

What is the Foundation of Our Fellowship?

By Mark Mayberry

7/11/2010

Introduction

Unity in diversity takes many forms. Sometimes it is religious, sometimes social, sometimes political, and sometimes criminal.

On Wednesday, July 7th, the *Houston Chronicle* published a story by Dane Schiller, under the headline “Diverse picture of alleged drug runners emerges in courtrooms,” describing the arrest and arraignment of 28 people accused of participating in a criminal conspiracy to distribute illegal drugs.

I was struck with the strange and sorted diversity of the co-defendants which included men and women, Caucasians and Hispanics, U.S. citizens, foreign nationals, and illegal aliens, rich and poor, urban sophisticates and good-ol’ boys. According to the article,

One accused drug dealer lives in the suburbs and is the hot-tempered daughter of prison guards.

Another is an undocumented Mexican who drives a purple Hummer...

There is a married Pakistani man with a string of girlfriends.

And a rural wife who has been looking for her ex-con white supremacist husband who went missing and is presumed dead.

Defendants include a woman from Colombia who “looked like she stepped off a magazine cover” and a burly Texan who wore coveralls.

Some players met only by phone. Others are linked by blood, marriage or friendship.

Records and court testimony show the defendants arrested include people from Mexico, Honduras, Colombia, Pakistan, Israel, Houston, Beaumont and elsewhere.

What brought them together, authorities contend, is not only an underground pipeline for cocaine and heroin, but exceptionally pure methamphetamine that went for \$24,000 a pound (worth more than gold).

Busting a group moving a few pounds of methamphetamine is significant. But authorities were stunned to find 25 pounds stuffed in a home’s air vent.

And that, authorities contend, is a small slice of what has been at play as many alleged conspirators are part of a family that has been dealing for years and is connected to Mexico's Sinaloa Cartel, which operates in northern Mexico. Other defendants lived on the fringes of big-time dealing and were minor players, authorities said.

Every defendant was indicted on the same charge: conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute narcotics. They face 10 years to life in prison.

This story was noted in the Friday edition of "Best of the Web Today," a column edited by James Taranto and published in the online edition of the *Wall Street Journal*, which offers a light-hearted analysis of the day's news.

Sarcastically referring to this *Houston Chronicle* article as "The Feel-Good Story of the Summer," Taranto quips, "Isn't it a nice change to read a story about people overcoming their differences and working together for a common goal?"

What brought this very diverse group of people together? What was the foundation of their fellowship? Simply stated, it was covetousness, greed, and the love of mammon/money.

What binds us together as a nation? What is it about America that so powerfully manifests the spirit of "E pluribus unum," i.e., "Out of many, one"? This motto was included on the 1776 Seal of the United States and officially adopted by an Act of Congress in 1782. Originally signifying that out of many colonies/states emerged a single nation, in the modern era it communicates the melting pot concept, i.e., out of many peoples, races, religions and ethnicities has emerged a single people and nation.

What is the basis of Christian unity? Spiritually speaking, we must ask, "What joins us – a very diverse group of people – together as one?" What connects us as a church? What binds believers as a brotherhood? What underlying principles form the basis of our spiritual "E pluribus unum?"

Is it mere friendship? Is unity based upon the blood ties of family? Is it numbers, i.e., a desire to be part of something big? Or is our union founded upon something more serious and substantial, i.e., a mutual commitment to truth?

Is it Friendship?

Sometimes fellowship decisions are based upon friendship. We associate with those whom we like, and who like us. However, friends sometimes make bad choices. In such circumstances, do we rationalize their wrongdoing, or do we stand upon principle?

The righteous man does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers (Psa. 1:1-6).

Psalm 1:1-6 ... 1 How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! 2 But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night. 3 He will be like a tree firmly

planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers. 4 The wicked are not so, But they are like chaff which the wind drives away. 5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. 6 For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the wicked will perish. (NASB95)

Solomon said, “He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm” (Prov. 13:20).

Proverbs 13:20 ... 20 He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will suffer harm. (NASB95)

Paul warned the Corinthians, “Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?” (1 Cor. 5:6-8).

1 Corinthians 5:6-8 ... 6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? 7 Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. 8 Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (NASB95)

Again, he counseled, “Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals. Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning” (1 Cor. 15:33-34).

1 Corinthians 15:33-34 ... 33 Do not be deceived: “Bad company corrupts good morals.” 34 Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame. (NASB95)

Is it Family?

Sometimes fellowship decisions are based upon family. We enjoy interaction with kith and kin. However, family members sometimes make poor decisions. In such circumstances, do we defend the indefensible, or do we manifest conviction?

The Levites were praised for the equitable manner in which they meted out punishment at Mt. Sinai for the transgressions involving the golden calf (Exod. 32:25-29; Deut. 33:8-11).

Exodus 32:25-29 ... 25 Now when Moses saw that the people were out of control—for Aaron had let them get out of control to be a derision among their enemies— 26 then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, “Whoever is for the Lord, come to me!” And all the sons of Levi gathered together to him. 27 He said to them, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Every man of you put his sword upon his thigh, and go back and forth from gate to gate in the camp, and kill every man his brother, and every man his friend, and every man his neighbor.’ ” 28 So the sons of Levi did as Moses instructed, and about three thousand men of the people fell that day. 29 Then Moses said, “Dedicate

yourselves today to the Lord—for every man has been against his son and against his brother—in order that He may bestow a blessing upon you today.” (NASB95)

Deuteronomy 33:8-11 ... 8 Of Levi he said, “Let Your Thummim and Your Urim belong to Your godly man, Whom You proved at Massah, With whom You contended at the waters of Meribah; 9 Who said of his father and his mother, ‘I did not consider them’; And he did not acknowledge his brothers, Nor did he regard his own sons, For they observed Your word, And kept Your covenant. 10 “They shall teach Your ordinances to Jacob, And Your law to Israel. They shall put incense before You, And whole burnt offerings on Your altar. 11 “O Lord, bless his substance, And accept the work of his hands; Shatter the loins of those who rise up against him, And those who hate him, so that they will not rise again.” (NASB95)

In like manner, Christians must stand for truth, regardless of the effect this may have upon familial relationships (Matt. 10:34-39; Luke 12:49-53).

Matthew 10:34-39 ... 34 “Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 “For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; 36 and a man’s enemies will be the members of his household. 37 “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. 38 “And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. 39 “He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it. (NASB95)

Luke 12:49-53 ... 49 “I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled! 50 “But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished! 51 “Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division; 52 for from now on five members in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three. 53 “They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.” (NASB95)

Is it Numbers?

Sometimes fellowship decisions are based upon numbers. In other words, we want to be a part of something big. However, the majority is rarely on the side of right. In such circumstances, what do we do?

Moses said, “You shall not follow the masses in doing evil...” (Exod. 23:1-3).

Exodus 23:1-3 ... 1 “You shall not bear a false report; do not join your hand with a wicked man to be a malicious witness. 2 “You shall not follow the masses in doing evil, nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after a multitude in order to pervert justice; 3 nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his dispute. (NASB95)

While many travel the broad way that leads to destruction, faithful disciples walk the narrow and lonely pathway that leads to life (Matt. 7:13-14).

Matthew 7:13-14 ... 13 "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. 14 "For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it. (NASB95)

We must willingly face ostracism and exclusion for the cause of Christ (John 9:13-41; 16:1-4).

John 9:13-41 ... 13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who was formerly blind. 14 Now it was a Sabbath on the day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. 15 Then the Pharisees also were asking him again how he received his sight. And he said to them, "He applied clay to my eyes, and I washed, and I see." 16 Therefore some of the Pharisees were saying, "This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath." But others were saying, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And there was a division among them. 17 So they said to the blind man again, "What do you say about Him, since He opened your eyes?" And he said, "He is a prophet." 18 The Jews then did not believe it of him, that he had been blind and had received sight, until they called the parents of the very one who had received his sight, 19 and questioned them, saying, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? Then how does he now see?" 20 His parents answered them and said, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; 21 but how he now sees, we do not know; or who opened his eyes, we do not know. Ask him; he is of age, he will speak for himself." 22 His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone confessed Him to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue. 23 For this reason his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." 24 So a second time they called the man who had been blind, and said to him, "Give glory to God; we know that this man is a sinner." 25 He then answered, "Whether He is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." 26 So they said to him, "What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?" 27 He answered them, "I told you already and you did not listen; why do you want to hear it again? You do not want to become His disciples too, do you?" 28 They reviled him and said, "You are His disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. 29 "We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where He is from." 30 The man answered and said to them, "Well, here is an amazing thing, that you do not know where He is from, and yet He opened my eyes. 31 "We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing and does His will, He hears him. 32 "Since the beginning of time it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. 33 "If this man were not from God, He could do nothing." 34 They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you teaching us?" So they put him out. 35 Jesus heard that they had put him out, and finding him, He said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" 36 He answered, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?" 37 Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you." 38 And he said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped Him. 39 And Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind." 40 Those of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things and said to Him, "We are not blind too, are we?" 41 Jesus said

to them, “If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains. (NASB95)

John 16:1-4 ... 1 “These things I have spoken to you so that you may be kept from stumbling. 2 “They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God. 3 “These things they will do because they have not known the Father or Me. 4 “But these things I have spoken to you, so that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told you of them. These things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you. (NASB95)

Is it Truth?

The foundation of our fellowship should be based upon something more than friendship, family, or the desire to be part of something big. It should be firmly established upon our mutual commitment to truth.

When King Hezekiah sought to restore the Passover observance, many scoffed, but others evidenced humility and obedience: “The hand of God was also on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the princes commanded by the word of the Lord” (2 Chron. 30:1-12).

2 Chronicles 30:1-12 ... 1 Now Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover to the Lord God of Israel. 2 For the king and his princes and all the assembly in Jerusalem had decided to celebrate the Passover in the second month, 3 since they could not celebrate it at that time, because the priests had not consecrated themselves in sufficient numbers, nor had the people been gathered to Jerusalem. 4 Thus the thing was right in the sight of the king and all the assembly. 5 So they established a decree to circulate a proclamation throughout all Israel from Beersheba even to Dan, that they should come to celebrate the Passover to the Lord God of Israel at Jerusalem. For they had not celebrated it in great numbers as it was prescribed. 6 The couriers went throughout all Israel and Judah with the letters from the hand of the king and his princes, even according to the command of the king, saying, “O sons of Israel, return to the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, that He may return to those of you who escaped and are left from the hand of the kings of Assyria. 7 “Do not be like your fathers and your brothers, who were unfaithful to the Lord God of their fathers, so that He made them a horror, as you see. 8 “Now do not stiffen your neck like your fathers, but yield to the Lord and enter His sanctuary which He has consecrated forever, and serve the Lord your God, that His burning anger may turn away from you. 9 “For if you return to the Lord, your brothers and your sons will find compassion before those who led them captive and will return to this land. For the Lord your God is gracious and compassionate, and will not turn His face away from you if you return to Him.” 10 So the couriers passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, and as far as Zebulun, but they laughed them to scorn and mocked them. 11 Nevertheless some men of Asher, Manasseh and Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. 12 The hand of God was also on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the princes commanded by the word of the Lord. (NASB95)

Jeremiah foreshadowed an age when God would establish His everlasting covenant with the faithful remnant: “They shall be My people, and I will be their God; and I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me always, for their own good and for the good of their children after them” (Jer. 32:36-44).

*Jeremiah 32:36-44 ... 36 “Now therefore thus says the Lord God of Israel concerning this city of which you say, ‘It is given into the hand of the king of Babylon by sword, by famine and by pestilence.’ 37 “Behold, I will gather them out of all the lands to which I have driven them in My anger, in My wrath and in great indignation; and I will bring them back to this place and make them dwell in safety. 38 **“They shall be My people, and I will be their God; 39 and I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me always, for their own good and for the good of their children after them. 40 “I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; and I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me. 41 “I will rejoice over them to do them good and will faithfully plant them in this land with all My heart and with all My soul. 42 “For thus says the Lord, ‘Just as I brought all this great disaster on this people, so I am going to bring on them all the good that I am promising them. 43 ‘Fields will be bought in this land of which you say, “It is a desolation, without man or beast; it is given into the hand of the Chaldeans.” 44 ‘Men will buy fields for money, sign and seal deeds, and call in witnesses in the land of Benjamin, in the environs of Jerusalem, in the cities of Judah, in the cities of the hill country, in the cities of the lowland and in the cities of the Negev; for I will restore their fortunes,’ declares the Lord.” (NASB95)***

Ezekiel anticipated future days of restoration, when the people of God would forsake idolatry, and share a divinely-ordered unity: “I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them... that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and do them” (Ezek. 11:14-21).

*Ezekiel 11:14-21 ... 14 Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 15 “Son of man, your brothers, your relatives, your fellow exiles and the whole house of Israel, all of them, are those to whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, ‘Go far from the Lord; this land has been given us as a possession.’ 16 “Therefore say, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “Though I had removed them far away among the nations and though I had scattered them among the countries, yet I was a sanctuary for them a little while in the countries where they had gone.” ’ 17 “Therefore say, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries among which you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.” ’ 18 “When they come there, they will remove all its detestable things and all its abominations from it. 19 **“And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, 20 that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and do them. Then they will be My people, and I shall be their God. 21 “But as for those whose hearts go after their detestable things and abominations, I will bring their conduct down on their heads,” declares the Lord God. (NASB95)***

Such hopes were realized in the apostolic church, as disciples shared spiritual unity, continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer, being bound together with one heart and one soul (Acts 2:42-47; 4:23-35).

Acts 2:42-47 ... 42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. 44 And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; 45 and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. 46 Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. (NASB95)

Acts 4:23-35 ... 23 When they had been released, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, "O Lord, it is You who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them, 25 who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said, 'Why did the Gentiles rage, And the peoples devise futile things? 26 'The kings of the earth took their stand, And the rulers were gathered together Against the Lord and against His Christ.' 27 "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur. 29 "And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, 30 while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus." 31 And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness. 32 And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. 33 And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. 34 For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales 35 and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need. (NASB95)

Conclusion

The church of our Lord is a diverse group, composed of believers from differing backgrounds, experiences, ethnicities, etc. In Christ Jesus, distinctions that otherwise segregate are set aside: there is neither Jew or Greek, circumcised or uncircumcised, male or female, rich or poor, barbarian, Scythian, slave or freeman (Gal. 3:26-29; Col. 3:9-11).

Galatians 3:26-29 ... 26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 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. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise. (NASB95)

Colossians 3:9-11 ... 9 Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, 10 and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him— 11 a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all. (NASB95)

Despite such diversity, there must also be conformity: we must be obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which we were committed (Rom. 6:17-18), and we must become conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29-30).

Romans 6:17-18 ... 17 But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, 18 and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. (NASB95)

Romans 8:29-30 ... 29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. (NASB95)

Accordingly, three questions are of paramount importance: Do you know the truth (John 8:31-32)? Do you love the truth (2 Thess. 2:10-12)? Have you obeyed the truth (Rom. 2:4-11)?

John 8:31-32 ... 31 So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." (NASB95)

2 Thessalonians 2:10-12 ... 10 and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. 11 For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, 12 in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness. (NASB95)

Romans 2:4-11 ... 4 Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? 5 But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, 6 who will render to each person according to his deeds: 7 to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; 8 but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. 9 There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, 10 but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 11 For there is no partiality with God. (NASB95)

Original Article in the Houston Chronicle

Headline: Diverse picture of alleged drug runners emerges in courtrooms

By DANE SCHILLER

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One accused drug dealer was a male stripper.

Another lives in the suburbs and is the hot-tempered daughter of prison guards.

There is a married Pakistani man with a string of girlfriends. An undocumented Mexican with a purple Hummer who allegedly exploited his contacts in the gay community. And a rural wife who has been looking for her ex-con white supremacist husband who went missing and is presumed dead.

As some of at least 28 people accused of partaking in a machine that pumped millions of dollars in drugs from a Mexican cartel to Houston and the surrounding area appeared in federal courtrooms over the past nine days, so too did the unseemly and diverse picture of this city's alleged drug runners and sellers.

What brought them together, authorities contend, is not only an underground pipeline for cocaine and heroin, but exceptionally pure methamphetamine that went for \$24,000 a pound. That's more than gold.

Records and court testimony show the defendants arrested include people from Mexico, Honduras, Colombia, Pakistan, Israel, Houston, Beaumont and elsewhere. Some players met only by phone.

Others are linked by blood, marriage or friendship — or know each other so intimately that federal agents sometimes had to suddenly stop secretly monitoring phone calls, as drug-driven appetites shifted conversation from selling narcotics to exploring sexual fantasies.

To stay on the line would violate privacy as the talk was not about alleged crimes.

'Can't stay away from it'

Agents are still connecting dots in a case could expand.

"The users can't stay away from it, and the dealers make so much money," said Assistant U.S. Attorney Michelle Englade. "As long as it is so pure, they don't care where they get it from."

More revelations are expected in coming months as defendants either confess to crimes in plea agreements or face accusers at trial.

Busting a group moving a few pounds of methamphetamine is significant. But authorities were stunned to find 25 pounds stuffed in a home's air vent.

And that, authorities contend, is a small slice of what has been at play as many alleged conspirators are part of a family that has been dealing for years and is connected to Mexico's Sinaloa Cartel.

Other defendants lived on the fringes of big-time dealing and were minor players, authorities said.

"I have seen nothing to indicate it is a uniform, typical conspiracy group," said attorney Jim Lindeman. "So many of the conspirators seem to be in very minor roles, if they are proved to be conspirators at all."

Outside a court hearing in Beaumont, spouses and family fretted about how their loved ones could possibly be tied to a cartel.

They were as much a cross section of society as the defendants themselves. A woman from Colombia looked like she stepped off a magazine cover. A burly Texan wore coveralls.

A 32-year-old defendant briefly raised her cuffed and shackled hands to wave at parents as she was led from the courtroom.

They later talked of getting her help with addiction.

Every defendant was indicted on the same charge: conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute narcotics.

They face 10 years to life in prison.

Sources:

Dane Schiller, “Diverse picture of alleged drug runners emerges in courtrooms,” *The Houston Chronicle*, July 7, 2010, Copyright 2010, Houston Chronicle.

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