

The American Association of Interchurch Families Report: November 2008

AAIF has had a real presence at the National Workshop on Christian Unity during the past two years. This has been essential to AAIF in two ways: AAIF has needed to be genuinely visible to other ecumenists and in return AAIF needed to learn what the current trends are that are being discussed among those people who are making decisions that might affect our daily lives in a very personal way.

AAIF has completed our video project. We have been working on this for a long time. "Bridging the Divide" is currently available on DVD. The DVD includes many outtakes of our "Greater Interchurch Family" from over the years with commentary from clergy on the merits of being interchurch families.

At our last AAIF National Conference in 2006, we decided to hold the 2008 conference in June in Kentucky because of the many numbers of Kentuckians at that conference. Local Kentuckians helped to organized pre-conference tours of Kentucky. This was especially nice because it gave us a chance to spend time together informally. Over the years, we have all gotten to know each other so it is more like a family gathering; it was nice to have time to get caught up with each other. In Bardstown, KY, we visited Heaven Hill Distillery, the Proto-Cathedral in Bardstown during the 200th year celebration of the Catholic Church in Kentucky, Pleasant Hill "My Old Kentucky Home," and Gethsemani Abbey where Thomas Merton had lived. Early Friday morning before the conference, one of our members from Louisville arranged for us to have a private and personal tour of the backside of the track at Churchill Downs when the race horses go out for their early morning workouts. The backside track diner overlooks the track. As we ate our sausage, eggs and toast, we could see the horses racing by. One of the jockeys stopped by the windows so that the small children could see the horse nose to nose. It was a sweet encounter. Then we saw the horses get their morning "hot walk" and morning baths followed by a big breakfast of their own. Some of the horses were getting new shoes by farriers.

Friday evening, Daniel Olsen, who at that time was a Ph.D. candidate from Loyola University of Chicago, our keynote speaker explained that interchurch families can be domestic churches. Using the Catholic Church's definition for Domestic Church interchurch families meet this criterion, and go beyond that.

On Saturday morning, Father George Kilcourse brought together Louisville Clergy and a soon to be ordained Methodist minister for a panel discussion so that they could share their interchurch family stories as pastoral caregivers. This was a great success. Interchurch Families have rarely heard our story from this perspective.

After a picnic style lunch, we broke into smaller groups, Bonnie Mack, who is in an interchurch marriage herself presented feedback from her presentation at Boston College. This report, I believe, will become available in the near future.

Barbara MacDonald, who is retired from the Family Life Office, spoke to us about the practical aspects of being married, and how we mirror each other.

Father Ernest Falardeau, SSS spoke about the US Faith and Order Statement and how the Church can speak with credibility to the world today.

Mass was held in a beautiful Chapel on the Ursuline Campus near the Louisville Presbyterian Campus on Saturday evening. After supper, we viewed the video for the first time; the discussion of the video took up more time than anticipated, but it was extremely well received.

On Sunday morning, a Methodist communion service was held on the Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary Campus. The President of the Seminary assisted the Methodist theologian who presided. She was from an interchurch family; her sermon reflected a deep understanding of our lives as it was one that she had lived as a child. She had included an explanation of the history for why she chose the hymns that she did, and she chose familiar hymns for everyone.

For the prayers before meals, interchurch families shared their own prayers that they used at home or that they had learned elsewhere. Most of these are sung.

On Sunday afternoon we visited Bernheim Forest south of Louisville. The Visitor Center is an award winning eco-friendly building; the grounds are lovely. We ate together family style at a restaurant on the banks of the Ohio River. On Monday, we went to Maker's Mark Distillery in Nerinx, KY, the Convent of the Sisters of Loretto where on their grounds a Mennonite lady has constructed an eco-friendly home and back to the Abbey of Gethsemani where Thomas Merton lived.

We were pleased with the turn out for this conference. We hope that AAIF will continue to grow. The ARK, the official publication of the AAIF, has increased awareness about AAIF, who we are, what our lives are like, what Vatican II documents really provide, and this makes it possible for interchurch couples to find us more easily. I personally have gotten good feedback about the ARK and I am grateful for all who have helped to put it together.

Submitted by
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