

Simple Sundays

**What Makes
People Equal?**



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Main Idea

Belonging to God: A First Catechism explains that being "made in God's image" means that "we are made to reflect God's goodness, wisdom, and love" (Question 9).

You Will Need

Bibles; bowl of water

Faith Statement

In sovereign love God created the world good and makes everyone equally in God's image, male and female, of every race and people, to live as one community.

—A Brief Statement of Faith

Background

Ephesians 4:1-6 includes Paul's call to the church to live in unity. Paul knew that the community in Ephesus, as well as other churches, was made up of Jews and Gentiles who were trying to serve God together. Their understandings about several areas of the life of the church were different. Some Jews believed that in order to become a part of the church, people had to follow the laws of Judaism—laws such as circumcision. Others, like Paul, believed that Jesus died so that people could be free of such laws and regulations. There were other differences that affected the life of the church and its ability to live in unity and equality. Paul's call to "maintain the unity of the Spirit" (v. 3) is a call to all parts of the body of Christ to exercise "humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love" (v. 2).

We live in a very diverse community with people of different races, nationalities, ages, religions, and lifestyles. To be effective as a church and as a community living together, we must "maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (v. 3). Christ calls us to be at peace with one another by exercising love, patience, and compassion. We must live with diversity in order to achieve equality and unity. We must live out our baptism, which makes us all a part of the body of Christ.

You and Your Youth

In this session, emphasize two things: (1) Paul's call to maintain the unity of the Spirit—the call to exercise patience, humility, gentleness, and love; and (2) baptism as an empowering experience that has to be lived and remembered in order for us to understand ourselves as part of the body of Christ. Take time for spiritual preparation, praying, reading the passage, and asking God for insight.

 **Enter**

Learn names, encourage interaction, and laugh together as the session begins.

God's Image

Ask the youth to name one thing that helps other people recognize them, such as freckles on the nose or a special laugh. When everyone has had a turn, brainstorm some things that the group has in common. This can range from physical characteristics (eyebrows) to the fact that they are all in the same place today.

Affirm all answers and observe that although each one is special and unique, we are a community because of the things we have in common.

Opening Prayer

Dear God, we are grateful for the opportunity to study your Word. Lead us as we try to understand your call for us to live, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

 **Explore****Study the Bible**

Bibles

Listen as a volunteer reads Ephesians 4:1–3. Form teams and discuss the following:

- According to the letter, what unites us as a church?
- What other connections do we have in common?
- According to the letter, what should a church try to be like?
- What do you think it would be like to be a part of such a church?

Write the phrase “Baptism is . . .” on a chalkboard or on a sheet of newsprint. As a group, try to finish the phrase with the first word or words that come to your mind. After you are finished, read verses 4–6. These verses inform us that we have seven things in common with others who share the Christian faith. Baptism is emphasized because it reminds us that we are empowered by God to live as the body of Christ. Discuss:

- Why do you think it's important for people to be baptized? Who is the most important person in the celebration of the sacrament?
- How can we live out our baptism?
- How does our church join together as one baptized community to show God's love?
- What else might we do?

There Is One Body

Form teams of five. Each of the groups will be a “body.” Each person will be one part of the body: one will be the feet, another the eyes, another the hands, another the mouth, and another the ears. Stand as follows: The eyes should stand directly behind the feet, and the mouth should stand behind the eyes so that the eyes and mouth stand facing opposite directions, with the eyes in the middle. The ears and hands should stand facing outward on each side of the eyes.

The four outside persons should face outward, and then link arms to form a “body” around the eyes. Except for the “eyes,” all should have their eyes closed or be blindfolded if you have enough handkerchiefs. Keep in mind the following:

- The ears can whisper to the mouth only what is heard.
- The eyes are the only part that can see, and they can whisper to the ears only what is seen.
- The mouth says to the whole body what it hears from the ears.
- The feet carry the body by being in front and leading the body.
- The hands are the only part that can reach for something.

Each of these groups should perform three tasks:

1. Write the word *equally* on a piece of paper.
2. Search for Ephesians 4:1–6 in the Bible.
3. Imagine that they scratched a knee and have to put a Band-Aid on it.

After you are finished, talk about the experience of having to work together as a body. Discuss the similarities between the human body and the body of Christ.



Express

These discussions are an opportunity to apply the Scripture to our lives. If the youth do not seem to relate to these situations, then modify them to make them relevant.

Youth Issue

The phrases “two becoming one” and “we have to be one” are often applied to marriage or romantic relationships. Some people think that in order to “become one” the members of the couple must lose their identities so that each can be the same as the other.

- Have you known a relationship where one person hides who he or she really is in order to “become one” with the other person? If so, what are your thoughts about this?
- How important is it for people in a relationship to have things in common? How important is it for them to have differences?

Action Steps

Think of activities that will enable your youth group to share experiences with different age levels. For example, you could have a game night with the adults of the church, or you could have a talent show. You could invite the women in your church to a dinner or provide a babysitting night when youth care for the children of young married couples.



Exit

Closing Prayer

Bowl of water

The following is a spiritual practice that will enable you to experience God’s presence as you remember your baptism. Find a bowl that is big enough so that everyone in your group can surround it and put at least one hand in it. Allow each person to put one hand into the water. Close your eyes, and think about your baptism. Close with the following prayer:

O God, we thank you for our baptism, for it reminds us of your call for unity in diversity. Help us hear your call for us to help break down the walls of fear that prevent us from living as a part of the one body of Christ. In your name, we pray. Amen.