

# The Mundelein Encounter

## A Catholic-Evangelical Model of Ecumenism

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In the fall of 2013, a new initiative was undertaken in Chicago for Christian unity at “grass-roots” level. This initiative, which eventually became known as the Catholic-Evangelical Conversation (CEC), had its origin in the relationships of several individuals associated in different ways with the evangelical Lausanne Movement. The Lausanne vision, expressed in *The Cape Town Commitment* (<https://www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment>), animated the early discussions of John Armstrong, Norberto Saracco, and Douglas Birdsall, who shared their vision with Thomas A. Baima and Robert Barron. Individuals associated with the Lausanne Movement formed the early core of the evangelicals who became involved with the CEC. A second formative element of this conversation came from the vision of Pope Francis, who

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Claritas: Journal of Dialogue and Culture, Vol. 6, No. 2 (October 2017)  
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shares a growing need for unity for the sake of Christ’s mission. Individuals associated with the Archdiocese of Buenos Aires and Cardinal Bergoglio were early collaborators with the CEC. Both of these visions shape the direction of the CEC into the future.

The Catholic-Evangelical Conversation has become a relational, international, encounter between Christians who have recognized a call from the Holy Spirit to engage in missional ecumenism. Those who participate in CEC recognize each other’s baptism and incorporation into Christ and are firmly committed to their own ecclesial tradition. The CEC is rooted in the experience of baptism and the historic creeds as a sufficient basis from which to pursue common witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. The CEC seeks to strengthen the ties of our baptism through intentional relationship with other Christians. We do this by means of an experience shaped by listening, respect, prayer, study, nonsacramental worship, and hospitality. Our name implies the nonofficial nature of this relationship. While recognized by our churches, even at the highest levels, CEC remains the work and responsibility of the participants. It is supported in its work by two institutions, ACT3 Network and the University of Saint Mary of the Lake in Mundelein, each of which supply financial and logistical support.

As it is currently constituted, the CEC has two expressions. The first is the Mundelein Encounter, which brings together leadership for fellowship and formation in missional ecumenism. The second are regional encounters, which will replicate the experience in cities where local leadership desire to share in the fruits of the encounter and where the vision of missional ecumenism already finds expression. Each year, the Mundelein Encounter embraces a theme. The regional encounters will follow the leading of the Holy Spirit locally. Each encounter includes both closed

invitational sessions and open public sessions, as the need determines. The invitations are issued by the coordinating committee of the Catholic-Evangelical Conversation, which is ultimately responsible for the project.

The Catholic-Evangelical Conversation includes pastors and ministry practitioners (both lay and ordained) and professors (theologians and biblical scholars) whose scholarship or ministry has been identified as offering something important to the mutual exchange of gifts in support of missional ecumenism. The CEC's goal is *not* to solve theological differences in the way an official institutional dialogue does but to clear away misunderstanding that impedes missional cooperation and common witness. The aspects of the Mundelein Encounter can be divided into three areas:

- **Witness.** Here we share our personal testimonies of, and reflections on, the experience of missional ecumenism. We do this by engaging in a mutual exchange of gifts. Our goal is the personal and communal transformation of our lives together so that we might enter into deeper “conversion.”
- **Study:** We invite scholars from among our participants to offer presentations or responses based on several areas of common interest. These include: (1) the theology of missional ecumenism; (2) significant issues of biblical interpretation and theological reflection on matters of faith and morals relevant to Christians working together for the spread of the gospel; (3) theological reflection on the spirituality of unity; and (4) contemporary mission studies in the context of world Christianity.
- **Worship:** Finally, we are committed to worship with one another. Here we provide opportunity to experience the formal worship of each tradition as well as an opportunity for

Bible-based services planned by the group that are more informal. We also allow much time for shared prayer among participants.

It is from the second area (study) that we have chosen six papers to be published in *Claritas: Journal of Dialogue and Culture* in commemoration of the five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation. Both of us have a close and professional relation with its editor, Donald W. Mitchell. He has an international reputation in interreligious dialogue but a strong interest in ecumenical dialogue as well. Also, each year we publish reports and testimonials from participants on the Mundelein Encounter on the ACT3 Network website ([www.act3network.com](http://www.act3network.com)). Occasionally, other resources may be published in the same manner.

Each year we have approximately fifteen people from each tradition attending the Mundelein Encounter, for approximately thirty people in total. These participants come from across the United States, Latin America, Africa, Europe, and Canada. We are committed to meeting with the same group of friends for three years so we can build relational unity by being together in the Spirit, listening and loving as the Spirit leads us. We ask you to pray for this unique meeting, to follow our gatherings through our published work, and to pray for God to be present in our midst. Pray, in particular, that this model of Catholic-Evangelical encounter is adopted in other locations, as the fruits of this meeting are spread through the lives of all of those who participate, as well as those who experience its fruits in various forms.