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## What s the Point of Pursuing Unity?

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# What's the Point of Pursuing Unity?

Mark A. Taylor

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*This piece is a reflection on the 2012 Dialogue meeting, which was a time of spiritual retreat. It was previously published in the Christian Standard<sup>1</sup> and adapted for publication in Leaven.*

So what's the payoff you're expecting as a result of these meetings?" The question came from my roommate in the middle of a November 2012 spiritual formation retreat sponsored by the Stone-Campbell Dialogue outside Dallas, Texas. The Dialogue is a loosely organized group that has met at least annually since 1999 to build understanding and trust among members of a *cappella* Churches of Christ, Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). In the late-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, these three streams diverged from each other while remaining a part of what we call the Restoration Movement, or the Stone-Campbell Movement. Although members in each of these congregations shared a common heritage, the groups were isolated from each other for many decades. The Dialogue is one effort to bridge those divides. But many who hear about the Dialogue wonder whether it matters.

"Why would you give your time to this meeting?" one new member was asked by her supervisor. Involvement does require a significant amount of time. This year national Dialogue participants committed to four days of discussion, worship, and fellowship. From the greater Dallas-Fort Worth area eighteen members of the national team, as well as thirteen young leaders, attended the spiritual life retreat on Friday and Saturday. After the retreat ended on Saturday, the national team continued on, meeting through Monday afternoon.

"They are not going to change," a friend said to me. To at least some degree, she is right. The purpose of the Dialogue is not to browbeat "them" into agreeing with "our" position. But as the Dialogue members have met together through the years, they have discovered a long list of positions on which they *can* agree. Their discussions and new friendships have been a catalyst for cooperative ventures among members of all three streams around the country.

"It's all about relationships," said one team member in the closing discussion of the 2012 meeting. "Relationship is not an *only*; it's an *ultimate*." He added that participating in the Dialogue "dispels bitterness and prejudice." And then there is the most important reason of all: "Christ compels us to do this."

Too often we have responded to Christ's prayer for unity (John 17.20, 21) by equating unity with agreement. "I am all for unity! When they admit their errors, I am ready and willing to be united with them."

But as Gary Holloway so eloquently stated in an article first posted to [the *Christian Standard*] site in 2011, "God through his Spirit can work even through those who are wrong. I hope so, for I believe he works in me even when I am wrong."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Mark A. Taylor, "What's the Point of Pursuing Unity?," *Christian Standard* website, accessed May 16, 2015, <http://christianstandard.com/2012/11/whats-the-point-of-pursuing-unity/>.

2. Gary Holloway, "Faith, Liberty and Love in the Holy Spirit," *Christian Standard* website, accessed May 16, 2015, <http://christianstandard.com/2011/07/faith-liberty-and-love-in-the-holy-spirit/>.

One member of the Dialogue team who has served among *a cappella* Churches of Christ for a lifetime reflected on the unity of the Great Communion service we enjoyed Sunday evening. It was hosted at the North Davis Church of Christ, an *a cappella* congregation in Arlington, Texas. A choir, pianist, and cellist from Arlington's First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) led worship. Dusty Rubeck, president of Dallas Christian College, spoke and D'Esta Love, from the Church of Christ, presided at the Lord's table. This team member observed, "To me, the fact that we can all worship together transcends everything."

And that says it all. Perhaps experiencing and demonstrating unity is payoff enough, at least for now.

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