

CROSSROADS COMMUNITY CHURCH

Core Values Lessons for Neighborhood Gatherings

Mission: The mission of Crossroads Community Church is helping people on their journey back to God. We will do this by becoming a spiritually mature community of Christ-followers, equipping ourselves to impact the world as the presence of Christ, in order that lives may be transformed, God's purpose in the world fulfilled, and our Creator honored and glorified.

LESSON 7: INTERDEPENDENT DIVERSITY

Value: *DIVERSITY* — Believing that diversity results in strength and discernment, we seek to cultivate a climate of acceptance and transparency in relationships with all persons.



Breaking the Ice (10 minutes)

- Do you prefer a settled routine or are you more often on the lookout for different and unique experiences?
- What is your most memorable experience of the diversity of God's creation?



Discovering the Truth (20-25 minutes)

Galatians 3:28; NRSV

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

One need only look at the wonder of God's creation to understand that God values diversity. As I write this, I'm looking out the window at pink and purple azaleas in full bloom, budding oaks, flowering white and pink dogwoods, the beginnings of new leaves on the hickories and poplars, lush laurels, green loblolly pines, blue spruce, and swaying cedars. There are robins hopping around in the yard and bluebirds swooping between the trees.

The rich variety of that which God has brought into being staggers the imagination. Everything that exists is astoundingly different, yet, intimately connected — planets and galaxies, species and ecosystems, lightening bugs and whales, sky and wind, bedrock cliffs against which the ocean tides shift in phase with the moon. Such variety is a window into God's character. Indeed, it is inherent to God's very being, for *God exists in a trinitarian diversity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit*. God delights in diversity. *The church is called to embrace and reflect this divine characteristic of interdependent difference.*

The witness of the scriptures is that from the beginning God has valued diversity. Following his initial burst of creativity, "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good (Gen. 1:31a). One of my peers has

described it this way, “God made a quilt, not a blanket . . . God saw diversity and was happy with it.”¹ Included in that good creation were the progenitors of every race, ethnicity, tribe, and nation — Adam and Eve. Even as the chasm separating humankind and God continued to grow following Adam and Eve’s disobedience, the Lord chose Abraham to be the instrument through which God might bless *all the nations and peoples of the earth* (Gen 12:2-3). And when the descendants of Abraham had grown into the nation called Israel, she became the instrument through which that promise would be fulfilled, not because of some inherent superiority, but solely because of God’s grace (Hosea 1:10).

Ultimately, this blessing of the nations was fulfilled in the Christ event. The aim and power of the cross of Christ was to break “down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us” (Eph. 2:14) that he might “reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross” (Eph. 2:16).

One of the most scandalous aspects of Jesus’ ministry was his practice of mingling with people who were different. Even more scandalous, Jesus said that the Kingdom of God encompasses this same radical diversity. In Jesus’ parable about the Great Banquet (see Luke 14 and Matthew 22), guests were invited from all walks of life, and many were “outcasts” in the eyes of the religious purists of the day. But by bringing these guests together, God, the host, honored their differences. The feast was not the elimination of differences; *it was their affirmation*. The feast did not separate differences from one another; *it joined them together as continuing differences*. The Great Banquet is the symbol of the kind of world that God, through Christ, is already bringing into our midst. It is a snapshot of what the church should look like.

The apostle Paul spent much of his ministry seeking to communicate this truth. The context of our focal text from Galatians passage is a practical matter. Persons had come into the churches founded by Paul in Galatia proclaiming that one must be a good Jew in order to be a follower of Jesus. The goal of these teachers was to impose their boundary markers on the freedom which the Galatians were experiencing in Christ. The letter written by Paul is a resounding defense of his mission to *non-Jews*, a defense which ultimately provided the theological foundation for a Christianity independent of its Jewish roots. Paul challenged the religious leaders of both Jews and Christians to affirm that God is no respecter of persons. Thus was the foundation laid for racial, national, social, and gender equality in the church, “for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”

The theological basis for this perspective is fleshed out further in Ephesians where the apostle wrote: “For [Christ] is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us” (2:14). Paul knew from personal experience that when individuals and communities blindly exalt that which is different about themselves, the result is religious, national, and cultural tension and conflict. Acknowledging and affirming God’s desire for diversity is crucial if we are to “love one another as I have loved you” (John 13:34; 15:12).

Paul summed it up: “In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female” (Galatians 3:28). This does not mean that our human differences disappear. It means that from a Christian standpoint, differences in race, ethnicity, culture, gender, socioeconomic status, age, and ability are not reasons for separation from one another. On the contrary, such differences, when respected and valued are essential for the kind of ‘comm-unity’ God desires and in which God exists. *That is part of the image of God in us — relationship (unity) in diversity, a relationship of depending on each other and being dependable for each other . . . loving one another. Amen.*

For Reflection:

1. The doctrine of the *Trinity* offers many rich insights into what it means to be a Christ-follower. Do you agree that this foundational Christian doctrine offers insight into the issue of diversity? Why or why not?

¹Leslie Veen, “God Made a Quilt and Called It Good,” at this [link](#).

2. Is diversity within the body of Christ an opportunity to be embraced or source of conflict to be ignored? Which path has the historical church most often chosen? Why?
 3. Why would Paul be so adamant in Galatians regarding the equal standing before God of all races, genders, and socioeconomic levels, yet equally insistent elsewhere that women and slaves remain in the secondary roles assigned them by society and culture? (Compare 1 Cor. 14:34-36; 1 Timothy 2:11-15; Ephesians 6:5-8; Colossians 3:22-4:1. See also Romans 16:1-7; Philippians 4:2-3;) Check out this [link](#) to a current *USA Today* opinion/editorial discussing these issues.
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Embracing the Truth (15 minutes)

Diversity requires of us a willingness to love. In preparing this series of lessons on the core values of CCC, I have been amazed at how regularly I find myself returning to the center of Christian life: *love*. At the heart of all that we value and do is LOVE. Faith, hope and love enable us to overcome our fear and apprehension of the “other.”

It is important to note that diversity is not an issue of political corrections. Diversity is an expression of God’s image, love, and boundless creativity. All persons bear the image of God and are, therefore, valued. Our pursuit of biblical diversity is centered around fulfilling Christ’s command to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 19:19; Mark 12:31, Luke 10:27). We submit to the lordship of Christ and the leadership of the Holy Spirit when we love as God in Christ has loved us, appreciating each other’s uniqueness while simultaneously pursuing the unity for which Jesus prayed (John 17:21).

A non-cookie-cutter unity which transcends our differences, and even finds joy in and values our differences, is a unity which bespeaks a mature faith. It is a unity in which we are *interdependent*, recognizing that every person has strengths to offer others and weaknesses with which we need the help of those who are different from ourselves. An interdependent unity which is healthy both supports and depends on others. Such unity delights in God-inspired and God-blessed diversity.

For Reflection:

1. *Get Real* — What are some barriers to the diversity which the church so desperately needs to reflect? (social, economic, theological, cultural)
 2. *Where the Rubber Meets the Road* — How has God equipped *you* to overcome some of these barriers?
 3. *Tending the Vineyard* — Who are some of the diverse people groups who live and work in the Zion Crossroads area? If resources were no obstacle, how might we incorporate these folks in our life together as the body of Christ?
 4. *Truth for Life* — If time permits, have one or more group member share a *truth for life* from one of the scripture passages in **For Further Study**.
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Connecting (10-15 minutes)

Pray for the Holy Spirit to work in our midst in such a way that we might be used to bring the diverse groups of people in the Zion Crossroads area together. Pray for discernment regarding how we might effectively proceed in this area of our journey as a community of faith.

1. Praises from group members
2. Concerns from group members
3. Share these in conversation with God

For Further Study:

Matthew 28:19-20 - the Great Commission (my italics)

¹⁹“Go therefore and make disciples of *all nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Acts 2:5-11; NRSV - The Diversity of Pentecost (Note the different races, ethnicities and cultures represented here)

⁵Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking *Galileans*?” ⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹*Parthians, Medes, Elamites*, and residents of *Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia*, ¹⁰*Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt* and the parts of *Libya* belonging to *Cyrene*, and visitors from *Rome*, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹*Cretans and Arabs*—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.”

Revelation 7:9-11 - The Destiny of the Church (my italics)

⁹After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, *from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages*, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰They cried out in a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!” ¹¹And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹²singing,

“Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom
and thanksgiving and honor
and power and might
be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”