

## **The Wider Picture: All Are One**

When I was a student in the early nineteen seventies I had the privilege of spending a term in France and then an academic year as an English language assistant in a school in Germany. As well as providing an opportunity to improve my language skills I greatly valued the chance to live for a while in a different country and experience differences in culture, history and lifestyle. I realize that those of you who are visiting us from Lübeck are here for a very much shorter time but I hope you will have a similar experience.

Yet there is great variety even within countries. My first job as a librarian was then in the middle of Wales, a part of the United Kingdom with its own distinctive history and culture, and not least its own language.

One of the aims of the Community of the Cross of Nails is learning to live with difference and celebrate diversity. And diversity is indeed something very much to be celebrated. Different traditions and cultures only enrich humanity. And we can learn so much from one another.

However, that needs to be balanced against the recognition that underlying all this we are all, in God's eyes, one. We heard as our Bible reading just now that powerful passage from St Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus (Ephesians 4.1-6) in which he uses his image of the Church as a body, one body, the body of Christ. His concern is for the unity of the Christian community of faith despite its inevitable differences. Christians are to deal with one another with humility, gentleness and patience. They are to bear with one another in love. They are to do all they can to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

These words may be addressed to Christians but surely they are applicable to everyone. And that is the message that we as Christians are called to share with others.

There is perhaps a fine line between pride in one's own distinctive culture, traditions and language, on the one hand, and the more strident nationalism we see in so many parts of our world today.

We are of course seeing this in this country at this critical time. The divisions between those who wish the United Kingdom to leave the European Union and those who wish to remain are as strong as ever. And yet that is in some ways just a symptom of deeper divisions within society, and not just in this country.

Which is why the wider picture of the Good News of Christ needs to be heard. The Church crosses national and social boundaries, as does more specifically the Community of the Cross of Nails. Even Christians themselves may have quite different views on political, economic and social issues. And yet our task, with God's help, is to bring people together and to enable unity, peace and reconciliation.

Kingsley Boulton  
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