

Addressing Diversity and Promoting Reconciliation – A Summary Statement

How do we address Diversity and at the same time promote Reconciliation? This is a puzzle made up of many parts; diverse pieces that when looked at alone appear to have nothing in common. The church, particularly the United Methodist Church is very diverse. How can we recognize, even celebrate those “things” that could divide us and cause us to use terms like “us” and “them” or “those people”? Things like color, sex, location, point of origin, political or sexual persuasion, language, socio-economic status, ethnic background, even style of worship as well as other differences can and often do become divisive. How can we come to view these as unique and valuable parts of our church instead of just “another brick in the walls” that divide us?

Our group after much study, research and prayer came to recognize seven actions that if practiced can lead to reconciliation, to unity of mind, heart and hand. They are as follows:

- I am willing to reach out to those who are isolated and alone.
- I am willing to truly listen to your position, ideas, suggestions; your story.
- I am willing to learn about you, me, God and the world we live in together.
- I am willing to accept others who are different from me.
- I am willing to forgive words and/or actions that hurt others or me.
- I am willing to serve others in ways that will benefit them and the world we share.
- I am willing to love others and myself unselfishly.

These consciously chosen actions on the surface may appear to be rather diverse in nature. Some are active; others are passive. Some may appear easy to accomplish while others can require deep and often painful introspection. Some can be accomplished by the individual while others may demand a community effort. But in the final analysis, interwoven throughout all seven actions is a single common thread. They all require the individual to set aside his or her own wants, desires and interests and focus on the needs of another human being.

Every Christian is called to “die to self”. In Luke 9:23-25 [NIV] Christ himself says, *“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?”* And Paul in Philippians 2:3-5 [NIV] states, *“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:...”*. Only when we seek to have the mindset of Christ can we as a people put aside our differences and be reconciled to one another. Only then will all the pieces of this puzzle come together. Reconciled to Father God and each other by the sin offering of Jesus Christ and bound together by God’s Holy Spirit, we can then present to the world the complete beautiful and colorful picture that is the Kingdom of God come to Earth. May it be so!