

We should all listen to communicate

By Bill Le Grand

We Christians are a strange, wonderful motley crew of people, from every possible tradition.

Provided we affirm the authority of scripture, belief in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ and accept the centrality of the CREEDS, we have a common set of denominators.

Most important is our call into the Fellowship of a believing community, for it's here that the WORD becomes lived, believed, followed and proclaimed.

Still, we're not truly reconciled to one another as Christians in the Body of Christ. Why?

I suggest because we do not listen and fail to articulate our Faith. Ecumenism is more than coming together in worship and fellowship; it's more than dialogue or blueprints on agreement.

We clergy sometimes fail to

recognize that Ecumenism is being invited into another tradition by friends, the result of which is a loving exchange among neighbors.

Church of the Middle Way

We Anglicans have perhaps one of the most unique expressions in Christianity, and I don't mean "the Tory Party at Prayer".

We call ourselves *the Church of the Middle Way*, for that's what we are. To others, Anglicanism must seem the embodiment of Ecumenism at work in one denomination, with our Low Evangelical Protestant and High Anglo-Catholic parties trying to reconcile Liturgical forms, belief systems, sacramentalism, the Charismatic Experience and the Authority of Scripture in one Body.

It's not easy. I've worshipped in Churches where the Blessed Sacrament is processed, while priests incense the lectern and altar, singing a Marian Litany.

In these places, a whole range of external signs are prominent- from crossing oneself (often with Holy Water), genuflecting and beating one's breast in the Prayer of Humble Access, to chanting the Gospel and intercessions in Latin or Greek.

Other Churches have resembled the simplest of settings, where the altar is a plain table (without Liturgical covers), the signs are never used, the Holy Eucharist (as the Lord's Supper) is celebrated monthly or less, the organist or pianist plays a medley of Gospel, toe-tapping Hymns...the priests there are always 'ministers' and candles, Liturgical vestments and stained glass windows are denounced as Anglo-Catholic trappings.

Beyond baptism and the Lord's Supper, no other service is deemed a sacrament.

Both settings are extreme... both are found, especially in urban centres and parts of Newfoundland, as expressions of Anglicanism. Except for the Holy Scriptures and the Prayerbook, these kinds two kinds of Churches resemble different denominations.

Most Anglican parishes are similar to St. John's, where vestiges of the High and Low are found.

Yet Anglicans of both parties do have fellowship and, in recent years, have recognized their common heritage as Christians of one tradition.

The fact of the matter is that Anglicans have identified 'the Middle Way' as the only means by which we can experience harmony.

This does not mean that High Churchmen wax joyous over an Evangelical Praise Service, from the Evening

Prayer, where testimonies and country gospel predominate.

It does not mean that Evangelical Anglicans are expected to enjoy incense, holy water, sanctus bells and Latin chants with processions.

It does mean that Anglicans will often hear the words of co-religionists of another Church party, and not condemn them as being 'unAnglican'.

Tolerance and understanding are prime ingredients for listening Anglicans. Many, like myself as a Low Churchman, grow to appreciate the richness of the other tradition.

As well, Anglicans have learned to recognize Christ's Presence in other liturgies- even those which seem alien to their faith experience.

Anglicans have also known extraordinary changes in their ethnic makeup. Fully 52 per cent of our worldwide communion of 60 million are non-whites, and 35 per cent are other languages than English in their liturgies.

We're like most other denominations when we participate in Ecumenical dialogue- nervous about our own potential loss of identity.

In the sixties, we worked closely with the United Church of Canada, towards plans of unity. Eventually, these shared talks began to lose their momentum... perhaps because Anglicans and United Church folks were not ready to concede some compromises on tradition.

During the '70s and '80s, Anglicans and Roman Catholics have developed dialogue through talks, about the feasibility of an organic union some day in the future.

Again, Anglicans and Roman Catholics have maintained warm and cordial relations, but we both see the need for further prayer and reflection, before we can all celebrate a common Eucharist.

Anglicans and three Lutheran Synods have come to share intercommunion and fellowship in Canada and the U.S.

Recently, an Anglican priest from our Diocese invited a Lutheran pastor to celebrate an Anglican Eucharist for Lutherans and Anglicans in the summer month, during his absence.

The point remains that differences exist among Anglicans within their communities- much as they are present within other denominations.

Our Middle Way does not rule out differences, but it allows Anglicans to worship in harmony and love.

We, like other denominations, are hesitant about dipping our toes into icy waters. After all, we all mostly shared a chauvinistic brand of denominationalism until Vatican II.

The glory of John, as the Holy Father, was not that he simply 'opened the windows of his Church for fresh air'.

John, as pope, opened his heart to 'the Prayer of Jesus' for Christian Unity found in John's Gospel.

May we as Anglicans and non-Anglicans, anticipate a greater unity of purpose among one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

May we not deny our differences, but celebrate them as part of our rich heritage developed over centuries of spiritual growth.

May we, like Pope John Paul, reach out to our fellow Christians to live out our baptismal covenant, as members of One Church, One Faith and One God known to us in Jesus Christ.

Above all, may we listen to communicate the Good News of Christ's Reconciling power of healing and renewal for each one of us.
Bill Le Grand.

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Feb. 8: 6:30 p.m. is Bible study (Witness Workshop III), and at 7:30 p.m. Worship service (Depression Part III).

For more information contact: Rev. Mark Moss, 887-3020 (office), 887-2612 (home), Lloyd and Hilda Hiebert, 825-3897, or Cathy Withers, at 825-9495.

St. John's Anglican Church

Holy Eucharist every Sunday at 9 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. Holy Eucharist every first, third and fifth Sunday.

Morning prayer every second and fourth Sunday at 10:30 a.m.

On Fridays the Holy Eucharist is celebrated at 10:30 a.m. at Birchwood Terrace.

You are always welcome at St. John's where all Christians are invited to receive the WORD and sacrament.

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St. Martin of Tours Church

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