

THAT THEY ALL MAY BE ONE . . .
BUILDING SHARED MINISTRIES

Urban Shared Ministries Conference
St. Michael's Retreat, Lumsden, SK

Alyson Barnett-Cowan and Peter Wyatt, the ecumenical officers respectively of the Anglican and United Churches, were the leaders of this event. While some registrants came from a distance (Toronto and Winnipeg) most were members of the tri-parish churches of Bread of Life Lutheran, Eastside United and St. Philip Anglican in southeast Regina. Judicatory officials of both the Anglican and Lutheran churches were in attendance.

PRESENTATION I: Motivation for Shared Ministry and Mission

In the first theme presentation, Peter and Alyson both addressed the question of the motivation for shared mission and ministry. Alyson's remarks are found in full in an appendix to these pages. Peter's remarks focussed on the biblical basis for shared mission and ministry:

There are a number of different approaches to justifying shared ministry in the New Testament:

- integrity of the body -- I Cor. 12, Rom. 12, Eph. 4 -- it is inconceivable that we don't need each other and each other's gifts
- the mystery and miracle of inclusion (of the gentiles) - Eph. 2.11ff., Acts 10, 15, Rom. 11 -- God is always surprising us with fresh news about who also belongs in the covenant of faith
- the truth of the gospel implies unity and concord -- I Cor. 1, John 17, Phil. 2. It is this last approach that is explored in the following.

In John 17, the Jesus who prays for the unity of believers (in order that world may believe) shares in a profound intimacy with his Father, an intimacy begun before the foundation of the world. The love shared by the pre-existent Christ (now incarnate) and the Father results in a mutual glorification, as each defers to the other. It is this kind of love that Jesus prays will be in believers. Jesus is praying not only for those who now believe but for all who will believe because of the testimony of present believers.

Glorification may sound like too inflated a word for us, but it has an incontestable benefit for humanity: the gift of eternal life is conferred through this mutual glorification. How? In John's gospel the glorification of Jesus takes place pre-eminently in his suffering and death. Jesus does this willingly; as he says to Pilate: "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above." The glory of God is revealed in the self-offering of love given freely by Jesus. Here is glory in tattered robes.

In Philippians, Paul addresses squabbling in the congregation that seems to be based in conflict between two eminent women, Euodia and Synteche. Is it about some failure to give due credit, or to

make an apology, or to acknowledge the other's gifts and honour? We do not know. But Paul points out that the eternal Christ, refuses to grasp at power and recognition, empties himself and takes the downward way. This one who is "God's Equal" defends his honour, stands on his rights, demands due recognition of legitimacy by divesting himself of all such claims. It is this Jesus Christ who calls Euodia and Synteche, the whole congregation at Philippi and us to "one mind, one heart, one soul" in ministry and mission. Yet if this means greater participation for us today in ecumenical shared ministry, we seem too comfortable and too culturally bound to have this mind of Jesus Christ.

Following the addresses, participants commented on their own understanding of the possible motives for shared ministry and mission. Among them:

a way of modelling unity

practical necessity

there is strength and greater effectiveness when we are together

moving past the details (of denominationalism) to the core of faith

experiencing biblical reality by "having all things in common"

coming to understand our own traditions better

discovering transcendent richness in worship

better able to meet the needs of people

a community of choice not inheritance

"God happens" when people who don't normally get together, get together

newness, difference is exciting

more opportunities for lay ministry

it works and spreads and comes back

interchange of diverse views

sense of belonging to larger community

reflects multi-cultural world we live in

roles of clergy and laity more fluid

PRESENTATION II: Models of Shared Ministry

The video, "Ecumenical Shared Ministry; a Love Story" -- produced in conjunction with the national consultation on ecumenical shared ministry in 1993 -- was shown. Alyson introduced several models of shared ministry, including:

several independent congregations, each with a building agree to covenant for shared ministry

several independent congregations sharing a building

single pastor or joint multiple-staff serving distinct worshiping and/or voting units

united congregation, perhaps with several, varied services of worship

Participants then responded with some account of where their own shared ministries were. A number of critical issues were identified by members of the group, though the precise meaning of some of them is not clear from the phrases on the newsprint:

where is home?
relationship with the denominations
communication
money
role played by personality of leaders
how to formalize relationships
choice of programming
shared ministry "on the margins"
military chaplaincy/prison chaplaincy often overlooked
can there be meaningful worship?
what spirituality undergirds us?
long traditions and big books (denom. traditions and rules)
is there a shared story?
how to deal honestly with issues
it takes a long time
have to absorb traditions of the other
differences/difference
baptism
could reduce clergy in moving to blended ministry
need or choice?
buildings
need to understand the other church well
judicatories -- the bosses
"reel" cultural differences

PRESENTATION III: "Open space" discussions

Saturday afternoon began with the exploration of an envisaged relationship between an Anglican bishop and a United Church presbytery chairperson. Thanks to denomination-reversal in this role-play, the challenge of appointing a new pastor to St. Sarah's on the Prairie was illumined through a glass darkly. A good time was had by all.

After the introduction of the concept of "open space", six topics were posted, discussions ensued and some conclusions essayed:

1. "Can't live with 'em; can't live without 'em!" -- living creatively with the judicatories.
 - need to have ownership of our own mission
 - need to understand relationship of congregation to judicatory and vice versa
 - communicate early and often with judicatory; i.e., establish a relationship (money talks -- work through sharing)
 - recognize primary motive of congregation and judicatory is self-preservation [God help us!]
2. Gathering and incorporating interest from the larger community
 - attract people through uniqueness
 - tell our story to other congregations

-this is an adventure, not a threat to others

3. Mission beyond our denominations: multi-faith, multi-culture
[no yellow stick-ums seemed to have appeared]

4. How does the group motivated by pragmatic solutions connect to the visionary group in shared ministry?

-people are differently motivated [is the point of connection being able to affirm the value of both approaches?]

5. Unfocussed group -- when you've tried everything and you're still committed

-sometimes you have to back off and wait

-focus on prayer

-focus on healing; share the stories

6. Words/Liturgy

-in order to understand and appreciate one another's liturgies it may help to negotiate

The group travelled to the scene of tri-parish collaboration, participated in a late Saturday afternoon liturgy and then enjoyed a tasty barbecued dinner. Afterward, a number of skits and songs were offered in celebration of shared ministry before returning to St. Michael's Retreat.

PRESENTATION IV: Drafting Covenants

On Sunday morning several hand-outs collected by the Saskatoon Centre for Ecumenism were distributed [thanks, Nick!] on the significance and scope of covenants were distributed. The we broke into three groups. Two groups in which members of all three congregations in the tri-parish were present worked on drafting a covenant for the three churches. The third group was composed of all others who reflected on next steps in their ministry settings.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

1. The question was raised as to whether we are ready for another national consultation. Certainly there was agreement that we need to do something like this again and to spread the news about what seems to have been a very successful gathering.

2. The tri-parish shared ministry in SE Regina has moved to a new place: things are both easier and more frank. The ministry exercise shows what the next concrete step might well be.

3. Who takes initiative for future gatherings? [Was an answer given to this question?]

4. There is an inter-relatedness among the local, regional, national and global dimensions of ecumenism.

5. There is Roman Catholic grief that full participation in ecumenical shared ministries is not a reality.

6. What is the constructive role for synods and other judicatories?

7. One might feel awe about the achievements . . . but we need more information and resources. We have only an inkling

8. Some gained new concepts and language to express the vision.

9. We have confirmation that ESM works.

10. Judicatories are slow to believe that ESM can work in urban settings.

A list of participants' e-mail addresses was gathered, to be circulated by Martin.

Glory to God!

Peter Wyatt