

Editorial

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In every generation the church negotiates the struggle to embody unity of the Spirit while also embracing the diversity that comes with seeking to live out the fullness of the gospel. The church is rarely diverse enough, falling well short of being God's community in which barriers of race, class, gender, and nationality are overcome in Christ. On the other hand, the limited diversity we do embody poses challenges enough to maintaining the identity, mission, and unity granted to us in Christ. This issue of *Vision* explores the interplay between unity and diversity, assuming that both constitute a gift and challenge to the church.

Loren Johns observes that "diversity is beautiful only if some unifying factor provides a sense of order in all the chaos." This

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statement highlights two themes running through this issue. Diversity is a gift to be cherished and consciously nurtured, but for diversity to be a blessing the church must also nurture a theological and spiritual center that empowers it for witness and mission.

Steve Heinrichs brings these two themes together by asserting that the church's center is the ministry of Jesus Christ through which

God is breaking down the dividing walls of hostility and creating one new interethnic humanity in which we are reconciled to God and one another. Dorothy Jean Weaver paints a vivid picture of the amazing diversity of people Jesus relates to. Their unity is built on the magnetic force of Jesus himself and his invitation to follow him. Such following creates a defining and unifying identity, sense of belonging, and mission. Gordon Zerbe explores Paul's vision of the church as God's eschatological community that prefigures the breaking down of divisions in the cosmos that will characterize the final reign of God. Commitment to Christ must supersede other

identities, rankings, loyalties, and beliefs, even as the church embraces the multitude of gifts offered by its diverse membership.

Iris de Leon–Hartshorn names the reality of racism and the fact that Sunday worship is the most segregated hour of the week in North America. She calls the church to confess, and challenges us with concrete suggestions for moving toward an antiracist future. In a manner perhaps more gentle than we deserve, Samson Lo analyzes barriers to cross-cultural relationships in our congregations, and suggests ways we can reach out to people who are different from us. Deborah Froese tells the moving story of Aboriginal elder Thelma Meade. In Thelma’s life and community the church’s fear of diversity has caused much pain, and yet the church has also been a source of healing for her. Larry Miller celebrates the diversity that graces Mennonite World Conference, while being honest about the challenges this gift poses. He describes the process of moving autonomous Anabaptist-Mennonite groups toward deeper communion through sharing gifts, stating convictions, and building consensus.

The Mennonite church may be somewhat comfortable (at least in theory) with ethnic and class diversity, but theological diversity poses a much greater challenge. Loren Johns highlights the theological diversity enshrined in scripture and asks wherein then lies the Bible’s unity. He suggests that the focus on God unifies scripture, and especially its witness to Jesus. To some this may seem like a minimalist answer, but perhaps a danger of overemphasizing the Bible’s unity is failure to see how the Bible’s own diversity spawns much of the theological diversity within the worldwide church and our own denomination. Nancy Kauffmann reminds us how challenging and messy it can be for the church to “hold to a theological center that allows for flexibility at the edges.” She remains modestly optimistic that the church can embrace concrete practices through which we yield ourselves to the “unity of the Holy Spirit in which our rich diversity finds its proper expression.” By God’s grace, may it be so.