

## Why bother?

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As I move around pastors in the area, sometimes the questions are raised: *"What's the point of all this talking of unity? Why bother with things like Illawarra AD2000? Isn't it all a waste of time? Shouldn't we just be getting on with the job in our local churches?"* So, let me try to give some answers at least as to why I bother:

1. **I can't escape the fact that it seemed to be very important to Jesus.** In John 17:22,23, he prayed *"I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."*

There was a purpose in His wanting His followers to be brought "to complete unity" ... to let the world know that the Father sent Jesus and loved them. The reason for the link between unity and evangelism seems to follow from the second point...

2. **The purposes of God in Christ demand unity.**

The Gospel is about reconciliation - the reconciliation of mankind to God which must flow into the reconciliation of person to person. Paul says 2 Corinthians 5:19, that *"God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation."* Time and again, the Bible points to the fact that our relationship to God is also linked to our relationship to each other. In the context of prayer, Jesus says (Mark 11:25) *"And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins. "*

The final purposes of God are clearly stated by Paul in Ephesians 1:10 when he writes that God's revealed will, *"which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment (is) to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ."* This "bringing together" is at the heart of what Christ has done. Now in Christ, we (Eph. 2:10) are *"God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."* Now in Christ Jesus we (Eph 2: 13,14) *"who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace..."*

Look at what Paul goes on to say: (Eph 2:19,22) *"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the*

*whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."*

Joined together ... a holy temple in the Lord... a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit!

In the Old Testament, the glory of God, representing the Presence of God, was understood to reside in the Holy of Holies of the Tabernacle, and later, the Temple. That was the place that people went to meet God. At the time of the exile, there is the moving picture of the glory of God departing from the Temple - the Temple is no longer the place where people can meet God. The glory of God only comes back in the Person of Jesus Christ (John 1:14-16) *"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth... From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another."* Jesus is now the place where people are to meet God - a person, not a place. And the glory of God is displayed in Him - not in some mystical cloud or sign.

But the Risen Jesus is no longer visible to the world. How will people see the glory of God? How will (Hab. 2:14) *"the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea."*? The answer lies in the Church, the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Holy Spirit - making visible the life of Christ - not always clearly, but with increasing clarity as (2 Cor 3:18) *"we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit"*.

Remember, that Jesus said His followers would (Acts 1:8) *"receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."* As we, the people of God, the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Spirit, live and proclaim Jesus to the nations, the peoples, so the *"the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea."*

3. **The world notices the disparity between what the Church proclaims and how it lives.** How many times, in talking to someone about the Gospel, the argument has come up "But what about all the divisions in the church! You say this is right, but someone else says..."

Recently, here in our own region, John Thew has drawn our attention to the fact the Buddhism proclaims a form of peace which people are looking for in an unpeaceful world. His comment is that the church has failed to demonstrate the peace of God in its life - we haven't been visibly representing the oneness that is in Christ. We have been more characterised by our divisions than our unity, and then wonder why the Buddhists are making such inroads into our community!

4. **The spiritual authority of the church is greatly affected by it.** One of the things that Ed Silvano has reminded us about so clearly is that we are in a spiritual battle. Ephesians 6:12 says *"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (6:13) Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand."*

We are in a spiritual war! But as the Body of Christ we are *"seated with Christ in the heavenly places"* (Eph. 1:20; 2:6) and *"all things (are) under his feet"*. As the Body of Christ, we have authority over the powers of darkness!

**So how does Satan get such a hold on the church and on our communities?** Satan and the powers of darkness have no authority over us unless we give it to him! *"Don't give the devil a foothold"*, Paul says in Ephesians 4:27. **How do we give a foothold?** The context of that verse is mainly about relationships, about not living as the people of God, about not speaking the truth in love - about all the things that cause disunity and the breakdown of relationships in the Body of Christ, whether at the level of the local church or on the level of the church within the suburb or the city. To tackle the suburban stronghold of the enemy takes the suburban church working together. **To tackle a city-wide stronghold of the enemy takes the city-wide church!** Our failure to live as the Body of Christ with a commitment to the wider Church is one of the reasons why we are struggling so much in all our efforts in evangelism.

5. **That brings me to my last reason why I bother to work for the wider church - it works!**

I've read enough and seen enough to know that when the church begins to move together in unity, things begin to happen spiritually.

Around Australia I hear of towns where the Gospel is beginning to change things. I hear that where churches begin to pray together, the powers of darkness are being put to flight, trouble spots in the communities are being eliminated, and people are coming to the Lord in increasing numbers. There is an "atmosphere for effective evangelism", as Silvano calls it.

It's happening in other places as well - in Argentina, even in Japan. Where the churches begin to regard each other with honour and work and pray together, things happen! Where they don't, the church loses (if it ever had it) its place of authority. Silvano says *"as the fullness of Christ expressed by the Church decreases, it can be reasonably assumed, that the influence of the prince of the power of the air (Satan) increases in the heavenly places. That is why, when Satan has the upper hand in a city, we always find a Church that is deeply divided with members, congregations and denominations angry at each other"*.

I want to see the Lord glorified more in the Illawarra! I want to see His Kingdom coming and His will being down here in Illawarra, even as it is in

heaven! Therefore, I bother with things like the unity of the church. I bother with things like Illawarra AD2000 and pastors' prayer breakfasts. I want to live in the fullness of what Christ has for His church. I want to see His Church living the way He intended it to live - for His sake, and for the sake of those who don't know Him as well as for the sake of the city which needs to experience His Kingdom and His righteousness.

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Prepared by David Bartlett, Illawarra Pastors' Network, January 1996

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