

*Arvada*  
United Methodist Church

October 4, 2009  
World Communion Sunday

*One World?*  
John 17

Rev. Valerie Oden

Our world is changing fast. The elders of our day have seen more changes than any other generation. We turn to our children for help with the so called advances in technology. We used to turn to the 12 year olds in our family to fix the blinking clock on our VCR's, but now we turn to our 5 year olds to set the DVR, whatever that is—some machine that in my house that I gaze at suspiciously as it sits right on top of the VCR with its blinking clock.

We have access to instantaneous communication over the internet, and complain when we have to wait a few seconds for a download. I heard on NPR about a business in Johannesburg that was so tired of the slow speed it took to send a document to its partner firm in another city 50 miles away that it tied a memory stick to a carrier pigeon named Winston and sent the pigeon to the partner. Winston beat the internet.

In this generation we've moved from gas lighting to movement-sensing electric lights. Our church caretaker installed those automatic lights in the women's bathroom last week to help us save energy. At staff someone asked what was going on with the new light switches, and Mike explained that they were set to go on and off automatically. He went on to say, "Oh, and by the way, you've got 10 minutes to do your thing before they go off." It took half a heartbeat for the staff to understand what he was saying and burst out laughing. In ancient days we turned to God as keeper of the light. But make no mistake: Now we turn to our church caretaker who decides how long we get light.

With advances in technology and communication our world is more "one world" than ever before. We are connected not only through seven people, but through the world economic machine, through invisible satellite waves that spin through the heavens and govern this earth, through instant accessibility to information about anywhere in the world, including photos on Google Earth. We do not, simply cannot, live in isolation. We are one world.

Or are we? How can we be one world when the differences between us are astounding? When one culture has traditions that are unpalatable to another? When medicine that is abundant is kept from certain places on the globe? When a tiny percent of the world's people consume the vast majority of the world's resources?

Is what connects us as human beings across the globe greater than what divides us?  
And if so, what is that common denominator that unites us?

These are questions we must ask on this World Communion Sunday, when Christians of all denominations, theology, and customs join at the Table to share a meal.

I want to approach these questions by sharing with you 2 stories that occurred just last week. Last Sunday morning I was literally half a world away, in Santiago, Chile. I had gone to this city in South America with my parents as a guest at a meeting of the World Methodist Council. This is a body made up of delegates from 77 different denominations from around the world who have Methodism in their roots. The United Methodist church, which is itself a global body and by far the largest of those represented, is just one of the 77 denominations.

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*A church where science, religion and life are compatible*

# Arvada United Methodist Church

We began the week with the 200 delegates splitting up on Sunday morning to attend worship at one of 3 Chilean Methodist churches in the city. My group went to a small church in inner-city Santiago. The board on the wall from last week showed that there were 32 people in worship the week before, and an offering of 3,800 pesos. That's about 9 US dollars.

Just above the board, painted on the wall of the sanctuary in big bold fancy letters, were the words *unida y cambiante*—united and changing. The same words were painted above the cross.

There were no hymnals in the pews. Instead, the words were typed out in the bulletin, in Spanish of course. But the church had gone to lengths to be hospitable to their guests, so they had secured an overhead projector and posted the words to the hymns in English.

After the call to worship, we sang the opening hymn. It was “Holy, Holy, Holy”, the same one we sang this morning. As the music started, the heads of us guests went to the screen for the English words. But those 30 natives were singing out so loud, with such strength and praise in their voices, that by the end of the first line all heads went down to the bulletin and we joined them in singing it in Spanish. Now, most of us couldn't get past uno, dos, tres. But something in the voices around us drew us in, even though we out-numbered them, and we all sang the hymn in Spanish. If they noticed our poor pronunciation, they made no indication of it. Of course, they were lost in singing their praise to God.

What was it that called us to unite in those moments, as one body, in the midst of our differences?

Monday morning the official meeting began. There were 5 translators at the back and people with headphones hearing the words in their language. As you can imagine, The World Methodist Council suffered last year in giving from its member denominations. In fact, we are one of the few churches anywhere whose giving was sustained and budget met through the economic troubles of the last year. Thank you to each of you for that. Not all Christian communities were so fortunate, and the World Methodist Council was looking at how to tighten up its purse.

A committee had been formed to look at the constitution and re-write it to shrink the costs, which meant shrinking the representation to the meetings and shrinking the missional support that it extends around the world.

The committee presented their work, a new constitution, and arguments ensued. For three days opposing views were spoken, new suggestions made. Naturally, people didn't like their project being cut, or their countries delegates limited. Discussions went on over meals, and by the 4<sup>th</sup> day, everyone had spoken. They were out of time, and they needed a new constitution. They began listening, compromising, and eventually passed a new document, which, oddly, was very, very close to the one the committee had presented on the first day.

But the process was important. Listening to each other and being heard was important.

As the meeting closed, Communion was shared. A spirit of unity prevailed. Through the differences, the people from all over the world had come together to make difficult decisions. But there was something else in the Communion service. Something that called from beneath our differences. Something that called from beyond us. Something that was clearly greater than any of us.

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What is it? What is it that connects humanity through our differences? What is it that unites us in this changing, global world.

Jesus prayed for the disciples, and for us, that they may be one. Perhaps the oneness he prayed for was not just about being one in the midst of our differences. Perhaps it was also about being one in God.

An innate human desire to connect has always governed humanity, from the first tribes to the building of cities to scattered farm folks coming together at harvest time.

We desire to connect because we know that we are vulnerable; we know that our lives are not our own.

The ritual of Communion reminds us that we are the body of Christ. We re-member ourselves to—become again a part of—that body. We share in the morsel of bread and the sip of juice as a way of remembering that we are one—in God, in Christ, in the whole human community.

Today, we join our brothers and sisters across the globe in remembering whose we are, and how to be as that. One body, united and changing, for the sharing of goodness, compassion, love, around the world.

May it be so. Amen.