



**The Second Report
after**
The American Association of Interchurch Families Biennial Conference which took place at Holy Wisdom Monastery in Wisconsin in July 2010
“Learning from Benedictine Spirituality” with an emphasis on the family, community and society

~Please join AAIF as we continue our journey, by continuing this theme, during the next two years between conferences

Interchurch Families:

Christian Unity

Made Visible

in our Households

Christ told them to “become like little children”

-What does this mean in our lives today?
-How have we been affected by the presence of children in our interchurch families as domestic churches? -The children in our midst . . . included in this edition of the ARK:

Interchurch Children as Bilingual Christians
by Daniel J. Olsen, Ph.D.



“become as little children,” ~ Matthew 18:3



**Make plans now to attend the next
AAIF Biennial Conference
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Interchurch Children as Bilingual Christians

by Daniel J. Olsen, Ph.D.

I have been considering for some time the ways in which interchurch children come to experience their religious upbringing differently than do children from same-church families. A recent discussion I had with my four year old son about football provided me with a key insight into the unique interpretive perspective of interchurch children.

Last week, my son asked me why I was a fan of the Green Bay Packers football team. We now live near Chicago and he is having a hard time understanding why his cousins, aunts, and uncles (from my wife's family) like the Chicago Bears. Likewise, no one in his preschool class seemed to understand why he kept saying that he was not cheering for the Bears in an upcoming game against the Packers. It was as unfathomable to the other kids that he would cheer for the Packers as it was to him that he would not. Since four year old boys tend to gravitate toward the likes and dislikes of their fathers, he wanted to know why we were both Packer fans when it made no sense to everyone else.

I explained to him that I grew up in Wisconsin and being a Packer fan in Wisconsin is as normal as having turkey on Thanksgiving and getting presents on Christmas. It was just how you were raised and it

was how your reality was shaped from an early age. His friends' parents, however, mainly grew up in Chicago and became Bears fans without even thinking about it. They then passed on this allegiance to their children.

He is still trying to figure out how two seemingly bright people can come to completely different assessments of something seen as (relatively) important to him. I understand that this needs to be seen as a trivial example, but it clarified for me the level of shaping that goes on for youth depending on their surroundings. Context determines much in life. My son is afforded the benefit of considering this reality early on in life because his beloved parents hold allegiance to two different football teams.

In a much more significant and pronounced way, interchurch children become enmeshed in a dialogue about respecting difference at a very early age. They come to know

two different symbolic expressions of Christianity and the rituals, theological articulations, prayers, and depictions of God that go into making up this symbolic framework. For the sake of this reflection, I would like to identify this symbolic framework as a broadly understood Christian "language." Each Christian church has a language that is related to, but somewhat distinct from other Christian churches. How many

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Reflection of an interchurch child; photo taken during the 2010 AAIF Biennial Conference at Holy Wisdom Monastery

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sacraments are there? What priority is given to the sacraments or to Scripture in the life of this community? What does it mean to be saved? Who can/cannot be a minister in this community? How these and a myriad of other questions are answered come to define a given community's Christian language. Thus, interchurch children are uniquely gifted because their interactions in relation to these two faith communities allow them to become bilingual Christians at an early age. They exhibit an ability to converse fluently about Christianity in relation to two Christian languages and this linguistic aptitude makes them well situated to explore the ongoing spiritual giftedness of diverse ecclesial traditions.

Current scientific research convincingly reveals that the best time to begin to learn another language is at an early age. Accordingly, American schools are beginning to structure their curriculum around language development at early ages. My daughter, for example, just entered Kindergarten and began learning American Sign Language and Spanish during the first week of classes. Last week, in fact, she taught me how to sign her name. This development in pedagogical focus does not mean that American elementary schools have chosen to neglect English or Phonics, but it does show



that learning a second (or third) language is seen as an important step for one hoping to become a viable member in an increasingly globalized American context.

This reality caused me to wonder why our Christian churches do so little to make their young (or even more experienced) members more aware of the "languages" used by their sisters and brothers in Christ. We teach them Catholic, Baptist, Lutheran, Anglican or Orthodox theological language and practices depending on their respective tradition, but often fail to alert them that other ways of explaining and/or interpreting the Christian faith exist. Does this situation not make Christian youth less likely to recognize other expressions of Christianity as valid and worthwhile? Does it not stunt their ability to discern

the richness of various Christian communities? I am not unaware of the practical difficulties faced by religious educators due to time limits or lack of parental or institutional support. However, if Christians are to commit themselves fully to the ecumenical task they must become more devoted to revealing the distinctions and similarities among Christian communities to their young. If they do not begin to do a better job carrying out this educational endeavor, the next generation of Christians will likely remain stunted in their ability to identify, celebrate and dialogue about core variations among ecclesial communities.

Luckily, there are already communities where this type of education is alive and well, namely, within Christian

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"become as little children," ~ Matthew 18:3

I can respect and understand people's beliefs and religions."

on the road to full and visible unity.

Within the everyday fabric of their family life, interchurch children are confronted with questions about the meaning of the Sacraments (especially

Let me conclude by saying that I am not making any claims as to the theological superiority or sufficiency of any one Christian perspective. I am simply

making the (hermeneutical) point that children in interchurch families experience their Christian faith in direct relationship with two distinct Christian communities and that this reality enhances their ability to know and relate better to the symbolic

As an interchurch child, would she describe herself as bilingual or as the bridge builder between two cultures, two church cultures, and between two distinct families?

Yes, she holds this potential, and brings great hope. She may not yet have the vocabulary to articulate this as well as she will about how she will act in loving ways toward both of her heritages in an effort to have them both seated at the same table. Along with others like her, together, she will be one of those who will be the builders of a bright future.

What message would you like her to carry into a future you may not see? ~ M.J. Glauber

languages of these two bodies. Thus, they are challenged daily to become good ecumenical conversationalists from their infancy. In so doing, they develop a facility for recognizing the rigors and challenges of the ongoing struggle for Christian unity. They remain hopeful that ecumenical dialogue will continue unabated in the future because they experience the pain of division today. In short, they stand as grassroots Christian linguists who serve as needed models for Christians who often fail to

Eucharist), Scripture, church structure, liturgy, among a host of other theological and spiritual realities. By speaking about and experiencing these diverse expressions of the Christian faith, these children become more knowledgeable about the issues that continue to divide these communities. They can, for example, more easily discern the need for one community to spend more time discovering the riches of Scripture, or for another to consider in more depth the sacramentality of the everyday. They live the gifts that each ecclesial community offers and are well situated to share with others a sense of these gifts and the challenges that remain

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interchurch homes. Interchurch children do not have the luxury of learning about a single Christian tradition if they are to make sense of their religious lives. They must become bilingual at an early age. The effect of this expanding theological vocabulary is testified to by the following reflections from interchurch children. One writes, "[Being interchurch] gives you a wider view of the Christian religion and you are less blind and more understanding towards other Christian traditions and beliefs." Another states, "I feel I am less narrow minded, I can see the good and bad points of both churches and through this

Diane Burton, an AAIF Board Member and one of AAIF Founding Members, at the reception after the Sunday Assembly during the 2010 AAIF Conference



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become proficient in any expression of Christian faith but their own.

While my son will likely continue to ask why “smart people” are not Packer fans, at least he has begun to contemplate the influence of culture and upbringing on one’s life perspective. Interchurch children come to experience this same inductive process of discernment about something far more significant. Attending to the ways that they have come to understand their reality of double belonging is important if Christians are to come to an appreciation of the fruitfulness of varying Christian languages.

Lynne Wragge a former AAIF Co-Chair from Omaha, NE at the 2010 AAIF Biennial Conference



“become as little children,”
~ Matthew 18:3

Both reflections can be found at HYPERLINK "<http://www.interchurchfamilies.org/resource/baptism/bapt03.shtm>"
<http://www.interchurchfamilies.org/resource/baptism/bapt03.shtm>. Accessed 9/25/10. Many other similar reflections on life as an interchurch child can be found here or more generally on www.interchurchfamilies.org.



Dave Natella gathers us in for a group photo before we all head out on our separate ways after the 2010 AAIF Biennial Conference at Holy Wisdom Monastery-Interchurch Families: Christian Unity Made Visible in our Households; “Learning from Benedictine Spirituality” with an emphasis on the family, community and society



AAIF City Chapters: Listening Project

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

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FOR THE ARK - AAIF
LISTENING PROJECT
MATERIALS TO BE USED
BY YOUR AAIF CITY
CHAPTERS.

Reflecting on Matthew 18:3 and its implications for Interchurch Families and the role we play in finding Christian Unity

On Saturday afternoon during the 2010 AAIF Biennial Conference, we took time to discuss the spirituality of interchurch children and the gifts that they brought into our interchurch marriages.

"Real education consists in drawing the best out of yourself"

~ Mahatma Gandhi

"Peace"

In that discussion, we concluded that children have an openness toward learning new things, they have an awe of creation, and perhaps a childlike openness toward others in general and to accepting new ideas or concepts. They have no hidden agendas. If they like something, you know it. If they

don't, you know that too. However, no judgment seems to be passed on other people. I am aware that children go through a brief period of having a fear of anyone who isn't their parent, but this dissipates, and the child expects to greet people, to like them, and to be liked in return.

What are your observations about the natural holiness of children that we should be emulating as we live our daily, and most ordinary lives to help to bring us closer to the nature of God in this study and in our pursuit of Christian Unity?

~ M.J. Glauber



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As divine gifts, children are physically immersed in the exploration of a new world in which they have been placed



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the tactile nature of children

"It is a bad habit to say that another man's thoughts are bad and ours only are good and that those holding different views from ours are the enemies"

~Mahatma Gandhi
"Peace"



Bergamot is in the mint family of plants. It is a native plant on the prairie.

"And said, . . . unless you become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

~ Matthew 18:3

Children continue to have awe for God's creation and sometimes for things that we may have begun to take for granted.



"Mom, Do you see that big wet thing over there? Can I explore all of it before or after nap time today?"



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Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will.
 ~Mahatma Gandhi
 "Peace"

If I keep trying to open this, I will succeed. If adults can open this, then I will be able to open this. I am motivated by the challenge. Tasty and cool food is often kept in here. Call it curiosity or motivation; I keep trying.

Father watching son enjoying God's creation in the Pacific North West. As I looked over this scene, I felt that there was a divine presence. Although I find it difficult to articulate that presence, I felt it very strongly at that moment. I believe that God is very much present in our daily lives. We simply need to listen for/look for that Still Small Voice of God.



Many Thanks are extended to the following people for their help in preparing this edition of the ARK:

American Association of Interchurch Families - Officers: CO-CHAIR: Laura & Franz Green; VICE CO-CHAIR: Dave & Carol Natella; SECRETARY: Diane & Lamar Burton; TREASURER: L. Elaine & Clint Hall and to Libbye and Guy Montgomery for their on-going organizational support - Fr. Ernest Falardeau, S.S.S.; Fr. George Kilcourse; and the Rev. L. Elaine Hall for their friendship, pastoral and spiritual guidance; Daniel J. Olsen, Ph.D. for his contribution to this edition of the ARK and to AAIF through the years; The Wragges, Peter Glauber, Molly Glauber, Maggie Horn and her family, John and Pam Glauber for their on-going support and to all AAIF members who have helped to make AAIF an on-going success and for their input oftentimes behind the scenes to help to give ideas and input for articles for the ARK.

Many Thanks!!!! Mary Jane Glauber



Practicing Lectio Divina:

Please read over these Bible verses several times. If something within it begins to sparkle for you, focus on that part to reflect on that section. If you can, write a prayer based on the part that sparkles for you. ARK readers would like to read your prayers.

Mark 9:36-37

(New International Version)

36 He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them,

37 "Who ever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me." Please think on these things.

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

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To:



Rough Leaf Sunflower - a native prairie flower found in God's creation

"become as little children," ~ Matthew 18:3