

Series: New Testament Consolidation
Scripture: I John 1:3,7

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Lesson 1 Nov. 25, 1990

NEW TESTAMENT CONSOLIDATION (Part 1)

Introduction One of the themes of the Bible, is how God puts things together. The Book of Genesis begins with

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."

Likewise, at the beginning of the Book of John we read,

"All things came into being by Him [Jesus] and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being." (1:3)

In creation itself, no scientist can help but be amazed at the wonderful complexity and order of individual creatures. A ROSE is a marvelous invention of design, symmetry, productivity, attractiveness and variation. Roses are made up of basic building blocks of cellulose, water, pigment and energy; and GOD has put the building blocks together to produce an integrated whole. The Bible portrays God as a Being Who loves to put things together to form a more perfect WHOLE, and which although *more complex*, more beautifully reflects His creative hand.

Christian marriage is another example of God putting things together. In a Christian marriage, He brings together two distinct individuals who entertain differing genetics, differing conditioning as children, different likes and dislikes, different gifts, and differing Christian testimonies. But when they covenant to spend the rest of their lives together serving Christ, He joins them and begins to mold them into a unified WHOLE. The process is not instantaneous. But if the two individual "building blocks" will be patient and faithful, the process IS inevitable.

We read also in the Book of Genesis, about how God started to put together a people for Himself. He started with a pagan Chaldean named Abram, and went on from him and his wife, Sarai, to create the Hebrew nation which He has always intended to be THE PEOPLE on the planet who would look like the true God; and they would *reflect* Him through their distinct *individual* life-styles, and in their *corporate* life-style as a kind of people who did things as a nation with excellence and with righteousness.

In the New Testament, you get a picture of the Lord still PUTTING THINGS together...specifically, He is still putting His people together. In Galatians 3:28 we read,

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

In this verse Paul in teaching that the kinds of distinctions that people find significant, LOSE their "all-fired-up" importance when people become Christians. God's program of drawing people from all over, from all kinds of backgrounds, saving them, and making them part of the Bride is more important than...

1. Ethnic distinctions (*neither Jew nor Greek*).
2. Cultural & class distinctions (*neither slave nor free*).
3. Sexual distinctions (*neither male nor female*).

Now, the idea is not that when God starts putting things together it gets like that drink me and my friends used to make in college (where you take one part Coke, one orange-soda, one part milk, one part coffee, one part whatever else you happen to have around...the resultant concoction being a) ugly b) difficult to swallow c) likely to produce significant gastric responses...

BY THE WAY...

I do not think that God intends His people to act different. In fact, I think that is what many non-Christians detect and resent. No, God intends for Christians to make DIFFERENT DECISIONS in their lives, than the decisions the world, the flesh or the devil may be suggesting. God intends His people to look like Him, not by acting religious or invulnerable, but by quietly and very *privately* making choices which they know please Him. The Lord has been putting this kind of people together for about 3,500 years. 2,000 years ago the Apostle Peter said,

"...you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light..." (I Peter 2:9) *Also I Cor. 1:26-31*

God puts people together in local Christian assemblies, too. It is not just *chance* that Hixville is Hixville. It is not chance that Mullein Hill is Mullein Hill. Dartmouth Bible Church is not just a random collection of wacko-religious fanatics who just *happened* to bump into each other on Morton Avenue. God has been behind the putting-together of our church.

As I was updating our Membership List on the computer this week, I sat there staring at the screen... Each member of this church has his or her own story of how they came here. Each member values being here (or they would not be a member), and each saint represents their part in the process of how God puts things together.

NOTE: One thing in our merger with Elim that will be a *challenge*, is that, as a small church, each INDIVIDUAL receives personal attention from the rest of us. We haven't added members in rapid-fire fashion here. Ever. People have joined one by one, and each

new member has a special entry and really, precious place in this Body. With the introduction of 35 or 40 new members, we will feel a challenge:

- * to learn them (and they us),
- * to consider each individual from their assembly as *special* (and each of us to them)
- * to enjoy each of their individual gifts (as they come to enjoy the gift which JERRY has, and the one that LINDA has, and the one that Ron has...)

Well folks, as I see it, God is in the *consolidation* business. He delights to see believers working hard to *draw together* around the principles of His written Word. Conversely, it grieves Him--I am convinced-- to see believers forever *fragmenting* and separating from each other. Israel's history is filled with fragmentation. It seems like nearly every time Israel enthroned a new king, the people chose up sides. (In fact the very idea of a king was not God's idea, but theirs so that they could be like all the other nations). And then the day came when the nation of Israel split into TWO peoples of God--the northern and the southern kingdoms. What a grief to Jehovah, who called each and every one of them BY HIS GRACE out of darkness.

Dear ones, the program of God today is still to "glue people together." In our families and in the assembly, the Holy Spirit is moving to *consolidate*, to build an internal *loyalty* and *commitment* between the individual parts. Each part is different, to be sure.

In that flower we mentioned, the leaf doesn't do the same thing as the root. The root cannot effect *reproduction* of the flower as the stamen can. But the stamen cannot attract the pollenizing bee as the petal does.

The flower is a silent witness to God's way of doing things. He puts things together to create a more unified WHOLE, which better reflects the beauty of Who HE IS...

The church is intended to be a witness also, dear ones. And I ask you, would it not be a wonderful testimony to those around us here in Dartmouth and over in New Bedford and in Westport, and wherever else anyone might get wind of it...if we can pull this merger off?

These past two months I have had quite a few people, both within our church and on the outside, predict various dangers and pitfalls with our even trying this:

- * I have had a number predict that Lou and I will probably end up at each other's throats. Lou is aggressive, they say, and you are not. "He will have your ministry..." they say.
- * I have had others who are fairly sure that some of you will jump ship during the process, thus depriving us of some of whom the Body--as it is now--is quite fond.
- * Others have foreseen nothing but financial disaster for us, Elim being the owner of an unsaleable building.

- * A few of my fellow ministers have reacted towards me rather coolly, and I felt like I was being looked at as Donald Trump, working the leveraged buy-out of a struggling and failing company.

In other words, not a week has passed when I didn't encounter someone who felt it was their God-given responsibility to throw cold water on this merger. I suppose that was predictable, and I am--I assure you--not naive going into this.

But my friends, ask yourself as I ask myself, "what is the Lord doing in the churches?" What kind of goal is the Holy Spirit prodding us towards? Is not a merger of two like-minded, Bible-believing assemblies who are virtually identical in burden, doctrine and philosophy of doing the ministry a TESTIMONY of what God is doing now and HAS been doing since the beginning--putting things together in a plan? Can you not picture two little, humble--often struggling--evangelical families consolidating their members and resources and energy so that a greater WHOLE might emerge?

I am talking about "1 + 1 = 3". I am talking about us working hard to overlook the little difficulties, the policy-differences, and the stuff that really doesn't matter much at all, in order to crank up the level of IMPACT this assembly is having here for Jesus Christ. *Rom. 1:11, 12*

- I would LOVE to have some MORE people with the gift of evangelism.
- I would LOVE to have some MORE people with gifts in the area of visitation.
- I would LOVE to have some MORE people who can effectively communicate the Word of God and challenge people to make MORE daily decisions for Christ.
- I would LOVE to have some MORE people who care about missions.
- I would LOVE to have some MORE people who give, freely, without keeping score.
- I would LOVE to have some MORE people who look like Jesus Christ in the way they privately choose to live their lives.

Today, beloved, I am just saying that I think the whole program of God in the New Testament is to put together people into strong local assemblies, making an increasingly noticable impact on their communities with each passing year. We have an unusual opportunity to significantly speed up the calendar on that count, if we can pull this merger off successfully!

By successfully, I mean, it gets done with no casualties. It gets done and no one is injured in the process. It gets done with no compromising of God's Word. It gets done and results in JOY for ALL the saints.

I haven't been able to shake a verse I recently read in Acts... Let's close with that verse today: Acts 9:31.

May the Lord of the harvest, sustain us, protect us, convict us and empower us.

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life--and the life was manifested and we have seen and bear witness and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us--what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, THAT YOU ALSO MAY HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH US; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write, so that our joy may be made complete. And this is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, WE HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH ONE ANOTHER, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have not sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us.

I John 1:1-10

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

Genesis 1:1

All things came into being by Him [the "Word"--Christ], and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.

I John 1:3

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is not male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:28

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

I Peter 2:9

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no one should boast before God. But by HIS doing, you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us, wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, that just as it is written [Jer.9:23] *Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.*

I Corinthians 1: 26-31

For I long to see you in order that I might impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; that is, that I may be encouraged TOGETHER WITH YOU while among you, EACH OF US BY THE OTHER'S FAITH, both yours and mine.

Romans 1:11,12

So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, BEING BUILT UP; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.

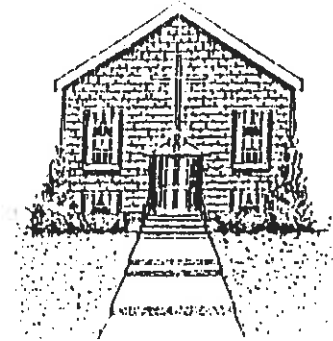
Acts 9:31

DARTMOUTH BIBLE NOTES

Sermon

Notes From the Sunday Messages

52 Morton Avenue North Dartmouth, Massachusetts



Series: New Testament Consolidation
Scripture: Psalm 32:2 etc.

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Lesson 2 12/2/90

THE GLUE OF CONSOLIDATION

Introduction Dear ones, there are so many happy things for us to enjoy these days--I really think that *right this month* we need to make a special and extraordinary effort to offer God thanks and praise for the blessings we're receiving right now. I know some of you are out of work and I know some of us are growing increasingly anxious about world events; but right this month...WE NEED TO CONCENTRATE ON THE BLESSINGS WE HAVE RIGHT HERE: For instance:

1. The joy we derive from the holiday season. Christmas cards, and shopping and your family and the special holiday events we share together as the Body of Christ.
2. The relative peace all of us are enjoying right now as part of this country.
3. The good things that are happening in the ministry...many kids memorizing Scripture; the growing number of small fellowship groups that are springing up; the new faces in this church; the growing sense of cooperation between evangelicals in our area.
4. The weddings that we look forward to in 1991, and maybe there will be new babies too next year!
5. The merger coming to pass!

In fact, I believe that one of the Christian's greatest sources of JOY in life, is to see good things *come together* and happen. That, I believe too, is something by which God is greatly pleased. When He brings things together--which is His way (see Lesson 1)--it models more fully HIS creative nature.

That is how I am defining "consolidation," *God, putting things together*. He put the planet together. He calls believing men and women together and marries them under the canopy of His covenant-love. And He called OUT OF the masses a people for Himself, which He is still putting together. I believe that He calls pastors and shepherds to individual flocks, too; and, if they hang around long enough, God creates a kind of marriage there too. Consolidation, then, is something we ought to look for and promote.

Now I remember in the 60's and early 70's there was a lot of talk between churches about the "ecumenical movement." In fact, some are *still* trying to make it happen--I received an invitation to our church this week from a Catholic parish, inviting us to participate with them in a Christmas pageant. When I suggest to you that the New Testament teaches us that God is a God who puts

people together--who CONSOLIDATES them--I am not saying that He does it irrespective of sound doctrine. He does not. In fact there are a fair number of passages which prohibit consolidation either with unbelievers on an individual basis, or with organizations which reject the cardinal doctrines of the faith.

But I am talking about a New Testament *theme* which I see, calling God's people from within the haven of the true Church, the Body of Christ, to work hard and tirelessly to promote the *consolidation* of individual gifts and callings, to make greater wholes. Christian families, where each member of the family is called upon to bring Christ TO the family, is one example. And small Christian groups (*koinonia-cells*), doing the detail work of building up, equipping and encouraging, is another example. And local Christian churches, moving along AS A WHOLE, to promote the cause of Christ in the community--whatever that may entail from one month to the next--THAT is something of great importance in the New Testament too.

You see, the spirit of *radical individualism* is pretty foreign to the ethics and theology of the New Testament. The person, or family, or local church which practices WE (or I)-DON'T-NEED-ANYONE-ELSE is missing something which I believe, at least, is the heart of Jesus in Scripture.

It is the sacred heart of the Savior to save and redeem individual people and bring them into the Body of Christ.
It is the sacred heart of the Savior to draw together two Christians, who are seeking first HIS will, into holy matrimony.
It is the sacred heart of the Savior to burden individual churches to catch a vision of His work beyond their own walls.

Well, I believe there are building materials which the Lord uses to bring about consolidation. The basic meaning of that Greek word *koinonia*, which we translate as "fellowship", is to *share things in common*. Sharing various things in common is a building block for people coming together.

Two people do NOT generally get married today, if they discover they share next to nothing in common.

Churches don't get together if they don't pretty much share their doctrine in common.

Another "building block" of consolidation is the one which is probably the most OBVIOUS one you have to have, and that is the practice of a Christlike love. "Love", as used in the New Testament *does mean affection and attraction*. But it's most significant usage means *sacrifice out of commitment*. Families which are happiest, run on the fuel of the practice of giving-of-self, no score kept. Churches which are happiest run on that same kind of fuel.

The other "building block" for N.T. consolidation which I want to mention today, is what I am calling "A SPIRIT OF INNOCENCE."

A Spirit of Innocence C.S.Lewis, in his science fiction book, "Out of the Silent Planet", weaves a tale about life on Mars (which he calls "Malacondra"). The Malacondrans, Lewis imagines, are creatures who know, worship and love Christ. They are also creatures of great intelligence and nobility. They are also sinless, never having fallen into sin, and therefore forbidden from contacting anyone on *this* planet.

I am not endorsing Lewis's extraterrestrial fantasies, but it is interesting how Malacondra is affected in the story by its first visit from earthlings... I'll just tell you that the spirit of innocence is lost.

Before the fall, Adam and Eve manifested complete innocence. It was not a *stupid* innocence, for they were highly intelligent creatures. But they had a complete and godly lack of deceit and guile. One can only fantasize what it might have been like for them, and for their offspring, had they NOT fallen.

There are many examples in Scripture after Genesis of INNOCENCE. One "hero" who comes to my mind is *Esther*. She finds herself caught up into the world of the royal household, and is really an innocent player as others of no greater intelligence, but greater *intrigue* plot around her--her cousin Mordecai, and the king's counselor, Haman, in particular. Esther was not immaculate, but she is a study in innocence.

It's interesting that the name of God is not mentioned in the book, although His vindicating presence is all too clear!

Ruth, in her humble state, is innocent of any deceit, as God cares for her situation. And *David*, as a young man, before He became Israel's king, must have stood wide-eyed as the ruined Saul, full of suspicion--so says the writer of I Samuel (18:9)--tries to peg him to the wall with a spear!

David himself would write (Psalm 32:2b), *How blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.*

Jesus commended Nathaniel to his friends by saying (John 1:47), *Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile.*

The Savior Himself is the very highest model of innocence. The picture of Jesus as a "sheep, mute before its shearers," is a picture of innocence. Jesus never even once entertained the thought of deceit. Never once did He seek to cover up his motives or plot to protect Himself from His enemies. There was never a more intelligent man, than the God-man, Jesus Christ. And there was never a more innocent-minded being to walk the planet than He!

The Apostle Paul reassured the Thessalonian believers that his own ministry was bathed with proper motivation (2:3). The Apostle Peter exhorted *his* readers to "*long for the pure milk of the Word...*" Part of that self-nurturing process was to be in their "*laying aside all malice and all guile...*" When you study the grammar of this section of I Peter,

you see that these two verses in chapter 2 are TIED BACK TO something Peter said just before that (1:22). Christians--like newborn babes (CAN THERE BE A CLEARER PICTURE OF INNOCENCE)--are to establish in themselves, and maintain a *SINCERE LOVE OF THE BRETHREN*, as evidence of having been truly born again!

Well, my friends, I believe that fostering a spirit of innocence is something that the Holy Spirit wishes to produce in us. It is the glue that accomplishes a joyful putting together of things, in the way that God loves.

There is something special, dear ones, when a young man and a young woman come together in Christian marriage, and both have been celebrate up to that point! That is a beautiful flower, and I fear a rare thing, any more.

And when Christians join together, either in small groups, or in larger ones, and JUST ASSUME their union will bring joy and growth, that is a beautiful flower too!

How to Develop a Spirit of Innocence

If we are to provide this "glue" to the things we believe God is putting together--be they new families being established, or old ones being repaired and rehabilitated, or be they new fellowships and ministries, or be they mergers of already existing fellowships, then we need to know HOW TO DEVELOP a spirit of innocence.

1. Nothing substitutes for just spending time with Christ. A spirit of fear, which God does NOT give, comes from self-imposed exile from Christ. SPEND TIME with Him, lots of time. Allow Him to fill you and empower you with His precious Spirit. There can be no substitute for the simple *being-around* the Savior.
2. Crucify feelings of *suspiciousness* when you feel them cropping up. I understand that suspiciousness is an unconscious *defense-mechanism*, but who ever said we have to always be slaves to our unconscious defense-machanisms?

I think that the reason we protect ourselves from risk and from what we perceive to be naievete, is because we are really *afraid* to entrust ourselves completely to God Spirit. Again, FEAR brews up, and we capitulate to it, and sometimes we can be so *used* to giving in to fear, that it just automatically takes over...

3. Restrict influences of cynicism in your life. Suspiciousness is generally a *learned behavior*. Little children are very, very rarely suspicious. They are more naturally *trusting*, are they not? And we find ourselves (tragically, I think) having to train our kids NOT to be trusting...
4. ALLOW yourself to take godly, Spirit-led risks. Ultimately, dear ones, what do you have to lose?

As we approach the Lord's Table together this morning, may the Head of the Church redeem our minds and our spirits, and make us wise stewards of our intelligence and resources, but a trusting and innocent-minded people.

**HOW TO DEVELOP (or
recover) A SPIRIT OF
INNOCENCE**

- * LOTS OF TIME SPENT
WITH THE SAVIOR**
- * CRUCIFY FEELINGS
OF SUSPICIOUSNESS**
- * RESTRICT INFLU-
ENCES OF CYNICISM**
- * ALLOW SPIRIT-LED
RISKS**

Series: New Testament Consolidation
Scripture: Matthew 7:12

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Lesson 3 12/9/90

CONSOLIDATING NEW PEOPLE

Introduction At one point or another, each of us was a new person here in this church. (Maybe for someone here today, THIS is your first Sunday, and we welcome you). For me personally, this is the seventh church I have been part of since I have been saved. I can remember my initial reaction to each church when I first began attending. Each church has been a little bit different in my experience, but the needs I had were pretty much the same from one place to another.

This morning I'd like us to consider the WAYS in which a new person is consolidated into a local church, and I hope to stimulate your thinking about how that person can be AIDED, FIRST as he or she thinks about whether this church is for them, and then--after they've pretty much made that decision, how to integrate into the flow of the ministry.

Different Backgrounds At the beginning here, we need to be aware of the differing spiritual backgrounds that people have. Each visitor to DBC comes with a unique "spiritual portfolio" in hand. Here are a few examples of what I mean by that:

Some people grew up in a solid **Christian home** like Timothy's:
For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois, and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well...You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14,15

Some people come to a church out of a totally **pagan** experience:
Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers shall inherit the kingdom of God. AND SUCH WERE SOME OF YOU; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God. 1 Cor.6:9-11

Some people come to our church, not yet saved, but relatively speaking, they're good people, who have the beginnings of faith. They haven't yet actually been born again, but they're on the road... And we get people like this sometimes too:
And there was a certain man of Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion

of what was called the Italian cohort, a devout man, and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people, and prayed to God continually. Acts 10:1,2

Another category of visitor is illustrated by an interesting incident recorded by Mark (2:1-5). That is where the "visitor" to Jesus' house was BROUGHT by someone else. What is interesting about the incident (other than the extreme measures the paralytic's friends had to take to get him there), is that nothing is said of the paralytic having any faith *himself*. It is his four *friends* who have faith, who go to significant trouble to GET him there, and as soon as Jesus heals him, Jesus tells the fellow to go home! Sometimes folks come here the first time because they were *brought* by someone else--"I'm here with her..."

One last example of a seeker, is *Zaccheus*, who was a tax-gatherer like Matthew, and generally despised by everybody. But he was so intent on seeing Jesus, that he climbed up into that sycamore tree to see Christ. Jesus zeroed in on him, met with him in his house and saved him from his sins. I love Jesus' words that Luke gave us summing up the encounter: ***The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost*** (Luke 19:1-10).

People visit us too, seeking, and with all kinds of *other* interesting things about them. Some are from different parts of the country. Someone from the Midwest is going to find New England different. With a growing international complexion to Dartmouth and New Bedford, some come with greatly different cultural features. When we get a visiting Chinese student from SMU, or a recent immigrant from Portugal or elsewhere, they have cultural differences. All of these aren't things we need to get crazy about, but we need to be aware that each visitor has a unique story, and usually when he comes to a church, he would like someone to be interested in *hearing* a little of his story. Most of our visitors though, are from around these parts and come with many similarities to us. The biggest similarity, of course, is a spiritual hunger. All of us in this place have the desire to see the Lord more clearly. Hardly anyone is here that doesn't want to be here, and that says that each person has a strong spiritual hunger to receive something from us, or to participate in worship with other people. And it is our job to feed them, to challenge them, to love them, to get to know them. Here's the guiding principle, dear ones, on how to "consolidate new people" into this church... Jesus said it, and it is recorded by both Matthew (7:12) and Luke (6:31). This is the thing to keep in mind as we think about how to integrate new folks into the ministry here at DBC.

And just as you want people to treat you, treat them in the same way.

New Testament consolidation, or "church growth", ought to be governed by the Kingdom-ethic of these words from Jesus. When a new person comes into our church, they can EXPECT you to welcome them with the same kind of approach that you would enjoy. So, how do YOU like to be treated when you

first check out a church? We're going to spend the rest of our time laying out some guidelines for consolidating new people... First, a couple of other observations and statistics...

- A. Currently, we are ministering to 94 adults, in one capacity or another. 75 of those adults came to this fellowship since 1980. 27 have come in the past year and a half. We are a "new" church, even though this building has been here for 27 years.
- B. Most people require a year to become fully integrated into DBC. For some it takes less time and for some, more; but that is an average.
- C. People visiting are increasingly less homogenous in their living circumstances. 1. More and more single parents; 2. More and more ethnic variety; 3. More and more culturally and socially secular; 4. People's lives are considerably more *complex*. They are no BUSIER, but they are juggling more demands on their time and are more emotionally "spread out."
- D. As with much of modern life, church-life for many (not ALL) has deteriorated into "what's in it for me?" We just need to admit that this is where a lot of people are at, when they come in the door, and that the church ought to take to heart the song we sing, *Make me a servant, humble and meek, Lord, let me lift up those who are weak. And may the prayer of my heart always be, make me a servant, make me a servant, make me a servant, today...*

But even with the fact that, "the times, they are a changin'", people still have the same BASIC needs when they start out with a church--when they begin with THIS church. Let's review those needs, and how WE--as the Body of Christ--can help them "integrate" into our fellowship.

Guidelines for Consolidating People

1. Notice them without threatening them. Everyone wants to feel like he is important to somebody. The person who wants to become part of a church without anyone knowing him or her is the exception. Most people want to be noticed, even if they don't want to be "assaulted".
2. When you meet a new person, take the time to "follow up" on your introduction to them, and theirs to you. Send a note or card in the mail. Give them a short friendly call during the week. Begin to pray for one thing for that person after you've had that first get-acquainted chat with them.
3. Welcome their ministry skills. Scripture tells us that each believer has been provided by God with at least one spiritual gift. God didn't put it there just to collect dust--its there for them to use in the Body--in THIS Body, if they choose to remain with us.

4. Encourage the new person to join the ministry. Many new people WANT to contribute, but they're not sure its welcome or that it will be accepted. We who are here need to go out of our way a little bit to ENCOURAGE that new person to feel the freedom to GET involved.

5. Expect the Body to change a little bit with each added believer. That is not a bad thing, it is a good thing. We tend to assimilate people ONE AT A TIME, whether we're talking about adding members or working in a new S.S. teacher or getting to know someone's other skills. And each time a person starts to exercise his or her ability, the Body changes a little. The church which gets used to change, HEALTHY change, is a growing church.

6. Accommodate their physical needs. This comes down to little things like *parking* and *seating* and someone greeting them at the door with a *bulletin*, and *directing them* to the various Sunday School classes. Scripture is not silent on these things--Matthew 23:6; James 2:3,4; Acts 6; John 13.

7. Allow them into MY life, at a comfortable pace. I'm talking about granting THEM some transparency into my life. That makes a person feel welcome and needed.

Conclusion Dear ones, this is something we need to become real good at, if we want to keep growing, if we want to see this merger with Elim come off well, and MOST IMPORTANTLY, if we want to please our Lord. Let's comclude by just applying that *Matthew 7:12-criteria* in realtion to each of these seven "guidelines:"

1. How do I like to be noticed when I am new, and what do I find threatening?
2. What kind of "follow-up" attention do YOU enjoy when you're new to a fellowship?
3. If you were just starting out in a church, how would you want to go about developing your ministry?
4. What kind of encouragement and "green lights" would you need to feel like you are a part of things?
5. What kind of an impact for change would you like to make on a church?
6. What physical needs are important to you or to your family?
7. How much warmth and friendliness do YOU look for, and how much visibility into the lives of someone (anyone) in that church do you wish to have?

COMMENTS or QUESTIONS?