

GROWING Together

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SPRINGTIME IN ECUMENISM



In recent years prophets of gloom have proclaimed that Ecumenism is in a deep freeze. But the winter of ecumenism has turned to spring here on the prairies! "Dialogue", assumed to be the arena of theologian and academic, is beginning to have results where it affects us most – sitting in the pew! Are we ready? Are we prepared to see these opportunities as God's work?

- An Anglican priest in Rosetown walks into a welcoming Lutheran congregation and begins the words of the communion liturgy. In 2001 these two Canadian Churches plan to sign a permanent agreement allowing ministers and people to move freely back and forth from one to the other. They are acknowledging their unity and maintaining their identity.
- In Saskatoon, a United Church and a Roman Catholic Church have entered into a covenant where they promise to pray for each other publicly and regularly, to welcome each other at worship, to exchange preaching and music at least twice a year. They have committed themselves to encourage and support one another.
- Pastors from Evangelical churches and pastors from the "main line" churches work together to plan millennium events in Regina and Saskatoon. They are praying together, confronting issues of doctrine and practice. They are discovering how to plan worship so that each one's tradition is honoured.
- Across the prairies and around the world Christians from many traditions celebrated an historic event on October 31, 1999. "This is a cornerstone for the complex road toward unity among Christians," said Pope John Paul II. The Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation signed the Joint Declaration on the doctrine of justification by faith, lifting mutual condemnations that go back to the 16th century. It was the outcome of more than 30 years of discussion and dialogue.

What is God's desire? Jesus prayed fervently that we might all be

one (John 17). The early church was threatened by fragmentation. Paul urged them to face their differences and come to an understanding so that they might continue to worship and work together. We are one body with many parts. We can't all be eyes or ears or feet. We need the differences, and we need the unity. "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it". (I Cor. 12:27)

Are Christians coming together only because of financial need or dwindling numbers? While necessity may be part of the motivation, it isn't the whole story. Many are beginning to acknowledge that uniformity may not be God's expectation. The variety within the whole of creation confirms God's delight in diversity. We are called to *unity* around Jesus Christ, *not uniformity*. Our relationship exists because Jesus Christ joins us together. As in marriage, we do not give up our individuality, though we are no longer separate. We work for the good of the other.

Praying and seeking justice, regardless of denomination, we are drawn together in mutual ventures that surely are of God. The world needs God's peace and healing. The most effective way to combat violence and hatred is to gather as churches and work and pray together in harmony. Acknowledging our differences *and* the Spirit in each other produces a powerful witness for those who have yet to encounter God.

We are partners; we are called by the Son to love each other; we are united by the Spirit to live and work as friends. Thank God for the spring, so filled with hope and new life!



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

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