

REIMAGINING ECCLESIAL UNITY – INVITED SESSION

Topic: Reimagining Ecclesial Unity
 Convener: SimonMary Asele Ahiokhai, University of Portland
 Moderator: SimonMary Asele Ahiokhai, University of Portland
 Presenter: Mary Follen, Spirit of Grace Ecumenical Community, Beaverton,
 Oregon
 Juan Carlos La Puente Tapia, Spiritual and Theological Mutual
 Accompaniment International Network
 Thomas Mason, Our Lady of the Lake Catholic Parish, Lake Oswego,
 Oregon

Mary Follen’s paper, titled “Thirty-year Worship Journey and Struggle of an Ecumenical Community,” provided the historical origins of the Spirit of Grace Ecumenical Community in Beaverton, Oregon. The community constituted of Lutherans and Catholics who wanted to pray together. Over time, members of both denominations sought permission from their ordinaries to celebrate the Eucharist together. The permission was granted for them to celebrate the liturgy of the word together and then to separately celebrate the liturgy of the Eucharist. This was the operating policy until 2020 when the Catholic Archbishop of Portland, Most Rev. Alexander Sample, withdrew the permission. The community continued to gather and to pray together. In 2023, the community had one of their members ordained as a woman priest who now leads the community. Follen called attention to how the Catholic members who constitute this community are seeking answers to matters they feel are exclusionary in their tradition. For example, the lack of women priests in their tradition.

Follen’s presentation was followed by that of Juan Carlos La Puente Tapia, whose paper was titled “Spiritual and Theological Mutual Accompaniment.” He described his work as an associate of the Oregon Synod Bishop of the Ecumenical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA), even though he is a Catholic. In his capacity, he has established a global network of ecumenical communities that promote mutual spiritual and theological support for its members. They organize ecumenical retreats and theological reflections aimed at bridging the divides that exist among the religious communities.

La Puente Tapia’s presentation was followed by that of Thomas Mason, whose presentation was titled “Emergent Reflection Regarding Understanding of Authority and Its Guiding Means for Walking Together.” Mason, an active member of Our Lady of the Lake Catholic Parish in the Catholic Archdiocese of Portland, spoke of the work being done on the parish level to promote a culture of synodality. He called attention to some divisive policies in the Catholic Church, especially as they play out in the Archdiocese of Portland. These policies and practices include the lack of ministerial support for endangered gay members of the Catholic Church and the continued culture of erasing female voices in the administrative life of the church.

After Mason concluded his presentation, the session transitioned to addressing the questions from the audience members. The session ended shortly after the questions and answers.

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