

Staff Work

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Dwelling in Unity

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Dwelling in Unity

Abstract

"Around long tables, vastly different cultures bravely stumble through attempts to communicate across language barriers. They eat, laugh, encourage, and learn more about each other."

Posting about unity in the body of Christ from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<http://inallthings.org/dwelling-in-unity/>

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

Dwelling in Unity

 allthings.org/dwelling-in-unity/

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John Baas

Daily Scripture Texts

[Psalm 133](#)

[Genesis 49:29-50:14](#)

[Romans 14:13-15:2](#)

A small band of volunteers leaves the rural church. It is their turn to make the Sunday morning trek to the fledgling Laotian congregation in the nearby city.

“Sa Bai Dii” (Hello!) say the pastor and a few early arriving attendees as they bow to greet their guests. “So very nice to see you again.” Slowly, more congregants arrive. A dozen or so elderly men and women, a couple of families with small children. The old church van pulls in the lot, dropping off a load of middle and high school students. About ten minutes past the scheduled start time, the service gets underway. Accustomed to punctuality, the volunteers note that, in this setting, a few minutes late is right on time.

A greeting, an opening prayer, some announcements—first in Lao, then in English for the visitors and the young people. Next comes the congregational singing, in English again, accompanied by electric guitar, electric piano, and one of the young people on drums. A “one size fits all” drum fill and about three chords set the background for “We Bring the Sacrifice of Praise” and “As the Deer.” The tune and words are familiar and yet altered enough in presentation to bring a smile (or is that a grimace?) to the face of the visitors, who remind themselves that God is being praised, even if the meter is uneven, entrances are missed, and words and tenses get scrambled.

After the offering, the volunteers leave the sanctuary—the sermon will be delivered in Lao—with the children and young people. Some lead the pre-school and elementary school kids in Sunday School curriculum, while others introduce the middle and high school students to basic catechism lessons. Attention and discipline is spotty, similar to a normal Sunday in most any church—but also dissimilar. One young Sunday schooler takes a mouse out of her pocket and proudly shows everyone her “pet.” Trying not to look horrified, the teacher does her best to refocus the class on the Bible story. In the high school group, the teens share prayer requests. “Pray for my meeting with the probation officer this week.” “I’m not getting along with my parents.” “My brother got suspended from school for fighting.” If these things also happen in the rural church family, the students do not so openly share them with their teachers or classmates.

When the worship service concludes, the adults join the children and their teachers for a meal together. Lasagna, cheesy potatoes, and chocolate éclair dessert meet sticky rice, marinated greens, noodles, and meat of often uncertain origin. “Try this, you like.” “Not that—too spicy for you!” The young people make short work of the dessert.

Around long tables, vastly different cultures bravely stumble through attempts to communicate across language barriers. They eat, laugh, encourage, and learn more about each other. Prayer lists get longer and more specific. The rural band of volunteers eventually heads home, thanking God for their brothers and sisters in both communities.

“How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity!”

We still have a long way to go, but this is a good start.