

CONCERNING UNITY OF THE BODY OF CHRIST AFFIRMATIONS AND DENIALS

The International Church Council Project
(Topic #11)

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Article I

We affirm that the Bible, in likening the Church to a human body and its intended unity of function, includes all the believers of every level and sphere of human community.¹

We deny that the Bible, in likening the Church to a human body and its intended unity of function refers only to individual local congregations or only to the worldwide body of believers.

1. Rom. 16:3-5; 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:1-31; Eph. 2:13-16; 4:4-6; 11-16; Col. 4:15-16

Article II

We affirm that God ordained elders and leaders within the several churches of a given locality are called to show familial and bodily oneness among the churches, and to teach by word, as well as by example, the divinely intended unity of all the believers in the locality.¹

We deny that the divinely intended unity of believers in a locality necessarily implies a need for frequent large gatherings, or of community-wide sharing in all projects undertaken by believers there, or gathering all local believers under one organization, denomination, or ecclesiastical structure.

1. John 17:20-23; Acts 1:14; 6:1-7; 15:4-29; 2 Cor. 8:23; Philip. 3:17-4:2, 9; 1 Thes. 1:2-7; 2 Thes. 3:6-15; 1 Tim. 4:12; Titus 2:7-8; 1 Pet. 5:1-3

Article III

We affirm that biblical unity among congregations in a locality calls for a unified way of peacefully resolving, conciliating, or ameliorating conflicts among believers which transcend the lines of single local congregations.¹ We further affirm that biblical unity calls for a unified way of exercising discipline when believers are involved in serious sin with which individual congregations are unable to deal adequately without help from outside their congregations.²

We deny that, when some applicable agreement of cooperation with others does not exist, individual congregations are obliged to share with outside persons or jurisdictions responsibility over conflicts or sinful behavior within a congregation.

1. Acts 15:4-29; 20:17-38; 21:18-26
2. 1 Cor. 5:9-13; 6:1-8; Rom. 16:16-20; 2 Thes. 3:14-15

Article IV

We affirm that leaders of congregations within a locality are not realizing God's intended potential for their leadership if there exists some unaddressed great distress within the local community, or if there is some other unmet great opportunity for witness by the Body of Christ. We further affirm that Christian laymen and laywomen exercising local leadership in government, law, business, education, and the media may often be better positioned or better gifted than local pastors and elders to bring solutions to community problems.*

We deny that it is necessarily the responsibility of leaders of congregations within a local community to give corporate attention to every problem facing the people of the community.*

Article V

We affirm that to more nearly fulfill the intent of the biblical picture of the Body of Christ as a human body, and to realize health and purposefulness in the Body, the leaders of congregations and Christian organizations within a city or locality should together prayerfully create plans for sustained ongoing cooperative Christian ministry in and for their community, and seek with the Lord's enablement to call these plans into life among their congregations and organizations.*

We deny that the leaders of congregations and Christian para-church organizations will fully realize their callings if they fail to prayerfully and cooperatively share their gifts for unified ongoing ministry in their local community.*

Article VI

We affirm that true Christian unity must be based on a doctrinal foundation that includes historic Christian doctrine as revealed in the inerrant Scriptures and expressed in the Apostles' Creed.

We deny that true Christian unity can be divorced from the foundational truths of the Christian faith.¹

1. Rom. 16:17-20; 1 Cor. 11:19; Eph. 4:13-16; 2 Thes. 3:6; 1 Tim. 4:6-11; 6:3-5; Titus 1:7-10; 3:9-10; 2 Pet. 2:1-3, Jude 3

Article VII

We affirm that it is God's will for pastors to have fellowship with other Christian leaders who are committed to scriptural Christianity by getting acquainted, praying together, discussing current issues of concern, and developing a relationship of love, trust, and accountability.¹

We deny that it is scriptural for pastors and other Christian leaders to remain personally or emotionally aloof from other Bible-believing leaders, or to operate as if the other churches in town did not exist.²

1. Pro. 11:14; Zech. 8:16-17; Mat. 16:18; 1 Cor. 12:21
2. Rom. 12:3-6; Eph. 4:15-16; Phil. 2:3-7

Article VIII

We affirm that pastors and Christian leaders in their community or local area ought to seek God's will for what He wants done in their area, and that the normative scriptural pattern is for them to do this in fellowship rather than independently.*

We deny that any one Bible-believing church or organization is capable of accomplishing all that God wills in any given area if other Bible-believing groups minister in that same area.*

Article IX

We affirm that it is wise and appropriate for God-fearing pastors and leaders of good reputation to form a local fellowship to give a united witness on what is harmful and what is wholesome and edifying in their locality.*

We deny that any agency has authority to prohibit a fellowship of Christian leaders from exercising the responsibilities God has entrusted to them, and deny that Christian leaders can rightly refuse their responsibility to work together against evil in any form.*

Article X

We affirm that national or state-wide organizations that exist to promote evangelism or to solve social and political moral evils should seek the cooperation of local pastoral fellowships before proceeding with programs locally.*

We deny that any Christian and/or parachurch organization from a national or state-wide level should seek to solve local problems without receiving the input of existing pastoral fellowships, and if possible their cooperation.*

*(Comment: We are confident that God's Word, the Bible, teaches these principles. For reference, we encourage the reader to study the principles and examples contained in the verses given under the other Affirmations & Denials in this paper. For further study we commend to you the following passages and their contexts which contain principles and/or examples of unity: Prov. 11:14; Zech. 8:16; Mat. 16:18; 18:15-20; 21:43; John 17:20-23; Acts 1:14; 2:41-42; 2:46-3:1; 4:24-36; 5:11-12; 6:1-7; 9:31; 11:29-12:3; 14:20-23; 15:2, 4-29, 31-32; 20:17, 28; 21:18-26; Romans 1:7; 12:4-5; 16:3-5; 1 Cor. 6:1-6; 2 Cor. 8:19; 2 Cor. 8:23; Ephes. 2:13-16; 4:15-16; 4:25; Col. 1:13; 1:24; 4:15-16. The preceding is not by any means an exhaustive list. We further encourage the reader to study the principles and Scripture references in the following International Church Council Project Affirmations & Denials papers: #3- Essentials of a Christian World View; #4- The Kingdom of God; #14- Christian's Civic Duties.)