

## Talk on Ecumenism

Last week, Fr Paul and I went to a full-day workshop in Port Pirie about Receptive Ecumenism. Now that just sounds like 2 long words that might not be very relevant to your life, but if I asked instead whether you have friends or family members who are not Catholic, I think you might get what we were talking about. Sometimes when you have friends or family members who are not Catholic, do you feel a bit challenged or confronted by them? Or sometimes do you feel inspired or blessed by them? Our speaker was Professor Paul Murray, who is a Catholic theologian from the UK. He explained Receptive Ecumenism by saying that it is first a matter of the heart before it is a matter of the head. That is, it is about relationships with other people and friendships with other churches.

He did talk about head things – about churches working together at international and leadership levels. In many ways, he said, ecumenical projects have gone as far as they can go. Especially since the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, we have been trying to remove misunderstandings between Catholics and Lutherans and Anglicans and the Uniting Church and many others, and we have realised that often we are using different language to talk about the same religious realities. We have also found that we all share the same understanding of baptism. But now we need to also be challenged and converted by those from other denominations. The question to ask is not “What do the other traditions need to learn from us?” but “What do we need to learn from them?” Maybe another church is better at congregational singing, or managing church finances, or lay ministry. He wasn't saying that we need to start new groups or projects, he said this is not a program but a movement. But all of us in our own patches can invite in members of other churches to give their experience and see if it can enrich our own. For example, I could get a youth leader from the Uniting Church to talk about how they do youth things. It is not about changing to another denomination, or blending them all together, but becoming more fully, more freely who we are – to become Catholic rich, not Catholic lite. What can we learn from others, not what can we learn about them. This is very exciting and Paul Murray suggested that while we are all living with smaller congregation sizes, ecumenism won't be a drain on us, but actually a resource, when we find what we can share together. If you run at the horizon, the horizon expands, he said. Another good image was that this way of thinking and acting can become a virtuous virus, so I hope we can catch this virus and receive from other Christian churches.

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