



unity

church leadership resources

sbtexas.com/healthsurvey

Based on the Church Health Assessment you completed, unity may be an area of needed growth for your church and/or church leadership. Other than the gospel itself, unity is the most valuable thing a church can possess. Consequently, it is also often the most delicate. In the **Explanation** section below, you will find several important biblical foundations for unity as it relates to church health. Subsequent sections of this report will include **SBTC Resources/Tools, Other Recommended Resources** and **Contacts**. All of these are designed to help strengthen your church in the area of unity. Please take time to read through this report and to share it with some key influential leaders in your church.



explanation

“For he is our peace who made both groups one and tore down the dividing wall of hostility. . . . He did this so that he might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross by which he put the hostility to death.” Ephesians 2:14-16

In a healthy church, sons of men will refuse to resurrect what the Son of God died to kill. In his flesh, Jesus put hostility to death when he was crucified in our place on the cross of Calvary. In healthy churches, members embrace unity and peace by meeting one another in the middle, at the cross of Christ, where antagonism, opposition, division and conflict come to die.

It is likely that we have all been a part of a church where disunity brought shame to the cross of Christ instead of bringing honor to it. Unhealthy churches often fight over the smallest of things. Their commitment to a bylaw revision, musical style or carpet color runs more deeply than their commitment to one another.

In his instruction on life together, the apostle Paul urged the Roman church to “prefer one another” (Romans 12:10). All matters of preference were to become matters of deference. In other words, if it was not a matter of doctrinal fidelity, it was to be a matter of interpersonal amenability.

Churches do not usually begin this way. When churches are freshly planted (or replanted) and their focus is on Great Commission advance, members usually defer their preferences willingly. They are too busy moving forward together, on mission, to get sidetracked by peripheral disagreements.

They possess little or nothing, so they are thankful for anything they get. An old music stand is just as well received as an ornately carved wooden pulpit. A school cafeteria is as good a place to gather as a dedicated room in an owned building. Folding chairs seem just as comfortable as padded pews. When they have nothing, they are thankful for everything.

They are as willing to sing songs after the sermon as they are before it. They could not care less if their small group meets in a home or a hallway. They are fine with either a Memorial Day picnic or a Memorial Day mission trip. When they have standardized nothing, there is joy in everything.

But as a church matures and grows over time, it can sometimes become more passionate about its possessions and its traditions than about its message and its mission. And when a change is proposed that might liquidize that possession or violate that tradition, disunity rears its ugly head. For such a church to take steps toward congregational health, divisions such as these must find their death at the cross of Christ.

Jesus himself prayed in John 17 that we would “all be made one, so that the world will believe” that he was sent of the Father. Pay careful attention to the words “so that.” In so praying, the Lord Jesus indicated a cause-and-effect relationship between a church’s unity and its effectiveness in its mission. There is a correlation between a church’s unity and its gospel-impact: “May they all be made one . . . so that the world will believe.”

But how do we know if our church is unified? Unity in the church can be a difficult thing to measure. Allow me to explain what unity is not and what it is.

Unity is not uniformity.

In an unhealthy church, sometimes the only way to have the appearance of unity is to have the appearance of uniformity. Uniform churches are only welcoming to certain kinds of Christians. Peace in such a fellowship is protected because every person has the same political party affiliation, the same socioeconomic status, the same ethnic background, or the same generational leanings. This is not unity. This is uniformity. The Bible teaches that God delights in diversity. To have a diverse church, comprised of every cross-section of the community's population, is a beautiful thing. Where else could all kinds of people from all kinds of different backgrounds come together as one under the guiding peace that is only found in Christ Jesus? Only at the foot of the cross. To require uniformity for unity's sake is to settle for a cheap imitation of the peace that comes through Jesus. Unity is not uniformity.

Unity is not unanimity.

How often do one hundred percent of the people agree on something? Every church I've ever served or visited is full of real people who have real problems like me—and those real people with real problems bring their real opinions to every real issue. Unanimity is a blessing when it happens. But to require unanimity as a demarcation of unity is simply not feasible. Nor is it biblical. When the Holy Spirit gives complete unanimity among his people and when they receive it and communicate it with grace, it is a special thing indeed. But rarely do we all completely agree on something. Rather, unity happens when those who do not agree choose deference instead of division. Unity happens when disagreement is defused because one or more parties choose to prefer one another over their own preferences. Even those of us who agree on almost everything will eventually disagree on something. Unanimity is not the standard for unity. Unity is not unanimity.

Unity is oneness.

"May they all be made completely one, as you are in me and I am in you, may they all be made one in us so that the world will know you have sent me," prayed the Lord Jesus for his church, in John 17:21. In the church, unity is oneness. It is a oneness of purpose, a oneness of mind, and a oneness of heart, a singular devotion to the mission. The apostle Paul urged the Philippian church to "make my joy complete by thinking the same way, having the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose."

Unhealthy churches allow division to corrupt mission.

Healthy churches allow oneness of purpose to guard and guide their mission together.

sbtc tools & resources

SBTC Prayer webpage

Resources and event links to help your congregation unify around a healthy desperation for God through prayer.

“Unity in Church Revitalization”

A one-hour teaching video by Tony Wolfe on what biblical unity is and is not, why it matters and how to cultivate and maintain it in your church.

Church Revitalization

Your SBTC staff can help call the church back to unity around her primary mission through a strategic, biblical approach to church revitalization and renewal.

other recommended resources

Recommended Books/ Articles/Videos:

Peacemaking Blogroll

by Peacemakers ministries

Firestorm: Preventing and Overcoming

Church Conflicts

by Ron Susek

“Why is Unity Important in the Church Body?”

article by Tony Wolfe

Unity Training/Methods:

Prayer Meeting Playbook for Pastors

by Nathan Lino and Northeast Houston
Baptist Church

Peacemaker Ministries

a comprehensive church peacemaking
ministry resource for leadership training,
conflict mediation and more

contacts

Please do not hesitate to reach out to the following contacts for encouragement, consultation or direction. It will be our joy to come alongside you as you lead your church to reach your community for Christ.

Jeff Lynn – jlynn@sbtexas.com

Senior Strategist for Church Health & Leadership

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SBTC Prayer Ministry Catalyst



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