

UNITING IN AN ENCOUNTER WITH JESUS

So many things divide us today: Red state-Blue state; Black-White; Pro this-Con that; and Catholic-Protestant. Last Sunday, North Hills Christian Reformed Church, our neighbor down on Adams Road, hosted a dialogue between a “Protestant and a Priest” commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Protestants and Catholics joined in hymns and prayer in this ecumenical event. There were likely no converts, either way, but there is hope for unity.

The highlight was a discussion between Msgr. John Zenz, from Holy Name parish and Sacred Heart Major Seminary, and philosopher Dr. Richard Mouw, from Fuller Theological Seminary. They spoke on the history of our division, false myths we learned about each other, what separates us, and what we believe in common. It has been 500 years since Luther posted his “95 Theses” against the Church, but before that there was more than 1500 years of unity in Christian belief and practice. On Sunday, there was both agreement and disagreement across wide-ranging topics, such as the pope, justification by faith, *sola scriptura*, confession, and the Eucharist.

A common understanding shared by the panelists resonated with the foundational conviction of *Unleash the Gospel*: “That every person at every level of the Church, through personal encounter with Jesus Christ, embraces his or her identity as a son or daughter of God...” and that “one’s relationship with Jesus ... [is] the central guiding principle of every aspect of life” (pp. 3-4). Msgr. Zenz and Dr. Mouw emphasized how central an enduring encounter with Jesus is to the faith.



There is hope for reunification, but no clear way there, yet. There was a very clear, profound agreement that our hope for a world marked by materialism and secularism, for society scarred by violence and incivility, and for neighbors and families separated by distrust and discord, depends upon uniting under our one Lord, Jesus Christ. This is the mission of all Christianity: to share the Gospel and bring all people, however we are divided into nations, parties, constituencies, races or religions, to personal encounters with Jesus Christ.

Let us pray for unity in the Church, as Jesus Himself prayed for us, that we be united in love with Him as closely as He is united with the Father: “Holy Father, keep them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one just as we are” (John 17:11).