Healing Gifts for Wounded Hands

The promise and potential of Receptive Ecumenism...

This booklet is dedicated to **Professor Paul D Murray** who visited Australia and New Zealand in mid-2012.

Professor Murray is a Systematic Theologian in the Department of Theology and Religion and founding Director of the Centre for Catholic Studies at Durham University. His most recent book is Murray (ed.), *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism*, (Oxford: OUP, 2008).

Paul’s visit inspired, encouraged and offered hope-filled possibility to many people across the Church in Australia/New Zealand and led to the desire of the South Australian Council of Churches to keep alive the ‘conversation’ on the promise and potential of Receptive Ecumenism. The booklet contains many insights, wisdom, images and phrases from Paul. We hope that people across the Church, in whatever land, will also feel inspired to action by what they discover in these pages. It is a work-in-progress and all are invited to share the fruits of their deliberations and actions, as we each engage in the way of Receptive Ecumenism, as a source of nourishment on the journey towards our unity in Christ.
1. Principal characteristic of Ecumenism to date

What do others need to learn from us, if we are to make real progress?

The question is understandable – being committed to the gifts and understandings of our own tradition and discovering more about one another across the traditions is appropriate. We give thanks for the many positive initiatives that have grown through the ecumenical movement and we rejoice in the many people who have shared their gifts and resources and responded to Jesus’ prayer for unity. We trust that action together will continue to occur. However, conversion/inner change and resultant growth has remained generally at the individual level, with seemingly little, if any, impact on corporate conversion – leading to the wellness, or healing, across the structures, systems, processes and practices of the life and mission within each tradition.

2. What is Receptive Ecumenism?

The question Receptive Ecumenism asks is:

What can we – and what do we need to - learn and receive, with integrity, from the other traditions?

There is a growing awareness that if we were all asking and acting upon this question, we might be moving in ways that could open up new possibilities in relation to our unity in Christ. The question, therefore, invites us all to consider and address the challenges within our own tradition through learning from other traditions.

Receptive Ecumenism starts from a yearning, with the awareness or a frustration that some practice or structure or process within one’s own tradition may be an inadequate, or a painful, or even an ‘absent’ manifestation of the fullness of Trinity.

“You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”
St Augustine

Receptive Ecumenism invites us, through a spirit of humility, and a desire for healing, to share the pain, the woundedness, the felt-absence, with our ecumenical other.

“Healing gifts for wounded hands.” Paul Murray

Receptive Ecumenism encourages us to make a safe space for learning, for receiving the giftedness of the other, for conversion and for growing more fully into who God made us to be, of becoming more authentically what God has called us to be.

Receptive Ecumenism speaks to all layers of the Church, without one waiting on/for another, and can be carried out at the level of

- Local Parish or Congregation, eg Church Council ....
- Agency, eg Welfare, Education, Finance...
- Governance/Decision-making body, eg Synod, Diocese, Bishops Conference, Assembly, Board…
Receptive Ecumenism offers an approach that includes the potential for change, including and especially, across the structures and the practices of the various traditions – and even the way we serve the world - “...they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me”. John 17:21

“Receptive ecumenism is more about self-examination and inner conversion than convincing the other; Anglicans and Roman Catholics can help each other grow in faith, life and witness to Christ if they are open to being transformed by God’s grace mediated through each other.” ARIC III Media Release May 2011

**Receptive Ecumenism** is about
- Listening
- Humility
- Leaning into the Spirit

**Receptive Ecumenism** is about letting the Light of Christ shine on those parts of our Church – people, practice, processes, systems, structures - where we may feel shame, sorrow, confusion or absence.

**What it’s not...**

**Receptive Ecumenism** is not about
- Settling for less than the churches already are
- Diminishing the heritage of our particular churches
- Conducting a program: it’s a movement of the Spirit.

**Receptive ecumenical awakening...**

Receptive ecumenical awakening is properly a matter of the heart before it is a matter of the head; a matter of falling in love with the experienced presence of God in the people, practices, even structures of another tradition and being impelled thereby to search for ways in which all impediments to closer relationship might be overcome. Professor Paul D Murray

**Key words and phrases:**
- Broken sign value to the world of our divisions
- Lean into the Spirit, the agent of the ecumenical journey
- Offering our wounded hands – rather than offering our best china?
- Run at the horizon and the horizon expands
- Surprised by joy – expectant and penitent joy, realising we are on Holy ground fed by the presence of Christ
- Receptive Ecumenism – a Movement … a virtuous virus…
- A journey of continuing growth on each side
- Promise-filled invitation…hopeful imagination…
- Start with the part of the garden we’re responsible for…
3. What are the principles that mark Receptive Ecumenism?

Rev Dr Denis Edwards has suggested the following criteria for receiving into one’s own church the institutional gift of the Spirit, of charism, that we see exemplified in another church.

1. It can be recognized by the receiving church as an authentic expression of biblical and apostolic faith

2. The proposed institutional charism leads to Christ, and to authentic discipleship

3. It is not opposed to the deepest self-understanding of the receiving church

4. It can be seen as an organic development of the faith of the receiving church

5. It brings to the receiving church a renewed energy and life

6. It is accompanied by the fruits of the Spirit – “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” Gal 5:22

4. So…how do we offer our wounded hands…?

Some Activities

“Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Matthew 11:28-30

Each of the suggested activities are best commenced within each tradition, by members of that tradition, at any level of Church eg the local Congregation, the Church Council, the Synod, the Board, the Deanery/Presbytery, Regional Meeting, Neighbourhood Church/House Group, Agency.

Further steps will follow by taking the aspects that have emerged – our wounded hands – and offering them to another tradition with a view to learning from the other – for our greater flourishing and so that each part of the body of Christ may become more, not less, than it is already.
Activity 1
Ecclesial Examination of Conscience

“Receptive ecumenism” surely signifies, not only that we should be receptive in relation to our fellow Christians, but also, and much more fundamentally, that we should be receptive in relation to God. Our horizontal receptiveness presupposes, as its source and inspiration, a vertical receptiveness.”

Kallistos Ware, Metropolitan of Diokleia, in a paper given at St Mary’s Catholic Church, Chelsea, in November 2007.

This is a prayerful process especially for any grouping within a tradition to:

- Name its woundedness, where the Church is ‘stuck’, where it is lacking... in relation to the people, practices, processes and structures
- Recognise its vulnerability
- Take steps to share its woundedness with the other
- Receive the gift of the other
- Open itself to conversion – to bring about healing and wholeness

The first step, therefore is silent prayer. ‘Be still, and know that I am God.’ Psalm 46:10

The second step is to give thanks for our own tradition and all that it has offered us in coming to a deeper experience of God’s unconditional love.

The third step is to acknowledge an occasion, a process, a practice, a system, as structure....in our tradition where it has diminished, obscured, ignored or overlooked God’s grace to the world.

The fourth step is to reflect on one of these and pray for the Holy Spirit to direct the group to something that God thinks is particularly important.

The fifth step is to ask for the grace to take a step with another, to be open to receiving the loving support and gentle, wise companionship and giftedness of another.

‘God is love.’ 1 John 4:8

I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. Ephesians 3:16-21
Activity 2
Receiving the Gift of the other
1. Quiet pondering: from your own experience, what is the gift that you, have received from the another tradition?

2. In small groups (3-6 people)
   ➢ Share insights – name the gift(s) have you received from another Church.
   ➢ What appears to be one of the distinctive charisms of that Church?

3. Plenary
   ➢ Share insights on the gifts of the other
   ➢ What does this have to say to our tradition?
   ➢ What might we in our tradition do differently in the light of what we have heard?
   ➢ How do we take that step?
   ➢ Who do we take it with?

Activity 3
The Curiosity Box
The purpose of this activity is to elicit a spirit of curiosity enquiry, learning and receptivity and so engender a Receptive Ecumenical awakening. Possible Questions that one Church at whatever level may pose to another are below. Other questions will, of course, emerge from the lived experience and/or from prayerful reflection and conversation.

Questions may lead to a one-off conversation with another or may be ongoing for a period of time.

➢ What are the structures and processes that promote the transmission of Christian identity, faith and mission in your Church to young people, to adults?

➢ Leadership & Ministry: how is your Church responding to the issues surrounding the changing numbers of clergy / ministers?

➢ How does your Church nurture an active congregation?

➢ How does decision-making occur in your Church? Who participates?

➢ What collections do you take up...how are they disbursed/shared?

Action
In selecting a question and through conversation with the other, together with listening and prayer...

➢ what have you heard that sets your heart on fire...what would you like to learn more about in relation to the leadership, context, systems, processes?
what can your tradition learn, or receive, with integrity from your various others in order to facilitate your own tradition’s growth into deepened communion in Christ and the Spirit?

For more information and to discuss any of these together with your own ideas and insights, contact SA Council of Churches - sacc1@picknowl.com.au +618 8215 0300

5. Quotes & Resources to nourish and nurture the way of Receptive Ecumenism

Quotes
Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking with us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us? Luke 24:32

The Church receives the fullness of the Spirit only in the totality of gifts made by all her members. Yves Congar

I am to see my Orthodox identity as a gift of grace from God, for which I am profoundly grateful. But I am to repent of the fact that I am such a poor and inadequate member of the Orthodox Church. I am to repent because my understanding of Orthodoxy is so petty and restricted. I am to repent, that is to say, not only of my moral failings but of the narrowness of my imaginative vision. Kallistos Ware, Metropolitan of Diokleia

Timothy Radcliffe OP, in Towards a Humble Church, speaks of the diverse ways of assisting in the building of a more inclusive and unified Church “which lifts people up into the mystery of loving equality, which is the life of the Trinity”.

Resources
For background and links on Receptive Ecumenism, see www.centreforcatholicstudies.co.uk and www.sacc.asn.au


Member Churches of SA Council of Churches

- Anglican Church of Australia, Diocese of Adelaide
- Anglican Church of Australia, Diocese of The Murray
- Anglican Church of Australia, Diocese of Willochra
- Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide
- Catholic Diocese of Port Pirie
- Churches of Christ in SA/NT
- Coptic Orthodox - Diocese of Melbourne & Affiliated Regions
- Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia
- Lutheran Church of Australia - SA/NT District
- Religious Society of Friends SA Regional Meeting
- Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of Australia/NZ - SA Parish
- Salvation Army South Australian Division
- St Urael Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church in SA Inc
- Uniting Church in Australia - Synod of South Australia

Want to learn more…?

For the names of people in your Church appointed to the Executive Committee of SA Council of Churches, see below or, contact

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THIS BROCHURE IS A WORK-IN-PROGRESS. PLEASE SEND YOUR LEARNINGS, INSIGHTS, SUGGESTIONS to sacc1@picknowl.com.au – THANK YOU! 10 October 2012