

Today, this congregation recognizes 200 years since Thomas Campbell's Declaration & Address. The day also happens to be World Communion Day. All around the world Christians are looking to partake in that most holy of events—the Lord's Supper. And this congregation is aware of Thomas Campbell because he urged people to be "Christians only."

He saw that as a Presbyterian minister, his denomination was supporting division of the one true church—Christ's body. So he, along with Barton Stone, a Methodist minister, sought to reform the way Christians viewed each other. He and Stone argued that Christians should view themselves as part of a larger whole—the church—and that Christians should look to the Bible as the main basis of their faith instead of denominationalism. This thought spread throughout America and would eventually become a movement known as the Restoration Movement.

200 years ago in Campbell's Declaration and Address, he wrote in Propositions 10 and 11, "(10) That division among Christians is anti-Christian, anti-scriptural, unnatural, and productive of evil and confusion. (11) That division is caused by neglect of the will of God and the arrogance of human beings who have assumed unwarranted authority in the church."<sup>1</sup> What Campbell is arguing is that division comes about from humans and is not appropriate for the church.

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<sup>1</sup> Henry E. Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity: A History of The Restoration Movement*. Revised Edition (Abilene: ACU, 2003), 81.

This is, of course, echoed in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians when he says,

**1 Corinthians 1:10** <sup>10</sup> ¶ Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose.

And one of the ways we can exhibit the scriptural unity that is called for in the New Testament, and by the leaders of the "Christians only" mindset, is to come together as one church and share in communion.

As a theological leader of this restoration theology, John Mark Hicks urges that, "*The Church should revision the supper as the visible, concrete display of unity of the body of Christ. When at the table, the church exhibits their 'common union' in Christ...The table, then, is the place where the church testifies to the world how it transcends all world distinctions...The oneness of the body, with all its cultural, ethnic, and gender diversity, is given visible expression when in the church people who are divided in the world sit at one table and eat from one bread.*"<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> John Mark Hicks, *Come To The Table: Revisioning The Lord's Supper* (Abilene: Leafwood, 2002), 191.

Paul also had this in mind when he said:

**Galatians 3:28** <sup>28</sup> There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

So today, we recognize that we need to do a better job of seeing ourselves not only as just Christians, but also as *one church with many congregations*. As First Corinthians 12:12-27 argues, we are all but members of the larger body. As such, each congregation has a special place in the larger body—that is the church of Christ.

Therefore, congregations cannot afford to not work together in matters of ministry. This division is exactly what has hurt the church in recent decades and we need to remember that Paul urged us to examine our individual roles and make use of them as a coherent whole as a united church of Christ.

I urge us all to change the way we speak about church and be as accurate as possible to the biblical text.

For we should not say, “I am a member of the Methodist church” or “I am a member of the disciples church.” No, we should say, “**We are all members of the church,**” period.

We need to view each congregation as a member of Christ’s body and not as something separate from it. No longer can the church afford to be divided. For its congregations feud amongst themselves over issues irrelevant to the purpose of why Christ established the church. And the church serves not only to worship its creator *but also enact His commands.*

Unfortunately congregations have the tendency to view success not in how well it carries out Christ’s commands but rather how many members it has. And some congregations go to great lengths to steal other congregants from nearby churches. This is wrong brothers and sisters; just as wrong as measuring the success of a congregation by its financial balance sheet.

While I don’t know of any congregation in Iowa that gives over 25% of its contributions back to the community as this congregation does, I think we can do better. This congregation is dedicated to the principles Jesus’ taught us to stand up for.

So when possible, we will make efforts to unite with other congregations and serve those less fortunate than ourselves. It is in this way this congregation as a member of the church is fulfilling its mission and ministries.

So today, let us be united in Christ.

Let us pray for other congregations.

And let us speak of ourselves as “Christians only.”

Though we may be *Many Congregations*, we are **ONE CHURCH!**