

A Little Closer To The Fulfillment Of “Missio Dei”

Two of us were asked by the Board of World Mission to participate in a January term conference course for seminarians organized by the Lutheran Church. The title of the course was “Ecumenism in the Globalized World.” Canada, The Netherlands, and the U.S.A. were represented, as well as several branches of the Lutheran Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Methodist Church, the Old Catholic Church, and the Moravian Church. The following are just a few reflections on the topics we heard about and discussed.

Before participating in the Ecumenism Conference in Geneva, Switzerland, I didn’t even fully know what the word “ecumenism” meant. I am learning, however, that God is calling us to look outside of our own congregations and our own denominations to the rest of his family – *our* family – and celebrate our unity in Christ. We are

called to do this not only when it’s easy and everyone agrees on every issue or doctrine, but also when it’s difficult, when it’s painful, when beliefs collide. The fact is that we are all part of the family of God, no matter how one person or one denomination feels about one issue or another. It’s okay when everyone doesn’t agree – that’s called diversity! Part of ecumenism is embracing that diversity, embracing and respecting those who have different opinions from your own, which doesn’t necessarily mean letting go of your own personal beliefs. The true test, like many things in life, of whether or not we are living out ecumenism in our daily lives is not how we respond when others agree with us and when it’s easy, but how we respond when faced with beliefs grossly different from

ones we hold dear. How will we, as individuals and as a denomination, respond when these times come?

After two weeks of intense discussion, study, and introspection, I am learning that ecumenism, in the truest sense of the word, is an integral part of being a Christian and of what the Moravian Church calls “Missio Dei” – God’s Mission. God is calling our denomination to seek unity with others in his family – regardless of differing beliefs. One way to do this is through mission and service work. For example, a little known fact amongst many Moravians and Lutherans is that the South African Moravian Province is a member of the Lutheran World Federation – an organization that keeps all the different branches of Lutheranism connected and networked with one another.

One might ask, what on earth is a *Moravian* province doing being a member of a *Lutheran* church organization? Well, it’s historical and it’s natural. From the get-go, the Moravians and Lutherans in South Africa have worked together to reach out to their communities.

So it makes sense for them to be members of the same organization and share the same resources. They don’t do the service and mission work God calls them to separately – cut off from the rest of the body of Christ – they do it together.

Not that we have to be members of the same organization in order to serve God together. Lately, I’ve found myself wondering, why is it

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The Ecumenism Conference

God’s overwhelming beauty was evident in the Swiss Alps with the endless snowcapped, jagged peaks cast upon a clear, bright, blue sky and the gathering of diverse individuals seeking spiritual growth and wisdom for how to be effective ambassadors of Jesus’s love. The Geneva, Switzerland ecumenism conference enabled me to rediscover what it means to be a Christian in a globalized world.

From my experience conversing with Lutheran seminary students and engaging in dialogue with guest speakers all who were engaged in a variety of global missional platforms or service, I was caused to question the definition of world mission. I foresee a mission embracing all of God’s creation- working closely with other Christian denominations, faiths, and spiritualities for the common mission to address the needs of vulnerable, poor, and marginalized communities- composed of both people and the rest of the non-human environment. A mission where there is an equal exchange of learning and sharing. A mission that incorporates ecological consideration into all aspects of community development.

This conference rejuvenated my yearning to actively participate in God’s continued restorative power through global missions. *Elyse Jurgen of Lititz, Moravian (Pa.) and is a Senior at Moravian*