All Saints Day, November 1, 2011

Applying life lessons to our ecumenical journey:
The theme for the November 2011 edition of the ARK asks us to look at the way we live. We are asked to examine our ordinary lived experience. How do we make a positive impact with our actions? Have we examined our priorities.

All Saints Day along with All Souls Day reminds us of the excellent examples of lives well lived that we have been blessed with over the years: our friends, our family, our teachers and our pastors - anyone who has made a positive impact, even if in only small ways should be remembered and emulated. Think about the things they did that made a difference.

M.J. Glauber

“-Consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds” - Hebrews 10:24

Make plans now to attend the next AAIF Biennial Conference to be held in 2012 - July 13-15 in Collegeville, MN Please see www.aifusa.org for on-going updates
Vatican's top ecumenist assesses ecumenical progress, future prospects

WASHINGTON (CNS) -- The Vatican's top ecumenist offered a frank assessment of recent ecumenical progress and future prospects in a Washington talk Nov. 3, 2011.

Cardinal Kurt Koch, the Swiss-born president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, said different types of divisions affect Catholic relations with the Orthodox churches and with those that were born from the Protestant Reformation, but both can be resolved with dialogue.

He also criticized the "anti-Catholic attitude" displayed by some Pentecostals and said Catholics must resist a temptation to adopt the "sometimes problematic evangelical methods" of those churches.

The cardinal spoke at The Catholic University of America before an audience of about 100 people, including Cardinal Donald W. Wuerl of Washington, who serves as university chancellor. The title of his talk was "Fundamental Aspects of Ecumenism and Future Perspectives."

Cardinal Koch said progress toward Catholic-Orthodox unity became nearly "shipwrecked by the problem" of differences over papal primacy.

Churches that arose from the Protestant Reformation, on the other hand, sometimes diverge from the Catholic Church on the handling of ethical questions, he said, mentioning homosexuality as a "fundamental problem" in particular between the Catholic and Anglican communities.

Some Anglican churches, including the Episcopal Church in the U.S., have ordained openly gay priests and bishops.

Cardinal Koch said Protestant churches have in the past generally agreed with the Catholic Church on ethical issues while disagreeing on matters of faith. "Today that has been turned on its head, and we can say that ethics divide but faith unites," he said. http://www.catholicnews.com/data/briefs/cns/20111104.htm

Ten Ways Jesus Showed Love:

Agape - the Greek word for unconditional, self-sacrificing love, and what we can learn from Christ.

Stephen Post examines the ten ways that Jesus showed Love. The gospels show us his immense compassion for the suffering of others, his attentive listening presence, and his energetic celebration of the lives around him.
First, Steven Post notes, “The Way of Humor,” and explains that “There are innumerable moments when Jesus expressed humor. The British theologian C.K. Chesterton, in his classic work, Orthodoxy, concluded that mirth was "the hidden virtue of Jesus." C.S. Lewis wrote that "joy is the serious business of heaven." The Quaker theologian Elton Trueblood, a chaplain at both Harvard and Stanford Universities, wrote The Humor of Christ in 1964 to "challenge the conventionalized picture of a Christ who never laughed."

Regarding “The Way of Humor,” Post offers the following Prayer: “Lord, inspire in us the warm humor and mirthful joy that frees all from anxiety.”

Second, Post adds “The Way of Creativity” when he explains, “The parables of Jesus are works of creative brilliance. The great stories of agape love are three: The Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, and the Widow's Mite. The first describes the power of compassionate response to echo down through the ages; the second captures the unconditional love of a father even after he has been insulted by his son in every way imaginable; the third shows how much it means when someone who has almost nothing gives a small contribution. Jesus loved people through improvising stories galore, for he was a literary genius. He was also creative in resolving ethical disputes, offering Solomonic resolutions. He had an unusually free creative mind.

Regarding Creativity, Post offers us this prayer: “Lord, use our creativity for the best purposes.”

Third, Post notes, “The Way of Reverence” and explains that “Jesus had immense reverence for nature and spent much time in quiet natural settings or on the sea. He constantly showed reverence for the hearth, for the everyday life of the family. While no religious leader had yet bestowed equal status on children, Jesus welcomed them and made them prototypes for those who would enter the Kingdom of Heaven. He respected women in ways that were unheard of at the time. He respected the downtrodden, the blind, the lepers. His respect for life was universal.”

Regarding Reverence, Post offers this prayer: “Lord, give us a deep reverence that frees us from the desire to manipulate others.”

Fourth, Post notes, “The Way of Loyalty,” and then explains that “Jesus was loyal to Peter after Peter denied him. Even when rejected he was loyal, as in his lament over Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37). He was loyal to the will of God when, before his death, he prayed, "Lord, let this cup pass from my lips; nevertheless, not as I would but as you will." And there was never anyone, however maimed or ill or rejected, whom he...
did not affirm in loyalty long after everyone else had negated them.”

Steven Post offers us this prayer regarding the explanation for loyalty he has given to us, “Lord, keep us loyal even to those who, like ourselves, aren’t perfect.

Fifth, Post notes, “The Way of Compassion,” and explains, “Jesus is depicted in the gospels as a healer who responded to the needs of the suffering even on the Sabbath and was roundly criticized for this by the authorities. He responded to those who would otherwise have been stoned to death. Compassion was perfectly captured in his parable of the Good Samaritan, a man who responded immediately and directly to a wounded man bleeding by the side of the road. Nothing could make him act in a way contrary to compassion—not a busy schedule or social stigma, as in the case of the Samaritan woman most others would not talk to. Jesus just did what compassion requires, whenever and wherever.”

The prayer that Post offers us regarding compassion is “Lord, deepen our compassion amidst suffering.”

Sixth, Steven Post notes, “The Way of Attentive Listening” and explains that “In interacting with others, Jesus was extraordinarily attentive, showing a humble willingness to respond in depth to what others had spoken. In his many healings, people cry out to him in need. Simply by listening and a touch, he offered them hope and wholeness. He listened carefully to his enemies and responded to them thoughtfully. He had immense patience with his disciples even when he had every reason to be impatient.”

Regarding “Attentive Listening,” Steven Post offers us the following prayer: “Lord, humble us for attentive listening so that others feel valued.”

Seventh, Steven Post notes, “The Way of Carefrontation,” (Yes, that is the word that Post used and how he spelled it.) and explains that “Jesus was a master of caring confrontation. He practiced nonviolent resistance to evil, and it was his teaching and example that would inspire Gandhi and the great African-American Christian leaders of the civil rights movement. Jesus asked Peter to put down his sword; he said that those who live by the sword die by it. But he also confronted spiritual hypocrites and the many moneychangers who had set up shop in the Temple. He was constantly challenging people to think and act lovingly, and this meant that he had often to take the risk of confrontation when he saw destructive attitudes and behaviors around him.”

Regarding “Caring Confrontation,” Steven Post offers us the following prayer: “Lord, strengthen us in the courage to confront evil with...
wise love rather than malice.”

Eighth, Steven Post notes, “The Way of Generativity,” and explains that “Jesus didn't just help people. He inspired others to do so, and encouraged helping behaviors. Jesus devoted much of his time to making everyday people like James and Peter, ordinary fishermen, into paradigms of agape love. His life can best be understood as a light that has passed the power of agape love down through the ages, from generation to generation, through the church and beyond.

Regarding Agape Love, Steven Post shares with us the following prayer: "Lord, prompt us to lend a helping hand to the needy, and be a generative example to others."

Ninth, Post notes, “The Way of Celebration,” and explains that “There are so many times in the New Testament when Jesus celebrates. He attended a wedding feast, he was regularly criticized for drinking a bit of wine with his disciples, and he fed the five thousand. Jesus said that he came that we might have life, “and have it more abundantly” (I John 10:10).

Steven Post offers us this prayer: “Lord, let us see all lives as your gifts calling us to gratitude and celebration.”

Tenth, Steven Post notes, “The Way of Forgiveness,” and explains, “Jesus of Nazareth brought forgiveness into the Western world. The great prayer of Christianity states: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Jesus asked men ready to throw stones to forgive a woman who had committed adultery. He always taught forbearance and recommended that we avoid judging one another because we all have faults. As he died on the cross, his last words were, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Finally, regarding “Celebration,” Steven Post offers us the following prayer: “Lord, enable us to forgive and make our apologies meaningful.”

The full article can be found at http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/Christianity/2008/09/Ten-Ways-Jesus-ShowedLove.aspx#ixzz1dPlhd08k

Steven Post writes the column "Intercultural Geomancy." Other books by Steven Post include: The Geomancy of Ancient Crete, and Walking and Christianity.

I have included Steven Post’s article, “Ten Ways Jesus Showed Love” because I believe that he has highlighted the strengths we hold in common as Christians.

Within these Christian principles, there are some concrete solutions being offered that will help to enable us to begin our conversations leading us to Christian Unity -“That they (we) may all be one”

“For the beauty of the earth...” ~ Autumn in a Kentucky Wetland Area
However, it may be in the area of understanding forgiveness where Christ offers us the most hope for positive and constructive change in our world. As Christians, we pray in one or more versions or form the following: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Forgiveness may be the beginning point in our discussions leading toward finding Christian Unity. Asking how we can forgive and be forgiven may help us to find a path in the darkness toward the "Light."

Please take some time to reflect over the prayers that Steven Post has provided and how they may help to assist us on our journey toward Christian Unity.

Comments by M.J. Glauber

The United Methodist-Catholic Dialogue: Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs:

http://www.usccb.org/seia/methodist.shtml


Methodist-Catholic Dialogue Looks at Environment, Eucharist

10-130; July 7, 2010 Press Release

WASHINGTON— Scholars from the Catholic Church and the United Methodist Church (UMC) discussed the relationship between the environment and Eucharist at the fourth session of the seventh round of the Catholic-Methodist dialogue, June 28-30, in Washington.


Both bishops highlighted the shared world view that emerges from the Eucharistic traditions of their churches and said it is relevant to today’s ecological crisis in the Gulf of Mexico.

“In our dialogues and final report

The following link will bring you to the PDF document published by the Episcopal Church in the United States indicating their standing in 2007 in regard to ecumenical matters:


Please reflect on what is written at the preceding link.
we hope to help fellow congregants see how our public worship, particularly the Eucharist, shapes us to see God’s glory in creation and to care for the creation as faithful stewards,” Bishop Whitaker said.

Round 7 has convened liturgists and ethicists to study caring for God’s creation. The fourth session focused on sacramentality, liturgical memory, and reading the signs of the times as environmentally attuned Christians.

Monsignor Kevin W. Irwin, dean of the School of Theology at The Catholic University of America, began the session by examining the fundamental language of Eucharistic celebration.

“The very preparation of, taking, blessing, breaking, and giving [bread], imply work and communal responsibility to share all of the earth’s resources with all on the earth, lest we rape the world and leave it devastated for the next generation,” Irwin said.

Msgr. Irwin affirmed the Roman Catholic Church’s doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the species of bread and wine and said the manufacturing and eating of food belongs to the heart of Christian worship. The Eucharist rightly understood, he said, “reveres the means of production in terms of human ingenuity and it reveres food as the gift of the God of creation and redemption.”

Karen Westerfield-Tucker, Ph.D., Boston University, noted strong Methodist (or “Weslyan”) agreement with Irwin’s paper, especially the concept that liturgical symbols like water, fire and wheat retain their essence as natural and manufactured goods.

“Precisely as symbols which occasion the act of blessing God, these things become more truly what they are natively — bearers of God’s presence and images of God’s own goodness,” she said.

Another presentation on the themes of creation and redemption drew on ancient Christian commentaries. Angela Christman, Ph.D., Loyola University, Baltimore, noted that for early church Fathers like St. Augustine the human activity of producing bread, a gift of creation, mirrors the transformation of worshipers at the Eucharistic liturgy. She cited a fifth century sermon of Augustine to the newly baptized of his cathedral.

“Afterward you came to the water, and you were moistened into dough, and made into one lump, she said, citing Augustine. With the application of the heat of the Holy Spirit you were baked, and made into the Lord’s loaf of bread.”

Jesuit Father Drew Christiansen, editor of America magazine, looked at ecology’s ethical considerations and explored how recent popes have understood the “signs of the times” when reflecting on such challenges as climate change, deforestation, and impending conflicts over water resources. While popes have made use of both metaphysical and empirical methods in advancing Catholic social teaching, they concur that authentic human development cannot take place without conscious attention to the
environment. Pope Benedict XVI argues that ecological responsibility and “human ecology”—the defense of human life and dignity—are inseparable.

During the deliberations dialogue members noted the Gulf crisis and other environmental issues in the headlines since they met at the end of 2009.

Other participants in the dialogue included Edgardo Colon-Emeric, Ph.D., Duke University School of Divinity; Rev. Betty Gamble, Acting Ecumenical Officer for the UMC; Connie Lasher, Ph.D., visiting scholar at Santa Clara University, California; Father James Massa, Executive Director of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, USCCB; L. Edwards Phillips, Ph.D., Emory University's Candler School of Theology, Atlanta; and Sondra Wheeler, Ph.D., Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington.

Interchurch Families benefit from cross denominational dialogues and projects that we can work on together. We hope that these kinds of dialogues and shared mission work will continue and that a greater sense of understanding and community can be found.

~ M.J. Glauber

Make plans now to attend the next AAIF Biennial Conference to be held in 2012 - July 13-15 in Collegeville, MN

Please see www.aifusa.org for on-going updates
The Ecumenical News
International reports:

Pope's trip to Germany fails to meet ecumenical hopes

Berlin (ENInews)--Pope Benedict XVI's visit to Germany on 23 September featured an ecumenical worship service in the town of Erfurt that was meant to reach out to German Protestants, but for many felt like a missed opportunity.

In his sermon, Benedict said that "there was some talk of an 'ecumenical gift' which was expected from this visit. "Here I would only say that this reflects a political misreading of faith and of ecumenism."

Many were disappointed there was no indication that the pope intended to relax a ban on non-Catholics taking communion in Catholic churches, or recognize Protestant denominations as "true churches" as opposed to "ecclesiastical communities."

Catholics, Protestants unite in prayer, but differences don't disappear

By Cindy Wooden, Catholic News Service

FREIBURG, Germany (CNS)

"Divided Christians can celebrate their common faith in Christ with beautiful prayer services, but that does not mean they leave aside all their differences."

The full story can be found at http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/1103794.htm

"Swiss Cardinal Kurt Koch, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, stated the Catholic position that shared Communion as a regular practice is appropriate only once the Catholic and Protestant churches come to a fuller agreement on serious theological questions, including the meaning of the Eucharist."

"At a press conference after the papal events, the Rev. Nikolaus Schneider, chairman of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany, reiterated the position of his church that when a Catholic and Lutheran are married they should be able to receive Communion at each other's church services."

Rev. Schneider responded by saying that the concrete faith lives of married couples, and not just "theological theories," should be given greater consideration by the Catholic Church. Protestants have been raising the issue with the Vatican for a long time, even to the point of perhaps causing irritation, he said.

Cindy Wooden reported that "The Lutheran leader also was asked about the hopes some Lutherans expressed that Pope Benedict would "rehabilitate" Martin Luther or symbolically withdraw his excommunication during the trip, or at least by 2017 when they mark the 500th anniversary of the Reformation."

Cindy Wooden explained that "He said the pope's speeches that morning were, in effect, a re-evaluation of the person of Martin Luther and his praiseworthy goal of exploring how sinful human beings can receive God's grace."

"Rev. Schneider said he hoped the official Catholic position on Luther would continue to develop and would move toward a re-evaluation of Luther's theology, not just his personal faith."
Cindy Wooden added that “Cardinal Koch responded that reconciliation is “a two-way street.””

“Both Catholics and Lutherans have work to do in evaluating what happened during the Reformation and what has happened since, he said,” reported Cindy Wooden in the Catholic Review.

Her full article can be found at: http://www.catholicreview.org/subpages/storyworldnew-new.aspx?action=10673

AAIF members anticipate ongoing discussions regarding this topic since it affects our lives on a regular basis as interchurch families. At the 2006 AAIF Conference in Virginia, interchurch couples repeatedly asked the USCCB representative for the opportunity to be able to take communion together as a family.

AAIF took note of this request, and we are continuing to seek paths toward Christian Unity that will foster understanding and perhaps ultimately the possibility of regularly shared communion for interchurch couples. For interchurch families, by virtue of who they/we are, being able to share communion as a family is important. The fact that in 2006, Interchurch Families at the AAIF Biennial Conference repeatedly asked for and about this possibility of the USCCB over all over requests points out its importance.

Certainly we live this unity within our homes, and at every meal we share together, there we find Christ’s presence among us. Still, officially, we can’t take communion together regularly in each other’s churches as a family according to the existing guidelines.

On the other hand, it may be that our interchurch families’ presence may be considered as an “Exception” - The aspect of being a daily “Exception” may need to be considered on behalf of those faithful and devout interchurch families.

I pray that this can be resolved soon and to the benefit of all the faithful interchurch couples who
Life Lessons
(Applying “Life Lessons” to our lived experience of being Interchurch Families)

Ken Neuhauser interviewed Claire Vujanovic, a mother and an attorney who recently moved to Louisville with her family from Asheville, NC; his article about Claire Vujanovic appeared in the Courier Journal Newspaper on Sunday, May 29, 2011. Her life lessons have been pared down to five main points:

Learn the rules:

Claire Vujanovic noted that “there are rules that apply to everything, from how to handle silverware at the dinner table to managing complex litigation. She admits that it isn’t exciting, but it is necessary to know the rules if you intend to excel in those things that give you joy. She indicated that we are constantly being taught the importance of rules from the time that we are children, but that it may not be until we are adults before we can appreciate their importance.”

As I read this, I felt that for interchurch families that we are constantly in a process of learning many sets of rules or traditions. This broadening of our knowledge base serves to allow us to show greater understanding and compassion for others.

Color outside the lines:

Claire Vujanovic told Ken Neuhauser that “Once you know the rules, you will know which ones you must adhere to, which ones you can bend and which ones you can break.” She explained that “Through experience, she had learned that just about everything in life is negotiable. So don’t be afraid to color outside of the lines.”

I believe that Claire Vujanovic has observed that there is a need to evolve in how we understand the rules and their purpose. This allows us to grow and to become more what Christ had envisioned and continues to envision for us. This translates into all aspects of what we do, but for interchurch families, this gives us permission to reflect carefully about our role on the journey toward creating Christian Unity.

“Better the ball:”

“Claire Vujanovic borrowed this phrase from a volley ball coach; it means that each time you touch the volley ball, leave it in a better position than you found it. Claire Vujanovic explains that in life, with everything or every person you “touch” strive to make it or them better.”

Claire Vujanovic adopted this phrase because “it best explained a belief that she had held for a long time.”

As interchurch families, we have been given a task to help to promote “Christian Unity” as one of the ways that we will help to make the world a better place after we have “touched” it. This task was given to us by default; (Although I also believe that God put us in this kind of a marriage for a reason) it simply comes with being an interchurch family so we should
embrace this as an opportunity.

**Slow Down:**

Claire Vujanovic read an article which "estimated that people who rush through the mundane tasks of life save only minutes while inflicting considerable stress on themselves and those people around them. The article she had read explained that rushing actually oftentimes takes more time as we make silly mistakes like forgetting our keys. Claire Vujanovic began to consciously slow down. She observed that when she has accomplished this small feat that she does seem to notice and enjoy her family, friends and work much more. She wished that she had thought of this sooner; now it has taken a priority in her life."

For interchurch families, this may translate into being a key component for allowing us to be attentive and present in the moment so that we can see opportunities for creating bonds and for building bridges across what had formerly been traditional divides. Our lived experiences place us into contact with a diverse population; we live lives that are enriched by the presence of others. We are allowing ourselves to contemplate this kind of enrichment.

**Be kind:**

Claire Vujanovic noted that "Some measure of our happiness is derived from just being kind." She tries to pass this life lesson on to her children on a daily basis.

For interchurch families, we may see within that message “The Golden Rule” which we have known to be an effective way for dealing with others. The others around us may look different, speak another language and worship in a different space, but they were all created by our same Creator. By practicing this simple “Golden Rule” to be kind will enable us to accomplish far more in our endeavors at creating Christian Unity than we may have even considered to be possible in the past.

~ I would like to thank Ken Neuhauser of the Courier Journal Newspaper and Claire Vujanovic for sharing her “Life Lessons” with us. I have applied them to our lived experience as Interchurch Families, although these lessons are most valuable for all people no matter what they are doing and where they are. They are universal in the way that she has described them and they give great hope.

~ Mary Jane Glauber

*     *    *

Reconciliation is “a two-way street.”

Making what may at first appear to be insurmountable differences work for
the benefit and good of all people, that is to do God’s work in our lives:

“I am your brother, Joseph”

Please note that forgiveness and reconciliation are two different things not to be confused one with the other.

The dictionary offers definitions for “Reconcile” that are diverse. In fact, they are so diverse that they become confusing as to which definition for “Reconcile” is being used by either the speaker or the listener when they are trying to communicate.

Being reconciled “to accept something that is not desired” isn’t what we are talking about as interchurch families. We are looking for a more positive and inspired Christian experience.

The following Biblical passage is inspiring for interchurch families who live this unity in their homes:

John 17:21 “so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me.”

God expects unity from us.

In John 1:5-9, we read: 5 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; 7 but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

The sense that God is Light is significant for interchurch families and ecumenists who are seeking a path toward Christian Unity. This Bible passage has a lot in it for us to consider.

Moving toward “the Light” and away from the darkness is our
primary objective as interchurch families, Christians and ecumenists.

We must be alert for and attentive to that of God, our Creator, the “Light” in the world around us and for all the creative possibilities that exist which come from our Creator.

We are not blindly accepting our faith, but we are examining it for the depth that it brings to our understanding of God, our Creator, “That Holy Light” so that we can all flourish. This would be the opposite from competition that many of us thrive on to drive our academic and/or financial successes.

Reconciled comes from Middle English through a Latin route. In that context, it means to make good again, repair. An extension of the meaning for being reconciled also provides us with “to reconcile hostile persons” and “to bring into agreement or harmony; make compatible or consistent: to reconcile differing statements; to reconcile accounts” as meanings for being reconciled.

“To make good again and to repair” and “to win over to friendliness; cause to become amicable” seems to be the best meaning or meanings, for being reconciled, from the many that were also provided in the dictionary, for us to pursue as interchurch families and as Christians who are seeking a greater unity.

To forgive so that we may be able to reconcile eventually is what needs to happen first, but how will that happen?

We can look at dictionary definitions for “Forgiveness,” too, of course, but lived examples of forgiveness will help us to better understand what it is that we are called to do. The task at hand is to create an environment and dialogue where differences are viewed as gifts of opportunity and possibility from our Creator.

We look at flower gardens and note that there is great diversity which contributes to the beauty of the garden. Walking in the forest, we admire all of the trees that serve to create an overall beauty through their diversity. Some of the trees are tall canopy trees and other trees are understory trees; each although very different one from the other belong in the healthy forest which was provided to us by our Creator.

Our Creator has given us diversity; we should embrace this diversity.

We are not God so we are not set in a position to pronounce judgment on others who have also been created in God’s image. Recognizing this provides a very liberating feeling. I am not speaking here of our legal system, I am speaking about how we live in community as Christians with others.
I am not talking about “forgiving” loans made by a banking system. I am looking for a deeper meaning for “Forgiveness” that allows us to create the foundations for Christian Unity. Let’s look for that path.

What allows us to forgive others? Please see: Genesis 37:11; 37:32-33; Genesis 38:25-26; Genesis 50:15-19 where you will find the story of Joseph and his coat of many colors in order to see examples of forgiveness.

This is a popular Bible story that is often read to children, but then forgotten about as we have grown older. It is time to look at this Bible story from the perspective of being an adult so that it has meaning, deep meaning that can exceed the one we may have attached to it when we heard it for the first time as children. What lessons about forgiveness can be found within this Bible story that we can apply to our own lives? I have found some parts in it that highlight for me what forgiveness is all about. You may find others so I encourage you to re-read Genesis.

This will become our purpose to look for concrete examples of forgiveness.

Joseph was envied by his brothers. This may also have stemmed from the fact that Joseph was the son of Rachel, Jacob’s most beloved wife. However, other factors were involved in creating the resentment that Jacob’s sons felt toward their half-brother Joseph who bragged a lot or so it seemed to them.

I began by reading Genesis 50: 15-19: “15 When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?”

To me this appears that although they had been allowed to live and to prosper while in Egypt where Joseph was in a position of power while their father was alive, they also wondered if this help was only being given because Joseph loved his father.

Joseph’s brothers understand that they made some serious mistakes, but they don’t know how to correct their past deeds. We live in the present moment; the past is over and the future isn’t here yet. Correcting past actions may be an impossible task; we can only act in the present.

16 So they sent word to Joseph, saying, “Your father left these instructions before he died:

17 ‘This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.’ Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father.” When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

18 His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. “We are your slaves,” they said.

19 But Joseph said to them, “Don’t be
afraid. Am I in the place of God?

20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

21 So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.” And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.”

Joseph’s words are an example of forgiveness. He is clearly speaking from out of his own understanding and plans to act based on that role with which he had been entrusted.

First, he explains that he is not God. Then Joseph says to his brothers, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.” This is our beginning point in trying to discern the role of forgiveness in our lives.

Not being bogged down by his own emotions and feelings Joseph is able to recognize what is for the greater good and to set out to accomplish that or to act in such a way so that the greater good can be accomplished which we also refer to as the will of God, and this is the part that we should focus on too.

When we act from a position of forgiveness, we do this to free ourselves from our burdens and emotional baggage. The act of forgiveness may bear great fruit for the general welfare and prosperity of all ultimately, but we do this to liberate ourselves from any kind of emotional baggage that may bog us down.

Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt so he decided to send his sons to barter for that grain “so that we may live and not die” which is very significant for the survival of the people who will form the tribes of Israel. If they had all died from starvation; the story would have been over. Ultimately, and with Joseph’s help, Jacob moved all of his family into Egypt where they would thrive. It was a difficult process for everyone, but God wishes for us to live.

Joseph may have had some suspicions of his own about his brothers when they first arrived in Egypt asking to buy grain. He was human and no doubt felt every kind of feelings that humans feel. Joseph asks many questions. This is an opportunity of some kind, and he sets about discovering what it is that God expects of him in this situation.

It is in Genesis 42: 24 where we read that Joseph briefly turned away from his brothers who had not recognized him
and that he wept out of their sight.

Joseph wept out of their line of vision, but Joseph wept. This seems to be such a normal and natural response. We, too, may grieve over many things in our lives, and rightfully so, but do we get stuck at that point or do we keep asking questions that lead us to a deeper understanding, to solutions, and us to a place where we can do the work of God?

Seeing his brothers again who had sold him into slavery was not an easy experience for Joseph. At this point, Joseph could have responded in anger toward his brothers. Joseph acts intelligently and with wisdom. Joseph protects himself, but then he sets aside his own emotions to achieve the greater good. He feels those emotions, but he recognizes that he has a greater purpose that has been given to him by God for his people.

Reading on, we see that this also hasn’t been an easy experience for Joseph’s brothers nor for their father. In Genesis 42:25 - 37, we read about those deeply felt emotions. Joseph gives grain to his brothers and returns their coins by having them placed in their bags of grain without their knowledge. When they discover the money in their grain bags, they have their own fears that they are being tricked in some way by that powerful Egyptian who is really their brother. How many times have we also been perplexed by the actions of someone else? We may wonder about their motives for which we cannot grasp any kind of comprehension.

Joseph’s brothers are afraid of this unknown and powerful Egyptian, but they need his help. I find this story to be most plausible especially when typical human emotions are shown. Even in the 21st Century, I can identify with all of the obviously strongly held emotions.

How many times have we let our own emotions get in the way of what needs to be done in our own lives? How many times have we let our need to be right override the task God has intended for us?

The story of Joseph continues in Genesis 43 when it tells of “The Second Journey to Egypt.” Jacob is told that he must send his other beloved son, Benjamin if they are to negotiate with the Egyptian. Jacob has already lost one of his favorite sons, but to possibly lose a second favorite son may be too much for him. We read how this must have been a major obstacle for him.

We may pause to consider that it seems as if the name Jacob, who was Joseph’s father, is being used interchangeably with the name Israel. This must have significance then. Also, in Genesis, we observe that Jacob sets aside his own worries in favor of pursuing the greater good. This is a selfless act of Charity.

Is Joseph consumed by so many feelings of anger, having been betrayed, and hatred that he will act out his feelings using his new position of power to gain revenge? Is Joseph able to let go and let God's will prevail?

In Genesis 43: 15- 28, we read that Joseph’s brothers are invited to eat at his home. Joseph’s brothers are welcomed back in Egypt, but they still don’t know who he is yet. Once again we see that Joseph must take a brief leave from his brothers because he is so overcome by emotions that he must weep. The sight of his brother Benjamin causes Joseph to weep.

Joseph once again expresses the kind of emotions that most
of us feel or would feel if we were in his position. They are his feelings so he weeps. The repeated need to weep indicates that this was a process for Joseph to go through so that he could discern the Will of God for his situation.

Joseph makes his true identity known in verse 5 of Genesis 45; this is when Joseph actually expresses to his brothers, those same brothers who had sold him into slavery so many years before, his first overt sign of forgiveness. He wept over them in the open so they could see this. He wept so loudly, that the Egyptians who had left the room could hear his weeping. Like many stories that are witnessed by human beings, this one spread quickly from one person to the next so that news of this reunion spread quickly to the Pharaoh who offered to help.

Joseph understands that all of this happened so that he would be placed in a position where he could save his family. His feelings of forgiveness has nothing to do with what his older brothers are feeling for what they had done nor their previous perceptions of Joseph.

Joseph also allows himself to feel whatever emotions he has. We observe Joseph’s emotions when we read that he weeps over and over again. It is when Joseph is able to take into account the purpose of his situation that he is able to act from a position of real forgiveness.

 Forgiveness is something we feel genuinely and it is often found over time and by some kind of a deeper insight into any given situation.

 Forgiveness is something we do for ourselves so that our lives are not wasted by allowing ourselves to wallow in our own self-pity to the extent that it consumes us.

The story continues: In Genesis 45: 16 -24, Joseph warns his brothers, as they set out to go back to get their father, “Don’t quarrel on the way!!” This line has significance for us, all of us, no matter who we are; it advises us to set aside our own personal quibbles, and to stay focused on the task at hand. We are called to focus ourselves on the work of God.

In Genesis 46, Jacob, Joseph’s father goes to Egypt. In this section of Genesis. Jacob says to God, “Here I am” after God has called to Jacob in the darkness of night. Jacob, in effect, promises to do God’s will when he says, “Here I am.” This is also significant because Jacob is attentive and alert enough to hear that Voice of God and to follow God’s will over his own will, fear and emotions. Jacob follows that Holy Light that is God.

Jacob’s fears are clearly elaborated in Genesis, but he sets them aside to be able to follow the Will of God. Jacob takes everyone in his family to Egypt based on what God has told him.

The Israelites, Jacob and all the descendants of Jacob head out to Egypt as God had

“For the Beauty of the Earth”
Light on the hydrangea plant
~ Autumn in the USA
advised Jacob. In Egypt, Joseph greets them. As soon as Joseph appeared before him, he threw his arms around his father and wept for a long time.

This is a highly emotional experience both for Joseph and his father. I am struck by their actions since if I had been in their place I most likely would have wept as well.

However, do their emotions get the best of them so that they seek some kind of revenge, justice or repayment in kind, or do they feel their emotions and do what they know to be God’s Will? Also the role that love plays in this Bible Story cannot be emphasized enough. Actions done out of Love and a Love of God triumphed over fear.

And what about reconciliation, you may be asking, how does reconciliation become involved? What are those brothers of Joseph who had sold him into slavery in Egypt thinking and feeling? Have they changed overtime?

I don’t know if Joseph was ever actually fully reconciled with his older brothers who had sold him into slavery, but the story shows that he acted from a position of forgiveness so that all twelve tribes of Israel were able to continue to live more or less side by side in the world. The survival of the people of Israel depended on Joseph to do what was right, and he did that.

How Joseph chose to respond and that he did not let his own feelings and emotions prevent him from doing what was the right thing to do, so that all of the twelve tribes of Israel could continue to exist is significant. Joseph’s decision to act from a position of forgiveness makes him great; in fact, Joseph is considered to be the greatest hero. However it was because Joseph sought to do the work of God that he distinguishes himself as the hero for his people.

May we be guided by our own ability to forgive. Forgiveness may not change the character of those we forgive, but it frees us immensely so that we can live full and fruitful lives.

As interchurch families, we may have been able to forgive history so that we can live in the present to the fullest. Freed from the burden of negative emotions that serve only to eat at us, we are able to see that of God at work in the lives of others and the natural world around us. This forgiveness liberates us so that we can do God’s work in our world.

Perhaps the path for Christian Unity isn’t so much about a need for reconciliation, but about forgiveness and being able to forgive. Perhaps our way forward is about recognizing that of God in the face of all people we may meet and their personal gifts of insight into the Divine in the world around us at this moment in time.

Forgiveness takes place within us individually, and it transforms us so that we can achieve our full potential. Truly it is God who enables us to forgive others. We may not need to look so much for reconciliation, but for how to forgive simply so that we can all move forward to do the work of God in the world around us.

Forgiveness allows us to put that of God first.

‘Thoughts and Reflections about “Joseph and his coat of many colors” as it relates to Forgiveness’ by Mary Jane Glauber
Christians are called to be the hands and feet of Christ in our world.

The 184th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Kentucky was held from November 11 and 12, 2011 at St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church, Louisville

Theme for the Convention 2011: ‘The Fruits of Compassion’

A focus on compassion

“As hinted in its theme, "The Fruits of Compassion," the diocese's first fall convention spotlighted, from a Christian perspective, calls for us and our communities to respond compassionately to brokenness in the world. These calls have been seen recently in a national campaign for communities to adopt the "City of Compassion" Charter, which is intended to create "more compassionate" cities that encourage their citizens to live and act in compassionate ways."

Mission lab with bishop & other workshops

“During the first hour of afternoon workshops, beginning at 2 p.m., Bishop Terry White led a "mission lab" to plan, hypothetically, to start a congregation in these economically challenging times. Their task was to determine what is essential, indispensable, for Gospel mission.”

“The Rev. Ben Maas, rector of St. Andrew's, and others led a panel discussion on church vitality with a focus on how successful ministry at two parishes grew out of their unique contexts. Their conversation included a discussion of knowing and spreading the Word to those you seek to reach.”

“In a Friday workshop presented by the Department of Justice and Jubilee, the biblical bases for compassionate response were explored. The Justice and Jubilee workshop on "Our Call to Compassion" was led by the Rev. Dr. Mary Abrams. The other workshops also were devoted to promoting awareness and developing skills and resources that encourage our members and congregations to be vital, compassionate citizens in their communities.”

Opportunities to act compassionately

Christians are called to be the hands and feet of Christ in our world. But we don’t have to
travel to a foreign country or spend thousands of dollars to do mission work. Panel members from four different parishes shared with us opportunities for mission work within our Diocese.

"Convention goers personally had at least two opportunities to act compassionately. For the first time, convention participants and guests were asked to support an outreach ministry of the host church. For this convention, they were asked to bring canned goods and other non-perishable foods or donate money for two food pantries at the Episcopal Church of the Advent (one for people food and the other for pets). St. Andrew's partners with Advent in operating the food pantry, which distributes food twice a month."

"As with previous conventions, the Seamen's Church Institute recruited volunteers during lunch to help support their "Ministry on the River" program. Instead of packing candy for Easter, however, the volunteers packed Christmas boxes for the mariners who navigate our region's waterways. Donations of candy suitable for Christmas are also wanted."

** **

What are the implications for Interchurch Families and Ecumenists?

The creative problem solving gave me a sense of hope and possibility for finding creative solutions in other places. Being "Christians who are called to be the feet and hands of Christ in the world," and their chosen theme "The Fruits of Compassion" which was 'spotlighted from a Christian perspective based on a strong foundation on the Word that calls for us and our communities to respond compassionately to brokenness in the world' is very hopeful.

The theme of Compassion and a concept of being both "the hands and feet of Christ in the world" merit further and ongoing exploration for us as we seek a pathway to Christian Unity. Understanding that there is brokenness in the world allows us to seek solutions. We can become compassionate.

Convention information can be found on the website for the Episcopal Diocese of Kentucky.

"Implications for Interchurch Families and Ecumenists" by M.J. Glauber
Many thanks to everyone who made this edition of the ARK possible.

Special thanks are extended to: Daniel Olsen, Cindy Wooden, Claire Vujanovic, Ken Neuhauser, The Ecumenical News International, The Methodist-Catholic Dialogue Looking at Environment, Eucharist, The Episcopal Church’s Ecumenical Officers, The Episcopal Diocese of Kentucky, The PCPCU, the USCCB ecumenical representatives; AAIF Board Members, AAIF Members,

AAIF Pastoral Advisors: Father Ernest Falardeau, S.S.S.; Father George Kilcourse; and Pastor Elaine Hall

Especially, I would like to thank my husband, Peter, and our family for their on-going encouragement.

Looking forward to the 2012 AAIF Biennial Conference: July 13-15 in Collegeville, MN - Please ‘save the date,’ details to follow at www.aifusa.org

"-Consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds" - Hebrews 10:24