

## Families Living the Gospel

### Though Many, One: PART 3

The title of the article I started to share last week is called, *'Though Many, One': Where to go from here?'* In that article author Gretchen R. Crowe of OSV Newsweekly shares her experience at the Georgetown University conference 'Though Many, One: Overcoming Polarization through Catholic Social Thought'. After spending three days with more than 80 Catholic leaders whose ways of thinking spanned the progressive and conservative wings of the Church Crowe came to this conclusion, "Catholics have far more in common than not" and that we can use our faith as a place to build common ground and unity.

The task of the conference was to "explore how the principles of Catholic social thought can help bridge ideological, political, racial and ecclesial divides in the Church, thus enabling more effective evangelization and an advancement of the common good in the Church and in society." Crowe writes that Catholic social teaching is the best place to start because "all Catholic social teaching is founded on the profound, inherent, equal dignity of all human people. From this point, this common ground, we are able to move forward." If we can agree that all people are worthy of dignity, then our conversations have a base where we can always return.

So how can we use Catholic social teaching to bring about unity and to help build relationships founded in respect? As Crowe says, "Cardinal Blase J. Cupich of Chicago advised embracing America's rich history of civil argument. 'Our heritage is to value public argument and not shy away from it as if we were terrified of conflict or worse, prone to retreat into our own polarized camps, safely living in isolation with those who affirm our views'. At the same time, Archbishop José H. Gomez of Los Angeles reiterated that Catholics must not lose sight of the bigger picture: that we are to bring others to Christ. 'The Church exists to evangelize. Period. There is no other reason for the Church,' he said. 'We are not called to be social workers or advocates. We are called to be apostles and saints.' 'The salvation that we proclaim to our neighbors is a salvation of the whole person, body and soul,' Archbishop Gomez said. **'That is why there is no 'polarization' in the Communion of Saints; and there are no 'single-issue' saints. The saints teach us to see with the eyes of Christ. They teach us to see that every human life is sacred and special, no matter what stage of development or condition of life. And the saints teach us that whenever human life is threatened, whenever the image of God is obscured and violated, we are called to rise up and defend it.'**"

Crowe says "as we move forward, each of us has a role to play — and it's up to us to determine whether that role will be used for good or for ill. As Catholics strive for holiness, members of the convening were reminded that basic principles come into play: When in dialogue with an individual, give the speaker the

benefit of the doubt. Listen to hear, not to respond. Remember that, as Catholics, there is more that unites rather than divides. With those basics of respectful dialogue in place, the third and final day of the convening sought to find a way forward from the “us versus them” mentality that too often shapes conversation in the Church and hinders its evangelical witness. It left participants pondering questions that apply to all: **What role does each of us play in overcoming polarization? What does love call for, given each role? With what attitudes do we encounter diversity? How may we have labeled certain individuals? Who are we seeking to help? How do we discern when to stand firm as prophetic witnesses and when to be open to negotiation?”** I don't think anyone expected this conference to solve all our problems, but it was a start. It is up to each one of us to keep the conversation going.

After learning about this conference and reflecting on these questions here, I realized that I have a lot of work to do on myself. I am not innocent. In my own ways I have contributed to the polarization of our community and have perpetuated stereotypes. But I know that with the Lord's help, the mercy of Jesus, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit I can keep striving for holiness and become, as the Prayer of St. Francis reminds me, 'an instrument of peace'.

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-Katie Neu, Director of Lifelong Faith Formation

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