



New Stories to Tell: Living Ecumenism Today

A project of the
Anglican-Roman Catholic
Dialogue of Canada



Archbishop Donald Bolen (left) and Bishop Linda Nicholls (right) lead a service of ecumenical prayer / Courtesy of The Catholic Register

CHAPTER XII

Bridges not walls: Transformed through dialogue

Ecumenical dialogue happens in many different ways and at many different levels. The Co-Chairs of ARC Canada at the time of this current project have both had the honour of serving on international Commissions and Anglican and Roman Catholic dialogue as well. Bishop Linda Nicholls is a member of ARCIC III and part of the drafting team which produced the most recent text *Walking Together on the Way* (2018). Archbishop Donald Bolen has been the

Co-Chair of International Anglican–Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission (IARCCUM) since 2013. In both cases, their global ecumenical experience has had a profound influence on their local ministries.

Of her participation on ARCIC, Bishop Linda writes:

~~~~~  
*As an ordained woman I am a visible image of one of the stumbling blocks in our continued work towards unity. When appointed to ARCIC I wondered what my reception would be like at the table? It has been a deep grace to be welcomed as a colleague in faith; to build friendships; to explore our traditions together and to share with others who share the gift of episcopate. Our recent exploration of the nature of our church structures invited us to a deeper honesty about our own tradition, including areas in which we need to grow and develop. Rich theological dialogue is accompanied by fellowship over meals and local community visits that assist the understanding of our history and contexts. The opportunity to pray together, in a pattern of alternating Anglican and Roman Catholic liturgies has been particularly important, participating as each tradition permits.*

*Some Anglican friends wonder why I bother with dialogue with a church that cannot recognize my ordination. My response is that dialogue deepens my understanding of the roots of our differences, enriches me as an Anglican and encourages me in seeking opportunities to share that understanding in my context. Building relationships and bridges rather than walls is part of the necessary road to unity.*

~~~~~

Archbishop Bolen also shares from his experience on IARCCUM:

~~~~~  
*It has been an enormous privilege over the past twenty years to work on Anglican–Roman Catholic relations, to work together towards reconciliation, to enter into dialogue, and to enjoy the bonds of friendship and common mission. A major highlight of my time on IARCCUM was the 2016 meeting in Rome where there were commissioned nineteen pairs of Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops from around the world to go out from there as partners in mission.*

*During our time together in connection with this celebration there were many high points. One that really stands out was the Evening Prayer service where we were told that one symbol of our being sent forth together was that we would each be given a ‘Lampedusa cross.’ None of us knew exactly what that was.*

*Lampedusa is an island off the southern coast of Sicily, and tragically, it is the place where many boats carrying refugees from North Africa have been shipwrecked as they have sought a new life. The boats which began as vehicles of hope became vehicles of death. The Lampedusa cross that we were given was a simple cross made of wood from a shipwrecked boat that came ashore on this little island. Holding the cross, you feel a direct connection to the tragedy of lives caught in desperation, peoples whose dreams died with them at sea. Receiving the cross in ecumenical pairs, we received the summons to work for justice, responding to the needs of refugees and working for systemic change so that millions of people do not need to flee their homes; and to do this work together.*

~~~~~



A Lampedusa Cross / Credit: Fred Hiltz

In the Preface to *The Church as Communion*, the Co-chairs of what was then ARCIC II framed their statement on ecclesiology by offering a witness to something very similar to what bishops Linda and Archbishop Bolen are alluding to above. As they wrote: “The members of the Commission have not only been engaged in theological dialogue. Their work and study have been rooted in shared prayer and common life. This in itself has given them a profound experience of communion in Christ: not indeed that full sacramental communion which is our goal, but nevertheless a true foretaste of that fullness of communion for which we pray and strive” (CC, Preface).

Participation in ecumenical dialogue on behalf of one’s communion is also a tremendous responsibility. There is a definite gravity that comes with spending time talking through the difficult issues and divergent paths in Christian history, and to think that the words and actions of those in dialogue today have a tangible bearing on the continuing implications of those divisions is a profound thought. Yet it is also a great privilege to be

drawn into relationships and conversations with fellow Christians that deepen one's own faith and help them to see new possibilities for the future.



Members of ARCIC III hard at work / Credit: Linda Nicholls

While the fruit of these international dialogues is often measured in terms of the documents that have been written and the way they have been engaged in the churches, this is not the only way to track results. As the stories about illustrate, the transformative experience in the life of those who commit themselves to the ecumenical task, be that at the international, national, or local level, is perhaps just as tangible a result. Bishop Linda and Archbishop Bolen both attest to the fact that the way they live as Christians, and the way they minister as bishops, has been indelibly marked by the impact of their lives in dialogue. Although not everyone is going to be appointed to a formal Commission such as ARCIC or IARCCUM, we can all open ourselves up to the possibility of being changed through dialogue with the other.

Are there local ecumenical dialogues between Anglicans, Roman Catholics, and others where you live? Who participates in them? What do they talk about?

Share an instance where your Christian faith and life have deepened and grown by being in relationship with someone who saw things very different from you. How has this continued to impact you?