

# GROWING *Together*

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## STICKING TOGETHER WHEN THE GLUE FEELS CRUSTY

Most of the time, we live our lives with people who share our point of view and lifestyle.

We live in a home surrounded by homes like our own. We choose the kind of magazines we read and the radio station we listen to. We decide whether to join the tennis club, or the hockey team. Likewise we work with people who have chosen the same kind of job: teaching, construction, nursing.

One of the few places in our society where we meet and interact *significantly* with people different from ourselves is the church.

It is true that to a certain extent we choose our faith community: it is the church or denomination where our family has always gone, or one seriously involved in social justice as we want to be; or it is the one which welcomed us most enthusiastically, or uses music we like for worship. Yes, we do choose our faith community – hopefully, with care.

However, even within that congregation – no matter how well matched we are – there are always sharp differences of opinion. Who can use our building? Do we stand or kneel? In our Sunday worship, can we call God “Mother”? How will we raise money? Will we publicly acknowledge support for our gay and lesbian members?

People’s answers to questions like that always vary. Sometimes, we despair of our differences. Other times, we may try to run from the, looking for another “peaceful” church, one without disagreements. Or maybe we conclude – for the sake of our faith community – that it’s better for us to say nothing.

There is another way of looking at our differences. Having a wide range of opinions need not be a downside to church life. Having a wide range of opinions is – on the contrary – a sign of a truly Christian community. For when we are active in our parish or congregation, we soon realize everyone is not just like us. An unmarried unemployed mother and a high-powered businessman can worship side by side with integrity and serve faithfully on the same church committee. Recognizing and valuing our differences is part of our response to Jesus Christ who loves and calls us all.

But, it goes farther than that. We need to struggle to stick together even when the glue feels crusty because Jesus calls us into *genuine* community: a community conscientiously listening to one another, a community learning to love those with whom we disagree. We ought to value our faith community because it plunges us into tough discussions and relationships. These tough struggles can enrich us profoundly; deepening our knowledge of Christ and our relationship with God. In our faith community we are called to cease judging one another and to live with an educated generosity that anticipates, welcomes and appreciates our diversity. This diversity is Christ’s gift to us and a precious expression of his Spirit. Only in our faith community are we called to live with Christian generosity like that, an informed willingness to lay down our lives for others.

People set limits, note differences, and hand down judgements. Jesus Christ sets us free, overcomes differences even of life and death, and forgives us daily. And when we are able to keep our conversations going as a faith community, we make a significant contribution to holding our fragmented society together.

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GROWING TOGETHER is a series of five monthly Sunday bulletin inserts for the ecumenical education of Christ’s faithful.



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