

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the St. Louis Church of Christ,

It was great to be together this past weekend with nearly a thousand brothers and sisters from 12 different congregations throughout the Heartland. We all felt the joy and strength of fellowship and unity with our brothers and sisters in other congregations of the Lord's church. Recently we have all experienced other great fruits of unity, whether through our Heartland Youth Camps, our partnership with Eurasian Missions, tsunami relief in Southeast Asia, or hurricane relief in New Orleans. It is no wonder that Jesus spent so much time 2000 years ago praying for our unity!

On that note, there have been a couple developments in recent days about the unity of our churches. Specifically, there have been some letters circulating which make different proposals of how we may want to proceed as a fellowship of churches worldwide. Many in our church here in St. Louis have read these letters and asked Dan Rice and me to respond to their proposals--so we are taking a brief moment to do so at this time.

First, Kip McKean unveiled a plan he has regarding other churches within our fellowship. In a portion of an article summarizing this plan, he wrote:

“...the Portland leadership believes it is time for a progressive ‘calling out of the remnant of disciples’ from dying, former ICOC churches. For years I have preached ‘one church-one city;’...I still believe in this same principle...In the fall the Portland leadership will begin to seek out church leaderships in congregations that are struggling to ask if we can help them build a foundation of sold-out disciples. If they are not inclined to receive help, then we will offer help to any group that would prefer to be in a new congregation composed of only sold-out disciples. To the casual observer, this may look like ‘two churches in one city.’ Yet, in time it will be obvious who has God’s approval.”

While we do appreciate any desire to help struggling churches, and understand that Jesus deserves our total, “sold-out” commitment, this plan seems to promote more competition and division than it does respect and unity. We have all had enough of that in the past. Here in St. Louis, we have no desire to be a part of such an endeavor.

Also the leadership of the Los Angeles Church of Christ has made a unity proposal of its own last week. In it there was a list of unified beliefs, unified practices and an appeal for unified worldwide leadership. They asked that church leaders throughout the world sign up for this plan by September 5<sup>th</sup>, and then have further discussions and make further improvements on it at our leadership conference in Seattle next week. We greatly respect the desire of those brothers to do something that would hopefully draw God’s people together. However, at this point, we do not desire to sign such a proposal, fearing it may limit true unity rather than promote it. We do not feel that a centralized leadership group or a narrow view of “unified practices” should be the foundation or requirement for unity amongst our churches. Rather, it should be simply our common commitment to honor, obey and serve Christ.

Again, we are excited about the unity that is being forged within and around our church here in St. Louis: from our relationship with the Heartland churches, to our support of HOPE worldwide, to our partnership with the Eurasian churches, to our newer fellowship with the Greater Alton Church of Christ and other churches that were not a part of the ICOC. As Paul commanded, we must “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

This next week, we will be going to Seattle for an international conference, where we will be talking much more about all of this. Please pray for us as your servants to be both learners and leaders as we all strive to fulfill Jesus’ prayer for unity in today’s day and age.

If you would like to read more about these proposals to which I have referred, you can find them on [DisciplesToday.net](http://DisciplesToday.net). As always, we would love to hear whatever input, feedback or questions you may have.

In Christ,

John Lusk & Dan Rice, Evangelists of the St. Louis Church of Christ