



Unity through Strong Relationships Philippians 4:1-3

In this article I address the challenge of Unity in the more traditional Church setting. Where you have Senior Pastors (SP) and support leadership, the challenge to unity is great. Ultimately we suggest this form of Church government be abolished, but because we are aware many remain in these settings we address some of the challenges to unity in such a setting.

*Paul Modeled it:
Philippians 4:1-3*

¹Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends! ²I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with (i.e. be in unity with) each other in the Lord. ³Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

*Jesus Modeled it:
Matthew 4:18-22*

¹⁸As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” ²⁰At once they left their nets and followed him. ²¹Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, ²²and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

If you follow the Gospel accounts carefully, it is evident that Jesus had spent a full year cultivating a relationship with these men, before He ever called them to leave their professions and follow Him. And for three and a half years He continued deepening that relationship so He could turn the entire world over to their pastoral care.

Relationship is Critical!!!

A. Unity is maintained by shared beliefs, which are developed in Teaching & Relationship.

Unity in the body is generally disrupted when another leader has felt that the things he believes are not being respected, and thus begins to seek out others who will share his beliefs.

If there are concerns great enough for an elder to feel his conscience is being compromised by the belief of his Senior Pastor (SP), then that SP needs to recognize that either he is being too strong about his belief, or he needs to take as much time as is necessary to resolve the concern and come to a unity of mind. Such concerns must not be ignored and allowed to become a point of stress.

B. The Flock needs a Unified Leadership.

The flock is always watching on, looking for unity in the leadership. If they detect that the elders and the SP are at odds with each other it creates an inner tension and confusion. Sheep have a need to see their leaders all in agreement on where they are leading the church. When they don't see this agreement it creates anxiety which will erupt into division if not handled properly.

C. Unity rests on the Respect & Compassion of the Senior Pastor, which flows through his Relationship with his support leaders.

The SP has the responsibility to soothe the concerns of his leaders, rather than roll over them in a demanding and unresponsive manner. Support leadership, by the very nature of their position, wrestle with a fear that because they don't have the final say they don't really have any say at all. In most cases this is not a realistic concern, but it behooves the SP to continually go out of his way to communicate to his elders that he respects their opinions, is open to correction, knows he can be wrong at times, and cares what his leadership are thinking and feeling.

D. Joy in the congregation will be in direct relationship with joy in the leadership team.

When the principle of what takes place at the top will always trickle down, is kept in mind, then SPs will keep in mind that joy in the church will never be any greater than the degree of joy in the leadership. Joy in the leadership is generally in direct proportion to the degree of respect and relationship that is accorded to them by the SP. When lording it over takes place, the leadership become restless and anxious of spirit. Mutual respect and relationship is a major key to joy in the leadership and ultimately joy in the congregation.

E. Senior Leadership must not be Domineering.

Mat 20:20 (NKJV) Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him. 21 And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She said to Him, "Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom." 22 But Jesus answered and said, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They said to Him, "We are able." 23 So He said to them, "You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father." 24 And when the ten heard it, they were greatly displeased with the two brothers. 25 But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "***You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. 26 "Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. 27 "And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave; 28 "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."***"

SPs must recognize one of their chief responsibilities is to keep the unity of the eldership strong. To do so requires a strong commitment to relationship, building trust, showing mutual respect and spending time listening to the concerns of his leaders. He must regularly be emphasizing their team involvement, and consciously resist any temptation to remind his leaders that he is ultimately in charge. Because of this, the role of SP is best given to one who is highly secure in his emotional sense of value and personhood. Insecurity is commonly exhibited in SPs who regularly make it clear to their leadership that they are the boss. This can be done by direct statement, or by exercising decision making apart from the knowledge of his eldership. SPs are not one man teams, they are men who carry the greatest degree of responsibility for the unity and

joy of the fellowship, and know it is best maintained by a happy and affirmed leadership team.

F. Selective Relationships are a necessity.

Depending on the size of the church the SP may not be able to be relationally intimate with all of the people in his church, but bottom line he must maintain as one of his highest priorities, a close friendship relationship with each of his leaders, their wives and family. The church will never be more relationally intimate and joyful than they see modeled in their leadership. If the SP is a lone ranger, and distant emotionally and relationally the church will struggle more with unrest in its people and generally a lack of intimate relationships in the body. I know this can feel like a straight jacket to a SP who is by nature relationally withdrawn, but if you can hear this and recognize how much your leadership team needs this from you then you will stretch yourself to become the kind of SP that is comfortable with intimate relationship with your team. Add to this the fact that if you will develop and maintain this intimacy you will find that when you strongly believe the church needs to go in a particular direction your leaders will be far more inclined to agree with you without a lot of debate about it, because they already trust you. For a leader trust is a major key. You will never be able to lead your team beyond their trust in you, and trust can never be built by just being a man of integrity. It takes relational intimacy to create trust.

G. Be Courageous - Ask your Leadership Team how they are feeling about this area.

If you, as a SP aren't sure where you sit with your team members on this score, I strongly suggest that you get alone with each of them and their families and ask them. Your transparency and openness will go a long way. Do more listening than talking. They need to believe that you really want to know how they feel. If they have been struggling with this for quite some time they will likely be fearful of expressing their concerns and may need your extra encouragement to do so. If you make them feel safe enough you may find out that they have been struggling with some hurts that you didn't even know about, but which had been draining their strength for ministry and stifling their joy. The SP simply must take the responsibility for setting the tone of his whole church, from the leadership down. With authority comes responsibility, and relationship is a major responsibility for the SP.

It is both exciting and challenging to be the SP, but if the SP handles his authority properly he should find that with each passing year his team will become more and more solid and able to accomplish greater and greater tasks for the kingdom of God.