

Interdependence and community

What Does This Mean?

Many modern societies tend to stress the individual: individual decisions, lifestyles, and tastes. Although this has brought a certain type of freedom, it can lead to loneliness and a lack of connection with others. The lack of a sense of belonging makes it difficult to make choices with others in mind. The Bible stresses the connection between people, since God is the father of all (Malachi 2:10).

We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community. Dorothy Day

Christianity puts relationships at the center: Jesus encouraged his followers to call God “Father” when they pray, indicating a close relationship (Matthew 6:9). Within the Trinity there is a relationship between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which means that relationship is at the heart of the Godhead. The Christian faith is about people living out their relationship with God as a community (Romans 14:7). When speaking of the church, the Bible likens Christ to its head and the people to its body, such that all the parts depend on each other (Ephesians 4:15-16).

We can be human only in fellowship, in community, in koinonia, in peace. . . . We are not made for an exclusive self-sufficiency but for interdependence. . . . A person is a person through other persons. Bishop Desmond Tutu

As members of the same family, all Christians are brothers and sisters regardless of gender, nationality or status (Galatians 3:28). There is a sense of mutual responsibility that is taken for granted in the Bible. When Cain asked, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” he already knew the answer was yes. The Apostle Paul compares the church to a body, where the parts are dependent on each other ([1 Corinthians 12:12, 276]) and where people bear each other’s burdens and share their highs and lows (Galatians 6:2; Romans 12:15). This creates a strong element of belonging both to God and each other.

Christian community is based on all being one in Christ and expressing that oneness in a compassionate lifestyle (Romans 12:9-10), shared worship, and a shared meal (the

Eucharist, or Communion). It is lived in supporting each other, working together for others, and giving of time, wealth and self.

The Christian community is a community of the cross, for it has been brought into being by the cross, and the focus of its worship is the Lamb once slain, now glorified. So the community of the cross is a community of celebration, a Eucharistic community, ceaselessly offering to God through Christ the sacrifice of our praise and thanksgiving. John Stott

What Does This Mean in School?

A community emphasis can make a difference to teaching and learning in many subjects.

- When studying people in history, explore the communities they belong to rather than presenting them as lone individuals. For example, William Wilberforce was part of an active group and a wider grassroots movement.
- Help students to connect with the local community. Get the church community involved in student learning; people in churches have a broad range of skills and gifts.
- Nurture interdependence in learning by having students bring their different skills to a project.
- In subjects as such as drama, English, history, geography, and civics, emphasize the connections between people and follow up with the consequences of one's actions for others.
- Occasionally ask students to work together and come up with a group statement rather than just individual opinions. Engage students in more personal interaction as part of their learning when this is suitable.
- Have students reflect on what it means to belong to a community and on how one belongs to a Christian community.

Think of a lesson or unit where you already emphasize communities, belonging, and interdependence. Now think of another where there is potential for reducing the

emphasis on individualism. For example, a geography lesson might highlight a community's role in environmental change. Think of a lesson where you made learning more relational, perhaps inviting someone in to be interviewed in history or linking a painting to the story of the artist. What was the students' response? Are there lessons where you could extend the approach?



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