

GROWING Together

15th Series

AN ECUMENICAL REPORT CARD

Plays Well with others

The search for Christian unity touches the very heart of what it means to be a disciple in the modern world. Ecumenism is not secondary for Christian people. To serve the poor, to work for peace, to share the gospel inevitably draws us closer to other Christians with whom we toil in the vineyard. Aware of our own call from God, we recognize that others are also called. Our ecumenical vocation invites us, as Christian people and as a Church, to examine our relationship with all who bear the name of Christ.

Projects incomplete

In humility, and with integrity, we must be prepared to confess our failures and our sins of disunity, and forgive those of our Christian brothers and sisters where they too have sinned. Integrity calls us to address questions that are painful, to dig up unhappy memories, to admit to our sins against unity.

Is not working up to potential

There is one Lord, one Faith, and one Baptism. (Eph. 4)

Does sharing in the one Lord and one baptism necessarily mean we share in a common expression of the one faith? It is sometimes said that doctrine divides, and work unites. While it is true that working together unites us, is it true that doctrine divides? Perhaps doctrine defines. Doctrine gives each of us the focus of our faith. This focus may differ from our neighbours', and cause us to think that our faith is different as well. Christian unity involves the conviction that beyond the diverse expressions of doctrine lies a common faith.

In 1888, the Anglican churches defined the foundation of unity as Scripture, the Creeds, the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, and the historic ministry of bishops. Many churches might like to add to this list, and others to remove one or more of these elements. And yet, what Anglicans offered us early in the ecumenical quest was the wisdom that unity does not lie in uniformity, but in a diversity that affirms certain fundamental convictions.

The marks of true ecumenism are openness to the views of others, recognition that we need to learn from others, and an acceptance of diversity as an expression of the fullness of the church.

Strong on Talk

The really tough questions today are not doctrinal but practical. Many serious practical issues force us out of our denominational ruts. The same problems and questions arise in all churches, and solutions are regularly shared across the church spectrum. Where issues divide one church, they probably divide others as well.

In the late twentieth Century, it is style rather than doctrine which divides us. There are liberals, conservatives, orthodox and charismatics. Each of these movements cuts across denominational lines, and draws people with common perspectives into common cause. A late nineteenth Century Christian might have shuddered at the “anarchy” while a “post-modernist” will revel in the diversity.

Weak on performance

Some may say that true denominational difference no longer exists. The most noticeable differences within the Christian community are the diverse forms of worship. Free prayer, inclusive language, musical instruments, speaking in tongues. These are the burning issues that erupt into controversy. So, a secondary task of contemporary ecumenism must be to promote dialogue within churches, as well as among the churches.

As Canadians, can our experience of cultural and religious diversity contribute something to the wider church around the world? Does our authentically Christian and authentically Canadian approach to unity amid diversity offer a model to the churches?

GROWING TOGETHER is a series of five monthly Sunday bulletin inserts for the ecumenical education of Christ's faithful.



Gathering the Family of Jesus

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