

# Witnessing the miracle of community

Before moving to Delaware, I lived in a small town in Illinois. Shortly after arriving there, I purchased a history of the town that had been written by a lifelong resident who had also been a high school history teacher.

When she came to the chapter on the early 20th century, she described the diversity there in terms

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of the different languages spoken by the people who had recently emigrated. In addition to those from Germany, Italy, and Ireland, people came from "Latvia, Lithuania, Russia, the Ukraine; more Czechs, Bohemians, Croatians, Slovaks, and Polish."

A significant part of the town's story involved the making of a nearly homogenous community out of so many parts. By 1958, it was American Graffiti. In less than 50 years a diverse collection of immigrants had become one people.

Mostly European, and coming from homelands characterized by great strife, from nations that in that 50 year span had waged two very destructive wars, in America they experienced something quite different, they became a people. Though not everyone was included in this "becoming a people," and it can be criticized in many ways, one must not underestimate magnitude of this "miracle of community."

We face a similar situation in the 21st century. The sense of fragmentation of our common life is perceived all across the country and increasingly we are acting out of anxiety about our future.

Some fear our best days are behind us. People are still coming to America from other places as they have for over 400 years, only now the largest groups are from Mexico, Central and South America, all over Asia, and Africa.

We face an uncertain future because unlike the Europeans who shared a similar racial and religious heritage, present day immigrants are more diverse racially and represent different faiths altogether, and some claim no faith at all.

Additionally, the political divide between conservatives and liberals, Republicans and Democrats seems sharper than ever. Is there another "miracle of community" on the horizon?

In the liturgical year, Pentecost is June 4, which is only about eight days away. According to Acts chapter 2, people from all over the world met at the Temple in Jerusalem. "Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs" (Acts 2:8-10). They experienced a miracle when they heard the wonders of God in their own tongues.

We are told the people devoted themselves to "koinonia," (Acts 2:42) which is often translated "fellowship," but means more than that. Can the biblical vision of community can be played out again like it did at that Pentecost or 100 years ago? Can we have another "miracle of community?" At the very least I believe we desire it.

In spite of the evidence that a sense of community is breaking down all around, there are hopeful signs of a deep longing for friendship among the groups that make up America, and those signs are evident in Delaware.

The tradition of first Friday's, for instance, and the many other events like this past weekend's Delaware Arts Festival, along with newer movements like the Delaware Community Coalition and events like the Delaware Family Festival on July 15 (about which I wish there was more room to write), all point to a deep longing for "community," a desire to come together rather than break apart.

There stands before us an opportunity to be an example of how people of different backgrounds and convictions can share life peacefully; to better include those who in the past have been left out; to find friendship despite great obstacles.

It may take a big miracle, but it is worth hoping and striving for. Follow the deep longing.