

Call to Action Conference 2009

I believe interchurch families, learning day by day to listen to the other, discover the value the other brings to the relationship, may yet have much to offer our churches. I hope the day may soon come when the experiences gained in our practical 'laboratories of unity' may be recognized and shared with the wider church, helping people of faith come together in that 'fraternal rivalry' of which Unitatis Redintegratio speaks, leading to the fullness of truth rather than to increasing scandalous division.

What brought on this reflection?

I had the joy of participating in the annual [Call To Action conference](#), 'Everyone at the Table', which was held in Milwaukee November 6-8. It has proved to be a significant event in the lives of active and committed Catholics, with some 2500 participating annually for years.

The keynote speakers were brilliant. Some of their presentations are [available for sale](#), of which I particularly recommend Louise Ackers and Dianne Bergant. I'm told Robert McClory and Thomas Draney were also well worth hearing.

I participated in two workshops by Pace Bene, an organization founded by the Franciscans which conducts workshops on non-violent response to situations of injustice. Several of their quotes (which I can only paraphrase) gave me real food for thought. One was "Our movement is not about changing the minds of the Pope and the hierarchy, but about alerting the populace and bringing change at that level." Another was a question of the internal and external obstacles to change. What were the things within the Church and society which prevented us from living Church as we felt called to do? And what were the things inside ourselves, be it anger, fear, or anything else, which proved similarly to be obstacles in our journey? Finally, there was the open-ended "If I were not afraid, I would _____" Reflecting on that to fill in the blank has proved particularly challenging!

We were told of a statement by Catherine of Siena: "Cry out as with a million voices. It is silence that destroys." And finally, there was "We can no longer expect to change authority. We must live the change we are calling for." What that may mean in the lives of each of us is something that can only be decided on a case-by-case basis, like so many things in the life of interchurch families.

We heard that Sr Christine Schenk, very active in the work of [FutureChurch](#), was successful in lobbying bishops to review the place of women in the Lectionary, any reference to their part in salvation history having been almost completely expunged in the course of the Lectionary's renewal. I was most impressed by her and the work she and FutureChurch are doing.

I was struck by Sr Dianne Bergant's scholarly exposition of the Book of Ruth. You will recall that Ruth was a Moabite who married Boaz, and became the ancestral parent to King David. It's important to note that Ruth never became an Israelite. Rather, she is known always as a Moabite. In this, she is and remains the migrant in the community's midst. The community is not blessed for ministering to the migrant, nor is the migrant blessed through that ministry. Rather, the community is blessed through the migrant in its midst. I couldn't help thinking that our spouses of other traditions, remaining faithful to who they are, likewise become the source of great blessing to us and to our churches.

I must confess I came away from the conference with very mixed feelings. The conference was excellent, and I look forward to returning, hopefully to conduct a workshop for people in, or interested in, interchurch marriages. And yet there was something disconcerting, a deep question that remains with me. Was I participating in a wonderful movement of faithful people working toward a new way of being Church? Or was I participating in a new Reformation, brought about because church leaders have lost the capacity to listen to the people in their midst, choosing instead only to command, to dictate what comes from afar? There was so much that was good, alive, vibrant. But so much of it appeared to come not as a good in itself, but as a result of not being heard, of being treated without the care and concern due human beings, of finding this the only place where questions could be asked, issues explored. I hope and pray I was part of a rich movement of growth and vitality, rather than the start of a new set of scandalous divisions, brought about because, like in the Reformation, a lack of capacity by people to hear each other.

As I stated at the outset, I believe interchurch families may have something significant to contribute, having developed the capacity to listen to and learn from the other.

I hope many more people may come Call To Action, there to experience the vibrant richness of a large group of diverse people gathered to learn, to grow, to pray and to celebrate.