



The topic of 'unity and outreach'

Just as a four-piston car needs all four pistons working to run smoothly, so does God's Church. Health in our wider witness and work will be the product of...

1. Individual effort
2. Small group effort
3. Congregational effort
4. United effort - which can happen at the (a) suburban, (b) city and (c) national levels.

Just like in human body (1 Corinthians 12) - all parts are needed. If one part suffers, the whole body suffers.

We suggest piston #4 is an area of weakness.

Church unity is highly significant to outreach:

Unity is, however, difficult.

- Human nature makes it so.
- ...Tribalism makes it so.
- ...Pride and ambition make it so.
- ...And 500 years of the Protestant movement - with the creation of hundreds of denominations, hasn't always helped.



Theologically:

A theology of unity is very simple. There is only one Church - made up of all who follow and know Christ.



"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all".

Ephesians 4:4-6

Terminology: Church vs church

It is useful to define 'church' with a small 'c' when referring to individual congregations or a denominational organisations, while referring to 'Church' with a capital 'C' refers to the united Church in a place - which would refer to all of God's people and congregations in that geography.

The overarching goals of unity

There are two primary goals in view regarding unity in the Bible.



1. The glory of God

- Psalm 133 quickly comes to mind. "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!"
- Just as parents delight at the sound of their children playing peaceably together, so does God.

2. Mission

- Jesus' unity prayer in John 17 is a prayer 'that the world might know'.
- Paul writes, "Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you" (Philippians 1:17-28). Unity would produce both gospel fruitfulness and also boldness in the endeavour, despite opposition.

Denominations - An 'Elephant in this room' - so let's discuss it!

Any honest discussion on 'unity and outreach' eventually has to address the role and function of denominations.

- Let's note the tension - and then two points that bring a simple resolution.

1. Probably not God's intent - while also probably inevitable

Few would suggest the existence of denominations was something God purposed.

Biblically, many see their beginning in the way early believers divided themselves between followers of Paul and followers of Apollos.

In response Paul wrote, "For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere human beings? What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task." (1 Corinthians 3: 4-6)

It is, however, possibly inevitable that we end up with our various denominations due to the human dynamic, as reflected in this division between followers of Paul and Apollos.

2. Doesn't have to be in tension with a united Church

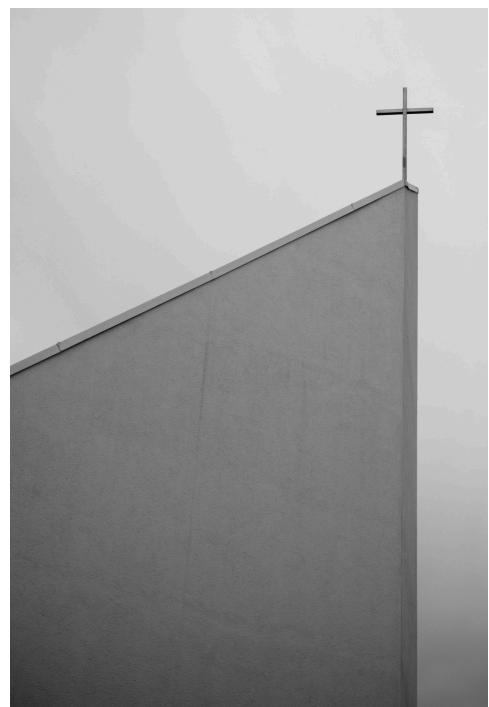
Many reading will have an appreciation of the history from which the various denominational movements arose. In most cases, the intent was good, not bad.

For a simple logic, if the primary purpose of a denomination is to bring

- (a) training,**
- (b) accountability** and
- (c) support** to the congregations in their geographically sprawling networks.

There is nothing inherently wrong with these purposes, so there is nothing inherently wrong with denominations!

Also, in as much as a denomination does this work well, it can bring increased health to the congregations it serves!



3. Does have a subservient position to take

What makes the local connection most important? The key thing denominational organisations can never lead in is mission - because mission, by its very nature, is geographically defined.

- For example, it is not the prerogative of the Presbyterian or Baptist churches of Tauranga to reach Tauranga for Jesus. Instead this is the mission of all Christian churches that are planted in the city together.
- Mission is therefore the primary factor that necessitates the functional unity of God's people in a place.
- For a boundary: We connect to identify and do together important things, in service to our mission, that we cannot do apart. (There is nothing wrong with independence - doing well what we can individually. What outcomes might require our collaboration?)

Denominations therefore sit in a subservient place with regard to the mission of the Church - even while they can concurrently bring strength and help to the congregations they serve (via their training, accountability and support).

If the relationship is understood, the tension need not exist. (Do you agree?)

GETTING PRACTICAL 3 - 5 - 3 The goals of city and national unity

- **Three** 'levels' of unity
- **Five** attitudes that sustain unity
- **Three** possible areas of application for pastors groups (church leaders together in a location)
- **Support resources**

3 LEVELS: The overarching goals of unity

UNITY LEVEL #1 Coffee and prayer

A natural process in unity amongst churches is as follows:

A. Coffee unity (relationship)

B. Prayer unity (beginning to unite in vision)

C. Functional unity (where healthy vision achieves its practical outworking).

We suggest here that #A and #B are our first 'level' of unity.

Christian leaders gather, establishing an initial foundation of relationship - inclusive of prayer - from which the needed foundation of TRUST comes (not just relationship).

Only then do we transition to consider a SHARED VISION of things we might uniquely be able to achieve together ('level 2').

UNITY LEVEL #2 What can we do together that we cannot do apart



"In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." (James 2:17)

God wants more than our enjoyment of relationship and prayer. Our unity has a purpose.

**Put differently, we do not need unity for unity's sake.
As in John 17, we need unity for mission's sake!**

The process of all Christian mission can be summarised as follows:

- **Unity**
- **Prayer**
- **Action**

This process is just as true for a group of Christians gathering in a work place or school, as for a pastor with their team in a local church, a pastors' group in a city or a missionary going to Cambodia who seeks out God's people, to work with them.

We UNITE together ... to then PRAY about...what we could DO.

The goal of our unity isn't only our relationship and prayer. It includes action!

Here are EXAMPLES of how churches have worked together to consider the ideas:

- **Read about what has been happening in England.** Churches united in 1500 separate areas. It was called 'HOPE Together UK' - and Roy Crowne visited NZ to share the story for our benefit. Read at AllTogether.co.nz/roycrowne/
- **Read about Te Hahi.** This outstanding united initiative started in Gisborne. With five churches involved it can meet a need across a city - while bringing reputation, connection and other opportunities as a natural by-product. Read at www.tehahi.org.nz/
- **Read about the Invercargill 'serve your community' day.** A single day, with nearly 20 projects and a few hundred people involved, has not only helped by way of service - it has likewise resulted in wide reaching reputation and opportunity as a by-product. Read here AllTogether.co.nz/invercargillcommunityservice/
- **Read about the Good Neighbour trust in Tauranga.** Starting from a desire to give practical help to people with needs, the work has expanded to include food rescue, fire wood, community gardens and far more. Read at their website goodneighbour.co.nz

These are examples of the kinds of things we can do together but not apart.

UNITY LEVEL #3 What can we be together that we cannot be apart

If level 2 is what we can uniquely do together, level 3 is about what we can uniquely be together. And what is that?

- We can be the creators of a context out of which our church members are empowered and released to unite with one-another in their own areas of interest and influence!

This is the most grand vision of unity!

• Illustration:

Just as a talented pastor running programmes is no match for 100 mobilised members, 20 pastors facilitating united endeavours are no match for 2000 church members released and inspired to INITIATE good things in service to their workplace, school and city!

Were we to help our **MEMBERS** unite in their areas of interest and influence, the effects could be profound!

...but how could this be made practical?

EXAMPLE: Making the MOBILISATION of MEMBERS PRACTICAL

A regular prayer meeting in every workplace and school



- We cannot think of a 'grander' vision for unity.
- This would catalyse the initiative and action of many.
- Some Christians do already initiate like this in their workplaces and schools - but it is rare.
- It is also rare at this point that Christian leaders encourage this as a specific direction for application.



Is this the most simple & profound vision for unity you have ever heard?

How then can we get to 'application' in our unity?

We need to traverse the pitfalls.

Functional unity amongst churches is uniquely fragile.

What then are the pitfalls - and how could we overcome them?

5 ATTITUDES - that can SUSTAIN or UNDERMINE unity

1. Pride - can cause God's favour to withdraw

To quote Marcus Aurelius from the movie 'The Gladiator', ***"There was once a dream that was Rome. You could only whisper it. Anything more than a whisper and it would vanish."***

- Unity is like this.
- Human pride offends God.
- With 'even a whisper of personal ambition' it can 'vanish'!
- There can be ambition in a pastors' group no different to in an individual congregation.
- Leadership / facilitation in the unity space is therefore a most sacred trust.

2. Speaking well of one another

The key challenge relates to denominational and theological differences - and we can **all easily and unknowingly** become guilty of words unwisely spoken.



- **Illustration - church structures:** The Pentecostal might criticise the seemingly **inflexible power structures** of the traditional churches - while the traditional churches criticises the seeming **concentration of power in one man or woman** in the Pentecostal churches.
- **Illustration - spiritual gifts:** The theological conservative might perceive those valuing outwardly expressed **spiritual gifts as being deceived or overly emotional** - while the reverse perception is of a congregation **lacking life, joy and vitality**.
- **Illustration - style:** The person in the traditional church might look at the Pentecostal and wonder why there is **so much emotion and hype** - while the reverse view perceives an **absence of the Holy Spirit's presence**.
- **Illustration - gospel approach:** The church with the 'evangelistic crusade' is perceived to be **too direct** - while the one criticising is perceived as **too quiet, as if too ashamed** of the gospel to share it with those who have never heard.

"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."

(Ephesians 4:3)

We must speak well of each other!

3. A scepticism of the idea of functional unity

"Once bitten, twice shy."

- Sometimes hidden behind the non-attendance of pastors at city pastors group is a deep-rooted scepticism lack of belief that functional unity is even possible - because 'we tried that and it didn't work'!

4. An unbalanced identity in denomination

This has already been addressed.

Where mindsets are too strongly 'married' to a denomination, it's easy to neglect the wider work of God's Church in the city - even to the point that we cannot even see it.

- If one part of the body doesn't play its part, other parts are affected.
(1 Corinthians 12:12-31)



As stated above: **Denomination and Church do not have to be in tension.**

The solution is in **understanding the unique roles and function** of Church vs denomination.

We then pursue health in both!

5. An inadequate recognition of the need of workers released to serve on the united Church platform

While my personal bias might be suspected in this point, you will know that I genuinely advocate for outreach on 'all four pistons' (individual - small group - congregation - combined).

As a simple picture, our funding structures are anchored to local congregations and denominations - not the united Church. In fact exorbitant funds are spent each year on our maybe 3000 pastors and staff's salaries across a plausible 4000 churches

with 2500 buildings nationally - sustaining the first three of those pistons (individual - small group - congregational). Tithes do this.

Yet, because of how we are structured, the same doesn't naturally sit in support of the fourth piston, which is Church work in the city or nation.

Positively: Many do recognise the need for Church work that serves wider purposes in our cities and nation. Consider the student work of Cru /Tandem and TSCF, Rhema Media's work, the unity / networking efforts of NZCN / Shining Lights Trust / Wilberforce Foundation - and then a myriad of ministries working in specialised areas nationally.

The pitfall: If we only have a 'lens' that sees 'denomination' and 'congregation' we might struggle to recognise and empower those called to this important wider work.

- For a Biblical analogy - this is like struggling to recognise Gideon, Ehud, Jephthah, Deborah and Sampson when God raises them up - because they don't fit the mould we expect.
- Workers need releasing and empowering.

How do we overcome the above pitfalls?
We talk about them.



(We won't strengthen the functionality of our unity if we don't talk about it)

The above five-point article can be shared for discussion at AllTogether.co.nz/sustainingunity

APPLICATION Church members

Unite in your workplace / school

1. Meet with other Christians from your workplace or school once per week,
2. to pray together for your workplace/school, and regarding
3. what you could do?



APPLICATION Church leaders together

SUGGESTION 1: Find something you could uniquely do together

With a habit of meeting together as pastors to pray for your city/town as your foundation, **What you could do together in service to the city that you could not do apart?** (Examples are given earlier in this article)

SUGGESTION 2: Find a way to ensure that, as Christian leaders in a city or town, you KNOW about ALL of the 'help on offer' coming from all of your local churches to your community

We suspect the above is NOT the case in the vast majority of NZs city and town pastors' groups.

Until a church leader knows what the Church of their city or town does , it is difficult to stand as a representative of God's churches.

However, once a group of church leaders have this knowledge, ALL are positioned to stand as a representative of God's Church - which then changes the way we engage!

There is an inherent wisdom to this - if we can perceive it.

The question is then, HOW might we help pastors across a community gain this knowledge - and retain something of it on an ongoing basis?

A simple idea:

Pastors' groups engage in a specific brief discussion every quarter

To discuss what?

- (a) Two of the eight spheres of influence (8 therefore covered in a year)
- (b) ...and also any upcoming seasonal opportunities in the calendar (Waitangi, ANZAC, Christmas etc.).



(To break it down) If this simple quarterly discussion were embraced as a habit

(1) this would bring MEANING and ENCOURAGEMENT to pastors' groups

(2) while catalysing

- enhanced COLLABORATION and TEAMWORK serving the community, and enhanced COHESION (presenting 'as one') to the community

...naturally generating increased ENGAGEMENT with and PROFILE within the community. ...which would unavoidably affect PERSPECTIVES, leading to increased FAVOUR and OPPORTUNITY.

'Suggestion 2' is a strategic key.

SUGGESTION 3 : Engage with and leverage momentum from national initiatives

Just as there are things we can do together but not apart in a city - the same applies nationally

Local Church unity can take on the same 'spirit of independence' ('empire building') as is possible in local congregations - thereby 'shirking off' anything 'national' as of no relevance.

Sometimes regional and national initiatives are purposed by God.

- They bring economies of scale.
- They can enable or catalyse action in multiple places that might rarely exist in a single location otherwise.

Discernment is needed.

By God's grace, enough people discern the value of every gospel effort God has purposed - so it thrives in our nation!



In summary

Level 1 - Relationship and prayer (Establishing your DNA)

- Actively 'disciple' the DNA and culture/thinking of your pastors' groups - achieved through time together discussing matters related to unity - including goals/purposes, attitudes, values of, disappointments in, pitfalls of, possibilities of and desires for unity.

Level 2 - Doing together what you cannot do apart

1. Find something to do together that meets a need in your city (an activity)
2. Know what each other does - so you can represent as one (discussion)
3. Leverage national initiatives - knowing it greatly increases your capacity (participation)

Level 3 - Being together what you cannot be apart

- Consider how you might enable and release the members of your churches to unite in their areas of influence and interest - most-certainly including in their schools and workplaces.
- The vision of catalysing united prayer gatherings connected with every possible workplace and school is a meaningful way to do this -catalysing their connection, prayer and new initiative).

**May God give favour to every gospel-purposed endeavour in our nation
that it might thrive in its season!**

SUPPORT RESOURCES

Books:

God is a City Builder by Ian Shelton - Find online

A House for His Glory by Colin Shaw - Free pdf can be found at www.citybycity.co.nz/resources - Free hardcopy (pay postage only) email admin@shininglights.co.nz

In One Spirit by Dave Mann - Free pdf can be found at AllTogether.co.nz/ebooks/ or can be purchased at AllTogether.co.nz/product/because-we-care/

Organisations:

Shining Lights Trust - Networking / encouraging vision in pastors groups, including a quarterly update to pastors' group convenors re vision + passing on ideas + articles.

- See AllTogether.co.nz/pastorsgroups/
- Subscribe for the quarterly updates at AllTogether.co.nz/updates/
- FaceBook: Closed group only for those facilitating unity / pastors' groups - search 'Mahi Ngatahi - Working Together'

New Zealand Christian Network - An expansive networking work connecting churches and Church ministries (para-church) together. NZChristianNetwork.co.nz

- They facilitate a weekly national online prayer meeting called 'Pray As One', 8pm Mondays. Details at prayasone.nz

Wilberforce Foundation - A charitable and expansive networking effort serving about 150 Church / Para-church ministries in areas of help to governance, healthy working practice, concurrent with the sustaining of a clear gospel vision and hope. Wilberforce.org.nz

The Auckland Church Network - While the efforts of ALL pastors' groups deserve praise - Auckland contains one-third of our nation's population. They've also funded staff (Church workers) to facilitate city-wide work. This is quite a unique dynamic in NZ. AucklandChurchNetwork.nz

- Auckland churches are encouraged to be connected and united in and for their own 'quarter' or 'wider area' of the city - thereby functioning just like pastors' groups do in all other NZ cities and towns - for your 'city' (meaning 'part of Auckland city').

City by City - Facilitated by Colin and Grace Shaw, City by City has sought to encourage the unity of pastors in cities and towns nationwide. With Colin and Grace having recently retired, a network of Christian unity leaders remains and is praying into its next season. Citybycity.co.nz

