

ECUMENICAL ENGAGEMENT + PERENNIAL WISDOM

We value the diversity of the Church + wisdom across faith traditions.

It can often feel as though division is the language of our world. And yet, when we take in Jesus' teachings, some of his final words to the disciples encourage a picture of unity and connection.

John 17:23 (NIV)

I in them and you in me...

In following Jesus' model, here at Foundry Spiritual Center

- *We value the diversity of the Church + wisdom across faith traditions.*

Defining Ecumenical

When we use the word "*Ecumenical*," we're talking about:

- *The entirety of all Christian faith communities*

Why Ecumenical Engagement?

Our Center's Spiritual Formation Team has come to appreciate diverse church settings and the importance of learning from various traditions.

We recognize that:

- **Diversity is good.**

It's written into the fabric of who we are. We're meant to enjoy it, benefit from it, and celebrate it.

We're reminded of this right away in Genesis 1 and 2 where we're told that diversity exists in the very makeup of everything:

- The diversity of the day and the night,
- The waters that teem with living creatures
- The many sorts of animals, birds, ones that fly, crawl, walk
- The great variety in vegetation

In all of it, we're repeatedly told: *God saw all that had been made, and it was good and very good.*

We also acknowledge:

- **Diversity is hard.**

Whether it's a bias, a concern, an annoyance, a trigger, a trauma, or something else, diverse engagement can be difficult. We may

- Feel our churches have been too exclusionary
- Find our beliefs now feel outside the beliefs of our churches of origin
- Wonder if we ourselves are truly welcome

And yet even with the challenges of diversity, we find we can't ignore the benefits and richness of connection that diversity brings.

Connecting with the diversity of the Church

Ultimately, connection offers us an expansive view of God.

- Some draw us into a historical contemplative experience.
- Others teach us the value of expressive worship and prayer
- Still others remind us to be faithful in loving others

The diversity of the Church enriches our collective experience. And...

As we value the diversity of the Church, we also appreciate perennial wisdom:

PERENNIAL WISDOM

We value wisdoms that exist across faith traditions.

Perennial wisdom, in our context, is about cultivating a respect for one another's faith traditions. We aren't talking about a global religion. Rather, it's about recognizing common shared values - wisdoms and truths that ring true across time, culture, and space.

To break that down a bit, when we think of "*perennial*," maybe we think of perennial flowers - flowers that come up every year.

To be perennial is to continually recur.

Throughout the ages, seeds of compassion, love, justice, gratitude, forgiveness, and the like have been planted in societies and cultures - across time and distance - and for ages, these virtues have lived on, re-emerging in the next generation.

Perennial wisdom, then, as we noted above, is:

- **Wisdom that spans across faith traditions**

These wisdoms may not be exactly the same given that all of us come from unique vantage points. And that's okay because diversity is about the celebration of our differences.

A Metaphor

To give an image of sorts, let's say you're climbing a mountain. And on getting to the top of that mountain, you're able to look out, surveying the landscape below, your journey and experiences swirling in the fabric of your being. If your neighbor climbs the mountain across from you, they, too, are looking out at the landscape below, but from a different vantage point with a different set of experiences.

This is an image of Perennial Wisdom. Similar but different.

We're not suggesting all rivers converge into one big ocean. We're not trying to synthesize the faith traditions or say they're all saying the same thing. We're trying to become aware of, and celebrate, our connectedness, with honor for one another. And in return, we often receive the added benefit of someone saying something or sharing a spiritual practice with us that helps us connect more deeply with our own spirituality.

Why is Perennial Wisdom Compelling

- **It moves us past an “*us vs. them*” mentality.**

Rather than focusing on our differences, we move into appreciation and connection.

- **We gain new wisdom and insights.**

Perhaps some of us have heard the phrase:

- *“Be in the world but not of the world.”*

Phrases like this one may have come up so frequently in our lives that we struggle to extract meaning from them anymore. Then one day, we come across a Muslim friend. And in the words most familiar to them, we hear them say:

- *“Engage externally while letting go internally.”*

The difference between these two phrases may be slight. But suddenly, new life comes into an old phrase, and new or renewed wisdom emerges for us personally.

- **We learn new spiritual practices.**

Again in the Christian tradition, we may have grown up hearing about “the Sabbath,” maybe even reading Scriptures that encouraged us to keep the Sabbath holy. But for all the times we had heard it mentioned, maybe we lacked a model, something to show us what it would look like to keep a Sabbath practice.

Then, while connecting with our Jewish friends and their practice of Shabbat, suddenly, the Sabbath comes alive for us, and we feel encouraged to create a Sabbath practice for ourselves.

A Few Fears and Questions

For many people, as good as “*no us versus them*” sounds, it also comes with a few questions, things like:

- **Is this a slippery slope?**

We may fear that all of this love and acceptance of others will leave us feeling lukewarm towards our own faith traditions.

- **Will I lose connection with some of my friends and family?**

What if others judge or even reject me?

- **Could other faiths and practices be demonic?**

It’s common to be afraid of anything that feels unfamiliar to us.

In all of the fears and questions that may arise, we continue to remember that acknowledging the presence of Perennial Wisdom in our world is one way we can seek to love our neighbors - both those we know and those we have yet to know.

Perennial Wisdom is a Practice of “Being With.”

Many of us may have come from faith systems that encourage us to convert as many people as possible to our particular faith tradition. The hostility and trauma this has caused in our world is as palpable today as it’s been for hundreds of years.

Jesus repeatedly engaged with people in a way that offered mutual love and respect, going to parties and graciously receiving their hospitality.

Jesus didn't say, *"I'm for you. You're not for me."*

Instead, Jesus said, *"I'm open to this human experience of **being with.**"*

This is a big paradigm shift!

To give an example:

Loving by way of The Golden Rule

In exploring the faith traditions, it's remarkable to see just how many traditions offer up a similar expression of something we've come to know as "The Golden Rule." Here are a few examples:

Christianity: Matthew 7:12

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

Hinduism: Mahabharata 5:1517

This is the sum of duty: do naught onto others what you would not have them do unto you.

Jainism: Sutakritanga 1.11:33

A man should wander about treating all creatures as he himself would be treated.

Daoism: Tai-shang Kan-ying P'ien

Regard your neighbor's gain as your gain, and your neighbor's loss as your own loss.

For even more examples of how this saying appears in other faith contexts, click [here](#).

Here at Foundry Spiritual Center we uplift:

- Cultivating a respect for one another's faith traditions
- Recognizing our common shared values

We engage the wisdoms that have existed across traditions and across years of changing cultures - to embrace living into the present moment, looking towards each other with wonder and awe, and acknowledging the connection that exists between us.

"I in them and you in me..."

- *Jesus, John 17:23*

