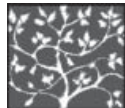


truly Christian conversation among those of us who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ. We who identify ourselves as Christian must begin to talk with one another, seriously and respectfully, about what it means to be followers of Jesus at this time in human history. A genuinely Christian conversation among Christians is by no means all the world needs today, but it is a form of progress that is badly needed.

If the Church were to show the world what it means to work together “two by two,” that would be progress, not only for the Church but for the world.

*—By The Progressive Christian Witness team*

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## The Progressive Christian Witness

*A Ministry of Pacific School of Religion*

*The Progressive Christian Witness: A Ministry of Pacific School of Religion*, [www.progressivechristianwitness.org](http://www.progressivechristianwitness.org), aims to strengthen the voices of progressive Christianity in the public square by publishing theologically grounded resources—brief articles like this one and longer essays—for laypeople and pastors on significant issues in American life. Contact us at [pcw@psr.edu](mailto:pcw@psr.edu) or 800/999-0528.

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## INVITATION TO CHRISTIAN CONVERSATION

**A** MERICAN CHRISTIANS REFLECT THE DIVERSITY within our culture. But more important, we also reflect the diversity of spiritualities and theologies in our Scriptures. Holding differing points of view is not unfaithful to Christ. Differences among followers of Jesus are evident in the New Testament. But those differences, when addressed in a manner that is faithful to Jesus Christ, were brought together in prayer and careful deliberation. That should be our model today.

We do not fail as Christians when we differ with each other, but we do fall seriously short when we deal with our conflicts in the way that differences are too often addressed in the larger culture.

The simplistic slogans and shallow one-liners that characterize the so-called “debate” on social issues in America today do not fit with a Christian worldview. Christian faith is rooted in an awareness of the difference between humans and God. “God’s ways are not our ways, and God’s thoughts are not ours.” The meaning of this important insight becomes clearer if we turn it around: Our ways are not God’s ways, our thoughts are not God’s thoughts. Our ideas and ways of life are part of God’s good creation. But they are not God’s, and God alone is perfect. Surely this means that we cannot be dogmatic, for now we see through a glass darkly. And surely this means we should be humble, not only in the presence of God but also in the presence of each other. Though God sees clearly, from a human point of view the world is complicated. In

light of this, shallowness and sloganeering—the ways so popular in politics today—should be shunned by Christians.

Divisive attitudes and practices don't fit well with Christian faith either. Because the issues we face are complex, we need to think and pray together. For that, we need to stay together. Staying together is not the way of our culture. The popular attitude today seems to be, "If we disagree, let us divide." We see that in the practice of politicians who no longer truly listen to one another. They separate into caucuses where their views are reinforced, not examined with critical care. We see that in advocacy groups who may rightly present their causes, but do not truly try to hear other points of view. Sadly, we also see the practice of division among some Christians today.

In Luke 10, as Jesus prepares to end his ministry, he commissions his followers to carry the message forward in pairs, "two by two." We can surmise that two disciples, though united in Christ, represented two histories, two perspectives, and often two points of view. But they went out together with their differences. This can be a metaphor for the witness we need to make today. We have more than one theology, more than one spirituality, more than one moral perspective, more than one reading of Scripture. When brought together and discussed, these differences will be resources for strengthening the Church and sharing the Gospel.

While secular institutions may persist in reducing alternatives to slogans, a faithful Church must acknowledge the complexity of issues and openly discuss them. If the way of the culture is to separate from those who differ, Christians must stay together, pray together, worship together, listen to and learn from one another.

Not too many years ago, Christians of different racial/ethnic groups invited each other to share in worship, Bible study, and discussion. Christians of various denominations—Catholics and Protestants, Pentecostals and Presbyterians—did the same in order to discover what they shared and to understand better why they disagreed. Perhaps it is time for "liberals" and "conservatives" of all varieties to visit each other, sing and pray, share a meal, study together, and actually listen to each other!

Christians in every part of the country are organizing and calling for a renewal of the progressive Church. Some of these people are heirs to liberal Christian traditions. A number of them stand in the heritage of evangelical and conservative Christianity. Many, especially in historically marginalized communities, defy these categories. But all say that the health of the nation and the world—to say nothing of the integrity of the Church—requires a more effective progressive Christian witness in America today.

We agree! But just as important is the renewal of a