**From the Ecumenical Officer January 2018**

What does the word “ecumenical” mean? That is an appropriate question to ask, especially in this season of Epiphany, which recalls the first relations of Jesus with the world beyond his Jewish faith and family, a world represented by the wise men of Matthew 2. From the Greek word for house, “ecumenical” means having to do with the whole inhabited world.

Generally we have used “ecumenical” or “ecumenism” to describe Christians working together. At its best this means doing together whatever we can; at its least, this means doing at least something together. Often this working together has been around issues of our life together in neighborhoods or cities, issues like homelessness or racial divisions.

In recent years ecumenism has often been understood to mean working not only with Christians but also with persons of other faiths, especially Jews and Muslims. (Our congregations now have access, through relations with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, to a series of CDs on Islam, prepared by Christians and Muslims together a few years ago, after 9/11 but before attitudes toward Muslims became a divisive part of American politics.)

But working with persons of other faiths should not divert us from seeking to work more closely with other Christians. A friend, the son of Moravian pastor, is now a Roman Catholic deacon. The new executive of the Board of World Mission has worked for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Within the last few years Moravian pastors have served Presbyterian and Lutheran congregations, and Baptist, Lutheran, and Presbyterian pastors have served Moravian congregations (those are just the ones I am aware of). The majority of Northern Province congregations use a Sunday bulletin series which we prepare working with the Lutheran Church.

But more important than these sorts of actions is what goes on where we live. How do our congregations live together the values and the priorities of Jesus so that the world knows we are followers of the Lamb? This is a question for individual congregations and congregations together. Perhaps this will drive to the Gospels, to ask, Who is this Jesus we claim to follow?

For example, as we hear allegations of men’s mistreatment of women, what words and models do our churches give about healthy relationships? What do we tell our boys about what it means to be a man in relation to women? Congregations together might try to respond.

When Jesus lived in Palestine centuries ago, people knew he was there, so much so, that they tried (unsuccessfully, as we celebrate at Easter) to get rid of him. Does your neighborhood know your church is there? If the congregations in your neighborhood disappeared, would the neighborhood miss them?

*Lord Jesus, show us how to work with other followers of yours, so that the world notices and is drawn to you and the fullness of life you offer. Amen.*

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