

Ecumenical Gathering Preparation: Reading Reflection Questions

Jennie Berkholz, “The Value of Rural Churches and Fresh Hope” in *Gone for Good?*

1. What stories, memories, people and places come to mind for you as you read the personal story and statistics at the opening of the chapter? What feelings surface?
2. In what ways do the descriptions in the section “The Rural Church” resonate with your experience? In what ways is your experience different?
3. The author identifies several strategies for rural churches to navigate current realities:
 1. Connecting spirituality with wellness
 2. Self-organizing for change
 3. Community partnerships
 4. Revisioning spaces
 5. Funding rural innovation

What examples of these strategies have you seen in action? Which are you drawn to? Which do you resist or find hard to imagine? Which do you want to know more about?

Economic Halo Effect of Historic Sacred Spaces

While the Halo Effect research study focused primarily on urban worship communities and differences surely exist between urban and rural churches, the examples and benefits cited are not limited to congregations in cities/suburbs.

1. Which of these benefits are already present because of your congregation?
2. If your congregation were featured as one of the case studies, what would be highlighted?
3. Which of these benefits could be possible in your area with creativity, coordination, or partnership?
4. Which of these benefits do you dream of but struggle to imagine for your community?

The Lima Text: Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry

[FO1982_111_en.pdf](#)

This is an incredibly rich text worthy of further reflection and discussion. For our purposes, we have focused on a few specific prompts to help you prepare for the day’s conversation and prayer.

1. Make at least one note about each of the following sections to help you remember the key points or your response to the points:
 - Baptism
 - Eucharist
 - Ministry
2. What is one line (or paragraph) of the text that you find particularly moving or meaningful? What is its significance to you?
3. Consider the following line: ...”despite much diversity in theological expression the churches have much in common in their understanding of the faith.” (pg. vii of Introductory letter to Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry)

- In what ways have you experienced the diversity of theological expression across Christian traditions?
- In what ways have you encountered what is common and shared?

4. Reflect on the following statements individually and in relation to one another:

..."our one baptism into Christ constitutes a call to the church to overcome their divisions and visibly manifest their fellowship." (Baptism, D6)

"We live in a crucial moment in the history of humankind. As the churches grow into unity, they are asking how their understandings and practices of baptism, eucharist and ministry relate to their mission in and for the renewal of human community as they seek to promote justice, peace, and reconciliation." (pg. vi of Introductory letter to Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry)

In light of the other readings, your lived experience, and the area in which you live:

- In what specific ways might God be calling the church to overcome divisions and visibly manifest fellowship?
- In what specific ways might God be calling the church to renew the human community through the promotion of justice, peace, and reconciliation?

5. "We believe that many significant advances are possible if in our church we are sufficiently courageous and imaginative to embrace God's gift of Church unity." (pg. vii of Introductory letter to Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry)

- As you prepare for this gathering, how might God be inviting you to be courageous and imaginative?
- What are your intentions and hopes for this gathering?