

MODELS OF LOCAL ECUMENISM

*“A united church is no optional extra.
It is indispensable for the salvation of God’s world.”*
Archbishop Desmond Tutu

1. THE ECUMENICAL INSTITUTE Of the Carolinas A Venture in Interfaith Understanding

The Ecumenical Institute was organized in 1968 under the authority of the trustees of Wake Forest University for President James Ralph Scales. It was in response to the new efforts following Vatican II for ecumenism with the first purpose of introducing scholarly dialogue between Baptists and Roman Catholics. During the late 1970s, Belmont Abbey became a partner in the discussions. In 1992, Furman University and Mepkin Abbey joined the partnership. This combined the resources of these four institutions and other institutions and agencies to create a climate of public awareness among individuals and various faiths and denominations in efforts to seek answers to questions that trouble the religious world.

The Ecumenical Institute works to develop mutually supportive fellowship, common witness, study, and action to the glory of God and the good of persons. The purpose is to celebrate unity and understanding through scholarly research, publications, interfaith dialogue. It also exists to encourage and maintain relationship, fellowship, and cooperation with institutions of higher learning, churches, synagogues, mosques, and other agencies in the nation and world in carrying out the ecumenical mission.

Throughout its history, these purposes have been pursued through conference of invited scholars, publications, public lectures and discussions, community meetings, worship services, spiritual retreat, student seminars, academic courses, open seminars, and various other forms of creative interchange.

For further information contact: Carlton Mitchell, 6312 Salemtowne Drive, Winston-Salem, NC 27106.

2. HABITAT PROJECT

An urban Baptist church partnered with an urban United Church of Christ, an African-American Baptist, and an African-American Christian -- both also urban -- to build a Habitat House. The chair was from one of the churches, but the committee chairs and members were quite evenly divided among all four churches. We worked every Saturday, and formed lasting friendships among the group.

Having a goal made our work challenging and created a wonderful atmosphere of cooperation among the four churches from the same city. The cost of the house was divided among the churches also.

For further information contact: Barbara Volk, 302 Springmoor Dr., Raleigh, NC 27615. bvolk19775@earthlink.net 919-848-7302

3. OPENING DOORS TO OTHER CONGREGATIONS

The simple act of allowing another denominational congregation the use of facilities can have far-reaching effects. Nearly 100 years ago the forming Episcopal congregation that became Ascension Episcopal Church in Fork, NC, was given the use of the facilities of what was then Fulton Methodist Episcopal Church South until they constructed their own building. Out of this association, an act of ecumenical friendship, grew a lasting relationship.

The two congregations celebrate Thanksgiving together, yearly alternating sanctuaries, with the non-host pastor preaching. Each congregation receives news, and invitations to any social, fundraising, or special service event at the other church, where members of the two congregations mingle freely, and are warmly included.

Ascension is now celebrating its centennial and Fulton is having a significant part in the celebration.

For more information, contact: David Joyner, 3400 NC HWY 801 S. Advance, NC, 27006. gdavidj@yadtel.net 336-998-4537

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