the basis for the unity of the church is the nature of God and the reality of God’s redemptive activity in Christ Jesus.

Second, unity is an act of Christian witness, since a divided and hostile world desperately needs the unifying power of the good news of God’s love, revealed in Christ Jesus (John 3:16, 13:34, 17:26). The oneness of the community of believers with God is an act of proclamation to a divided world. Moltmann highlights the importance of unity by saying: “The history of the kingdom of God on earth is nothing other than the history of the uniting of what is separated and the freeing of what is broken, in this being the history of the glorification of God.”52 When the world sees the church in harmony with God and with each other, the point of Jesus’s petition may be realized, “that the world may believe that you have sent me.”53 The unity of believers explains to the world God’s indwelling in Jesus only by divine love, and this demonstration of unity can transcend all humanity (Gal 3:28). Differences in culture, tradition, social norms, and political orders can be bridged by Christ as the love that true Christians share with one another testifies to God’s love.

Third, spiritual formation is necessary to cultivate unity. “May they also be in us” (John 17:21) suggests that the unity of the disciples is based on a direct relationship of the believers with the Godhead. Lindars asserts that Jesus’s unity with the Father must be reflected in the life of the church.54 Spiritual formation practices such as prayer, meditation, study, service, worship, and confession ground believers in their relationship

with God. Lukas Vischer describes the importance of Christ as the church works towards unity: “Unity is unity in Christ. Christ is the power of life flowing through the branches. Without the vine they are nothing.” Thus, spiritual formation is essential for the Holy Spirit to produce fruit (Gal 5:22), which enhances unity. Unity is not self-generated; unity comes when Jesus’s disciples are rooted in a relationship with God.

Fourth, unity is a vehicle that enables the world to realize what God has been doing in Christ Jesus. God sent Jesus into the world on the vital mission of demonstrating God’s love for people. This purpose of unity is found in v. 23: “so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.” The mission thus flows from God’s love, by which “people draw near to the Christian community because they are irresistibly attracted by its supernatural power.” Unity then flows from love towards one another, which demonstrates God’s supernatural power to bring people to himself and to others. Francis Schaeffer calls v. 21 “The Final Apologetic,” explaining that “we cannot expect the world to believe that the Father sent the Son, that Jesus’s claims are true, and that Christianity is true, unless the world sees some reality of the oneness of true Christians.” In this light, love and unity form an apologetic that serves as a prerequisite for mission. Schaeffer contends, “the world is going to judge whether Jesus has been sent

55. For more on spiritual practices that help Christians grow closer to Christ, see Richard J. Foster, Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1988).
57. Borchert, John 12–21, 208.
by the Father on the basis of something that is open to observation.”\textsuperscript{60} Not only are unity and love a prerequisite for mission, but they bear witness to the achievement of mission.\textsuperscript{61}

*The Importance of Unity in Healing Divisions (1 Cor 1:10–17)*

Paul founded the quarrelling Corinthian church on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1–18). Unity ought to be a hallmark of a New Testament church, but the Corinthian church struggled mightily with it. Gordon Fee notes four major issues at Corinth. First, there was quarrelling and divisiveness in the congregation. Influential teachers served as divisive rallying points, and although evidence does not exist for the leaders’ instigating the quarrelling, it was present (1 Cor 3:5–9 and 16:21). Second, the quarrelling supposedly was done in the name of wisdom (1 Cor 1–3). Paul used the word “wisdom” disparagingly, indicative of the Corinthian way of thinking. Third, the Corinthians were boasting and being puffed up in human leaders instead of lifting up Christ (1 Cor 3:21). Fourth, the Corinthian knowledge and “wisdom” was puffed up against Paul. In 1 Cor 4:1–5, Paul tells them they may not judge someone else’s servant. Perhaps the Corinthians had thought of their new-found faith as an expression of wisdom—and with their Hellenistic influence, they were upholding their favorite teacher as an example of superior wisdom. The problem with the Corinthian divisions and quarrelling was a tarnished gospel witness.

\textsuperscript{60} Schaeffer, *The Mark of the Christian*, 35.

Paul was in Ephesus when he heard a report from Chloe’s people about the problems in Corinth (1 Cor 1:11). Chloe was probably a woman of wealth and influence who possibly had a household of servants. More than likely, she was a patron of the church and a group met in her home, so Paul uses her name to establish credibility. He wants his readers to know that he is not responding to rumors, hearsay, or gossip but a report from a trusted source. What follows in Paul’s letter is a direct response to this report from Chloe’s people.

Paul begins vv. 10–17 by appealing to his brothers and sisters in Corinth. Verse 10 is the propositio thesis statement for the entire discourse, where he reminds Corinthian Christians of the teachings of the cross. His appeal follows a request formula that comes with full apostolic authority. For the tenth time in the first ten verses, he uses Christ’s name to remind the Corinthian church they are a part of Christ’s community and ought to display Christ’s character. Paul’s use of the word “appeal” serves as the thesis

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statement for the letter, offering consolation and warning.\textsuperscript{67} Indeed, their behavior was affecting the public image of Christ.\textsuperscript{68}

The Greek word for division (\textit{schism}) means “fissure.” Their differences led to divisions or schisms as people were holding on to their opinions as if they were the only ones who were right.\textsuperscript{69} Fee notes that the word \textit{schismata} properly means “tear/rent,” like a garment might be torn in two (Mark 2:21; Matt 9:16).\textsuperscript{70} Paul is not referring to official parties here but to divided opinions over their various leaders, which had developed into jealousy and quarrels.\textsuperscript{71} The groups had not yet turned into separate entities, as evidenced by the fact that Paul addressed the church as a whole and not individual groups, but the potential for a fractured church was still a threat.\textsuperscript{72}

The \textit{schismata} (divisions) were not caused by interpersonal disputes as much as they were the result of an errant focus on worldly wisdom and human leaders. The church had allowed the competitive norms of secular Corinth to influence their thinking.\textsuperscript{73} Thus, their division was a symptom of the problem of a misplaced emphasis. Their quarreling


\textsuperscript{68} Vang, \textit{1 Corinthians}, 22.

\textsuperscript{69} Groeshide, \textit{Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians}, 34.


\textsuperscript{71} Fee, \textit{The First Epistle to the Corinthians}, 54.

\textsuperscript{72} Baird, \textit{The Corinthian Church}, 31.

\textsuperscript{73} Vang, \textit{1 Corinthians}, 23.
had its root in false theology, which exchanged the theology of the cross for a false triumphalism and wisdom that went beyond or excluded the cross.⁷⁴

Divisions in Corinth also arose out of deeply embedded cultural practices among Corinth’s most wealthy and influential people. Patronage was engrained in the culture. The relationship between the wealthy patrons and their clients came with rules that were often unspoken—a granted favor required reciprocity. Patron-client relationships were a factor in Paul’s relationship with the Corinthian church.⁷⁵ Perhaps church members viewed the apostles or the hosts of their house churches as patrons. Paul mentions Christ often to highlight his aim that the Corinthians point their loyalty to Jesus and not to human leaders; Christ is their ultimate patron. David Garland notes reasons for division in addition to theological differences in Corinth that include “social stratification, personal patronage, philosopher/student loyalty, and party loyalties fostered by urban alienation.”⁷⁶ Corinth was a fractured city, and the church was following suit.

Although the explicit path to unity is not provided in the text, it is assumed that unity will occur when divisions are opposed and left behind. In 1 Cor 1:10, Paul exhorts “that all of you be in agreement” or that “I urge that you all say the same thing.” To “speak the same” is a classical expression meaning “to make up the difference between individuals or groups and to be at peace.”⁷⁷ He desires for the church to experience unity as it is knit together in the same mind and with the same purpose.

⁷⁴. Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, 50.
⁷⁵. Vang, 1 Corinthians, 6.
⁷⁷. Witherington, Conflict and Community in Corinth, 96.
Paul implores the Corinthians to “be united in the same mind and the same purpose.” The Greek word for “perfectly united” is *katertismenoi*, which denotes a theme of restoration. This word may have had subtle references to God’s original plan for his creation (Heb 11:3) to be put back together as it was originally intended. What Christ did among the church when they first heard the gospel ought to be the reality again.\(^{78}\) Paul is implying that they must agree on the basic nature of the gospel, which is spelled out in 1:18–23.\(^{79}\) He envisions the Corinthians perfectly united (knit together). “Perfect union” is not referring to complete doctrinal agreement but to the recipient’s common testimony about Christ.\(^{80}\) The message does not demand uniformity, since the argument for the need for diversity occurs in 1 Corinthians 12 as well as Gal. 2:1–10.\(^{81}\) The focus for the Christian community is on restoration to God’s original intentions for creation, and this focus ought to affect their behavior towards one another and give purpose to how they think and make decisions.\(^{82}\) God’s story revealed in Christ ought to have been the point of unity to bring a common mindset and purpose to the Corinthian church, but that was not the case.

A common mindset and purpose was far from the norm in Corinth. 1 Corinthians 1:12 states “each of you says, ‘I belong to Paul,’ or ‘I belong to Apollos,’ or ‘I belong to Cephas,’ or ‘I belong to Christ.’” These slogans literally read “I am of Paul” or “I am

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80. Ibid., 232.
Paul’s person.”\(^{83}\) Although it is not clear whether Paul lists every clique or whether this list is merely selective, his concern is the devastating reality of these splits. As stated, no evidence exists that the leaders were the ones encouraging the splits,\(^{84}\) and in fact, Paul highlights that he and Apollos are co-workers.\(^{85}\) Even though the leaders may not have been encouraging the splits, and not everyone in the church was automatically involved in adopting these divisive slogans, the fact remains that these allegiances to human leaders were affecting everyone.\(^{86}\) It was common in Corinthian culture to form parties and claim the leadership of various outstanding people, including religious leaders. This cultural trend exalted religious teachers to the status of men who possessed divine qualities, and pledging allegiance to these Christian men followed a similar cultural pattern.\(^{87}\)

Paul even mentioned that some said, “I follow Christ.” Some in the church may not have claimed a distinct group, but in their attempt to rise above the others, they fell into the same trap of spiritual elitism that made them like everyone else.\(^{88}\) The whole church was suffering from the disputes by thinking their wisdom had come from one of their esteemed leaders.\(^{89}\) Corinth was a competitive place, and it is possible that the various leaders mentioned, and different patrons in whose homes the church met, had

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83. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 56.
84. Ibid., 55.
86. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 56.
87. Bruce, *1 & II Corinthians*, 32.
89. Ibid., 58.
certain allegiances from those they led to faith in Christ or baptized—they may have thought their preacher was better or more significant than the others. To claim a special relationship to Paul, Apollos, or Cephas had led them to become filled with pride and competition.\(^\text{90}\) Paul states the problem in v. 13 by asking the question, “Is Christ divided?” The Corinthian behavior makes it look like Christ is divided, but splits and cliques are against the nature of Christ.\(^\text{91}\)

Who baptized the Corinthians was apparently also part of their divisions: “I thank God that I baptized none of you” (1 Cor 1:14a), Paul protested. The point of baptism is not to give honor to the one who performs the baptism.\(^\text{92}\) A common commitment to Jesus ought to have been the Corinthians’ focus, not who baptized whom. Paul does not downplay baptism when he said, “For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel” (1 Cor 1:17). Romans 6:3–7 would rule out the idea that Paul is minimizing baptism,\(^\text{93}\) which, according to Paul, is equally valid whether administered by an apostle or any other Christian. The preaching of God’s word, not baptism, was the change agent,\(^\text{94}\) and baptism should not be a seam upon which the church tears.

**Theological Reflection (1 Cor 1:10–17)**

A false understanding of wisdom, a lack of accepting differences, along with an allegiance to human leaders contributed to the disharmony that was occurring in Corinth.

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\(^{90}\) Vang, *1 Corinthians*, 25.

\(^{91}\) Vang, *1 Corinthians*, 24.

\(^{92}\) Ibid., 25.

\(^{93}\) Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 63.

\(^{94}\) Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 102.
Confusion concerning the gospel arose and the church lacked a common mission. Corinth’s issues are worth reflection for the contemporary church since similar realities can easily creep into local congregations.

An improper understanding of wisdom’s origin was one major problem that led to divisions in Corinth. As evidenced by Paul’s lengthy discussion in the Corinthian letter, wisdom had become a code word that gave boasting rights and made groups think they had spiritual prominence (1 Cor 3:18–21). When Paul wrote, “For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom” (1 Cor 1:17), he was not creating a dichotomy between proclamation and wisdom, only moderating the role of the minister. His message was that those ministers who exalt themselves, even in the name of faith, do not proclaim the gospel. The goal for Paul was not that his followers were impressed with his rhetorical style or powers of logical reasoning. Instead, his aim was to establish a Christ-empowered community centered on godly wisdom, not the worldly wisdom of local Corinthian practices.

The second major reason why unity was a problem in Corinth was that their lack of unity did not display the gospel well. The cliques and divisions arose because cultural ways of thinking shaped the church. As a result, the culture would have a hard time accurately understanding the gospel. Quarreling in the church did not arise from doctrinal differences but from matters that should not hold such prominence. Pride, human wisdom, and division over their leaders segregated the church. With petty cliques and

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96. Bruce, *1 & II Corinthians*, 34.
divisions, Christ was not changing Corinth; rather, the church was allowing Corinth to change the message of Christ. Subsequently, the Christian faith became one more religious option playing by the same rules as everyone else in Corinth.98 The danger of disunity is described well by Moltmann,

Where old enmities flare up again in it, where people insist on getting their own way and want to make their perceptions or experiences a law for other people, not only is the fellowship between people threatened, but so (in a deeper sense) is the fellowship with God himself. Through claims to domination and divisions of this kind Christ himself is divided.99

When dissension is present, gospel mission is absent, which is why a common allegiance and proclamation about Christ are essential to Christian unity. The church must evaluate the message they are sending about Christ. Garland explains, “[the church] ought to be like a chorus singing from the same page of music, not like a cat’s concert with each howling his or her cacophonous tune.”100 A common allegiance and message about Christ are essential to perform the beautiful symphony of unity and love that the world longs to hear.

Third, the church in Corinth was tearing people apart, even though the church’s unity ought to bring different people together. A unified church demonstrates the power of the cross to break down walls, cliques, and divisions that violate the very character of God (Deut 6:4; John 10:30). Major personalities, political convictions, musical tastes, preferences for church programs, and theological slogans build walls and undermine the

98. Vang, 1 Corinthians, 26.
100. Garland, 1 Corinthians, 42.
gospel, but when a church is divided, it no longer portrays God accurately.\textsuperscript{101} Christ came to break down the wall that separates (Eph 2:14) and unite all people in the church (Gal 3:28). In Corinth, the world saw outward allegiance to human leaders, not Jesus. If the body of Christ will not let Christ remove her cliques, the cross has lost its power, and the church has lost its testimony.\textsuperscript{102} Restoring unity required the Corinthian church to capture Paul’s focus on true wisdom and accurately understand the gospel.\textsuperscript{103}

Fourth, the Corinthian church did not understand the difference between unity and diversity. Unity is not the same thing as uniformity, as Moltmann explains, “the brotherliness of the messianic community does not find expression through uniformity, but through diversity.”\textsuperscript{104} Having the same mind and purpose does not translate to full agreement, or uniformity, on all issues regarding theology and practice of the Christian life. A commitment to unity, however, is marked by humility and gives up on the notion that “I alone can be right.” Personal agendas have no place in the church; instead, like a tapestry woven together, each thread has its place and purpose to support God’s creative handiwork. Diversity can exist but not without a common allegiance to Christ.\textsuperscript{105}

The church is an alternative eschatological community in which Christ’s transforming power makes the kingdom visible as the church lives out its eschatological purpose. The church’s common purpose ought to be to “love the Lord your God with

\textsuperscript{101} Vang, \textit{1 Corinthians}, 25.

\textsuperscript{102} Vang, \textit{1 Corinthians}, 26.

\textsuperscript{103} Fee, \textit{The First Epistle to the Corinthians}, 56.

\textsuperscript{104} Moltmann, \textit{The Church in the Power of the Spirit}, 309.

\textsuperscript{105} Vang, \textit{1 Corinthians}, 26.
all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with
all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27). Furthermore, the Great
Commission, to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father
and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19), ought to be a staple of church
practice. Unity occurs when the church is purposeful in love and mission, not in their
selfish agendas (1 Thess 5:11).

As stated, the divided and quarreling Corinthian church likely met in various
patrons’ house churches, and Paul’s antidote to restore unity was to have a common
mindset and purpose that would result in diversity that demonstrated the power of the
gospel.106 His instruction later in Corinthians was to lay down their own rights for the
good of the church and the gospel (1 Cor 9:1–18). His prescription for unity was not that
the church needed to start meeting in the same house church at the same time. He did not
instruct the church to choose to follow him only, nor to name Apollos or Cephas the
official leader or teacher of the church at Corinth. Buildings, times, instruments, and
human leaders are not what unifies a church, as theologian Emil Brunner argues, “The
New Testament church . . . was an astonishingly well-ordered whole without such a
formal hierarchy.”107 If the Corinthians had laid down their rights and sought the highest

106. Most of the early Christians met in Greco-Roman households. The record of the book of Acts
gives the house church a significant place in the narrative of early Christianity (Acts 1:13, 2:46, 5:42,
12:12). Evangelistic sermons were preached in public but the life of the church was in the home, the base of
the movement. In the first century, Christianity was not an officially recognized religion; therefore, there
was no public meeting place like the synagogue. According to Paul, Priscilla and Aquila made their home
a center of Christian fellowship and teaching (1 Cor 16:19, Rom 16:15). Romans 16 indicates that each
Christian congregation or group had its own place of worship, and there is no reference in the Roman letter
that the entire church met in one place. The church at Rome met in private residences. Despite the fact that
they met in separate house churches, they were not viewed as being separate churches. House churches
allowed privacy, intimacy, and stability of place, however, conflicts also were present. For more on early
Christian house churches, see P. Coutsoumpos, Community, Conflict, and the Eucharist in Roman Corinth.

good of others, they would have been unified. A church that says the same thing about Jesus and has a common mission and connection is unified, which is the natural result when Christ is the focus and the mission.

**Affirming Diversity within the Unified Body (1 Cor 12:12–26)**

Paul’s letter to the church at Corinth introduces the human body as a rich metaphor for church unity. The argument for unity in diversity comes in three parts:

1. A physical body has many parts (12:12–24), and
2. The parts are all different (12:15–20), yet
3. They all depend on each other (12:21–26).¹⁰⁸

Thus, 1 Cor 12:24–26 illustrates unity within diversity.

The human body has many different interdependent members, which may be why body imagery was common in the ancient world.¹⁰⁹ Likewise, the Christian community parallels the human body—each person is different, interdependent, and therefore valuable. Fee notes Paul’s chief concern with body imagery is not that the body is one, even though it has many members, thus arguing for unity despite diversity. Instead, Paul’s concern with the body metaphor comes in v. 14, that even though the body is one, it does not consist of one member but many. Paul is emphasizing the Corinthian need for diversity since they are one body. Verse 12 highlights the concerns of unity and diversity:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For just as</th>
<th>the body is one,</th>
<th>A</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yet</td>
<td>has many members,</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And</td>
<td>all the members, though many,</td>
<td>B’</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>are one body,</td>
<td>A’</td>
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</tbody>
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¹⁰⁹ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 603.
So also is Christ

The first clause (AB) emphasizes diversity; the second (B’A’) emphasizes unity.\(^{110}\) The image of the body illustrates Paul’s teaching concerning unity and diversity.

The words “so it is with Christ” (1 Cor 12:12) comprise a transitional phrase that keeps the readers’ focus on Christ, their true patron. The church is a living representation of the Incarnate Christ, not just an organization looking for a common challenge or charge. When Paul discusses union, his aim is not simply to have a common purpose or similar interest; rather, he highlights the importance of individual but interconnected body parts and their purpose and connection in relation to the rest of the body of Christ.\(^{111}\) The church only has life, purpose, and connection in relationship to Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Verse 13 begins with Paul stating, “For in the one Spirit.” A common experience with the Holy Spirit makes the Corinthians one, and the Holy Spirit is responsible for, and demonstrated in, the diversity that Paul teaches.\(^{112}\) The Holy Spirit is what distinguishes the believer from the non-believer (1 Cor 2:10–14), and the gift of the Spirit is what marks the beginning of the Christian life (Gal 3:2–3). Indeed, the Spirit above all is what makes a person a child of God (Rom 8:14–17).\(^{113}\) Paul saw the Spirit as the key to everything in the Christian life,\(^{114}\) including the source of unity.

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110. Ibid., 601.
112. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 603.
113. Ibid.
114. Ibid., 607.
The unity of the church is governed from one center, which leads to the same mind and purpose examined in 1:10. Groeshide explains, “The body is an organism, it has many members, but it can only be what it is if it possesses all those members and if all those members are governed from one center; there is one life in all of them.”\textsuperscript{115} Christ (Eph 5:23) and the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:13) are the governing center for the church, and working as one, they bring the spectrum of human diversity (Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, et al.) together, unified in Christ.

The Holy Spirit secures unity between Christ and the church body, making the church “one body.” As husbands and wives who marry and become one flesh, believers are joined by the Spirit and become one body (Eph 5:28–30). To function in harmony with the other parts of the body is the purpose of each body part. A limb must fulfill its assigned purpose or else it will cease to be part of the body, leaving the rest of the body impaired.\textsuperscript{116} No one organ can take over all bodily operations, and likewise, the church must enjoy the gift of unity cultivated by the Holy Spirit reflected in the unity of her different parts.

In vv. 15–17, Paul personifies the parts of the body, particularly the two limbs (foot/hand) and two of the sensory organs (ear/eye). A body cannot prefer a hand over a foot; likewise, an ear cannot claim that it is not part of the body. Choosing an ear over a nose would be absurd because all parts of the body belong to the body.\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{115} Groeshide, \textit{Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians}, 291.

\textsuperscript{116} Vang, \textit{I Corinthians}, 173.

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
It follows that God’s gifting of some members does not carry higher significance than his gifting of others. A healthy body needs different parts, and the Holy Spirit calls and equips everyone differently to fulfill Christ’s calling.\textsuperscript{118} Fee exclaims, “If all the parts were of one kind, there would be no body at all, only a monstrosity.\textsuperscript{119} If the entire church were indistinguishable, the church would be one homogeneous mask, but this is an organism that does not exist in such homogeneity.

Verse 21 explains the point of the body analogy, “The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the foot, “I have no need of you” (12:21). The practice in Corinth was to value one member, leader, or group over another, but given the analogy of the body, no one can say, “I have no need for you.”\textsuperscript{120} Paul refers to the sexual organs as those organs treated with greater honor and given greater modesty, while the more decorous parts are not covered. Bodily appearances are deceiving because all parts of the body are necessary, even those mistakenly treated “lesser.”\textsuperscript{121}

The church cannot faithfully fulfill her task if any members are lacking, and all members are to have the same care and concern for one another. The slaves and the poor are those considered dishonorable (\textit{atimoi}) outside of Christ’s community, but Christ considers the dishonorable honorable in his community. God gives abundant honor (\textit{perissoteran}) to those without status;\textsuperscript{122} thus v. 25 should characterize the Corinthian

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\item \textsuperscript{118} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{119} Fee, \textit{The First Epistle to the Corinthians}, 611.
\item \textsuperscript{120} Fee, \textit{The First Epistle to the Corinthians}, 612.
\item \textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 614.
\item \textsuperscript{122} Vang, \textit{1 Corinthians}, 173.
\end{itemize}
church “that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another.”

Unity results in compassionately shared experiences, good and bad, as v. 26 states, “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.” When one part suffers, every part hurts; likewise, when one part is honored, the whole body is honored. When shared experiences are not the norm, the body ceases to be a body and becomes a collection of disjointed parts.

Discord between members is a clear sign that the body is in an unhealthy state.\textsuperscript{123}

The Corinthian’s lack of unity was demonstrated most clearly at the fractured Lord’s Supper table (1 Cor 11:17–34). Paul’s teaching in v. 27, “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” serves as a reminder that the church belongs to one another, not their parties and factions. An organism that is formed and maintained by Jesus ought to have his complete character exhibited by unity.\textsuperscript{124}

The attempt to balance unity and diversity is not a new challenge. In Paul’s mind, the balance is overcome with a clarity of purpose. Diversity can thrive in community and even strengthen the unity: “As it is, there are many members, yet one body” (1 Cor. 12:20). The body metaphor illustrates that both unity and diversity go together.\textsuperscript{125}

Diversity is only a problem for unity when individual members confuse God’s purpose

\textsuperscript{123} Bruce, \textit{I & II Corinthians}, 122.

\textsuperscript{124} Groeshide, \textit{Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians}, 297.

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 291.
with their selfish desire for prominence and recognition, something of which the Corinthian Christians were guilty. 

Theological Reflection (1 Cor 12: 12–26)

Since unity and diversity build up the believing community, a healthy church is possible through the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit. A body functions cooperatively, not competitively, and not only tolerates diversity but depends on it to function properly. The following four themes emerge from Paul’s body metaphor in 1 Cor 12:12–26 to illustrate healthy practices for the believing community.

First, unity is found in the acceptance of, and appreciation for, diversity. Paul’s ultimate concern is for essential unity with the message of Jesus (1:10). The Corinthian error was to think that uniformity was a value that represented true spirituality, but unity is not possible without diversity. The body is one, yet it has many members with different roles: “But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose (1 Cor 12:18).” Van Gelder notes the importance of both oneness and diversity:

The oneness of the church is not optional. It is a gift from God that must be expressed within the historical church. This does not necessarily require some type of organizational or institutional oneness. But it does mean that there needs to be a real communion of the saints among diverse expressions of the church in any particular setting. This communion may take a wide variety of forms, but the form is not the critical issue. What is critical is that the church must maintain its unity.

128. Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, 602.
129. Van Gelder, The Essence of the Church, 122.
Just as a body is only a functioning body because of its different parts, so unity can be found in a need for, and affirmation of, difference. Francis Schaeffer describes loving unity in action;

the observable and practical love among true Christians that the world has a right to be able to observe in our day certainly should cut without reservation across such lines as language, nationalities, national frontiers, younger and older, colors of skin, levels of education and economics, accent, line of birth, the class system in any particular locality, dress, short or long hair among whites and African and non-African hairdos among blacks, the wearing of shoes, cultural differentiations and the more traditional and less traditional forms of worship.¹³⁰

Unity that catches the attention of the world is found in an acceptance of, and affirmation for, diversity.

Second, unity is a result of common life in the Spirit, “For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body (1 Cor 12:13). Emil Brunner describes the origin of the common life in the spirit: “the fellowship of Jesus Christ is the work and product of His word and spirit.” The common life in the Spirit that results in unity is a work of Jesus Christ and is a gift.¹³¹ Because the Holy Spirit is a gift, it follows that the unity generated by the Holy Spirit is also a gift. Thus, the gift of unity results from the church’s common life in the Spirit, not human programs. The need in Corinth and the need for churches today is for a sovereign work of the Spirit to do what programmed unity cannot. While the Spirit’s work might seem to create disunity for some, such a perspective comes from fallen humanity. It is humanity’s common sin that divides and causes pride, suspicion, and distrust to prevail when it comes to the work of the Spirit. Unity, though, is a

¹³⁰ Schaeffer, The Mark of the Christian, 30.

¹³¹ Brunner, The Misunderstanding of the Church, 25.
permanent and never-ending task of the church, and true unity is a gift that results from a common life in the Holy Spirit.\footnote{Fee, \textit{The First Epistle to the Corinthians}, 607.}

Third, unity happens when everyone is recognized as significant and connected to the life of the body. The problem in many churches is not the differences themselves but rather how those differences are handled. Different parts of physical bodies are often rendered insignificant, but no part of Christ’s body is insignificant. Any idea that a believer can be disconnected from active participation in the church is an anomaly to Paul, as each believer is important and must remain connected to the fellowship: “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it (1 Cor 12:27).” \footnote{Vang, \textit{1 Corinthians}, 176.} Limbs that are cut off from the body die,\footnote{Karl Barth, \textit{The Church and the Churches} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1936), 11.} which makes it critical for a body’s life and health that differences must be handled with respect and appreciation.

Fourth, God designed each believer to receive gift(s) to strengthen other parts of the body. Karl Barth said, “the New Testament speaks of a variety of communities, of gifts, and of persons within one Church.”\footnote{Bruce, \textit{I & II Corinthians}, 119.} Each believer must recognize their unique function as a body part within the body of Christ with the understanding that God has a purpose for the church that is only accomplished when each person is utilizing their God-given gifts \textit{(etheto)} to build up the common good.\footnote{Bruce, \textit{I & II Corinthians}, 119.} God’s plan for his body is one of unity, which results when each member properly applies and uses their unique gifts.
In sum, 1 Cor 12:12–26 details the importance of appreciating and affirming differences. True unity is a gift of the Holy Spirit that occurs when everyone is connected and recognized as important to the body of Christ. God has gifted each believer with gifts to strengthen the body, and when the body of Christ is served by each member, Spirit-inspired unity is present.

**Virtues that Foster Diversity and Togetherness (Eph 4:1–7, 11–16)**

Ephesians 4:1–16 offers practical instruction on how the church can grow into maturity by focusing on unity.\(^{136}\) Verses 1–3 focus on loving deference to one another, in that believers are to live in the present in a way that is consistent with the past, free call of God. Paul appeals to his readers in v. 1 to *peripatesai* (walk) in a way that is worthy of the calling God has given them. He references their conversion, or call, at which point they heard and believed the gospel.\(^{137}\) Because of God’s gracious call, believers should value his love enough to be shaped by it and walk in it.\(^{138}\)

Verse 2 describes a balanced life worthy of God’s call. The word “worthy” (*axios*) at one time was used to mean “to bring up the other beam of the scales into equilibrium,” or “to put things in proper balance.” The actions of Christians should reflect the actions of God,\(^{139}\) and they should exhibit virtues such as humility, gentleness,

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patience, tolerant love, and peace-keeping. Humility is not being overly impressed by a sense of self-importance, and gentleness is a characteristic of Christ (2 Cor 10:1) that fosters kind and gracious actions even in the face of challenge. Similarly, patience is a persistence in a person’s conviction even when circumstances are difficult; for example, to bear with one another in love means to put up with something that is annoying. Among other fruit of the Spirit, the life worthy of God’s call includes humility, gentleness, and patience.

The final adverbial phrase in v. 3 is climactic, the goal toward which the other three phrases have been moving. Unity is mentioned in two other places in Ephesians (3:13, 2:14) and Paul reiteratively tells his readers that they should be eager to keep the unity of the Spirit. Christ personified peace within the church that included two separate groups, Jews and Gentiles, unified as one—he created unity where there had been great hostility. Paul seems to envision the unity of the church as a complex subject and a gift that the Spirit brings in concert with Christ, whereby the barriers that divided various social groups were torn down (2:18, 22).

For barrier-crossing unity to continue to happen, believers are to “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit.” The phrase “make every effort” is translated from the word spoudazō meaning to be zealous or eager. Paul intends the church to value

140. Snodgrass, Ephesians, 196.
141. Thielman, Ephesians, 254.
142. Snodgrass, Ephesians, 197.
unity, be attentive to it, and invest energy so that unity is not endangered. He is deeply concerned with their relationships with others, and he encourages them to maintain energetically the unity that the Spirit has given them despite their differences with one another. It is this kind of practical application of humility, gentleness, and patience within a loving context that supports, encourages, and produces unity in the church.

The church must maintain unity, which is kept by the syndesmos (bond) of peace. This term means a fastener, like a bond that ties prisoners together or something that holds clothing together. Bonds attach and cling to one another as a ligament binds bone to muscle. In the same way, peace is the fastener that preserves the church’s unity. Lovingly putting up with people’s differences, being polite, humble, and gentle are just some of the practical ways that peace binds unity. Leslie Mitton observes that peace is not the goal of the church, but a means by which the greater unity of the Spirit is continually secured.

Unity is the goal of vv. 1–3 and the bridge to the next paragraph (vv. 4–6). In v. 4, Paul utilizes a series of short statements that begin with the number one and focus on the church body. There are seven subjects, a significant number in Judaism and early Christianity, which leads some interpreters to believe this was an early Christian creed.

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144. Snodgrass, Ephesians, 197.
146. Snodgrass, Ephesians, 198.
149. Ibid., 255.
“Oneness” is Paul’s main concern for the next three verses (4–6), stating that there is “one body and one spirit.” He reminds his readers that they should keep the church fastened together with peace because of what God has done for them, uniting them across entrenched social boundaries and giving them his spiritual presence. If people have the same Lord, believe the same gospel, and have experienced the same reality of being baptized into Christ, should they not live out this unity?150

The term “one” appears six times within the space of thirty-four words before transitioning to the next major section (vv. 7–16) where the unity of the church amid a diversity of gifts is the main subject.151 The unity of God’s people (one body) is grounded in the unity of God (one God, one Lord, one Father, one faith) and of the response of God’s people to God (one hope, one faith, one baptism).152 For Snodgrass, theological oneness (one God, one Lord, One Father) serves as the foundation for the unity of the church.153

God is Father of all and sovereign over all things; he has created everything and works intentionally through and in all things to accomplish his intended goals. The church, then, occupies an important piece of God’s divine plan by practicing unity in tangible, loving ways among believers.154 For example, Christians share one faith, or the body of teaching that Christians believe, and they share one baptism. Thielman notes that

150. Snodgrass, Ephesians, 199.
151. Thielman, Ephesians, 254.
152. Ibid., 250.
154. Thielman, Ephesians, 260.
baptism in this context is a shorthand expression for the whole process of conversion, which is summarized by a reference to the practice of water immersion in the name of Jesus. Baptism thus succinctly symbolizes a person coming under the Lordship of Christ into the realm of “one hope, one faith, one baptism.”

In v. 7, Paul introduces the metaphor of architectural completeness in reference to the church, which is a building not yet complete. While every believer must put forth effort towards the church’s completeness, the power for achieving the goal does not come from the believer’s resources but rather is a gift from Christ. The church has been given different gifts for the purpose of bringing the building to completion—apostles were specially authorized agents of God responsible for teaching and sharing God’s good news, prophets were people prompted by the Spirit to speak a particularly relevant message, evangelists brought good news, shepherds or pastors held positions of authority and were charged with the church’s well-being, and teachers built up the church towards maturity and kept false teaching at bay. Then and now, each believer utilizes individual gifts to work together to complete the metaphorical building that God is constructing called the church.

Even when unity is a given (4:3), it is still something toward which Christians must work. The goal is the preparation of the saints for the work of the ministry and the building up of the body of Christ. Verse 12 continues the architectural metaphor as the building grows, as those gifted in the ministry of the word, and those whom they equip for ministry work together to build up the body of Christ. Unity of faith, knowledge of

the Son, and maturity in Christ are the goals of the church. Paul intends for his readers to think of the church, which is the body of Christ, as eventually attaining Christ’s full height.157

As believers maintain correct teaching and speak the truth in love, they grow in Christ. Every believer has a role to play, whether apostolic ministry, prophesying, evangelizing, shepherding, or teaching. The purpose of all this activity that fosters unity is to build up the church, and the goal of the church’s construction is a unified commitment to doctrinal truth and the experience of the knowledge of Christ.158

Theological Reflection (Eph 4:1–7, 11–16)

Ephesians 4 contains several significant implications for understanding the nature of unity in the Scriptures. First, Christians should understand unity as a gift of the Spirit to be guarded and preserved, about which Garland writes, “The unity of the church rests upon what God has done and upon His essential oneness, not upon ‘some common enthusiasm within the community.’”159 In Eph 3:10, Paul notes that even the principalities and powers in the heavenly places are going to be astonished and amazed when they see the unity of the church. His urgent message is that unity is a gift that must be maintained, whether Jew or Gentile.160

157. Ibid., 282.
158. Ibid.
Unity is motivated by theological oneness (4:4); in other words, one can only speak of the church’s unity because it is founded in the one Lord.\textsuperscript{161} The quest for unity, according to Barth, “must be identical with the quest for Jesus Christ as the concrete Head and Lord of the Church.” Therefore, division in the body of Christ denies the doctrine of God.\textsuperscript{162} Brunner argues what is needed most:

It is not an organized unity of the churches that we most need; on the contrary, such a thing could in the last resort merely serve to increase the fundamental evil—the misunderstanding of the church—by identifying, once more, Church and institution. What we need is the Holy Ghost who is promised to faith in Jesus Christ and who, where he is powerfully operative, brings about that freedom in obligation and that sense of obligation in freedom, that responsibility in fellowship, which is as far removed from all collectivism as it is from all individualism.\textsuperscript{163}

The Holy Spirit brings about a freedom for the church to be united in a spiritual bond that supersedes any need for organizational unity. Moltmann agrees that “the unity of the congregation is a unity in freedom . . . everyone must be accepted with his gifts and tasks, his weaknesses and handicaps.”\textsuperscript{164} There are not several bodies across multiple locales, nor are there several bodies across one locale. The church is hypocritical when it preaches a gospel of reconciliation but is marked by division within. The reality is that each congregation is a representation of the “one body” of Christ.

As discussed above, baptism is a powerful symbol that reminds believers of God’s gift of salvation and unities them around a common response to his grace. Vischer expounds upon the symbolism of baptism in relation to unity: “baptism stands at the

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  \item \textsuperscript{162} Barth, \textit{The Church and the Churches}, 13.
  \item \textsuperscript{163} Brunner, \textit{The Misunderstanding of the Church}, 114.
  \item \textsuperscript{164} Moltmann, \textit{The Church in the Power of the Spirit}, 343.
\end{itemize}
beginning of unity; it is the basis and not the result of unity. Because the unity of the
church expresses the unity established by Christ, human beings do not need to produce it;
though they can give thanks for it.”165 Thus, the church’s “One Lord” has gifted the
church with unity, and baptism is a symbol of the unified faith that Jesus Christ has
established through the church. Moltmann explains, “the congregation is gathered
through proclamation and calling. It gathers for the one baptism (Eph 4:5, 1 Cor 12:13),
and for the common Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 12:13, 10:17). It lives in the spirit of mutual
acceptance (Rom 15:7) and maintains the unity of the Spirit through ‘the bond of peace’
(Eph 4:3).”166 The unity of the church is perpetually aided by God’s calling and
subsequent gathering for baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and quality of love within the body
of Christ.

Second, holy virtues produce the peace that binds unity. Because Christianity is a
shared faith with no such thing as separate or individual faiths, everything that a Christian
holds significant is held with other people. Therefore, how Christians treat others are
significant factors in the degree to which a church is unified. Moltmann describes
Christian character in action:

The unity of the gathered congregation is visible and experienced in the
fellowship of people who are in themselves different . . . the fact that Jews and
Gentiles, Greeks and barbarians, masters and slaves, men and women surrender
their privileges, or are freed from oppression as the case may be, is—like the
gathering of the new people of God itself—the sacrament of the kingdom and the
beginning of the messianic era.167

165. Ibid., 128.
166. Ibid.
To preserve this unity, the church must remain in the sphere of the Spirit—otherwise, the works of the flesh, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, and envy will cause the church body to be split. Where there is a spirit of divisiveness, competition, and animosity, one can be sure the Spirit is not present.\textsuperscript{168} For a church to be unified, holy virtues like humility, gentleness, and patience must characterize Christian behavior. When the Christian community is characterized by the fruit of the Spirit described in Gal 5:22 (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control), peace reigns and the bond of unity is sealed.

Third, the exercise of spiritual gifts enhances unity. Each member contributing to the greater good of the body enhances the unity of the church. Whether exercising gifts of apostolic leadership, prophecy, evangelism, teaching, or nurturing, unity is developed, and Christ is honored. Service, generosity, leadership, mercy, wisdom, and faith are gifts of the Holy Spirit designed to grow the church toward maturity (1 Cor 12:3-8). Practicing spiritual gifts equips God’s people for ministry and the building that is Christ’s church draws closer to completion. Paul’s letter to the Ephesian church makes clear that “church unity is not an objective reality that the church can grasp from a distance but a dynamic reality that one grasps only when one lets oneself be grasped by it in prayer, praise, and conduct.”\textsuperscript{169} Barth summarizes the emphasis on unity in Eph 4:17, 11–16: “the government that guarantees the unity of the living congregation is the concern of her living Lord alone, and of His Word attested by the scriptures.”\textsuperscript{170}

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\textsuperscript{168} Garland, “A Life Worthy of the Calling,” 3.
\textsuperscript{170} Barth, \textit{Man’s Desire and God’s Design}, 73.
\end{flushright}
The Beautiful Symphony of a Unified Church (Acts 2:42–47)

Pentecost ushered in a new era for the people God, as new believers put their faith in Jesus Christ. Pentecost reversed the division that occurred at the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:19) and drew people from many different groups and languages to the gospel. Acts 2:42–47 is a Lukan summary of the newly restored faith community that describes the next steps for the church after Pentecost, namely the community of new converts. Early Christian communal life is portrayed ideally by Luke to emphasize that the early Christians bonded together effectively. Acts 2:42–47 is an illustration of a healthy, unified fellowship of believers.

Verse 42 mentions four practices to which the believers devoted themselves in their new life together. The word “devote” (proskarterountes) means that they were persistent or persevering in something; it is an ongoing action. This unity was exhibited among early disciples of Jesus in Acts 1:4: “All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.” This devotion to God and to one another is also reflected in 2:42–47.172

Devotion to the apostles’ teaching is mentioned first, which would have included Old Testament interpretation, Jesus’s resurrection, and their own memories of Jesus’s earthly ministry and teaching. Jesus charges his disciples in Matt 28:19–20, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son


and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” The apostles’ teaching carried out this command to “teach them to observe all that I have commanded you.”173 Likely, this teaching also included practical aspects and grounded the church in the central promise God had given in Jesus.174

“Fellowship” (koinonia), the second practice characterizing the early church, means association, communion, sharing, or close relationships.175 Overtones of mutual support such as giving alms and giving generously are associated with the word, and it is often used to describe the type of mutuality that takes place in marriage. Craig Keener explains that the word for fellowship refers to the harmony created by a shared purpose and working together.176

Sharing all things in common was practiced in the early Christian community; people gave as needs arose. Luke points to fellowship to highlight the personal, interactive nature of relationships in the early church.177 William Neil notes that this fellowship included belonging to the community of the new Israel. Additionally, the sharing of possessions practically expressed the Holy Spirit’s work.178 Sharing is the only logical alternative to the rivalry that characterizes every other human community. To say

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that none of the things one possesses are one’s own is to totally reverse the process of accumulating material goods for the sake of one’s self typically modeled by the world.179

Breaking bread together is the third practice mentioned (Acts 2:43). Although the term is not explicitly clear, many scholars believe this to include the celebration of the Lord’s Supper with regular meals, which often took place in various homes.180 John Polhill notes that this probably also included the agape meals (love feasts).181 Eating together around a common table characterized the early church, and the Lord’s Supper was a specific hallmark of the early Christian community.

The final practice mentioned in v. 42 describes the early church is prayer. The use of the definite article before the word “prayers” might imply specific prayers, such as the daily Jewish prayers, since early Christians potentially kept the formal prayer hours of Judaism.182 Verse 46 states that the early community daily attended the Temple, another Jewish practice. It is possible, however, that they went to the temple outer courts each day only to preach.183 Polhill concludes that the reference is broader and involves the prayers in their private house worship primarily.184 He notes that the reference to prayer mentioned in v. 42 is broader and involves primarily the early church sharing in prayer together in private house worship.185 Prayer, which seeks God’s direction and makes one

182. Polhill, Acts, 120.
185. Ibid.
dependent on him, is something that Luke emphasizes about community life. God’s people do not work primarily by feelings or intuition but rather by actively submitting themselves to the Lord’s direction and wisdom. \(^{186}\) Thus, the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, common meals, and prayer were staples of the early church.

Verse 43 describes the people’s reactions to the ministry and teaching of the apostles, which included mighty works that bore witness and demonstrated the reality of God’s in-breaking. \(^{187}\) “Signs and wonders” described the apostles’ work and applied to others as well: Jesus (2:22), Stephen (6:8), Moses (7:36), Phillip (8:13), and Paul and Barnabas (14:13, 15:12). \(^{188}\) All the believers took careful, respectful notice at what was happening inside their community.

Verse 44 again characterizes the relationships the believers held, elaborating on the fellowship they enjoyed. “Those who believed” characterized those who responded to the message of the new messianic community; indeed, they were called believers because of their response of faith in the preached message. \(^{189}\) “Those who believed” are said to have been “together,” a Greek phrase (\(\text{epi to auto}\)) that only occurs five times in Acts and is difficult to translate. Polhill asserts that the term seems to strongly emphasize the unity of the gathered community, which unity is further expressed by the church “holding everything in common.” \(^{190}\) As mentioned earlier, 1:15 depicts the unity of the early

\(^{186}\) Bock, \textit{Acts}, 151.

\(^{187}\) Chance, \textit{Acts}, 59.

\(^{188}\) Polhill, \textit{Acts}, 120.

\(^{189}\) Bock, \textit{Acts}, 152.

\(^{190}\) Polhill, \textit{Acts}, 120. See Acts 1:15, 2:1, 44, 47; 4:26.
Christian movement, along with 2:1, which states, “they were all together in one place” on the day of Pentecost. This same theme of unity repeats in v. 47.191

The believers held everything in common and would sell their goods for the benefit of others whenever a need arose. A community in which everything is held in common and shared equally was ideal in Greek culture, even though property was not owned collectively by the community. The verb for selling possessions and belongings (pipraskō) is used in the imperfect tense, indicating that the event was a recurrent, continuing practice voluntarily done again and again.192 Their practice was to sell their property and goods and then distribute the proceeds when other believers had a need.193

Community members were not moved to sell what they owned all at once, but the practice of selling possessions happened when a need arose. A healthy community is functioning appropriately with love and compassion when the needs of members are generously met.194 The Acts community did not regard their property as private; instead, their property was viewed as if it were held in a trust from God that was to be donated to the common pool when there was a need.195 Luke paints a picture of a community that cares for all its members, even those in material need.

Verse 46 provides evidence for dual locations of the early church’s life together. They met in the Temple but also in their homes—believers worshipped in their everyday environments. It also appears they remained faithful to their Jewish worship in the

194. Ibid.
Temple, as Temple participation related the early community to the gospel’s Jewish beginnings and heritage. In Jerusalem, the Temple was the primary place where the crowds would be found. There is some evidence that the Temple was the place where Christians went to evangelize, while the homes were places for Christian worship. Whether in homes or the Temple, believers were together.

Some homes had an open courtyard that could hold many people, but even in the larger homes, there rarely would have been more than fifty people. Such house meetings created a family-like environment, and in the intimacy of the home setting, a common meal was shared, which probably included the Lord’s Supper.

“With one accord” (homothymadon) is commonly used in Acts to express a unity of purpose. A group “with one accord” does not have pretense or performance in the way the believers behaved. Verse 4:32 highlights the believers’ open hearts and unity of Christian fellowship: “Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.” “With one accord” or single-mindedness is not always a good thing, since the same word for single-mindedness described the angry mobs that rushed upon Stephen (7:57) and Paul (19:29). Single-mindedness, however, is a necessity for the Christian community. The church is properly “in one accord” only

when rooted in fellowship with Christ and the unity of the Holy Spirit who guides the unity of the Christian community.  

The result of their common life together was joy. No one was trying to impress anyone; they were sincere. An attitude of love toward one another enabled them to truly enjoy one another. It was a time marked by rejoicing in their fellowship with one another and the Spirit. Each contributed an open heart and a sincere spirit. Joy was expressed as they praised God for his presence in their life together. When God’s people come together and enjoy fellowship, “praising God is the natural result.” True fellowship focuses on God and helps people to remember the good things he has done, which in turn, causes praise (2:47).

The practices of the early believers were noticed by outsiders, and God added new converts daily. Many chose to join their ranks, or “to be saved.” As Bock states, “a vibrant community extends itself in two directions: toward God and toward neighbor.” The love that the early church had which resulted in unity was noticed, respected, and contagious.

Theological Reflection (Acts 2:42–47)

Acts 2:42–47 has necessary implications for the church today, the first of which is that evangelism must not be separated from discipleship. After Pentecost, which saw hundreds saved, there was a need for the new converts to be discipled; thus, the new

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201. Ibid.
believers were invited into the life of the church. The apostles’ teaching, breaking of bread, prayer, sharing common resources, and praise were practices the new believers immediately undertook. The mere conversion to Christianity was not the goal, as evangelism cannot be separated from discipleship. A healthy church evangelizes the lost by bearing witness to Jesus and disciples the lost in the context of the believing community.

Second, discipleship includes specific practices exhibited in the faith community. Those practices included devotion to the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, common meals, the Lord’s Supper, prayers, praise, meeting material need, and the apostles’ miraculous works. Vischer describes the church in action:

holding the one apostolic faith, preaching the one Gospel, breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such wise that ministry and members are accepted by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God call his people.205

The Holy Spirit fostered a common sense of purpose and mission by guiding the church to engage in spiritual practices together, all of which served as unifying elements for the local church.

Third, the practices that foster discipleship naturally allow for unity to flourish. The apostles’ teaching unites the believing community in the story of God revealed in Christ Jesus, and fellowship unites the believers together in common love for one another. The Lord’s Supper unites the believing community around a common table, cup, and body that tangibly reminds them of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. Prayer unites the believing community by opening the community to a common bond to seek

God’s will together. Praise unites the believers in adoration for who God is, what he has done, and what he will do. Meeting material needs unites the church by ensuring that everyone will be taken care of, regardless of economic need or social status. The apostles’ miraculous deeds united the church around a common sense of God’s in-breaking work. Moltmann describes the “community of brethren” in Acts 2: “1. There is no more lordship or slavery, 2. the greed for possessions and the claim to personal property came to an end, 3. Social, cultural, racial, and sexual privileges lose their validity. The community of brethren proclaims the kingdom of God through its way of life, which provides an alternative to the world surrounding it.”

Although the church met at different times and different locations, they were unified through discipleship that centered their shared life together and enabled the outside world to see the gospel in action.

Fourth, unity can happen for the wrong reasons. The word for single-minded (Acts 2:46) is also used to describe mobs who went after both Paul (Acts 19:29) and Stephen (7:57). People can be united, but if it is without a common commitment to Jesus with a common purpose, unity on its own can be dangerous. Acts 2:42–47 describes an almost utopia like experience, but this unity did not endure. Polhill describes how the Acts community also struggled, “Sincerity sometimes gave way to dishonesty, joy was blotched by rifts in the fellowship, and the favor of the people was overshadowed by persecutions from the Jewish officials.” Luke’s summaries present an ideal for the Christian community, toward which it must always strive, and to which it must constantly return to discover anew if it is to have that unity of spirit and purpose essential for an

effective witness. When the mission of the believing community or the church unites around the wrong reasons, Acts 2:42–47 provides common practices that can correctly unify the church.

Fifth, the welfare of the church was a priority that enhanced the church’s witness. Luke wanted the readers to understand the connection between the communal life of the church and the favor experienced with outsiders. What was preached by the church was lived by the church; their life as a community was a visible sign of their testimony. Then and now, a healthy, unified, discipleship practicing church has a positive impact on the church’s witness.

**Conclusion**

Unity is a characteristic of God that flows from covenant love between God and people. Pictured in the relationship among the Godhead, unity is essential among Christ followers. Centered around a common set of experiences among the faith community, unity is gifted and fueled by the Holy Spirit. The unity of the church is a vehicle that enables the world to realize what God has been doing in Christ Jesus. In contrast, a lack of unity does not display the gospel well and tears a church apart. Proper unity must be understood to include diversity, when everyone is recognized as significant and connected to the life of the body of Christ. A healthy, unified church exhibits unity by displaying holy virtues and exercising spiritual gifts to edify the church, and such a healthy, unified, discipleship practicing church has a positive impact on the church’s witness.

CHAPTER THREE

Method

Introduction

Churches need to experience unity. Unity is a gift of the Holy Spirit that binds a church together with a common connection and purpose. Unity defines the relationship between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Jesus prayed for the unity of his disciples, and the pastoral epistles include numerous teachings to maintain unity along with examples of what unity looks like in action. Congregations can have a reputation for division both among church members and in their communities. Even further, churches that have multiple venues for corporate worship are often characterized as several churches rather than one unified church.

Description of Intervention

This study attempted to help PDBC understand and experience unity through a common sermon series on unity in both corporate worship venues. A six-week sermon series was presented in both corporate worship venues by the respective venue-pastors utilizing the same text and emphasis concerning church unity. First, a common preaching plan was developed that focused on biblical principles of unity. Second, participants were randomly selected and asked to participate in the intervention. The participants were expected to attend corporate worship in their regular worship venue every week for six weeks. If participants were unable to attend a Sunday, they were asked to obtain a copy of the sermon through compact disc or listen on-line. Third, the sermon series was
delivered to the congregation over the course of six weeks. Each week’s theme centered around unity and utilized the same sermon text, sermon title, and general outline in both corporate worship venues. Fourth, a post-intervention survey was administered to participants to assess changes in their understanding and experience of unity.

Statement of the Research Questions

The inquiry into the effectiveness of this project was guided by the following two questions:

1. What effect did a common sermon series on unity utilizing a common biblical text in both venues for corporate worship have on the participants understanding of unity?

2. What effect did a common sermon series on unity utilizing a common biblical text in both venues for corporate worship have on the participants experience of church unity?

Description of Method

I chose a qualitative research method for this intervention that employed the use of a sample survey. Use of a sample survey allowed information to be gathered from a part of the population by asking questions and assessing whether the answer to those same questions was different because of the intervention. Additionally, the sample survey allowed the researcher to assess broad understandings and experiences of unity; an important dynamic in a large church with multiple venues for corporate worship.

Criteria for selecting a survey included:

1. The data was best obtained directly from the respondents;

2. Data was obtained by brief answers to structured questions;

3. Respondents are expected to give reliable information;
4. You know how you will use the answers; and

5. You can expect an adequate response rate.¹

Vogt writes that often the only efficient way to obtain information about people is by asking them, which is especially true of subjective data, data about the inner attitudes, beliefs, or values of the participants.² In this intervention, I asked questions concerning the subjective understanding and experience of unity within the church; therefore, a survey was appropriate.

Population of Interest

My population of interest was the people of PDBC. Due to the large membership, a random sampling of members was conducted to obtain the appropriate survey group. An announcement was made in both corporate worship venues that a church-wide sermon series was coming up that was designed to help improve the unity of the church. Paul Vogt states that the organization’s endorsement of the research can help aid in the response rate.³ Names, e-mail addresses, and phone numbers from male and female church members age eighteen and over were downloaded from the church’s database into an excel spreadsheet alphabetically. Members who were coded as attending “The Gathering” (contemporary venue) were placed in one spreadsheet, and members who attend “Celebration Worship” (traditional venue) were placed in a second spreadsheet. Every fifth member was selected until seventy-five had been chosen from each worship


². Ibid.

³. Ibid., 19.
venue. Participants were then e-mailed requesting their participation in the intervention along with a statement of Informed Consent (See Appendix A).

**Data Collection**

The survey was self-administered electronically through the web-site Survey Monkey. Self-administration of the survey allowed respondents to be asked the same question the exact same way. Electronic distribution of the survey was chosen due to the low cost per respondent, time per question required, the effort to obtain a large sample size, and researcher’s efficiency. The survey is included in Appendices B and C.

To measure changes over short amount of time (the 6-week intervention), a panel study was chosen so that individuals are surveyed to determine whether their attitudes changed after participating in the program.\(^4\) The format for the questions were two-fold. In the first survey (Appendix B), thirteen questions were asked. Five questions were questions to obtain demographic information on the respondent, which included the last four digits of their phone number to identify them on both surveys and e-mail address, the worship venue they normally attend, how long they have attended PDBC, how often, on average, the respondent attends worship services, and gender and age. Five questions were related directly to the two research questions (dependent variable):

1. The church is unified.
2. I feel a connection with other members at PDBC.
3. I sense a common purpose with other members at PDBC.
4. PDBC is a unified church.
5. I understand the meaning of biblical unity.

Three of the questions (regarding Sunday School class participation and ministry and mission activities) were designed to account for other means by which a participant might experience unity within the church (independent variable):

1. I am involved in a Sunday School class with church members who attend a different worship venue than me at PDBC.
2. I am involved in a church ministry with church members who attend a different worship venue than me at PDBC.
3. I am involved in an off-campus mission activity (service project, mission trip, etc.) with church members who attend a different worship venue than me at PDBC.

The same questions were asked to measure independent and dependent variables at the post-intervention survey (Appendix C), except one question utilized to measure participation in the intervention:

1. Over the past eight weeks, how often did you attend worship services at PDBC?

Two questions measure the effect of the intervention on the dependent variable:

1. Having the same sermon series preached in all venues for corporate worship enhanced the unity of the church.
2. The sermon series on unity preached in all venues for corporate worship enhanced the unity of the church.

Finally, the survey included three open-ended questions that allowed participants to describe the impact of the intervention using their own words:

1. What impact, if any, did the sermon series on biblical unity have on you?
2. What impact, if any, did the sermon series on biblical unity have on PDBC?
3. What, if anything, would you suggest to improve the unity of PDBC?
For the five questions related to the research question, a Likert scale was utilized. Respondents chose from the options below:

a. Strongly disagree
b. Somewhat disagree
c. Neither disagree nor agree
d. Somewhat agree
e. Strongly agree

The Likert scale provided a familiar pattern: a statement followed by a series of options that aided the researcher in looking for large, not subtle, differences across participants. This scale is good for assessing the degree of agreement with or support for a belief, policy, or practice. The Likert scale aided in coding, reliability and validity.

Data Analysis

Survey results were coded by the last four digits of the participant’s phone number. Each response was placed in an Excel spreadsheet where comparisons were made between pre-and post-intervention surveys along with comparison to the questions of other participants. Data Analysis included:

1. Description of responses from pre-intervention survey,
2. Description of responses from post-intervention survey,
3. Analysis of change in results from pre- to post-intervention surveys.

By processing the data in this manner, I was able to assess the understanding of and experience of unity before the intervention as well as after the intervention.

Additionally, I was able to account for other means by which means a participant might experience unity (Sunday School class, ministry involvement, mission activity) before and after the intervention. Finally, by analyzing pre- and post-surveys, I was able to assess changes in the data analysis that occurred because of the intervention.

**Data Reporting**

A summary of the data is presented in Chapter Four and major findings are presented in Chapter Five.

**Validity and Reliability**

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, I utilized member checking and let the participants know that I might call them to clarify some of the data and allow them to comment on the findings. Second, I also consulted with peers during the intervention to gain an outside perspective on the study being conducted. My faculty supervisor and other students in the Doctor of Ministry program at Truett were consulted during the intervention to increase the reliability of the intervention’s findings.

I was aware of biases I brought into the intervention that could endanger the validity of the research. My desire for this project was to bring unity to the church. I already believed that unity is essential and that the church already experiences a healthy degree of unity, though the church could grow both in understanding and experiencing unity. I believed that PDBC is a healthy, unified church that has been able to uniquely support multiple venues for corporate worship over the course of a decade. I hoped that other churches that have multiple venues for worship would be able to adapt this project to improve unity within their church. Additionally, churches with only one venue for
worship would be able to implement the project and improve their unity. I was aware that
the participants’ experiences of unity do not necessarily match my own perceptions of
unity, pre- and post-intervention.

Having served as a pastor at PDBC, I acknowledge I brought preconceived
judgments about the unity of the church. This bias was controlled by standard survey
questions to objectively obtain data. I was also aware that I serve as a pastor for the
people in the congregation which could result in a social desirability bias. Vogt’s research
indicates “people who are willing to participate in research seem eager to try to give
honest answer or to make an effort to remember correctly.”6 I made clear to the
participants that the success of the research was not dependent upon responses that would
be found to be potentially desirable to the project; accurate information was the most
helpful.

*Ethical Issues*

Care and protection of participants was of highest priority. Each participant was
told in writing exactly what was expected of him/her for participation in the intervention.
All this information was contained in the informed consent that each participant reviewed
and signed before the project began (see Appendix A). No participants were under any
threat of injury or harm during the project and all possible risks were disclosed. Findings
were reported with the utmost integrity and care. No deception was intentionally used.
Participants were not paid nor did they receive any benefit from this study, nor did it cost
them anything to participate. Participants could withdraw from the study at any point
without penalty.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Summary and Results

Churches need to experience unity. Unity is a gift of the Holy Spirit that binds a church together with a common connection and purpose. Unity defines the relationship between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Jesus prayed for the unity of his disciples, and the pastoral epistles include numerous teachings to maintain unity along with examples of what unity looks like in action. Congregations can have a reputation for division both among church members and in their communities. Even further, churches that have multiple venues for corporate worship are often characterized as several churches rather than one unified church.

The purpose of this project was to lead PDBC, a church with multiple venues for corporate worship on Sunday morning, to grow in their understanding and experience of unity. To accommodate differing preferences for worship styles, the church launched a contemporary worship service called “The Gathering” in 2005. The existence of two worshipping congregations with two different venue-preaching pastors has led some to assert that the church is two, not one. This project aimed to delineate unity in such a way that members of PDBC understand and experience biblical unity through the experience of a common teaching text and sermon series on unity in both corporate worship venues.

A unified connection and purpose characterized healthy New Testament churches. Often, churches hold a false understanding of what true unity looks like because little to no theological reflection is given concerning biblical unity. This project aimed to recover a biblical and theological perspective concerning matters of unity that ultimately helps
the church understand their common connection and purpose to one another all the while maintaining two venues for corporate worship. The inquiry into the effectiveness of this project was guided by the following two questions:

1. What effect does a common sermon series on unity utilizing a common biblical text in both venues for corporate worship have on the participants’ understanding of unity?

2. What effect does a common sermon series on unity utilizing a common biblical text in both venues for corporate worship have on the participants’ experience of church unity?

**Description of Sample**

The total membership of PDBC is two-thousand one hundred and two of which one hundred and twelve people who were randomly selected and responded that they would be a part of the intervention and filled out a pre-intervention survey. The response rate for the pre-intervention survey was thirty-four percent. Of the 112 who filled out a pre-intervention survey, eighty-one people completed the requirements for participation in the project and completed a post-intervention survey.

Survey responses included forty-nine percent of participants who attended The Gathering (contemporary worship venue) and fifty-one percent who attended Celebration Worship (traditional worship venue). Most respondents (fifty-nine percent) have attended PDBC more than ten years, while twenty-seven percent had been a member between one and five years, twelve percent had been a member six to ten years, and nearly one percent had been a member less than one year. The gender breakdown of the sample included fifty-one percent of study participants who were male and forty-nine percent who were female. Most respondents (sixty-five percent) responded that they attended church services weekly or more while twenty-one percent attended three times per month, ten
percent two times per month, and four percent only once per month. Thirty-two percent of the respondents were sixty years or older, thirty-six percent were ages forty to fifty-nine, thirty-one percent were ages twenty to thirty-nine, and one percent were younger than twenty.

Survey analysis revealed sixty-five percent of church members were involved in a Sunday School class with church members who attended a different worship venue at least once a month or more. Additionally, sixty-nine percent of church members were involved in a church ministry with church members who attended a different worship venue at least once a month or more. Furthermore, forty-eight percent of church members were involved in an off-campus mission activity (mission trip, service project, et al.) with church members who attended a different worship venue once a month or more.

**Research Question 1 Findings**

*Changes in Participants’ Understanding of Unity*

Table 4.1 below illustrates that when asked their belief concerning the unity of the church, overall agreement concerning the unity increased from seventy-six percent before the sermon series to eighty-seven percent after, an increase of eleven percentage points. Strong agreement increased from thirty-five to forty percent, an increase of five percentage points. Dave, who has attended The Gathering more than ten years, shared about their discovery of the importance of unity; “The series made me much more aware of the need for unity and made me want to do more to create and sustain greater unity.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Participants</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belief in the unity of the church</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>+11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.2 below illustrates that when asked about their belief in the unity of the church, participants from The Gathering experienced an increase from seventy percent before the series to eighty-eight percent afterwards; an increase of eighteen percentage points. Additionally, the strength of agreement among gathering participants also increased by thirteen percentage points, from twenty-five to thirty-eight percent. Libby, a female who has attended The Gathering for more than ten years, shared how the series helped her understand how the different worship venues can be a unifying strength,

I grew up traditional Southern Baptist and it has been a process to break out of the traditional one style of worship fits all box. The sermon series brought home the truth in a clear way that our diversity is our strength as long as loving/worshipping God is what unifies us as a church. . . . Pioneer Drive is a stronger, more loving, more effective church because of our diversity.

Table 4.2: Among The Gathering Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Gathering Venue</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belief in the Unity of the Church</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>+18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3 below illustrates that when asked about their belief in the unity of the church, participants from Celebration Worship increased from eighty-one to eighty-five percent agreement. The strength of agreement changed from forty-one to forty-four percent.

Table 4.3: Among Celebration Worship Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Celebration Worship Venue</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belief in the unity of the church</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>+4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.4 below illustrates that the perception of unity increased among every independent and dependent variable, with the largest increase in the perception of unity found with those who are part of a church ministry without members from a different worship venue, those involved in a mission without members from a different worship venue, and those who attend Sunday School without church members from a different worship venue. Attending a Sunday School class, church ministry, or off-campus mission project with members from a different worship venue could serve as a contributing factor to a person experiencing unity with members from a different worship venue. The post-intervention survey revealed that the highest increase in perception of unity occurred among members in the dependent variable group; those who do not attend Sunday School, church ministries, or off-campus mission activities with members from a different worship venue.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Pre</th>
<th>Post</th>
<th>Total +/-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunday School with members from a different worship venue</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>+8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday School without members from a different worship venue</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>+14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church ministry with members from a different worship venue</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>+7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church ministry without members from a different worship venue</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>+18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-campus mission activity with members from a different worship venue</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>+3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-campus mission activity without members from a different worship venue</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>+18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusively, these surveys demonstrated that the common sermon series on unity in both venues for corporate worship increased the belief that the church is unified regardless of whether they participated in a Sunday School class with church members from a different worship venue. James has been a member less than a year and is not a
part of a Sunday School class with church members who attend a different worship venue, shared how he grew in his understanding of unity; “It was good to hear a series about unity that didn’t revolve around music styles or personalities.”

Participants’ belief in the unity of the church among respondents who participated in a church ministry with members from another worship venue increased seven percentage points, while agreement increased among members not involved in a ministry with other church members by eighteen percentage points. Jamie, over age sixty, who has been a member for more than ten years and is not involved in a church ministry with members from a different worship venue, shared her belief concerning the unity of the church,

I think we are a pretty unified church, but all of us can stop and think about our reactions to each other and each idea that comes up. All worship doesn't have to be identical to be unified, just the core beliefs taught through God's Word is a must. I think this series should help us to study God's Word and his idea of unity and then dedicate ourselves to doing what He commands us to do to achieve unity with Him, our families, our friends, and especially through the church. Prayer and studying of God's Word are two of the great avenues to achieve this unity and then put all into action.

*Impact of Common Sermons Series on Church Unity*

The common sermon series on unity in both venues for corporate worship increased the belief that PDBC is unified among those who are and who are not involved in a church ministry with church members from a different worship venue. Participants’ belief in the unity of the church among respondents who participate in an off-campus mission activity with members who attended a different worship venue increased slightly by three percentage points and among those who are not by eighteen percentage points. When thinking about the impact of the series, Dana, who attends The Gathering, has been
a member for less than five years, and is regularly involved in mission activities with members from other venues, reflected upon what she learned from the series, “How and what we as the members of the church can be more united and equipped us with tools for our mission.” The intervention helped increase the belief that the church is unified among participants who are and are not a part of an off-campus mission activity with church members from a different worship venue.

Table 4.5 below illustrates the result when all participants were asked whether they believed a common sermon series enhanced the unity of the church. Eighty-five percent of study participants agreed that having the same series preached in all venues for corporate worship enhanced the unity of the church. The strength of agreement concerning the degree to which participants believed a common sermon series enhanced the unity of the church was fifty-seven percent. Susan, who attends The Gathering and attends weekly reflected on her participation in the study by saying, “I believe that having all four services on either end of the church participating in the same series strongly impacted unity in the church. So many members [are] involved in the many ministries [and] we are one body every Sunday.” Tanner, who is under age thirty-nine and attends Celebration Worship said, “I think it sent a message that we truly are one church. One message. I like the idea of continuing this style.” Participants’ believed that having the same sermon series preached in all venues for corporate worship enhanced the unity of the church. While several respondents felt that it was too early to tell the impact of a common sermon series on the entire church, Jim, who is over age sixty and attends Celebration Worship, shared his hopeful outcome, “I am hoping that this sermon series
made people think about their role in worship, and purpose of connection with the church. Are we just going through the motions of attending Sunday services?"

Table 4.5: Among All Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post-Intervention Response</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Common sermon series in all worship venues enhanced the unity of the church</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.6 below illustrates the result when participants were asked their belief concerning the impact of a common series on the unity of the church. Ninety-one percent of The Gathering venue participants and 100% of Celebration Worship participants agreed that a common series enhanced the unity of the church. The strength of agreement concerning the belief that a common series enhanced the unity of the church was slightly higher in The Gathering, fifty-seven percent, than it was in Celebration Worship, fifty-eighty percent. Ken has been a member for more than ten years and shared his reflection on participating in the sermon series, “It pointed to the importance of unity in a thoughtful way.” When asked if a common sermon series on unity enhanced the unity of the church, ninety-one percent of gathering participants and 100% of Celebration respondents reported that a common sermon series enhanced the unity of the church. Libby shared,

The series was a reminder that we do not have to hear the same sermons, sing the same type of songs, dress the same way, have the same outlooks, political beliefs, economic status, same race or nationality. We, as a church unite as a body of believers to love Christ and share his love and grace with the world. Christ is our connection to each other and transcends any and all differences between us. At Pioneer Drive we are one church with vibrant, diverse worship venues united in our love for God.

Amy attends The Gathering and shared, “I believe it gave the entire body of Pioneer Drive knowledge of what we as a whole want our church to be. It puts us on the same
page no matter what service you attend.” Participants in both worship venues overwhelmingly believe that a common sermon series enhanced the unity of the church.

Table 4.6: By Worship Venue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common sermon series in all worship venues enhanced the unity of the church</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Gathering</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebration Worship</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.7 below illustrates that when participants were asked if a sermon series specifically on unity increased the unity of the church, eighty-five percent agreed. A total of fifty-four percent agreed strongly that the common sermon series on unity in all worship venues enhanced the unity of the church. Jim highlighted the impact of a common sermon series in both worship venues, “I really liked the idea that all areas and both worship settings were hearing the same message at the same time. I think it helped to dispel myths that we have two churches under one roof.”

Table 4.7: Among All Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post-Intervention Response</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Common sermon series on unity in all worship venues enhanced the unity of the church</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.8 below illustrates that when asked if a common sermon series on unity enhanced the unity of the church, eighty-six percent of participants agreed. Among The Gathering participants, sixty-eight percent strongly agreed and among participants from Celebration Worship forty-two percent strongly agreed, a significant difference of twenty-six percentage points. When asked about the impact of the sermon series, Dana, who attends The Gathering venue, shared, “it reminds us of our common purpose.” Ann
attends the Celebration Worship venue and shared how she perceived both worship venues were linked throughout the sermon series,

The series gave us a sense that the Gospel is being preached in both Services. We all have the same goal in mind and that is to tell others about the Good News. The series gave us a better picture that we as Pioneer Drive members are to be busy in the Word and Service to others. It also was good to see other people with a desire to worship their Lord and Savior.

Melissa attends The Gathering venue and shared how the series brought a better understanding of unity, “It solidified the biblical answer to what ‘unified’ actually is instead of our human definition of ‘if they look like me, talk like me, dress like me . . . then we can be unified.’ I appreciate this series.” She further observed that the sermon series made them more mindful of their connection to others, “I think it naturally made us more mindful of one another. I am hopeful that in that mindfulness we are willing to recognize just how different we can be and yet we find commonality and unity in Christ.”

Meredith, who attends The Gathering worship venue, explained how she discovered a common connection and purpose through Jesus,

The series gave me a different view on the idea of unity. Previously I thought for a church to be unified, all members needed to like the same music, see scripture the same way, agree on everything. Now, I feel, we can all bring our opinions and ideas, not everyone has to see things the same way, we can embrace our differences while loving and worshiping our one Lord. Jesus is our bridge.

Table 4.8: By Worship Venue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common sermon series on unity in all worship venues enhanced the unity of the church</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Gathering</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebration Worship</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Changes in Understanding of Biblical Unity

Table 4.9 below illustrates the result when participants were asked if they understood biblical unity and the common sermon. The question yielded an increase of eleven percentage points from eighty-eight to ninety-nine percent in the participant’s overall understanding of biblical unity. The strength of agreement concerning biblical unity rose considerably by thirty-six percentage points, from forty-nine to eighty-two percent. Grant reflected on what he learned through the series, “I learned many new definitions, ideas and new perspectives on church unity. I had never thought about unity being a gift of the Holy Spirit. Also, unity includes diversity and I was challenged by the thought that unity makes the Gospel believable.” Concerning the importance of biblical unity and the impact upon worship, Jamie said, “Made me think of what unity meant according to the Bible and through worship.” The common sermon series on unity in both worship venues led to an increase in the participants’ understanding of biblical unity. When reflecting upon what was learned Blair stated that the sermon series, “Helped open my eyes to the fact that unity is much more than people thinking the same on certain church issues.”

Table 4.9: Among All Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Understanding of biblical unity</th>
<th>All Participants</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre</td>
<td></td>
<td>88%</td>
<td></td>
<td>+10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post</td>
<td></td>
<td>99%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As illustrated in Table 4.10 below, post-intervention analysis of responses from The Gathering venue and their understanding of biblical unity revealed an increase in total agreement by seven percentage points, from ninety-three to 100 percent. There was a thirty-three percent increase in participants who strongly agreed on understanding
biblical unity, from forty to seventy-three percent. When reflecting on their understanding of biblical unity, Melba, over age sixty, observed, “I feel that Biblical unity is an absolute necessity, although I hadn’t given it much thought before these sermons. I’m glad PDBC can have the traditional and also the contemporary services. It reaches more people. And I liked the idea of both services using the same subject matter.” The common sermon series on unity increased participants understanding of biblical unity in both worship venues.

Table 4.10: Among The Gathering Venue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Gathering</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of biblical unity</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>+7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As illustrated in Table 4.11 below, in analyzing responses from the Celebration Worship venue and their understanding of biblical unity, agreement rose by twelve percentage points, from eighty-five to ninety-seven percent. Strength of agreement increased from forty to seventy-three percent, an increase of thirty-three percentage points. When asked the impact of the series had on him, Wes reported no impact, but for an interesting reason, “This is not because the sermon material was lacking, but only because I already identified well with what the material was focused on. The material shared many similarities to my current beliefs.” The common sermon series on unity revealed an increase in the agreement concerning the unity of PDBC. The common sermon series on unity revealed an increase in the strength of Celebration Worship participants’ understanding of biblical unity.
As illustrated in Table 4.12 below, participants’ understanding of biblical unity increased among those involved in Sunday School classes, church ministries, and off-campus mission activities with or without church members from a different worship venue. Participating in a Sunday School class, church ministry, or off-campus mission activity without members from a different worship venue demonstrated the largest percentage point increase. Sunday School classes, church ministries, and off-campus activities with members from a different worship venue can contribute to unity, which demonstrated the importance of the intervention in helping those participants not involved in a Sunday School class, church ministry, or off-campus mission activity experience unity.

Nicole is involved in a Sunday School class with church members who attend a different worship venue and reflected on the impact of the sermon series by stating, “I was reminded of how much the Bible talks about unity within the body of Christ! And I am encouraged that our church strives for unity as a family of believers! We are all on the same team—Jesus' team.” Participants’ understanding of biblical unity did not change among those who are involved in a Sunday School class with church members from a different worship venue but rose by fourteen percent among those not involved in a Sunday school class with church members from a different worship venue.

Participants’ understanding of biblical unity among those involved in a church ministry with members who attend a different worship venue increased by five
percentage points and among those who are not by twenty percentage points. Joey is involved in a Sunday School class and church ministry with members from a different worship venue and shared, “I did the small group study as well. It made me look for unity instead of disunity. Also, it helped me to re-focus on my personal role in unity, and creating unity through the Holy Spirit.” Regardless of whether they were in a church ministry with members from a different worship venue, participants’ understanding of biblical unity was increased by the intervention.

Resulting from the intervention, participants’ understanding of biblical unity among those who are involved in an off-campus mission activity with church members from a different worship venue increased by six percentage points and among participants who are not by fifteen percentage points. Tom, who is involved in mission activities with church members from a different worship venue, shared what he learned from the common sermon series regarding service, “A better understanding of how our church uses everybody's gifts to serve the whole of the church and surrounding community.”

Table 4.12: Among Independent and Dependent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Pre</th>
<th>Post</th>
<th>Total +/-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunday School with members from a different worship venue</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>+0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday School without members from a different worship venue</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>+14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church ministry with members from a different worship venue</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>+5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church ministry without members from a different worship venue</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>+20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-campus mission activity with members from a different worship venue</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>+6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-campus mission activity without members from a different worship venue</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question 2 Findings

Participants’ Experience of Connection

Table 4.13 below illustrates that when participants were asked about experiencing a common connection with other members at PDBC, the intervention resulted in a five percent increase, from ninety to ninety-five percent. Strength of agreement concerning a common connection decreased from sixty-three to fifty-eight percent. Sharing about the impact of the sermon series and the common connection that believers share in Jesus, a female who has been a member for more than ten years and attends Celebration Worship said, “Knowing that the church membership has many different personalities with different thoughts but knowing that Christ is the center, the pinnacle that brings us together.”

Table 4.13: Among All Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel a connection with other members at Pioneer Drive Baptist Church.</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>+5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.14 below illustrates that when asked about their experience of connection with other church members, ninety-eight percent of respondents from The Gathering agreed to an experience of connection with other church members, an increase of eleven percentage points. Strength of agreement concerning experience of connection changed from fifty-nine to sixty-three percent. Trey, who is younger than thirty and normally attends The Gathering venue, shared how he grew in his understanding of what it means to be connected, “It was a good reminder that unity is not sameness . . . which is what I try to make unity sometimes.”
Table 4.14: Among The Gathering Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Gathering Venue</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experience of connection</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>+11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.15 below illustrates that when Celebration Worship participants were asked about their experience of connection with other members, ninety-three percent agreed to an experience of connection pre- and post-intervention. Strength of agreement concerning participants experience of connection decreased by thirteen percentage points. Karla normally attends Celebration Worship and reflected on the sermon series by stating, “It made me realize we at PDBC are not totally unified.” Celebration Worship participants reported a decrease in the strength of agreement concerning connection with other members, however, an increase in Celebration Worship participants who somewhat agree that they experience a common connection meant that there was no change in overall agreement concerning experiences of connection.

Table 4.15: Among Celebration Worship Venue Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Celebration Worship Venue</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experience of connection</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>+0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.16 below illustrates that participants’ experience of connection mostly increased among participants involved in a Sunday school class, church ministry, or mission activity, with or without members from a different worship venue. Increases of the most significance in experience of connection were among participants involved in a Sunday School class, church ministry, or off-campus mission activity without members from a different worship venue. Participants’ experience of common connection among
those involved in a Sunday School Class with church members from a different worship venue increased by five percentage points, while those who do not attend a Sunday School class with members from a different venue increased by seven percentage points. Janice is involved in a Sunday School class with church members from different worship venue and provided insight about the common connection all church members share in Christ; “It reminded me that all of us have gifts, all are equally important to the body of Christ as we are all necessary. Not one part of the body is more important than another.” The common sermon series on unity in both venues for corporate worship increased the connection that church members experienced among those who are and are not involved in a Sunday School class with church members from a different worship venue.

Participants’ experience of a common connection among those involved in a church ministry with members who attend a different worship venue increased by two percentage points and among participants who are not experiences of connection increased by ten percentage points. Upon conclusion of the series, Karla shared how the series made them want to explore other church ministries, “[It] caused me to stop and think, learn of the importance of unity and think about unity in areas/ministries of the church that I'm not familiar with.” The common sermon series on unity in both venues for corporate worship increased the experience of connection that church members experienced among those who are and who are not involved in a church ministry with members who attend a different worship venue.

Participants’ experience of connection among those involved in an off-campus mission activity with church members from a different worship venue decreased by one percentage point and among participants who had experiences of connection increased
eleven percentage points. The common sermon series on unity in both corporate worship venues increased the likelihood that someone not involved in an off-campus mission activity with church members from a different worship venue experienced a common connection, while it slightly decreased among those who are involved in an off-campus mission activity with church members from a different worship venue. Terri, who is not involved in an off-campus mission activity with church members from a different venue, shared how she always felt like PDBC had a common purpose and the series only enhanced the experience of purpose, “I have always felt a strong unity at Pioneer Drive that’s what has drawn us to this church. We have always felt welcome and loved from many different people here. If anything, it has brought us all together even more.”

Table 4.16: Among Independent and Dependent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Pre</th>
<th>Post</th>
<th>Total +/-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunday School with members from a different worship venue</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>+5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday School without members from a different worship venue</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>+7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church ministry with members from a different worship venue</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>+2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church ministry without members from a different worship venue</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>+10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-campus mission activity with members from a different worship venue</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>-1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-campus mission activity without members from a different worship venue</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>+11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Changes in Experience of Purpose

Table 4.17 below illustrates the result when participants were asked if they experienced a common purpose with other members. A total of ninety-five percent agreed, a one percentage point change over the pre-intervention survey. Strength of agreement changed from a pre-intervention strong agreement of fifty-six percent to a post-intervention agreement at fifty-three percent, a change of three percentage points.
Sharon, who attends Celebration Worship, reflected on the purpose she came to understand during the sermon series, “It made me realize that to serve God, we need to be united in one purpose and goal—to send the same message to the world that we serve one God. We are many, with many types of missions, but ultimately, we shall love the Lord with all our heart and soul.” A high percentage of other participants also reported seeing an expanded opportunity for common purpose. Sharon observed, “It made me see the diversity in our members and realize together we are stronger. We have different gifts and needs, and can benefit God’s kingdom when we come together.”

Table 4.17: Among All Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience of Purpose</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>+1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.18 below illustrates that when asked their experience of purpose with other church members, participants’ responses from The Gathering venue increased in agreement from eighty-two to ninety-three percent, a total of eleven percentage points. Strength of agreement increased nine percentage points, from forty-nine to fifty-eight. With multiple venues for worship and many different church ministries, Terri offered a word of caution to stress the importance of a focused purpose, “It is easy for large churches to become silos and our unity is an act of Christian witness. It is important that we do not become a silo.”
Table 4.18: Among The Gathering Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Gathering</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experience of Purpose</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>+11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.19 below illustrates that Celebration Worship participants’ agreement concerning their experience of purpose was ninety-seven percent at the pre-intervention assessment and ninety-eight percent at the post-intervention assessment. The strength of agreement at the pre-intervention assessment, however, was sixty-four percent and forty-nine percent at the post-intervention assessment, a decrease of fifteen percentage points.

Table 4.19: Among Celebration Worship Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Celebration Worship</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experience of Purpose</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>+1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As illustrated in Table 4.20 below, a high experience of purpose was experienced by many participants before the intervention. Notably, the most significant change was a decrease of ten percentage points among church members who do not participate in a church ministry with members from a different worship venue. Many church ministries are integrated between worship venues; therefore, participants that are not involved in a church ministry with members from a different worship venue are more than likely not involved in any church ministry. Participants’ experience of a common purpose among those who are involved in a church ministry with members who attend a different worship venue increased by three percentage points and among those who are not their experience of purpose decreased by ten percentage points. Connie is involved in a church ministry with members from a different worship venue and explained how the sermon
series helped them understand their purpose, “[It helped me to] understand the concept of unity through the lens of a church. Also, inspired me to continue to enhance unity through the church with my God given talents and abilities.”

Participants’ experience of a common purpose among those who are and are not involved in a Sunday School class with church members from different worship venues did not change significantly. Susan is involved in a Sunday School class with church members who attend a different worship venue and shared the impact of the sermon series; “It helped me look at myself and my involvement in the church.” The intervention slightly increased the experience of purpose that church members experienced among those who are and are not involved in a Sunday School class with church members from a different worship venue.

Participants’ experience of a common purpose among those not involved in an off-campus mission activity with church members from a different worship venue and among those who are not did not measurably change. Patricia is not involved in an off-campus mission activity with church members and explained how the series made them want to volunteer at the church, “Made me think about how to contribute to the unity. Encouraged me to start volunteering at PDBC.” The intervention had no measurable change concerning participants experience of purpose, regardless of whether the participant was involved in an off-campus mission activity with church members from a different worship venue.
Table 4.20: Among Independent and Dependent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Pre</th>
<th>Post</th>
<th>Total +/-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunday School with members from a different worship venue</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>+1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday School without members from a different worship venue</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>+1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church ministry with members from a different worship venue</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>+3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church ministry without members from a different worship venue</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>-10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-campus mission activity with members from a different worship venue</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>-2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-campus mission activity without members from a different worship venue</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>+1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Changes in Experience of PDBC Unity

Table 4.21 below illustrates the result when participants were asked about their belief concerning the unity of PDBC. Their agreement increased nine percentage points, from eighty-two to ninety-one. Strength of agreement increased from forty to forty-four percent. Jo, who is older than sixty and attends Celebration Worship, reflected on the importance of the series in helping them understand unity, “It pointed out that PDBC is a truly unified church. We are blessed to be part of a body of Christians who value the same beliefs regardless of the type of worship service they prefer.”

Table 4.21: Among All Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All Participants</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belief in the unity of Pioneer Drive Baptist Church</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>+9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As illustrated in Table 4.22 below, when asked about their belief in the unity of PDBC, agreement among The Gathering Venue increased by eleven percentage points, from eighty to ninety-one. Strength of agreement also rose from thirty-one to forty-three percent, an increase of twelve points. Francette normally attends The Gathering venue
and learned that the unity of the church is important. She shared, “It made me realize the importance of having a unified church.”

Table 4.22: Among The Gathering Venue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Gathering Venue</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belief in the unity of Pioneer Drive Baptist Church</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>+11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.23 below illustrates that when Celebration Worship participants where asked about their belief in the unity of PDBC, overall agreement increased from seventy-six to ninety-two percent, an increase of sixteen points. Strength of agreement also increased from forty to forty-six percent. Amy learned through the series what the church ought to strive for as she shared, “It made me understand what God intends for His church to strive for.”

Table 4.23: Among the Celebration Worship Venue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Celebration Worship Venue</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belief in the unity of Pioneer Drive Baptist Church</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>+16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.22 below illustrates the increase of belief in the unity of the church among church members involved in Sunday School classes, church ministries, and off-campus mission activities with or without church members. Among each category, agreement rose to around ninety percent concerning the unity of PDBC.

Participants’ belief in the unity of PDBC increased among those involved in a Sunday School class with church members from a different worship venue by nine percentage points and by seven percentage points among those who are not involved in a Sunday School class with church members from a different worship venue. Betsy, who is
younger than thirty-nine, is involved in a Sunday School class with church members from a different worship venue and reflected on her role in helping the church experience unity, “While I still maintain my opinion that PDBC is not as unified as we could be, I did learn that the unity must start with me. I can be a unifier. My mindset is of paramount importance in the implementation of unity.” The common sermon series on unity in both venues for corporate worship increased the belief that PDBC is unified among those who are and are not involved in a Sunday School class with church members from a different worship venue.

Participants’ belief in the unity of PDBC among those who are involved in a church ministry with members from a different venue increased by eight percentage points and ten percentage points among participants not involved in a church ministry with members from a different worship venue. Even after the sermon series, a couple of participants expressed the perspective of Dwight, “I feel that I understand the unity of all Christian churches. I did not feel that I learned anything that made me feel that The Gathering and the Celebration Worship congregations [are] one body.” With more than ninety percent of respondents agreeing that PDBC is unified, however, the perspective of Dawn, who is younger than thirty-nine and normally attends Celebration Worship, is more likely true of most respondents and their view of members who attend a different worship venue, “I know PDBC is unified. I don’t feel like a separate church because other[s] go to [the] gathering.” The common sermon series on unity in both venues for corporate worship increased the belief that PDBC is unified among those who are and are not involved in a church ministry with members from a different worship venue.
Greg, who is involved in an off-campus mission activity once a month or more, shared that the series taught them that working towards unity is a direct response to God’s love, “Our church falls short on unity and it’s up to us to bring it together. It is a direct response to our love for God.” Participants’ belief in the unity of PDBC increased among those who are involved by six percentage points and eleven percentage points among those who are not involved in an off-campus mission activity with church members from a different worship venue. The intervention increased the belief that PDBC is unified among those who are and are not involved in an off-campus mission activity with church members from a different worship venue.

Table 4.22: Among Independent and Dependent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent and Dependent Variables</th>
<th>Pre</th>
<th>Post</th>
<th>Total +/-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunday School with members from a different worship venue</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>+9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday School without members from a different worship venue</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>+7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church ministry with members from a different worship venue</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>+8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church ministry without members from a different worship venue</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>+10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-campus mission activity with members from a different worship venue</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>+6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-campus mission activity without members from a different worship venue</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion

After six weeks of teaching centering on biblical unity, this project accomplished its stated purpose of leading PDBC, a church with multiple venues for corporate worship, to experience a better understanding of unity and experience of connection and purpose with church members. Belief in the unity of the church increased by eleven percentage points and eighteen percentage points in The Gathering venue. Participants’ experience of connection increased by five percentage points overall and eleven percentage points in
The Gathering. Participants’ experience of purpose increased by eleven percentage points in The Gathering. Regarding belief in the unity of PDBC, a nine-percentage point increase was gained among all participants, eleven percentage points in The Gathering, and sixteen in Celebration Worship. Participants’ understanding of biblical unity increased by ten percentage points among all participants and seventeen percentage points among Celebration Worship. Belief that a common sermon series enhanced the unity to the church was held by eighty-five percent of participants and belief that a common sermon series on unity enhanced the unity of the church was held by eighty-six percent of participants. Because of the series, church members grew in appreciation for the topic of unity and the significance of unity in church life.
CHAPTER FIVE
Discussion and Reflection

Summary of Significant Findings

This project sought to lead a church with multiple venues for corporate worship to experience common connection and purpose. Pre-intervention surveys confirmed the researcher’s hypothesis that PDBC is unified in many ways but the understanding and experience of unity could be improved. The pre-survey intervention revealed a general agreement concerning participants’ understanding of unity, experience of common connection and purpose with other church members, belief in the unity of the church, and the strength of agreement concerning the unity of Pioneer Drive Baptist Church, participants’ experience of connection and purpose with other church members and participant’s understanding of biblical unity varied significantly among respondents.

This study was guided by two research questions:

1. What effect does a common sermon series on unity utilizing a common biblical text in both venues for corporate worship have on the participants’ understanding of unity?

2. What effect does a common sermon series on unity utilizing a common biblical text in both venues for corporate worship have on the participants’ experience of church unity?

When respondents were surveyed about their understanding and experience of unity before the project began, their responses confirmed that generally church members understand biblical unity, and they experience that unity at PDBC, though the experience of unity could be improved.
After experiencing a common series about unity for six weeks, participants exhibited significant increase in their understanding and experience of unity with other church members at PDBC. These results manifested themselves in several primary findings: 1) Belief in the unity of the church increased by eleven percentage points and eighteen percentage points in The Gathering venue; 2) Participants’ experience of connection increased by five percentage points overall and eleven percentage points in The Gathering; 3) Participants’ experience of purpose increased by eleven percentage points in The Gathering; 4) Regarding belief in the unity of PDBC, a nine-percentage point increase was gained among all participants, eleven percentage points in The Gathering sixteen in Celebration Worship; 5) Participants’ understanding of biblical unity increased by ten percentage points among all participants and seventeen percentage points among Celebration Worship; and 6) Belief that a common sermon series enhanced the unity to the church was held by eighty-five percent of participants and belief that a common sermon series on unity enhanced the unity of the church was held by eighty-six percent of participants.

Three of the survey questions (regarding Sunday School class participation and ministry and mission activities) are designed to account for other means by which a participant might experience unity within the church (independent variable).

1. I am involved in a Sunday School class with church members who attend a different worship venue than me at Pioneer Drive Baptist Church.

2. I am involved in a church ministry with church members who attend a different worship venue than me at Pioneer Drive Baptist Church.

3. I am involved in an off-campus mission activity (service project, mission trip, etc.) with church members who attend a different worship venue than me at Pioneer Drive Baptist Church.
By analyzing the dependent variables (questions related to the experience and understanding of unity) with the independent variables (other ways participants might experience unity with church members from a different worship), the analysis conclusively revealed that the intervention positively increased nearly every independent and dependent variable. Regardless of whether participants were in a Sunday School class, church ministry, or mission activity with church members from a different worship venue, the result was that their understanding and experience of unity increased. Only three variables decreased after the intervention: 1) the impact of off-campus mission activities among participants who are involved in an off-campus mission activity and participants experience of connection, 2) participants’ experience of purpose among church members who are not involved in a church ministry with members from a different venue, and 3) participants’ experience of purpose and participants who participate in an off-campus mission activity with members from another worship venue.

Post-intervention analysis revealed that participants reported an increase in their understanding, experience, and appreciation of unity. Participants noted that they will have a continuing appreciation and concern for the unity of the church.

Theoretical Significance

The theological significance of this project lies in its investigation into the condition of the relationships among the people of God with God and other members of the body of Christ. Unity is ultimately found in the love of God that God’s people share with God and others. The way in which church members treat one another ought to flow out of a deep sense of appreciation for the love that God has demonstrated in Christ Jesus, which ought to overflow to others in the church and beyond. Unity is crucial
because it makes the gospel believable as it displays to a watching world the union God wants to have with all people.

We live in a sharply divided world that does not handle differences well. People tend to flock to others who are most similar and what is most different is avoided. Consequently, when people do not share their lives with those who are different, mistrust develops which can often lead to fear and even hatred of the other. Whether the differences are political, national, ethnic, economic, or gender based, the world knows division. Sadly, churches can often follow suit and mirror the same divisiveness tendencies found in the world. Further, churches that offer different styles of worship are often characterized as following the marketplace demands of consumer taste, which only leads to more division. By examining unity biblically and theologically, the church gained understanding that multiple venues for worship are not counter-productive to mission but rather flow out of a mission to help all people experience a relationship with God.

In chapter two, I mentioned several theological implications that underscore the importance of unity. First, God is the only God and requires that Christians worship God alone. The love of God expressed through worship unites the people of God. Second, unity is a vehicle for God’s mission in the world that makes the gospel believable. The union of Christ followers bears witness to the mission of God; the union of people with God and people with one another. Third, focusing on the shared connection that Jesus brings to the church heals divisions in the body of Christ. Sharing a connection and purpose in Christ brings unity to a fractured church. Fourth, true unity enables an acceptance and affirmation of diversity. The Body of Christ cannot be who Jesus
intended it to be when there are cliques, divisions, and partial treatment of church
members. Fifth, Christ-like virtues foster diversity and togetherness. Under the leadership
of the Holy Spirit, as church members treat others within the body lovingly, gently,
humbly, and patiently, peace reigns and seals the unity of the church. Finally, a church
that is unified demonstrates God’s love to a watching world. Worshipping together,
sharing lives together while learning the way of Jesus, contributing to the needs of the
body, and sharing God’s gracious love beyond the walls of the faith community are all
ways that demonstrate God’s inviting love to a watching world.

Also in chapter two, I wrote that unity is a vehicle for God’s mission. I quoted
Francis Schaeffer’s concern that the unity of Christ followers is the final apologetic; that
“we cannot expect the world to believe that the Father sent the Son, that Jesus’s claims
are true, and that Christianity is true, unless the world sees some reality of the oneness of
ture Christians.”¹ Love and unity form an apologetic that serves as a prerequisite for
mission as well as a tangible confirmation for the achievement of mission. As Schaeffer
contends, “the world is going to judge whether or not Jesus has been sent by the Father
on the basis of something that is open to observation.”² How believers treat God, fellow
brothers and sisters in Christ, and people outside of the faith community is deeply
theological. This common, six-week series on unity helped the church to grow in their
own relationship with God, their understanding of God’s mission in the world, how the
church fits into that mission, how they can enhance the unity within the church, and how
the dynamic of unity impacts those inside and outside the church.

¹. Schaeffer, The Mark of the Christian, 27.
². Ibid., 35.
In a deeply divided world, the fundamental concern of this project was that division has no place in the body of Christ. Churches that are cliquish are cancerous. Believers who do not treat one another with Christ-like virtues do not experience peace, and therefore do not experience unity. Churches that tolerate sameness and a lack of diversity miss out on the true boundary-breaking work that God has accomplished in Christ Jesus. Believers who allow interpersonal disputes or prejudices to cloud their relationships will not experience the abundant life that God intends. Likewise, even churches that have multiple venues for corporate worship can still experience unity as they worship the same Lord, share the same purpose in Christ, share common connections with other believers, and say the same thing about Jesus. Experiencing unity by worshipping God, loving one another, appreciating differences, and allowing Jesus Christ to be the unifying connection and purpose for the church are what fundamentally unites a church. This project helped the congregation understand that pastors, instruments, buildings, or styles are not ultimately what unifies a church. Instead, unity is a gift of the Holy Spirit that allows a church, no matter how it is structured, to experience common connection and purpose.

Practical Significance

I noted the problem that can occur when churches adopt a plan to hold multiple venues for corporate worship on the same campus. Many assert that this approach is two churches, indicative that a split is evident in the body. Can church members with multiple venues for corporate worship truly experience a common connection, purpose, experience, and understanding of unity?
In my role as Lead Pastor for The Gathering at PDBC, I have regularly visited with church members concerning the unity of our church. Some of these members believe that multiple venues for worship makes two churches, not one. Also, when describing PDBC’s approach to corporate worship with church leaders from other churches, many of them also assume that two venues for corporate worship is indicative of a split church. They observe that a common mission and purpose must be absent merely because believers worship in a different worship venue and hear the sermon preached by a different pastor. Many of these leaders are speaking out of their own limited experience and lack of biblical understanding concerning unity.

As this study demonstrated, church members who attend a church with multiple venues for corporate worship do experience a common connection and purpose with other members, along with a belief that the church is unified. Additionally, this study demonstrated that with a biblical and theological foundation concerning unity, the Holy Spirit can further deepen the experience of unity within the Body of Christ. Where members have common connection and purpose, where they are saying the same thing about Jesus, unity is present. As one of the venue preaching pastors at PDBC, it was immeasurably helpful to know that most participants agree that the church is unified and only a small percentage do not feel a common connection, purpose, or belief that the church is unified. This finding is immensely helpful for understanding the health of a church with multiple venues for corporate worship, as there are not many churches following this approach nor are there many resources to aid in church health or unity for churches that have multiple venues for corporate worship. When discussing unity at
PDBC, I concluded, thankfully, that the church is not having to fix a problem with disunity but rather has an opportunity to further strengthen its unity.

The participants in this study were a cross-section of the entire church at PDBC. This study revealed that most church members in a church with multiple venues for corporate believed before the study that the church was unified, experienced a common connection and purpose with other members, and that they understood biblical unity. After experiencing this study, the results demonstrated that a six-week sermon series on unity increased their experience of unity (common connection and purpose with other church members) and their understanding of biblical unity.

The limited sample of this project demonstrated that a common sermon series on unity in both venues for corporate worship helped the participants better understand and experience unity. By helping the congregation understand how unity is connected to worship, evaluating and committing to improving interpersonal relationships and urging the finding their place to belong and to serve with in the body of Christ, the reports of connection and purpose with other church members increased along with participants’ understanding of and belief in the unity of the church.

**Broader Significance**

Unity is a gift of the Holy Spirit that allows a church to experience a common connection and purpose. The importance of unity is not limited to PDBC or to churches that have multiple venues for corporate worship. Unity is an essential matter for all churches and few resources exists to help local churches understand and experience unity. Unity is a gift that all Christians and all churches can receive but it must be guarded, preserved, and protected.
The implications of the sermon series on unity can be replicated in all churches. In fact, churches that have one pastor, one worship time, and worship with one instrument all in the same building can be divided as well. This sermon series gives a theological basis applicable for all churches so they can develop a better understanding and experience of unity. Whether the church has multiple venues on campus for worship, utilizes satellite campuses, contains multiple worship styles but they meet in the same building with the same pastor in both venues, or has one worship style with one pastor preaching to the congregation, unity is important in each local church expression.

For churches that do have multiple venues for corporate worship or have satellite campuses, this sermon series and survey method could be relevant and helpful for assisting their church in unity. Further, many churches do not teach specifically on unity. Whether they have multiple venues, satellite campuses, or one worship service, the theological points are relevant to all congregations and give illustration and instruction to unity; a concept often thrown around but often nebulously defined.

By definition, unity is a gift of the Holy Spirit that allows a church to experience common connection and purpose. Therefore, implementation of these teachings to those outside the church would be difficult without a common connection to Jesus. Many of the teachings of this series, however, especially those on virtues that foster unity, could be used to invite people to worship God and experience a common connection and purpose unlike they have anywhere in the world. If people beyond the church were introduced to the teaching and learned holy, unity enhancing virtues, much of the intensity of the world’s hostility could diminish.
Future Research

As mentioned, if unity is a gift of the Holy Spirit that allows a church to experience common connection and purpose, then further research should be carried out at PDBC for the congregation to better understand and experience unity. Further research at PDBC should include studying the effects of venue preaching pastors swapping their usual preaching assignments, which would give church members in both venues a connection with the leaders. Though venue preaching pastors do not unify a church, they certainly play a role in fostering a sense of connection and purpose within the church.

Many factors can influence church members’ understanding of unity and their experience of unity with other church members. Further research could include church communication and specifically the effects of a unified brand on the unity the church experiences. Also, a study could be conducted on the experience of unity if the church were to have a joint worship service that blended worship styles and included the leadership from different worship venues. Studies of small groups, church ministries, and off campus mission activities could also be commissioned to further learn the effects of these different ministries on the unity of the church.

Additional research to assess PDBC’s experience and understanding of unity with other congregations could prove insightful. For instance, it would be helpful to know the results of a survey taken from a church that has multiple venues for corporate worship with two different preaching pastors who do not typically preach the same series and emphasis. Likewise, a survey taken from a church with multiple venues for corporate worship where the venue preaching pastors are either simulcasted through video or are preaching the same series and emphasis could be a helpful comparison group. Even
sharing the survey and analyzing results from a congregation with one venue for worship and one pastor would be helpful to establish a common evaluation of unity among different types of churches. This study would have benefited immensely from this information but due to feasibility constraints was not chosen as part of the methodology.

Conclusion

Unity is a gift of the Holy Spirit that allows a church to experience common connection and purpose. We were created to live in union with God and with people. The love of God united God’s people and serves as an example to the world of the union that God wants to bring to every man, woman, boy, and girl. The church is called to set the example in unity so that the gospel is believable in the eyes of the watching world. Jesus is the one connection that Christians share that bridges all divisions. Holy Spirit empowered virtues foster unity and a unified church has the power to make the gospel known to the world. Sadly, the division that characterizes the world can characterize the church and undermine the church’s influence.

This project sought to help a church with multiple venues for corporate worship experiencing a true understanding of biblical unity and experience a stronger connection and purpose with believers in the church. Experiencing a six-week study on unity had profound impacts on the understanding and experience of unity among project participants. They experienced a better understanding of what biblical unity is and looks like, a greater appreciation for the common connection they share with other believers, and a greater understanding of the purpose they share as the body of Christ. In short, experiencing the study of unity helped make the gospel more believable through PDBC.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Informed Consent

Baylor University
George W. Truett Theological Seminary
Consent Form for Research

PROTOCOL TITLE: The purpose of this study is to study the effect of a common sermon series on the topic of unity on the participants understanding and experience of unity at Pioneer Drive Baptist church.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: John Whitten

SUPPORTED BY: Baylor University

Purpose of the research: The purpose of this study is to study the effect of a common sermon series on the unity of Pioneer Drive Baptist Church. We are asking you to take part in this study because you are a member of Pioneer Drive Baptist Church.

Study activities: If you choose to be in the study, you will:
• Participate in corporate worship every week for six weeks from January 7-February 11, 2018.
• If it is necessary for you to miss a Sunday, you agree to listen to the sermon on-line or obtain a Compact Disc of the sermon.
• Fill out a pre-intervention survey.
• Fill out a post-intervention survey.

Risks and Benefits:
To the best of our knowledge, there are no risks to you for taking part in this study. There are no benefits to you from taking part in this research.

Confidentiality:
A risk of taking part in this study is the possibility of a loss of confidentiality. Loss of confidentiality includes having your personal information shared with someone who is not on the study team and was not supposed to see or know about your information. The researcher plans to protect your confidentiality.
We will keep the records of this study confidential by storing them under lock and key. We will make every effort to keep your records confidential. However, there are times when federal or state law requires the disclosure of your records. Authorized staff of Baylor University may review the study records for purposes such as quality control or safety.

**Compensation:**
You will not be paid for taking part in this study.

**Questions or concerns about this research study**
You can call us with any concerns or questions about the research. Our telephone numbers are listed below:
John Whitten R. Robert Creech
325-201-2496// 254-710-6697
If you want to speak with someone not directly involved in this research study, you may contact the Baylor University IRB through the Office of the Vice Provost for Research at 254-710-1438. You can talk to them about:
• Your rights as a research subject
• Your concerns about the research
• A complaint about the research

Taking part in this study is your choice. You are free not to take part or to stop at any time for any reason. No matter what you decide, there will be no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are entitled. If you decide to withdraw from this study, the information that you have already provided will be kept confidential. Information already collected about you cannot be deleted.

By continuing with the research and completing the study activities, you are providing consent.
APPENDIX B

Pre-Intervention Survey

Last 4 digits of phone #:________________
E-Mail Address:__________________________

1. Which worship venue do you attend most often at Pioneer Drive Baptist Church?
   a. 9:00 am Celebration Worship (Traditional)
   b. 9:00 am The Gathering (Contemporary)
   c. 10:30 am Celebration Worship (Traditional)
   d. 10:30 am The Gathering (Contemporary)

2. The church is unified.
   a. Strongly disagree
   b. Somewhat disagree
   c. Neither disagree nor agree
   d. Somewhat agree
   e. Strongly agree

3. I am involved in a Sunday School class with church members who attend a different worship venue than I at Pioneer Drive Baptist Church.
   a. Never
   b. Once a month or less
   c. Twice a month
   d. Three times a month
   e. Weekly

4. I am involved in a church ministry with church members who attend a different worship venue than I at Pioneer Drive Baptist Church.
   a. Never
   b. Once a month or less
   c. Twice a month
   d. Three times a month
   e. Weekly

5. I am involved in an off-campus mission activity (service project, mission trip, etc.) with church members who attend a different worship venue than I at Pioneer Drive Baptist Church.
   a. Never
   b. Once a month or less
   c. Twice a month
   d. Three times a month
   e. Weekly
6. I feel a connection with other members at Pioneer Drive Baptist Church.
   a. Strongly disagree
   b. Somewhat disagree
   c. Neither disagree nor agree
   d. Somewhat agree
   e. Strongly agree

7. I sense a common purpose with other members at Pioneer Drive Baptist Church.
   a. Strongly disagree
   b. Somewhat disagree
   c. Neither disagree nor agree
   d. Somewhat agree
   e. Strongly agree

8. Pioneer Drive Baptist Church is a unified church.
   a. Strongly disagree
   b. Somewhat disagree
   c. Neither disagree nor agree
   d. Somewhat agree
   e. Strongly agree

9. I understand the meaning of biblical unity.
   a. Strongly disagree
   b. Somewhat disagree
   c. Neither disagree nor agree
   d. Somewhat agree
   e. Strongly agree

10. How long have you attended Pioneer Drive Baptist Church?
    a. Less than 1 year
    b. 1-5 years
    c. 6-10 years
    d. More than 10 years

11. On average, how often do you attend worship services at Pioneer Drive Baptist Church?
    a. Once a month or less
    b. Twice a month
    c. Three times a month
    d. Weekly or more

12. What is your gender?
    a. Female
    b. Male
13. What is your age?
   a. Less than 20 years old
   b. 20 to 39 years old
   c. 40 to 59 years old
   d. 60 years old or older
APPENDIX C

Post-Intervention Survey

Last 4 digits of phone #: ______________________
E-Mail Address: ____________________________

1. Which worship venue do you attend most often at Pioneer Drive Baptist Church?
   a. 9:00 am Celebration Worship (Traditional)
   b. 9:00 am The Gathering (Contemporary)
   c. 10:30 am Celebration Worship (Traditional)
   d. 10:30 am The Gathering (Contemporary)

2. I feel unified with people who attend a different worship service than I at Pioneer Drive Baptist Church.
   a. Strongly disagree
   b. Somewhat disagree
   c. Neither disagree nor agree
   d. Somewhat agree
   e. Strongly agree

3. I am involved in a Sunday School class with church members who attend a different worship venue than I at Pioneer Drive Baptist Church.
   a. Never
   b. Once a month or less
   c. Twice a month
   d. Three times a month
   e. Weekly

4. I am involved in a church ministry with church members who attend a different worship venue than I at Pioneer Drive Baptist Church.
   a. Never
   b. Once a month or less
   c. Twice a month
   d. Three times a month
   e. Weekly

5. I am involved in an off-campus mission activity (service project, mission trip, etc.) with church members who attend a different worship venue than I at Pioneer Drive Baptist Church.
   a. Never
   b. Once a month or less
   c. Twice a month
d. Three times a month
e. Weekly

6. I feel a connection with other members at Pioneer Drive Baptist Church.
   a. Strongly disagree
   b. Somewhat disagree
   c. Neither disagree nor agree
d. Somewhat agree
e. Strongly agree

7. I sense a common purpose with other members at Pioneer Drive Baptist Church.
   a. Strongly disagree
   b. Somewhat disagree
c. Neither disagree nor agree
d. Somewhat agree
e. Strongly agree

8. Pioneer Drive Baptist Church is a unified church.
   a. Strongly disagree
   b. Somewhat disagree
c. Neither disagree nor agree
d. Somewhat agree
e. Strongly agree

9. I understand the meaning of biblical unity.
   a. Strongly disagree
   b. Somewhat disagree
c. Neither disagree nor agree
d. Somewhat agree
e. Strongly agree

10. Having the same sermon series preached in all venues for corporate worship enhanced the unity of the church.
    a. Strongly disagree
    b. Somewhat disagree
c. Neither disagree nor agree
d. Somewhat agree
e. Strongly agree

11. The sermon series on unity preached in all venues for corporate worship enhanced the unity of the church.
    a. Strongly disagree
    b. Somewhat disagree
c. Neither disagree nor agree
d. Somewhat agree  
e. Strongly agree

12. Over the past six weeks, how often did you attend worship services at Pioneer Drive Baptist Church?  
a. Once a month or less  
b. Twice a month  
c. Three times a month  
d. Weekly or more

What impact, if any, did the sermon series on biblical unity have on you?

What impact, if any, did the sermon series on biblical unity have on Pioneer Drive Baptist Church?

What suggestions, if any, do you have to improve the unity of Pioneer Drive Baptist Church?
APPENDIX D

Sermon Titles, Texts, and General Outlines

Sermon Series Title: 1 Church: A Study of Church Unity

Sermon 1: Title: 1 Church: 1 Lord
Text: Deut. 6:4-5
Main Idea: God is the only God and requires that Christians worship God alone. The love of God expressed through worship unites the people of God.
- Definition of unity: Unity is a gift of the Holy Spirit that enables a church to experience common connection and purpose
- The foundation for unity is rooted in our loving response to God’s love
- God is the only God and requires complete loyalty and worship
- God requires wholehearted covenant love and devotion from his people.
Image: Pure substance vs. mixture (chemistry)

Sermon 2: Title: 1 Church: 1 Mission
Text: John 17:20-24
Main Idea: Unity is a vehicle for God’s mission in the world that makes the gospel believable. The union of Christ followers bears witness to the mission of God; the union of people with God and people with one another.
- Unity among Christ followers is important
- Unity is an act of Christian witness.
- Spiritual formation is the fuel to cultivate unity
- Unity is a vehicle that enables the world to realize what God has been doing in Christ Jesus.
Image: Vehicle

Sermon 3: Title: 1 Church: 1 Connection
Text: 1 Cor. 1:10-17
Main Idea: Focusing on the shared connection Jesus brings to the church heals divisions in the body of Christ. Sharing a connection and purpose in Christ brings unity to a fractured church.
- Sharing diversity and maintaining unity means appreciating and accepting differences
• Sharing diversity and maintaining unity requires sharing a common life in the Spirit
• Sharing diversity and maintaining unity recognizes everyone as significant and connected to the life of the body
• Sharing diversity and maintaining unity uses believers gifts to strengthen the body.

*Images*: Silo, Mosaic

**Sermon 4:**  
*Title:* 1 Church: 1 Purpose  
*Text:* 1 Cor. 12:12-26  
*Main Idea:* True unity enables and acceptance and affirmation of diversity. The Body of Christ cannot be who Jesus intended it to be when there are cliques, divisions, and partial treatment of church members.  
• Unity is found in the acceptance of, and appreciation for, diversity.  
• Unity is a common life in the Spirit.  
• Unity happens when everyone is recognized as significant and connected to the life of the body.  
• God designed each believer to receive gift(s) to strengthen other parts of the body.  

*Image:* Mosaic, not melting pot, body

**Sermon 5:**  
*Title:* 1 Church: 1 Gift  
*Text:* Eph. 4:1-7, 11-16  
*Main Idea:* Christ-like virtues foster diversity and togetherness. Under the leadership of the Holy Spirit as church members treat others within the body lovingly, gently, humbly, and patiently peace reigns and seals the unity of the church.  
• Responding to God’s 1 Gift of union with Christ, Christians should:  
  • Walk worthy  
  • Walk together  
  • Walk responsibly

*Image:* Gift

**Sermon 6:**  
*Title:* 1 Church: 1 Devotion  
*Text:* Acts 2:42-47  
*Main Idea:* A church that is unified demonstrates God’s love well to a watching world. Practices of worshipping together, sharing lives together while learning the way of Jesus, contributing to the needs of the body, and sharing God’s gracious love beyond the walls of the faith community demonstrates God’s inviting love to a watching world.
• A devoted believer is lovingly, loyally, enthusiastically persistent to the body of Christ.
• The Acts church was devoted to the Apostle’s teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, prayer, giving to those in need, praising God
• The congregation must consider where their devotion lies
• Pioneer Drive members are committed to loving God supremely, living life together, contributing to the body of Christ not consuming, and going beyond the walls to share God’s love hear, there, and everywhere with friends, neighbors, and strangers
APPENDIX E

Recruitment Materials

Dear Pioneer Drive Baptist Church Member,

You have been randomly selected to participate in John Whitten’s Doctoral Research Project. John is the Lead Pastor for The Gathering and is studying unity and how a congregation with multiple venues for worship (The Gathering and Celebration Worship) experiences common connection and purpose. John (The Gathering) and Pastor Stan Allcorn (Celebration Worship) will be doing a common sermon series using the same Biblical text, sermon title, and general outline for 6 weeks on the topic of unity. (January 7-February 11th).

Participation in this project is completely voluntary and requires:

- Taking an on-line pre-intervention survey (link below) prior to December 22,
- Attending corporate worship in the venue in which you regularly worship every week of the sermon series (if you are out of town or unable to attend due to other circumstances obtain a CD of the sermon from the church office or listen to the sermon on-line),
- Taking an online survey post-intervention survey by February 16th. (Link for survey will be sent out on February 11th),
- Each survey requires 5-10 minutes.

Attached to this e-mail you will find a document of “Informed Consent” which answers questions in regards to the expectations of the research process. If you wish to participate in the project please read the Informed Consent. By clicking on the survey link below and taking the survey you are providing consent to be a part of this research study.

INSERT LINK TO PRE-INTERVENTION SURVEY

Thank you for considering taking part in this important research,

John Whitten
Lead Pastor, The Gathering
Pioneer Drive Baptist Church
APPENDIX F

Letter of Support for Baylor Institution Review Board

Date:

To Whom it May Concern:

Pioneer Drive Baptist Church supports John Whitten’s research project “Unity: Helping a Congregation with Multiple Venues for Worship Experience Common Connection and Purpose.” John has our permission to follow his research plan at Pioneer Drive Baptist Church.

Sincerely,

Stan Allcorn
Senior Pastor
Pioneer Drive Baptist Church
Abilene, TX
APPENDIX G

Announcement for Project Support

This spring Pioneer Drive will be participating in a research project by John Whitten, Pastor for The Gathering. 150 people from our church have been randomly selected to participate in two surveys that will help us understand unity and how a church with multiple venues for worship (The Gathering and Celebration Worship) experiences common connection and purpose. Selected participants have received an e-mail with information about participating or not participating in the study. This study will provide insight into how our church understands and experiences unity.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


