

Editorial

The challenge of unity in the context of diversity

Introduction. Distrust, intolerance and fake news continue to proliferate in social networks, creating mistrust among users. We face an online "culture" that does not distinguish between fact and fiction and where fake news predominates. It is a corrosive process for our public conversation and for democracy. It is a culture where a few claims on Twitter carry the same weight as a library full of research (Ac. Grayling). This misinformation is accentuated in electoral times, as seen in the current political situation in Guatemala. Christians do not escape these tendencies. Especially when it comes to the difference of opinions on political options. It is difficult for us to accept positions contrary to our own. In the face of this challenge, it is key to remember our unity as the body of Christ. It is a unity that Jesus made possible in his death on the cross (Jn.17, Eph.2:11-21), that has as its reference Jesus' relationship with the Father; it can lead others to know Jesus, and whose ultimate goal is the glory of God (Rom.15:5-7). Of course, it is worth asking ourselves, how is unity understood in the Bible?

The apostle Paul in his letter to the Corinthians presents us with an example of how unity should be shown. He does so by confronting the root of the divisions that affected their unity. "Some said I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, I am of Peter, and others more spiritual affirm I am of Christ" (1 Cor. 1:10). He questions the divisions and their arrogant attitude because some thought they were wiser than others. By forming parties, they slipped their loyalty to Christ to their leaders. For this reason, he asks them, "Is Christ divided?" They lost sight of the fact that Christ is the head of the church and that he alone deserves their loyalty (Col. 1:18). To help them understand their unity, he uses the figure of the human body to make them reflect (1 Cor.12:12,13). In the light of the apostle's reflection, we affirm that unity does not mean uniformity, but tolerates differences, and is open to cooperate with others.

1. Unity does not unify. The Corinthians were divided into groups around a leader because of their different ways of thinking. Paul reminded them that if indeed the body is one, it has many members, but being many it is one body. Such is the body of Christ. He then notes that, though all are different, they were all united into one body by the Holy Spirit, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free. Unity occurs in the context of diversity. Each member is different and has a particularity within the body. What does this diversity imply? Recognizing that not everyone has the same function. Openness to the diversity of the body of Christ opens the space to be and think differently in terms of theology, ideology, or ways of doing mission. According to Paul, it is in diversity that the body functions, and he lets us see that in the difference of criteria, the truth is verified in the light of the gospel (1 Cor. 11:19). This call to attention was important for the Corinthians in order for them to evaluate their claim that some were wiser than others.

Christians today face similar challenges. We think our opinion is better because we believe we are in the right. Especially when it comes to ideological positions. We would like others to think like us and vote according to our political preference. We lose sight of the difference of positions or the right to dissent. We expect others to see things from our particular point of view. But, we don't always evaluate our positions, or investigate opposing ideas. We go so far as to demonize the ideas of others. We forget the rights of others in terms of differences of ideas, gifts, theologies, etc. Our challenge is to respect differences and to seek the truth of the facts beyond our opinions. Let us remember, "In essentials unity, in doubtful things liberty, in all things charity or love" (St. Augustine of Hippo).

2. Unity recognises otherness. Paul confronts not only the division of groups but their mutual rejection of each other. Each group considered itself better than the others. They did not accept that others were different. In the light of the human body, he asks, "because I am not a hand, or I am not an eye, I am not part of the body?" (1 Cor.12:14-20). He reminded them that each member is different in form and function. This lack of acceptance led to intolerance. It is important to affirm that the other defines the person on the basis of the differences they have while being part of the same body. The "difference" of otherness should be seen as a complement, a path to communication and learning. Not taking this difference into account becomes the starting point for systemic hierarchies, war, oppression of social, religious, racial, gender and other minorities (Sofía García-Bullé). Difference should not be a threat but a complement. The non-acceptance of differences led the Corinthians to intolerance and closed them to listening to the point of others.

Christians today face similar risks to the Corinthians. In the past it was not easy to accept our differences. For example, differences in gifts, forms of worship, organisation, or theological emphases. Thank God we have learned to recognise and accept our denominational differences. However, we struggled to accept each other's differences of opinion. Strata difference was no problem for Paul. He became a Jew to the Jews, to win the Jews; those who were subject to the law as subject to the law, to win those who are subject to the law; those who were without law, as if he were without law, to win those who were without law. He became weak to the weak, that he might win the weak; he became all things to all men, that he might save some (1 Cor. 9:19-23). Without abdicating the truth of the gospel, he accepted differences of ethnicity, language, ways of thinking, or positions on the Law, and knew how to live and work with them (cf. Acts 17:16-34).

In this context, we must accept our differences, whether we are on the right or on the left, debate ideas with respect, and avoid letting our ideology become the last word. Let us remember, the kingdom of God is not married to any ideology. Rather, it is the criterion for evaluating any system, be it political, economic, cultural, or religious: "It is in the midst of a difference that we have our golden opportunity. When everything is going well and we are all standing in a small circle, there is not much for the world to see. But when we get to the place where there is a real difference, and we exhibit an unwavering commitment to truth, but at the same time an observable love, then there is something for the world to see, something they can use to judge that these really are Christians, and that Jesus has indeed been sent by the Father" (Francis Schaefer). Because we have been reconciled to God, and reconciled to one another as brothers, let us take on the privilege of being ambassadors of reconciliation in the world (2 Cor.5:18).

3. Unity must lead to cooperation. Undoubtedly, we all find it difficult to open ourselves to listen, to receive, or to cooperate with others. This is why Paul encouraged the Corinthians to seek interdependence. He told them: "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you', nor can the head say to the feet, 'I have no need of you'. On the contrary, he said, all parts of the body need each other. He emphasized, because we are all part of the body, we must all cooperate for the good of the body, and care for one another (1 Cor.11:14-27). This implies keeping in mind that all members of the body of Christ are important and necessary. The formation of parties made them self-sufficient, and led them to lose sight of their interdependence. They are firmly reminded that they need one another, and not to forget that the foolish things of the world God sought to shame the wise (1 Cor.1:28).

In the current situation that the country is going through, we are called upon to join forces in favour of its spiritual and social development. We must dare to work together with others, even if they think differently. Beyond ideological banners, justice, truth, and solidarity are essential values of the kingdom of God. It is a call to proclaim and live the integral gospel that promotes life in all its aspects, the family according to God's original plan, and God's justice and Shalom for the well-being of the most vulnerable, the marginalised and those who suffer injustice. It is essential in this process to affirm that we are brothers and sisters in faith, and fellow citizens of one another. It is not easy to work alongside others. The apostle was aware of this difficulty, and therefore exhorts us to seek the way of love (1 Cor.12:31; 13:1-13). Without love there is no possibility of showing unity in diversity, without love it is impossible to accept others, and without love it is not possible to cooperate with others for the common good. In building a better country, let us work side by side in the midst of our differences. Let our good works shine forth so that God the Father may be glorified in all things (Matthew 5:48).

Theological Studies Programme

Conferences on the Kingdom of God

On May 19 and 20, Ezra Centre facilitated the conferences The Kingdom of God, The Theological Framework for the Life and Mission of the Church, and The Kingdom of God and Disciple Making for leaders and pastors of the Latin American Natural Entity for Strategic Cooperation (ENLACE), whose focus is to train church leaders to engage and partner with leaders and organizations in their communities to design sustainable initiatives that transform their communities and regions. There were 48 attendees from churches of various denominations.



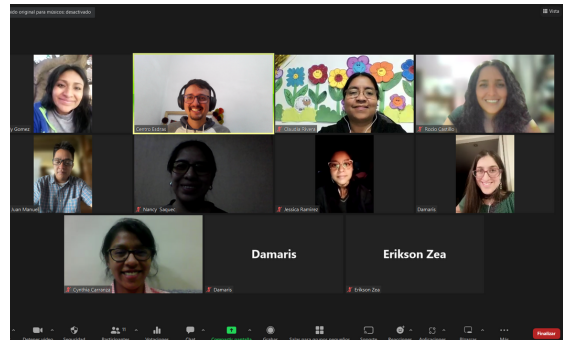
Graduation of the Diploma Course "Potential Leaders" - Compassion

Our Lily and Israel Ortiz participated in the graduation of the diploma course "Potential Leaders" in Quetzaltenango. Our director shared the conference "Jesus the Servant Leader" with young people from churches of different denominations in the southwest associated with Compassion Guatemala. Ezra Centre collaborated with several modules of this diploma course. As a requirement of their graduation, the young people presented five projects on how to face problems such as migration, juvenile delinquency, kingdom economy, environment, and prevention of sexual violence in their respective communities.



Diploma Course on the Pedagogy of Jesus and Contemporary Education

So far this year, a beautiful learning group has been forming in this diploma course. Among the modules that have been provided, the following stand out: The Pedagogical Principles of Jesus, Biblical Cosmivision, How to Teach the Bible, Contemporary Contributions to Education, and in progress is the Competencies of Educators. They have been spaces of much learning, as the students emphasize, which have provided topics and conversations that are not usual in ecclesial circles and that invite to rethink the way of seeing the faith and Christian teaching.



In the area of diploma courses, we are praying for what is to come, and we pray for those that are in progress. Join us in this process and journey.

Jeison Rodríguez
Coordinator of Programme

Childhood, Adolescence and Family Programme



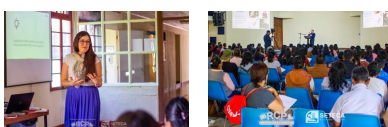
School for Parents Project

On the 15th. of May, the School for Parents Programme Team carried out the validation of the first workshop, with the participation of members of the Ezra Centre Team. This activity allowed the theological content of the Manual to be strengthened. Progress is also being made in the development of content and workshops that will be integrated into the Facilitator's Manual.



Workshops for Teachers of Christian Education - SETECA

By the grace of the Lord on Saturday, June 10, we participated in the Christian Education Seminar "CPR Emergency to the heart," organized by SETECA, with the workshops: "On your marks, ready! Games!" and "Don't get tangled in the nets," directed to teachers and leaders of churches and people who work with children and adolescence.



Karen Sipac
Coordinator of Programme

Contributing with fellow organisations

On the 20th of June, Dr. Israel Ortiz participated in the Territorial Missionary Conference of the Full Gospel Churches of God of the Western Region in the city of Quetzaltenango. He gave the biblical presentations "Mission in the Style of Jesus" and the workshop "The Church of Antioch paradigm of local and global mission."



Gratitude:

- For the Christians and Politics seminar held on the 29th of April and for the good reception among pastors and lay people.
- For the diploma course on Pedagogy of Jesus and Contemporary Education.
- For the workshops held at the Seminar on Christian Education, organised by the Central American Theological Seminary (SETECA).
- For the graduation of the ELIJO programme (diploma for potential leaders) on the 26th of May in the city of Quetzaltenango.
- For the printing of the 2nd edition of the book "Christians and Politics" and the good reception it received in the context of the elections.

We thank you, dear brothers and sisters inside and outside Guatemala for your spiritual accompaniment and support in the journey of the ministry.

Please PRAY for the following:

1. For the discernment of the people in the 2nd round of the presidential election on the 20th. of August, and for the Lord to protect the country from acts of violence.
2. For the follow-up of cooperation with our brothers of ENLACE. We are working on a strategic alliance to provide diploma courses to pastors and lay people from churches associated with your organisation.
3. For the follow-up analysis of the Thinking and Social Projection chapters of the Research Programme.
4. For the team working on the publication of the book "*Rethinking the Church in the 21st century*."
5. For the approval of projects sent to partner organisations.
6. For the finances, projects, and team of the Centre. May the Lord direct all we do and may it be for His glory and honour.

Do you enjoy reading?

We have some books on offer

Super special prices!



- *Los Cristianos y la Política 2a. Edición* Q.50
- *Diccionario Bíblico Contemporáneo* Q.160.00
- *Reinventando la Misión en América Latina* Q.125.00
- *El Shalom y la Justicia de Dios* Q.50.00
- *Esperanza para toda la Creación* Q.75.00

** Envío a domicilio con costo adicional

DONATE!

Be part of the vision. Together we can do so much for the formation of the leadership of the people of God.

Locally: Checking account Fundación Centro Esdras, Banco G & T Continental, Cta. #018-0007479-9

internationally: **United States**, <https://uwm.org/projects/65510/>, for **Europe**: www.latinlink.org.uk/donate and

select "support a project" then in the arrow select "Ezra Centre" and follow the instructions.



info@centroesdras.org
www.centroesdras.org
(502)2441 0387

33 AVE. "A" 7-68, ZONA 7
JARDINES DE TIKAL II
CIUDAD DE GUATEMALA



Centro Esdras