

Fellowship found through diversity.

Services of the Word at the Cathedral of Lausanne.

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Over the last few years, we have seen how God gathers and unites us, but never forces us into the same mould. This has become particularly apparent through our monthly services of the word held at the Cathedral of Lausanne, where every first Sunday we join together in prayer.

The Community of Christian Churches in the Canton of Vaud (CECCV) invites its twenty member churches and many others to join these celebrations. A wide variety of church traditions are represented: Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, Evangelical, Pentecostal; other participants include various migrant churches, and Christian movements, communities and agencies. Since we began in 2004, we have gathered together in the Cathedral for over 100 celebrations.

Brother Alois, Prior of Taizé, wrote about these celebrations: *"Having participated on several occasions at these Services of the Word at Lausanne Cathedral, we, the brothers of Taizé, know how very valuable this undertaking is in helping Christians walk together on the path towards unity. By coming together in the presence of God, listening to God's word, in silence and in praise, we receive a foretaste of unity. Just a simple prayer is enough for the Holy Spirit to unite us. And humbly, in this prayer, we learn to belong to one another. And this, in turn, also enables theological dialogue to move forward."*

Each month a different church takes a turn to prepare the celebration. Sometimes the services are prepared by several churches together, or by members of movements or communities. All the churches and communities are invited to attend.

Every three years we have a major celebration that fills the Cathedral to capacity. In September 2010, we gathered under the banner 'Together and Diverse'. To illustrate this, a portable, stained-glass window was created in the form of a chalice: it is composed of 25 glass sections, each bearing the seven colours of the rainbow. The individual sections are put in place by the leaders of the churches, communities and movements, to create the complete window. It is a moving and meaningful way to symbolise the call to communion and fellowship between churches and movements.

Towards truly reconciled diversity

These celebrations have provided an opportunity to discover our diversity, and to rejoice in it. They have made us aware of different approaches to prayer and to

communicating the word of God. And creating this space where communities and movements can meet together has also been a way of recognizing and appreciating their contribution.

I believe that God loves diversity just as much as unity. God has endowed his people with extraordinary spiritual diversity. These celebrations are a wonderful apprenticeship in ecumenism. They show us that there is no need to fear what is different, or to turn in on ourselves, or be judgmental. Rather, they encourage us to give thanks for all the gifts God bestows on others, gifts that will never cease to enrich us all.

Indeed we have been greatly enriched by this encounter with the prayers of other churches, and with their way of reading and understanding the word of God. Reconciliation between churches begins like this.

Even so, we are well aware that there have been, and are still, things which divide us; boundaries, walls, misunderstandings, hurts. For this reason, in seeking unity, our approach from the outset has always been marked by a deep sense of penitence and a desire for full reconciliation with the Lord and with one another. In three of the celebrations we pledged ourselves *"to open ourselves to the leading of the Holy Spirit... in an attitude of penitence and humility"*.

We continue to walk in this same sense of penitence so that our journey may lead us towards a truly reconciled diversity. And even now, from our own very modest experience, we are learning what the people of God could be:

- A people of diversity and unity.
- A people where church leaders collaborate among themselves and with other Christian agencies, communities, groups and movements.
- A people of ministers and laity, women and men, young and old.

Transformations

Praying and witnessing together can transform the way we perceive other churches. And that is what has been happening through these celebrations of the word. Listening to the same word, visited by the same Lord to whom we turn together, we learn that we belong to each other. And we discover that what unites us is so much stronger than that which divides us.

We also know that the Word of God creates links between communities: and the more we put this into practice, the more our unity grows. And then, after praying together, we enjoy *"the liturgy after the liturgy"*. Prayer moves us to greater fellowship at every level.

Many other inspirations have arisen from our times of prayer when the Lord is present opening our hearts and drawing us ever onward. So we have seen the emergence of Ecumenical pilgrimages, meetings for theological dialogue, initiatives for

evangelization, an 'Open-Church Night', an artistic competition, publications, and so much more.

Fellowship found

In their latest book on the Lord's Prayer, (*Vous donc priez ainsi*, Bayard, Paris, 2011 - *Pray then in this way*), the Dombes Group, a French-speaking group for Protestant-Catholic theological dialogue, proposes an itinerary of conversion using this prayer. As we pray together to the same Father we acknowledge that we are brothers and sisters: as the book says, "*the proclamation of the same paternity obliges Christians to take seriously the implication that we are sisters and brothers*".

Fellowship restored, this is the great accomplishment of the Ecumenical pilgrimage of the last century - as Pope John-Paul II noted, some 20 years ago, in his Encyclical on unity (*Ut unum sint – That they may be one*).

In Lausanne, we are glad to be able to bring our modest stone to contribute to the construction of this newfound fellowship.

The place of art in the Church as a way of experiencing unity and reconciliation, and proclaiming praise to God.

Guy Barblan

During the ecumenical celebrations at the Cathedral of Lausanne, we have experienced unity mainly through singing, but also through other artistic expressions, such as dance, sculpture and paintings.

When God's people come together to praise and adore him, artistic forms can lead to divisions, just as various liturgical styles might. But we experienced a totally different dynamic as we prepared songs with a choir for example ; therein our differences enriched us spiritually as well as becoming an artistic discovery.

We can opt to hold a protective or defensive attitude, demonstrating a lack of self-confidence and fear of others. If however, we each come with an open mind and a genuine desire to discover, we will be enriched by each others' differences.

Our role is not to protect our own territory, nor to be the defenders of a unique or « correct » artistic style, which suits us (and according to whose criteria ?), but rather to encourage interaction in order to create a *shared masterpiece* composed of beautiful colors, like in a stained-glass window which lets the light of the Spirit shine through with a beautiful burst. I think that when we limit ourselves to only one artistic expression, we act as a dam which prevents the whole plain from being watered.

In 2014 we organised an artistic contest having two topics : « Unity of the Church –

Unity of humanity » and « Beauty of God – Beauty of the world ». The artists had two forms to choose from in expressing these themes : compose a song, or present a painting. More than 50 people took part in the contest. We were able to expose the paintings for one month in the cathedral, and several compositions were sung during a festive celebration, under the direction of the composers. This celebration was an unforgettable experience, rich in diversity. The people of God, young and old, gathered to praise and worship him. (The winners of the contest ranged from 5 to 80 years old !) I still remember a tourist who passed by as we were hanging the paintings and was absolutely bent on buying one of them.

Let us learn how to open our eyes to see the beauty of God's creation. Let us be enriched by the diversity of artistic expressions, even if they sometimes surprise us. God inspires, via His diversity.

