

Ecumenical mission offers opportunity to hear other voices

Worshipping together, learning together and growing together in Christ were important aims of an ecumenical mission held at churches in and around Sherwood Park.

Bob Calder, with the Sherwood Park United Church, chaired the 15-member committee that organized the 21st annual Strathcona County Ecumenical Mission, held Oct. 24-27. This year's theme was Creation Speaks God!

"Personally, I see it as the high point of the Church year," said Calder. "It's a chance to strengthen your faith, to learn, to get new perspectives and to be inspired. Part of that inspiration comes not from what you hear from the leader, but by rubbing shoulders with followers of Jesus from different denominations."

Nine churches from four denominations were represented this year, including Roman Catholic, Anglican, United and Lutheran. Among the participating churches was Our Lady of Perpetual Help, in Sherwood Park.

Realizing that the commonalities are much more important than the differences is an important realization for Calder. Breaking down barriers among different churches is vital, especially in an increasingly secular society.

"It helps the churches appreciate each other, and appreciate differences in worship, differences in our approach to things, but within the context that we're all headed in the same direction, following the same God, following Jesus," said Calder.

SHARING FOOD

Mission events included a potluck supper at Bethel Lutheran Church, breakfast session at Sherwood Park United Church, afternoon tea at Mount Olivet Lutheran Church, and a Bible study at Ardrossan United Church.

The mission leader was the Rev. Dr. Fran Hare, a former professor at St. Stephen's College of the U of A who retired earlier this year as a minister with the Gaetz United Church in Red Deer. She viewed the mission as an opportunity to share insights and theologies, and form fellowships.

"The big thing it seems to be about is community, the sense that we belong together. We may have different denominations, but we have one Saviour, one God, and we share this. The same Spirit flows through all of us," Hare told the WCR.

Part of the value of an ecumenical mission is the chance to see the different perspectives of the other participating churches, she said.

ECOLOGY, ENVIRONMENT



Rev. Dr. Fran Hare was featured speaker at the Strathcona Ecumenical Mission. Chris Miller, Western Catholic Reporter

When asked to lead the ecumenical mission, she was permitted to choose her own subject matter. She opted to speak on how ecology, the environment, creation, God and the world we live in go together. She had to prepare nine separate “sermons,” all of them connected and intended to make people ponder her views.

“They are more than sermons. They are also about helping people think about stuff. It doesn’t matter so much if they agree, but that they get to ponder it,” she said. “We have enough common ground that fighting over the details doesn’t seem very productive.”

At St. John Lutheran Church, in Strathcona County, she spoke on the parallel between creation and Jesus’ crucifixion, citing Matthew 27.45-56.

“Matthew, in telling us in this way, wants us to understand that the crucifixion is a cataclysmic event. This is so huge that nature and the crucifixion reflect each other,” she said.

Comparing Jesus’ actions to the butterfly effect, his seemingly inconsequential actions had significant consequences. The idea is that one butterfly flapping its wings could eventually have a far-reaching ripple effect that impacts weather patterns or causes a storm miles away.

“Jesus was a butterfly whose holiness affected the people around him so much

that the world shifted and continues to shift," said Hare.