

Building Community Among Churches

by Steve McCutchan

For lots of reasons, churches have begun to pull away from their connection with other churches. The dream of the 50's that denominations could work together and make a common witness symbolized in the church center built on Riverside Drive in New York fell apart. Then increasingly even the denominational connection began to fray. Denominations still have regional meetings but they are meetings of strangers who feel little commitment to the other and are suspicious of any attempt to have uniform practices and positions. The idea of bonding together and offering a common witness in our society holds little attraction to the individual churches.

In an age of distrust, we need to rebuild our sense of community among our churches. Many presbyteries have altered their agenda to have less business and more efforts at building that community and nurturing the spiritual roots that call us to be connected as part of the one Body of Christ.

HAVING FUN BEING NICE

What follows is a proposal for another way that presbyteries can strengthen our connection with each other in a fun and celebratory way. This design is meant to be flexible and can be tried either during the actual meeting, often in a sanctuary, or during lunch where people are sitting at tables. The intention is to have fun theologically and to practice appreciation of each other as churches and pastors.

The simplest way to proceed is to provide people with a number on their name tag during registration. The moderator or person in charge of the experience explains the procedure. S/he will call attention to the numbers on their name tag. S/he will also call attention to a small list of Christian terms common to our shared faith. Examples might be forgiveness, Scripture, charity, hospitality, Christ, sin, church, elder, deacon, worship, prayer, etc.

The moderator will then point to a person and ask them to pick a number from one to two-hundred (or whatever number represents the number of those present.) That person will rise, give their name and their church's name. Then they will provide a two or three sentence definition to one of the theological terms provided by the moderator. Following that, the person will name another church or pastor present and say two or three things that they appreciate about the church or pastor's ministry.

A representative of the church named will call out a new number and a Christian term to be defined by the person with that number. That person will rise, give their name and church, define the term, and name a new clergy or church, say what is appreciated in that church or pastor's ministry.

The procedure continues with new names, numbers, definition, and expression of appreciation. They are especially encouraged to choose pastors and churches that are different from their own in terms of size, location, or theological reputation.

IF ONE MEMBER IS HONORED, ALL REJOICE

Have fun, express appreciation of each other's ministry, and talk in simple terms about the faith that unites us. Keep the comments brief and plan to continue for at least a half-hour to forty-five minutes. As you proceed, there should be some good humor and bonding as they talk together about the faith and their appreciation of each other.