

That All May Be One

Let's have a quiz. How many different denominations of Christian Churches are there?

We can make a guess, but sources list from 46 to 45,000! Each church or denomination differs from another in at least one way that would set it apart from the other denominations. If we look at Westfield and Southwick, we see numerous Christian denominations Church historians Mary Weaver and David Brakke wrote:

“Christians differ substantially in doctrine, practice, and ecclesiastical structures, and those differences all arose within specific historical contexts. The more serious arguments among Christians led to major divisions within Christianity itself and the formation of separate churches and denominations... The fact that the early Christians had to figure things out rather than follow some predisposed plan of action is not a negative judgment but is a testament to the complicated realities of community life.”

Living in a community is not always easy. I lived in a religious community for five years and had some wonderful times but also some challenges along the way. For our purposes, though, this community life is what we call “church” today. We gather together to seek support, worship with each other, pray with each other, sing or ring with each other, and often socialize. It is where we get some of our fuel to go on with our lives at work and home.

Church is also a place where we learn of our history, especially as we have read in the Acts of the Apostles. For those churches that follow the Revised Common Lectionary, we are gifted with some of our early church history as the first followers of “The Way” with today's reading with Paul and Silas. Truly, Paul and Silas, as early disciples of The Way, were doing everything in their power to make the people “one” as Jesus and “the Father” were one. Even in the reading from the Book of Revelations this morning, Jesus is described as the Alpha and

Omega. With all of these examples of how we can be one like Jesus and the Father were one, how did we manage to get to where we are today?

The different denominations also can be reflective of our society in 2025. We have ever growing and changing political parties, lifestyles, and choices that people made. This would ring true for those who lived in 1725, 1825, and 1925. Some people cannot fathom how these changes have come about and how people can be so different from who they are. And, sometimes, people who cannot figure things out simply label others as wrong, immoral, stupid, etc. instead of leaving folks who are not hurting anyone or themselves alone.

The things that we do with people are the things that we have also done with churches. The churches in Westfield and Southwick had always come together for meetings and some worship services, especially around Thanksgiving or World Communion Sunday. I can go through the records of this as I found binders that contain meeting minutes as well as the various activities of the clergy and churches. The pandemic put a stop to it; with some effort, we have been able to do this yet again but on a smaller scale. Some of the churches are in a divisive mode and can't bring themselves back to share in worship with the different denominations. We continue to work towards this as we see to be the answer to Jesus' prayer in the Gospel: "The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

We can certainly work together to come together as churches in the area. However, I think we also have to do some work within our own congregation, our own church community, to ensure that we are truly one, even with our differences of opinions on things. Are we ever

going to agree on everything? I don't think so. But we continue to learn to live with each other and as well as learn what the differences in our lives might be.

My prayer for our church community is that we continue to strive to be one as Jesus and the Father are one so that we can grow in our realization that we are indeed loved by God. And then, as we become one, we can grow in love with each other and, in turn, allow ourselves to be loved. May we become complete as one. Amen!