

The ARK

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Interchurch Families: Christian Unity Made Visible in our Households

The ARK, a publication of the American Association of Interchurch Families

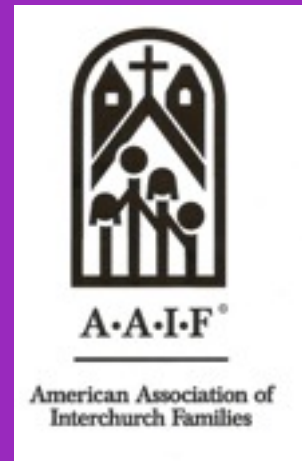
Our Advent based on "A Prayer on the Beach"

from
A New Kind of
Christianity, Ten
Questions That Are
Transforming The Faith

by Brian D. McLaren
Harper One, 2010

Brian McLaren created a prayer based on the one that was said over the pilgrims as they were about to embark on the Mayflower for the New World where they would be able to found a colony based on their conscience and seek the truth. They would finally be able to live their faith in honesty, openness and freedom. McLaren intends for us to use each line of the new

Our Advent continued on the next page



Merry Christmas from AAIF to you



2010

**Make plans now to attend the next
AAIF Biennial Conference
to be held in 2012**

Please see www.aifusa.org for on-going updates

Our Advent continued from the previous page

prayer as the basis for a meditation to prepare us for our journey ahead in our quest for a new kind of Christian faith.

We acknowledge that we have made a mess of what Jesus started.

We affirm that we are wrong and Jesus is right.

We choose not to defend what we have done and what we have become.

We acknowledge that we have created many Christianities up to this point, and they call for reassessment and, in many cases, repentance.

“We are not reassessing for the purpose of vilifying our ancestors in the faith or in order to contrast a dark, backward “them” with an enlightened, progressive “us,”

Male Cardinals become bright red in winter or they appear to be that way since the rest of nature is much more drab in winter in the northern hemisphere. The people in Australia may be planning a day at the beach. They have other foliage that gives them the green and red that we associate with Christmas. ↓

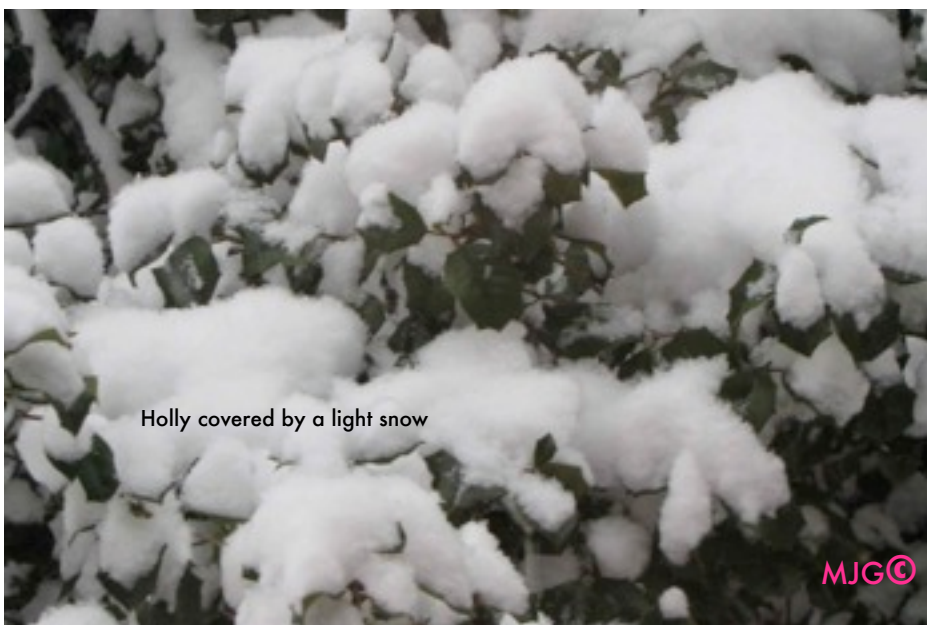


snarkily implying that they got it wrong all along and (insert trumpet fanfare here) we have finally got it right after all of these years.” Such an arrogant and “pathetically naive thesis doesn’t deserve our attention, much less commitment.”

McLaren clarifies that we are, “reassessing as a humble act of ethical responsibility, so that

we can avoid merely carrying on the “traditions of humans” as Jesus said the Pharisees once did.” McLaren notes that “we are in fact following the example of our ancestors, who again and again from the margins did this kind of collective self-examination and repenting.” ...“We are beginning to reassess and repent of the actual versions and formulations of the faith we have created, that these creations deserve to be reexamined and deconstructed, not so that we may slide into agnosticism, atheism or secular patriotic consumerism, but so that our religious traditions can be seen for what they are. Our ideas of Christianity are evolving, embodied, situated versions of the faith - each of which is unfinished, imperfect, and sometimes pretentious, and

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Holly covered by a light snow

each of which is often beautiful and wonderful, renewable and serviceable too.”

We choose to seek a better path into the future than the one we have been on.

McLaren finds in the gospel “ a perpetual fountain of youthful newness, an on-going advent, a constant beginning, a continually generative genesis, always fermenting like new wine, a tide that rises, wave by wave.” McLaren explains that “ We do not conceive of our faith primarily as a promise to our ancestors, a vow to dutifully carry on something that was theirs and and we have inherited. No, it is more like God’s promise uttered to us from the future, toward which we reach an outstretched and hopeful hand - just as our ancestors did. The gospel is for us a beckoning, a summons, always associated with transitive words like “leave,” “come,” “go,” “follow.” So, just as a new path opens up new territory in which cities can be built, the gospel is for us a movement, a pioneering adventure, leaving behind it a pathway along which institutions are constructed, renewed, replaced, and so on. But the movement is never contained or controlled by the institution any more than the wind is contained or controlled by the branches through which it blows; no city along the path should be taken as the journey’s end.”

We desire to be born again as disciples of Jesus Christ.

McLaren explains that this means to be “born into a lifelong experiential adventure of discipleship.” McLaren contrasts the meaning that has come to be associated with being Christians as “people who have entered a certain sedentary membership or arrived at a status validated by some group or institution,” while “disciples are learners (and unlearners) who have started on a rigorous and unending journey or quest in relationship to Jesus Christ.” McLaren points out that “the word ‘Christian’ occurs in the New Testament exactly three times and the word “Christianity exactly zero. The word ‘disciple,’ however is found 263 times.”

McLaren makes it clear that “in no way are we who seek this new birth as disciples claiming a superior status. We have no interest in distinguishing ourselves as super-Christians, better than anybody else...We may have crossed a starting line, but we have not

crossed a finish line, so we are still in motion.”

We pray that God will create something new and beautiful in and among us for the good of all creation and to the glory of the living God.

McLaren explains that “what we need is not simply a new way of thinking, although our quest leads deep into and through the mind. We also need a new way of being, a new inner ecology, a new spirituality that does more than make us opinionated and fastidious, but that renders our souls an orchard of trees bearing good fruit, rooted in who we are before God and who we are becoming in God. We are seeking to be people of

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'orthopathy' in whom the deep orientation or attitudes or feelings (pathos) of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control blossom and bear-fruit."

McLaren adds that "this inward transformation requires community, an expanding network of connectivity that perhaps could be captured by a term like 'ortho-affinity' - a good and right way of relating to one another in communities of faith and in relation to our neighbors outside our faith communities (including those who consider themselves to be our enemies.)"

McLaren explains that "Our faith is vain and self-centered if it only brings blessings for us or to us. It must result in blessing

that flows through us to the world. Good thinking (orthodoxy), good being (orthopathy), and good relating (ortho-affinity) must interact with and express themselves through good work and practice (orthopraxy) in the world, the creation that God made, loves, and will never abandon or betray.

"We do not expect to be capable of completing this quest by our own strength, guided by our own flickering lights, so we pray, expressing our dependence on

We begin to decorate the house with holly and ivy, and to think about getting a Christmas tree



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Mother with infant son

- our families are holy too.



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the gracious and living Holy Spirit, from whom we have received life and every good thing, in whom we live, move, and have our being, and toward whom we move in our journey through life," explains McLaren.

"Rare moments come to us in our journey when the penny drops, the tumblers click, the pieces fall into place, the lights come on and our breath is taken away," explains McLaren. "The old paradigm falls away behind us like a port of departure, and we are won over to new possibilities, caught up in a new way of seeing, looking toward a new and wide horizon. The Lord has more light and truth to break forth, we believe,

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Like winter is a season -

Advent is a season, but on the church calendar. During this time we prepare ourselves for Christ's arrival. This is a spiritual preparation.



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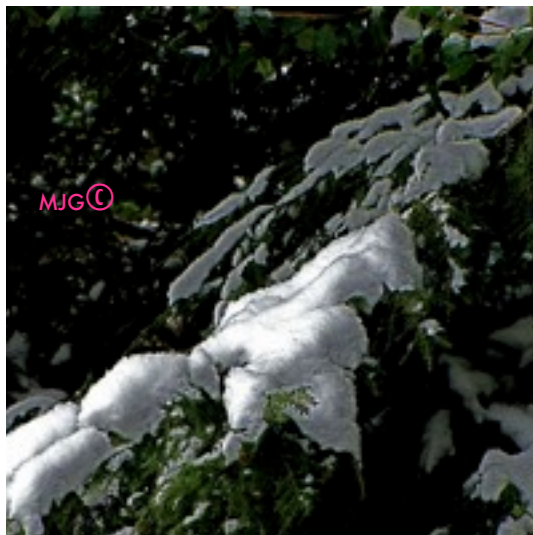
and so we raise our sails to the wind of the Spirit. We are embarked on our quest, launched by a prayer."

This appears in one of the opening chapters of McLaren's "A New Kind of Christianity, Ten Questions That Are Transforming The Faith." Reading this as a member of an interchurch family, I find that the words have drawn me in and that I can identify with much of what he has written thus far. Of course, some words stand out far more than others. The many Christianities created up to this point do need to be reassessed. We are looking for Christ to guide us into the future on our journey as disciples. We will be active as disciples of Christ in the creation of something that is good for all of creation and to the glory of the living God since we are already on this path at this time.

As interchurch couples, we have been blessed with a unity in our homes that others may only aspire to attain. While I recognize that this is a gift from God, I do not know how we were so

fortunate to have been selected. I am not sure what direction this gift will take us and how we should best share this gift. In this sense, I am still on my own spiritual journey.

~ Mary Jane Glauber



In the northern hemisphere in December, a light snow coats the hemlock trees in God's creation ↑

AAIF City Chapters: Listening Project

Are you interested in meeting and talking to other interchurch families in your city between AAIF Biennial Conferences?

PLEASE SEE WWW.AIFUSA.ORG For membership information

Please contact: **Laura & Franz Green** at fandlgreen@cox.net or at AAIF.co.chair@gmail.com

for information about how to form a City chapter in your area or how to find the AAIF City Chapter closest to you.

Please contact: mjglauber@gmail.com for the ARK - AAIF Listening Project Materials to be used by your aaif City Chapters.

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Advent in Interchurch Families

How do you celebrate Advent as interchurch families?

What are the new traditions that you have created in your new home for this season?

* * * *



Theology's Prophetic Commitments

by
Father Ernest Falardeau, SSS

The Catholic Theological Society of America met in Cleveland, Ohio, June 10-13, 2010 at the Renaissance Hotel adjoining Public Square. The topic was timely, fruitful and productive. I particularly remember one of the plenary presentations given by Catherine E. Clifford of Saint Paul University, Ottawa, and Richard Gaillardetz from the University of Toledo entitled *Beyond Presumption: Reimagining the Ecclesial-Prophetic Vocation of the Theologian*. I was particularly struck by the references to the theology of the laity in Vatican II rooted in its understanding of baptism. The prophetic mission of the Church extends to all the members of the Church and its value and appearance in history has been notable and profound.

There were other plenary and concurrent sessions that explored many facets of theology and one had to make a choice of what to attend. I particularly appreciated the presentations by Gregory G. Baum of McGill University (Emeritus), Most Rev. Thomas J. Gumbleton, Retired Auxiliary Bishop of Detroit and Anne E. Patrick, SNJM of Carleton

College (Emerita). Baum and Patrick were past presidents of CTSA. The title of this "invited session" was *Theology's Prophetic Commitments: Insights from Experience*. I

was not disappointed with the rich insights of these theologians who had borne the "heat of the day" in the struggle for Christian unity, peace and women's voice in the Church.

As a long-time ecumenist I did not want to miss *The "Patient and Fraternal Dialogue" Toward a Reformed Papacy* which was a panel discussion shared by Margaret O'Gara from the University of St. Michael's College in Toronto, and John Strykowski from St. James Cathedral, Brooklyn with a response from Mark Powel from Harding Graduate School, Memphis. Powell had written a book on the subject that was favorable to a consideration of a possible role for the papacy in a united Christianity. Powell is Protestant. The presenters thought very highly of Powell's work and hoped it would get more attention broadly.

James Coriden from Washington Theological Union spoke on "Canonical Perspectives on the Ecclesiastical Processes for Investigating Theologians." Ormond Rush, Australian Catholic University, spoke on "Theology and the Prophetic Office in the Church: Pneumatological Perspectives on the *Sensus*

Fidelium-Theology-Magisterium Relationship" and John Strykowski, St. James Cathedral, Brooklyn (former staff theologian to the USCCB Doctrine Committee) spoke on "Magisterium and Theologians: Lessons from Service in Rome and Washington". This was a very experienced panel that shared much knowledge and experience of the ins and outs of academic efforts and oversight responsibility.

I joined the CTSA in 1959 and have attended meetings quite faithfully over the years, especially since I began my work as an ecumenist. The society has changed a great deal from the early days. From a society made up mostly of clerics who taught in seminaries, the society now numbers about one third of women among its ranks, and theologians teach at a wide range of theological institutions. It has worked closely with Church authorities during the Second Vatican Council and in the more than forty years since the Council. Many of the theologians are engaged in ecumenical conversations, writing and official dialogues, as well as in various committees and task forces serving the bishops and the Church.

I would like to say more about the "*sensus fidelium*" (sense of the faithful) and the prophetic role of the laity, but that would be a difficult topic to summarize in a few words.

"Theology's Prophetic Commitments" continued on the next page



Suffice it to say: the Holy Spirit guides the entire people of God and unites the body of Christ which is the Church through the Eucharist, the Bread of Life and the Cup of Salvation that nourishes the Church.

Father Ernest Falardeau, SSS

Ecumenical Corner September 2010

(reprinted here in the ARK with permission from the author)

Please pause a few moments to re-read and to think about Father Ernie's last sentence and what this means for Christian Unity and our ecumenically lived lives. Do you have any further reflections on this topic that you would like to share from your lived experience?

Continuing some of the themes from the 2010 AAIF Biennial

Conference:

"All marriages are a form of interchurch or blended family"

(↑ from notes taken during Dr. Lynn Turner's keynote speech at the 2010 AAIF Biennial Conference)

Two people, from two families that most likely have somewhat different traditions for how they celebrate the holidays have now merged into one household. For the first time, some of these traditions which may be more cultural or traditional rather than



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religious may be put into question. However, life is always full of changes, big and small changes. Sometimes these transitions aren't so easy. Linda Sapadin, PhD, a psychologist who specializes in helping people make positive changes in their lives, has created 6 potential situations for anyone who is preparing for any kind of life transition.

Dr. Sapadin's 6 scenarios for adapting to change:

- 1. When a major change looms, the first thing, I do is ____.** 1) Nothing. I don't know where to start. 2) Feel anxious and turn to a trusted friend. 3) Learn more about the situation by speaking with others, doing internet research, and reading relevant articles that offer many opinions.
- 2. As I reflect on major transitions in my life, I believe that ____.** 1) If I could turn back the clock, I would. 2) It took awhile to adjust to the change, but it all worked out

OK. 3) Each change had some positive impact.

- 3. When change isn't initiated by me (e.g., new job duties or a child leaving for college) my attitude tends to be ____.** 1) "Things will tougher than before." 2) "It will be a challenge to make some adjustments but I'll do it." 3) "I'm looking forward to new opportunities."
- 4. Which statement do you most agree with? ____** 1) Just when you think things will get better, they get worse. 2) Things frequently work out better than I thought. 3) Change often brings about new and exciting opportunities.
- 5. The prospect of change makes me feel ____.** 1) Unlucky and nervous. 2) Uncertain, but accepting of what lies ahead. 3) Hopeful and inspired.
- 6. When I'm anxious about change, I ____.** 1) Spend more time watching TV or sleeping. 2) Call a friend to vent, but sometimes that friend may have enough of their own issues. 3) Seek help: from

journaling my feelings, a self help book or a qualified therapist.

Then Dr. Sapadin explains that if, on this self-test, you answered mostly with 1)'s that "you find change challenging, and that you often procrastinate when you are feeling anxious about the unknown". She suggests, "That you break down the segments into smaller segments that don't seem so overwhelming" or threatening.

As interchurch families or any newlywed couple who is constantly renegotiating their joint path, breaking down what seems to be a major obstacle into its component parts may make the issue far more negotiable. It is most important that the issue is discussed between the husband and wife, and that the decision be made between them as a couple to reinforce the bond between them as a married couple.

Dr. Sapadin explains to those who chose mostly answers number 2)'s on this self-test that "You recognize that change is inevitable and necessary even though you don't always welcome it. At times you are pleasantly surprised by how well you accept change that you haven't initiated. She encourages us to "reflect on the opportunities that are likely to accompany the change." Dr. Sapadin also indicates that "this switch in plans or change may even help to energize us." This part intrigued me and gave me great hope.

For interchurch families, many times, we feel that we are entering into uncharted waters so it is natural and a good thing to be attentive and alert to the potential and the possibility for positive changes within our families while guarding against inadvertent negative input from well meaning, but misinformed people who actually know less about ecumenism than we do since we live this in our daily lives. The word "Opportunity" may stand out for us. As interchurch families, our position in life, has often required us to study ecumenism in depth. In this sense, we have been energized, and then well informed, which in turn becomes a great gift.

If you mostly answered 3)'s, Dr. Sapadin indicates that "You feel confident about your ability to handle change. You thrive on new experiences and you welcome the benefits they can bring to your life."

Recognizing the gifts that your interchurch marriage and ecumenical lifestyle has brought to you, your lived experience can serve as a role model for others who follow and who might benefit from hearing your life stories.

Please do not hesitate to seize those teachable moments so that we can all move closer to Christian Unity along a peaceful path of compassion and outreach one to the other.

It may be that even some interchurch couples and their

extended families and their communities may have started out answering with mostly 1)'s, then moved toward answering more with 2)'s and eventually more with 3)'s over a period of time as their understanding grew. This is God working in us and through us through our understanding of Christ's mission that we may all be one.

Did some of us start out at a place of fear? That may well be an accurate description for any person who enters a situation where they have heard negative comments about "the other." When couples enter into an interchurch marriage, that act can often bring up to the surface many latent or many not so latent biases that have been verbalized in the greater community over the years about "the other" who is usually not there to defend who they really are nor able to dispel any misconceptions before they become ingrained. Without any real dialogue between diverse and yet very similar Christian denominations, not only among clergy, but also among parishioners. Left unchecked, these biases can and will continue and grow sometimes to exaggerated extremes. Barbara Brown Taylor noted that having a common enemy tends to bind communities in her book "An Altar in the World, A Geography of Faith." For this reason, people of faith must open the lines of communication and dialogue at the most basic levels in our society.

How do we begin that kind of dialogue where we cultivate a basic level of respect for the other person who will in turn respect us? Listening is an art to be cultivated so that first the other person feels as if they have been heard. After they have been heard, and this can be confirmed by repeating what you believe you heard them say so they can verify it. Then you can begin to decide if you agree on some of the points or if you disagree on any of them. You still may need to clarify some of the points. Without this you may waste so much time talking about mere perceptions and little of what is real. This wastes your own time, and does nothing to further your own interests since you have never actually found that common ground.

At the 2010 AAIF Biennial Conference, we were reminded of the Biblical verses from: Matthew 18:1-4 1...asked Jesus "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" 2 He (Jesus) called a child over, placed it in their midst, 3 and said, "Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me." Unlike other areas of the Bible that may describe the church order or duties of each office, this one focuses on our role of being humble. It does not propose that as adults we should blindly accept the authority of others. It

is the very innocence and a lack of ulterior motive that we are called to have, clearly stated here in Matthew 18:4.

Continuing and building on that topic, motivated by the examples of love that Christ has shown us over and over again, in Matthew 18: 20, we are reminded that "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." It is in our interdependence and our compassion in our interactions with others where we will continue to find that of God. How should we interact one with the other?

In their book, **The Wisdom of Forgiveness : Intimate Conversations and Journeys**, by Bstan-'dzin-rgyatsho, Dalai Lama XIV with Victor Chan and Shishir Kurup, they explain the important role not only of forgiveness but in being able to understand our interrelatedness and interdependence in every situation. The Dalai Lama and Bishop Desmond Tutu share many similar personality traits. The Dalai Lama has a childlike and contagious laugh and sense of humor; it is through this that he is able to accomplish so much as a bridge builder and peace maker. He may not do things in ways we may have expected for someone who has been run out of his own country by violence, but his methods are most effective. Buddhism speaks of an "emptiness" that is enabling or empowering for all that is good. Perhaps this is what we describe as becoming like a child who is open to possibility and

hopefulness regarding change. The Dalai Lama understands that what is good for others will be good for him and refers to this as "enlightened self interest." This book is worth reading. Look to see how he has handled change. What can we learn from him?
~ Mary Jane Glauber

Advent, a beginning, commencement, or start and in the Christian world, the four weeks in which we prepare for the coming of Christ. Note, this doesn't mention anything about going out shopping or trying to figure out what the perfect gift should be for someone. There is no mention of commerce; this is a spiritual time. Of course, we all like to receive a gift that has been carefully chosen for us, but that may not be part of the "big picture." As a child, I was instructed to write thank you notes by my parents to my extended family members who had sent me gifts for Christmas. I was young and writing was so difficult for me then. Articulating my thoughts was difficult too; I didn't yet have the words to say thank you for being a wonderful role model all year long, nor thank you for caring about me enough to think you should send me a gift although it is really the interconnectedness that you give me to a past I never saw that I hope to carry into a future for you that you will not see. Thank you for loving me, a little child, only half formed, but who hopes to become a lot like you someday.
~ M.J. Glauber



If you would like to share what you are thankful for with other ARK readers, please send your list to mjglauber@gmail.com "Thankfulness and Gratitude"

International Conference INTAMS [This information was in the September ARK as well as repeated here since there is a wealth of important information to be found at this site]

The Household of God and Local Households: Revisiting the Domestic Church
Catholic University of Leuven, 10 – 13 March 2010 Plenary Sessions (in chronological order)
official summaries may be found at the following link:

<http://www.intams.org/events-col10-plenarysessions.pdf>

Practicing Lectio Divina:

Read over the following Bible Verses several times slowly allowing yourself time to quietly focus on each word or phrases. Sit quietly thinking about these verses. Perhaps some of the lines sparkle for you. Think quietly about those lines. Take time to do this slowly. If you feel so inclined, please create a prayer to share with other ARK readers from these Bible verses:

Ephesians 4:1-6

(New International Version)

4 Unity in the Body of Christ:

1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—

5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism;

6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.



Looking forward to the 2012 AAIF Biennial Conference
- Please 'save the date,' details to follow at www.aifusa.org

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The ARK

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*Please consider joining
AAIF for the 2010-2011
dues year*

*Membership information
is at
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Many thanks go to: Fathers George Kilcourse, and Ernest Falardeau, SSS, to the Rev. Elaine Hall, and to all of the AAIF Board Members for their on-going dedication to Christian Unity and Ecumenical Dialogue.

Prayers and blessings are extended to all of our interchurch family members and ecumenical community as we enter the new year that their lives might be filled with good health, hope and possibility.