

INTEGRITY, a journal published by an independent nonprofit corporation, is basically a ministry of reconciliation which utilizes the varied talents of a large community of believers who seek accurately to reveal God to both the church and the world so that all may become one as he is one.

Integrity

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The Potter's Wheel

The church who is supporting a missionary outreach can surely profit from the lesson in Acts 15. Jerusalem was the home congregation, where the strength of the early church was largely concentrated. Among the believers there were former Pharisees, serious students and interpreters of the Scriptures, who were recognized authorities in matters of holiness, cleanliness, and pious living. These men were deeply disturbed when the Gentile Christians in distant cities like Antioch seemed to ignore such matters. For the evangelists who were going out with the Good News were not teaching these things, apparently departing from the faith as they moved away from Jerusalem. Ultimately it became necessary for the evangelists to come home to talk things over.

The question seemed to be, were the evangelists compromising the Gospel for

the sake of expediency, afraid to preach God's full message to the Gentiles for fear of offending them? Or were the former Pharisees just spinning their theology in a vacuum, busy developing theories but failing to test them out at the point of contact? Both possibilities are within the realm of human frailty.

The solution to this knotty problem can better be learned from the discussion than from the conclusion. The evangelists were short on logic, but long on testimony; they spent little time arguing, but a lot of time telling what God was doing among the Gentiles. And that testimony became the basis for a decision that seemed to satisfy all.

We plant, and we water, but does God give the increase? That, I believe, is the ultimate appeal in any such discussion.

-Gene Cowie

January/February 1985

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"The Unity Which The Spirit Gives"

"Spare no effort to make fast with bonds of peace the unity which the Spirit gives." (Eph. 4:3) So wrote the apostle Paul in his earnest plea that the Body of Christ, with its Spirit-created oneness, remain high on our priority list of Christian concerns. Yet the Body continues to be grievously fractured by a multitude of sinful attitudes and behaviors.

Among the various dynamics giving rise to the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement was a passionate concern for the unity of God's children. The first proposition of Thomas Campbell's *Declaration and Address* of 1809 affirms, "That the Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one;" and while recognizing that the church on earth must necessarily exist in particular and distinct congregations, reasons that "there ought to be no schisms, no uncharitable divisions among them. They ought to receive each other as Christ Jesus hath also received them, to the glory of God."

While decrying the fractured and torn condition of our Restoration Unity Movement, we take heart that today there are again healthy stirrings among the churches of this Movement to remove schisms, to replace the uncharitable divisions with bonds of love, and to exert every effort to maintain the "unity which the Spirit gives." In this initial issue of the new year, *Integrity* focuses on the practical efforts now being exerted by some Christians to effect unity among the people of God; and we are indebted to two of *Integrity's* board members for assuming the responsibility of gathering the material for this issue, Bruce and Diane Kilmer.

We believe that you will thrill with praise and gratitude to God for the conscientious steps being taken by some believers and congregations; and for this reason we have prepared this special issue both to inform and encourage others in our strife-torn brotherhood to begin actual implementation of that plea which we have verbalized about for decades, with apparently little intent or effort to break these barriers. The position of our non-instrumental churches of Christ, divided into about two dozen groups,

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Church Unity

J. BRUCE KILMER
Lansing, Michigan

Our Responsibility in Unity

As I sat in my study trying to decide where I would begin this article, I looked up at the wall of books next to me. There were books that were supposed to help me understand God's Way. Concordances, dictionaries, commentaries, histories, treatises and dozens of translations of the Bible lined the shelves. I thought of the many people in the world with one, or no translation of the Scripture. I thought of the thousands of other "Bible helps" we who speak the English language have as close as the local bookstore or library. These sources, while providing insight into God's plan, come with a grave responsibility. We, who can learn the nuances of God's Word, have little excuse for failing to put our understanding into practice. And there is no area where we have failed more miserably than in church unity. We have often turned our understanding of nuances into barriers of fellowship, and even worse, into legalism. The serious dangers of legalism are described by Paul in his letter to the Galatians:

Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only

thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

Gal. 5:2 - 6 (NIV)

Legalism is one cause of our disunity, but there are many more: lack of love, misinterpretation of Scripture, fear, failure to accept the salvation offered us, and lack of communication, to name a few. Where do we start our attempts at unity?

Our Relationship with God

We begin with our own relationship to God. The basis of our relationship with God is the work of Jesus Christ. When we accept this, and when we accept that His work is also the basis of our unity with others, then we realize that the unity of the church is God's creation. We cannot create it. It existed before we were born. When we become one of God's children we are in the family. We have brothers and sisters, whether we accept or even know them. It is our responsibility to see that this God-created unity is realized and experienced in the way he intended. We must allow God's Word to be written in our hearts rather than in our debate notes. We must experience the joy and peace of God's gracious salvation. With this security of salvation, we will be free to love those with whom we disagree. We will not be threatened by their "wrong" ideas.

Closely related to this experience of salvation is the surrender of our wills to God as we are being sanctified by the Holy Spirit. For if we have died with Christ then the pride, desires, feelings and ego that often get in the way of unity will have died

with us. In their place is God's new creation. When God justifies us in His Son, He is far from through with us. If we see ourselves being changed from one degree of glory to another (II. Cor.3:18), we will have the self-assuredness and confidence to meet, in love and hope, with those with whom we disagree. Furthermore, if we have a realistic view of our own poverty of spirit, sin, faults, and weaknesses, we will be able to accept our brothers and sisters in spite of their faults. Together we can witness the changes and fruits God's Spirit will produce in us. Rooted in God's love, built in Jesus, and indwelt by the Spirit, we become truly free to love. When our own relationship with God is secure in our mind and heart, we are then ready to make attempts at experiencing unity with those with whom we disagree.

Practical Steps in Unity

Often the ability to work or worship with others involves our emotions, habits, and comfort level more than our beliefs. We need to continually look for opportunities to cooperate and have fellowship with those whose practices or beliefs are different from our own. These times will help us grow emotionally in our ability to experience unity with others. There are many areas in which we can increase our exposure to other Christians. Bible studies, joint holiday services, programs for the needy, are just a few ways. Something as simple as visiting the meetings of other churches is an opportunity for growth in the understanding of others that we often neglect.

It is better for attempts at unity or merger to be made after a relationship and love exist between those seeking unity or merger. To begin communication with a debate of differences is to doom the relationship from the beginning. Discussions of differences take a much different tone between parties who already love each other than those between parties who have no relationship and nothing to lose. Love causes many differences to pale in significance.

Important differences that remain even after discussions can be dealt with constructively when persons genuinely love one another. It should be mentioned that membership in the same congregation does not guarantee that a loving relationship exists. Too often members of the same congregation do not take the time to develop relationships that can survive differences.

Unity and Churches of the Restoration Heritage

In practice, there are several presuppositions held by many from the Restoration Movement background that can be an obstacle to working out differences.

There is a tendency for persons within the Movement to consider their traditional beliefs and practices as essential for fellowship or even for salvation. This tendency arises from viewing the New Testament as a detailed blueprint for the 20th century church. It is clear from the New Testament documents themselves that such a viewpoint is contrary to the spirit and scope of the information and instructions contained in them. And many of the 20th century Restoration churches have sifted out much of the so called blueprint which has not been culturally acceptable. Meeting in homes, foot washing, order of widows, baptism for the dead, veils and long hair for women, and tongue speaking are a few examples. Furthermore, many culturally inspired practices have been retained by most of the Restoration churches. Local paid preachers, church buildings, Sunday school, invitation songs, church bonds, busing, unfermented grape juice, individual communion cups, short hair and costly attire for women, and the New Testament in its present form are additions not found in the first century church. When numerous practices and opinions become essential, there is less and less opportunity for unity. By reducing what we hold to be essential to the historic gospel, we open the door for a much greater opportunity for realized unity.

Defining Essentials

I would offer the following as a biblical and historical content for essentials.

A belief in:

- 1) One God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- 2) The incarnation of Jesus Christ and his historical death and resurrection for the salvation of men and women and his historical return.
- 3) The appropriation of God's gift of salvation by the acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior through faith, repentance and baptism and the receipt of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to bring about a changed life in accordance with God's plan.
- 4) The authority of the Scriptures.

These beliefs need to be coupled with a desire to be a part of a local family of believers in order to carry out the work of God's kingdom. The content of even these basic essentials may be the cause of disagreement, but with a small number of essentials, there is much more likelihood of agreement.

Often we have been taught, or at least it has been felt, that our presence in a meeting in which there were practices with which we disagreed, was condoning the practices and was tantamount to sin. Usually the practices in question should not have been termed a sin. Things such as instrumental music in worship, a woman teaching an adult Bible class, belief in the millennial reign of Christ, or using candles in worship are not sin. We may disagree with such practices or beliefs, but they are not a sin and our presence when such practices are conducted or when such beliefs are espoused is not sin. Can we not for the sake of unity be present and worship with brothers and sisters who believe or practice such things? As long as we are not forced to

play the instrument, or teach if we are a woman who believes a woman should not teach, or recite that Jesus will reign for a thousand years on earth, or light the candle ourselves, can we not put a few things aside for the sake of unity and work together for the Kingdom of God? Paul's admonition concerning meat in Romans and I Corinthians is not a sword we are to use to force our beliefs on others. The lowest common denominator of agreed beliefs or practices are not the only ones available to a congregation. We are not to assume the role of a weaker brother or sister in order for our opinion to prevail. Most of the "weaker brethren" I have known were not going to stumble but were in fact going to do a lot of grumbling if beliefs with which they disagreed were practiced.

Even when brothers and sisters are willing to forego certain practices or when other brothers and sisters are willing to be present when their preference or opinion is not followed, there is still the possibility that such differences can exist between them that they will not be able to conscientiously or comfortably meet together in a congregational setting. Some preferences and some beliefs are just too strong to compromise or overlook. Then what are we to do? I would suggest that we admit our differences and while accepting one another as a brother or sister, part company as far as the day-to-day congregational setting. We can still have contact, fellowship, and even cooperation in endeavors in which we agree. Unity does not demand identical beliefs or practices or even physical proximity, but it does demand the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, which we have experienced from God, to be shared with all those whom He has received. Clearly this unity is not a nuance of the Scriptures but a major theme, the realization of which we are responsible.

Restoration Summit Conference

Enthusiastically positive responses have followed a Restoration Summit Conference held in August in Joplin, Missouri.

"There was splendid cooperation. People treated each other with candor and kindness," said W.F. Lown, one of the Christian Church speakers during the meeting.

At the summit, 106 men, half from non-instrumental Churches of Christ and half from conservative Christian Churches, met for three days to discuss similarities and differences between the two groups.

A Common Heritage

Both groups share a common heritage in the Campbell and Stone restoration movement. In the late 1800s, polarization began over such matters as missionary societies and instrumental music with Churches of Christ taking the more conservative position. In 1906 the U.S. Religious Census showed a separate listing of Church of Christ for the first time.

The result has been that the groups remain divided with Churches of Christ reporting more than 1,200,000 members in some 12,750 congregations and Christian Churches/Churches of Christ having an estimated 1,063,000 in 5,600 congregations.

The Joplin meeting marked a major effort to restore communication between the two groups.

Lown said, "I believe that these two expressions of the same group were delighted at the prospect of coming together. The exciting thing is that there had never seemed to be the right time before; however when these people were invited, it seemed to happen. Perhaps right at the first there was a sense of caution, but the farther it went the more open it became, with no one seeming

to feel they had to walk gingerly, and a general acceptance of everyone else."

The meeting was organized by Alan Cloyd and Dennis Randall of the Restoration Ministry, which is under the direction of the Vultee Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee and Don DeWelt, who publishes *One Body*, a periodical urging unity. Sessions were conducted at Ozark Bible College.

Those in attendance represented 23 states and Canada and included five presidents of church-related colleges, one dean, one chancellor, 16 professors, four faculty members from schools of preaching and five editors of religious publications.

Cloyd, editor of *Restoration Leadership Quarterly* and formerly a member of the Christian Church, said the meeting was an effort to open a dialogue.

"There was such joy. . .they could scarcely believe the fellowship and joy at coming together," said Lown. "That doesn't necessarily mean that anyone gave up any points of belief they came with. It just seemed that we had grown to know we could reject an idea without rejecting the person."

Silence of Scripture

Most of the differences seemed to revolve around each group's attitudes toward the silence of Scripture. Those in the a cappella churches of Christ generally believe that since the New Testament is silent regarding the use of instrumental music in the worship assembly, it should not be used. The other group feels that since the Scripture is silent, use of a musical instrument is a matter of opinion or expediency.

John Fisk, minister of the Cuyahoga Falls Church of Christ in Ohio said, "I was really pleased with the spirit. We didn't concentrate on our differences, but on what we have in common. The spirit was warm and everyone was accepting of each other. There was a total positive discussion. It was real great to be a part of it."

Robert Palmer, senior minister of the South Lansing Church of Christ, an instrumental church, said, "My impression was very favorable. I've had a lot of experience and communication with the debating side; this had a different flavor to it. I was pleased by several things. One man after another would refer to me as a brother in Christ. As the meeting went on there was a general growth of warmth and better understanding."

Furman Kearley, head of the graduate program in Bible at Abilene Christian University, also spoke at the meeting. He was quoted in the September issue of *Christian Chronical* as saying the instrument question remains an issue "of major proportion which cannot be swept under the rug. . .and an issue of conscience on both

sides." However, those who attended the summit stressed that the meetings were not a debate over instruments.

Some Church of Christ brethren who came said they were not aware of the philosophical differences between the conservative Christian Church and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Participants were encouraged to go back and try to cooperate with each other on the local level, one-on-one and with individual congregations.

Another larger meeting of the two groups is planned for spring. Further discussions will focus on ways in which the two groups see the Bible alike and the different approaches both groups use in biblical interpretation, particularly in regard to biblical silence.

Cloyd said details concerning the next meeting will be announced later. Video tapes of the meeting can be obtained by writing Good News Productions, Joplin, Mo. Cassette tapes can be secured from Ozark Bible College.

Natalie Randall
Integrity Editorial Board

Merging — From Possibility To Reality

DEAN THOROMAN

Fenton, Michigan

A news article in the local weekly newspaper was the first knowledge I had about a new church's beginning in Fenton, Michigan. Under ordinary circumstances, the article would have probably been overlooked or just casually reviewed. However, this item could not be lightly dismissed because it was about the Fenton Christian Church and what was being

planned for the Fenton community. The more closely I examined the story, the more I was convinced that their goals and those of the already existing Fenton Church of Christ were identical. Here was an unusual situation—a new congregation was announcing its intentions to accomplish exactly what a twenty-five year old church was already trying to do. It seemed an almost

unforgivable waste of energy and resources to begin a new work in the area when the only published difference between the two groups was the use of instrumental music during the worship activities. I remember asking myself how it would be possible to logically explain this difference to any prospective member in the community!

My wife and I decided to attend the dedication service to see how many persons were involved in this effort. I also wanted to meet their leaders and to let them know my conviction that an earnest attempt ought to be made to unite the two groups rather than to promote division and difference to a community already religiously separated. Needless to say, our presence at that meeting caused mixed feelings. They were delighted that we were there, but somewhat perplexed (to say the least) at my proposal to get together for discussions to see if we might present a united front to the people of the Fenton area.

Path to the Present

At this point it may be helpful to let you know where I was coming from. Most of the readers of *Integrity* do not know about my church background and may not care to pursue the matter to any great extent. One purpose for relating some of it here is to get a sense of what it means to merge an instrumental Christian Church with a non-instrumental Church of Christ—from the point of view of one who has been involved with the latter group for more than 40 years.

My parents started attending a non-instrumental Church of Christ when I was eight years old. From then until now I have missed so few Sundays that I have to really think to recall the last time I was absent. We always attended church services whenever the doors were open, so Sunday School was as much a part of my life as other church-related activities. My teachers did an effective job of instilling most of the important doctrinal differences between

this church and other churches. It seemed inevitable that I would continue to willingly be pressed into and groomed for leadership roles in this body. No one was surprised that David Lipscomb College beckoned after high school and that I would later enroll at Freed Hardeman for some additional training to be a preacher.

Preaching appointments and part-time pulpit sharing seemed to fall my lot for a number of years—mostly in the Flint, Michigan area. Various church-related activities and responsibilities came in increasing numbers. I worked with youth camps, participated in lectureships, spoke at youth rallies, and served in other similar capacities. In short, I was about as involved as any person can be with this particular church group. Any change on my part by that time had to be labeled heresy by church leaders who knew about the degree of my involvement.

And the change did occur! About 16 years ago I became acquainted with Carl Ketcherside and began to read his *Mission Messenger*. It was also a privilege to be closely associated in the local area with Hoy Ledbetter and his brother-in-law, John Smith. Each of these helped to enlarge my thinking about a great number of traditional views I had never previously questioned. Another influence on my thinking at about the same time was Leroy Garrett and his *Restoration Review*. As I read and listened to each of these I knew I could never fully endorse the traditions of the church of my youth. To shorten this part of my article, suffice it to say that several leaders in the Fenton Church of Christ began to fall into disfavor with leaders in Flint area churches because we no longer adhered to the “party line,” including such unforgivable practices as taking into our fellowship some who had been excluded from participating in their previous affiliations.

All that has been said thus far is aimed toward providing background information for another event which had been one of the most exciting church activities in which

most of us at the Fenton Church of Christ have ever become involved. I’m referring to the merger of two congregations which were not supposed to do such a thing.

It wasn’t easy and it didn’t happen fast, but following our meeting at the dedication service of the Fenton Christian Church an agreement was reached to get representatives of both churches together for an open discussion of both likenesses and differences. There were more skeptics than believers at our early meetings. It was painfully obvious that some were strongly opposed to becoming involved beyond surface discussions. There were those in the Christian Church who felt that the enthusiastic commitment to their new work would be derailed by even talking about merging. Some in the Church of Christ were convinced that no good could come from getting serious about joining with those who used musical instruments during corporate worship.

There were also fears and/or anxieties about leadership roles. How could the two churches work out a combined “power structure”? What if the members of one group became a majority of the merged group and made decisions contrary to the minority? Would this ultimately lead to another split? If so, why bother to merge?

Questions to be Answered

In the first meetings there were far more questions than answers. What would other churches think? How could the merger be accomplished without losing any members from either group? Would members who did not attend the discussions support their representatives who did attend? How could the two budgets be brought together? What about preaching arrangements? What would the legal ramifications include? Would merging be better or worse than consolidation? What precedents were there for such plans?

Let God be thanked! The power issue never materialized. The participants in the

initial meetings quickly convinced each other of sincere intentions and found it easy to present views openly. Each session was presided over by a different person and the variety of leadership was profitable as well as stimulating.

Optimism Replaces Skepticism

As time passed there was a dramatic change in the feelings of those who continued to get together to explore merging. Skepticism was replaced by optimism and this frame of mind became that of the overwhelming majority of this group.

Feedback from most of the members in each church was so positive that discussions centered on plans for definite steps which would lead to the actual joining of the two bodies. Each meeting resulted in progressive action. An attorney who is a Christian and an expert in this field was chosen to guide the legal process and a special committee composed of four members from each group was appointed to take the steps necessary to complete merger.

Part of the initial planning included ideas related to helping members of each group to get better acquainted. Preachers exchanged pulpits. Fellowship dinners were held. Members were encouraged to support activities of the other congregation. A month was set aside as “Unity Month” and both groups assembled as one body in the building owned by the Church of Christ. A different speaker each week emphasized important aspects of unity. The month was so successful that it became apparent that continued separation would not be allowed by the majority of members in both groups.

The Christian Church was invited to use the Church of Christ building for its own worship activity an hour before a common Sunday school period. The Church of Christ continued to hold a worship activity after the Sunday school classes were over. Members were invited and encouraged to participate in the total program and quite a number did just that. United Sunday eve-

ning and Wednesday night studies rounded out the program at that time. Instrumental music was used solely at the early morning worship service.

In special meetings called for the purpose of exploring further steps leading to merger, there was almost unanimous approval to become one body in every way possible. Months before the legal work was completed, the physical merger took place. When the paperwork was finally completed the signing and filing of the documents were mere formalities to fulfill legal technicalities.

Some Problems Remain

Has everything been sweetness and roses? Not at all! The goal of accomplishing the merger without the loss of a member from either group was more idealistic than realistic. Some were not able to fit comfortably into the new group. As far as we know most everyone found a church home somewhere—with blessings from those of us who have remained. We still have those who are not completely happy with the compromise on the use of instruments. There are others who are restless about what they label as “the way the church is headed.” We have not resolved all the problems related to selecting church leaders. There are difficulties about sharing the pulpit. In short, we have a number of problem areas which we continue to discuss.

Difficult Issue

The stickiest issue to work out was the matter of using instrumental music in corporate worship. We don't claim to have THE answer to this problem, but the compromise under which we presently operate seems quite simple. Our group worship has a beginning period of praise which includes the use of an organ, a piano, or other instruments (guitars and flutes have been

used during this time). The rest of the worship period is a cappella. If anyone is conscientiously opposed to the use of instrumental music in worship, such a person may remain out of the auditorium until that portion of the service is over.

The fine line to be aware of is the one which separates the violation of conscience for some and trampling on the freedom of others. As is usually the case, the greater problem is with those who not only hold strict (legalistic?) views on certain Biblical topics, but insist that others must also hold the same views. In this congregation as well as among their sympathizers in other congregations, those who oppose the use of instrumental music in corporate worship find it difficult to allow anyone else to do so—even when they are not under any pressure to be present when such is happening. It will be no surprise to Bible students that many of us see striking parallels to the controversy about eating meat offered to idols which Paul discusses in I Corinthians and Romans.

Something to Offer

How has merging affected each group? From the beginning it was apparent that each had something important to offer the other. The Fenton Christian Church had an enthusiasm for accomplishing great spiritual goals in the area. None of the leaders had much experience in establishing a new congregation, but their zeal was delightful to behold and their talents were many. They had already hired a young minister when merging discussions began. The Church of Christ owned its building, had seasoned leadership, and was in the process of searching for a full-time pulpit minister at about the same time. In these areas alone it seemed more than the operation of chance that our joining together was not only a nice thing to do—it was right and necessary.

Are there disadvantages to merging? This is a difficult question for one as biased as I

am for unifying the body of Jesus. However, some would probably argue that merging placed a lot of pressure on those whose consciences are not used to compromising in any way in terms of their understanding of scripture. Compromise is seldom satisfactory to any parties involved. Others would feel that the process slows down almost everything else because much time and energy must be expended to reach a workable joining together.

Worth the Price

On balance, it is my strong conviction that all costs which have been paid thus far are well worth what has been achieved. We must begin to practice what we preach. Unity IS what God has provided for all of His through Jesus. Ours is not to establish unity, but to maintain it. The joining up of all who have claimed salvation through Jesus is one concrete way to demonstrate to unbelievers that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

When one considers all the misery in this world and contrasts that with the joy our Creator has for each of His, then measures that against the petty issues which are used to keep believers apart, doesn't it seem almost ridiculous that we are so inflexible and cold in clinging to beliefs which have nothing to do with unity or spirituality?

A major hope behind the writing of this article is to encourage others to reach out in a special way to those who share a common religious heritage. Dare to explore reasons for getting together rather than emphasizing differences. Combine resources and talents in a demonstration of unity so that believers are convincing to unbelievers and skeptics. In short, DO instead of wishing and talking! Allow the Spirit of God to rule our spirits in the only agreement which will produce lives worth imitating.

The merging of the Fenton Christian Church and the Fenton Church of Christ has had a number of effects on my own life. There has been an increasing awareness of

being part of something much larger than self or even of two relatively small churches. The influence of God's Spirit has brought about seemingly impossible results. Hearts have been softened. Hurdles have been crossed. Conflicts have been resolved. Verily, all things are possible with God!

Another effect has been to sharpen my sensitiveness to the need for being a good listener. When sincere souls know their concerns are genuinely heard and when they feel such concerns will be seriously considered by the entire body of believers, there is more openness of expression and willingness to reveal feelings honestly. Hidden agendas are much less of a problem. There is a caring, sharing attitude. Patience is increasing. Thank you, Lord.

Finally, my life has been affected most by coming to know people who not only love in deed, but who are constantly SAYING so and SHOWING it by unabashedly hugging each other. When Christians find it easy to say “I love you” to each of God's children, many barriers have already been broken. When members of the one body embrace each other fervently many so-called issues (even doctrinal ones!) become insignificant compared to the love and affection of those who share a common precious faith.

Pray for Us

We covet your prayers. Maintaining the unity of the faith is a ceaseless task. If Satan has a more effective weapon than keeping us from this task, I don't know what it is. We must resist his devious ways and provide a convincing example to those outside the faith that victory is within the unified body of Jesus.

If any of *Integrity's* readers want additional information about our merger, please do not hesitate to write in care of the publication's mailing address. We will continue to pray for the Spirit to move tender hearts and to supply courage as needed wherever you are. Let every tongue confess Jesus as Lord!

Reflections On Merging

FRANCES BACUS

Fenton, Michigan

The first time I visited the Fenton Church of Christ I didn't get much out of the sermon. The reason was that I kept thinking, "Doesn't God know there's a piano hidden under that fringed cloth—even with a vase of red roses on the top?"

If I had attended the earlier service instead of the later one, the covering would have been removed from the piano. It would have been seen as well as heard.

For about a year, two congregations of the Lord's people had been meeting in one building at separate times. This had nothing at all to do with the size of the building. It had to do with the size of the people. And I am not talking about size in numbers. I am referring to spiritual stature.

At first there was wariness between the two congregations, as they mingled—one group going, the other entering.

A firm hand shake, "We don't quite believe the same as you but we love you." A bright smile, "In spite of our differences in doctrine, you are my Christian brother or sister and I love you." "I feel that my position is right on this or that issue but I respect your feelings about it and I still love you."

Soon a keynote began to be heard in both congregations and it had nothing at all to do with the sound of the piano. The keynote was 'love.'

Conversations began to change. Bright smile, "Since we are all God's people, perhaps we can work out our differences in a spirit of love." Warm hand shake, "wouldn't it be nice if we could all come together as one congregation and just love one another?" "I believe we can have unity and settle anything as long as there is love between us."

I began to see expansion in the spiritual stature of individuals in each congregation, but I was still on the outside looking in. Just visiting occasionally, and wondering how two Christian groups could possibly unify when instrumental music or the lack of it was such a strong issue. After all, many points of doctrine might be a matter of individual choice. I really do not have to share with my fellow Christians whether or not I am a premillennialist; whether or not I believe in 'once in grace always in grace'; whether or not I believe one goes to Heaven or Hell immediately after death, or waits in Paradise for Judgment Day.

But a piano! Now that's something else. Either it is in the church building and being used or it is not. A stand has to be taken.

How to do it? Many meetings were held. Many plans were made. Result: More spiritual expansion.

A revival meeting was held with the piano remaining silent (mutually agreed upon). Special "together Sundays" were planned, with both congregations meeting at the same time. Enormous success (piano still silent)!

A fifteen minute period was set up at the beginning of the worship hour for those who preferred to worship with instruments. After that and before the communion service, the piano is silent—enabling those who feel adverse to worshipping with instruments to come and participate at that time.

The piano is now left undraped. The two groups have merged.

I placed my membership with the 'new' congregation in June of 1983.

We are now one in the Spirit, notwithstanding the dire predictions that were

hurled in the beginning that such could not happen when the two groups had been divided for years.

"The Christian Church and Church of Christ can never be united," stated some. "They'll have a doctrinal battle soon. They can't exist together," some predicted. "It will never work," said others.

But it is working because members are careful to be less judgmental of their brothers and sisters. It is working because we are trying to improve our own attitudes and not worry about someone else's. It is working because we love one another.

Before I became a member of the Fenton Church of Christ I had worshipped at different times with both the Christian Church and the non-instrumental Church of Christ. I had prayerfully considered both sets of views and searched scripture for answers.

I have never been able to take a dogmatic stand for one position over the other. I have been in churches where bitter campaigns have been fought—the church dividing like a political arena. I've seen a mother and daughter yelling at each other because of conflicting views. I've seen men who have been good friends for years refuse to speak to each other in church. I've seen congregations disfellowshipping other entire congregations. I've seen letters so damaging to character that surely they would be grounds

for libel if brought up in a court of law. I've seen hate. I've seen malice. I've seen sorrow. I've seen heartbreak. And all presumably in the name of Christ.

I've seen brothers in Christ share a communion tray and refuse to shake hands. I've seen Christians stand shoulder to shoulder and sing "It is well with my soul" and 'cut each other dead' on the way out the door. I've seen teenagers drop out of church because division has destroyed their faith.

Loretta Lynn has a song out, called "God Bless America Again." The song begins with the new America, bright with hope and promise, founded on faith. It goes on into our country's hurts and stumbles. It ends with Loretta's tear-filled voice asking God for help and healing. "God bless America again."

What a glorious day that must have been when the Lord's church was born. There was a mightily rushing of wind. Flames of fire danced miraculously upon the people. Foreign tongues were loosed and understood.

Shortly after, the church hurt. It stumbled. It still hurts and we still stumble. Perhaps if we all tried harder to understand one another and work out our differences in a spirit of love, that help and healing would come and we could pray that God would bless His church AGAIN.

To God Be The Glory

DIANE G. H. KILMER

Lansing, Michigan

We felt like the remnant of University Church of Christ. It was fall of 1982 and two more families had just left us for out-of-state jobs. That left only seven families: five with small children, one family with teenagers, and one single woman. Having

originally begun as Campus Advance, our ministry had slowly evolved from a student ministry into a "families" church. Due to this change, we now focused on a children's education program to accommodate our 11 preschoolers, who comprised 40% of our

church. In addition, we took turns planning worship services and adult Bible classes. We continued to run our dormitory building with all the maintenance and crises such a situation can entail. And we still tried to fit in individual Bible studies with students and community benevolence. With so few people, everyone felt the pressure of needing to pull more than their share. We wished for older folks in our congregation who could be "grandparents" to our kids and who could offer us their wisdom and encouragement. We loved each other and were very close, yet we wanted an even larger fellowship for ourselves and our children. When the Lord did not send us the usual influx of freshman students and new families, we decided it was time to look for a larger group to fellowship with.

We Prayed and Fasted

We had long discussions, prayed a lot and fasted together. We became sure the Lord had a place in mind for us where our needs would be met and where, in turn, we could exercise the gifts and talents he had given us. We decided to send out two adults per Sunday to "scout out" various churches in Lansing that were known to be strong, Bible-based churches. This included, of course, those churches representing the main segments of the Restoration Movement. The scouts would report back on Sunday nights, and we would talk. I remember one Sunday night we prayed that God would let us know, even beyond our feelings, where we were to go.

Many of the churches we visited were clearly doing exciting things in the Lord. Their worship services honored God. They were interested in Bible education, had community outreach activities, and were friendly and welcoming. Yet, when we visited University Christian Church, both the leadership and those of the general membership made us feel welcome and needed. The minister, Michael Grange, and the associate minister, Bud Holmes,

specifically expressed welcome and excitement at the possibility of two segments of the Restoration movement joining. Already organized among University Christian members were weekly Bible and Fellowship Nights in homes around the city. We knew we could feel at home in those small group settings and were eager to join them. Some young families had been wanting to expand their children's classes and junior worship with methods we had been practicing for several years. We could help them set it up. Many in the congregation were interested in evangelism. So were we. Many had already organized activities that aimed at building more family-type relationships within the congregation. Since our small group had experienced that church-family bond, our presence could possibly reinforce that type of association.

Most of us had had little experience with the Independent Christian Churches who, we learned, function quite autonomously. We also learned that many of their sister churches use the name "Church of Christ" and that the two names seem interchangeable. We found little difference in teaching between our own background and the Christian Churches'. In the Christian Church, however, there does seem to be more freedom in areas where the Bible is silent. Generally, the two are alike except for one major difference: the Christian Church uses an instrument during worship services. This was not a doctrinal issue with any members of our small group. None of us believed that musical instruments prevented us from fulfilling Paul's admonition in Ephesians 5:19-20. It did, though, take some adjustment to get used to the organ after years of singing a cappella.

We Had Our Doubts

Of course we had our doubts and fears about merging! We were afraid we would lose the closeness we felt with each other. We regretted losing the freedom in creative worship that can sometimes be taken ad-

vantage of by small groups. We anticipated that there might be some in the new congregation who were not so welcoming to us as others, and who perhaps dreaded the changes seven new families can bring. And we were afraid of any repercussions that might follow from those who did not understand that we would not be abandoning the Churches of Christ/non-instrumental, but rather that we were feeling that the Lord was leading us to expand our fellowship to more brothers and sisters in God's family. In late November 1982, we closed our own doors and began worshipping at University Christian Church and participating in their activities. In the spring of 1983, together we formally placed membership with the congregation.

Did University Christian have their doubts about our joining them? We were so truly welcomed in meetings and by individuals that it took months for one particular doubt to surface. As we got to know people who had been raised in the Christian church, they would quietly tell us stories of personal experiences where in some situation or another they had been "condemned to hell" by non-instrumental brethren for using the instrument in worship. No doubt a few wondered if we felt the same way. Over the months, however, our actions and words seem to have left no doubt about our attitude of full fellowship toward them. Granted, there have been other occasions for "fine tuning," yet nothing more than what any family would experience upon moving into a new congregation.

Blessings and Advantages

It has been two years now since we joined University Christian Church. After recently talking over the whole decision with some of our "old" group, the long list of blessings and advantages resulting from "the joining" confirms again what we thought was God's leading. The move did give us a much larger, loving church family. We have all found opportunities to be active and

useful in this church. We have all felt the relief of having enough people to do what needs to be done. We (and our children) appreciate being in a normal setting with a normal church building (as opposed to a dorm); having a regular minister (as opposed to always taking turns in the pulpit); and learning from other teachers in the congregation besides ourselves. Some who never felt quite comfortable in the campus setting have found more people with backgrounds like their own with whom they can fellowship and to whom they can minister. Some have felt real personal growth in having been able to act out in their life their belief that others outside the Churches of Christ/non-instrumental are going to heaven.

It has been a joy to become acquainted with some of the many missions the Christian Churches support and to participate in joint fellowships with other Christian Churches in the city. Lansing is also particularly blessed with having the Christian Church-affiliated Great Lakes Bible College with its dedicated staff and Christian student body. Last winter our congregation enjoyed Landon Saunder's film series "*Heart of the Fighter*" on Sunday nights. Many attended from throughout the city, including dear friends from the Church of Christ/non-instrumental group. Michigan Christian Campus Ministry, also affiliated with Christian churches, has a full-time minister and is an active ministry on MSU's campus. Michigan Christian Campus Ministry and the old Campus Advance group were established about the same time, fellowshiped with each other in the early years, and both "borrowed" the baptism in the building in which we are now worshipping!

One member of our old group, reflecting upon our decision to merge with University Christian Church, summed it up this way: "It was a natural move, not artificial; not particularly philosophical or theological. We were seeking a Christian family, one where they could minister to us and we to them; and God led us to this church community."

“Receive One Another. . .

As Christ Has Received You”

DONALD HOLMES

Lansing, Michigan

It has been more than two years since I first met the members of the University Church of Christ. They began to trickle in to our services by twos or threes, a different few each time. They seemed intensely interested in what one congregation, University Christian Church, was doing, and in what we planned to do in the future. We learned that they had been a sort of combined campus ministry and church, meeting on the campus of Michigan State University, for several years. During that time their group had gone through many changes, one of the most significant being that the core group of resident members was growing older. A new element began to be introduced into their fellowship—children! The demands of parenthood, along with other factors, made them realize a lessened effectiveness in ministering to the college students. They prayerfully came to the conclusion that God wanted them in a church where there were other families, elderly, teens, etc. However, this could not be just any church, so the search began that brought several families to minister with us at U.C.C.

I had been working as Associate Minister for a little more than a year at the time these special visitors came. My experience had been with the instrumental Church of Christ from childhood up, including college at Great Lakes Bible College. But I also had contact with the non-instrumental Church of Christ. My Uncle's family had been in that church for years. His children all attended David Lipscomb College in Nashville, and in fact they paved the way

for my oldest sister to attend there. This contact with the non-instrumental Christians left me puzzled, and sorry that the “break” had ever happened. My Restoration History class at G.L.B.C. did not change those feelings, and though I could perhaps understand the events better, I still could not believe that God wanted His people separated over a musical instrument (for that was the only thing I saw that was between the two groups, non-instrumental and instrumental Church of Christ!). Every time I read John 17 it seemed to me Jesus must be horrified over the divisions in His people, His body. The prospect of seeing some of that division healed was very exciting to me. Though “membership transfers”—or the “shifting of the saints”—is not nearly as significant in my mind as a new babe in Christ coming into the family of God, when these people transferred their lives into our fellowship, I felt a special thrill of joy!

Blessings from the Start

From the start the participation of these brethren has been a blessing to us in many ways. Most of them had been teachers and leaders before, and their maturity and experience were both needed and wanted. Some of my personal goals were able to be realized as a result of the experience of our new friends. We revamped and revitalized our pre-school programs down to the newborn babies. They were able to donate equipment worth hundreds of dollars.

Their supplies and direction and our personnel have resulted in a very strong ministry to the little ones today. The experience that these folks had with small groups in the past has also proved to be helpful in our adult classes and in a study for new Christians. They have preached, taught, sung, prayed and served with us since coming. We have three members from this group represented among our elders and deacons helping us seek the Lord's direction for our fellowship. From my standpoint this has been a tremendous blessing.

I believe we have also been a blessing to the former University Church of Christ. They were relieved to learn, I think, that we were not a people who had forsaken the Word of God for a liberal or social gospel. We have provided that mixture of families and students that they had hoped for. We have sought to both let them minister to us, and to minister to them when they need feeding and encouragement. My silver lining is not without its cloud. There have been the normal amount of adjustments that any situation like this must require.

Yet, personally, I have not, even yet, quite gotten over the blessing of this whole event. I confess that I have a tendency to tell the story to all my friends as we meet in conferences and seminars. As my relationship deepens with those who have come to us, I am grateful for what God is teaching me through them. Two other recent developments along similar lines—the church in Fenton, Michigan, and the recent meeting at Ozark Bible College—have me wondering whether God might be working in a powerful way among the “restoration” churches to again hone us into a useful tool to bring the gospel message to the unsaved. I pray that He is! For several years I was convinced the “movement” was not moving at all, and that it might not move again! But perhaps my fears will not be true if these things continue to happen. Praise be to God!

Unity

Jesus weep again.

Your earth vision was true:
We of Your Name are blind to the body.
Groping for You, we flail at one another,
trampling the parts in righteous discord,
With sightless wails, we call Your Name;
Visionless, we miss the power, only to
demand;
“Master, who do you love the best?”

Name me. Name me.
I know the rules; I have played the right
games.
I am not like the others; I keep
myself clean.
I can recite why you must
Name me. Name me.
Call me beloved, son, daughter, saved,
alone,
Name me. Name me. Name only me.
Only me.
Me.

Jesus weeps again.

Spirit: send us a Peter with vision afresh
and sheet of sail-cloth, slung from the
sky.
Challenge us Gentiles with our own
unclean beasts to devour the blinders
that fetter our vision of who are our
sisters and brothers.
So from that new rooftop, united as one,
we cry,

Jesus weep no more.

— Joyce Poole Haner

Readers' Response

"I am in a Christian nursing home trying to get adjusted to having to use no more than my pension for expenses. I am thankful I could send to worthy (Christian) projects in former years and find it hard to give up projects. My sister and her husband take care of so many needs of mine. We do appreciate *Integrity*. Enclosed is a check to help with expenses."

—Edith Huey
Worthington, Ohio

Dear Joe:

"I have intended to write you for months to tell you how much I have appreciated your articles in *Integrity*. . . I got on the mailing list several years ago and have read with much interest and appreciation the various articles but especially your writing. . . May the Lord continue to use you in an ever increasing ministry for His Kingdom."

—William (Bill) Baker
Perris, California

"Thank you for years of *Integrity*! They are on file in my library."

—Bea

To the editors: "Thanks for *Integrity*. It has been (and is) a great personal study help to me and I look forward to each issue. *Integrity* has a way of 'jogging' me a bit so that I don't remain content with my present level of spiritual maturity. You help me to grow, stretch, and to constantly "press on toward the mark." Zeal, knowledge, orthodoxy, etc., do not necessarily equal spiritual maturity and I am becoming more and more aware of this fact. Paul says that being like Jesus is what counts! The staff and writers for *Integrity* do a wonderful service. Thank you.

—Janet Slinkard
Vandalia, Ohio

"Have especially enjoyed the past year's issues. Have enjoyed Carl Ketcherside's articles."

—Wendell H. Prior
Imperial, Nevada

"I truly appreciate the recent issues of *Integrity* dealing with the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts. The honesty of approach to scriptures is especially impressive and greatly appreciated. I am a member of the Christian Church (formerly a member of the non-instrumental Church of Christ for 18 years as a minister at times and an elder). However, I am also involved in an interdenominational prison ministry which is quite charismatic, with numerous Pentecostals involved. Sometimes the "deadness" of my assembly, as compared to the prison ministry is very discouraging. Your magazine gives me renewed hope and encouragement that, indeed, there are out there somewhere Church of Christ folks that believe in the Holy Spirit and a God that doesn't change. Praise the Lord! Keep your magazine coming. God bless you.

—Bob Zerphey
Arnold, Maryland

"I have been remiss in receiving your excellent publication and not contributing to its furtherance. Please accept this donation and I will make it a practice to be more regular in its support. May God continue to bless your labors!" An Ardent reader.

—Major W. Lane

Dear Sir: "I hope to write a piece for your magazine this winter if it would be O.K. I am enjoying your magazine more and more. Thanks."

—Grover C. Ross
Portales, New Mexico

"Enjoy *Integrity* very much. It's good food for thought."

—B.E.C.

Dear Friends: "I'm enclosing a check for another year of good writing on subjects that I believe many Christians are very concerned about. I am of the opinion that many, many members of the church today are no longer in agreement with some of the views held and taught about such subjects as the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts, etc."

—Mrs. J. W. Davidson
Shelleyville, Tennessee

(Continued from page 2)

has been to others of our Restoration Movement, "Come and join with us;" although it would be a rather awesome task for these other Restoration churches to know which of our two dozen non-instrumental churches to unite with, since few of them will recognize and fellowship with each other! The apostle's admonition was "Spare no effort to make fast" the Spirit given unity.

Essential to such efforts must be a redefining of the basis of oneness in God's church, a task with which Bruce Kilmer of *Integrity's* Board wrestles. Following his insightful study are articles telling of "unity conferences" among brethren; and then there are thrilling narratives of congregations which have effected such harmonious conditions, "Welcoming one another, even as God in Christ has welcomed them." Natalie Randall reports on a "Restoration Summit Conference" held in Joplin, Missouri this past summer; and Dean Thoromon gives a very personal and extended account of the merging of Fenton (Mich.) Church of Christ (non-instrumental) with the Fenton (Mich.) Christian Church (independent), reflecting on both challenges and problems involved in this unique venture. Frances Bacus reflects on her personal emotional and

Dear Mr. Jones,

"I wish to thank you for your continued efforts with *Integrity*. It's a publication much needed. I have enclosed a check to help in the financing of the publication. I likewise would like to order the issues on "God—Divorce—Remarriage" and "Christian Unity and Fellowship". I have written the names and addresses of some people who would appreciate your publication. In Christian love,

—A. Warren Turney, M.D.
Wolcottville, Indiana

spiritual pilgrimage in uniting with the newly knit body of believers in Fenton.

Diane Kilmer and Donald Holmes share personal yet different perspectives as they relate how members of the University Church of Christ and the University Christian Church (both in East Lansing, Michigan) have joined together, bridging long existing gaps, transcending barriers, in loving acceptance of one another. As Diane captioned her article, "To God be the Glory."

With unique poetic insight Joyce Haner expresses much of what has been said in all the articles in her passionate appeal entitled, "Unity." God hasten that day when all God's people may be one, and we can pray with Joyce her final petition, "Jesus weep no more."

A final note of deep appreciation is in order. Response to our *Integrity* letter dated August 31, 1984 has been far beyond our expectations, and will serve to motivate us further to maintain the quality and integrity of this ministry. Your generous gifts and encouraging letters, some of which are included in this issue, have thrilled our hearts.

Joseph F. Jones, Chairman
Integrity Editorial Board