

UCANZ Forum “Here what the CVs are saying to the Churches” – April 2021
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“How do they do ecumenism abroad?”

Contemporary tools for the ecumenical project:

- Some describe the current milieu as the ‘ecumenical winter’ – but like the season of winter, we know spring follows: we look towards new tools, new experiences, new methods of receptions, new ways of sharing common mission.
- Ecumenism is not dead!
- Rather, *new tools* are required for a *new era* of ecumenism.
- The objectives and images of unity has changed. ‘Organic unity’ does not have the same emphasis it did in the mid 20th century, but organic unions have still occurred recently. ‘Reconciled diversity’ holds greater emphasis that creates a space in which denominational identities and traditions are respected and valued.

Receptive Ecumenism: is one of the ‘new tools’

Whereas the ecumenism of the mid and late 20th century aided the ‘softwood’ ecumenical dialogue (the ‘easy’ reconciliation and unity of understanding, eg common baptism), we are facing the ‘hardwood’ of ecumenism (the difficult topics that are harder to obtain consensus or unity of expression, eg for some traditions it is difficult to achieve the interchangeability of ordained ministries, common understandings of episcopal ministry, the role of the Chair of St Peter ie the Pope).

It is suggested that Receptive Ecumenism could be a tool for the ‘hardwood’ conversations. For this, the ‘marks’ of Receptive Ecumenism include:

- Exercising one’s own self-understanding in relation to the sister church
- Attending appropriately to the structures of our own church life that will facilitate ecumenical reality;
- Taking contextual cognisance of our own and other denomination organisational-cultural realities;
- In the context of attentive hospitality toward each other – honouring, respecting and receiving the truth from the other.

It is not:

- Settling for less than the churches already are;
- Diminishing the heritage of our particular churches;
- Conducting a ‘programme’: it is a movement of the Spirit.

It is:

- a safe space for learning, for receiving the giftedness of the other, for conversion and for growing

Additional tools for ecumenical dialogue:

▶ Empathetic ecumenism

a discipline to stand in the shoes of one’s ecumenical partner; seeking to understand their living of the totality of Christian discipleship
(eg Vatican recently reminded its bishops that *ecumenism is a lifestyle, not a task*)

▶ Differentiated consensus

insistence that confessional identity is not to be given up.
development of a fellowship of varying confessional identities living, practicing and showing further visible unity.
language – a better understanding of our diversity of words in relation to the potentially some common aspects of underlying meaning.
(eg, a Church Times UK article highlighted that *unity requires more than ‘being nice’.*)

► Ecumenical catholicity

To truly be an expression of the one holy catholic and apostolic church to which we aspire to represent, the minimum requirement of catholicity should be an openness to other churches; whereas churches that close themselves off from other churches deny their own catholicity.

conversely, we should avoid risking a '*deficit of catholicity*' through a lack of openness to our different traditions.

How do these expressions resonate with CV/CP/Uniting parishes today?

As the products of ecumenism, who do we project contemporary expressions of ecumenism?

“An Ecumenism Snapshot – where are we at?”

This opens conversation to talking about:

- where it is now in NZ;
- talking about where union/CVs are seen (by themselves and others) in the field of ecumenism today verses at their formation.

Some observations/points made by John Bluck in *Everyday Ecumenism – can you take the world church home?* WCC Publications, Geneva. 1987.

Ecumenical adventures have as an imperative of being disciples to outwardly live being the one holy catholic and apostolic church:

How we do this in our Christian communities is the litmus test for our discipleship

The marks are the destiny of the one true church of Christ.

What about the marks of Jesus' life with others? (rather than the ancient marks).

Indiscriminate friendship, compassionate service, life of resistance, nonexclusive welcome.

This is an interface of the traditions of the church.

Further, John Bluck explored these touchstones for being ecumenical churches:

- Ecumenism (or the work of ecumenists) is “*not to create something new but to recognize, integrate and understand the something new already under way*” p viii.
- Realizing ecumenism
 - How can we get over ourselves, and model a way of ministry and being in spite of ourselves?
 - What are ecumenical ventures saying (about ecumenism) to the churches 50-60+ years since the first ecumenical ventures in NZ?
- Marginality – what from the margins can be said as a critique of the ‘church’? (either for CV’s in relation to the institutional church, or churches in general in relation to general society)
- Credibility – how are ecumenical ventures walking the talk of ecumenism, including facing one’s own fragility and plurality, and not to assume authority?
- Piety – how are ecumenical ventures pathfinders to address the boundaries of denominationalism, while addressing their own ‘piety’?
- ‘Faith-culture contract’ for today’s word – how do ecumenical ventures contrast with contemporary culture, including voicing the hurts pains and joys within our communities and society?
- Symbol seeking – how do ecumenical ventures continue to help re-frame ecumenism and models of the ecumenical [ad]venture in NZ for today?

We do not do this alone – we do this with God, and with fellow Christians/denominations. Exploring an understanding of “**ecumenical space**”, as expressed in the Methodist Church of New Zealand document “To be Methodist is to be Ecumenical” (affirmed by MCNZ Conference in 2004):

*In recent ecumenical discussion some significance has been attached to the concept of ecumenical space. This refers to the setting in which, even in a state of division, churches witness to their common allegiance to Jesus Christ and cooperate together to further the visible unity of the church. It is in this space that our common Christian identity is affirmed. It is here we can talk together in a new way, with a greater opportunity to discern together Christ’s will for the church, in ways that are not possible in isolation from one another. This is a space where there is commitment to overcome former divisions and search for unity. It uses the process of dialogue that can lead to transformation and renewal in the light of our common quest. In the midst of divergent affirmations, ecumenical space encourages us to seek to maintain fellowship with each other. This is the space where frank and serious discussion that embraces questioning and listening, searching and discovering, takes place. In this space no church is required to deny its identity or heritage. Here we refrain from judging one another as churches. The opportunities of ecumenical space include reconciliation of memories, renewal of the churches, common witness, guidance into the will of the Spirit, and discernment of what will advance the visible unity of the church. There are certain obligations that go with being together in this ecumenical space. They include: compatibility of attitude and behaviour within and outside the space; making sure our actions are consistent with brotherly and sisterly relationships; and a fostering of mutual support, forbearance and accountability. **We need more, not less of these ecumenical spaces at this time.***

Further:

*Through ecumenical encounter we have come to cherish our roots and our distinctive way of being church. Participation in ecumenical bodies and dialogue with sister communions has immensely enriched the life of our Church. **We have not yet received all that is offered. Nor have we exhausted what we have to give from our tradition.***

We believe that the unity of the church is not incidental to God's purpose.

1 Peter 3: 15 “Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you”