

## Receptive Ecumenism

A second international conference under this theme was held at Ushaw College, Durham, 11-15 January. The basic idea of this movement is that all the churches should ask themselves what gifts they can and should receive from others – this seems to point a provisional way forward at a time when progress towards visible unity appears to have slowed down. God has given us a great variety of gifts in our separated state, and it is up to us to identify them and to receive them from one another. (As interchurch families do!) Thus we can begin to learn to be Church together.

Ray Temmerman who runs the web-site and listserv came from Canada, as did Don Bolen who gave us so much help, as a staff member of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, in organising the Rome Gathering of 2003 and our later visit to the PCPCU of 2005. We were able to arrange a small meeting before the conference with three local AIF couples, the Bones, the Howells and the Riggs. Don had asked for the room where we met, and we were amazed to find it labelled ‘Pontifical Council for Interchurch Families’! We thought we had really gone up in the world, and I have kept the notice as a souvenir. Gill Walsh was invited to Ushaw as a member of the Catholic-Methodist Committee, but unfortunately couldn’t come as she was still recovering from a spine operation.

Brother John from the monastery here at Turvey joined us, and said afterwards that it was a lens through which he saw the whole conference. The ecumenical review *One in Christ* has been re-launched by the monastery after a gap. I am pleased that the current number contains two echoes of our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary conference last year: Thomas Knieps’ text on interchurch families and domestic church, and a short piece by me ‘Forty Years On’. We had been hoping that Professor Bernard Prusak, Chair of the Department of Theology at Villanova University in the US would be able to join us – he was billed to give a short parallel paper on ‘Receptive Ecumenism from Below: Heeding the Voice of Interchurch Families’ – but he didn’t arrive in time.

His parallel paper was put together in a session with Ray’s. We were intrigued to meet him, and to discover that his interest in interchurch families began when he was asked to speak to a Presbyterian spouse who wanted to receive communion at his child’s First Communion. He knew nothing about the subject, but researched it (how useful the web-site is) and got the Presbyterian to write to the Bishop. To his dismay the answer came back that the occasion was not exceptional enough. That set him on a course to find out more, and led him to offer his paper at Ushaw. ‘The voice of interchurch families should be a contributing, integral component of ecumenical dialogue. They are a resource in which an ecumenical relation is being lived through the unitive love of the spouses. Their situation provides an ideal opportunity for specific actions which would stand as tangible, public signs of progress.’

Ray’s contribution was firmly announced as a workshop, not a paper. He took the familiar but always moving theme of the two made One in marriage – but where is that One to be fed? And if one half is not made welcome in a particular church, can the other really feel welcome? Timing was very tight, and we had already started this part of the session when three more people came panting in (changing over between papers sometimes meant rushing from one end of the large building to the other – quite a job in the allotted five minutes). One of them was the wife of the organiser of the conference, Andrea Murray, who is Ecumenical Officer for the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle. She is clearly very interested in this most local of local ecumenism, and her presence boded well for the retention of interchurch families on the agenda for the next conference. There had been considerable laughter when Paul told us she had suggested he ‘got real’ and involved local ecumenical officers in the Receptive Ecumenism project, not just academics. The words ‘Get real, Paul!’ were heard several times after that. Nothing is more real in ecumenism than the living experience of interchurch families.

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