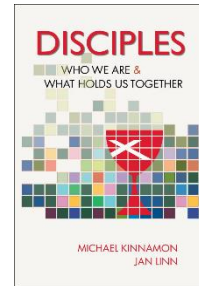




Have you signed up for the conversation?

Authors Michael Kinnamon and Jan Linn are continuing the jam-packed General Assembly workshop, "Being Disciples: Holding Together What Sometimes Tries to Fly Apart," online. Workshops are next Tuesday OR Thursday (pick one), but you have to sign up to receive information on joining the call. Here are the links to the two identical workshops:



- [Tuesday, September 24, 3pm ET/2pm CT/1pm MT/12pm PT/9am HT](#)
- [Thursday, September 26, 3pm Eastern/2pm CT/1pm MT/12pm PT/9am HT](#)

If you weren't in Des Moines -- don't worry! You can join the conversation without having attended either General Assembly workshop.

At the heart of this conversation is the Disciples' historical claim to a distinctive identity within the one body of Christ. But do Disciples still agree on the marks of this identity? Is our covenant strong enough to hold us together in the face of disagreement?

The conversation is built around *Disciples: Who We Are and What Holds Us Together*, which sold out at General Assembly but is now available through ChalicePress.com and other book-buying venues. (Study questions are listed below.) If you haven't purchased your copy yet, order now!

In addition to the book's content, the workshop will demonstrate how it can be used as a teaching resource in your congregation or region. We also invite you to share how you have put *Disciples* into use so far or how you're planning to use it in your particular setting.

A REFRESHER:

Knowing some time has passed since Des Moines, or perhaps you're just now able to join the discussion, here are a few questions posed during the workshop that will serve as a starting point for the continuing conversation:

Chapter 1: "This reform movement called the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is, itself, in great need of reformation. We have not adequately taught our own heritage to a new generation, to the point that even leaders in our congregations are frequently unfamiliar with central aspects of our historical identity. Being a "restructured" denomination (something we did in 1968) seems to have become an end in itself, with only a handful of practices that distinguish us from other churches." (p. 6) What signs do you see that confirm or challenge the thesis that Disciples have not adequately taught our own heritage to the current generations of members and pastoral leaders?

Chapter 2: “We are convinced that despite the cultural trends (or perhaps because of them), Disciples and other Christians are experiencing a deep hunger for interdependent community, for a faith that demands discipline and thus makes a difference in the way we live, for a church that is able to offer bold, even countercultural, witness to society. We are also aware, however, that a covenantal ecclesiology is a very difficult way of being church. To demonstrate . disciplined community that values diversity, dialogue, and dissent—to model responsible freedom—requires real spiritual maturity. But if we Disciples don’t act as a covenantal people, then we become, in effect, clubs of culturally formed individuals, preoccupied with ‘the relief of psychic distress and institutional maintenance.’” (p. 27) In what ways is your congregation modeling “responsible freedom” that nurtures and strengthens its commitment to being a covenant people as explained in this chapter?

Chapter 3: “...The goal of a covenantal people is not to win interpretive battles, but to stay at the table until fuller truth is discerned, until God’s claim on us all is strengthened. The Bible is not a club we use to beat up on ideological opponents; it is an authority to which we commonly appeal in our pursuit of deeper love and knowledge of God.” (p. 37) Based on your experience, would you say the members of your congregation are committed to open and respectful discussion of biblical texts that acknowledges diversity of views in the context of unity?

Chapter 4: “When the church claims ownership, the table represents division. When it remembers that the table belongs to God, the table becomes the gathering place for the one community under Christ. . . . Communion is perhaps that single most visible reminder that we live and move and have our being because we are held together by a covenant with God in Christ and one another that transcends whatever differences we bring to the table” (pp. 40-41). Is the Lord’s Supper central to the life of your congregation? What does your congregation do, or what more might it do, to help emphasize this centrality?

Chapter 5: “The great strength of a tradition such as ours, however, is to insist that the church is in a missionary situation, that we do live in a culture that is antagonistic to the gospel. The way one is baptized guarantees nothing, but believers’ baptism—by emphasizing both God’s gift of grace and our human response—underscores the fact that baptism has profound ethical and missional implications.” (p.54) Does your congregation make the connection between baptism and the missionary call to stand “over against” the dominant culture, and, if so, in what way is this highlighted when individuals are baptized?

Chapter 6: “We cannot be Disciples and not seek to heal the church of its divisions and, thus, model for the world a life together marked by justice and peace.” (p. 73) The context for this statement is a call to Disciples to hold unity and peacemaking together. What are some of the ways your congregation finds itself confronting conflicts that hamper its ministry, and what are you doing to resolve those conflicts before they become divisions?

Chapter 7: “Reconciliation is what Christians do as witnesses to God’s good news in Jesus Christ because reconciliation is who we are. Being in Christ has made us people of reconciliation, and being people of reconciliation is how we show the world we are in Christ” (p. 78). How does your congregation express the ministry of reconciliation and how might it do so better?

Chapter 8: “Growth cannot and should not come at the price of compromising loving our neighbors and our enemies as ourselves. The key we believe to remaining faithful is for congregations to focus on their spiritual health. Churches are not organizations. If we take Paul’s metaphor of the church as the body of Christ seriously, it is natural to focus on spiritual healthiness as the biblical measure of a congregation’s life” (p. 89). What, as you see it, are marks of spiritual health in a congregation? How spiritually healthy is yours?

Chapter 9: Lay and ordained ministry “are inextricably intertwined for us to the point that the weakness of one undercuts the healthiness of the other. This is why we believe any tendency to emphasize lay ministry at the congregational level by diminishing the leadership role of clergy needs to be resisted” (p. 97). How does your congregation manifest the interdependence of lay and ordained ministry? How might it do so better?

Chapter 10: “We see many signs of hope that our church is . . . confronting difficult choices and challenges creatively and faithfully. . . . Admittedly our embracing of racial and gender diversity has been uneven, but our commitment to it has not been. . . . Recent history shows that racial and gender diversity is now core to who we are as modern Disciples” (pp. 106-07). Is your congregation an example of how Disciples are becoming a pro-reconciling, anti-racist church? What further steps might you take in this direction?

Jan and Michael look forward to the conversation!