

Ecumenical Conversation Starters: Introduction and Topic List

Prayer

Gracious God, we give you thanks for gathering together your people from places near and far, leading us in one Christian faith amidst the vast diversity and expressions of different cultures, histories, and traditions. We give you thanks for naming us as your own, baptizing us as children of God, making us brothers and sisters in Christ. Grant to us, we pray, the ability to rejoice in what we share and not to fear what is different, that we might better come to know you as Lord. We ask this through your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen

Scripture and Meditation

“After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him. This is my message for you.’ So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.”

– Matthew 28:1-8

Introduction

“Go quickly and tell his disciples.” You and I are each Christ’s disciples. Our Christian mission is to go out into the world to spread the good news of the Gospel. We go out into the world to those who are hurting in body and mind; we go out into the world to those who feel oppressed; we go out into the world to those who feel alone and lost. We go out into the world to tell them that death will not have the last word. The tomb is now empty. “He is not here; for he has been raised.”

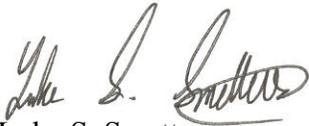
We have been baptized into his family as children of God. Through God’s ever abiding grace we recognize that we are all members of the same Christian family; we are all people of God. We are brothers and sisters in Christ called to uphold one another through life’s trials and tribulations. And we rejoice with one another in what we share, celebrating the many blessings God has bestowed upon us.

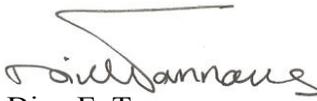
We come from a broad diversity of experiences, cultures, and traditions. Yet, we all come together as the same body of believers. We do not have to fear difference. As Christ prays that we may all be one, so too we also pray for Christian unity. Our prayer for you is that your conversations will be fruitful to your Christian walk.



Ecumenical Conversation Starters

Your brother and sister in Christ,


Luke S. Smetters
Seminary Intern
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ELCA Youth Ministries

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Ecumenical Conversation Starters

“Ecumenical Conversation Starters” is a conversational guide issued by the Department for Ecumenical Affairs of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to stimulate conversation on the presence of ecumenism throughout our lives. These are not intended as position papers but as conversation starters with the hope of deepening faith through creating a greater awareness of the multi-facets of ecumenism. These may be reprinted without permission for use in small groups and other congregational settings.

Your comments regarding these topics and suggestions for future topics are encouraged. To submit personal reflections or the results of a group discussion, use the accompanying Response and Evaluation form located in the back of this resource, or e-mail eainfo@elca.org



Ecumenical Conversation Starters: User's Guide

“Ecumenical Conversation Starters” is a conversational guide comprised of topics of interest from ELCA seminarians who are working toward Christian unity. A wide range of church leaders have been asked to make a written contribution on a given topic, after which the topics were correlated in the present resource. The Department for Ecumenical Affairs of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is happy to distribute these topics in a single resource, which includes information for further study as well as a glossary. The resource is meant to stimulate conversation between Christians on many aspects of ecumenical life and also heighten awareness of how ecumenical issues affect our lives in very practical ways. As a happy outcome, many writers herein conscientiously aim to foster conversation that demystifies the language of ecumenism, making it less unwieldy and more accessible for all of us.

All of the contributing church leaders speak from a deep vocational passion they have on their respective topic. Each of the topics is meant to challenge all of us in some way, and to stretch our horizons as we approach the neighbor in our midst. In this light, “Ecumenical Conversation Starters” is not a resource for Lutherans alone, but rather welcomes the consideration of our fellow Christians from all communions. These aforementioned ELCA seminarians demonstrated that, insofar as we share our concerns toward Christian unity, then we are already living into Jesus’ prayer for his believers at John 17:21, ‘that we might all be one.’

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, in its constitution, has written that this church “seeks in its faith and life to manifest the unity given to the people of God by living together in the love of Christ and by joining with other Christians in prayer and action to express and preserve the unity which the Spirit gives.” (ELCA Constitution 4.02.f.). The Department for Ecumenical Affairs, in seeking to support the constitution of this church, prepared a statement titled *Ecumenism: The Vision of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, which was adopted by the 1991 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. This vision states the following: “The unity of the Church, as it is proclaimed in the scriptures, is a gift and goal of God in Christ Jesus. Ecumenism is the joyous experience of the unity of Christ’s people and the serious task of expressing that unity visibly and structurally to advance the proclamation of the Gospel for the blessing of humankind. Through participation in ecumenical activity, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America seeks to be open in faith to the work of the Spirit, so as to manifest more fully the oneness in Christ.” (Find the entire statement at www.elca.org/ecumenical/vision.html).

Our hope is that those who are participating in these conversations will be enriched and empowered to live out the promise of their baptism with renewed energy for the mission of the Church and the sake of the world.

How to Begin

“Ecumenical Conversation Starters” will assist you in sparking conversation about the presence of ecumenism in our lives. We encourage leaders to re-arrange the topics in an order that most interests your audience. We also encourage you to supplement questions and bring additional appropriate resources. Here are other suggestions:



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- 1.) If you are the leader or convener of the conversation group, prepare by reading through the conversation starter on your own. If you have questions on the material or further interests of your own, then check out the list of additional resources that are provided at the end of each conversation starter.
- 2.) Before you begin each conversation starter, take a few minutes to allow individuals to get situated.
 - Meet in an informal environment that is welcoming to all. Sit in a way that is conversational, making sure you can see everyone.
 - Allow time for individuals to get comfortable and relax from the business of everyday life.
 - Look around the room. Welcome one another. Introduce yourself to people you don't know.
- 3.) Begin each session with the prayer provided. Pray aloud on behalf of those who have gathered or invite someone else to pray. Follow the prayer with a time of silence. A minimum of thirty seconds is suggested for silence.
- 4.) Read, or invite someone else to read, the scripture provided. Then, allow for a time of silence to meditate on the words that were read. Invite the group to share their thoughts and reflections on the scripture. Pay attention to what is important for one another as you hear diverse expressions of the Christian faith.
- 5.) Begin to explore the “Ecumenical Conversation Starter” as someone from the group reads it aloud. Ask the group for their initial reactions. Use the questions to guide you through your conversations together.
- 6.) Finally, thank everyone for their participation in the conversation and conclude with prayer.

These conversation starters were first developed with seminary students in mind. The intention is not to replace classroom education, but rather to supplement classroom learning with informal conversations and personal reflection between students.

The conversational nature and devotional style of this resource also lends itself to be used in a parish setting. Understanding the tremendous presence of ecumenism in our lives can be very exciting. Adults and youth alike will have much to say about the work of ecumenism. Adult forums and youth groups may be comfortable and inviting environments in which to begin these conversations.



Your Personal Story & Ecumenism

Prayer

Gracious God, we pray for your holy catholic Church. Fill it with all truth and peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in anything it is amiss, reform it; where it is right, strengthen it; where it is in need, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it; for the sake of Jesus Christ, your Son our Savior. Amen

– Prayer for the Church, Lutheran Book of Worship

Scripture and Meditation

“One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, ‘Which commandment is the first of all?’ Jesus answered, ‘The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

– Mark 12:28-32

Ecumenism – My Story

By Luke S. Smetters, Seminary Student at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, Illinois

In a traditional sense, I’m about as “Lutheran” as you can possibly get. My grandfather is a Lutheran pastor and my mother is a church organist. Not only am I the first-born child, but I am also my grandparents’ first grandchild. I literally grew up in the church. Yet, during my undergraduate education, I would discover that life was much greater than my small Lutheran bubble. I attended Valparaiso University, an independent Lutheran institution. Independent meaning that it is not directly affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) or The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LCMS), although each church body supports the institution in different ways. The unique environment this university offers is one where students of both the ELCA and the LCMS traditions have come together, joining in a common dialogue. Perhaps even more significant, Valparaiso University is only 40 percent Lutheran, which means that the remaining 60 percent come from a variety of denominational and interfaith backgrounds.

During my pre-seminary studies at Valparaiso University, my best friend was also engaged in pre-seminary studies. Although we shared many things in common, one of the main differences between us were the Lutheran traditions in which we were raised. He was raised in the LCMS tradition while I was raised in the tradition of the ELCA. Another close friend of mine was of the Roman Catholic faith. My friends and I would regularly engage in weekly conversations asking one another questions in order that we might gain a better understanding and appreciation for our diverse traditions. We wrestled together over the questions: Why do some of our churches have a closed communion policy, withholding the Eucharistic feast from



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certain individuals? What allows other churches to freely give out communion to anyone who comes forward? At what age should children begin to receive the sacrament? We would discuss these questions for hours at a time, often taking us into the wee hours of the night. Sunday after Sunday, we each confessed ourselves to be members of the one holy catholic and apostolic church. Yet, we constantly asked how we were modeling this belief in our daily lives?

David Truemper, chair of the theology department and close mentor to me during my studies at Valparaiso University, strongly encouraged ecumenical thinking in each one of his classes. He had been a member in the LCMS for much of his life, but transferred to the ELCA for reasons of personal faith. Yet, he encouraged a relationship between these two Lutheran bodies at the Institute of Liturgical Studies, an annual conference that attracts pastors and other church leaders. He had also sat on various ecumenical dialogues that would work to establish full communion relationships with other denominations.

Through the lessons of my mentor David and my close friends my passion for ecumenism has evolved into what it is today. My friends and I have developed a passionate faith in which we celebrate our differences and sincerely care for one another. It is an ecumenical faith in which we acknowledge one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, children of the same heavenly Father.

By Dina E. Tannous, Program Administrative Staff, Department for Youth Ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Having studied in a theological institution, ecumenism was always talked about in several classes that I have taken. Many people try to define what ecumenism is, and write pages and pages of theological and well-written reflections on ecumenism. I, personally, approach ecumenism differently. I don't need a book or a dictionary to tell me what ecumenism is, I know what it is first hand from my life story and experiences.

I was brought up in Palestine in the Middle East. I have always been a minority among a minority among a minority. What I mean is that, we, the Palestinian people, are the minority among the Israeli people. We, the Christian community, are the minority among the Palestinian people. We, the Lutheran community, are the minority among the Christians.

I was raised in a home with two parents who came from two different denominational backgrounds. My mother was Greek Orthodox, whose maternal grandfather was a Greek Orthodox priest, and whose father was a lay leader in the Greek Orthodox Church. My father, on the other hand, is second generation Lutheran whose father was one of the first members of the Lutheran church in my home town, Ramallah. I was brought up Lutheran, but at the same time, the Orthodox traditions and teachings were observed and practiced to some degree by my mother, who had passed them onto me. I have had many discussions with friends and other family members from different Christian backgrounds about their Christian faith and traditions. In Palestine, most Christians, who comprise less than 2 percent of the total Palestinian population, are Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic (Malachite), or Roman Catholic. So, I was in a sense, *different* than most of my friends when it came to my religious traditions. However, I was the *same* in believing in Christian unity and the same in believing in one Savior, Jesus Christ.

Due to the long and rich history of different religions in Palestine, I was always aware of interfaith relations. As I mentioned, the Christian community was the smallest of all. We lived



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with two other major religions in Palestine – Judaism and Islam, particularly Islam. Even though I went to a Lutheran school in Ramallah, many students were Muslim. We had Christian education classes and Muslim education classes. These experiences gave me an opportunity to learn more about the background of the people I lived with and interacted with everyday. Interfaith Ecumenism shaped who I am right now. Without these experiences, I would be different on where I stand on certain issues, specifically with respect to religious ethics and tolerance. So, again, I was different than most of my Muslim friends in our religious backgrounds. But we were united in believing in One God and one cause – peace, freedom, and justice, for our country Palestine.

Ecumenism – Your Story

Tell your own personal story and invite others to share theirs.

Questions for Further Reflection

- A) Why did we share these stories? Why do they impact us? How do these stories shape us?
- B) What impact does ecumenism have on our lives?
- C) What does it mean to confess our faith in the whole catholic Church?
- D) What does this have to do with our Lutheran identity?

Additional Resources

Department for Ecumenical Affairs, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
Telephone: 800-638-3522 x2610 www.elca.org/ecumenical

Visit the ELCA Ecumenical Affairs website and download “Ecumenism and the ELCA”, the Powerpoint presentation on Ecumenical Life in the ELCA.

[Ecumenism: The Vision of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.](http://www.elca.org/ecumenical/vision.html)
www.elca.org/ecumenical/vision.html

[Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement, 2nd Edition](#), World Council of Churches, WCC Publications, Geneva Switzerland, 2002.

[Directory For the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism.](#) Vatican City, March 25, 1993.

[A History of the Ecumenical Movement](#), Volumes I-III, World Council of Churches.

[Growing Consensus II: Church Dialogues in the United States, 1992-2004.](#) eds. Lydia Veliko and Jeffrey Gros, FSC, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, D.C., 2005.



Baptism & Ecumenism

Prayer

Gracious God, we give you thanks for freeing your sons and daughters from the power of sin and for raising them up to a new life through the sacrament of Holy Baptism. Pour out your Holy Spirit upon each of us: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in your presence. Amen

– Lutheran Book of Worship, *Service of Holy Baptism*

Scripture and Meditation

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the results of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what God has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.”

– Ephesians 2:8-10

Baptism & Ecumenism

A) *By the Rev. Mark S. Hanson, presiding bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*

At the baptismal font we are bathed in God’s grace, sealed with the Holy Spirit, and marked with the cross of Christ forever. God’s claim upon us is a truly amazing display of grace. For there we are, having done nothing to earn this grace, and yet here God is, claiming us. We are marked in flowing water with the cross forever. Through our baptisms we live in God’s amazing grace. “Living in God’s amazing grace” is the declaration that abundant life is a gift from God freely given. In times when our land is parched and the earth is not forthcoming, the living memory of our baptism calls us back into the giftedness of life.

B) *By the Most Rev. Frank T. Griswold, presiding bishop, The Episcopal Church*

And what have our baptisms done to us? Through baptism we are bound together with others and declared limbs – body parts – of the risen Lord who lives his life of reconciling love in and through us. God’s love becomes embodied in us. Baptism, therefore, is God’s act before it is our own. God draws us to himself and takes us out of our presumed separateness into a new web of relationship that unites us with others beyond personal affinity. Questions of whether we like someone or not, whether we agree or not, are no longer relevant. Something far more fundamental has happened: God has knit us together in a body not of our own making, and Christ is the head and consciousness of this body.

C) *By Dr. Ogbu U. Kalu, Henry Winters Luce Professor of World Christianity and Missions, McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago, IL, Presbyterian Church U.S.A.*

Traditions have mounted barriers that use baptism to exclude and define others. In the mission fields, racism mounted more barriers around the font. For instance, a seeker in some



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parts of the world must attend a year's class and receive a Western name. We have lost the sense, power, and ethical implications of baptism. To be baptized is to be immersed in the life of the Triune God, to experience forgiveness and salvation, and to become sealed in a new covenant relationship. New life does not end in the event of our baptism. Rather, the event of baptism is only the beginning of a life-long journey. We follow the footsteps of Christ, are continuously sanctified, and are at once a sinner and a saint.

Baptism initiates, anoints, incorporates, and sensitizes all of the baptized to the needs of the whole inhabited earth that God created, a world into which Jesus was sent in order to redeem it from the forces of darkness. Baptism is God's way of building a new community within the world that in its being, saying, and doing, becomes the sign, witness, representative, and foretaste of the reign of God.

D) *By the Rev. Dr. Lynn Japinga, associate professor of religion, Hope College, Holland, Michigan, the Reformed Church in America*

As a pastor I never mind when babies fuss or even wail while they are being baptized, because a cranky baby makes the symbolism even more meaningful. It would not be so difficult for God to look at a beautiful placid baby and say, "There's a worthy candidate for grace. I'll pick that one." But instead God sees a bellowing, red-faced infant who does not want to be there, and God says, "This one needs grace!" Some of us come peacefully into God's kingdom, and some of us come kicking and screaming and red-faced. Baptism is not about us.

Questions for Further Reflection

A)

- 1) Bishop Hanson writes that through baptism we are "marked with the cross of Christ forever." He describes this experience of God's grace as "amazing." What words would you use to describe your baptism? In what ways is baptism "amazing"?
- 2) The "living memory" or your baptism is the life-long recognition that God has claimed you through your baptism. When your "land is parched" and life is difficult, does the living memory of your baptism help?
- 3) How does our worship together assist us in remembering our baptisms?
- 4) If you were planning a baptism service, what might you add to the liturgy? For example, would you include any special artwork or personal statements of faith?

B)

- 5) Read where Paul talks about being members of one body (1 Cor. 12:12). What does it mean to be a limb?
- 6) How do you imagine baptism helping us to overcome disagreement or conflict?
- 7) How do we daily remember and live out our baptism as Christians and within our own denominations?



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8) What is the relationship between your baptism and your work in the world? What is the relationship between your baptism and your neighbor?

C)

9) What does it mean to die daily and be born again into new life? Why “new life,” why not just “life?”

10) Dr. Kalu writes that baptism has also been used to “exclude and define others.” What example does he give to this end?

11) Have you ever experienced a barrier in a community or social situation? Please explain. How can baptism remove barriers between different people and different cultures?

12) As we spread the Gospel in our missionary efforts, who do we baptize and why?

13) If two parents come from differing faith traditions, what determines when the children will be baptized?

14) What community does baptism welcome us into and why do we not have to be re-baptized if we change denominations?

D)

15) If baptism is not about us but about God, does that mean that we do nothing? Are we completely passive at our baptisms? How do we respond to God’s grace? What is the role of faith, repentance, and belief in our response?

16) Do you remember your baptism? What happened and what was most meaningful for you? Or if you do not remember, what about your baptism has become meaningful for you?

Additional Resources

Department for Ecumenical Affairs, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Telephone: 800-638-3522 x2610 www.elca.org/ecumenical

Talking Points: The Amazing Gift of Your Baptism

<http://www.elca.org/ecumenical/resources/Baptism.pdf>

Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry 1982-1990: Report on the Process and Responses. WCC Publications, Geneva.

<http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/faith/bem1.html>

Guidelines and Worship Resources for the Celebration of Full Communion: The Episcopal Church and The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

<http://www.elca.org/ecumenical/fullCommunion/episcopal/guidelines/index.html>

By Water and the Spirit: A United Methodist Understanding of Baptism.

www.gbod.org/worship/articles/water_spirit/

Lutheran Book of Worship “Holy Baptism.” Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, 1978, pp121-125.



Department for Ecumenical Affairs of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
1-800-638-3522 ext. 2610 www.elca.org/ecumenical

Eucharist & Ecumenism

Prayer

O God, we give you thanks that you have set before us the Eucharistic feast, the body and blood of your Son. By your Spirit strengthen us to serve all in want and to give ourselves away as bread for the hungry, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

– Renewing Worship, *Service of Holy Communion*

Scripture and Meditation

“The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”

– 1 Corinthians 11:23b-26

Eucharist & Ecumenism

By the Rev. David E. Jensen, Ascension Lutheran Church, Minocqua, Wisconsin

Part I – Eucharist and The Use of the Means of Grace:

At the 1997 Churchwide Assembly, the ELCA adopted a new statement *The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament*. Part three of the statement, “Holy Communion and the Christian Assembly,” was the result of three historic changes in our church’s understanding of Eucharistic practice. These historic changes were: first, the renewed commitment to the sacrament as the feast of all the baptized; second, a change to the weekly offering of the sacrament; and third, new insights into how children learn through participation in the sacrament. *The Use of the Means of Grace* urges congregations to take a closer look at their own practice of the Eucharist.

What are the ecumenical implications of these changes with respect to weekly practice? The weekly celebration of the ELCA’s practice is rooted both in the teaching of the reformers and the historic fabric of the early church. The central role of the Eucharistic meal in our weekly worship points beyond our denominational identity to the unity desired by the meal’s host. The desire of our Lord, the host, is that we “might all be one” (John 17:21). Joining our lives and our hunger for unity at this table is another means through which we express our baptismal unity. Although all of the baptized are invited to our table, we grieve that some cannot fully participate. Yet, we look with hope to that time when our disparate communities can bridge the remaining gulf that divides us. This meal is a “foretaste of the feast to come.” Its eschatological and profound ecclesial implications are visible as we proclaim that great mystery – “Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again.”



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Another significant contribution from *The Use of the Means of Grace* is the invitation to the Table. Paragraph 37 states: “Admission to the Table is by invitation of the Lord, presented through the Church to those who are baptized.” Within the Church of Christ a variety of practices exist. For instance, in the Eastern Rite infants receive their first communion immediately following their baptism. Roman Catholic and Episcopal churches celebrate first communion at approximately first grade. And for generations, Lutherans have celebrated first communion either in conjunction with confirmation, or more recently, about fifth grade. *The Use of the Means of Grace* suggests: the age for reception of first communion “should be determined through mutual conversation.” This conversation involves pastor, parents, children and congregational representation. Such conversation allows for local options that remain in line with our Confessions and the historic practice of the Church.

Questions for Part One

- A) What are Pastor Jensen’s main concerns in this text?
- B) What are the main points attributed to *The Use of the Means of Grace* as stated above? How have you understood the sacrament of the Eucharist?
- C) Pastor Jensen seems to suggest that an ecumenical catechesis could be developed, with Christians from various traditions discussing the central significance of the Eucharist to the life of the baptized. What are advantages and disadvantages that you can see from such a development?
- D) How could an ecumenical catechesis or community discussion focusing on the role of the Eucharist speak to our world’s brokenness?

Part II – Eucharist and *The Lima Report*:

Finally, I am mindful of the contributing documents to *The Lima Report: Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* of the World Council of Churches, General Assembly in Peru. Two distinguishing means of understanding sacramental transmission and priority exist in our churches:

Christ → sacraments → church

- vs -

Christ → church → sacraments

In a state of disunity, I strongly suggest that we choose the former understanding. That is, that the sacraments fully belong to Christ and are given as vehicles of his presence to lead the church to obedient acknowledgement of the Kingdom of God.

When our sacramental priorities are challenged by our disunity, we are obligated to choose the Lord’s supper over the church’s supper, and that means intercommunion is a clear result. Practically understood, such an approach would enable local communities to participate at the Lord’s Table both as an expression of current unity and as a hope for increasing and deepening unity. When disunity forces us to choose between the Eucharist’s expressive and creative values, we would do well to choose the creative value. In this way, the practice of intercommunion would clarify the misunderstanding that this imperfect unity is cheaply enjoyed.



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It takes seriously the eschatological tension between the “already and the not yet.” At the Lord’s supper the Eucharist is a foretaste of that heavenly meal to come, and at this heavenly meal we are all guests. This meal continues to increase in us the desire for greater unity than can be achieved on our own. This gift of Christ continues to feed us for that journey toward the unity that awaits us.

Questions for Part Two

- A) What is the difference between “Christ → sacraments → church, versus Christ → church → sacraments?” What are the implications of these models on Christology and ecclesiology?
- B) As a feast that nourishes the baptized, and in a world in search of belonging, how does intercommunion raise the value and dignity of human life when seen in partnership with a suffering God?

Additional Resources

Department for Ecumenical Affairs, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Telephone: 800-638-3522 x2610 www.elca.org/ecumenical

The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament.
<http://www.elca.org/dcm/worship/worship/sacraments/umg.html>

The Lima Report: Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry 1982-1990: Report on the Process and Responses. WCC Publications, Geneva.
<http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/faith/bem1.html>

H. Davies, Bread of Life and Cup of Joy: Newer Ecumenical Perspectives on the Eucharist, Grand Rapids IL, Eerdmans, 1993.



Spirituality & Ecumenism

Prayer

Pray for openness of mind and heart. Pray the words of Jesus from John 17...

Scripture and Meditation

“Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth. I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

– John 17:17-23

Spirituality & Ecumenism

By Deaconess April L. Boyden, Director for Congregation Life at Faith Lutheran Church, Knoxville, Tennessee

Ecumenism by definition is the movement toward unity or cooperation among Christians. Why should we care about things ecumenically? Because we follow Christ who prayed that we would be One.

Spirituality has many definitions in our current day and culture. While it can be a valuable exercise in itself for each person to explore their own definition, for the sake of this article I would like to claim the somewhat simple definition that spirituality is how we experience God and how such experience impacts how we relate to each other and the whole creation.

God made us uniquely and speaks to us individually. God gives us each other and nurtures us to live communally. When we share with each other the voice of God that we have heard, we hear both the familiar that comforts and thrills us and the foreign that challenges and beckons us.

Spirituality is intimately personal while at the same time entirely universal. Thus an important aspect of the ecumenical movement needs to be about the ministry of listening one to another. We listen to hear another speak the words that we thought only we knew, and delight in being known! Simultaneously, we listen with longing to hear the words that are wholly new to us, desiring to hear the truth that we do not yet know, because we know full well we do not have all the answers.



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It occurs to me that exploring spirituality ecumenically is more about what we don't know than what we do know. While we are often divided in the things we think we know for sure, we are united in mystery. Our doctrines, practices and opinions establish foundational differences that lead to argument and defense. But mystery opens us to wonder together. It is not so much that we are united in ignorance and there find bliss, but that we are united in mystery and there find awe, experiencing the holy.

When exploring our spiritual depths we find ourselves asking the most basic of life's questions. Who am I? Why am I here? Who are you? What do we do together? They are questions of value and belonging, of calling and relationship. Finding ourselves broken, the questions lead to our need for forgiveness. Finding ourselves gifted, the questions lead to a sense of hope. Hope for a world where all are welcome, all are whole and all is well.

Henri Nouwen answers the question of belonging by saying that, "not being welcome is your greatest fear. It connects with your birth fear, your fear of not being welcome in this life, and your death fear, your fear of not being welcome in the life after this. It is the deep-seated fear that it would have been better if you had not lived...(but) everything Jesus is saying to you can be summarized in the words, 'Know that you are welcome'" (Nouwen, 118).

Christ prayed for our unity when he was most vulnerable, anticipating the cross. When we are honest, we know that to be human is to be vulnerable. We are united in this. Ironically, when we remain vulnerably open to each other, we find new union that makes us strong, strong enough to use our gifts to seek unity in a broken world.

Questions for Further Reflection

- A) Who is God?
- B) How does God speak to you? Of what does God speak to you?
- C) Have you experienced another's sharing about God as an "aha moment" where you knew what they were saying?
- D) What has someone shared with you about their spirituality that surprised you? challenged you? angered you? comforted you? stirred you?
- E) What is easy about discussing spirituality? What is difficult about discussing spirituality?
- F) What does it mean to "hope for a world where all are welcome?" What makes you feel welcome? How does knowing that you are welcome bring you a sense of peace?
- G) What does it mean to be the body of Christ and to exercise our spirituality with Christians from other denominations?
- H) What is the relationship between spirituality and ecumenism? How do they compliment one another?
- I) Is there hope for ecumenical conversations about spirituality?



Additional Resources

Department for Ecumenical Affairs, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
Telephone: 800-638-3522 x2610 www.elca.org/ecumenical

Lutheran Deaconess Association. Telephone: 219-464-6925 www.valpo.edu/lda/

The Deaconess Community of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Telephone: 800-638-3522 x1705 www.deaconess-elca.org/

Nouwen, Henri. The Inner Voice of Love: A Journey Through Anguish to Freedom.
Doubleday, 1996.

Cave, Kathryn. Henry's Song. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 2000.

Wood, Douglas. Old Turtle. Scholastic Press, New York, NY, 1992.

Wood, Douglas. Old Turtle and the Broken Truth. Scholastic Press, New York, NY, 2003.



Worship & Ecumenism

Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

– Lord’s Prayer

Scripture and Meditation

“So David and the elders of Israel, and the commanders of the thousands, went to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord from the house of Obed-edom with rejoicing. And because God helped the Levites who were carrying the ark of the covenant of the Lord, they sacrificed seven bulls and seven rams. David was clothed with a robe of fine linen, as also were all the Levites who were carrying the ark, and the singers, and Chenaniah the leader of the music of the singers; and David wore a linen ephod. So all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the Lord with shouting, to the sound of the horn, trumpets, and cymbals, and made loud music on harps and lyres.”

– 1 Chronicles 15:25-28

Worship & Ecumenism

By the Rev. Dr. Mark Bangert, John H. Tietjen Chair of Pastoral Ministry: Worship and Church Music at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, Illinois

The “Lord’s” prayer means that it is not owned by anyone apart from Jesus Christ who gave it to the community bearing his name. We seek it out as common ground, even when translations and doxologies confound us, because it affords some sense of respite from our attempts to reconcile the marks of disunity among us. “Christ is not divided,” said Visser ‘t Hooft to the first assembly of the World Council of Churches. When we pray “your Kingdom come,” a bond between worship and ecumenism emerges that can only mean a personal vocation for each of us to seek out unity in worship and worship in unity.

Sounds good, and we pray such things earnestly, holding hands to demonstrate our holy common calling. But things get in the way. Often we confuse contextualizations of worship with confessional positions for which we are ready to sacrifice our intellectual and vocational lives. The relationship between culture and worship lends us a pathway by which we might find unity beyond localization of Word and Sacrament. Or, fondness for one way of laying out in worship the common things given to us prevents us from acknowledging other ways, and closes to us the gifts of the Spirit in other times and in other places. Or, to bring this short list to a conclusion, our desire for an undivided Christ in an undivided church can be short-circuited when other agendas, important as they might be, delay or transform the longing for that kingdom



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to come, especially among us. The bond between worship and ecumenism directs us in at least five ways:

First, taking a cue from Visser 't Hooft, our vocation is to seek Christ above all, “for in seeking Christ we will find one another.” The Ditchingham Letter of 1994 says it clearly:

“We are one as we dwell in him and as, through him, the Holy Trinity dwells in us. We must become, visibly, what, in his mercy, we already are. For this drawing near to Christ, communal assembly for worship is essential.”

Second, we can find strength to stay the course in our baptism. The imprint of that event brings us back again and again to the “one Lord and one faith” and will not let us wander away from the font as if there is more wisdom and higher calling elsewhere.

Third, while differences in ministry and eucharist constitute some of the most serious components of our disunity, the eucharistic meal also offers each time a vision of what might be. That Spirit-prompted vision, poured upon eating and assembly, brings also intensified vigor for vocation as faithful pray-ers of the “Lord’s” Prayer.

Fourth, we dare not be satisfied with status quo. Ecumenism is not some left-over from the pie-in-the-sky, if not giddy, 70s. Rather, it is a powerful by-product of any and all worship done in the name of Jesus. To pray for the kingdom is to resist the notion that divisions will persist and are part of this postmodern world.

Finally, the bond between ecumenism and worship urges us to seek the meaning and intent behind those viewpoints, practices, bents, and quirks we each hold to be especially dear, all the while honoring the same in those different from us. The bond will become clearer and stronger as we know and love ourselves and each other more intensely. In fact, we will be given to see the body of Christ in a divided, broken world.

Excerpt from Faith and Order Paper #171

“In seeking Christ in *worship* together with Christians from various confessions and from all the world over, they experience “glimpses of unity, foretastes of full koinonia”. Many testify that it is such experiences that give them the strength to continue in the search for unity and in acts of common prophetic witness and service. Surely there are difficult moments, and deep hurt, as when Christians are unable to eat together at the table of the Lord. Yet even such moments may inspire us to work harder to resolve those divisions which keep us eating and drinking at our separate tables. *For we are not the only ones who desire our unity*: the Spirit itself hungers and thirsts for our unity, and the Spirit’s desire is unquenchable, and finally it will prevail.”

Questions for Further Reflection

- A) How do you seek to live out the words of the Lord’s Prayer, “Your kingdom come?” How do these words shape our common Christian mission?
- B) Can you identify personal viewpoints in your community that frustrate worship and delay the coming of the kingdom? How might you work peacefully to reconcile those with whom the tensions exist?



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- C) How do you experience unity through the eating and drinking of the Eucharistic meal? Why can some of us not share together in the Eucharist? How does the Eucharistic meal offer us a vision of what might be?
- D) In what ways can worship help foster and reveal unity? What components of the service would need to be planned with greater sensitivity towards differences?
- E) Why is it important to understand each other's "bents" and "quirks"? How do we respectfully go about discovering what those are?
- F) How do our many diverse styles of worship express our unity in the one body of Christ?

Additional Resources

Department for Ecumenical Affairs, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
Telephone: 800-638-3522 x2610 www.elca.org/ecumenical

The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament
<http://www.elca.org/dcm/worship/worship/sacraments/umg.html>

"A Letter on Koinonia in Worship," *So We Believe, So We Pray*. eds. Thomas Best and Dagmar Heller, Faith and Order Paper No. 171, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1995.

Where Liturgy and Ecumenism Embrace. G. Wainwright, New York, Oxford UP, 1997.

"Worship and the Oneness of Christ's Church", in *The Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order at Montreal*. eds. Rodger and L. Vischer, London, SCM Press, 1964.



The Church in the Public Sphere & Ecumenism

Prayer

Everliving God, strengthen and sustain all your people, that with patience and understanding we may love and care for one another. Grant that together we may follow Jesus Christ, offering you our gifts and talents. We ask this through Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

– The Book of Common Prayer, *Celebration of a New Ministry*

Scripture and Meditation

“And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

– Luke 1:76-79

The Church in the Public Sphere & Ecumenism

By the Rev. Dr. Kurt Hendel, Bernard, Fischer, Westberg Distinguished Ministry Professor of Reformation History at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, Illinois

The beginnings of the contemporary ecumenical movement are generally traced to the World Missionary Conference which met in Edinburgh in 1910. The missionary enterprise of the nineteenth century had awakened a sense of Christian unity and had promoted regular contact and even cooperation among denominations in various parts of the world. Those experiences gave rise to the ecumenical spirit. Another milestone in the development of modern ecumenism was the Life and Work movement which eventually became a constituent part of the World Council of Churches, one of the most concrete expressions of modern ecumenism. Nathan Söderblom, the chief architect and proponent of Life and Work, was convinced that Christian communities, particularly in Europe and North America, were willing to cooperate in addressing contemporary social, political and economic problems. Life and Work was intended to give them an institutional structure for doing so. Warfare, racism, imperialism, economics and other social and moral concerns thus captured the attention of the ecumenical movement from its very beginning. The urgent nature of these problems, an ecclesiastical pragmatism which recognized that communities which disagreed regarding doctrine, liturgy and polity could become partners in addressing practical global challenges and, of course, specific theological convictions have fostered cooperative ecumenical efforts in the past.

These factors continue to inspire ecumenically-minded ecclesiastical communities today. Although the validity and efficacy of the church’s role in the public sphere remain volatile issues, especially in the North American context, the question is not whether the church should seek to impact the public sphere but what that impact should be. Faith is never simply a private matter, nor is it solely a central component of the divine-human relationship. Rather, faith is the



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dynamic, divine gift that informs all aspects of life as it reminds both the individual and the community that believers live life *coram deo* – in God’s presence. Such a life is formed by the gospel and seeks to reflect God’s will. The gospel is always at the heart of the Christian experience, for it is the radical good news of life, salvation and freedom in and through the Christ. Faith is created and nurtured by means of that gospel, and life is then lived faithfully in light of the gospel. Of course, the gospel is not law. It does not compel the individual or the community to do God’s will, to address evil wherever it is manifest, to promote fullness of life, to strive for justice and to seek the common good. Rather, the gospel and faith free believers to do so. They also unite them as members of the body of Christ and as spiritual sisters and brothers who are part of the same family, the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. As members of this family, people of faith are best able to live life in God’s presence in community, and they are the most effective instruments of the gospel in the world when they celebrate and manifest their unity by working together to transform society through works of love which manifest their faith and which are consistent with the gospel.

Questions for Further Reflection

- A) The question is not whether the church should impact the public sphere but what that impact should be. Do you agree with this assertion? If so, why? If not, why?
- B) What do you believe the public role of the church to be?
- C) What theological convictions inspire and guide the church’s public role?
- D) What criterion/a should be used to determine whether the church’s public stance is faithful, life-giving and just?
- E) Why is ecumenical cooperation crucial for the public witness of the church, both pragmatically and theologically?
- F) How is your faith nurtured by the Gospel? How do you live your life out faithfully in light of the Gospel?
- G) How does the Gospel free you as a member of the Christian community “to do God’s will, to address evil wherever it is manifest, to promote fullness of life, to strive for justice and to seek the common good?”
- H) How do you feel in the knowledge that we are all “spiritual sisters and brothers?” What significance does this knowledge have as part of your Christian identity?



Additional Resources

Department for Ecumenical Affairs, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
Telephone: 800-638-3522 x2610 www.elca.org/ecumenical

Söderblom: Ecumenical Pioneer, C.J. Curtis, Minneapolis, Augsburg, 1967.

Nathan Söderblom: His Life and Work, B. Sundkler, Lund, Gleerup, 1968.

Movements for International Friendship and Life and Work: 1910-1925, and 1925-1948, N. Karlström and N. Ehrenström, in HI-II.

A Documentary History of the Faith and Order Movement, 1927-1963, ed. L. Vischer, St Louis MO, Bethany, 1963.

Documentary History of Faith and Order 1963-1993, ed. G. Gassmann, WCC, 1993.

Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs. (LOGA) Telephone: 202-626-7942. www.loga.org

Lutheran Office for World Community. (LOWC) Telephone: 212-808-5360.
www.elca.org/dcs/lowc.html



Ecumenical Organizations & Ecumenism

Prayer

Look with pity, O heavenly Father, upon the people in this land who live with injustice, terror, disease, and death as their constant companions. Have mercy upon us. Help us to eliminate cruelty to these our neighbors. Strengthen those who spend their lives establishing equal protection of the law and equal opportunities for all. And grant that every one of us may enjoy a fair portion of the abundance of this land; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

– The Lutheran Book of Worship

Scripture and Meditation

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.”

– Matthew 5:3-11

Ecumenical Organizations & Ecumenism

By Kathy Magnus, Director, Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Regional officer, North America

In a culture where “individual rights” and “silo mentality” are part of everyday conversation, the ELCA stands bold in our counter-culture commitment to sit at table with others in the faith community as we discuss our shared mission and ministry and our call as people of faith to act for the healing of the world. Those invited to the “table” are as diverse as the Christian communities in which we live and work. While we live in the context of our own communities, we are called to be “no longer strangers and sojourners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.”

National and global ecumenical organizations provide the table where we gather, not as strangers, but as family. At these tables our combined efforts on behalf of the poor and oppressed find vision and voice. According to Dr. Ishmael Noko, General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, “This wider communion must become for us more than an abstract, faceless reality. We must be able to touch, hear, taste and experience this reality firsthand. These face-to-face kinds of communications and interaction enrich, test out and deepen what it truly means to be a communion.”

Christians have gathered in informal diverse groups for centuries. Since the mid-twentieth century, these gatherings have taken shape as formal national and international organizations. The Lutheran World Federation, representing nearly 66 million of the world’s Lutherans, acts on behalf of its member churches in areas of common interest such as ecumenical



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and interfaith, human rights, humanitarian assistance, theology and mission development. The World Council of Churches with 340 churches, denominations and church fellowships represents some 400 million Christians, promoting a goal of visible unity and common witness in mission and evangelism. In the U.S. the National Council of Churches works with 100,000 congregations in 36 Christian church bodies.

Working together, we build new bridges over ancient chasms, putting our faith into action while deepening relationships with one another in a complex 21st century.

Questions for Further Reflection

- A) Can you think of a time when a group of individuals came together in order to achieve a common purpose? How was their impact strengthened by their working together for that common goal?
- B) Can you name some of the “ancient chasms” that keep our church divided? How might we create new “bridges” and deepen relationships in this new century?
- C) How does working together with people different from us shed light on our own personal identity? Similarly, how do we more deeply understand our denominational identity through working with people of other denominations and faith traditions?
- D) What are the benefits of listening to the voices of people from around the world?

Additional Resources

Department for Ecumenical Affairs, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Telephone: 800-638-3522 x2610 www.elca.org/ecumenical

Lutheran World Federation (LWF) www.lutheranworld.org

World Council of Churches (WCC) www.wcc-coe.org

National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA (NCCC) www.nccusa.org

Christian Churches Together (CCT) www.christianchurchestogether.org

Churches Uniting In Christ (CUIC) www.eden.edu/cuic/cuic.htm



The Three-Year Lectionary & Ecumenism

Prayer

Father, your eternal Word speaks to us through the words of Holy Scripture. We read about your mighty acts and purposes in history, and about those whom you chose as the agents of your will. Inspired by the revelation of your Son, we seek your present purposes. Give us ears to hear and hearts to obey. May the words of our mouths, and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord our God. Purify the lives and the lips of those who speak, that your word only may be proclaimed, and your word only may be heard. Amen.

– The Book of Common Prayer, *The Dedication and Consecration of a Church*

Scripture and Meditation

“We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Each of us must please our neighbor for the good purpose of building up the neighbor. For Christ did not please himself; but, as it is written, ‘The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.’ For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

– Romans 15:1-7

The Three-Year Lectionary & Ecumenism

By Gail Ramshaw, Professor of Religion at LaSalle University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

During the twentieth century, many Western churches engaged in liturgical reform, much of which reflected a return to liturgical practices of the early centuries of the church. This cross-denominational re-appropriation of ancient church rituals, for example rites for adult baptisms, had the ecumenical effect of bringing closer together churches that over recent centuries had developed quite disparate worship patterns.

Yet it was an innovation of the 1960s that can be judged the century’s most influential and transformative ecumenical achievement. In response to a call by the Second Vatican Council to replace its medieval one-year lectionary “so that richer fare may be provided for the faithful at the table of God’s word,” a Roman Catholic commission invented a three-year lectionary that appointed John for all festivals; Matthew, Mark and Luke over the three successive years; an Old Testament reading to correspond with the gospel; a psalm response; and an epistle reading. Especially in the United States, this lectionary caught the imagination of mainline Protestant churches, some of which (for example Lutherans, Episcopalians) had been using a variant of the Roman one-year lectionary, and others of which (for example Presbyterians, Methodists) had



practiced preacher's choice. Currently, a community can discover that Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Episcopalians, Methodists, Presbyterians, and some other Protestant churches are encountering the same biblical readings on Sunday. This has allowed for interdenominational lectionary study, as well as for seminary hermeneutical consideration that enhances biblical studies.

P.S. Lutherans need to be aware that although this three-year lectionary is being adopted by church judicatories around the world, each of the Scandinavian Lutheran churches has its own three-year lectionary, which follow a quite different pattern: the one-year medieval lectionary has been tripled, so that the focus of each Sunday, for example a healing miracle, is repeated in the following two years with alternative biblical selections.

Questions for Further Reflection

- A) What does a common lectionary have to do with Christian unity?
- B) What are the ecumenical advantages of following a three-year lectionary? What are the disadvantages?
- C) What ecumenical difference does it make for denominations to be reading the same passages of scripture at their Sunday gatherings?
- D) Do you know of any ecumenical bible studies happening in your neighborhood?
- E) What are the advantages to ecumenical bible study when denominations interpret scripture differently?

Additional Resources

Department for Ecumenical Affairs, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Telephone: 800-638-3522 x2610 www.elca.org/ecumenical

Revised Common Lectionary Prayers: Proposed by the Consultation on Common Texts.

Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 2002.

A Three-Year Banquet: The Lectionary for the Assembly. Gail Ramshaw, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 2004.

Between Sundays: Daily Bible Readings Based on the Revised Common Lectionary. Gail Ramshaw, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1997.



Ethical Issues & Ecumenism

Prayer

O God, you created all people in your image. We thank you for the astonishing variety of races and cultures in this world. Enrich our lives by ever-widening circles of fellowship, and show us your presence in those who differ most from us, until our knowledge of your life is made perfect in our love for all your children; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

– The Lutheran Book of Worship

Scripture and Meditation

“Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’ Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, ‘Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?’ At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, ‘Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, “Your sins are forgiven,” or to say, “Stand up and take your mat and walk”? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins’ —he said to the paralytic— ‘I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home.’ And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, ‘We have never seen anything like this!’”

– Mark 2:3-12

Ethical Issues & Ecumenism

By the Rev. Eileen W. Lindner, Ph. D., Deputy General Secretary, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, New York

Most of the history of conciliar ecumenism (i.e. councils of churches as opposed to bilateral ecumenism, for instance) has been written in carefully drawn language concerning ethical issues. Commonly these issues have treated issues in the public domain such as racism, poverty, gambling, human rights, etc. Less well known are various statements and documents related to ethical aspects of medical technology, end of life issues and/or pastoral care considerations. Those who have participated in the efforts to develop such statements often attest to the ways in which their sense of their own tradition and theology have been strengthened through an encounter with the ethical and theological thinking of others. Perhaps ironically participants have simultaneously reported gaining a new appreciation and respect for the ethical and theological approaches of other traditions through ecumenical encounter. In a world staggered by burdens of social injustice and pressing human need many pastors and churches are grateful for the opportunity to deepen their own prayerful reflection with perspectives from other Christians who are also struggling with developing a faithful response. Christian unity when it is



occasioned in such settings evokes Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17 in which he prays for the unity of the faithful "... that the world might believe."

Examples of Ethical Issues

"Assisted Suicide and Quality of Life of Persons with Disabilities--A Study Document Issued by the National Council of Churches Committee on Disabilities, January 2000"

Medical Ethical Decisions

In the middle of the controversy that roils the waters on assisted suicide is the medical profession. That doctors are not required to use "extraordinary means" to prolong life, is commonly agreed upon by religious organizations, governments and the medical profession itself. Medical technology helps keep people alive for long periods of time through respirators and artificial kidney machines even when patients are permanently unconscious or irrevocably brain damaged. Proponents of euthanasia believe that prolonging life by these means causes great suffering to the patient and family, to say nothing of the medical expenses surrounding such care.

Opponents fear that the great success in organ transplants coupled with the lack of organ donors may lead to abuse of the practice of assisted suicide. While the medical community is trying to allay these fears, the disabled community wonders how often a dying patient's death is hastened because of the need for his or her organs, even without legal sanctions.

Two doctors interviewed by the author state that a doctor's responsibility is to preserve life and do no harm. These issues are not consonant with assisted suicide. Both also feel that adequate pain management is either being ignored or not understood by too many physicians. With new pain medications now available and a better understanding of pain, doctors should provide better palliative solutions for patients.

Health Insurance Company Ethical Decisions

What is the role of health insurance companies in this matter? If health insurance companies are trying hard to contain costs, what is to prevent them from cutting back on medications for palliative care? When someone from Physicians for Compassionate Care called a Health Management Organization (HMO) and asked what their benefit for home palliative care for the terminally ill was, he was shocked to hear that it was a mere \$1000. As he testified: "What is this HMO going to do when that \$1000 is gone in a few weeks? When the seriously ill ask what their options are, will the HMO remind the patient that their assisted suicide benefit has not been used yet? This kind of financial incentive for HMOs will inevitable pressure patients to accept lethal prescriptions instead of good medical care. These incentives to offer suicide instead of medical care clearly pose a serious threat to public health and safety."(15)

Just after implementation of Oregon's assisted suicide law, that state decided to fund assisted suicides for the poor and disabled on its rationed Oregon Health Plan, while cutting needed services for the same patients. The Oregon Health Services Commission did this even though every organization representing the poor and disabled at their hearings objected to funding doctor assisted suicide, because it endangers the poor and disabled. The Oregon Health Plan carves out mental health care and provides what treatment it does through HMOs on a fully



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capitated basis. That is, contracting mental health clinics or groups are paid in advance per enrolled patient; they can actually profit by failing to deliver care.

The associate medical director of one HMO, feels that HMOs need to stay out of the assisted suicide decision making process and that HMOs need to develop ethics proposals so that the situation just described never happens.

Questions for Further Reflection

- A) How does your faith impact your stance on specific ethical issues? Explain.
- B) What are the advantages to having denominations work together on ethical issues as opposed to each denomination working separately?
- C) What does our working together on ethical issues have to do with Jesus' prayer for unity in John 17 "...that the world might believe?"
- D) Does denominational disagreement on specific ethical issues somehow undermine Christian unity in the world?
- E) What are some ecumenical implications for the two aforementioned ethical issues?

Additional Resources

Department for Ecumenical Affairs, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Telephone: 800-638-3522 x2610 www.elca.org/ecumenical

National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA www.nccusa.org

World Council of Churches www.wcc-coe.org

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Ecclesiology and Ethics: Ecumenical Ethical Engagement, Moral Formation and the Nature of the Church. eds. T.F. Best and M. Robra, Geneva, WCC, 1997.

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Personal Formation & Ecumenism

Prayer for the Formation of Our Day

Holy God, we give you thanks for the rich diversity of gifts with which you have blessed us. Stir up the power of your Holy Spirit among us that we may name and claim the gifts you have given us. Open ourselves to others and help us to nurture our own gifts that we may generously share those gifts with our neighbor. Grant us humility and vulnerability to receive the wisdom and gifts of others. Sustain us when the issues of the day threaten to overwhelm us. Keep us steadfast in your word that we may eagerly receive your blessing and strength. Empower us to be agents of your hope and grace for the building up of the body of Christ in love. Amen.

Prayer for Leadership in the Church

Almighty God, the giver of all good gifts, who of thy divine providence hast appointed various orders in thy Church: Give thy grace, we humbly beseech thee, to all who are [now] called to any office and ministry for thy people; and so fill them with the truth of thy doctrine and clothe them with holiness of life, that they may faithfully serve before thee, to the glory of thy great Name and for the benefit of thy holy Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

– Book of Common Prayer

Scripture and Meditation

“I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift...The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.”

– Ephesians 4:1-7; 11-13



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By the Rev. Robin J. Steinke, Dean of the Seminary and Associate Professor of Ethics and Public Life, Coordinator for the Lutheran Center for Theology and Public Life

This final section attends to your own readiness for entering the wider conversation on ecumenism. The text in Ephesians notes the importance of gifts for the sake of unity in the body of Christ. The gifts which are rooted in baptism and sustained at the Eucharistic table open the way for us to carry on the conversations of ecumenism in multiple arenas. It is not always easy or self-evident to identify those gifts and celebrate them.

One way of helping you to attend to your gifts and claim them is reflected in the recent introduction of the “wholeness wheel.” This gives attention to social/interpersonal, emotional, physical, intellectual and vocational well-being which are rooted in baptism and interwoven with spiritual well-being. Utilizing this lens into our gifts opens the way for us to name and claim the gifts for ministry. Denial of one’s gifts or false humility impairs the flourishing of our own well-being and compromises one’s formation for ministry and the ecumenical tasks ahead.

Self-sufficiency and indifference to the gifts of others can also be problematic. Our ecumenical partners in the Global South remind us that they have gifts to share which we need desperately. We are impoverished without the kind of mutuality, vulnerability and reciprocity that is possible when we are open both to sharing our own gifts as well as receiving the gifts which others have to share.

Naming, claiming, sharing and nurturing gifts cannot happen in isolation from community. Personal formation in Christ for service in the world is not a kind of personal piety or special interest group which meets to attend to the particular concerns of those gathered. Rather, personal formation and ecumenism is formation in Christ for service in the world.

There is a distinction between a kind of emotional unity or unity of like-mindedness and the vision of unity set out in Ephesians. Dietrich Bonhoeffer describes the importance of maintaining this distinction. Though he is commenting specifically on the nature of the study and life together of his seminarians, his broader ecumenical commitments allow for some parallels to be drawn.

“...a life together under the Word will stay healthy only when it does not form itself into a movement, an order, a society, a ‘collegium pietatis’, but instead understands itself as being part of the one, holy, universal, Christian church, sharing through its deeds and suffering in the hardships and struggles and promise of the whole church.”

Personal formation and ecumenism flourish in the context of community which is rooted in the word and sacraments, is woven in the daily discipline of prayer and attends to the suffering of the world.

One of the challenges of ecumenism in the life of the church today is attending to the importance of ecumenical work in the midst of many other pressing personal, social, political, and humanitarian needs. If ecumenism is merely seen as an option among many options then efforts to give public witness to the visible unity described in Ephesians is diminished. If however, ecumenism is seen as a concrete way to give and receive gifts, woven through the



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fabric of congregational life for the building up of the body of Christ, then possibilities abound for living into the fullness of God's reign where all are one in Christ, and no one will be hungry, and justice abounds.

Perhaps some of the recent fruit of the ecumenical movement, such as the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, Full Communion agreements, and Interim Eucharistic Sharing can be received in local communities with a view toward how it might help congregations work together for the sake of the Gospel. Though "issue fatigue" can indeed complicate reception of ecumenical agreements, attentiveness to the interconnections among personal well-being, justice issues, poverty, and resistance of violence and advocacy may provide a way forward.

Questions for Further Reflection

- A) What gifts do you personally bring to the work of ecumenism? What gifts do your Christian tradition bring as a whole to the work of ecumenism?
- B) How do you tend and nurture your own gifts? How do you tend and nurture the gifts of others? How does the "wholeness wheel" model assist you in identifying such gifts?
- C) Describe concrete strategies that may help raise the level of ecumenical awareness and the importance of ecumenical relationships in your seminary community, home congregation, local community, and in other educational and ministry contexts.
- D) Discuss common blocks or challenges to the flourishing of ecumenism in various contexts and strategize on creative ways to address these blocks or challenges. What does "issue fatigue" look like for you?
- E) Is there a role for healthy disagreement as we live into the vision of unity in the body of Christ described in Ephesians? What might such healthy disagreement look like?

Additional Resources

Department for Ecumenical Affairs, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Telephone: 800-638-3522 x2610 www.elca.org/ecumenical

ELCA Full Communion Agreements www.elca.org/ecumenical/fullcommunion/index.html

"The Wholeness Wheel" www.elca.org/health/wholenesswheel.html

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. Life Together and The Prayerbook of the Bible. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996, pp45.



Glossary

BEM - Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. The 1982 WCC Faith and Order document, also called the Lima Report.

Bilateral - Pertaining to two communions or churches in dialogue, and to joint statements on agreements and differences resulting from dialogue.

Christian Churches Together in the USA (CCT) - Christian Churches Together in the USA is a new organization growing out of a deeply felt need to broaden and expand fellowship, unity and witness among the diverse expressions of Christian faith today.

Communion - A grouping of churches having common origins and traditions and in communion with each other nationally and/or internationally.

Conciliar bodies - Relating to national and worldwide organizations governed by councils such as: the World Council of Churches, the [National Council of the Churches of Christ](#) and the [Lutheran World Federation](#) (council of Lutheran churches worldwide), [Christian Churches together in the USA](#) and [Churches Uniting in Christ](#).

Consensus - A total agreement, at least in content, if not in expression.

Dialogue - An exchange of traditions and ideas or opinions on particular issues, with a view to reaching an agreement or settlement.

Doxology – The study and appreciation of the liturgical expression of offering praise to God.

Ecclesiology – The study of the doctrine, canons, confession, et al. that define the nature of the church.

Ecumenical - Pertaining to the “whole inhabited earth.” It is now used to describe the movement to restore unity to all Christians or to describe openness and self-examination shared with other Christians to the end that Christ's prayer for unity might be fulfilled. It is sometimes used to describe any cooperative venture between communions.

Eschatology – The study of the “end times” or “last things” [eschaton], and the coming kingdom of God.

Eucharist – Another term for the Lord's Supper.

Evangelism - Spreading the good news of Jesus. The practice of ecumenism is a vital part of any effort in evangelization.



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Faith and Order Matters - Pertaining to the doctrines of the churches and to their visible structures, especially those involving sacraments, ministry and polity. The term arose from the 72 Faith and Order Conferences, which, with the Life and Work Conferences, led to the formation of the World Council of Churches.

Full Communion (from the biblical term *koinonia* meaning to share, act together) - A relationship between two distinct churches or communions where each maintains its own autonomy and recognizes the catholicity and apostolicity of the other, but includes sharing of the sacraments and exchange of clergy.

Interfaith - Activities by which good will, spiritual understanding and cooperation are fostered by people of all faiths. "Interreligious" is sometimes used as a synonym.

Koinonia – The communal sharing expressed through the vital life of the body of Christ through fellowship, Gospel, salvation and mission.

Lectionary – The series of liturgical readings or lessons which are appointed for the Sundays and festival days of the church calendar year.

Lutheran World Federation (LWF) - The LWF is a global communion of Christian churches in the Lutheran tradition. The LWF currently has 138 member churches in 77 countries all over the world, with a membership of nearly 65 million Lutherans.

National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America (NCCC) - A community of 32 communions.

National Workshop on Christian Unity (NWCU) - National ecumenical leaders of Christian communions are invited annually to a week of ecumenical worship, workshops and seminars.

Reception – The activity of ecumenical life and relation.

Substantial Agreement - A basic nucleus without which the message of salvation is not transmitted in its integrity, while accepting that neither doctrinal elaborations nor practices correspond entirely among partner churches. The essentials are assured, and there is the same shared intention of faith.

World Council of Churches (WCC) - A fellowship of over 340 national communions in over 90 countries.



Ecumenical Conversation Starters

Response and Evaluation Form

This form is provided as part of the “Ecumenical Conversation Starters” packet so that you may submit your thoughts and comments, either for yourself as an individual or as the report of a group discussion. The “Ecumenical Conversation Starters” are intended to stimulate conversation with an ecumenical point of view, and your input is very much appreciated. Please use this form to send your comments by mail, fax, or e-mail.

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Response and Evaluation Form

1.) Please indicate whether you are offering these comments as an individual or as a group report. If it is a group report, please describe briefly the nature of the group and the type and length of the discussion (adult education program, a one-time forum, youth education, etc.)

2.) Which Ecumenical Conversation Starters have you studied? Please list the topics.

3.) What thoughts and comments do you have about the ideas presented in the “Ecumenical Conversation Starters”? (use additional pages as needed)

4.) Has your study of the “Ecumenical Conversation Starters” changed your views or increased your understanding of ecumenism? If so, please explain.

5.) What suggestions do you have for other topics that might be covered in similar resources from the Department for Ecumenical Affairs?

6.) Would you like someone from the ELCA to contact you about other available resources for study of ecumenical issues?

Name _____ Congregation _____

E-mail _____ Phone _____ City & State _____

