

**Receptive Ecumenism** is now a recognised third strand of the ecumenical movement and for me is a powerful way of moving forward in what in recent years has seen to be an ecumenical winter. Therefore it was a privilege to be part of both the second (2009 Durham UK) and third (Fairfield, Connecticut 2014) international receptive ecumenism conferences.

Following the 1910 Edinburgh conference ecumenism as a specific movement was born. This was born out of the missionary societies believing there must be a better way of engaging in mission together even if it was only about agreeing to split the mission field up. This was a faith and works approach to mission and led to the birth of the WCC and other ecumenical bodies.

In the 20th huge progress was made as the churches through multi-lateral and bi-lateral conversations came together to explore faith and order issues; enhanced by Roman Catholic involvement following Vatican 2. Who would have thought in the 1960s that there would be agreement on baptism, and emerging out of some of these conversations mutual recognition of ministry and Eucharist? We have come a long way from when I was a child when as a 'chapel' family we were not really welcome, certainly not at Holy Communion, in the village parish church, to now in the UK sharing in worship, learning and mission with many partner churches. We must not forget this immense progress.

Yet as Paul Murray said in the opening of the conference in June this year the progress means that the dead wood has been cut away and we are left with the difficult issues that are intractable. Therefore a third way or different approach is required. Receptive Ecumenism does not ask how we might cooperate or act as partners in matters of faith and life, nor does it focus on big doctrinal issues; rather it asks a fundamental question: 'What is it that we in this particular tradition and church need and can learn or receive with integrity from others?'

The conference in worship, creative bible study and through papers reflected on how this question is being asked and responded to in different parts of the world by various churches. The range of experience and reflection was immense and specific to each context and area of learning. Receptive learning from different genders, between churches in the North East of the UK, regarding the place of Mary in Latin America; these are just some examples of the rich smorgasbord of papers shared.

Towards the end of the conference a more critical voice was heard that pushed us beyond the confines of a comfortable zone. This critical voice took two main directions. One was from the Asian experience and a position of post-colonial critique. The voice pleading to be heard was how can we receive from the other who is not only of a different church tradition but is also culturally different, not only in terms of a homeland 'overseas' but as immigrant and sojourner amongst us in our own country? How do we receive from the immigrant and ethnic minority churches that many of our own churches host and are landlord to? A post-Colonial scholar talked of the chaffing for him of receptive ecumenism. Historically mission churches have been forced to receive all their church lives and were now seeking independent church status from parent mission bodies. Therefore the receptive ecumenism question about receiving is not a question that they are asking and it can feel like a Western approach once more.

The second area of opening up that began at the end of the conference was the breadth of ecumenism. In a fascinating session on interfaith work, the question was raised as to how far receptive ecumenism is appropriate when relating to other faiths; asking the question of what we need to receive and learn from other faiths and agnostic or atheistic positions. There were no answers; simply a recognition that receptive ecumenism, while a useful approach leading to much learning in many places, is not going to solve everything and will lead to yet another series of questions for the church.

The South Australia Council of Church agreed to host the next international receptive ecumenism conference in 4-5 years when it will be interesting to see development and progress in this significant third strand of ecumenical life.

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