



Our Radical Unity in Christ

"The only meaningful label in eternity will be 'Christian.'"

Anonymous

Many of us seek ways to express the essential unity of the human race despite all that causes disunity among us. The separation of peoples because of language, culture, local customs and ethnic inheritance dates back to the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. The people's presumption in attempting to build a tower reaching to the heavens to establish autonomy was countered by God, who said, "Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other" (Genesis 11:7). The effect of that judgment persists to this day.

Jesus Christ comes to break down the separations between people by breaking down the separations between people and God. Paul put it, "For you are **all one in Christ Jesus**" if you have been baptized into Christ by faith (Galatians 3). This was precisely the meaning of Pentecost, which was a kind of anti-Babel. At Babel, people groups lost the ability to understand one another when suddenly they all spoke different languages. At Pentecost, the opposite took place. The crowd was bewildered "because each one heard them speaking in his own language" (Acts 2:6). Different languages still existed, but with the new events following the resurrection of Jesus, they no longer confused and separated people. Now all heard the same message.

Today, despite the confusion of language, it is possible to experience the unity of the Holy Spirit—even between individuals of vastly different cultures and traditions—if each has committed himself or herself to Jesus Christ.



A Radical Revolutionary Idea

Yet it seems that we do not fully grasp, even after 2,000 years, the profound unity to which Jesus calls us. When we belong to Jesus Christ by the grace of God through faith, we belong to each other. This is the true radical revolutionary idea: **we are one with all our Christian brothers and sisters**—no matter where they live, what language they speak, their politics, nationality, ancestors or church affiliation. This is the primary unity in life.

Totalitarian leaders recognize this, and are always quick to persecute Christians. They find it intolerable that people should have any allegiance greater than what they demand for themselves. We must not

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forget that one of the charges against Jesus was that He was a traitor: "Upon this Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, 'If you release this man, **you are not Caesar's friend**. Anyone who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar'" (John 19:12).

Our Lord had clarified this issue when He told Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world" (v. 36). Even today the allegiance Christians bear to Christ our King threatens those who would dominate others. They cannot tolerate a higher allegiance. They sense the dangers to them of Christian unity—often understanding its power better than we do.



Spiritual unity between Christians should be stronger than any other bond. Until we really begin to express that bond in our lives, we will fail to understand its strength and power for living or to draw others to faith in Jesus.

Ethnic Background or National Origin Distinctions

In Galatians 3:28, Paul names three types of relationships that are transcended by the unity there is in Christ. First, says Paul, in Christ, ". . . there is **neither Jew nor Greek**." The word *Greek* is used as a synonym for *Gentile* (Romans 1:13-16). No distinctions of **ethnic background or national origin** can break true unity in Christ. It doesn't matter whether we worship God in French, German, English or any of the world's myriad tongues. Natural languages separate people, but Christ overcame linguistic separation and made us truly one in the Holy Spirit. National loyalty can bite so deeply into the life of the church that Christians feel less united as members of the body of Christ universal than they feel toward those of the same nationality. Until we accept that we are Christians first, and members of a nation or ethnic group second, we will continue to deny the unity Christ affords.

Class (Social) Differences: In Christ, Paul also adds, ". . . **there is no slave or free**." As his mention of neither Jew nor Greek reminds us that no national or ethnic differences can be allowed to separate those made one in Christ, so his words, "no slave or free" warn us that no **class differences** can be allowed to separate those who are one in Christ. Here Paul aims at the ultimate class distinction between owners and the owned. Largely due to the impact of the Christian Gospel, many nations have abolished slavery; sadly, others have not. Paul reminds us that rich and poor, king and serf, and college president and day laborer all are one in Christ. Until we begin to show in our practical living and responses to others that we are Christians first, we can never eradicate the distinctions of class, wealth, or intellectual status that continue to mock our strivings for valid Christian unity.

Sexual Distinctions: In Jesus, Paul finally tells us, ". . . **there is no male or female either**." Sin has produced many conflicts between the **sexes**, and male domination is the pattern in almost every society. Christ takes us back to Genesis 1:27 unity: "So God created

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man **in His own image**, in **the image of God** He created him; **male and female** He created them." In the *image* of God—male *and* female! Christ brings such unity that as brothers and sisters in Him we share a common humanity, made as we **all** are in the image of God. Men and women equally receive all spiritual blessings.

Two More Distinctions Nullified By the Cross

Paul addresses two additional differences—religious and cultural—that are likewise nullified by Christ's radical revolutionary action on the cross (Colossians 3:11). In Christ, Paul says, there are no **religious** or **ceremonial** differences: ". . . there is **neither circumcision nor uncircumcision**" (Colossians 3:11). There was pressure on the Colossian believers to accept Jewish regulations for their lives (2:16). But Paul says circumcision has been accomplished in Christ (v. 11). Gentiles, therefore, are accepted by God and there are no legal or ceremonial differences in Christ, since circumcision of the heart—the reality to which ceremonial circumcision point—has been accomplished in Him (1 Corinthians 7:17-19; Acts 15:1-21). The Christian life is not a matter of ceremony and ritual—circumcision and uncircumcision—but of keeping God's commandments (1 Corinthians 7:19; Colossians 2:11-23).

Furthermore, in Christ, there are no **cultural** differences says Paul: ". . . there is **neither barbarian, Scythian**" (Colossians 3:11). Barbarians were people who did not speak Greek and were thought to be uncivilized. Scythians were known for their brutality and were considered to be little better than wild beasts. These people who were thought of as the lowest of the barbarians came originally from what is today south Russia—but Christ transcends all barriers and unifies people from all cultures.

The Unique Family of God

The family of God in Christ must take precedence, even over our natural families—even though they are most precious, and constitute a special trust given us by God. But not even they deserve our first and unique allegiance. Remember always what Jesus said in Luke 8: "**My mother and My brothers** are those who **hear** the Word of God and **do it.**"

Until we accept that our unity in Christ is more important than our differences as male and female, or even our roles as fathers, mothers, sons and daughters, we will continue to deny the fundamental unity Jesus won for us at the cross.

Unity is not uniformity! Christ does not call us to be clones but to be like-minded. We do not achieve unity through sameness of ritual, customs, or language. True diversity in unity is revealed to us in the triune Person of God, the multifarious aspects of human nature, and our common humanity comprising male and female.

ONE in Christ

The key to unity is not in us as believers, except in a derived sense. It lies in Christ, our mutual Lord. He is the acme of importance and the powerful presence in which the highest type of unity is achieved.

One in Christ! That is our identity, our calling, our challenge.

Pastor Lars

2013 Church Leadership

Your Church Council is set for 2013. Under the leadership of Jim Meyers, for the second year in a row, the Council is prepared to serve God and you as the Holy Spirit leads during the coming year.

The two items the Council is making a priority were determined by you:



New Church Leadership

- Greater outreach to our local community, and
- A focus on the young adult demographic.

Please continue to support your Council with prayer —

always felt and welcomed. If you have specific concern or question, please do not hesitate to contact anyone on the Council; or, if you have a ministry-related concern, please contact the listed Ministry Liaison.

Thank you for choosing us to serve; we offer back our time and talents.

CHURCH COUNCIL

Nancy Anderson	Jim Meyers
Marc Goyette	Bob Rieger
John Heitz	Darian Veerman

LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITIES

COUNCIL CHAIR	Jim Meyers
COUNCIL VICE CHAIR	Nancy Anderson
COUNCIL SECRETARY	Darian Veerman

COUNCIL LIAISONS TO MINISTRIES

<u>MINISTRY</u>	<u>MINISTRY CHAIR(S)</u>	<u>COUNCIL LIAISON</u>
Worship	Judy Goyette	Bob Rieger
Discipleship	Paul Veerman	Bob Rieger
Fellowship	Kyla Stetson/Melissa Otten	Nancy Anderson
Evangelism/Mission	Wiley Mullins	John Heitz
Service	Kasia/Steve Lindeberg	Marc Goyette
Children	Roseann Slater/Paula Keegan	Darian Veerman
Youth	Pastor Cary/Mark Hatfield	Tim Herrmann
Finance	Dave Gibbs	Marc Goyette
Properties/Maintenance	Bob Forstrom	John Heitz
Communication	Gail Lent	Nancy Anderson
Personnel	Pastor Lars	Jim Meyers
Administration	Gail Lent	Jim Meyers



Treasurer's Report

The financial results of the Unified Operating Fund for the 11 months ended November 30, 2012 were as follows:

INCOME

Unified Receipts	\$460,040
Investment & Other Income	<u>905</u>
Total Income	\$460,945

EXPENSES

Excess of Income over Expenses	<u>\$8,258</u>
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The surplus of income over expenses with only one month to go in the year is certainly a good sign. It occurred because November was a very low spending month, combined with receipts being higher than expected in the 2012 Financial Plan.



On the other hand, December spending will be substantially higher than November mostly due to the fact that the Church's missions and service commitments are paid at the end of each quarter. Pastoral Search spending continues to run well below original expectations. We hope to be in a position at year-

end to carry over to 2013 the unspent portion of that 2012 budget, with the expectation that it may be needed next year. In order for the carry-over to occur, the Church needs to have a surplus for this year at least equal to the unspent portion of the Pastoral Search budget.

Earlier in December, Jim Meyers and Dave Gibbs sent a letter asking each family to bring your giving up to date if you haven't already done so, and, if you have, to please consider an additional offering before the end of the year with the hope that December weekly offerings can average \$12,000 per week. The response to that request through the first three weeks of the month has been very gratifying. The weekly average is running very close to the requested amount. Thanks for your generosity.

Best wishes for a Happy New Year,
Bob Fiscus, Treasurer



- 1/1 * Krista Dolan
Brittany Morgan
Scarlett Mojcher
- 1/2 Ethel Thomas
♥Randy & Margo Cobaugh
- 1/3 Mark Mojcher
Elizabeth Thomas
Michelle Valente
Hailey Mulhall
- 1/4 Liz Anderson
- 1/5 Jesse Lent
- 1/6 Doris Anderson
- 1/8 Jill Monroe
Ashleigh Testa
Spencer Hatfield
- 1/9 Alice Sundman
AJ Keegan
- 1/10 Leonard Nelson
Julie Royster
- 1/12 Fred Chapman
Andrew Royster
♥Mike & Lillian Valente
- 1/13 Margaret Bjers
- 1/14 Rosann Daniels
- 1/15 Andrea Stetson
Jim Meyers
Jordan Andrews
- 1/19 Diana Swanson
Gabriela Estrada
- 1/21 Bob Merritt
- 1/22 Paul Linder
- 1/23 Bruce Cooper
Noah Slater
- 1/25 Adrian Ambrose
Tyler Forstrom
- 1/27 Kyle Anderson
- 1/28 Nancy Wilber
Roseann Slater
Ryan Greer
- 1/29 Marco Delfino
- 1/30 Aaron Logan
- 1/31 Bobby Spisto
♥Jim & Alma Kearns

Service Ministry Update

The Service Ministry began last fall with new ideas. The first was to take action by helping those in distress after hurricane Sandy by partnering with churches in Midland Beach on Staten Island. Nine of us — Mark Hatfield, Spencer Hatfield, Luiza Estrada, Gerry Lambert, Kasia Lindeberg, Steve Lindeberg, Melissa Otten and Cory Sharp — helped clear damaged appliances, walls and floors at three homes. After that we began advertising and collecting donations at our church for hurricane victims throughout the area.

The next week four of us — Wiley Mullins, John Heitz, Diana Swanson and Kasia Lindeberg — went to Bridgeport to hand out personal items from a "Churches for Christ" truck. This ministry sends goods worth over \$100,000 to victims of natural disasters and engages local churches to help distribute them.



One new idea for Service this year is the



"Handyman Ministry" which seeks to help those in our church family and the community around us. When little things become overwhelming and difficult to manage, call on this ministry to see that those repairs are made. Please contact Carl Otten if you or a neighbor is in need. We also need people who would like to use their time and talents.

Jesus said to his disciples *"love one another...as I have loved you."* We like to express this as *"serve one another...as I have served you."*

Serve with us,
Kasia Lindeberg

HANDYMAN MINISTRY



Can We Help With Your Small Repair Needs Around Your Home?

Forms can be found in your bulletin or the Welcome Center.

Return completed forms to Carl Otten.

Trailblazer Winter Retreat

At Pilgrim Pines in Swanzey, NH

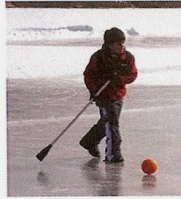
January 11-13, 2012

4th & 5th Graders

Cost \$120 due by 1/6
Scholarships available

Contact Roseann Slater
203.371.8335

roseann@coveaston.org



Join 4th & 5th graders from Covenant Churches all over New England for ice skating, broom ball, sledding, hot cocoa, great worship & a special speaker!

PSALM23
 mArk9:23 JOHN3:16
 PROVERBS JOHN4:20 Hebrews11:1
 Exodus3:14 Isaiah41:10 Psalm62:5-8 John3:7
 Ezekiel24:20 Galatians2:20 ISAIAH40:31
 Proverbs3:5-6 psalm37:4 Jeremiah29:11
 MATTHEW6:26 Matthew16:16 ICorinthians13:7
 ICORINTHIANS1:18 Micah6:8 ICORINTHIANS15:10 PETER5:7
 Peter4:8 Matthew22:37-39 ICorinthians13:4-13 Psalm19:1
 PROVERBS3:8 Philippians4:19 Psalm30 hebrewsthirteenfive
 Philippians4:13 JEREMIAH32:27 johntenten philLippiANS4:13
 Ephesians4:29 Ephesiansfourtwo Ephesians4:19
 proverbs31:30 Corinthians13:4-7
 2TIMOTHY1:7 ROMANS8:28 Numbers6:24-26
 Hebrews6:19 isaiah25:8 matthew4:4 Ecclesiastes3:11
 JOSHUA1:9 PSALM25:4 PSALM18:28
 Psalm24:8 Isaiah10:8 ACTS20:35
 JAMES1:7 IJohn1:1 John1:29

Tell us . . .

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE BIBLE VERSE?

(and tell us why if you want to)

The Discipleship Committee wants to know your favorite Bible verse

(and why it's your favorite)

Your responses will be compiled and

the plan is to post the verses on the walls of the Fellowship Hall.

Email your response to Paul Veerman

paulv@backtothebible.org

Be Careful What You Say

The other day when church was getting out, someone said to me, "I'll see you tomorrow if I'm not hit by a car." I was in shock when he said that and I couldn't help thinking to myself how often what we say comes true. But why wouldn't it, after all we are made in the image of God. God created everything with only a word such as "Let there be light!", so why is it hard to believe that the words we all say have power?

About a month ago, someone was trying to help me be safe in my home. If you know me at all, you know I worry a lot. But this guy had me beat by a mile. He kept saying what if. And before I knew it, he said the ultimate what if question, "What if your phone went out and you couldn't call anyone?" The very next morning, my phone went out! So I had to buy a new phone and I really blame him for saying that. And my whole life, I have noticed that whenever a lot of people say what if this and what if that, it can actually come

RECKLESS WORDS PIERCE
LIKE A SWORD BUT THE
TONGUE OF THE WISE
BRINGS HEALING

PROVERBS 12:18

true. The more people say that something bad will go wrong, the more it does. I sit in my wheelchair and I wonder if I really am the only one that notices it.

On the other hand, I am not one to talk. If I go up to most people I know, the first thing out of my own mouth is, "I have a problem." Or my other line is, "I have a question." [Editor's note: during our weekly phone calls these 2 questions come up every time!] and it's usually about a problem that doesn't exist. So I need to ask myself if I am speaking my own situation into existence. An old song comes to mind. "Be careful little mouth what you say."

So in dealing with my poor health that is getting worse by the day, I'm trying hard to watch what I say so that I help bring other people up. And I thought it would be worth encouraging people to only say positive things and reminding people to do the same and see how it changes your life and the people around you.

And while I'm on the topic of words, I have permission to ask people to call me. I am totally bored out of my mind and I only have one person that I can call which is Blake Roberts. He talks to me almost every day; but when I hang up, I can only stare at my four walls. So if anybody wants to put a smile on my face, dial my number and spend 20 minutes on the phone or more. My number is 607-595-3935 and I am not sleeping at night because I have to be flat on my back and I am just not used to it. So if anyone is a night owl, I would love a call but I'll take a call anytime day or night.

Snoopi Botten



Nate & Bethany Johnson

Serving in Austria

Christmas season in Vienna is a beautiful time of year. The city was transformed with lights, decorations and more. We enjoyed the scenery, but our hearts are burdened for this city and its need for a deeper transformation.

MAKING THE GRADE

Many of you prayed last month for our A1 German exam. We are required to submit a passing certificate of basic German with our visa applications in early January. We took the test on November 27th and your prayers were answered — **we passed!** Our certificates have been received and we are excited to submit our “very good standing” grades with our visa paperwork. Thank you for praying!



PULLING AN ALL-NIGHTER

Now that we have wrapped up our December German class, our minds are turning towards a very important date — **January 2nd**. We will begin waiting in line in front of the Visa office on January 1st in anticipation of submitting our visa applications the moment the office opens for 2013. We anticipate being outside on the street for at least 18 hours.

As you start 2013, please think of us in prayer. We will be waiting to apply from approximately 8 am ET on January 1 to 2 am ET on January 2. Here is how you can pray for us specifically:

- Pray for stamina as we wait outside overnight
- Pray that we would line up early enough to be two of the first 60 people to submit applications
- Pray for favor in the eyes of the Austrian government
- Pray that we would receive our visas in a timely fashion, at least by the end of June. Pray that we would be surprised by receiving them early!

We are nervous about the implications of such an important event. We cannot stay in Vienna if we do not receive these Visas. However, we trust in God’s mighty hand. He is in control, and He can keep us here!

We look forward to writing our next update to you from Litchfield, England, where we will be completing a 3-month internship and awaiting our Austrian visas. Until then, we wish you a blessed Christmas as we celebrate together the coming of our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ. May you contemplate His miraculous birth this year, as well as His miraculous gift of grace.

Your Partners in Ministry,
Nate & Bethany Johnson

Miscellaneous

Position Announcement for an Executive Director of Communication

The Evangelical Covenant (ECC) is seeking an Executive Director of Communication to serve as senior leader of its communication function starting in summer 2013 following the ECC Annual Meeting. Communication staff provide support for the communication of the church's missional priorities to both internal and external audiences across all available channels and forms of communication, while also providing marketing and public relations support for all Covenant Offices. The Executive Director oversees and manages the mission of the office, creating and leading a vision for communication that can fulfill and complement the needs of the ministry departments and denomination as a whole. The position requires a high level of communication, marketing, and media expertise; team leadership; collaboration skills; and business acumen.

See www.covchurch.org for more information. This position will be located at denominational headquarters in Chicago, Illinois.

Tutors Needed!

Would you like to start 2013 with a rewarding volunteer opportunity? Caroline House is in need of tutors to teach women English as a second language. Knowledge of Spanish is helpful, but not necessary. No teaching experience is needed and all the training and materials will be provided for you.

Classes are held Monday-Thursday, 9:00 am-12:00 pm. For more information, please call Sr. Peg Regan (203.334.0640) or email pregan@thecarolinehouse.org.

Caroline House is located at 574 Stillman Street in Bridgeport. They are a non-denominational educational center for economically-disadvantaged women and children. Check out their website at www.thecarolinehouse.org.

A Hospice Volunteer's Visual Response

Artwork by Don Cooper will be presented on January 12-February 9 at the Marie Louise Trichet Art Gallery at Wisdom House Retreat and Conference Center in Litchfield. On display are a collection of digital illustrations which express Mr. Cooper's emotional response to visiting with hospice patients.

Opening: Saturday, January 12
3:30 pm-5:30 pm
Artist's Talk: 3:45 pm
followed by a reception
Gallery Hours: Monday-Saturday
10:00 am—4:00 pm

For more information, please call Wisdom House (860.567.3163) or visit www.wisdomhouse.org.

Automated Giving

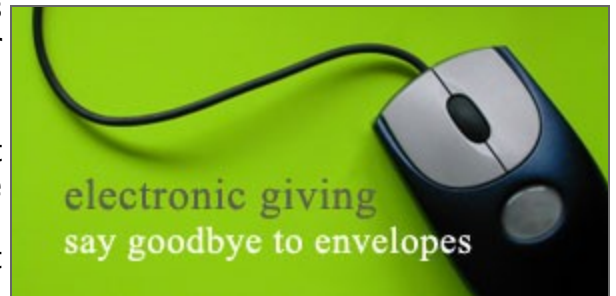
"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Matthew 6:21

Giving cheerfully and sacrificially of our finances is part of our worship. As a church, we want to help you understand and apply God's principles of handling money. We are called to serve God in all things and one of the primary ways we serve God is by cheerfully giving God our "first fruits" (2 Corinthians 9:7, Proverbs 3:9). We should not give just to meet some obligation but gladly sacrifice for the sake of the gospel because Jesus sacrificed for all of us, young and old, and all we have is His.

We are excited to offer the opportunity to make it easier for you to give to the church. In addition to giving every Sunday in the offering plate, you can also give automatically through **Automated Bank Debit**. Automating your giving is one of the best ways to build faithfulness into your stewardship of what God has given you.

The process is very simple – complete an auto-debit form (located in the Welcome Center or by calling the Church Office) give your banking information, frequency of giving (weekly or monthly) where you want your money applied (unified, missions, building fund, etc.) and sign the authorization form. Drop the form into the secure Mail Drop in the Copy Room (only the Financial Secretary has access) and have your giving deducted from your checking or savings account. Once it is set up, you may update or change your giving by contacting the Financial Secretary. Plus, 100% of your gift goes to the ministries of Covenant Church because there are no debit or credit card processing fees charged to the church. All your banking information will be kept secure and confidential.



If you have any questions, please contact Financial Secretary Larry Boyle (203.255.5387).

The Finance Ministry

"You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God."

2 Corinthians 9:11

DID YOU KNOW?

If you don't wish to participate in the automated debit program and you normally pay your bills online through your bank, you can make your church contribution when you pay your regular bills. Simply make *Covenant Church of Easton* a vendor and your bank will mail a check to the church.

JANUARY



Covenant Church of Easton

1 Sport Hill Road
Easton, CT 06612

www.coveaston.org

Phone: 203.371.8335

Fax: 203.373.9025

E-mail: gail.lent@coveaston.org

Rooted in Christ - Reaching Out to the World

January Worship

TWO SERVICES EACH SUNDAY – 9:00 am and 10:45 am

January	6	<i>The Nature & Mission of the Church, part 1</i> Matthew 16:13-19 Holy Communion	Pastor Lars
January	13	<i>The Nature of the Church, part 2</i> Ephesians 1, 2, 6	Pastor Lars
January	20	<i>The Unity of the Church, part 3</i> <i>John 17:20-23; Ephesians 4:3-6</i>	Pastor Cary