

Receptive Ecumenism

This sharing by David Peterman Jr. was presented at a General Community Gathering of the Christian Community of God's Delight on Sunday May 7th at the end of the prayer meeting. It is a review of the Charismatic Leaders Fellowship meetings that he and other members of the Community attended in February 2023.

One of the blessings of growing up in Community was that we were founded by a very dynamic man, Bobby J. Cavnar. He was called upon to witness, share, and be part of the Charismatic Renewal all over the world across the Catholic Church and all denominations. He traveled a lot, spoke at conferences, and developed many relationships. One of the exciting things for many of us was his sharings at the end of prayer meetings following his trips. We all learned from them. We learned that we were not just a single isolated group in Dallas, but part of a vast Renewal happening all over the world. We became connected to it through his sharings and testimonies.

In a similar way I am going to share about a trip that I took in February. A few of us from the Community went to Augusta, Georgia to attend a meeting called Charismatic Leadership Fellowship, CLF. This is a fraternal organization that's existed for 20 or 30 years. Brothers and sisters from all faith backgrounds come together to celebrate being charismatic. Their focus is on the unity of the whole body of Christ, following Jesus' prayer in John 17. This was the fifth year that I have attended their annual conference. Neil and Cathy Coward also attended.

The highlight for me is being able to hear brothers and sisters from all over the world, of all faith backgrounds, share how the Holy Spirit is bringing Christians together in unity. The theme of this conference was a term you may not have heard '**receptive ecumenism**'. To understand what this means, I want to share the progression of what ecumenism means in very basic terms. We start a journey to Christian unity by simply trying to not offend someone of another faith. The very basic first thing I can do is not say or do something that's going to cause offence. In my first or second ecumenical meeting, that is what I paid attention to and what I learned.

Next in the journey towards Christian unity, we focus on building trusting relationships with one another. How can I get to know you and build trust and respect? Can I just develop a trusting relationship where we can do things

together and not have to be worried about proselytizing. My next few years of attending such meetings I was focused on building relationships of trust.

This February, the 2023 conference focused on receptive ecumenism. Receptive ecumenism is a term that captures the desire to recognize that we are gifts to each other. We hunger to learn from one another despite being from different faith backgrounds. To best articulate what receptive ecumenism is, I'm going to read a sentence from an article by Paul Vukim from Australian Catholic University, *"Receptive ecumenism calls on each tradition to critically focus itself to determine what it can faithfully receive from other Christian traditions to grow together in deepening relationship. This calls for a shift of the ecumenical focus from offering one's gift to another to receiving the gifts that one another have in humility and with integrity."*

We know from growing up in the Community of God's Delight that we have always been an ecumenical community. We are the Christian Community of God's Delight. We also know that the Charismatic Renewal is ecumenical. The Kansas City conference was par excellence of that message. That is one of the reasons the Holy Father asked the Charismatic Renewal specifically to be an agent of working for Christian unity. The Alleluia Community has a higher percentage of non-Catholic members than we do. We learned what it is like to have all Christians together in unity living in Christian community from being with them.

I offer a reminder to us as the Christian Community of God's Delight, we are not all Catholic in this room. We have a tendency, because we are predominantly Catholic, to speak "Catholic." We may presume everyone is Catholic when we refer to "the readings," "Mass," "Adoration," and so on. But it's very important that we, as the Christian Community of God's Delight, remember that we are ecumenical, and that we are open to building God's church in unity. We need to be careful when we are speaking at the microphone or sharing with one another. We should not just presume "Catholic," and we should be eager to learn from others.

Pope Francis tells a story about Christian unity that I particularly enjoy. He said something like, if we were to gather all the theologians on an island, he was confident that the theologians would figure out Christian unity...about one week after Jesus' Second Coming. 😊 His encouragement to us was to work bottom up by learning to love one another regardless of our faith background, building trusting relationships, looking for gifts in one another, going on mission together.

We had the privilege in this conference to hear from Bishop Peter Smith, a US Catholic bishop who grew up in the People of Praise Covenant Community in South Bend. He shared the example of a Catholic and a Protestant who were together walking in a neighborhood doing ministry. They were greeted by a man who responded back to them with, "Leave me alone. You Christians are so divided." This person did a 180 and gave his life to the Lord in their presence, as it was explained to him that one of the missionaries was Catholic, and one of them was a Protestant.

Bishop Smith offered many examples of how we are sharing and collaborating across all denominations. A similar talk on receptive ecumenism is available on the North American Networks (NAN) meeting and is available on the NAN website (www.nanccc.org).

In closing, I want to remind everybody that unity is not the end goal. Our goal is to love one another and let unity happen. I also wrote a short article about the CLF conference, and it is posted on our website www.GodsDelight.org.

If you are interested in helping us build ecumenical unity, please contact Neil Coward or myself. He and I are attending meetings and building relationships with pastors of other churches. We are meeting with other leaders and would like to include you.

Thank you and God Bless,
David Peterman (Jr.)