



M I C H I G A N
M I N I S T R Y
N E T W O R K

**HOW TO CREATE AND MAINTAIN UNITY
IN A LOCAL CHURCH
PLAYBOOK**

Church unity doesn't mean everyone agrees about everything. In fact, Biblical unity means people with different personalities, preferences, backgrounds, and perspectives remain committed to Christ, one another, and the mission of the church despite their differences.

"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." — Ephesians 4:3

The objective is not merely to create a peaceful church. It is to create a mature church that knows how to remain unified when disagreement inevitably occurs.

Unity is something to be stewarded. It is a choice that people make to maintain health even through various perspectives and concerns. Unity is a gift to a church and a great representative to the world

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WHAT UNITY IS AND IS NOT

Unity in the church can be defined as a spiritual bond that connects believers through a shared faith in Jesus Christ, even when people have different backgrounds, preferences, or opinions.

What Unity Is

Centered on Christ: It is rooted in a shared belief in the gospel, the resurrection, and the saving work of Jesus.

Unity in Diversity: It is like a human body where different parts have unique jobs but work together as one.

Grounded in Love: Believers show patience, humility, and grace toward one another.

What Unity Is Not

Not Uniformity: It does not mean everyone must agree on politics, style of music, or minor personal preferences.

Not Hiding Conflict: It is not pretending problems do not exist just to keep a peaceful appearance.

Not Compromising Truth: It does not mean dropping core biblical teachings to make everyone happy.

Unity isn't something that can be demanded.

Unity is not forced or created just because a leader "says so". It takes an inward change of heart in everybody involved. This happens when people pursue less of self and more of Christ and have a shared devotion to the same mission and values.

Principle #1 - The church belongs to Jesus.

Almost every fight in a church happens because someone thinks they own the church. Maybe not legally, but most conflicts trace back to who believes they own an item, a ministry, a position, a title, or influence.

The pastor, deacons, founding family, largest givers, or largest families own the church. Christ is the head of the church.

Often, people are attached to a style/tradition more than to protecting the unity and mission of the church, or even Christ himself.

The Bible reminds us that everything on earth is His. That means we are all stewards of what God has given us to lead. It's all His.

The truth is that we can disagree about methods without dividing churches over our identity because our identity is rooted in Christ. We are called to protect Christ's mission more than protecting our personal preferences.

Be careful not to confuse unity with uniformity. Every healthy church is made up of people with different personalities, perspectives, giftings, histories, preferences, passions, and hopes for the future. That is the beauty of the church. Paul describes this in 1 Corinthians 12, when he says we are one body with many members. Unity doesn't require everyone to think identically.

Principle #2 - Lead with Vision.

Often, leaders assume that people in the church understand and are committed to the church's vision. To protect unity, the pastor must regularly LIVE and PRESENT the vision in a way that is caught when taught.

Unity becomes difficult when everyone is pursuing a different vision. You know the church gets the vision when they can communicate the vision statement, the ways it is being implemented, and what is expected of them to accomplish it.

The church should see the pastor leading the way if the vision is going to be realized. If the pastor says, "our church is an outreach church", then they should be out witnessing and placing a personal priority on evangelism for the church.

If the pastor says, "our vision is about being connected relationally", yet doesn't spend time with people, shows up to service at the last minute, leaves right away, and delegates relationships to others, then the vision will not be caught.

This protects unity, because it keeps everything clear and directional. The truth is, bored people will create problems, and shared responsibility and missions often eliminate them.

Principle #3 - Teach Core Values

This may be one of the most important practices for maintaining unity. Every church needs to be grounded in Biblical truths, vision, core values, and missional alignment rather than personal preferences.

A church that cannot distinguish biblical conviction from personal preference will continually manufacture unnecessary conflicts.

Principle #4 - Craft Deep Community

Unity isn't primarily created during crisis; it is established long before the opportunity for disunity occurs. People are more likely to extend grace to someone they know personally.

Churches must intentionally create opportunities to connect, including with their leaders. The truth is, relationships are preventative infrastructure. If the only time people experience each other and their leaders is on a Sunday morning, misunderstandings will multiply, and conflict will become easier to cultivate.

Principle #5 - Teach on How to Handle Conflict

The best time to teach how to handle conflict is when there is no conflict. Leaders often make the mistake of discussing this subject only when conflict is occurring. While it may be necessary, it is better to train your church on how conflict is handled in advance, so expectations are already established. Use Matthew 18 for regular church conflicts unless legal laws or moral boundaries have been violated.

Steps include:

- Pray before going to speak to the individual involved
- Go to the person, not around the person.
- Be articulate and accurate about the issue.
- Talk privately with the individual involved. Do not involve others.
- Seek help from a trusted and impartial individual if the issue is not resolved.
- Involve appropriate leadership when absolutely necessary.

Teach your church about the harm of gossip in the church body. We all know that gossip is one of the fastest ways to destroy church unity. Gossip can be difficult to identify because it often presents itself as concern, or in some cases even as a prayer request. Remember that not every concern or question is gossip; however, any information that damages someone's reputation is.

It is also wise to teach on how to disagree and still get along. There is a simple truth about unity: you cannot maintain unity by eliminating disagreement. You maintain unity by teaching people how to disagree well.

Healthy disagreements protect the value of everyone involved and keep perspectives from turning into judgment of another person's value or your love for them.

Unhealthy disagreements look to win the fight, be right, and devalue the person on the other side. Unhealthy actions create additional conflict as people get "termed" as "less than," "a problem," or "not as spiritual as me."

The goal in relationships is not to eliminate strong opinions or perspectives, but rather to remove hostility from disagreement. It is a choice to honor God by the way we honor those He loves.

Principle #6 - Create a Culture of Celebration and Honor

Romans 12:10 says: "Outdo one another in showing honor."

One of the greatest ways to create and maintain unity is to celebrate everything healthy. Make honoring people normal. Celebrate qualities such as sacrificial servanthood, faithfulness, behind-the-scenes work, long-term team membership, and people who have an impact on others' lives. It would be wise to do so across all ages and genders in your church.

Generational division can slowly, methodically, and quietly destroy unity. When older members feel devalued, dismissed, or relegated to a historic perspective, they will become more resistant and critical of what is occurring. The same is true for younger generations. Celebrating and honoring every age greatly reduces these kinds of conflicts. The goal is to see every generation serving and celebrating one another.

This helps teach your church to honor others even if they don't necessarily agree with them. Honor doesn't require agreement. People can disagree with someone's decision while still treating them with dignity.

Principle #7 - Model Leadership Consistency

How leaders talk about other churches, pastors, leaders, politics, their families, previous pastors, current pastors, and congregants sets the tone and structure of unity in a church. Doing this well does not guarantee a lack of conflict, but a congregation will usually imitate the leadership team. Therefore, leaders need a higher standard.

Talk about where you are going, how you will get there, and the confidence in God that He will get you there. It goes a long way to preserving unity and protecting people.

Philippians 2 gives the church a great reminder:

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves."

Unity requires people who can say, "I am sorry, " "I was wrong", and "I didn't understand." Unity requires leaders to go FIRST in humility. Churches become unhealthy when leaders believe admitting mistakes weakens their leadership. The opposite is true. It actually strengthens it! Humble leaders are the ones who others will follow.

Principle #8 - Build Trust Through Transparency

People don't need to know everything, but they need to know that leadership is trustworthy. When making big decisions, share the essential information that will give your congregation enough to feel confident and well-informed. While some things are confidential, remember that perceived secrecy creates suspicion.

Principle #9 - Listen Before You Defend.

When someone raises a legitimate concern, leaders should resist the urge to immediately explain why the person is wrong. This requires a leader to ask good questions such as: "Please help me understand what has occurred", "How has this affected you?", "What do you think should have happened differently?", "What would you like me to do to help bring resolution to this?" Listening doesn't mean agreeing. It means valuing the person sharing by listening.

Principle #10 - Do not create comparison.

One big area of division is when one ministry is seen as more important, resourced, or celebrated than another. Ministry leaders all believe (at some level) that their ministry should be the most important or at least equal to all the others. They want the same resources, stage time, facility usage, and recognition.

Overcoming this requires leadership to celebrate collaboration by consistently reminding everyone how each ministry works together to accomplish the church's overall mission. It's a reminder that all church ministries are interdependent.

Principle #11 – Stay outward focused.

When a church turns inward, one will usually find that most conversations gravitate toward oneself. Church leadership must keep the church focused on an outward mission. A shared mission creates shared purpose. People who serve others and focus outward often discover that their differences aren't as important as they thought.