



## Pastor's Corner

Dear Friends,

I mentioned on Sunday that I spent most of last week at the New Melleray Monastery in Eastern Iowa. I'm participating in a two-year Preaching Cohort for a program called *Bountiful Preaching*. Our ten-member group has study retreats where we gather from our homes in Ohio, Illinois, Iowa and Nebraska, and bring in scholars to teach and inspire us to preach more bountifully. Our cohort is one of many from all over the Midwest, and beyond.

Rev. Dr. Matt Skinner led us in a study of the gospel of Matthew. He started the class off by saying, *"To understand Matthew you have to have lived through a nasty church schism. You have to have lived through people actively sowing seeds of discontent; and not people far removed from you, but rather those closest to you. You wished they'd go away but they didn't."* Schism. The opposite of unity. This class was timely, because I'm also currently taking a Disciples' History and Polity class, and one of the main goals behind the Stone-Campbell Movement (which led to the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ tradition) was *Christian unity*. The Disciples seek to be *"a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world"* ([disciples.org](http://disciples.org)).

Unity is a challenge for people, in part, because our brains appear to be hard-wired to notice differences. In the Scientific American journal, author Leslie Henderson writes about research that suggests that the human brain functions in ways that influence our reluctance to trust others, especially those who are not like us (that is, different races, different religions, etc.) But just because the brain influences how we see those who are different from us, she writes, doesn't mean we can't work to change this. "Activity in our brains is malleable, [meaning we can] modify the more primitive fear and reward systems to produce different behavioral outcomes." Henderson quotes author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, who says that "the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story." And, going further, she draws upon social scientist Scott Page, who "provides mathematical evidence that although diverse individuals are less trusting of one other, when working together, they are more productive." The conclusion is that a diverse way of seeing things leads to better solutions than the most brilliant of like-minded experts.

So how do we build unity? I think we need to seek out opportunities to humbly learn from others, and the only way to do this is to build relationships with those who have different ways of living in and understanding this world, and the world yet to come. I was reflecting yesterday on what a blessing it has been for me to be part of diverse faith communities and cultures over the course of my life: from my Presbyterian heritage to my education at a Lutheran college; from my pastoring at a United Methodist, and now a Disciples of Christ, congregation; from my studying Hebrew at a Seventh Day Adventist university to working with Muslim Imams and Orthodox Rabbis. I am so so thankful I got to do all of this, and will continue to seek out ways to build bridges and learn how similar we really are, in the ways that matter.

I invite you to join me in this effort. Sharing God's love will mean finding ways to connect; and honoring God as a whole Creation will mean finding ways to unite. May you feel the love and joy of Christ every moment of this journey. Peace be with you!

Pastor Kara

