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# Integrity

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## Editorial

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If I keep having to have things done or said or thought *my way*, I'm clinging to the illusion that I am somehow in control. But the wall I've built in my mind against someone of a different race, a different gender, of a different economic level, or simply "different" is only that—a wall of illusion. The reality is this: we are all now one in Christ Jesus.

What will we look like if we let go and yield space in our minds to the Holy Spirit to create this new, transformed point of view? We'll be "subject to one another out of reverence for Christ"

(Eph. 5:21); we will in humility regard others better than ourselves (Phil.2:3b); we'll "love one another" (John 13: 34); we will "do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with" our God (Micah 6:8). We will have the mind of Christ.

The articles in this issue of *Integrity* address ethnic barriers

within the church and ways to dismantle them. The authors know about living with ethnic diversity firsthand. We pray that the Holy Spirit may use their penetrating wisdom to help us be better imitators of Christ.

Diane G. H. Klimer  
Co-editor

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## Editorial

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## Having to Have Our Way

*"There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3:28 NRSV)*

**M**y lack of love confronts me with a dilemma, of course, because I call myself a Christian. Jesus directly addresses ANY barrier-building going on in my mind with these words: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34). Denying myself could mean accepting others' ways of doing and thinking. Richard Foster states in his book *Celebration of Discipline* that in choosing to deny ourselves and, instead, defer to another, we gain a new freedom in Christ: "the ability to lay down the terrible burden of always needing to get our own way" (p. 111). Every time we "look to the interest of others" (Phil. 2:4) rather than to our own best interests, the dividing walls in our minds are disassembled, incident by incident, brick by brick. The more my mind yields space for others' differing ways, the greater my capacity becomes to love them--unconditionally.

During those days in Texas a dear Christian family befriended my husband and me, inviting us to their ranch, feeding us on Sunday afternoons, teaching us to eat black-eyed peas on New Year's Day. And I let my mind open to their big-hearted, Texan hospitality, to the culture's slow, easy-going pace, even to the bare landscape which allowed an unrestricted view of immensely gorgeous sunsets. In Japan I noticed that the missionaries to whom the Japanese listened the most were those missionaries who completely embraced the Japanese--loved their food, loved their art, loved Mount Fuji, loved their quiet courtesy, loved their intelligent conversation and appreciated their sensitivity to others in a group. The Holy Spirit can draw opened minds into love, and beauty, and knowledge of the Truth.

(continued on back cover)

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## Rebuilding Our Lives

CRAIG WATTS

**T**here is a story about the nineteenth century French artist Rodin that is instructive. Once as he was traveling he came across a huge, wonderfully carved crucifix. He bought it and arranged to have it carted back to his home. But it turned out that it was too large to fit in the house. He first considered cutting it down in size. But he quickly recognized that the beauty of the cross would be marred in the process. Instead, he knocked out a wall and raised the roof of his home and rebuilt it around the cross.

It is always tempting to whittle down the cross so it will comfortably fit into our lives. But when we finish, what is left is not really the cross of Christ anymore but some invention of our own. When the cross of Christ genuinely comes into our lives, we find ourselves dismantled and rebuilt around it. Our habits change, our life-style is transformed.

Christ doesn't want to decorate our existence. Rather, he comes to restructure it to make it suitable for his purpose and a habitat of his joy.

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Craig Watts, a contributing writer to *Integrity* for many years, ministers to the First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Louisville, Kentucky.

## Building Blocks to True Unity

R. VERNON BOYD

*Seek first to understand, before trying to be understood.*

**T**here is a certain amount of prejudice in all of us. It goes with the territory of being human. We tend to favor people in our biological heritage and the people we grew up with, those from the same part of the country. A person abroad suddenly feels kinship to every other American among a sea of strangers. It is only natural and it is not bad.

If I need someone to do a job and I happen to know a person from former days with an unusual talent in that direction, I probably will check to see if he or she is interested. However, to deny anyone access to that job based solely on the color of skin without

seriously considering his or her talent and abilities would be wrong. That is the bad kind of prejudice and it manages to pollute our minds and poison our society.

Unfortunately, racial prejudice is alive and well in America. We have come a long way since the first Africans landed in Virginia in 1619, before the Mayflower landed in Massachusetts. But the trick of Satan is to try new methods, place new interpretations on events to mask his way. For example, was it not a form of latent racism which caused white Christians in the Dallas area a few years ago to develop a college within 20 miles of Southwestern

Christian College and say nothing to Southwestern as to its beginning; or when they named it Christian College of the Southwest, an identification which was confusingly similar to the name of the black school?

Racial attitudes have played havoc in many lives, and white people especially, as in the case above, are often unaware of the contribution their attitudes may have played in perpetuating evil. I can never forget the visit I made to one of our church members shortly after I moved to a newly racially-integrated church in Chicago.

### An Education in Prejudice

My purpose was to visit as many homes as possible to become better acquainted with the flock. The lady was gracious and delighted that I came. We sat in her comfortable living room and enjoyed fellowship. She was curious about who I was and I about her. In probing her past I discovered the part of the South from which she came. This was a given. A black person living in Chicago was usually from the South since very few blacks of that generation were born there. The great migration out of Dixie began around World War I and continued up through World War II. It has been estimated that around 2.5 million black Americans relocated in the exodus. They fled raw injustice and poverty which was deeply inbred in southern culture--any place away from there had to be better.

This sister reached for her photograph albums to help interpret her family for me. She wanted me to see the pictures of her grandfathers on both

sides, one was Irish and the other was Italian. That put a new "color" on her story. I was curious to know if their marriages were secret. Did they hide their relationship from the general public? That kind of mixed marriage surely existed at a time when it would not have been favorably received. I believe they lived in Louisiana. She assured me the marriages were legal and that both sets of grandparents lived openly in their marriage state.

This set my mind turning. What kind of community in the South would have tolerated this? Certainly not the area of the South from which I came. There would have been burning or shooting or lynching for sure. There must have been difficulties with some neighbors but perhaps she, as a little girl, was not aware of these adult problems. It was perhaps hidden from her and only pleasant memories of doting grandparents remained with her. Sometimes we remember what we want to remember.

Then she told me about what the racial mixing had meant to her life. She had a sister who inherited most of the white characteristics while she inherited dark skin, but Caucasian contours and hair texture. It was not hard to imagine her having a sister with her features who could pass for white, which is exactly what she did. Her sister went to New Jersey and assumed a white identity in a white world. She purposefully wanted to escape the difficulties of her black heritage in the South. She eventually married a white man and told her sister that they could talk on the telephone but that she did not want her or any of the family coming to visit her in that new life.

### God Planned an Undivided Family

How very sad! Imagine not being able to enjoy the pleasure of visiting with a beloved sister in the flesh, or any other relative of the "wrong" color. It became obvious the problem was not created by the family but by the society that enforced rules which divide humanity unnaturally. This and other stories I heard in my racial education led me to the conclusion that God did not intend for his family to be divided. Society might try to impose its rules but God was clearly pointing in the opposite direction. No Scripture forbids interracial marriage. The church is one. In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, but we are all one (Gal. 3:28).

The fact that God made the different races is testimony that God created variety. There is no superior or inferior race. The amount of melanin in one's body does not determine a person's worth to God, and should not matter to people. The church is a place God has created where fellowship in Christ exceeds all other considerations. As Paul told the Ephesians regarding the racial tensions between Jew and gentile, "the war is over" (2:16). The bond of love which draws us to Christ is so strong that nothing can separate us from the Father and should not from each other. The church needs to be a place that is color-blind and Christ-conscious.

Christianity can and ought to make a difference in our attitude toward others of a different race. A black deacon I knew in Chicago told of a frightening experience he had in 1957 and how Christ made a difference. He also had come from the South and was able to get a good job in the city. As the family

customarily did, they headed home for the holidays. This time they were going to Mississippi in their brand new Buick Riviera. All went well with them until they got ready to head home. In those days blacks could not find restaurants or motels to serve them on the road so they had to plan on driving straight through. Their parents loaded them down with plenty of farm produce to take home. They got up early on the day of travel to head north. They were not far down the road and it was still dark in Mississippi when the Highway Patrol pulled them over to the side.

The white officer came up beside the car and ordered him outside. His commands were brusque and it soon became obvious why. The man in uniform was convinced the car was stolen and he felt he had stopped a crime in progress. The deacon explained the car was his and that it was new and he only had temporary registration at the time. The officer did not believe him and ordered the trunk to be opened. Upon seeing the food, the cop began to throw everything out, including a whole ham which he stomped into the mud.

The deacon was told to follow the policeman back into town. To insure there would be no escape, his wife was taken into the patrol car for the ride. He well knew that his wife was a very beautiful woman and he feared what would happen to her. But he had no choice. The dark ride back to town left him apprehensive. He knew about "justice" for a black man in Mississippi. He prayed.

On arriving at the police station, he was further questioned with the clear message that he was a thief. The patrolman blurted out that there was no way he himself could afford to drive a new Buick and he was convinced the black man couldn't either. Desperate to

try to get himself out of the situation, the deacon explained in his mild manner that he was not a crook. He was a Christian and attended the Michigan Avenue Church of Christ where Levi Kennedy was their preacher. Upon the mention of Levi Kennedy and the Church of Christ, there was a noticeable change in the officer. The deacon later reflected that because Levi Kennedy had preached in so many places in Mississippi, the patrolman may have heard the name. He certainly knew of the Church of Christ and may have been a member himself. At any rate, he let the family go, offering no apology, however. White suspicion of a successful black who had moved north ran deep.

### How Can We Reconcile Today?

How can we today work toward breaking down the walls that divide the races? Christ breaks down the dividing walls that separate. It is up to us to live out that imperative in our relations with one another. I can tell you what Will Ed Warren did in Detroit just after the 1967 riot.

First Warren tried to get Christians across racial lines to come together to discuss their differences in an open forum but discovered that there was too much hostility for civil dialogue. A fight almost erupted. About that time a white policeman who was a member of the Church of Christ had ordered a black man to halt and when he didn't, he shot and killed him. The black man was also a member of the Church of Christ and was deaf. He did not hear the command.

Warren then began to invite friends both black and white into his living room on Sunday night after church. Because he participated in a church athletic league he had become

acquainted with leaders from different churches. Those small gatherings where Christians got to know one another on a deeper level forged friendships which have lasted for decades and made an impact for good in the churches. People began to share their fears, their hopes. Either past hurts or impressions were the topics, or current events which had racial and Christian implications. Individuals will not change from the ruts they are in unless they reach out across racial lines to learn a perspective from another's view. They need to "walk a mile in another's shoes."

### A Walk in Sadie's Shoes

When I first knew her she was called Sadie. Her quiet and unassuming manner would easily lose her in a crowd. However, if she knew you, her wide smile would captivate you and melt your heart. Her meek ways betray a quiet contentment. Or it may be that she is just tired most of the time. She has been on her own since she was 14 years old. As a baby she was left on the doorstep of what must have been considered a stable older family in the neighborhood who took her in, but who did not love her beyond providing her physical needs, food, clothing, and a place to sleep. She was never aware of any biological relatives.

Sadie grew up near Monroe, Louisiana. At one point very early in her life a white elder in the church gave her a job in a cleaning establishment. He was a good and kind man and he taught her about the Lord. He also taught her cleaning and pressing--the trade which she has practiced all her life. Today her tiredness comes because she has to work long hours and in shops which do not pay benefits. Sadie helped

bring from Louisiana to Detroit a young, unmarried blind woman who had two small children. Because of her own struggles, Sadie has a tender heart for anyone who has a hard life. She helped the woman raise her children.

One day Sadie learned that I had helped another person obtain a birth certificate and she asked if I could help her get one. She wanted to obtain proper identification. As she collected information for submission she decided to take on a new name which would express her new life, and she searched the Bible for what would express the joy of Christ and the hope she had learned to place in him. She liked the story of scatter-brained Rhoda, with whom she sometimes identifies. That would be a part of her name. She pored over the concordance and checked the meaning of several obscure Hebrew names. She finally announced that she would be Saffron Rhoda Zuri (meaning, The Lord is my Rock).

The day she received her birth certificate and she and I walked away from the Court House, she was

walking on air. She later said that people might have thought we were newlyweds; here this black woman was hanging on to a white man as they laughed and talked on their way back to the car. She said it was the happiest day of her life. Saffron felt emancipated from the rootlessness of her past.

Saffron has been a vital part of our church family for several years. Because of her heavy work load she is not able to make all services. She is too exhausted from her long hours at work. Yet through it all her life has blossomed. She bought a car, then a house, and put her friend's son in college. When she can attend church potlucks or special occasions, she will stay up most of the night before and make the biggest and best banana puddings imaginable. Saffron has grown deep in her faith in God, who has brought her a long way. Her love and appreciation for what others in Christ have done for her knows no bounds. God's family, the church, is her own precious heritage. Isn't that what God intended?

You and I can change the world by bonding with one life at a time.

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R. Vernon Boyd, D. Min., a native Tennessean, has maintained a long-term interest in bi-racial ministry, spending most of his years of ministry in the North. Boyd has served in his current position as Minister of the Strathmore/Oakland Church of Christ in Southfield, Michigan for 26 years. His congregation is comprised of two bi-racial churches which merged in 1984.

## Ethnic Diversity in the Church: A Black American's Perspective

ED WASHINGTON

With Introduction by Dr. Curtis D. McClane:

**D**uring the late sixties, when Detroit was experiencing the "race riots," something phenomenal was taking place

simultaneously in Lansing. The previous Butler Avenue Church of Christ, an all African-American congregation, merged with the Holmes

Road Church of Christ. In 1968 a white minister and a black minister were on staff here. This merger was not an easy one. The elders of the church at that time took seriously the "one new person" in Christ. They were not going to allow race and ethnic issues come between brothers and sisters in Christ.

The elders had to approach some cantankerous white members and ask them to repent of their attitudes or be withdrawn from. This was truly a remarkable and courageous stand to take at the time. The Holmes Road Church of Christ now stands as a tribute to the spiritual vision that those elders had. Now Hispanics, blacks, whites, Filipinos, Koreans, and other orientals all worship under the same roof in the name of God and Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Next year will mark 30 years of integration for this congregation. Those years have been turbulent and we have had to learn that tolerance with suspicion had to be replaced with something more biblical and positive. We have moved from tolerance with suspicion to tolerance with acceptance. Now we are in the process of moving toward acceptance with celebration. We are asking our brothers and sisters of different ethnic backgrounds to help us celebrate our diversity. Only God and the Holy Spirit can create such a body of believers!

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Dr. Curtis McClane is in his tenth year of service as Minister of the Word at the Holmes Road Church of Christ, Lansing, Michigan, and is also a Board member of *Integrity*.

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## From Ed Washington

I grew up worshipping at an all black Church of Christ in Detroit, Michigan,

We believe that God sent Ed Washington our way. Ed has opened our eyes to the subtle issues of ethnic sensitivities that we have been overlooking. For those of you readers who grew up in an all-white church, and still worship in that setting, I ask you to give Ed a careful hearing. In order for the church to really make a difference in the new millennium, we have to reach out and accept with joy those who see and do things differently from what we are used to.

In May of 1989 the mayor of Lansing spoke at our annual Senior Citizens' Banquet. He made several references in his presentation about being surprised at the diversity of our congregation and he praised it. I spoke to him following his speech and expressed my opinion that I thought all of the churches in Lansing were integrated as we were. He assured me that they most certainly were not and he praised us for what he saw.

We are still in the process of learning from one another. God has given us a great opportunity to practice diversity. How we do that demonstrates the seriousness with which we take our stewardship of the gospel. Keep us in your prayers as our godly elders make wise and prayerful choices to keep the Spirit alive in our hearts. Our diversity has taught us the price of unity. Believe me, the cost is worth it!

during the 1970's. I went to school with other blacks, my neighborhood was black

and until I joined the Army, I don't recall having much contact at all with anyone who wasn't black. I remember watching shows like the Brady Bunch and Andy Griffith and thinking, "Who really lives like that?" "Are there really neighborhoods that have big houses built on clean, white concrete with large, green lawns and attached garages?" "No way were there towns that had only two police officers to handle all the crime." Unless you grew up in the country, you lived in a city where the real surroundings were street lights, concrete, two-story brick houses, with garages in the back connected to a narrow driveway barely wide enough to park the car in-between houses, plus small lawns, and a few thousand police officers.

Preparation for Sunday morning worship began Saturday night. We had to take our baths, lay out our clothes, and prepare for the Lord's Day. I remember always being told that when you go to worship God, you were supposed to be your very best in everything that you did: in your thoughts, your behavior during worship, and the way you dressed. You just didn't wear any old thing to church; that was considered disrespectful.

My aunt was a Sunday School teacher and the church secretary, so she made sure we got there by nine o'clock. Worship service usually began about 11:00 a.m. One of the brothers would begin the service by welcoming everyone, making a few announcements, and then giving members the opportunity to ask for prayers, give testimonials, or rededicate their lives. He would then offer an opening prayer that would acknowledge the testimonials and specific prayer requests.

The song leader would begin the morning's song service with a few selections to get the service started. The song service seemed to be a part of the worship service where a transformation occurred for many of the members. You would hear the voices of some of the members rise in joy, and sometimes in sorrow. It seemed normal that when the song leader could hear and feel the emotion of a particular selection, he would continue the song. We would repeat the chorus, or sing the verses a few more times to allow those that were emotionally caught up to gather themselves. Very few song leaders could actually read music, and I would say the majority of the members didn't read music either. We just learned the melody and did our best not to sing off key. When I think back, that's probably why we sang the same songs so often. But singing the same songs didn't seem to bother us at all. That sort of freedom to sing seemed to really make a difference in our mindset. After a few hymns--I say "a few" because you never really knew how many there would be--we had another prayer and then communion.

The second prayer of the worship service seemed to be the longest. The brother leading would take time to describe the blessings that we were thankful for. Rather than saying "thank you, Lord, for our health," he would "paint the picture" giving thanks, describing in detail, item by item, the things we were asking and for which we were thankful. Although as a kid I wished the prayers didn't take so long, I remember how the older and more spiritual members seemed to really get involved with this style of prayer. You would hear several "amens" and "thank

Jesus." It really seemed as though God were present.

During the communion we would either sing a song or have a brother read one of the apostles' accounts of the crucifixion. This also seemed to place members in a more spiritual frame of mind.

After communion and the collection we would stand for one more song before the sermon. This was a welcomed opportunity to stand because we knew it would be a while before we stood again. We would always sing an up tempo selection, repeating a verse or two and the chorus a few more times. Sometimes the song leader would initiate the song continuing and sometimes a few members in the audience might continue the selection. Even the minister would continue to lead the same song or start another as he made his way to the pulpit.

The sermons consisted of several quotes from scripture--men reading scriptures aloud from the front pews--humor, and analogies that I could relate to growing up in an inner city. The sermons were long and sometimes repetitive. The invitation alone sometimes lasted 15 to 20 minutes. We were constantly reminded that it wasn't the Lord's hour, but rather the Lord's Day. Therefore, it didn't matter what time we got out.

We were usually dismissed by 1:00 p.m. and, if there was nothing else going on, we would fellowship awhile and get home between one thirty and two o'clock. We would take off our good clothes before we did anything else, then have dinner, relax a little while, and get ready to go again that evening..."The Lord's Day, not the Lord's Morning."

That describes how worship service in the Church of Christ was the

majority of my life. It didn't matter which congregation we visited; if it was a "black congregation," that was pretty much how it was done.

As I got older I began to hear about how the "white congregations" did things a little differently. I hadn't yet experienced it first hand, but I recall watching a few services that were televised. When I finally did experience it first hand, I couldn't believe how different the atmosphere was--everything from how quiet the service was (the audience not yelling out any "amens" or "thank you Jesus") to how casually the members dressed for worship. Even more unbelievable was that they would get the entire worship service in within an hour. Just when I would normally be settling in for the message at my home congregation, here I was standing listening to the closing prayer. I remember leaving the worship service feeling like I had not really worshiped God at all. After that experience, whenever I wanted to visit a Church of Christ, I wanted to make sure ahead of time that it was a "black congregation." I wanted to worship in an atmosphere that I was familiar with and worship with people that I was comfortable being around.

### **Culture Shock**

Finding a congregation like that had never been a problem until roughly three years ago, when my family and I relocated to a city where there were no "black congregations" within 50 miles. As a result, we began to attend a predominantly white Church of Christ. I met with the minister on several occasions and doctrinally things were consistent with what I knew to be the truth. I enjoyed attending his Sunday morning and Wednesday evening Bible

classes. The Sunday school classes for my three-year-old daughter were excellent and a few brethren, including the minister, seemed like they were very sincere men of God. A few sisters would call and check on my wife shortly after she had our son, and offer to bring food.

Although I enjoyed several aspects of these new surroundings, the actual worship service at this particular Church of Christ was like completely changing religions; somewhat like going from a traditionally spirited Baptist style worship to a more solemn Catholic style service. I never imagined that I would ever experience such a tremendous contrast in style of worship.

It was quite a struggle waking up on Sunday morning. I didn't look forward to going to worship service. I wouldn't know any of the songs, and even if I did, they would be led differently, at an accelerated pace, and without the emotion that I was used to. It felt like we were singing through the song service just to get it over with, rather than worshipping God through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

The sermons are also very different. Our minister stands in the pulpit; gets right to the opening statement of his lesson, sticks with whatever is on paper and sits down. The presentation has very little emotion, and offers few if any analogies or humor. Although the messages were extremely beneficial to my overall spiritual development, I would leave the assembly that morning feeling somewhat cheated. I was so used to the minister illustrating points, telling stories that were funny, serious, or thought-provoking, using analogies and metaphors that the congregation could culturally relate to. Although

these illustrations and examples took a little extra time, to me they were well worth it, in order for the lesson to have application in our lives. I missed that.

The communion and offering is taken between the song service and the sermon. The announcements are made, the names of the visitors are read (without them standing) and we have a dismissal prayer. It's as if someone is holding this gigantic stop watch. The start button is pressed to begin worship, we worship, have a closing prayer, and there is this big click, the timer stops, and we go home. This is not a criticism of the service, but rather a personal observation of a style of worship that is much different from what I am used to. I never considered it wrong; just different. It was at this point that I really began to evaluate the issue of diversity in the church. Although the congregation was diverse in many aspects with members of different ethnic, educational, and geographic backgrounds, the worship service was very homogenized.

### **Asked to Lead Singing**

After worshipping at this congregation for a while, I was asked to lead singing, and one Sunday evening I did. As expected, the reviews were mixed. A short time later I was asked by one of the elders if I would be willing to attend a song leader school that was being hosted by a predominantly white Christian school. Right away I felt that I was being asked to attend this school so that I could learn the "right" way to lead singing. I was a little offended. I remember thinking, "I've been leading singing in the Church of Christ since I was 14 years old and

all of a sudden someone thinks I should go to a song leader school." Although I later learned that my perceptions were wrong, that was how I felt at the time. I let the elder know that I would consider going to the school, but that he should know up front that the way in which I lead songs would not change. I could definitely use the technical skills, but the emotion and overall style of leading a congregational song was part of my culture, and unless that conflicted with something scriptural, I felt no reason to change.

On the one hand I was angry, considering that as much as I had been uncomfortable with the established style of worship (especially the singing) over the past two years, I was still respectful, and refused to criticize how the worship was conducted. I respected their way of doing things. Then as soon as a song is sung a little differently or the song service lasts a little longer, certain members seemed to speak and act as though some crime had been committed during the worship service. They seemed to want diversity, but what we had was racial and ethnic representation. There was no diversity in the worship. There just seemed to be an overall lack of respect and/or tolerance for anything outside of what some members were comfortable with. Even though I was angry, I understood first hand how difficult an adjustment it must have been, especially after two years of having to make the adjustment myself.

I began to understand the distinction between being a part of a racially diverse congregation, and a culturally diverse one. I struggled over whether I could continue to worship where I felt culturally out of place. I wanted to get more involved with the worship service by leading songs,

saying "amen" or "praise the Lord" during the sermon. But I was really concerned about how other members would view that. As much as I tried over the last two years to adjust to that way of worship, I began to feel that I would never adjust.

I never thought that wearing a suit and tie could feel so awkward. After all, I have dressed the same way my whole life when attending worship service. I have always sung songs the same way as well. Yet when I sing a song a particular way it is viewed as not only different but wrong by some. Yet what is new or different for some is a way of life for others. Equating doing something different as being wrong, unscriptural or inappropriate, only perpetuates the underlying problem of cross-cultural intolerance.

After meeting with the elders to discuss how I felt, I learned for the first time that there were several members, black and white, who would appreciate a more spirited worship service. The elders welcomed a less methodical, robotic-style worship service and asked if I would agree to lead singing on Sunday mornings. I did, and again the reviews were mixed. Although many of the members complimented me on the singing, I learned later that others had a hard time accepting the song service. In fact, I recall one person stood up, walked up the center aisle toward the pulpit, made a sort of hand motion and walked out. That really hurt me. The only thing I could think to do was pray for that person; and I did, several times.

I began to wonder if it was fair to those that were a part of an established tradition to start something different. I began to feel guilty about the way I led songs. I wondered how I would feel if an individual came from a background

with traditions that were more charismatic and emotional than what I was. How accepting would I be? So I made up my mind that I probably would not lead singing again. Even though several members enjoyed it, it wasn't worth offending the few.

After some prayer and a few lessons from the minister, I reevaluated my position. Being concerned about who I might offend by the way I lead a song or say a prayer or having my own personal preference of a particular style of worship began to take a back seat to what I really should be concerned about: What is offensive to God? What type of worship service does God not only prefer, but command?!

### **Opening the Door of Change**

A great deal of spiritual maturity is going to have to occur if the church wants to deal successfully with the issue of diversity. Some assumptions, attitudes, and behaviors directed toward each other may need to be challenged by church leaders and church members. As communities change and become more diverse, the church needs to decide if we are here to try to please or satisfy individual church members and their families or our Heavenly Father.

There is more being done in corporate America, governmental agencies, and private industry to cope with this issue of diversity than there is among members of the Churches of Christ. Not only do we ignore the issue, but in many instances it seems as though we promote separatism. I remember how the whites would move out of my old neighborhood as blacks moved in. They would stop worshipping at congregations where blacks began

to attend. We believed in the same doctrine, studied from the same Bible and, most importantly, worshiped the same God. Yet it seemed that Christians from both races welcomed the separation.

Too many people are caught up in what is important to themselves, rather than what is good or best for others. Rarely do we really ever take the time to evaluate or honestly critique ourselves--our likes and dislikes, strengths, weaknesses, pet peeves, etc. We simply rely on how we were raised, and on our experiences in school and in the work place. A critical examination needs to be done by each individual Christian with God and his Word as the standard. People who are racially, gender, or culturally intolerant feel their flawed opinions, habits, and other character traits should be the standard for everyone to live by. Instead, Christ should be our example and to worship God our first priority.

Poor race relations and cultural differences are two of the primary reasons churches are racially divided. We see one another's race first before we see each other as Christians. Those who have never had the opportunity to worship with other Christians outside of their home congregation, for example, fail to realize that tradition is a relative term. I may lead a song that is traditional to me, but new to someone else. A person's race should have no bearing on how he or she is viewed. We need to gain an appreciation or even celebrate cultural differences rather than continue to criticize or condemn them.

### **We Need to Cultivate Love**

Although a partial reason churches are not racially or culturally diverse may be due to traditional disagreements

in doctrine, I think it has more to do with the fact that members of the church do not love each other the way we should. In fact, it's been my experience that there are Christians who would rather not even associate with those from other races, in or outside of the church.

When I love my brother or sister in Christ, I mean really love them, I don't care what color they are or to which ethnic group they belong. It doesn't matter that culturally we may not have a lot in common. That's okay. Because if I truly love them I will learn to accept or even appreciate the differences. If we disagree on an issue, that's all it is, a disagreement; not a condemnation. Church members need to: (1) pray for the spirit of humility and acknowledge that their opinions are just that, theirs, and that there was only One who is perfect; (2) understand that we are commanded to love and care for others, not judge them or be intolerant;

(3) follow the biblical principles of going to a brother that may have offended you in love, not in judgment. When we can do this, our churches will have only begun to address the issue of diversity in the church.

Not everyone grew up in a brick house in the city surrounded by concrete, street lights, and a few thousand police officers. People really did live in houses like the Brady Bunch and out in the country like the Andy Griffith show. People sing songs I don't know, enjoy sermons that are not very long, and worship God without saying "amen" or "praise the Lord" out loud. I accept that. Some like to clap after a baptism, or have it quiet during the communion; I accept that also. Why? Because I believe these differences pass the test of the real question: Does God accept them? The Christian race and Christian culture allows for this kind of diversity, and I wouldn't have it any other way.

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Ed Washington, who holds an Associates Degree in Criminal Justice, is the Cultural Awareness/Interpersonal Relations Training Coordinator for a 2,000 member law enforcement agency, providing awareness training at the basic and advanced levels for enlisted officers and civilian employees. He is a member of the Holmes Road Church of Christ in Lansing, Michigan.

## Many Colors Make a Tapestry: Finding Unity in Diversity

JULIE SHORT

Since the beginning of time we humans have used ethnicity, language, nationality, education, money, power, culture, marital status, age, gender, vigilance in keeping religious law, and many other criteria to tout our superiority over one another and

justify our existence. We have sought comfort and assurance by clinging to the familiar and excluding all that is different from ourselves. But the Gospel pushes us beyond our very human tendencies toward a deeper understanding of human relationships. In Paul's letter to the

Galatians, for example, he teaches that Jesus has freed us from the shackles of our human criteria for justification. We now are justified by faith in Jesus Christ.

Faith in Jesus destroys the barriers that separate people. We are free to reach out to the whole world, for there is no ethnic, class, or gender difference that can separate us from one another or from the love of God. Unity now has its foundation in the power of a love far beyond our sensibilities and judgments. As Christians we have access to that power--God with us. Our assurance and confidence spring from a new source--faith in Jesus.

Yes, there are and always will be differences among people. The differences, however, need no longer tear apart but rather make possible a rich tapestry of people of faith. God himself is the master weaver.

How do we as Christians work to let go of our all-too-human tendency to cling to the old measures of justification? How do we push ourselves beyond racism or classism or all of the other "isms" toward a unified body in Christ? How do we relax our kinks and allow the weaver to thread us through the narrow eye of his tapestry needle? Experience teaches that the process begins as we are drawn together from varied backgrounds by our common faith. As we grow personally and intimately closer together, our eyes are opened to our own prejudices, and the power of God's love draws us toward change. There are many ways both individually and collectively to chip away at the old views that maintain barriers.

### The Manhattan Church of Christ

I have attended the Manhattan Church of Christ for over 18 years. It is

a congregation of about 250 members with both an English speaking assembly and a Spanish speaking assembly. Most of our members are from the United States and vividly represent the range of ethnic diversity in our nation. Our congregation has chosen to be neither a "white" church nor a "black" church but a thoroughly integrated church. On a typical Sunday morning a little more than half of those in attendance will be "white" and nearly half will be--in the modern phrase--"people of color." But in both broad categories we continually see considerable diversity. A visitor on any Sunday could meet members from varied countries of origin such as Jamaica, Nigeria, Japan, Ghana, Colombia, South Africa, England, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Spain, Trinidad, Philippines, Guyana, Taiwan, Thailand, China, Korea, Brazil, Papua New Guinea, Venezuela, Antigua, Poland, South Korea, Botswana, Monserrat, Costa Rica, Russia, Ukraine, Hong Kong, El Salvador, Ecuador, Indonesia, Guatemala, Honduras, Lebanon, Peru, Canada, or even Texas.

We live in a huge metropolis that has seen intensive ethnic strife, but we are committed to being a community of harmony. We are individually and collectively striving to seek first the kingdom of God. With this as our quest and strong in our belief that we are unified and justified by our common faith in Jesus, we can work shoulder to shoulder, as God creates relationships that do not naturally exist in our old world. When we put on Jesus, he unites us with himself and with all Christians. How we respond to the differences among ourselves determines whether Christianity narrows or broadens our world.



## Story by Story

I am privileged to have spoken with many of my fellow members about ethnic diversity and how we work to break down barriers. I learned a great deal and in the process drew closer to each person I talked to. Many reminded me that divisions between people exist not only between the broad racial categories of "white" and "black" that we often think of in American society, but that within each broader culture there are usually divisive elements at work. One told how where he grew up dialect was a marker of division: "You're not really one of us because you don't speak our dialect as fluently as we do." Another described the intense ethnic and tribal divisions that make interactions among people in his nation very difficult: "You'd better not buy milk from that person. He's from a different region."

Each person I spoke with said that, ultimately, the responsibility for continued growth as a unified body lies with each individual. For us to nurture a richer variety of relationships, we must examine our own lives to identify the barriers we unwittingly maintain. For example, one barrier common to all humans is our comfort with the familiar, which often beckons us like a warm blanket on a cold night. Familiar language, similar cultural experiences, similar education, similar socio-economic backgrounds, similar regional origin -- such criteria often mark the boundaries of our lives. But our love of the familiar also points the road to overcoming the common barrier. We need not eliminate the familiar from our lives, but we must broaden our familiarity. If we find our confidence in Jesus, we can be courageous in reaching out to one another as we strive to move past our

differences toward more thoughtful, loving relationships. We need to get to know one another! We build ties of love by talking and listening to one another--listening to the stories of each other's lives.

In our small Bible study groups we often share life stories as part of our evenings together. There is no better way to dissolve first impressions and rash judgments of someone than to listen to their life story--discover who they are, learn their struggles, share their dreams. Strong cords of love are nurtured in these small groups. The old song, "Tell me the story of Jesus" takes on new meaning; as we tell our own stories, we tell the story of Jesus in our lives.

Similar opportunities arise each time we meet and in each joint endeavor we undertake. I have felt many of my own assumptions and judgments melt away, and I have rediscovered the truth that everyone, regardless of life circumstances, longs to be known and loved.

One specific way our Spanish congregation is building a greater appreciation for their diversity is by having dinners together in a member's home. These are rich love feasts; I know, because I often hear the children of these families telling wonderfully animated stories of their evenings together.

## Side By Side

Each step we take toward personally knitting ourselves together ultimately affects what we are able to accomplish as a congregation. On the third Sunday of each month, our English and Spanish Assemblies share in a joint communion service. Each prayer is prayed in English, Spanish and in a third language spoken by members of the congregation. Communing at our Lord's banquet table, we celebrate the love, freedom, unity,

and hope of his new creation. Following our worship together, we share in a fellowship luncheon--an agape meal--to continue our growth in love together.

One of the ways we have celebrated our differences this past year was through an "International Day" marked by an "International Fair." Members were asked to display art, photos, information, etc. about the culture of their country of origin. We wandered through the colorful displays, often filled with mementos of family and home, and talked with each other about our various backgrounds. We shared in a festive meal featuring everyone's favorite food from their country. The delicacies were served by proud cooks who were happy to tell us the origins of the dishes and how they were prepared. Many of us wore traditional clothing from our homelands. After dinner we were entertained with music and dancing from around the world.

Throughout the years, in various programs, the Manhattan Church has helped new immigrants learn to speak English. Many have heard the Gospel for the first time in their lives as they used the Bible for their English text. Currently, many young Chinese immigrants are eagerly learning English

taught by our members. The teachers report that they have learned just as much as the students in the mutual exchange of culture and language.

People are also drawn together by working side by side. Volunteers from the Manhattan Church regularly cook a meal and provide music and company for homeless and hungry people of our neighborhood. This "Community Lunch Program" is a joint effort with the Park Avenue Christian Church, which provides the facilities for cooking the meal. Ongoing relationships have formed between the regular group of volunteers and numerous people who depend on these meals, and thus the hunger for human contact and understanding is also fed. Similarly, our people are drawn together as they prepare a clothing distribution for the homeless. Each ministry not only serves people in need but also helps to build love within the community of faith.

We know we have a long way to go, but we have learned to enjoy our diversity rather than treating it as a problem. We trust that God will create new possibilities among us as he continues the loving creation of his tapestry, stitch by stitch.

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Julie Short is a speech and language therapist and social worker in private practice in New York. She also edits City Life, the Manhattan Church of Christ newsletter which is mailed monthly to 1,000 current and past members.

INTEGRITY, A journal published bimonthly by an independent nonprofit corporation, is intended to be a ministry of reconciliation which utilizes the varied talents of a large community of believers. These believers, united in faith but divergent in opinions, seek to accurately reveal God to both the church and the world so that all may become one as He is one. Accordingly, it should not be assumed that the view expressed by individual authors necessarily represents the opinions of either the editors or the Board as a whole.

## Friends Speak

STEVEN SPRAGUE

For approximately the past year and a half our congregation has been involved in a ministry called Friends Speak. Friends Speak allows us to reach out into the community to offer those for whom English is a second language the chance to engage in one-on-one English dialogue and instruction with a native English speaker. The program was adapted from the Let's Start Talking program used in overseas mission settings. It uses the books of Luke and Acts as the primary texts, and a relatively simple translation was chosen to accommodate students with limited English vocabulary. Beginning students are advised that the study texts will be taken from the Bible, and while we will not unduly impose our beliefs, we do think there is important information in the texts that could benefit them beyond its use in improving their English abilities.

Each Wednesday evening we have approximately ten to fifteen students at our building, spending time reading and discussing Bible passages one-on-one with their reading partners (members of our congregation). Vocabulary and content comprehension questions used for each section have been compiled by Dr. Mark Woodward, of Oklahoma Christian University. The comprehension questions serve to reinforce the primary concept regarding the text being studied, and the reading partners understand what that concept is prior to beginning the lesson.

Our initial thought upon beginning the program was that the majority of interested students would come from

the Spanish-speaking community in the area (metropolitan Detroit), and we were surprised at the diversity of ethnicity ultimately represented among our students. Students hailing from all over the world participate, including Albania, Bolivia, China, Greece, Honduras, Mexico, and Russia. Initial contact with these students has been made via flyers on workplace bulletin boards, public service announcements on foreign language radio stations, ads in non-English newspapers, and of course word of mouth.

An important aspect of Friends Speak is establishing a level of personal friendship and trust between the student and the reading partner. Therefore, the pairings of student and reading partner are ongoing. Additionally, a number of social opportunities have been hosted, including parties, strawberry picking, and a trip to an amusement park. These activities provide opportunity for our students to interact with each other and the other reading partners and become a bit more comfortable in a social setting conducted in English. Our reading partners have, in many cases, been able to establish a real connection with their respective students. We also look for opportunities to assist our students with day-to-day struggles they face. We have assisted one student in securing employment, provided driving lessons to another, and are currently aiding yet another locate housing. If you've read this far, you might be curious about program "successes." We view our program as a great success because of students served, friendships established,

reading partners encouraged and strengthened by the experience, and, most importantly, seeds planted. Though there have been no public decisions for Christ among our students as yet, there has been instruction in the powerful word of God, who we trust is able to work in the lives of our students through that Word.

If you are interested in learning more about Friends Speak, please contact the program's coordinator:

Janine Brazle

Heritage Church of Christ  
529 Grove Street  
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Steve Sprague is a new Integrity Board member and an active member of the Heritage Church of Christ.

## Readers' Response

Just received the Jan/Feb issue and, as usual, read it cover to cover before putting it down. Refreshing as cool rain. Thanks one more time. I would, however, console your letter writer, Brother R.J. Stipes, not to worry about the demise of the church. Christ gave her life, and she will be alive and well when he comes to claim her. She is not dependent upon leadership or membership (both of which will be forever flawed) but upon her divine origin and destination for her survival. Not all the forces of hell can destroy her—thanks and praise to his great Name!

Aline Edson  
Texas

I was just browsing the Internet and found your magazine. It looks great! It's great to see ministry available to such a large number of people. Good luck with it, and keep the faith ALIVE!

Josh Blann

The Nov/Dec issue was one of the best ever as far as I'm concerned!

Ed Williamson

I am writing on behalf of a group meeting in Halifax, Nova Scotia, comprised of ministers of the three branches of the Restoration Movement. I am a minister in a small a cappella church who believes strongly in unity in Christ and that the original Restoration dream must be reclaimed if we are to have any impact in this world of religious division. My fellow ministers in this group agree and we have been meeting for about a year together to talk together, plan ways to work together, and most importantly, to pray together.

Recently, I asked if they received your fine publication. I don't know if it is because you don't have a high circulation in Canada, but they had never heard of you. I "enlightened" them and said I would write and ask that they be put on the list of subscribers. They all were pleased to hear of your mission and were more than pleased to make donations for receiving *Integrity*.

Thanks again for your ministry of reconciliation. May God use us all in his service to bring about his prayer that "we may all be ONE."

Keith Brumley  
Nova Scotia