

One in the Spirit

In my time as Associate Pastor and Director of Family Ministries at my former church, I was responsible for running Vacation Bible School. As I was new to the concept and had never worked at one, I thought it best for us to purchase packages of programs with clever titles, such as “Son Treasure Island” or “Egypt: Joseph’s Journey from Prison to Palace.” As I lived through these, the thought crept into my head: “Hey, you can come up with something better than these!”

So, I did! Well, I don’t know if they were any better than the packaged programs, but we certainly had fun and the kids learned as they enjoyed themselves. We ran “Love Your Neighbor” as we discovered who our neighbors were. Another one was “Christmas in July” as we dove into the Christmas stories or Infancy Narratives with no mention of Santa Claus. We also had a week where we looked at “Superheroes of the Bible.” But the first one that I put together was entitled, “One in the Spirit.”

The VBC (“camp”; I couldn’t bring myself to call it “school”) had always attracted kids from different churches. It was a great time to

celebrate that we were all able to come together, regardless of denomination, to learn something of our faith in the Bible. That year we had 11 different churches represented at our VBC. Truly we were “One in the Spirit.” We were no longer Congregationalists, Lutherans, Catholics, Episcopalians, American Baptists, or Methodists. We were, indeed, one in Christ. As a side note, by the time I left Wilbraham United Church, we had established a VBC that welcomed 17 different churches!

The concept of “One in the Spirit” is repeated throughout Paul’s letters to the different area start-up churches. It is certainly included in the third chapter of his letter to the church community in the region of Galatia. The region of Galatia is what we know today as the country of Turkey. This is different from the other places where Paul wrote in that it was widespread. The region had become a Roman province around 25 BC, but, much like the regions in Israel, it managed to retain its language and take pride in its customs. We have the historian and philosopher Josephus to thank for writing down some of the Galatian history.

As the region was being introduced and converted to “The Way” or Christianity, they were pretty much being harassed by the Jewish members to convert to their ways, which, of course, included circumcision for the males. Part of Paul’s message was to encourage them to stay as they were because “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

This applies to us today, right here in Westfield, Southwick, and beyond. We are proud of who we are, enjoy our various cultures dependent on how we were raised. Our cities and towns have various traditions and ways of celebrating that are still intact today. We come together in this area with different labels, some of which are the same as the Galatians. Think about all the different ways in which we identify. We could be a Bomber, Tiger, Saint, Ram, Gator, Red Sox, Yankees, Phillies, Democrats, Republicans, Libertarians, Straight, Gay, Lesbian, Transgendered, etc. We are all one in Christ Jesus! This also goes for people in every part of the world. We are all one—we worship the same God. In the midst of war and strife, we tend to forget that.

How will people recognize US as Christians in 2025? We must come together to be One in the Spirit so that regardless of who we are, we will always know WHO'S we are! It appears that we could be headed toward some troubled times. Let our prayer that peace will prevail quickly, that we will remember that we all belong to God, indeed that we are one in Spirit, and for those who believe, one in Christ.