

LAITY MANUSCRIPT CONTEST 2017

Together We Are More

Variations on ONE Theme

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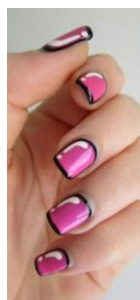
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“You should put that on Pinterest!” This is one of the biggest compliments to give someone today. Pinterest is a social network that describes itself as “The world’s catalog of ideas” with a multitude of recipes, decorating projects, and crafts. People go on the site to “pin” their favorite things or get inspiration for projects. I avoid Pinterest—I’m not crafty and I know that what I create will look nothing like the photos posted. Despite having a picture to look at, clear instructions, good intentions, and my best effort, I would take something



that looks like this [show photo to left on a screen] and make it look like this [show photo to the right]. I am not alone—in fact, maybe you’ve seen one of the Pinterest fail sites where I found these photos! Here are a few more examples [photos below].



(photos from https://www.buzzfeed.com/nataliebrown/pinterest-craft-fails-that-are-never-not-funny?utm_term=.ikgDWL6r4#.ktX10qb9B; <https://diyprojects.com/pinterest-fails-make-day/>; <https://www.businessinsider.com.au/pintester-sonja-foust-pinterest-fails-2014-5>)

There are obviously many people who can actually make Pinterest crafts that look just like or even better than the original photos. But my guess is that all of us have some area of our lives where despite having the best goal, the best instructions, the best intentions, and giving our best effort we still fail.

I think Ephesians 4:4-6 points out perhaps the biggest epic fail area of the church today. Despite having the best picture, Jesus; the best instructions, the Bible; and the best intentions—we seem to frequently be tripped up by the call to unity—to oneness as the Body of Christ. Ephesians 4:4-6 says:

You are one body and one spirit, just as God also called you in one hope. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all, who is over all, through all, and in all. [CEB]

It's important to look at the context of a passage to make sure we don't twist the meaning, so here are a couple of things to keep in mind about these verses. First, many scholars think Ephesians might be a circular letter—one passed among many churches rather than targeted specifically to the church in Ephesus. Paul doesn't focus on a specific sin or local conflict as he does in some other letters. The message is for everyone.

Second, the verses are close to the beginning of chapter 4, which starts with the word “therefore” (or “in light of all this” or “then” in other versions). *Therefore* connects a cause and an effect. As J.D. Greear describes it, the beginning of Ephesians 4 is like a hinge: the first three chapters of Ephesians focus on what God has done for us through our acceptance of Christ's sacrifice for our sins. He's given us the power of the Holy Spirit (v. 1:19), brought together two groups (Jew and Gentile) to be *one body* (v. 2:16), and given us the right to *approach Him with freedom and confidence* (v. 3:12).

The second three chapters outline the difference knowing what God has done for us should make in our lives and behavior. In fact, the heading for the outline of Ephesians 4 in my NIV Study Bible uses the title “Practical Ways to Fulfill God's Purpose in the Church.” Christians are called to live a new way. Here's what Paul says his readers should do according to Eugene Peterson's paraphrase version, *The Message*:

While I'm locked up here, a prisoner for the Master, I want you to get out there and walk—better yet, run!—on the road God called you to travel. I don't want any of you sitting around on your hands. I don't want anyone strolling off, down some path that goes nowhere. [4:1-3]

That's the goal of the project. Paul gives us a picture of what we should be doing—not sitting on our hands or strolling off down a path that goes nowhere—but walking—better yet running—on the road God calls us to travel.

Next, Paul instructs us on how we are to do this: *Accept each other with love [CEB]*. Matthew Henry's commentary puts it this way, “We don't walk worthy of the vocation if we be

not friends to all Christians and sworn enemies of sin.” The GNT version says, *Be always humble, gentle, and patient. Show your love by being tolerant with one another.* That’s a very tall order for us humans! It’s easy to laugh at Pinterest fail photos—easy to not be humble, gentle or tolerant. It’s a total stranger’s work, it’s impersonal, it’s anonymous—and I do wonder if some people try to fail badly just to get on a Pinterest fail site.

Now imagine if it were your child who tried to make the hedgehog cake--or your grandma who brought the odd deviled eggs to Easter brunch--or your best friend who tried to get creative with her nail polish? If someone we love created these “fails,” we might be more gentle and tolerant even if we can’t say they’re beautiful. I’d be humble simply because they tried it and I didn’t have the courage to! When we love others, we’re much less apt to judge them (Asbury Commentary). When we communicate in love, we tend to be less critical.

Finally, we’re given clear instructions for the project—we are able to love this way and live this way by knowing that we are one. The word “one” is used seven times in most translations of verses 4-6 (emphasis added).

There is one body and one Spirit, just as there is one hope to which God has called you. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; there is one God and Father of all people, who is Lord of all, works through all, and is in all. [GNT]

And if Chapter 4 is indeed the start of our life instructions as the church, take note that Paul starts with unity in the Holy Spirit. That’s the first step to living as the new type of community God wanted to create through Christ and the first step to walking worthy of our call. I have to wonder how effective we will be in any other step if we don’t follow this one first, because if we aren’t “one in the Spirit” we will very likely be pulling in different directions.

Notice what this passage doesn’t say:

- It doesn’t say one style of worship
- It doesn’t say one way to grow spiritually
- It doesn’t say one way to share our faith story
- It doesn’t say one way to serve communion
- It doesn’t say one way to live out our mission

One body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism (in Christ), one God of all people. In the Methodist church I'd add "one mission": to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Despite these very specific instructions, I often felt that I walked out of too many meetings I attended at my church feeling like an epic Pinterest fail in the call to unity. Unity isn't easy; it doesn't come naturally—even when we know that's what we are called to do! Even when we have the best picture, the best instructions, and the best intentions, why do we so often lose focus on the fact that we have: *one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism (in Christ), one God of all people*—and one mission?

Furthermore, why do we so easily forget that God *is Lord of all, works through all, and is in all*? Perhaps because even though God is Lord of us all and in us all, He doesn't work through us all in exactly the same way—and that's by His design. If we only did things one way, we'd be limited in the type of people we can reach for Christ. However, instead of appreciating that, we too often stubbornly expect others to do things our way.

Several years ago the evangelism committee in our church proposed starting a second, more contemporary service to reach a different population than our original service reached. We started the service, but without unity in the church as a whole to support the endeavor. As a result, we sometimes pulled in different directions, competed for resources and attendance, and judged the other's failures with the same smugness with which we look at Pinterest fails. We didn't always have humbleness, patience, tolerance and love for one another. Through the help of someone from the conference we were reminded of the unity of our mission as a church to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world—and the call to love each other even though we don't always accomplish that mission in exactly the same way.

Over time, most people in our church have come to appreciate that together we are more—that as one church with a united mission, we can carry out that mission in more than one way. Our church recently volunteered to lead a community worship service during a local festival. In the past, it was often a struggle to blend the traditional and more post-modern elements of our two services into one unified and connected whole when we had a combined service. This time, the entire planning team agreed that we would tell one story—the renewal we

have daily in Christ—in different ways, one flowing into the next and interwoven rather than separated into two distinct chunks as we’ve sometimes done in the past.

When I look back at the struggles with disunity we had transitioning to two services, I did see a shining example in one couple who truly understood the call to unity in Ephesians 4:4-6. Herman and Jean were well into their 80s at the time and served on the evangelism committee where the topic was first broached. Herman candidly admitted that drums and loud praise music were not his cup of tea. But, he continued, it was what his grandchildren and great-grandchildren were drawn to and he felt it was important for our church to offer this worship variation if we wanted the church to reach more people for Jesus Christ. He understood that the unity of mission did not mean we all had to do things one way.

That alone was a pretty powerful example—but it didn’t end there. Acting in love, Herman and Jean showed up to the fledgling service every week, turning down their hearing aids and showing their support, even though it wasn’t their cup of tea. They continued this practice until the service became more established and the leaders told them they didn’t need to keep getting up early and staying at church for three hours! Herman and Jean “walked worthy of the call” given to us in Ephesians. They reminded us we have: *one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God of all people*. What might happen in our churches if more of us would show such spiritual maturity?

A couple of weeks ago I saw an example of how this might look. The women’s group at our church sponsored a “Coffee and Canvas” event—like “Wine and Canvas” without the alcohol. As I said earlier, I am not a crafty person—this really isn’t my cup of tea. But they were raising money for a good cause, so I signed up hoping to at least enjoy the coffee and breakfast food they promised to serve.

The instructor showed us four variations of the painting she would help us to create and encouraged us to accomplish our goal—painting a vase with flowers—in our own way. As we got to work, some women stuck very close to the original, some simply changed the colors, some combined two or three of the variations, and some really put their own stamp on it.



We encouraged one another, old friends and total strangers alike. It didn't matter whether your painting belonged on Pinterest or in the darkest corner of your basement, people found something positive to say, offered advice, and applauded effort. In the end we had many variations of the same theme and we thoroughly enjoyed the journey together. That's what I'd love all ministries in our churches, conference, and denomination to feel like.

- Imagine if we saw beyond our preferences and were able to support and encourage those who are not called to ministry in exactly the same way we are.
- Imagine if we earnestly prayed for the success of others in our church and conference who are doing things a little differently to accomplish our mission.
- Imagine if we showed love those who tell the gospel story a little differently than we do rather than being critical of them.
- Imagine if we started every meeting, every mission project, every fundraiser, and every worship service reminding ourselves that we have *One body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism (in Christ), one God of all people*—and one mission—to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

My guess is that together, in unity of the Spirit and with the power of the Spirit, our ministries, our churches, our conference, and our denomination would be more effective in

building God's kingdom. There are endless variations on the one theme of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, and when we put all those variations together, we are more.