

Changing Church, Changing Society, Constant God



Pastor Bill Daywalt

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The Purpose Filled Church



Great grandmothers wore black dresses and bonnets to church. Grandmothers wore flower prints, wide brimmed hats, and white gloves. Mothers wore shirts and blouses or suits. Their children wear slacks or pant suits. Greatgrandfathers, Grandfathers, Fathers, and Sons wore variations of shirts, trousers, hats, and more casual attitudes about going to church attire.

Along with their congregations, churches, too, have changed in style and substance. In many ways, churches are reflections of the society where they function. For decades, Protestant churches held Sunday evening and mid-week services, as well as Sunday School and Sunday morning services. Now, most of them don't. People no longer reserve Sundays strictly for church going. Some people work on Sunday. Many stores stay open on Sunday so people who work during the week can shop.

In past decades, church attendance and membership indicated good citizenship, and community and social standing. Most people took it for granted that you went to church because you believed in God and affirmed that belief by going. Times have changed and so have churches and church attendance.

God's purpose in establishing churches has not changed.

Everything the Church has been asked to do can be classified under one of three categories; evangelism, edification, and benevolence.

1. Evangelism:

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:18-20

This is what Jesus said about the evangelism. Evangelism involves making visible what is otherwise invisible. It is a way that we can fulfill Christ's calling to be his witnesses. The goal of evangelism is for people to know how to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:8.

Unfortunately, some may never accept the saving grace of God the creator.

"He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin." Hebrews 11:25. Other though will chose to receive the Good News of the Gospel.

In short, evangelism is our human effort to proclaim this message to any audience of believer and nonbelievers. Evangelism is a commitment.

Evangelism may occur in the local community or as missionaries around the world.

2. Edification:

The Greek words oikodomeo, "to build," oikodome, "the act of building," are translated into the word edification.

"This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority—the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down." II Corinthians 13:10.

Edification means coming to a greater understanding of God and learning to walk with Him, living our lives in a way that is pleasing to Him. It is the practice of building up.

Edification involves constructive speech and behavior by Christian disciples and leaders to spiritually strengthen the Church and those whom they interact with outside of the Church.

“We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.” Romans 12:6-8

Edification is important for Christians leads to spiritual growth. It is what moves us forward in knowledge of and obedience to God.

3. Benevolence:

The Bible emphasizes the work of benevolence. To be benevolent to another is an expression of love.

“Those who give to the poor will lack nothing, but those who close their eyes to them receive many curses.” Proverbs 28:27

Benevolence, often referred to as mission, is funding meet people’s basic needs. Examples of these needs can include food, shelter, and medical care. Benevolence and reaching out to the poor are active parts of the life of the church,

“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.” Galatians 6:10

Is God benevolent? The Bible tells us that God is benevolent.

“You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.” Psalm 139:1-3

Any role the church tries to play that does not fit under one of those categories Needs to reevaluate its ministry. Every society has its lost that needs to be taught. Every society has its downtrodden that needs to be lifted. Every society has its poor than needs to be helped.

Jesus said, “The poor you will always have with you” Matthew 26:11

The expression, “The poor” appears some 135 times in the Bible

The command to love one's neighbor as oneself comes originally from [Leviticus 19:18](#), which says, "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord."

The Jews of Jesus' day would largely have understood their "neighbor" to be their fellow Israelites. But God has a broader definition in mind. Loving one's neighbor is more than simply loving those who are like us and who can love us in return.

In fact, Jesus said, "I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect". [Matthew 5:44-48](#)

Our neighbor is more than those in our circle with whom we can share God's love. We are called not only to love those who are like us or with whom we are comfortable, but all those that God places in our path.

God shows love to all people as His children and we are called to do the same. The answer to the question needs to be addressed in a totally in an inclusive manner. The social responsibility of the church needs to be responsive to every part of society and mankind. Inclusion includes those of different, race, religion, national origin, gender, disability status, veteran status.

Jesus says the love we have for our neighbors should be the same as the love we feel for ourselves. We will not care about someone that deeply unless we treat them as the Lord treats us.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the expert in the law would not have expected Jesus to name the Samaritan as the neighbor. Jesus points out how love should expand over cultural boundaries and ethnic lines. The Samaritan put aside any negative judgments about the man on the side of the road. Because he put the man before himself, he was truly loving him as a neighbor. This teaches us that our neighbors are not those who simply look, act and think like each of us.

The church's role in society has changed over time. A recent Gallup poll shows that 25% of those surveyed find that religion has little importance in their lives. An additional 22% feel that the church is losing influence over 25 years ago and 37% believe that the church is out of date. The number of people that attend worship weekly has declined by 8% over the last 25 years with 29% never attending.

How does the church overcome this disinterest and lack of participation.? How can the church reshape its inner and outer image and touch the lives of people to make them want to be members? And what are some of the issues that have driven people away? And what can churches do to make them want to become church people again What can it do to improve its interior and exterior images? Churches and their people believe in one God, but they worship Him in different ways and separately and sometimes they disagree about the beliefs that are supposed to unite them.

Can the Literal and Inspirational Bible Be the Same Book?



Christians interpret the Word of God in two different ways. Some view the Bible as being the “literal” word of God. Others believe that God’s word is inspired.

Biblical literalism or biblicism is a term used differently by different theologians. It can equate to a strict dictionary definition: meaning "in accordance with, involving, or being the primary or strict meaning of the word or words; not figuratively or metaphorically".

It can also refer to the historical-grammatical method, a technique that strives to uncover the meaning of the text by taking into account not just the grammatical words, but also the syntactical aspects, the cultural and historical background, and the literary genre. It references the words in the text but does not necessarily lead to complete agreement upon one single interpretation of any given passage.

Fundamentalists and evangelicals sometimes refer to themselves as literalists or biblical literalists. Sociologists also use the term about conservative Christian belief that the word is truth and without flaw.

This is the interpretation of the Bible in a pre-scientific world. To view the Bible literally can make it unbelievable and irrelevant in today's world.

A 2011 Gallup survey reports, "Three in 10 Americans interpret the Bible literally, saying it is the actual word of God. Of those surveyed 49% of Americans say the Bible is the inspired word of God but that it should not be taken literally. Another 17% consider the Bible an ancient book of stories recorded by man."

This view looks at the Bible as sacred text of faith stories. Contained in these stories are life lessons to be used by those who seek a more human and divine way of living and loving. The Bible's real authority and power is found in way those stories have shaped the life of those who seriously listen for its divine message.

Steve Falkenberg, professor of religious psychology at Eastern Kentucky University, observed:

"I've never met anyone who actually believes the Bible is literally true. I know a bunch of people who say they believe the Bible is literally true but nobody is actually a literalist. Taken literally, the Bible says the earth is flat, it has pillars, and will not be moved. It says that great sea monsters are set to guard the edge of the sea.

Christian Smith wrote in his 2012 book, *The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism Is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture*:

"The real problem is the particular biblicist theory about the Bible; it not only makes young believers vulnerable to being disabused of their naive acceptance of that theory but it also often has the additional consequence of putting their faith commitments at risk. Biblicism often paints smart, committed youth into a corner that is for real reasons impossible to occupy for many of those who actually confront its problems. When some of those youth give up on biblicism and simply walk across the wet paint, it is flawed biblicism that is partly responsible for those losses of faith."

The Bible contains the words of life, the word of Jesus. These words are meant to bring us hope, to make us wise about the things that matter most, to revive our souls. Above all, these words are meant to show us Jesus. These words are meant to bring purpose to our lives.

God has a purpose for each of us and that purpose is defined in God's word. To understand that purpose, the Bible needs to be a relevant, living document.

“But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth” (Exodus 9:16).

His purposes not only encompass our lives, but the lives of those around us—at home, school, work, and community. It’s important to know and live out the following Bible verses about purpose:

“Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose” (Philippians 2:12-13).

Literal interpretations of the Bible are often used to cause pain. People use the word of God to exclude and demean. Something meant to be life-giving has been used to harm, to limit, and to silence. The words of the Bible have been used over and over again by people wanting to shut down or control. The Bible can be used as a weapon against us or against people we love. This is not in keeping with today’s world.

The inspired word is all loving and inclusive. It addresses the needs of today’s society. It shows us that we are all God’s children, created in His image. God’s shows His love to all.

The Lord and His purposes are perfect, but we are not. We live with doubts and fears that can keep us from living out the purposes that He has established for us.

Through the inspired word we can overcome this by consistently reading and studying His word so that our faith will be made stronger. As we learn of God’s saving grace, we can live our lives full of confidence, joy, and love.

The Political Church



Should pastors and congregations seek to transcend politics or is that an impossible or even illegitimate goal?

Lee Hull Moses is pastor of First Christian Church in Greensboro, North Carolina answers the question.

“In the past two years, our congregation has lost at least one regular attendee because we’re too political. At least one other left because we’re not political enough. Some folks wish we were out in force, wearing our church T-shirts, at every protest. Others wish I would tone it down from the pulpit and just preach about how to be a good person. I take some solace in the adage that if you’re making people mad, you must be doing something right.”

Politics in the church is certainly a divisive topic. It makes preaching more difficult. It makes leadership more difficult.

Politics, whether as words of kindness or words of contemporary issues can lead people to disagree. Even the basic tenets of our faith—grace and mercy, radical hospitality, love of neighbor—go beyond politics but have political implications.

Is it possible for the church to call themselves followers of the Prince of Peace and not condemn violence born of bigotry and hate? How can the church tell the story of Jesus welcoming the children and not have something to say about the migrant children separated from their parents at our southern border?

What is the role of the church in politics? The church needs to recognize that it does have a role. Scripture and the history of the church clearly support the church's place in politics.

It provides numerous examples when people of God not only served, but excelled in political jobs:

Joseph, one of the twelve sons of Jacob, is a classic example (**Gen 37:1-50:26**).

Because of his relationship with God, he was able to interpret Pharaohs' dreams and save Egypt from the impending famine.

As a reward, Pharaoh promoted him to second in command of Egypt. Under Joseph's leadership, Egypt prepared for and prospered during the drought, and most of the surrounding area's wealth was funneled into Egypt.

The Book of Daniel tells of the Jewish prophet Daniel, who became the favored adviser to King Nebuchadnezzar while in captivity in Babylon. It was Daniel's faithfulness to God that ultimately resulted in his ascension to an influential position in the kingdom. When Babylon was overrun by the Persians, Daniel continued to prosper under their rule as well (**Daniel 6:28**).

During the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, he encountered many people who held political positions as tax collectors. Most tax collectors were dishonest people and were classified as extortionists, cheats, and adulterers by the Jewish religious leaders and citizens of that time (**Luke 18:9-14**).

Zacchaeus was a wealthy chief tax collector, and yet in **Luke 19:8** Jesus was his house guest. Zacchaeus tells Jesus that, *"Half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have wrongfully exacted something from anyone, I restore it fourfold."* Although tax collectors were looked down upon as sinful people, Zacchaeus used his position to help the poor and maintained honesty with others. Jesus commended him by saying in verses 9 and 10, *"Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost."*

A political job or position offers a great opportunity for a Christian to make a positive impact on the lives of many. Politics may seem corrupt and even like a lost cause, but that field is no more corrupt today than it was in the time of Christ. There will always be a need in the political spectrum for godly men and women to serve in an honest way, like Zacchaeus did.

In these trying times, it's tempting to remain neutral on such topics. But how can we not discuss gun control when there are children being killed in our schools. How can we not discuss homelessness when there are people sleeping under bridges in our communities? How can we not talk about minority issues when there are people being discriminated against in housing and employment? Many people who advocate for universal health care don't want the government to take over our lives, they just want everybody to get the medicine they need.

Good preaching in divisive times needs to remind people of the importance of living their faith that claims to mean something about how they live in the world, that "being a good person" is directly connected to our political systems and structures. Most congregations would like to stay somewhere in the middle. No matter your political view, the importance is to stay true to the Gospel.

The key role the church plays in politics is taking a role on issues of humanity in the name of God and Christ. The church needs to continue to engage with government on issues of justice, corruption, leadership, economic debt, housing, education, health care, safety and security, and whatever else is morally important.

The church also needs to be clear in supporting or opposing issues. The question is always who is really benefitting, the people or the officials.

Public leaders are elected to work for the betterment of their communities. A church's involvement should always be based on ethics. Ethics is responding to God's desire for the best of his creation. It reflects the image of God in all of humanity. We are all made in the image of God consequently we should seek what is the best for each other.

Through mission efforts the church provides a great deal of assistance to our communities and beyond that change many people's lives, often through financial support. Many times, the government is also involved. Whether politically left or right, each side has opinions about what services should be provided to those most in need.

Political parties have their own vision of what programs should be funded. Programs such as homeless shelters, food pantries, and medical clinics, are in part funded by government funds. Funds are also allocated to what are called “entitlement programs”, which include public housing, food stamps, and Medicaid.

Although in a perfect world, all decisions would be made on a bipartisan basis. Of course, with opposing political parties this is not the case. There needs to be an awareness of these issues because without one it is difficult to make an educated decision at the voting booth.

However, no law, codes, constitutions, or even the Bible can guarantee change without the will to act. For people to want change, they must be motivated to act, to create an atmosphere of hope.

Often, Separation of Church and State is used by the faith community as a reason not to respond to the needs of society. In fact, it is found nowhere in the Constitution or any other founding legislation. Our forefathers would never tolerate the restrictions on religion expressed today.

The concept was initially coined by the faith community to keep government away from regulating religious freedom. Our forefathers never sought to evict the church from society. Even non-Christian founders thought religion was essential.

Separation of church and state does not mean a separation of moral reasoning from public policy. Everyone, whether religious or secular, should have the freedom to make the case publicly or privately for laws which they believe should be passed.

Separation of church and state is a principle which secures the rights and privileges of all citizens under a government and ensures that both government and church function according to their God-given roles.

As people of faith, we need to be advocates for those in need and do so in accordance with God’s Word, being mindful of the boundaries which God has established between church and state.

The church should not and cannot be silent to issues that limit the church’s influence in society. To do nothing is to accept the status quo. We cannot become a silent majority.

The church's role in politics is to be visible in the context of political policy formulation. The church must be prophetic, speaking for God. The church must be

ethical showing values that enrich a nation. The church must be bold, constructive and innovative. The church must be "salt and light" in what is so often a corrupt environment, to bring light and health.

Maintaining a godly society requires that Christians become involved to some degree in politics. Whether it's by praying for our leaders, exercising our privilege to vote, or holding a political office, Christians should be concerned about how their government is run and their society ruled.

Would the Community Notice if the Church Disappeared?



Would the community know if the church no longer existed? Does the church make enough of an impact that it would be missed if it were gone?

Sobering questions indeed, but questions that identify the effect the church has on the community it serves. Has the church moved past the “don’t bother us, we won’t bother you” attitude?

We read the story of the Good Samaritan and condemn those who walked past the injured man without showing any concern for his needs. They had the means and opportunity to help, but lacked compassion, humility, or initiative—or maybe all three. In the story of the Good Samaritan, which person is the church?

Personal or national tragedy seems to cause a major shift in people’s assessment of church. It is a time when people flock to churches in droves. Suddenly signs everywhere read, “God Bless America”. There is just something about churches that society finds in times of tragedy and hardship.

But, in times of peace and prosperity, the church seems to become irrelevant again. The Christian Church is in desperate need of a more positive and accessible image. The most influential aspect of Christianity in America is how believers do, or do not, implement their faith in public and private. An increase in visibility will change people's impressions and interest.

The church's responsibility to society has been important and challenging since the beginning of Christianity. For example, Jesus was concerned for the lost sheep.

There is a sense of urgency for the church to respond. Both the church and society tend to show apathy confronting the human condition that exists. It's easy to turn a blind eye to the poverty, unemployment, homelessness, hunger, racism, and lack of inclusivity in front of us all. Apprehension can lead to disaster and hinders progress.

The church needs to be held accountable, to be accountable to someone and something. It implies a reaction to those needs of society. The "who" and the "what" are of equal importance and must be addressed simultaneously. What the church is responsible for depends on those they serve.

We must consider both past and future service.

Scripturally, God calls us to service.

The LORD Almighty has sworn, "Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will happen. Isaiah 14:24

For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back? Isaiah 14:27

His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. Ephesians 3:10-12

The Lord shows us the purpose. The believer is called to carry it out.

"What is the role of the church in today's society." The same as it was 2,000 years ago. The role is the same because the needs are the same because, every society still needs God, every society still needs Christ, every society still needs the gift of the Holy Spirit.

There comes a point where we must dig in and get our hands dirty. Relationships are essential to making that work. It requires involvement in the local community.

It is inconceivable that any institution as extensive as the church should exist without some role to play, some work to perform, and some mission to accomplish.

So how *can* a church impact its community? Simply put, watch, and listen for a need and go about meeting that need. Use the church's resources to accomplish the challenges.

For example, ask yourself: What are the societal needs present within our community? Then consider"

1. What are the financial resources available?
2. Who in our church are available to volunteer?
3. How can the church cooperate with local leaders, school districts and social service agencies to meet the needs?

In response to this commitment it is important not to spread your resources too thin. Taking on too much can lead to accomplish nothing.

And it is always important to remember that everything is to be done with love, expecting nothing in return. Service is always a reflection of what Jesus would do always promoting the Good News of the Gospel, sharing the love and mercy of God.

When the voice of a culture, and not the word of Christ, is what governs the church, then it is no longer the church. It's just a social club of people desperately trying to keep up with the cultural fashion. Ironically, that's the quickest way to close your church. Why would anyone bother coming to a church that is indistinguishable from anything else?!

Loving others helps them learn about and appreciate our God. "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." Matthew 5:16. These are so important concepts!!!! A sermon about each sometime?

So, find a need...and meet it! Demonstrate the love of Christ to your neighbors in practical, simple ways, and make an impact on your community.

The church must do away with all excuses and re-claim its place as a leader in society. It is never too late to provide a positive influence. The church can keep people grounded, flushing out the burden of life by providing a bedrock of faith and answers to humanity's deepest needs.

Churches, big or small, must be willing to accept this role to face the many challenges ahead. The church must start by look deep within itself and arise to serve the needs of all people in the name of Christ. Now is the right time to become the church that Christ expects it to be.

What Would the World Look Like If We Were All The Same?



As the new student, let's call him Sam, rolled his wheelchair into the sixth grade classroom, the teacher knew she faced a challenge from him and the rest of her students. The new boy confirmed her first impression when Sam told he couldn't use his arms and legs. His classmates didn't know whether to laugh at Sam or feel sorry for him, so they did both.

Trying to maintain a normal classroom, the teacher asked Sam to write his name. Sam bent over, put a pencil in his mouth, and wrote his name on the class roll. The teacher held it up for Sam's classmates to see, announcing that his writing was an example for the rest of the class to follow. Over the next few weeks, the Sam taught all of his classmates how to write their names with their pencils in their mouths. They thought Sam was the coolest friend ever. Sam became the most popular student in the sixth grade.

.In Mark 9 John said, "Teacher we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us."

But Jesus replied, "Do not stop him. For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us. Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward."

Jesus was inclusive. Jesus' view of discipleship was not to be exclusive, rather inclusive. The work of God is not for a private privileged group. The work of God is for everyone.

The Old Testament lists groups of people that were to be excluded.

Children: Deuteronomy 23:2 No one born of a forbidden marriage nor any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD.

Ammonites: Deuteronomy 23:3 No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD.

Handicap: Leviticus 21:17 The LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron: 'For the generations to come none of your descendants who has a defect may come near to offer the food of his God.'

Women: Throughout the Bible it is said that women were not allowed to leave the house without permission, were restricted to roles of little to no authority, and were not allowed to talk to strangers.

But Jesus on the other hand associated with several different people. Jesus 12 disciples consisted of ordinary men including fishermen and tax collectors.

The Bible illustrates to us the number of different people that Jesus associated with. Luke 5 says he reached out and touched the man with leprosy and healed the paralytic. The Pharisee's asked Jesus, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" In chapter 7, Jesus anointed a sinful woman and in chapter 8 he healed a demon possessed man.

One of the most well-known parables is The Parable of the Lost Son which is found in Luke 15. “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”

Back when the church was first being formed, people were sorted out into all kinds of categories, ranked by their position in life, each one holding more esteem than the other. Those at the top of the ladder had the grandest life, with the best seats in the house, the best food on their plates, and dressed in the finest clothing. They walked the town with everyone staring in admiration.

Those at the bottom of the ladder were forced to live outside the society. They were forced to sit and sleep on the floor, with only scraps to eat, dressed in what only could be described as rags. They walked (when they dared) into town being ridiculed. And it wasn’t just in the towns, or in the society, it was in the church as well.

Unfortunately, the church has a long history of excluding people. To “exclude” is to “shut out, to hinder from entering, to deny admission.” To “include” is the opposite: to “shut in, to contain, to hold” or “embrace.”

Exclusion is often due to prejudice, which is a dislike of people without knowledge of understanding of those people. The “isms” and “phobias” in society are based on fear, fear of the unknown.

The more people perceive someone to be different, the less likely they are to feel comfortable with or trust that person, and they place the person in their out-group. This kind of categorization, while usually unconscious, can do significant damage.

An article by Mark Sandlin in Sojourners Magazine lists the “10 Things the Church Can’t Do While Following Jesus”.

1. Be hypocritical
2. Let “how we’ve always done it” rule the day
3. Worship the Bible rather than God
4. Gossip
5. Enable a consumer Christianity
6. Let polity be more important than people
7. Exclude people
8. Think of outreach only as the giving of money
9. Refuse to advocate for the least of these
10. Hate a person or group of people

When people are exposed to people outside of their comfort zone (African Americans, gays and lesbians, elderly, women), they become more comfortable and accepting.

Inclusion is often referred to as diversity. There is a significant difference between the two. Diversity is like being invited to sit at a table that is already set; inclusion is being asked to partner with the host to help set the table.

When groups gather, it is only human nature to want to be included. Fear of exclusion begins with childhood games and birthday parties; it continues with being picked – or not – in sports teams, with finding a seat in the high school cafeteria, with seeking new friends in college, with finding a bar stool at happy hour or a seat at the office Christmas party. We never want to be excluded, and we are filled with natural indignation when we witness someone unjustly exclude another.

Jesus sought to include among His company many that had been excluded from society – tax collectors, public sinners, lepers. Before He ascended into Heaven, Jesus commanded his apostles that all peoples are to be included in His Church: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation.” (Mark 16:15)

The Apostle’s Creed includes the words “I believe in the holy catholic church”, meaning the church whose mission is *universal*. *This is a church that seeks to* bring the teaching, love, and mercy of Christ to all people, regardless of race, gender, sexuality, social status.

In God’s eyes, we are all equal: we are sinners in need of Christ’s redemption. All are welcome in Christ’s church.

Sadly, the inclusion that the Church desires is sometimes impeded by the Church itself for reasons beyond understanding. The church is failing in opening its doors to all. The church allows too many barriers to be constructed.

The church needs to realize that all people are created equal and equality for anyone is equality for everyone. When we say everyone is welcome, we mean everyone, including the LGBTQ community which the church often rejects.

A survey was done by the PC(USA). 2,763 people were surveyed and asked what they believe the church should “be and do”.

27% believe that the church should be welcoming and inclusive, 12% said it should be creative and relevant and another 8% said it should be more progressive and liberal while building community.

The church needs to create a new model. A model where all are equal, can share their life experiences and those God given talents allowing for creativity and participation. A place where all are welcome, the seekers and the doubters. A church whose mission reaches all the God’s children. The church needs to be a beacon of light in an otherwise dark world.

What is the value of inclusivity? Inclusivity generates fresh ideas and perspectives and leads to a richer life experience. It can shed light on a life different than your own, experiencing new

cultures and traditions. Most importantly inclusion leads to a growing acceptance and diminishes discrimination.

Writer Del Shores puts it this way.

“Sometimes I close my eyes and create a perfect world
A world of understanding and love, a world where there is hope
Even if the hope was just a whisper
A world where people change
A world where all are accepted
A world where the lonely are no longer lonely
A world where sermons preach about truth. about love and hope
A world where mothers and fathers accept, embrace, and love every single part of their children
A world where I can love, and he can love
But I always wake up
But now with hope and that world will still be there”

The churches message to all should be that God is love and love comes from God born of God and knows God. Whoever does not know love, does not know God because God is love