

In lieu of minutes

Winnipeg Mennonite-Catholic Dialogue, Meeting No.11

Held on Wednesday, 21 January 2004,
at Christ the King Parish, 847 St. Mary's Road

Background: The Winnipeg Mennonite-Catholic Dialogue group was invited to contribute of their experience at the 3rd session of an Inter-Church Dialogue Series, held at Christ the King Parish, 847 St. Mary's Road, Winnipeg. No minutes were taken of the meeting. What we have by way of record is an outline of the agenda along with Helmut Harder's preparatory program notes. We have no recorded minutes of the evening. But what follows gives a good idea of what happened.

7:30 – 8:30 pm

Introduction - Helmut Harder, Mennonite

Good evening,

Those of us involved in a Catholic-Mennonite dialogue here in Winnipeg count it a privilege to share with you this evening. We can only offer you a taste of what we have experienced in our dialogical feast. And I assure you, it has been a feast of sorts.

Back in the winter of the year 2001 I became acquainted with **Fr. Luis Melo** who was on staff at St. Paul's College at the time, as student chaplain and professor. We were actually brought together through Fr. Melo's doctoral supervisor, James Puglisi, a Franciscan who teaches in Rome. Jim and I had met a few years earlier around the table of the International Mennonite-Catholic Dialogue. Anyway, Fr. Melo and I got together, and began to talk about a possible way of engaging Mennonites and Catholics in dialogue here in Winnipeg. To make a long story short, after some consultation, we were able to co-opt 6 Catholics and 6 Mennonites to begin a dialogue. You see 10 of them before you this evening, including Luis and myself. Two of the Mennonites are not here. **Ardith Frey** moved to Waterloo this past summer. And **Harold Jantz** is leading the Festival of Prayer meeting at River East Mennonite Brethren Church where he is a lay member. We think of this as an unofficial dialogue. We are speaking for ourselves. We are not commissioned officially by our church bodies to do this. If we had gone that route, we may not have gotten started. We are proceeding informally, and we have already shared our experience with official church leaders of the Mennonite and Catholic communities. (In addition, there is the article that Julien Fradette did last year for your *Prairie Messenger*) But we are proceeding slowly. This evening is the first time we are telling our story in a public setting. You might say, we are easing into this relationship, and we are.

Over the past 2 ½ years we have had 10 meetings together. Each meeting began at 4:00 in the afternoon and ended about 9:00 p.m. We shared a meal together each time we met. In total, that amounts to about 50 hours of discussion between and among us. And we're not through.

In the first hour of this evening, we want to give you just a taste of what we have said to one another and of the kinds of sentiments we have experienced. We hope to have

some time for questions before the coffee break. Then in the second hour I will report on what has happened internationally, through the Mennonite-Catholic Dialogue that began five years ago.

Dialogue Panel

Each panel member contributes to our report tonight, according to the outline you have in your hands. Please introduce yourselves, including your church affiliation and your current professional occupation. The topics each person is to address are noted below.

Adolf Ens, Mennonite – Introduction to Mennonites in Manitoba

Richard Lebrun, Catholic - Mennonites and Catholics compared

Henry Loewen, Mennonite - Why Mennonite-Catholic dialogue?

John Long, Catholic - Why Catholic-Mennonite dialogue?

Elaine Pinto, Mennonite - Appreciation for Catholic rituals

Michael Radcliffe, Catholic – Appreciation for Mennonite rituals

Sr. Elaine Baete, Catholic – Catholic and Mennonite spirituality compared

Michele Sala Pastora, Catholic – Catholic and Mennonite ministry compared

Fr. Luis Melo, Catholic – Reflections

Time for Questions

8:30 – 8:45

Coffee Break

8:45 – 9:15

Report on the International Catholic-Mennonite Dialogue – Helmut Harder

1. Mennonite World Conference (Strasbourg) & PCPCU (Rome)
2. 7 Mennonites & 7 Catholics chosen from the international community
Catholics: Peter Nissen, Drew Christiansen, Joan Bach, John Mtuso Mbinda, Joseph Martino, James Puglisi, John Radano
Mennonites: Nzash Lumeya, Mario Higueros, Howard Loewen, Andrea Lange, Neal Blough, Helmut Harder, Larry Miller
3. Theme: Toward the Healing of Memories
4. Purpose: Developing a Christian understanding between our two churches
5. Vision: that we may explore our unity in the Spirit, our oneness in the Lord (Not to pursue oneness in Eucharist or oneness in church structure)
6. We decided on 5 annual week-long meetings for a 5 year period.
So we met 5 times – We moved from Strasbourg (France) to Venice (Italy) to Karlsruhe (Germany) to Assisi (Italy) to Akron (Pennsylvania).
7. Our dialogue followed 2 tracks, historical and theological.
On the theme of history, over the 5 years we explored 4 questions that had to do with how we view history
 - a. How do we interpret the 16th century schism, the Anabaptist movement? (RCs said: Today we see no theological justification for putting Anabaptist/Mennonites to death.)
 - b. What were the factors that led to the Reformation? Mennonite scholars and Catholics see the roots of the Mennonite church in renewal movements that were occurring during the centuries before the Reformation.

- c. How do we understand the early period of Christianity? This question zeros in on the 4th century when the Christians made their peace with the Roman Empire under Emperor Constantine. Mennonite theologians have referred to that as the “fall” of the church, whereas Catholics have seen that as the “salvation” of the church. Although today Catholics would tend to speak of that time and its effects as a “shift.” We agreed with the Catholics that Mennonite reference to the Constantinian era as a “fall” was probably too strong.
- d. What is our assessment of the Middle ages? Was that a glorious era of history? Was it the dark ages? Was the church a faithful church between the 4th century and the 16th century? Or was it an unfaithful church?

Overall it can be said that our study of history together was highly significant for building a sense of unity between Catholics and Mennonites.

8. The second track we followed in the 5-year dialogue focused on theological themes, as follows:
 - a. What is our understanding of the church? Where do we diverge? Converge?
 - b. How do we understand our baptism?
 - c. How does each of our communions understand the Lord’s Supper, the Eucharist?
 - d. To what extent do we agree and disagree on our peace theology?
9. Where did we come out on all this? The report is coming. It has a great deal of material. The suggestion coming from PCPCU and MWC General Council is that as much as possible, Catholics and Mennonites should meet, both together and separately, to discuss the report and the recommendations. At the end of 65 pages, it includes a Catholic statement of regret and a Mennonite statement to that effect. It concludes with a joint statement calling for a new relationship between us and also makes some recommendations for our future together.

[**Helmut** READ Paragraph 202 and Paragraph 204 and Paragraphs 205 and 206]

Time for Questions

9:15-9:30

Closing Worship – in a Mennonite style (see below)

Comments: What is Mennonite about this closing worship time? The call to worship through hymn singing. The four part singing with which we will begin ... the choice of hymn ... the prayer is drawn from a collection of Mennonite prayers dating back to the 18th century (now translated from the German into English), but not used in worship today ... the song “Unity” was very popular among us in the 1970s and 1980s ... The lack of careful attention to correct liturgical wording ... the somewhat casual atmosphere in general.

Closing Worship

Hymn “Holy God We Praise Thy Name”

1. Holy God, we praise thy name. Lord of all, we bow before thee.
All on earth thy sceptre claim; all in heav’n above adore thee.
Infinite thy vast domain, everlasting is thy reign.

2. Hark the loud celestial hymn, angel choirs above are raising.
Cherubim and seraphim, in unceasing chorus praising,
Fill the heav'ns with sweet accord; Holy, holy, holy Lord.
3. Lo! The apostolic train join thy sacred name to hallow,
Prophets swell the glad refrain, and the white robed martyrs follow,
And, from morn till set of sun, through the church the song goes on.
4. Holy Father, holy Son, Holy Spirit, three we name thee,
Though in essence only one, undivided God we claim thee,
And adoring bend the knee, while we own the mystery.

Scripture Readings Psalm 133:1-3 John 15:12-17 Ephesians 4:1-7, 15-16.

Prayer

O eternal, merciful God! You are a God of peace, love, and unity, not of conflict and division. With this unity you view the world in your righteous judgment, knowing it has forsaken you. You alone can establish and maintain unity in a world which in its own wisdom has fallen away from you, especially in those things which relate to your divine truth and the salvation of souls. You let the world divide and splinter into pieces, so that with the false wisdom of disunity, which can only lead to disgrace, the world might again turn to you, O Lover of unity!

We are poor sinners whom you have graciously endowed with the ability to understand all this. So we pray and implore you through the Holy Spirit to dispel all confusion. Unify what is divided and make it whole. Also give us the means to seek your unique, eternal truth, which leads to divine unity.

Thus may we turn away from every division and become of one mind, will, conscience, spirit, and understanding, aligned according to Jesus Christ, our Lord. May we then praise and glorify you, the heavenly Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, with steadfast unity and with one voice, through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, in the Holy Spirit. Amen.

[from a (Mennonite) *Prayer Book for Earnest Christians*, 1708]

Song “Unity”

1. Jesus help us live in peace/ From our blindness set us free/ Fill us with thy healing love/ Help us live in unity.
2. May times we disagree/ O'er what's right and wrong to do/ Help us Lord to really see/ From the other's point of view.
3. How we long for pow'r and fame/ Seeking every earthly thing/ We forget the one who came/ As a servant, not a king.

Closing Prayer (Unison)

May the God of steadfastness and encouragement/ Grant us to live in harmony with one another/ In accordance with Christ Jesus/ So that together we may with one voice/ Glorify the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ./ Peace be with you! Amen.