

**Discussion of the Application of
the Principles of Fellowship,
With Emphasis on the Application
of the Principles
to Christian Schools**

**Denver, Colorado
October 5, 2009**

Review of Basic Principles and Guidelines

“Christian fellowship” refers first of all to the spiritual fellowship which we have with God and with all believers through faith in Christ as our Savior. We cherish these fellowships as a great blessing.

But when we speak about practicing the principles of church fellowship, we are referring to every activity in which Christians join together with other members of the visible church in order to give joint expression to their faith.

Since we cannot see the faith in people’s hearts, we must determine whether we can practice fellowship with an individual or a group by comparing their confession of faith with Scripture. If individuals or groups agree concerning all of the doctrines of Scripture, they should practice church fellowship together. If they do not agree in doctrine, they should not practice church fellowship with each other.

The Unit Concept

Church fellowship must be dealt with as an undivided whole in two different respects. First, when the doctrines of Scripture are being discussed to determine if two groups may practice fellowship together, all doctrine must be dealt with as a unit. Since all the teachings of Scripture have the same divine authority, and we have no right to add anything to them nor to subtract anything from them, the practice of church fellowship must be based on agreement in all of the doctrines of Scripture.

Second, the various activities which may express church fellowship must be dealt with as a unit. Since various ways of expressing church fellowship (such as, celebration of the Lord’s Supper, exchange of pulpits, transfers of membership, joint mission work, joint efforts in Christian education, joint worship and joint prayer) are merely different ways of expressing the same fellowship of faith, all expressions of church fellowship require the same degree of doctrinal agreement, namely, agreement in all of the doctrines of Scripture.

Some Guidelines In Applying The Principles

Before we consider specific applications of the principles of fellowship, we will consider some general guidelines which should govern our attitude and actions as we wrestle with specific cases.

The Priority of Principle

1. Before we tackle specific cases, we should be sure that all parties in the discussion understand and agree with the scriptural principles as summarized above. We cannot make sound applications without a clear understanding of the principles. This means that we will constantly be studying the principles in Scripture, not simply receiving them by tradition.

“Hard Cases Make Bad Law”

2. We must remember that there are hard cases (cases of casuistry) in which it is difficult to determine which of two scriptural principles applies. Is it still time to warn a weak brother, or is it now time to avoid? We should be careful not to pass hasty judgment on decisions which fellow Christians have made in such difficult cases. We may not know all the circumstances that led them to their decision. We should patiently listen to their explanations.

3. We should recognize that exceptional cases may lead us to depart from our normal *practice*, but we should be on guard that exceptions are not used to undermine the *principles*. We must be careful that we do not allow difficult cases to establish or modify the principles. We may not let feelings, emotions, or human reason pressure us into a particular application and then reshape our principles to condone our action.

4. We must guard against allowing specific applications or historical precedents to become rigid rules which govern all similar cases. We must evaluate each case in the light of the scriptural principles.

5. When we are faced with such a hard case, we should seek the advice of fellow Christians and explain the reasons for our actions to those who are concerned about them.

6. We do not want to establish a detailed code of church law which prescribes practices for all Christians regardless of their local circumstances. But because we live in a mobile society, a certain amount of mutually agreed-upon uniformity of practice is necessary to avoid confusion and offense among our members. Members of our congregations will experience less confusion if we develop carefully considered guidelines concerning practices among us. Great confusion will result from “everyone doing what is right in his own eyes.”

Weak Brothers and Persistent Errorists

7. We must constantly balance two responsibilities: to patiently admonish the weak and to separate from those who cling to error. How can we determine if we are dealing with weak brothers and sisters or with persistent adherents of false doctrine? We can determine this only by examining their confession. What do they say? What do they do? Does their confession contradict Scripture? Are they willing to accept instruction and correct their errors? Do they reject correction and hold to their error? Are they making propaganda for their error?

In this process we must guard against two types of judging the heart: We cannot say of the penitent errorist, “I don’t believe his retraction. He is a hypocrite.” We cannot say of the one who holds to error, “I think he’s really a well-meaning individual. Maybe he’ll change his mind someday.” We can judge only by the person’s confession. We must assume that the confession which an individual makes by his or her church membership reflects that person’s actual confession, unless we have explicit evidence to the contrary.

We must pray for patience and humility in dealing with the weak. We ask God to free us from pride, impatience, and legalistic tendencies which may make us unwilling to bear with the weak. But showing love for the weak does not mean that we will be weak in acting against error, even when our action may not be fully understood by those who have a weak understanding of the principles.

8. We must be careful that our patience in dealing with the weak does not become a source of offense and confusion to other Christians who get the impression that we are condoning error. We can guard against this by reporting the status of our dealings with the person in error to our brothers and sisters in the faith.

9. We must pray for courage and decisiveness in dealing with the adherents of error. We ask God to take away any timidity or desire for the approval of men, which may make us hesitant to testify clearly against error or that may make us willing to yield to false teachers and their followers (Ezekiel 2:3-7, 3:3-8). Avoiding confrontation by a "don't ask, don't tell" practice is not love for the person in error nor for the truth. We cannot duck our duty to testify to the truth.

10. When we must refuse to practice fellowship with adherents of false teaching, we should be sure that all parties are aware of the specific denials of God's Word which make it impossible for us to work together with these people. It is God's doctrine which is at stake here, not ours. We express our concern for doctrine each time we pray, "Hallowed be Thy name." When we practice the principles of church fellowship, we are obeying the second commandment which teaches us to honor God's name.

Basic Attitudes

11. We must not regard our responsibility to practice the principles of church fellowship as a burden or a handicap, but as a privilege and an opportunity. Here is an opportunity to show love for God and for our neighbor. Here is an opportunity to suffer for the truth if it is God's will that we do so (1 Peter 4:12-16).

12. Above all, remember that these are not our principles of church fellowship; they are God's principles revealed in Holy Scripture. Human judgment cannot determine the principles. They are established by God's Word. But human judgment must evaluate each situation to see which principles apply at this moment. As with any application of law and gospel, the proper application of the principles of church fellowship requires life-long study and practice. We pray that God gives us the willingness and the wisdom to apply these principles faithfully.

Applications of the Principles

We must maintain a clear distinction between the principles set forth in Scripture and our applications of them. It is important that we not raise our applications to a level of equality with the scriptural principles.

The ease or difficulty of making an application may vary. Some of our fellowship practices are simply further instances of applications already made in Scripture. For example, Scripture states very clearly that we may not give financial support to false teachers, so we obviously should not give money to heterodox churches.

In other cases we have no clear precedents in Scripture since we are dealing with institutions or situations which did not exist in New Testament times. For example, Scripture provides us with no specific list of criteria for determining who can attend our Lutheran elementary schools. In such cases we must apply the principles to a new situation.

Questions for discussion

I. The school as evangelism tool

Is it proper to say that our schools are evangelism tools of our church? If so, what is the priority of this purpose for our schools?

The purpose of the school is set by the founding body. Our worker training schools, for example, do not have outreach as a primary goal. Some schools in world mission fields have been primarily outreach schools. The purposes and priority of purposes for schools maintained by congregations or associations of congregations is set by those congregations.

Can the enrollment of heterodox children be a danger for our own children?

The answer is obviously "yes," just as there is a danger to having our pastors and teachers study false doctrine to be able to combat it. We have to weigh the "risk to reward ratio."

We do want an "outreach school" to be also an "ingathering school." Is it actually serving as a means of gathering people into our congregations or is it simply providing a service for a fee in most cases.

How do we view the students and their parents? Do they all need to be prospects?

This is a question we need to ask at the very beginning when we establish criteria for enrolling in the school, and we need to ask it about each non-member student that enrolls. Why is this student here from our point of view? Why is this student here from his or her own point of view and from the parents' point of view?

II. What are joint expressions of faith?

Does this principle apply to congregations as well as to the individual?

The principles for groups and individuals are the same. The only difference is that in private actions we can give greater weight to a private confession of faith. Public actions involving many people must rely on the known public confession.

How do we apply the unit concept of fellowship to our practice? What makes an activity a joint expression of faith which we would not want to practice with someone with whom we are not in fellowship? Are there things which are joint expressions of faith sometimes, but not at other times?

Is there a distinction between things done as a joint expression of faith and things done as an individual expression of faith?

Some things like praying together, communing together, worshipping together are always expressions of faith. Other things like doing charity together may or may not be. The work of our medical mission in Africa is by definition a joint expression of our faith. Many other medical operations in Africa are not. I wouldn't give to Catholic Charities; I could give to the American Cancer Society. The work of being a "janitor" in the Temple of Israel was an act of ministry limited to called Israelites from the tribe of Levi. The work of being a janitor in our churches usually is not.

Such "neutral acts" are joint expressions of faith when either party understands them to be such. The way to be clear is simply to communicate clearly. Ordinarily, holding conferences like this to discuss doctrine together is a joint expression of faith. At other times, such as free conferences it is not. This is specifically stated in the conference invitations and at the opening of the conference. If you invite me to your conference, I assume it is in the framework of fellowship. If a district of the LCMS invites me to come and tell them why we are not in fellowship with them, I make it clear that this is outside of fellowship and that I will not participate in the worship. When I debate "Who is Jesus?" in a mosque and they call me "our dangerous enemy," I know that they do not regard this as fellowship.

Does the unit concept of fellowship mean that anything a believer does as an expression of his faith cannot be done with people outside of our fellowship?

No. I may be giving to the American Cancer Society as part of my obedience to the 5th Commandment and atheist may be doing it out of human kindness. I vote with the 4th Commandment in mind (and the 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th). An atheist may vote to express his opposition to godly values.

In our schools, the issue of what is a joint expression of faith most often seem to involve participation in sacred concerts and other forms of participation in chapel services and the like, so I will focus on that area.

Good practices for a school are not different from good practices for a congregation. We urge members to join the choir as a way of expressing their faith and serving the Lord. We have included musical training in the education of our Lutheran elementary school teachers, because we want our church musicians to be committed ministers of music, who are able to make more than a mechanical contribution to the worship of the church. Church musicians are public representatives of the church with a prominent public role. They, therefore, should be members of the congregation or its fellowship.

A secondary, practical consideration is the effect our practice may have on wavering or indecisive prospects. If we allow people who are not yet ready to make a commitment to membership to participate in the ministries of the congregation as if they were members, we may be encouraging them to continue their indecision. Withholding the privileges of membership will make it clear to them that they cannot continue to straddle the fence, but must make a decision. To permit them to make a commitment to serve the church before they are even committed to joining it is to put the cart before the horse. There might, however, be exceptional circumstances in which a committed person could be

permitted to join the congregation or to serve it in special ways before completing all of the lessons of a membership class. Such cases would be dealt with on an individual basis.

Many of our congregations do not exclude children of non-members from singing in church on such occasions as a service following the completion of VBS. Can we justify this discrepancy from our practice concerning church musicians which we have discussed above? It is normally clear to everyone that the children in the VBS are simply presenting what they have been taught in class. They are not independent preachers, who adhere to a message different from that of the congregation. They are learners receiving instruction from our congregation. They are not yet of an age to make a declaration of their faith on the basis of their confirmation instruction. In many cases their parents are indifferent to the church. If a situation arose in which Baptist parents said, "We think it's great that our children can come to your VBS each summer and sing in your service even though we disagree with your doctrine of baptism," we should not let their children participate, since we would have to give a clear testimony against their error. We should be forthright with all parents, church or unchurch about the evangelistic purpose of our classes.

The aim of the principles of church fellowship is not to prevent people from hearing, accepting, and proclaiming the truth. It is to give a clear testimony against false teaching. If we remember that, we will generally have a good idea of the action we should take in a given case.

Similar questions arise about the activities of non-member students in our elementary schools, high schools, and colleges. Should these students participate in chapel services, choral presentations, and the like? Here the root of the problem often lies partly in unclarity concerning the enrollment policy. Are the non-members in our schools evangelism prospects, that is, willing learners who are not committed to false teaching whom we are instructing with the hope of winning them for our fellowship? If so, they can participate in the school's activities in the same ways in which visitors participate in congregational worship, as discussed above.

If, on the other hand, these students and their parents are Christians who hold doctrinal convictions which are not in agreement with our position, who intend to maintain their present fellowship, but who are willing to pay for the services of our school for the perceived educational benefits, we should not treat them as if they were in fellowship with us, for then we are sending confusing, mixed signals. We should also honestly examine our reasons for permitting their enrollment in our school under such circumstances. Are we trying to win them away from their heterodox church? If so, is this proselytizing? Are we providing them with educational services for a fee as a way to increase the income of our school? If we are simply providing them with educational services for a fee, we might do well to ask ourselves if this is a valid function of our Christian schools. If we regard them as evangelism prospects, is it valid to charge them more for the services than we do for our own members? It is not our normal practice to charge people to be evangelized.

In other words, do we regard them as mission prospects or as customers? Do they regard themselves as mission prospects or customers? Even if this distinction is not expressed verbally or held consciously, it will effect the attitude of the parents toward the school and its teachers. I believe in some cases this is beginning to affect the attitude of even members of our congregation. As our members in some cases pay higher fees and tuition for their children to attend our schools, it become easier for them to begin to think of the school as a service they are paying for rather than as a gracious ministry which the congregation is giving them and to think of the teachers as employees they are paying rather than ministers of the congregation who are serving them. If non-members are paying thousands of dollars to attend one of our schools, it is easy for them to begin to think of activities such

as choir as educational activities which they are entitled to because they are paying for them, rather than as ministries of our church.

In short, we should treat non-member students in the same way that we treat other visitors to a congregation. If they are mission prospects being instructed in the truth, they can participate in the regular instructional program and worship, but they should not take a leading role in worship or serve as public representatives of the school, as, for example, touring choirs do. Since our main concern in the practice of church fellowship is clear public testimony to the truth, there is some difference between in-house classes, practices, and to some degree chapel services on the one hand and public concerts or tours to congregations on the other, but even in-house events should give a clear testimony to all students and parents, members and non-members alike.

The same general practice would be applicable to elementary schools, high schools, and colleges, but at each stage students must assume a greater responsibility for their own confession, which may be different from that of their parents.

A congregation or school is free to set its own policy concerning the presence and participation of non-member students as long as its practices do not disregard the principles of fellowship. In gray areas some may choose to draw the line of danger in different places. In each case we need to ask whether the students are there as prospects to whom we can witness the whole truth, or are differences of doctrine between them and us being overlooked?

It should not be too difficult to talk to the families of the non-member children to see what the families' attitude and intention toward the church are before deciding whether these children should participate in choir or outreach activities. In a large preschool with many non-members it may be very difficult to do this, and the congregation might conclude that it is better not to have non-member children sing in order to avoid confusion about the participation of non-member children. Another factor is that dealing with each case on an individual basis may cause more conflict because the families you are dealing with often do not have enough knowledge to understand the issues involved. If you allow LCMS students to participate if their families oppose the faulty fellowship practices of the LCMS, but not if they support the Yankee Stadium prayer service, will they be able to understand the difference? The greatest likelihood is that in most such cases you will be dealing with people who have a faulty understanding of fellowship. For example, in recent years, I have met no LCMS people who have an understanding of prayer fellowship. If you sent mixed signals, you will only be adding to their confusion.

The fact that someone may be taking instruction classes in our church does not mean that he or she can already begin to serve in the congregation on the basis of the hope that they might someday be in fellowship with us. The privileges and responsibilities of fellowship are assumed when evidence of fellowship exists, not when one hopes that it might someday exist. We must base fellowship decisions on what a person *is* not on what we hope he or she might *become*.

But so many American Christians have such a faulty understanding of fellowship and the need of doctrinal unit. Don't we have to allow more exceptions for them so they don't get offended and not come to our school?

The fact that they have such a poor understanding is all the more reason that we must give a clear testimony. It is true that if we tell them that they cannot participate in our worship leadership or outreach activities if they are not in fellowship, they be offended in the secular sense that they don't like us or what we are doing. But if we do not give a clear testimony to the biblical principles, we will

be offending them in the biblical sense by facilitating the practice of their sin. Which offense should we fear the most.

But if you don't allow them to sing in the choir, you are restricting our ability to witness to them?

It may be true that we are restricting their ability to witness to us, but we are not taking away from them any opportunities to hear our testimony to the truth. We can witness to anyone. Not everyone can be a participant as a witness in the ministries of our church. If this argument was true, we would have to let non-Lutherans participate in the Lord's Supper with us, so that we would not lose opportunity to witness to them.

III. How do we recognize an errorist or weak brother?

What is a prospect family vs. what is a persistent errorist?

Can we label any/every member of a heterodox church as a persistent errorist? Or can they be called weak-faithed brothers?

A prospect as the name declares (*pro specto* "to look ahead") is not someone with whom we are in fellowship, but someone with whom we are looking forward to establishing fellowship.

Anyone who is not a Christian is a prospect for evangelization. Hostile Muslims who hate Christianity and speak vehemently against it are prospects whom we must evangelize. This does not mean they are suitable prospects for our schools, unless we had set up a school specifically for confrontation.

A "prospect" in the sense of your question is a student who is not committed to false teaching, is ready to accept our instruction, and is committed to joining a true church if convinced that the teachings of that church are scriptural, that is, a person who is open to joining our church.

We cannot assume that anyone is a persistent errorist without talking to him or her, but by the same token we cannot assume that anyone is a weak brother without talking to him or her.

A persistent errorist is anyone who holds to false teaching in spite of admonition.

A weak brother is one who in ignorance or weakness holds a false teaching, but is ready to accept instruction on the matter and to renounce his or her teaching if shown from Scripture that it is wrong. We do not break fellowship with a weak brother until we establish that he is a persistent errorist. We cannot establish fellowship with anyone until we establish that he is a brother.

In general, we must accept the testimony of a person's church membership unless we have specific evidence to the contrary. There may be exceptional cases where a recognition of fellowship can be based on something other than external membership. For example, a teenager has been instructed and has confessed oneness of faith with us, but the parents will not let the child join the church until he or she is 18. They will allow the child to attend and participate. I would treat the child as one in faith and one in heart with us even though the formalities of membership could not be implemented. I would explain to anyone who had the need to know why we were regarding the child in this way. A person who wants to remain a member of a heterodox church does not fall into this category. Such a person is not in fellowship with us. Having such people represent our schools in the worship of our congregations will be offensive and confusing and will undercut the testimony of pastors and schools which are trying to follow scriptural practices in their midst, for example, in weddings.

Example 1: A LCMS pastor says that he opposes the liberalism in the LCMS and realizes that it is his duty to separate from false teaching, but he feels he has not finished his duty to testify against the error in the LCMS. He feels the local LCMS high-school poses some danger to his children's faith and he wants them to attend our high school. He has talked to them about the fact that he is considering leaving the LCMS, and that they will have to wrestle with the same decision. He wants them to study at our school to help them make their decision. I would call him a pretty strong brother, but we would not yet be in public fellowship. I could not commune in his church, nor he in mine. Nor could his children unless they became members there.

Example 2: Baptist parents make it clear that they reject our teaching of baptism. They regard our school as a lesser evil than the public school. They will try at home to correct the teaching of our school so that their children are not misled by the parts of it that in their opinion are false. Unless the child has a different attitude than they do, I question whether these children should be in our school. If they say that they are willing to practice fellowship with us in spite of our errors in some areas, this does not give us the right to reciprocate their lax attitude.

Is there a distinction in enrollment policies based on age of the child? PreK vs. High School? Should different ages be treated differently?

The greater the age, the more freedom the child has to make its own decisions. When, for example, can a Muslim child defy its parents and become Christian? We would have to deal very carefully with each child.

IV. Ministry and other topics

How does the doctrine of church and ministry apply to mission-prospect students? For example, who is this child's pastor?

Where does the ultimate responsibility for religious instruction of a heterodox child lie? Has God placed a WELS pastor in a role of authority over such a child?

The teachers do have a responsibility for the child if the parents have placed the child in their spiritual care, but the parents have placed the child and themselves in an untenable position if they have placed the child under two different teachers with contradictory beliefs.

When non-WELS parents enroll students in our school, we agree to assist them in the training of their child. Can we do that with someone who is not within our fellowship? In other words, is doctrinal agreement a prerequisite to enrolling a child in our school due to the partnership between parents and teachers?

We can train anyone of any age who is studying with us to make a decision about entering our fellowship, but we do not treat them as being in fellowship with us before they have made that decision. We cannot be partners with false teachers in their training.

Should non-member families be required to take instruction class?

Generally speaking, yes, they should know what our school is teaching. This may not be of the same scope as a class aimed at membership. I wouldn't make it a "one size fits all situation" nor would we penalize sincere children for the indifference of their parents.

Areas of Activity

What about a non-fellowship student in our school? What activities of worship can he participate in? This question is for the unchurched student as well as those who are members of other churches.

This is addressed above.

Fund-raising

What type of joint functions are proper? What about accepting money from those outside our fellowship?

If the school had a food booth at the county fair, it would not matter who the customers were, if they were simply buying something from us as a business trade—a fair price for goods or services. Whether this promotes the view of stewardship which we want and the image we want in the community are separate issues. Fellowship is not involved.

How do fellowship principles apply to fund raising and the hiring of outside agencies to help us with fund raising efforts?

What are the agencies providing? The spiritual message or effective design of brochures?

Is a different tuition level for non-WELS proper? Covered above.

Receiving Funds from Outside the Church

The church sometimes receives funds from outside its membership. These may be offerings given by visitors, or they may be gifts or grants offered by foundations, corporations, or the government. In some cases the gifts are offered spontaneously by the giver. In other cases the church may seek these grants or make formal application for gifts which have been offered. How does the reception of such gifts relate to the principles of church fellowship?

First, concerning gifts from individuals: We need not reject offerings made by visitors, but we should be very careful that non-members are not receiving a faulty impression concerning the motivation for Christian giving. If there is a self-righteous motive for the gift, we must warn the person against such giving and may have to reject the gift to make the point clearly. For example, if an excommunicated person offered a large gift to the congregation which had disciplined him in order to express his attitude, "I am not good enough for you, but I bet my money is," the congregation should reject the gift to make it clear "what we want is not your possessions, but you" (2 Corinthians 12:14). If it is not clear what the non-members' motivation for such gifts is, the solution is simple—ask them. We cannot let desire to receive a gift stand in the way of a clear testimony to the giver. Many congregations that have large numbers of visitors make it clear in the bulletin that they are not expecting payment from their guests. They are welcome to be guests.

If foundations or corporations are involved, the situation often becomes more murky. There is the least problem when corporations simply offer to match charitable contributions of their employees or customers. This is a fringe benefit offered to the employee or customer. The employee or customer assumes personal responsibility for where the gift goes and for the use which is made of it. For example, an investment in a mutual fund may carry with it the offer to match, up to a certain limit, a gift

which the investor makes to a church college. These matching gifts are an extra return on the investment, an incentive to hold that investment. Neither the investor nor the school have any religious fellowship with the company.

But what if the corporation takes it upon itself to determine where the grants go and how they are used? They then must certainly accept a measure of responsibility for the use which is made of those funds. Further problems arise if the group promotes itself as a religious association which is joining in the work of the church. Are the gifts advertised as a spiritual service offered by the corporation and its members? Such practices would raise valid concerns about the propriety of receiving funds from such corporations or foundations.

In our circles most of the concern and controversy about this issue has involved grants received from two Lutheran insurance companies, the AAL and Lutheran Brotherhood (now Thrivent)

There was little problem before 1961 when the AAL served only members of the Synodical Conference, and the Lutheran Brotherhood served members of other Lutheran churches. After the dissolution of the Synodical Conference, however, the AAL decided to serve Lutherans from all Lutheran bodies. This raised problems since the AAL bylaws implied fellowship between its members. In 1973, as a result of this unclarity, the WELS Conference of Presidents declared a moratorium on applying for grants from the AAL. Subsequently the AAL changed its bylaws to remove the implications of fellowship. The moratorium was then lifted. In 1979, the WELS convention accepted a lengthy report on this issue (*WELS Proceedings*, p 49-65.). The report concluded that receiving grants from such corporations does not in itself imply fellowship with the corporations nor with the other organizations which receive grants from them. However, the report also warned that vigilance is necessary lest such grants undermine Christian stewardship or give the impression of unity and fellowship where they do not, in fact, exist. The report also expressed concern that company advertising or publicity sometimes gave the impression of fellowship, contrary to the explicit statements of the bylaws.

The 1979 report also concluded that the Lutheran Brotherhood's statement of purpose implied a spiritual fellowship between its members and that the WELS, therefore, should not seek grants from the Lutheran Brotherhood. The Lutheran Brotherhood statements were later changed, and WELS institutions have received grants from them since then. In both cases the WELS went on record as being ready to give up gifts which carried with them an implication of fellowship where none existed.

A certain amount of unclarity exists in Thrivent about the manner in which their grants are given, but they seem to be trying to distance themselves from becoming entangled in the spiritual ministries of churches. This seems to be one reason why they got more involved with building houses with Habitat for Humanity, perhaps not fully understanding that Habitat for Humanity is designed as a ecumenical Christian fellowship.

Conclusion

In all of these situations our chief concern is "How can we give the clearest testimony to the truth, both to the weak and to the strong, to the errorists, and to the adherents of the truth?"

To what degree can we be in agreement on enrollment policies for our LES?

We do not want to establish a detailed code of church law which prescribes practices for all Christians regardless of their local circumstances. But because we live in a mobile society, a certain amount of

mutually agreed-upon uniformity of practice is necessary to avoid confusion and offense among our members. Members of our congregations will experience less confusion if we develop carefully considered guidelines concerning practices among us. Great confusion will result from “everyone doing what is right in his own eyes.”

Summary

How do we deal “in love” with this issue while still applying policy?

In 1 Timothy 1, immediately after telling Timothy to oppose false teachers, Paul says, “The goal of this commandment is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” We dare not lose sight of the reason that we practice the biblical principles of church fellowship: The goal of this commandment is love, love for the errorist, love for his victims, love for anyone who is threatened by his false teachings, and love for God and his truth. To withhold the truth from someone who needs it, to silently go along with error—this can never be love. To be silent in the presence of error, which sweeps people away to hell, makes me as guilty—no, more guilty than the person who silently stands by and watches a fire burn up a house and its sleeping inhabitants. Love require me to cry out, love requires me to warn. To be silent because I don’t want to offend anyone, because I don’t want to be labeled “intolerant,” because there are financial advantages to being silent, because I love the praise of men more than the praise of God—this is not love, this is selfishness. Let us never be guilty of sleeping on duty like unfaithful watchmen. We must sound a clear warning against all false teaching. *We must work together for the truth. We can do nothing against the truth.* These two principles direct us in all the decisions we must make concerning the practice of church fellowship.

We must, of course, always be on guard against pride and a self-righteous attitude. We must guard against tactlessness and against inconsistencies which will cause people to lose confidence in our judgment. Even as we speak strongly against the errors of false teachers, we will deal patiently with their victims as we try to gain them for the truth (Jude 1:12, 22). But we must not let a recognition of our own imperfection intimidate us into a neglect of our God-given duty to warn against error. Acceptance of our duty to warn against error must always be paralleled by a willingness to listen to warnings and admonition when we need them. If we first pull the plank out of our own eye, we will see clearly to pluck the speck of sawdust out of our brother’s eye (Matt 7:5).

If we keep our eyes focused on the blessed purposes for the principles of church fellowship—to testify to the truth and to warn against error—we will not dread the task of applying these principles to all areas of our life as Christians. We will recognize that this is just one more way we can serve our neighbors in love as we work together for the truth.