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Share Your Salvation Story for the Purpose of Christian Unity

Notes from the President

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“I’m amazed at how diverse the backgrounds are in my small group and yet we don’t notice the differences as we’re all focused on Jesus. It’s such a joy to experience this kind of Christian unity through the Institute’s Fellows Program!” This comment from a young professional woman of color at our 2016 Washington, D.C. Fellows retreat struck me. I was thrilled that the Holy Spirit had brought together Americans with ethnic and racial heritages from Europe, Korea, China, the Philippines, Africa, Sri Lanka, and India to be part of this year-long CSLI Fellows discipleship journey. The Fellows also represented people from many different professions including the military, education, medicine, law, business, church, technology and government. And perhaps even more amazing was the fact that we had people representing 41 different local churches from Greater Washington, D.C. who were pursuing the common goal of learning to obey all that Jesus commanded so that they could become more faithful and fruitful disciple-makers!

As our nation struggles with the ever-present problems of racism, hatred, bigotry and division, the American church is dealing with the same issues. We should be different in our attitudes and behaviors as followers of Jesus when compared to the world. Unfortunately, that isn’t always the case. Unity in the church is the prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in John 17:20-22 prayed to the Father,

“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” (ESV)

That Christian unity should transcend all barriers of race, ethnicity, politics, economics, social class, etc...

Jesus’ prayer makes a connection between true Christian unity and the resulting effect – “so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” This is a powerful message to us who make up the body of Christ. If we desire to reach our neighbors with the good news of Jesus, we must first present a picture of oneness in relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Unfortunately, the world doesn’t always see this desired picture of believers as being diverse in background, yet one in Christ.

In reflecting upon the unity experienced by many of our CSLI Fellows, I think there is one component that helps develop this authentic sense of unity. At the beginning of our fall retreat, in the safety of a confidential, actively listening small group of men or women, the Fellows share their stories of how Jesus made Himself known to them and rescued them. While each person's story is unique and different, at the same time, each shares the same story line in which they were saved by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior. When we understand that we've each been "born again" into the same family, we suddenly realize that we actually are brothers and sisters in Christ and, as a result, share the unity that comes from being in the same spiritual family.

May I suggest a simple step toward unity among believers from different churches, races, political parties and professional backgrounds? Take the time to share your spiritual journey with another believer who is different from you in race, church denomination, party or employment history. And then take the time to listen to his or her testimony. I think that you will find that it can only bring you closer to one another and help you participate more deeply in the unity that God the Father desires of us and that Jesus prayed so desperately to become a reality. ■■

Joel



Joel S. Woodruff, President, C.S. Lewis Institute, has worked in higher education, "tent-making," nonprofit administration, and pastoral ministries in Alaska, Israel, Hungary, France, and Northern Virginia. He served as Dean of Students, Chaplain, and Professor of Bible & Theology at European Bible Institute, where he helped train Europeans both for professional ministry and to be Christian leaders in the marketplace. Prior to joining the Institute, he was on the leadership team of Oakwood Services International, a nonprofit educational and humanitarian organization. He is a graduate of Wheaton College, earned his M.Div. from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and has a doctorate in Organizational Leadership from Nova Southeastern University.

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