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Of the Seventy

Apart, but Still One

In the Church, in spite of our differences, the Lord expects us to be one!

In June 1994, I was anxiously driving back home from work to watch on TV our national soccer team play in the World Cup. Soon after I started my journey, I saw from afar on the sidewalk a man quickly moving forward in a wheelchair, which I noticed was decorated with our Brazilian flag. I knew then he was also going home to watch the game!

When our paths crossed and our eyes met, for a fraction of a second, I felt strongly united with that man! We were going in different directions, didn't know each other, and had clearly different social and physical conditions, but our same passion for soccer and love for our country made us feel like one in that very moment! I haven't seen that man since then, but today, decades later, I can still see those eyes and feel that strong connection with that man. After all, we won the game and the World Cup that year!

In the Church, in spite of our differences, the Lord expects us to be one! He said in the Doctrine and Covenants, "Be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine."¹

As we all enter a meetinghouse to worship as a group, we should leave behind our differences, including race, social status, political preferences, and academic and professional achievements, and instead concentrate

on our common spiritual objectives. Together we sing hymns, ponder about the same covenants during the sacrament, and say simultaneously an audible "amen" after talks, lessons, and prayers—meaning that we jointly agree with what was shared.

These things that we do collectively help create a strong sense of oneness within the congregation.

However, what really determines, solidifies, or destroys our unity is how we act when we are apart from our Church members. As we all know, it is inevitable and normal that eventually we will talk about each other.

Depending on what we choose to say about one another, our words will either have our "hearts knit together in unity,"² as Alma taught those he baptized in the Waters of Mormon, or they will erode the love, trust, and goodwill that should exist among us.

There are comments that subtly destroy unity, such as "Yes, he's a good bishop; oh, but you should have seen him when he was a young man!"

A more constructive version of this might be "The bishop is so good, and he has grown so much in maturity and wisdom over the years."

Oftentimes we put permanent labels on people by saying something like "Our Relief Society president is a lost cause; she is so stubborn!" In contrast, we might say, "The Relief Society president has been less flexible lately; maybe she's going through some difficult times. Let's help her and sustain her!"

Brothers and sisters, we have no right to portray anybody, including from our Church circle, as a badly finished product! Rather, our words about our fellow beings should



reflect our belief in Jesus Christ and His Atonement and that, in Him and through Him, we can always change for the better!

Some start criticizing and becoming divided from Church leaders and members for things that are so small.

Such was the case of a man called Simonds Ryder, who became a member of the Church in 1831. After reading a revelation that pertained to him, he was perplexed to see that his name was misspelled *Rider*, with the letter *i* instead of with the letter *y*. His reaction to this event contributed to his questioning the prophet and eventually led to persecuting Joseph and falling away from the Church.³

It is also likely that we will all experience some correction from our ecclesiastical leaders, which will be a test of how united we are with them.

I was only 11, but I remember that 44 years ago, the meetinghouse where my family attended church was to experience major remodeling. Before that undertaking began, there was a meeting in which local leaders and area leaders were discussing how the members would participate with labor in that effort. My father, who had previously presided over that unit for years, expressed his very strong opinion that this work should be done by a contractor and not by amateurs.

Not only was his opinion rejected, but we heard that he was severely and publicly rebuked on that occasion. Now, this was a man who was very dedicated to the Church and had been a World War II soldier in Europe, used to resisting and fighting for what he believed in! One wondered what his reaction might be after this incident. Would he persist with his opinion and continue to oppose the decision already made?



We had seen families in our ward who had become weaker in the gospel and had stopped attending meetings because they could not be one with those who were leading. I myself also witnessed many of my friends from Primary not remaining faithful in their youth because their parents were always finding fault with those inside the Church.

My dad, however, decided to remain one with our fellow Saints. Some days later, when ward members were gathering to help in the construction, he “invited” our family to follow him to the meetinghouse, where we would make ourselves available to help in any way.

I was furious. I felt like asking him, “Dad, why in the world are you going to help in the construction if you were against having the members do it?” But the look on his face discouraged me from doing that. I wanted to be well for the rededication. So, fortunately, I decided to be quiet and just go and help in the building!

Father did not get to see the new chapel, as he passed away before the conclusion of this work. But we in the family, led now by my mom, continued doing our part until it was finished, and that kept us united with my father, with the Church members, with our leaders, and, most important, with the Lord!

Just moments before His excruciating experiences in Gethsemane, when Jesus was praying to the Father for His Apostles and all of us, the Saints, He said, “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee.”⁴

Brothers and sisters, I testify that as we decide to be one with the members and leaders of the Church—both when we’re assembled together and especially when we are apart—we will also feel more perfectly united with our Heavenly Father and the Savior. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Doctrine and Covenants 38:27.
2. Mosiah 18:21.
3. See Milton V. Backman Jr., *The Heavens Resound: A History of the Latter-day Saints in Ohio, 1830–1838* (1983), 93–94.
4. John 17:21.