

“...That they may be one”

Among the hats that I wear is that of Eparchial Ecumenical Officer. (Actually, as a Dominican, I can more often be seen in a hood than in a hat, but that is neither here nor there.) As such, I have been very much involved with the planning of the National Workshop on Christian Unity (NWCU) hosted by Chicago Churches this spring. And I am not the only one from our eparchy involved in this event; far from it! Nazar Sloboda of our chancery staff was called upon to take part in a discussion panel at the workshop, and Father Mykola Buryadnyk and the wonderful staff at St. Joseph's in Northwest Chicago have bent over backwards to show hospitality in many ways – including offering their imposing church building for a Divine Liturgy celebrated by Bishop Richard.

This kind of co-operation and collaboration has become a tradition in the St. Nicholas Eparchy. In recent years, we have been blessed to have very cordial relations with our Ukrainian Orthodox brothers and sisters—especially with our good friend Archbishop Vsevolod, whose passing has left a great hole in our hearts. One concrete example of this fruitful relationship has been the collaboration between Ukrainians and Orthodox in the development of the catechetical program Generations of Faith which Bishop Richard hopes to implement throughout the eparchy. Stay tuned!

Our involvement in the NWCU has broadened our ecumenical involvement beyond the bounds of the Ukrainian community. I, a Ukrainian Catholic, have been working with colleagues from all across the Christian spectrum: Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Polish National Catholics, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists ... you get the picture! Despite the differences which continue to keep us divided into separate Churches, we have been able to come together to work for the restoration of our broken unity so that the one Body of Christ, still crucified in our divisiveness, may finally come to Resurrection. At a recent meeting, a Baptist minister—who, by the way, just finished a masters' thesis comparing John Calvin and St. John Chrysostom—offered this prayer: he gave thanks to the Holy Spirit for bringing us together in love, and for inspiring us to work together for the building up of Christ's Church and the triumph of His Kingdom. That is what our committee is all about. Isn't it what we should be about as Church?

Very often, it is easier to get along with people of other faiths than with our own co-religionists. The Anglican communion is a case in point: headlines tell us that conservative Episcopalian parishes are breaking away from bishops whom they consider to be too liberal, aligning themselves instead with conservative African bishops. As is too often the case, unity takes a back seat to ideology—if not indeed to self-interest as well—thereby making schism a real possibility. The great priestly prayer of Jesus at the Last Supper seems all but forgotten: “...I have given them the glory You gave Me, so that they may be one, as We are one, I in them and You in Me, that they may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that You sent Me, and that You loved them as You loved Me.” (John 17: 22-23)

We Ukrainian Catholics have different issues, but this fact does not make the issues any less divisive. There are generational differences, including differences arising from the variety of immigrations involved. There are linguistic differences, the divide

manifesting itself not only between Ukrainian and English speakers, but also existing among Ukrainian speakers of different immigrations; the result is that people can't—or perhaps won't—understand one another. There are calendar issues which lead partisans on both sides to dismiss their adversaries as unenlightened and misguided. There are liturgical differences between militant Romanizers and rigorous Easternizers who have no use for one another or for any position more moderate and less doctrinaire than their own. Do we live up to the example of the early Christians of whom it was said, “See how the Christians love one another”? I fear not.

At every Divine Liturgy, the celebrant offers the following silent prayer before the processional antiphon: “You have given us the grace to pray together in harmony.” Instead of seeking to convert others to our point of view, may we learn that the most important conversion is our own conversion to the ways of the Lord Jesus. In this way, we redeemed sinners may come to embrace one another, sharing the Divine Love which saves us all. Only in this way will the above prayer may come to reflect the reality of our Church life.

-Fr. Jim Karepin, op