

## **We Are All One, Paul Says So**

**Dear Members and Friends of Howland Community Church,**

**I like to write letters and after the week we have had it seems wise to write you a letter this week. I learned this from the Apostle Paul. You know him. He wrote letters to every church community he ministered to. He wrote to Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Galatia, Colossa, Philemon. Those were some of his best letters or most of us think they are his letters. You won't want to hear what I might write to Abilene, Brooklyn, Saginaw, Wolcott, Stow, Leotonia or even Cleveland. But it is important that you at least hear what I am writing to you in 2016.**

**Eugene Peterson translated the verses in today's scripture, which I have found applicable for 2016. The scripture from Galatians 3:28-29 reads: "In Christ's family there can be no division into Jew and non-Jew, slave and free, male and female. Among us you are all equal. That is, we are all in a common relationship with Jesus Christ. Also, since you are Christ's family, then you are Abraham's famous "descendant," heirs according to the covenant promises."**

**Yes, we are members of Christ's family are we not? We have been baptized and confirmed in our faith to make this true. To be a member of a family we are connected. We relate to one another. We respect one another even when we do not agree with another. Many refer to church as their home, their family. When we consider the meaning of this possibility, we know love reigns supreme, through everything and everyone in the family. Love allows us to want the best for one another. Love helps us to share the meaning of our faith with one another.**

We might think love did not reign last Sunday morning in Orlando, but in truth it did. Love did reign even when one man filled with hate and vicious terror attempted to destroy love. He could not destroy the love that was evident among the people in that club last Sunday morning. The people in that club knew one another, they wanted to be with one another because they shared a commonality that they might not find in another place. Would they find the same feelings in our church, what they experienced in that place called Pulse. If we don't hear anything else from Paul's letter we must hear and believe that love always wins. It does not matter that the religious faiths of those who were being attacked, but it does matter that love smothered them in their pain, their anguish, yes even their dying. This love came to them through municipal leaders, police officers, emergency responders, physicians, nurses, social workers, attorneys, chaplains, journalists, and even faint recollections of familiar voices that they could hear through the cries of despair and anger and pain. Yes, Christ's family was present last Sunday morning, like it has always been present at every mass shooting we have witnessed for far too long. So, you ask what made it possible that Christ's family could not prevent this tragedy? I don't know.

**In Christ's family there are no divisions. What causes some of our churches to split apart throughout our country? Our country is divided. Some families are divided. Division always strains a relationship. Division causes separation. In Christ's family the Apostle Paul said there could be no divisions, but there are. Are there divisions in our church? That is a question you have to answer for yourself. When you think about your faith, your family, your vocation, your neighborhood, your community, are there divisions? Maybe you are the only one who can ease the division that is evident in your life.**

Paul tells us that the Jews and the non-Jews are one, that the slave and the free are one, that males and females are one. In 2016, it seems this would expand to Christians and Islams being one, women and men being one, black and brown and white being one, and heterosexual and homosexuals being one. Now wouldn't that be wonderful if we could aspire to that vision. Many aspects of our society and political parties and neighborhoods and yes even and especially churches cannot seem to see the value in this one-ness, but the Christian church certainly could be a tremendous gift to society and the world if we revealed a one-ness to all. Remember Dr. Martin Luther King saying that the most segregated hour in our lives is 11:00 on Sunday morning. The blacks go to their church and the whites come to our church. And yet only you and I can discern whether we are at one with different faiths, different races, different sexual orientations, different genders. It is a wonderful time to be alive, I think, 2016, when we are all free to be friends and companions to whomever comes into our life with the possibility of relationship. Does that attract you into experiencing your faith more deeply? We are living in a both/and world, not an either/or atmosphere. At least I hope this is the world that you and I are living in. That is the world I choose every day.

**So how do we live believing we are all equal. To be equal with my gay friends has been a gift in my life. They have all added to my life. I am a better person because they are in my life. How about your life? Do you have a gay friend? When we believe that a gay person you know is equal to you, the destination can be to have a common relationship with Jesus Christ.**

**Since we are all in Christ's family, we are also Abraham's famous "descendant," heirs according to the covenant promises. Yes, indeed we have been baptized and in that baptism and confirmation that followed we made a covenant with God. Not all have the experience of baptism or confirmation, but all faiths experience a covenant that connects them to one who is greater than they are. We, we are connected to the Son of God who loved us enough to promise we would never be alone, we would always have an Advocate to care for us.**

**One of the images that came to me throughout the week was thinking about many people who came to me in the 80's and 90's struggling with their sexual orientation. We don't live in the 80's and 90's anymore. We are in 2016 and Jesus has never changed. Jesus continues to teach that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves and the Apostle Paul is the one who says we are all one because Jesus modeled that for him.**

**May the Lord Jesus Christ bless you and keep you safely in the loving arms of your Creator God and may the Holy Spirit always be felt in your life wherever you go and whatever you do.**

**Pastor Mary Ann Short**