

Cornerstone: We are a Community

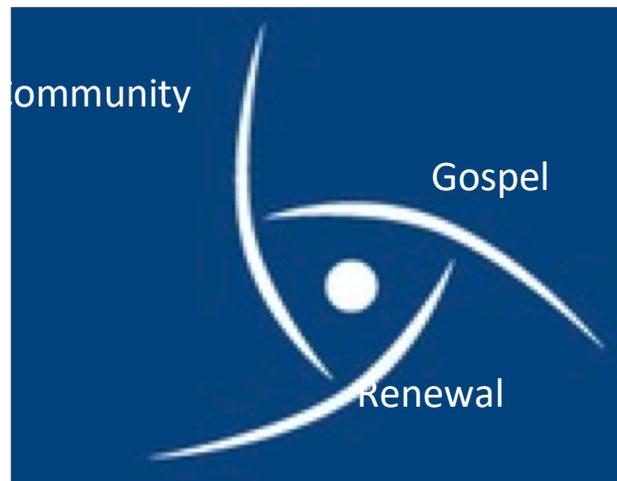
community | \kə-'myü-nə-tē\ n. a group of people with a common characteristic or interest living together within a larger society for a special purpose.

I have been reflecting lately about Cornerstone being *a community shaped by the gospel for the renewal of all things*, and several questions have come to mind:

- *Community*: What does it mean to be a community?
- *Gospel*: What is the gospel? How can we be shaped by it?
- *Renewal*: What does it mean to renew all things?

To me, the answers to these questions are important because taken together, these three images -- *community*, *gospel*, and *renewal* -- provide a *trifocal lens* through which we can collectively examine Scripture, our relationship with God and each other, and in general, deepened Christian life in the world.

So, I have decided to write a few thoughts on each focal point of Cornerstone's triune mission. These are not definitive answers nor is this a comprehensive treatise of the three images. Rather, I offer some ideas for initiating *intentional conversations* that can shape our thinking in what we are about.



Below I tackle the first question, "What does it mean to be a community?"

The Example of our Community

God has always worked within and through community. His essential being is our ultimate example. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit have always existed and will eternally exist in *tri-unity*.

We often say that we are made in His image, but actually, the first book of the Bible says, "Let us make man in *our* (plural) image, after *our* likeness" (Genesis 1: 26). These first passages of Scripture indicate the tri-unity, or comm-unity, of our Creator -- three in one and one in three. As image bearers, we are inescapably community bearers. The communion among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is our ultimate example of what it means to be a community, to be *e pluribus unum* -- or in God's case, *e tribus unum*.

God is not only the prime example of our community, but He has always related to the world in the context of community. While the notion of community is seen in Adam and Eve's family and Noah's progeny, the nation of Israel was/is an example of a special community chosen and set apart for unique relationship and purpose. Out of all humankind, God chose His covenant people, Israel, and intended them to serve as a light unto the world. Through the community of Israel, God has given the world manifold blessings, including Jesus the Messiah.

Through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, God created another community, brothers and sisters who are grafted and adopted into the family of God. Through faith in Christ's completed work for us, we are united to Him and to one another. The church is our spiritual family through which God takes people of different personalities and gifts, unifies them as a single body, and equips them to partner with Him in His work in the world (Ephesians 4: 1-3; 1 Corinthians 12: 12-17).

The *Unity* in our Comm *Unity*

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)

We are a united whole, one in the Spirit, and nothing can destroy that positional unity which God Himself has formed. However, the complete, deep *experience* of community *can* be damaged and devastated. That is why we are exhorted to "*make every effort* to keep (or preserve) the unity of the Spirit" (Ephesians 4: 3).

Much like a physical family can be disharmonious, so too can a community of believers. While our positional unity in Christ is a reality ordained by God, we must strive to experience the richness and depth of that community. While unity is positionally ours, it is not always experientially ours because of our own natural ways. Those of us who have experienced church splits know all too well how Christians sometimes shoot their own wounded. To fully experience unity, we must work diligently and do everything possible to recognize and reflect our oneness in Christ.

However, in our diligent work towards oneness, we must not confuse unity with unanimity. He has called us to oneness in the midst of our differences. We may differ significantly in certain views, such as: when and how our Lord is going to return, about the merits of serving wine or grape juice at communion, about free will or predestination, or in what spiritual gifts are pertinent for the church today. But while these are points that are best considered and interpreted within a community, we are not to let these things keep us from recognizing one another as brothers and sisters in the Lord.

In our differences, we all have one leveling, humbling common denominator: We are all finite beings trying to understand the Infinite. In the movie *Rudy*, young Rudy asks Fr. Cavanaugh why as a devoted Christian, his dreams of becoming a star athlete are over. "I have done everything I possibly can," Rudy laments, "Why is God doing this?" Fr. Cavanaugh's reply is one that I remind myself often:

"In the many years of religious studies, I've come up with only two hard, incontrovertible facts: *There is a God . . . and I'm not Him.*"

Members of an earthly family can hold differing opinions, even strong, divergent opinions, but still exhibit the family unity in love because they are one family. How much more should we who are members of the one body of Christ reflect our unity "in the bond of peace."

The Hallmark of our Community

None of us know the exact day and time we will depart from this planet. However, let's imagine that we did know the precise minute we will die. How would we spend our last day? What would we say to our loved ones? How would

we pray? No doubt, they would be the most intentional, purpose-filled conversations and prayers of our entire lives.

On the eve Jesus' death, we get a sense of what He valued most. He first gathered with his disciples, then He went to the garden to pray. In His conversation with His disciples, He emphasized the key relational component that He wanted to be the hallmark of their lives and interactions:

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

The idea of love, itself, is not new in this commandment. However, the pattern and power of love is a new phenomenon primarily because the disciples had been given the ultimate example – His love for them. Love marked Christ's entire life. He demonstrated unconditional love by setting aside rank and privilege to serve all humankind to the point of dying for them. This love should be the hallmark of our community.

Later on the eve of his death, he went alone to pray His last, deep supplications to the Father. He prayed for his disciples, and he prayed for us. He felt the most important thing to pray for is our unity:

I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me (John 17: 21).

He prayed for oneness so that the world will know we are His. Our division and discord have never been positive testimonies of the Church. As mentioned above, He gave us His own example of triune unity in diversity, and then He gave us the power of His love. Our love and oneness are the most powerful testimonies to the world. Community is simply sharing a common life of grace and love in Christ. It moves us beyond self-interest and isolation and beyond superficial contacts that pass for "Christian Fellowship." The biblical ideal of community challenges us instead to commit ourselves as the people of God.

How can we best live out our unity to God's glory?

What does community mean to you?