

Twelve Tales Untold

*A Study Guide
for Ecumenical Reception*

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William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company
Grand Rapids, Michigan

1993

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4. On the other hand, it might be a cloudy day; Father Pregunta could imagine himself inviting Mrs. Antinomo to take instructions in Catholicism so that she could be confirmed along with her daughter. A few days after that interview, Sister Derecha might well call to ask whether Father Pregunta knew that Angela Antinomo has stopped attending confirmation class.

If you were Father Pregunta, what would you do?

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Mission of the Atonement

(Lutheran/Roman Catholic)

DALE JAMTGAARD

In the later months of 1985, the congregation of Atonement Lutheran Church came to realize that its survival was in jeopardy. The income was not adequate to meet expenses. Of the options presented, the congregation decided to look for another Christian congregation that wanted to rent the church facilities part-time.

The Lutheran pastor was on friendly terms with one of the auxiliary bishops of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Portland and from them an idea emerged. The Bishop visited a neighboring parish, St. Anthony's Catholic Church, and in meetings with the laity, he invited them to form a mission community. They established it at the Atonement Lutheran facilities.

What evolved was more than anyone anticipated. The Lutherans and Catholics met together and elected to form one community of two traditions, each maintaining its separate identity.

The idea was met warmly by about 60 percent of the Lutheran congregation. Some were uncertain as to what was happening but saw no alternative. Some wanted no part of it. Others were willing to try it, and the rest were enthusiastic.

The bishop of the North Pacific District of the American Lutheran Church was hesitant but told them to proceed with caution. He visited the church and became supportive of the new venture, but shortly after that he died of a heart attack. The formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America resulted in the election of a new bishop who has given encouragement to the then year-and-a-half old mission.

The archbishop of the archdiocese of Portland was supportive during the initial phase. He then left and a new archbishop came onto the scene with the community already established and operating. The new archbishop remained cautious, taking time to acquaint himself with the nature of the intent. His support has grown with time.

The Catholic laity who chose to come from St. Anthony's came with enthusiasm. Many of them had held leadership positions in that parish. There were varied degrees of support and non-support from the other neighboring parishes, both Lutheran and Roman Catholic.

Questions that needed answers

There were five major issues that demanded attention as the two churches sought to share as much as we could yet remain true to our respective church bodies.

1. To what extent could we share our public worship life, i.e., the liturgy of the Word, prayer, eucharist, festival services, marriages, and baptisms?
2. How could we emphasize the laity's role in public ministry yet maintain a balance of lay and clergy leadership that would be effective and acceptable to each church body?
3. What patterns of administrative and financial support would be acceptable and effective for both communities given the differences in our traditions?
4. Which educational programs did we want to do cooperatively and which did we deem necessary to do independently?

5. Since we wanted to maintain the interest and support of the Archdiocese of Portland and the Lutheran North Pacific District and subsequently the Oregon Synod, what role would they exercise in the decision making?

Worship, the first concern

When our community began, the major concern was how we could all worship together. It seemed important to both the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics that we find some way in which we could gather together on Sunday morning to celebrate as one community of Christians. This desire was balanced by our concern that we not just form some new style of church but that we remain faithful to our respective traditions and thus serve as an ongoing expression of ecumenism between the two church bodies.

The community had some difficulty in deciding on the format for our joint services. It was the unanimous desire of the members of the community that we celebrate the eucharist together. However, this proved to be impossible, given the regulations on pulpit and altar fellowship for both the Roman Catholic and Lutheran Churches. We had originally hoped that we would be allowed to hold, in the same room and preferably at the same altar, a joint liturgy of the word with separate consecrations and communions. We soon found out that this was not acceptable to either church authority.

Our final solution for a total joint service, although it is considered somewhat less than ideal by many members of the community, was to hold a common liturgy of the Word on the final Sunday of each month. Consistent with a commitment to lay leadership, it was decided that lay people would lead this service and also preach.

There still remained the problem of the other Sundays. Ideally, many people wanted to hold a joint service of the Word on those Sundays, and then separate for eucharistic services. Separating into two rooms for the eucharist raised the issue of whether the eucharist was different in importance

than the liturgy of the Word. Both traditions hold that Christ is equally present in Word and sacrament. In the past the Roman Catholic Church has tended to give the eucharist more prominence in worship, and the Lutheran Church has tended to favor the liturgy of the Word. Therefore the unity of the process now seems important for both. It was then reasoned that, when both Word and sacrament are a part of a worship service, the policy of separation for the eucharist should apply to the liturgy of the Word also. This is an issue that we believe would be worthy of further consideration.

After some experimentation, we decided to hold a very short "entrance" service of song and prayer each Sunday (except for the last Sunday of the month) and then separate for the entire Lutheran liturgy and Catholic mass. The two groups alternate between using the sanctuary and the fellowship hall. Before the separation, which is always acknowledged as painful, the two groups sing a blessing to each other.

Lay people lead the joint service and the short opening services and the two pastors jointly conduct the liturgy of the Word for baptisms, weddings, and other special occasions. Each Monday the clergy and laity meet jointly for text study and the planning of the liturgies.

Christian Education

From the founding of the mission, Christian education has been considered a function to be conducted jointly to the extent possible. Children's Sunday school and adult classes are offered for one hour, three to four Sundays per month. On the last Sunday of each month a community potluck brunch replaces both adult and children's education.

Curriculum for the weekly children's Sunday school — preschool through junior high — emphasizes Bible study on common beliefs and values and avoids emphasis on doctrinal differences. Whenever possible, two teachers work as a team with each group. Currently, we offer a first communion and first reconciliation program for both Lutheran and Roman

Catholic children and a confirmation program for Lutheran children.

Joint adult education offerings have been very popular. Topics have been varied, including an extensive overview of the Lutheran/Catholic dialogues and more detailed discussion of specific topics such as justification by faith, an overview of church history, a series on prayer, a discussion series on differing liturgical and non-liturgical traditions, and Bible studies.

Evening classes have been held on holistic health, interpersonal relationships, and family issues. In addition, Pastor Dale Jamtgaard has been developing material and methods for a new small group spiritual and personal growth program called "Faithwalk." This involves members of the community and also serves as an outreach program. "Couples of Two Religious Traditions" is a unique study and fellowship group that explores the challenges faced by such ecumenical couples in their marriages and in educating their children.

We have also sponsored an ecumenical workshop in which both the Catholic archbishop and the Lutheran bishop have made presentations and given their support.

Administration

The Lutheran and Roman Catholic communities each have councils consisting of the clergy and six elected lay representatives. These councils meet separately, when needed, but most administrative decisions are made at the meetings of the monthly community council, which combines these two groups. The Lutheran community is a separate religious non-profit corporation and because of the history of the mission, it owns the church building. The Catholic community is technically viewed as a mission of neighboring St. Anthony's Parish, but practically operates in most respects like a separate parish.

Active lay involvement has been a key aspect of the mission. Both pastors are part-time. They work with the standing

committees for ministry in the areas of liturgy and worship, outreach and hospitality, administration and finance, Christian education, ecumenical concerns, social action, and fun.

We held a balance of lay and clergy leadership for worship as a goal from the beginning. This was further established during the year in which we were without permanent clergy, for the visiting clergy provided minimal coverage. The lay men and women then assumed the primary responsibility for the joint service, including presiding and preaching. Today the laity also assist with the liturgy and eucharist in the separate services. This seems to be well accepted. Both communities are concerned with providing adequate preparation for these roles and are seeking to do this jointly.

The two pastors who began this cooperative venture resigned from both the mission and the clerical status within the first year. In the selection of clergy, each community followed its own process with little involvement from the other community. However, we would change this in the future to provide for more shared input.

Father Matthias Tumulty serves half-time at the mission and half-time as the director of the Franciscan Enterprise, which rehabilitates and rents low-income housing. Pastor Dale Jamtgaard also serves the mission half-time and has a half-time private counseling practice as a clinical social worker.

The different approaches to compensating clergy and the related need for financial support for the mission as a whole provided an education for both communities. Pastor Dale's compensation package includes a salary, a housing and car allowance, and pension contributions. Although his compensation is below the church guidelines, it is substantially higher than Catholic parishes would ordinarily pay a priest. Father Matt is paid a monthly stipend, which only covers a portion of his living expenses.

Despite the substantial differences in clergy compensation, the Catholic community readily agreed to support the community budget. Both communities have learned about the

differences in attitudes and methods of supporting the church. Catholics have experienced and learned to appreciate the more active Lutheran approach to stewardship. Average contributions by Catholics have substantially increased, although they are still below the level of average Lutheran contributions. A large percentage of members of both communities give a high level of support in contributions of time and talents.

Unfortunately, the Lutheran community had lost membership because of the difficulties prior to the formation of the mission and experienced some mixed feelings at its inception. Even with the joint community, the income was not adequate to meet the pared down expenses. Some neighboring Lutheran congregations have responded with contributions. We have now received an equal commitment from each church body of a two-year subsidy, after which we plan to be self-supporting.

The communities have also learned of their differing approaches to membership. Catholics emphasize membership in the diocese, while membership in a Catholic parish has little or no formality and consists primarily of being listed on the parish register. Lutherans, on the other hand, identify much more strongly with their membership in and commitment to a particular congregation. For Lutherans the joining of a parish is achieved in a more formal way than for Catholics.

We hold orientation classes and a reception for new members both to respect the Lutheran tradition and to give prospective members a greater appreciation of the unique nature of the mission. However, both are optional, out of regard for the less formal Catholic tradition. The welcoming of new members is done at a gathering of both communities to recognize the participation in a larger mission.

A concern of the community is that although we are doing well in participation, service, and stewardship, we need to grow in order to be fully self-supporting. Finding others who are enthusiastic about our joint venture is difficult. More Catholics have shown an interest than Lutherans and our best

resource, not surprisingly, is couples of mixed religious traditions. Their need is an area we feel we are uniquely positioned to serve.

Reflections

We feel privileged to experience ecumenism on a weekly basis. Both communities have come to appreciate what the other tradition has to contribute to the richness of the worship, fellowship, and service of our community. We share an even greater appreciation, however, in the sense of oneness of the Church as we experience our unity in Christ.

When we realize the importance of our unity in Christ, we see our differences in an appropriate perspective. While it is important to have ways to deal with the differences, we believe we also need settings where our unity in Christ is acknowledged and celebrated. This we believe is our contribution to the movement of ecumenism.

Given the years of conflict and distrust between the Roman Catholic and Lutheran Churches, we like to say to all who come, "Welcome to a miracle."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. As a Lutheran, would you be willing to be part of a mission community with Roman Catholics?
2. As a Roman Catholic, would you be willing to be part of a mission community with Lutherans?
3. How would belonging to such a mission community affect your idea of "church membership"?
4. What common understanding of the eucharist do Lutherans and Roman Catholics share?
5. What prevents Lutherans and Roman Catholics from sharing the eucharist?

Longing for the Table of the Lord

(Presbyterian/Episcopal)

AURELIA T. FULE

Tom Walker was not certain what he was going to do with the rest of his life, but he wanted to be useful to others. As soon as he graduated from Swarthmore College he volunteered for Habitat for Humanity, where he could be productive and have time to think about the future. He liked the company of the other young and some not-so-young volunteers, and enjoyed many of the families for whom they were building homes. Tom grew in his experience as a volunteer: he developed physically, he became more at ease with strangers, he sensed a feeling of belonging, or solidarity, with his fellow volunteers, and his faith deepened as he worked with some very dedicated people.

Before Tom completed his term as a volunteer he knew what he was called to do. He applied to three seminaries. Two accepted him, and he chose Yale Divinity School. Although Yale is a nondenominational seminary and Tom was Presbyterian, he could become a candidate for ministry under the guidance of his regional governing board, or presbytery.

During his time in seminary, Tom found himself drawn to the weekly seminary communion service and began to attend it frequently. By the middle of his second year, he never missed