

## A Community of Shalom

Dr. Marlene Van Brocklin

Community is God's idea. Our Triune God—God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit—has had wonderful, active community of mutual love, honor and blessing for eternity and we are created in his image. We are created for community. God himself said of Adam, who was created in God's image: "It is not good that he is alone." God saw that one person in himself was not complete and so he created a soul mate for him: Eve. We are hardwired to live in community with others.

Scripture is the record of God's seeking out a people to be in community with him. He seeks and loves and patiently waits, even when we rebuff him. Jesus, when he was on earth, formed a community around him of disciples and followers, and the church continued this

community. The letters in the New Testament were written to these communities of believers. When a New Testament letter gives a direction such as "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." (Colossians 3:13) the "you" is plural. It would be better translated "y'all"! Too often, we individualize the letters when they are written to a group of people. We are meant to live and function in community.

What could this community look like? We can see some of God's intention in the blessing that the Lord God gave to Moses for the Hebrew people was: "The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give

you peace." (Numbers 6:24-26) The word we translate as peace is *shalom*. Shalom has a much deeper, richer sense in the Hebrew. The word connotes peace, flourishing, prosperity, completeness, wholeness. Shalom connotes life as it is meant to be lived.

In Nicholas Wolterstorff's book, *Educating for Shalom*, he points out that a college community is a prime place to experience and practice shalom. He spins a vision of flourishing, of people living in right relationships with God, themselves, each other and nature. But Wolterstorff also adds that shalom is also about struggle—a struggle to bring about that human flourishing amidst injustice and indifference. This means that shalom is about life inside the community but it is also about reaching outside the community...to care about

the homeless, the hungry, to struggle and work against human trafficking (issues about which some of you care very deeply). I long for a community of shalom here at Montreat College. I long for a place where each one thinks about the welfare of others, a place where we bless others and are willing to make an effort to strike down injustice.

However, to develop such a community takes:

- Time
- Commonality of Commitment wherein enough of us long for this community of shalom and are willing to work for it.
- Openness to the formation

of the Holy Spirit. We can't do it on our own.

To honor one another and nurture community we may need to refrain from so-called jokes that are just veiled insults (we protest, "I was only joking"). We'll need to listen to others' ideas instead of trying to get everyone else to do what we want. We'll spend time crying and rejoicing with other. We may even need to put down our cell phones and greet the people we meet. This may mean leaving our comfort zone to help those in need. May we all long to live in a community of mutual love, honor and blessing. May we actively seek shalom.

## Thoughts on Denominations

Travis Wilson

I have heard people say that denominations should not exist. I have heard others say, that while they love God, they are tired of hearing so much about Him. Both statements were made by Christians. I understand that these two views can be seen as coming from completely opposite perspectives, but I see a connection between them. Christianity has been reduced to a set of ethics that are not necessarily religious. The phrase "that's not very Christian of you" has become practically interchangeable

with "that's not very nice of you." This demonstrates that being a Christian has become a moral statement, rather than a declaration of love for Christ—that is why you hear people say "I love God, I'm just tired of hearing about Him." To love God has come to mean the same as loving community, or loving people, and the actual love of God has been taken away almost unnoticed. We have attempted to explain *why* God should be loved, and in doing so, we have come up with reasons that are convincing to

self-loving men.

For example, "love God because He loves the poor." Well, if I am poor, I certainly want to be helped, because I love myself, and so I must love God. This kind of "love" for God can't stomach boring sermons or lectures and certainly can't be the basis for sacrificing your life daily to God. I once heard a pastor ask "if God couldn't provide for you, or heal your sickness or even let you into heaven, would you still love Him?" There should be an element of loving God *just because He is God*. We, however, try to give reasons for loving God and the reasons we come to are unsatisfactory. So, there are people who believe they love God, but don't really think He fits everywhere.

This fits into the statement on denominations—one of the reasons we have given ourselves for loving God is that the concept of community and denominations are seen as a threat to community. The

truth is, when we honestly and whole-heartedly pursue God, we do come to differing views that are true convictions and we teach based on these convictions, and children are raised based on these convictions. Some people don't agree with those convictions, and don't want their families to be taught according to them. I have not been convinced that this is a bad thing. Some denominations don't believe women should be leaders in a church and some do. Neither group would be thrilled at the idea of their children being taught the beliefs of the other. If both sides are truly pursuing God, then there should be mutual respect shown from each side, however, there is no reason for them to share a denomination. It is their pursuit of God that causes differences between them, and that is

perhaps a pursuit worthy of having differences over.

I believe a man-centered view of Christianity is at play, in both the opinion that denominations should not exist, and in the opinion that a self-proclaimed Christian has of how often God is mentioned. I also believe if we were to be truly God-centered, we would have a better understanding about people who are passionate about their faith to the extent that they bring it into their every day life, maybe even holding differing perspectives so passionately that they wish to have their families taught along those lines.

