



HOW DO WE  
MAINTAIN  
**UNITY**  
AT WELLSPRING?



*“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” **Ephesians 4:2-3***

## OVERVIEW

This document seeks to help the Wellspring family of faith maintain unity not only in a divisive cultural season like the one we find ourselves in, but for future seasons of church life as well. We hope that this document helps you think more biblically and wisely regarding what unity is, how it can look, what we must do to maintain it, and why it is important. God desires His people to dwell in unity, and we receive His abundant blessings when we do [Psalm 133:1-3]. The format is Q and A. A longer essay form is available upon request.

## QUESTION #1: WHAT IS THE BASIS FOR UNITY?

The basis for biblical unity is essentially two-fold. First, Christians are reconciled to God and united by faith through the miraculous indwelling of the Holy Spirit [Ephesians 1:13]. Second, Christians are reconciled to one another as members of the Body of Christ [1 Corinthians 12:12], stones in the Temple of the Holy Spirit [1 Corinthians 3:16], and compatriots of the Kingdom of God [Philippians 3:20].

## QUESTION #2: WHAT DOES BIBLICAL UNITY LOOK LIKE?

Biblical unity looks like the Great Commandments [Mark 12:28-31] and the Great Commission [Matthew 28:16-20] lived out in a specific time and place by a specific community of Christians who are bound together for a common vision, with a common set of core doctrines, with agreed upon means for operating together [i.e. Constitution], and under a common set of leaders [e.g. Elders, Deacons, Staff, and other volunteer leaders].

## QUESTION #3: WHY IS UNITY SO IMPORTANT?

Christ died that all who put their faith in him would be both at peace with God [Romans 5:1-2] and at peace with one another [Ephesians 2:14-18]. When God values something highly, He speaks about it and acts powerfully to bring it about. God the Father values our unity to the point of the sacrifice of His only Son, Jesus Christ. When we lack unity, we also fail to give God the glory He is due, we fail to experience many of His blessings, and we fail to honor the sacrifice of Christ Jesus.

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## QUESTION #4: WHAT BUILDS UNITY IN A CHURCH?


There are two primary virtues that build unity within a local church. First, there is the “king” of the Christian virtues—love. The Bible commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves [Matthew 22:39], to put on love in community [Colossians 3:14], to love each other with mutual affection [2 Peter 1:7], and to lovingly forgive one another [Colossians 3:13]. Love can be defined as selflessly acting for the good of another person for their sake. Humility is the second key virtue that builds unity. A humble person values others’ needs as much or more than his or her own [Philippians 2:3-4]. Humble people are willing to confess their own weaknesses and sins first [James 5:16]; they take the plank out of their own eyes before removing the specks in others’ [Matthew 7:1-5]. And humility is acknowledging the enormity of the debt that was paid on our behalf by Christ on the Cross, allowing us to forgive the debts of others [Matthew 6:12]. When a community pursues love in humility, unity is strengthened.

## QUESTION #5: WHAT BRINGS ABOUT DISUNITY?


In contrast to the two virtues above, the two vices of selfishness and pride can divide previously united Christians. The Bible warns us against selfish ambition as a root of all kinds of disorder [James 3:16]. Selfishness is exhibited when decisions are made that benefit one or more people without consideration of and to the detriment of other individuals or groups [see Acts 6:1-7]. It is not hard to imagine how disunity can erupt when selfishness is present. Pride is a friend to selfishness, exalting individuals’ estimations of themselves and justifying selfish decision-making [in contrast to Christ, Philippians 2:5-11]. A person’s pride not only manifests in selfish decision-making, but also an entitled attitude, wrongly believing that others should make decisions based on that person’s desires and needs alone. Lastly, a prideful heart ultimately believes that what is good for him or her is what is best for the community, because [though they would never say it] they are the most important person in the community.

## QUESTION #6: WHAT ARE SOME COMMON WAYS THAT PEOPLE ENGAGE IN DISUNIFYING BEHAVIOR, WHETHER KNOWINGLY OR UNKNOWINGLY?

Keep in mind that pride and selfishness can have a blinding effect, barring the person who carries these traits from seeing them as such [see the Pharisees, Matthew 15:14]. Thus, it is often the case that when disunity occurs, the person [or group] who is acting in a disunifying way have a hard time discerning what is actually going on. Moreover, while it only takes one person [or group] to act in a disunifying way, often the fleshly responses of others can exacerbate the problem. These things in mind, here below are some bullet point examples of common disunifying behavior among God’s people:



“WHAT SHOULD I BE GUARDING MY HEART AGAINST?”



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## “WHO IS THE BEST PERSON TO DISCUSS THIS WITH?”

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- **CRITICAL EMAILS.** These are often long, often quickly typed, often more harsh than necessary, often not bathed in prayer, and often without wise input from others before the send button is clicked. When in doubt, don't press send.
- **VENTING ABOUT SOMEONE TO OTHERS.** The best method for venting is always to the Lord, casting our cares to Him in prayer [1 Peter 5:7]. While we do need trusted, mature friends and mentors who can handle our relational frustrations, there are still many times when we wrongly vent our anger to the wrong people and essentially transfer our emotional anxiety to them. This spreads disunity. Often venting frustration is a fruit of our flesh, not a healthy time of processing.
- **VENTING ABOUT A DECISION.** God raises up specific people and groups of people to make specific decisions [Acts 1:12-26]. Sometimes we will agree with those decisions, sometimes we will disagree, and sometimes we will be flabbergasted by them! One question that must be asked before we speak to others our disappointment in a decision is, “Is this a profitable, helpful, or unifying way to talk about my disappointment?” Another good question is, “Do I really need to talk about this, or do I need to pray about it?” And another good question is, “Who is the best person to talk to about this with?” Generally speaking, the best person to talk to is the person directly involved in making the decision and [ideally] with whom you have a personal relationship.
- **PUSHING FOR CHANGE.** Sometimes the Spirit leads individuals and groups to change, but sometimes we push for change, because we want the change, and we want it now. This desire in us can be a good desire, but it may be expressed in wrong ways or in a wrong timing. It can also be a selfish desire than needs to be purified by the Lord. Regardless, if we find ourselves pushing for a change that continues to be met with resistance, we would be wise to reconsider our motives, ask for feedback, and only then continue [or discontinue if need be].


## QUESTION #7: WHAT ARE SOME AREAS OF CHURCH LIFE WHERE WE ARE MORE PRONE TO WRITE CRITICAL EMAILS, VENT ABOUT PEOPLE, VENT ABOUT DECISIONS, AND PUSH FOR CHANGE?

- **WORSHIP MUSIC ON SUNDAYS.** Depending on our church background, particular styles of music minister to our hearts in different ways. Some of us feel God's love for us in powerful ways when we listen to, say, Hillsong United. Others of us encounter this same feeling when singing “How Great Thou Art.” In addition, worship songs are theological songs—and theology is important! There are times when we may disagree with some of the lyrics of particular songs that are chosen during a gathered worship service. Both our differences in emotional impact as well as theology combine to make this a particularly divisive area of church life—if we do not pursue love and humility.

- **CHURCH FINANCES.** The work of ministry requires finances to fuel it. And because where money goes reflects on some level the priorities and vision of a church, it can be a particularly contentious area.
- **IMPORTANT, BUT NOT ESSENTIAL, DOCTRINE.** Our doctrinal statement outlines what we believe are the core doctrines to be taught and united on as a church. But, the statement does not clarify many other non-essential beliefs about particular passages. And, its brevity does not allow it to go into the core doctrines to the extent that it is possible to. Because Truth matters to God and to us, and because there are various ways to interpret the truth of the Bible, it makes for an area where disunity can easily arise.
- **POLITICS.** Wellspring Church has deliberately decided to keep its core focus on the preaching of the Word of God and the making of disciples. Obviously, this should and does impact our view of and response to society, government, and specific laws and policies that impact us locally, regionally, and nationally. Yet, there are many, many different ways in which godly Christians can disagree on different issues. Prayer, humility, gentleness, and forbearance are all needed when engaging in divisive political issues. It is also helpful to remember that not all issues are of supreme importance. An undue emphasis on the political realm often limits our ability to hear the most important truths of the gospel and the Kingdom of God.
- **MINISTRY FOCUS FOR A PARTICULAR SEASON.** No church can focus on every important ministry equally in every season. God's Spirit leads some churches to emphasize certain ministries and other churches to emphasize other ministries. When our favorite ministry does not seem to be getting the attention we think it deserves, Satan can tempt us to become disgruntled and divisive.
- **LIFE GROUP RELATIONSHIPS.** Life Groups are designed and equipped to be smaller teams of life-giving biblical community [Acts 2:42-47]. So, it should come as no surprise that Satan would attempt to divide us here. Let us forbear with each other, gently and humbly confront when necessary, and do our best to leave a Life Group only by the leadership of the Spirit and on good terms with others.
- **SPECIFIC LEADERS.** We are all tempted to have favorite leaders and least favorite leaders, respecting some and disrespecting others. We go awry when we begin to unhealthily compare various leaders to each other, often building up some and tearing down others [1 Corinthians 1:10-17].

## QUESTION #8: HOW DO I DISAGREE WITH LEADERSHIP WITHOUT BEING DIVISIVE? HOW CAN I MAINTAIN UNITY EVEN WHEN I SEE THINGS DIFFERENTLY?

Great question! The goal at Wellspring is not sameness. We are not going for uniformity on



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all things. God created all of us with individual strengths, experiences, and perspectives [1 Corinthians 12:1-7]. If we do not speak honestly about what we see and how we view certain things, our community will suffer for a lack of creativity, vision, and collective strength.

The goal is this: at Wellspring we want to disagree without causing disunity, and we want to be united without being uniform. There are two primary things to keep in mind when attempting to keep this balance.

First, we have mechanisms in our Constitution to provide for fundamental changes when needed. So, if you disagree with a fundamental aspect of Wellspring such as our Constitution, our Doctrinal Statement, or something else that would be considered fundamental, then bring the issue to our elder board. By doing this you are seeking to bring about change by the mechanisms we already have agreed to use to do so. However, keep in mind that fundamental aspects of our core documents are unlikely to change much and unlikely to change often. If you cannot submit to some aspect of them, you may need to move to another church community where you can support the core beliefs and practices.

Second, unity is vastly more about attitude and character than it is about decision-making. Disagreements that are handled with humility, gentleness, and love are very unlikely to cause disunity. On the flipside, even very small disagreements that are handled with pride, harshness, and selfishness have the power to cause division. The most important issue when expressing disagreements with others is the posture of our heart, not the nature of the disagreement [though, of course, this is important as well].

### **QUESTION #9: I HAVE A SPECIFIC DISAGREEMENT OR FRUSTRATION. WHO DO I TALK TO ABOUT IT?**

First, God. Always. Pray about it. And keep praying about it. Also, search the Word of God about the issue. What does God's Word say? Do your best to get clear here before spreading your disagreement.

Second, think about who can actually address the issue. Is it a churchwide issue? Talk to an elder. Does it involve ministry funding? Talk to a deacon. What about something a preacher said from the pulpit? Depending on the seriousness of the issue, either bring it up with the preacher himself or allow it to be put in the category of "important, but not essential" and let it go. As a general rule, only when you are unable to find peace and unity through the primary channel of a person who can address the issue should you continue with others involved.

**“IS IT EVEN POSSIBLE TO DISAGREE WITHOUT DISUNITY?”**

As a reminder: others who God has placed in a decision-making position may ultimately disagree with you. As much as we do not like it, sometimes others see things differently and make different decisions than we would. If we come to this point, we should let the issue drop or only continue addressing the issue in prayer, allowing God to move in hearts and minds in ways we have proven unable to [Proverbs 21:1]. To continue to fight a losing battle with people causes disunity. On a rare occasion concerning a major issue, we may need to graciously seek another community of faith.


## **QUESTION #10: WHAT IF I CANNOT SEEM TO FIND RESOLUTION REGARDING MY DISAGREEMENT(S) WITH LEADERSHIP?**

There are occasions when individual members and the leadership of a local church cannot find resolution to a particular doctrine, decision, strategy, or other matter of importance. In this case, it is best for the member to move on to a different fellowship of faith. While the leadership may ultimately prove wrong, they are the ones who are entrusted to make the decisions necessary for the congregation to thrive. An individual who stays and is in open conflict with the leadership, no matter how cordial or humble, must ultimately move on.

If this is ever the case with you, it is of supreme importance that you leave graciously, humbly, and speak gently regarding the leaders whom you disagree with. This is easier said than done, but the Bible calls us to walk humbly with others, even and especially with those we disagree with. Those who leave well will receive blessing from the Lord as He sees your heartfelt attempts to please Him and love His people.

## **CONCLUSION**

The same Spirit who united us to Christ and to His people by faith is the same Spirit who is able and willing that we should be relationally united to one another in love. God loves to put diverse people together to humbly and gently serve one another as a witness to the watching world. Conflict is hard, but it is also a wonderful opportunity to grow in Christlike virtue. Disagreement can be unnerving, but the Word of God is clear that it can be handled well. As Wellspring seeks to be a place of diverse perspectives that hold to core beliefs, we trust the Holy Spirit will transform us to be a church that pleases God as we maintain the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace [Ephesians 4:3].



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