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A Couple Lives the Dialogue of Catholic and Methodist Faiths

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The Rev. Kimberly Greway of Pittsburgh graduated from Allegheny College majoring in French with minors in political science, religion and women's studies. She studied theology at The Divinity School at Duke University. A former Peace Corps Volunteer in Zimbabwe, she has served rural churches in North Carolina, a women's prison, five churches in England, a large suburban church in Pittsburgh, and presently the Allegheny County Jail as the Director of Chaplaincy Services. She is the Chief Operating Officer and Executive Director of the Foundation of HOPE. Rev. Greway in 2012 received the Pittsburgh Magazine's *40 Under 40* award for people committed to shaping the region and making it a better place for everyone.

A COUPLE LIVING THE DIALOGUE OF CATHOLIC AND METHODIST FAITHS

Our Backgrounds

Rev. Kimberly Greway and Kenneth Hendrata are a married couple who shares their Christian faith but comes from two different traditions – United Methodist and Roman Catholic, respectively. Though we each have strongly held beliefs, we navigate our differences and focus on the similarities of our traditions while also allowing the other to express the uniqueness of their tradition.

A note before we continue. We use the word, "tradition," purposefully when referring to our United Methodism and Roman Catholicism heritages because we belong to one faith – the Christian faith. We are Christians who find a home in the expressions of Catholicism and Methodism. While we have both experienced various traditions of Christianity and find our primary expression in different traditions, we share the one faith that guides our lives.

We do a lot of talking. As we are an interracial, intercultural, interdenominational couple, there is much to discuss, and more than one language to do it in. The negotiation tactics that we have developed in our shared life help us navigate our religious traditions as well.

Kimberly grew up in Pittsburgh in a family that attended Forest Avenue Presbyterian Church in Bellevue. Though her father was Catholic, her parents had decided to attend solely at the Presbyterian Church in part because of family ties. Just prior to Kimberly's Confirmation, the family moved its membership to St. Paul's United Methodist Church to be part of a church that had a vibrant and well-attended youth program. Providentially, this move and the accompanying youth programs had a significant impact on the Kimberly's discernment of a vocation in the ordained ministry. After participating, during college, in the multi-year discernment process for vocations in the United Methodist Church, Kimberly spent two and a half years in the Peace Corps in Zimbabwe and returned to enroll in the Divinity School at Duke University. Upon completion of all academic and ecclesial requirements, she was ordained. In the Methodist Church, bishops appoint clergy to congregations, as is the case in the Catholic Church.



Kenneth Hendrata

Born in India, Kenneth Hendrata spent his childhood in the Middle East and Indonesia. He earned a Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering from the University of Texas and Masters in Business Administration from Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh. Kenneth has been a software developer for more than 15 years and an entrepreneur for more than 5 years. Kenneth owns a consultancy firm specializing in Agile software project management and development, machine learning, business strategy, and new ventures. He has been singing in choirs for eighteen years, starting with the choir for Saint Marguerite Bourgeoys in Connecticut, and now with the Duquesne University Chapel and Mount Lebanon United Methodist Church choir groups.

Kimberly first served five small churches in the Poole and Swanage Circuit of the British Methodist Church in England, then Mount Lebanon United Methodist Church (MLUMC); she is presently the Director of Chaplaincy at the Allegheny County Jail.

Kenneth, who recently became an American citizen, grew up in Indonesia where Christianity is a minor religion comprising only around 10% of the population. Only two major Christian denominations existed in Indonesia when Kenneth grew up, namely, Roman Catholic and Protestant (a fused religion of different Protestant branches, but predominantly Lutheran). Kenneth's parents are both of Chinese descent, with a Confucian background. They attended Catholic schools, because the Catholic schools provided the best education in Indonesia at the time, and they converted to Catholicism. Kenneth attended a Protestant elementary school; he was baptized when he was eight years old in a Maria Bunda Karmel Catholic Church. He then attended a Catholic school from age twelve to eighteen. He practiced Catholicism throughout college, and has been practicing ever since, singing in multiple church choirs for some sixteen years.

Kenneth is Asian, immigrant, native Indonesian speaker, and Catholic; Kimberly is White, American, native-born English speaker, and Methodist. Kenneth's profession emphasizes cold logic (software development and business), while Kimberly's emphasizes empathy (ministry). We have found that these different techniques for coming together across cultures and professions also work wonders when navigating and negotiating our faith traditions.

We observe our Asian values, as well as American values. We shed bad habits entrenched in our cultures and strengthen good ones. We use our strengths from each profession to help each other in everyday tasks - Kenneth handles airline

ticket purchases and taxes, while Kimberly manages bills and navigates social expectations for the couple, for example. We choose to grow stronger in our faith by having open minds

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and an open dialogue about our different denominations, and to dive deeper into theology to understand and experience God's love for humankind.

Music as Metaphor for Shared Religious Life

For us, a great expression of our faith and an important part of our “work of the people” (*leitourgia*) is music – both vocal and instrumental. We sing everywhere – at rehearsals, in church, in the car, at home, with friends. We sound out our soprano and bass voices wherever possible. We go caroling, sing for inmates at the jail, and lead worship through choral music. We both find expression of our faith and inspiration from God in the religious and secular music that we sing, play, and listen too.

Similar to a choir made up of people singing different vocal parts, a traditional Indonesian orchestra called *gamelan* is made up of varied instruments played together. Made up primarily of percussion instruments, such as xylophones and gongs, *gamelan* sometimes includes stringed instruments, flutes, or singing. Unlike a western orchestra which is understood to be made up of various instruments, a *gamelan* is considered almost to be one instrument, though it is made up of various individual instruments. These images of both vocal, part-based music, and *gamelan*, one instrument made up of many parts, are helpful in our understanding of our shared religious life. Kenneth comes from an Asian Catholic perspective with heavy doses of Confucian influences; Kimberly harkens from a WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) perspective with a deep appreciation of high liturgy and high Christology. Just as different instruments and voices combine to make complex and interesting music, we view our different denominations as an opportunity to enrich each other. We like to think of our relationship and our shared faith like fused music, East meets West, string meets percussion, soprano meets bass. Without the other parts, a single voice or instrument can be thin and uninspired. Together with instruments and voices both young and old, of differing histories and traditions, music is deeper, richer, and more sonorous. So, too, our faith is enriched by our understanding, appreciation, and celebration of the other's religious traditions.

How Does it Work: Negotiating, Compromising, Learning

Some interdenominational couples may choose to worship and participate in the life of their respective congregations separately. We have not chosen to do so. We place a high priority on worshiping together, even if sitting in separate sections of the choirs in which we sing. We alternate churches on Sundays, and are active in the choirs of both Duquesne University Chapel and Mount Lebanon United Methodist Church. While we try to rotate weekly, there are occasions on which Kimberly is preaching, teaching, or leading worship in various churches. If we have two “Methodist Sundays” in a row, we try to spend the next two in the Catholic Church. Even our sacramental/ritual celebrations, such as Confirmation and Marriage are joy-filled exercises in ecumenism. Our marriage celebrations encompassed both Methodism and Catholicism, as we shared our vows at Mount Lebanon United Methodist Church and received a Catholic blessing at Saint Bernard's the year after. Kenneth was confirmed as an adult, having changed schools at the age of confirmation and thus missing his opportunity. Upon his confirmation at Saint

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Bernard's and our marriage, our Methodist and Catholic friends celebrated these holy sacramental events together as one community.

We also deliberately choose to engage in Christian ministries outside of worship together. We have volunteered in Haiti as part of a United Methodist mission team, and have served on several inter-denominational Thanksgiving meal preparation and delivery teams. Music plays an important role in our life of Christian service; we sing in various Catholic and inter-denominational worship services, and have facilitated the Duquesne University Chapel choir coming to the Allegheny County Jail to perform concerts for inmates.

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We spend a lot of time talking, discussing, and negotiating. We talk about practical things, like where to spend particular holidays as well as our presumptions about our Christian faith. Kimberly's profession as a pastor makes for rich discussion, as she is well versed in theology, and as scholars know, few things can be as exhilarating as an exchange of thoughts between two different philosophies, if done respectfully. Being married to a pastor has other benefits as well. On one Ash Wednesday, Kenneth realized at around 10:30 pm that he had forgotten to go to church to receive ashes. Kimberly quickly sprang into action. She had palms from Palm Sunday the year before, burned them, mixed them with oil, blessed them, and made a cross with the ashes on Kenneth's forehead. Disaster avoided.

Just as singing in both the Catholic and Methodist churches has expanded our horizons to music ranging from Latin chant to camp meeting hymns, so has practicing different traditions of Christianity enriched our palate with different spiritual flavors.

The Necessary Ingredients

We reap the benefits of standing on the shoulders of those that have gone before us in the faith and observing how varied people live out their Christian faith. Our histories and traditions inform our understandings of how varied Christians live out their faith today; they greatly help our shared life. Several factors assist us in living our individual traditions while respecting each other.

A better Understanding of between Catholicism and Protestantism

Through the grace of God, Kimberly and I live in an era where Catholicism and Protestantism have had time to learn from their experiences, contemplate their practices, and mature in their theologies. Much dialogue, discussion, and reconciliation have occurred between Protestantism and Catholicism since the split five hundred years ago. Kimberly: "I in particular am pleased to live in an era where much of the hard work of ecumenism and reconciliation has been done – both on a denominational scale and on a personal level. No longer are little Protestant children told to cross the street to avoid walking in front of a Catholic household as my mother was told in her childhood."

Being open-minded and validating Each Other.

Kenneth and I love to travel and when we do, we visit nearly every church we see. I have worshiped in churches of all kinds: rural Mennonite, Hungarian Protestant, Haitian Methodist, and Indonesian Catholic, among others. An understanding of the praxis of faith in many contexts helps us at home to accept and even appreciate the other's practices. Being well traveled, we "have been here before." We have been exposed to people doing things differently and acknowledge that these different approaches can be a faithful expression of our traditions. When bridging different approaches, we are naturally excited to teach our approach, and must be careful not to turn this enthusiasm into enforcement. As Stephen Covey pointed out in his book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*,¹ Habit 5 is to "Seek first to understand, then to be understood." This rings true in many aspects of social interactions, and certainly in our religious conversations with those of other beliefs.

Valuing spirituality

Our theologies and practices have so much in common. We believe in God and the importance of nourishing one's spirit. Being Christians, we believe in Christ's salvation and the need to express our individual relationship with him. Our shared Christianity makes it possible for us to attend each other's church and still relate to the liturgy and receive spiritual nourishment from the worship.

Sparing the details

As evident in many aspects of life, the details are an area fraught with contention - we can always find something to disagree with. Instead, Kimberly and I take a more pragmatic approach to differences in the details. Do they matter? Do they matter for us in this situation? We endeavor to look at the spirit behind the teaching and to reconcile the differences to enable communion. We follow the other's lead at times, but we focus on the big picture, and do not let the details distract and divide us. We focus on love - Jesus' love and our love to each other, as husband and wife, as human beings, and as God's children.

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An example of how we reconcile differences is how we recite standard prayers, responses, and the Nicene Creed. Catholics and Methodists have slightly different versions when reciting The Lord's Prayer. The Methodists add, "for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and glory forever," directly after "but deliver us from evil." Responding to "The Lord be with you," Catholics now say, "And with your spirit," while the Methodists say the original, "And also with you." Yes, there may be some theological differences between the two, but the point is that we also want to reflect the peace to the other person as a whole, including the spirit. So, we just follow the response of the "church of the week" and we believe what we say. A similar approach goes with the Catholic adoption of the new translation of the Nicene Creed. Again, there may be some theological differences, but we focus on the spirit, follow the lead, and believe what we say.

What Is Distinctive about Each Tradition? What have We Learned from Each Other's Denomination?

Age

Roman Catholicism is an ancient tradition, while Methodism grew out of Anglicanism as a reform movement led by John and Charles Wesley almost 250 years ago. Just as our old and young generations can learn from each other (think quilting and smart phones), these two denominations stand to benefit from learning about each other's journey and collective wisdom.

Methodists have experienced a liturgical revival in the last few decades, re-establishing some of the traditions that were thrown out in reforms made in the 1700s and 1800s. Methodism has grown out of its heritage of self-definition as anti-Anglican, and reintroduced much of the liturgical elements that had been rejected. Kimberly: "When I was a pastor serving in the British Methodist Church, I encountered resistance to what were fairly standard Christian traditions which the British Methodists felt were solely Anglican. Candles, a beautiful reminder of the light of Christ offered to the world, seemed "too Anglican" to these faithful Christians until they understood the history of the use of candles, and that they were widely accepted in many forms of Christianity aside from Anglicanism."

Methodist pastors have greater liturgical freedom and thus are able to more flexibly experiment. Recent liturgical innovations combined with liturgical traditions can provide worship that is both relevant and deeply rooted in tradition. One example of this "ancient-future" worship that we have experienced together is a "U2charist" service, using hymns taken directly from U2 songs. It drew a younger and more liberal crowd. All are welcome in the church of Christ and having this diversity can certainly help spread the good news.

On the other hand, sweeping new concepts without regard for the old ones - time tested and stable - is not wisdom either. We have attended a number of weddings in our six years of marriage. The ones that deliberately veered from tradition undoubtedly have some intriguing elements, some for the better and some for the worse. We both cringed as a presider once uttered the words, "by the power vested in me from the Internet..." Yes, scrapping the old for the new can foster innovative approaches, but to truly improve, would it not be better to evaluate the old with the new?

While evaluating old tradition, it is up to us to challenge the reason for its existence and validate it for our own time. What was logical in the past may not be logical now. The reason for Daylight Savings Time to save energy was very logical when first introduced in the early 1900s, before widespread use of Air Conditioning systems and flexible work hours. (Daylight Savings Time means more daylight for people after work and decreased use of electricity for light before bedtime.) In recent times, people have questioned the rationale to keep Daylight Savings Time and they should. Situations have changed.

It would be prudent for us to learn from both old and new. The old has concepts that have evolved over tens and perhaps hundreds of years, making them very stable. The new

has new ideas that can reform old ideas. Methodists can learn from Catholics an appreciation of traditions that are centuries long, while Catholics can gain from Methodists an appreciation of changing with the times. Catholicism certainly has evolved over its lifetime (indulgences is one case in point) and it is important for us to continue to have an open mind and open dialogue. It certainly is no easy task to lead those dialogues, and we are thankful to have Pope Francis and our Catholic leaders lead the charge.

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On the other hand, I have found that Catholicism has a deeper mastery in drawing the congregation's mindset and spirit towards union with God and communion with one another. The evolution of the Catholic liturgy over hundreds of years has beautifully narrated the Mass into the culmination of the Holy Consecration and the following Communion. This is one example of where Methodism can learn from the older Catholicism. A deep look into Catholic liturgy may bring in a new dimension to Methodist services.

I am sure there are lots of other examples where each denomination can learn from the other; once again, the key is open minds and open dialogues. I feel blessed that I live in communities that exemplify this. A couple of times every year, the Mount Lebanon United Methodist Church joins Saint Bernard's Roman Catholic Church in lessons in carols. MLUMC also has several joint activities (Thanksgiving meals and Good Friday services) with other Protestant denominations (local Lutheran and Presbyterian churches).

Size

There are about 70 million Catholics in the US and 1.2 billion in the world. In comparison, United Methodism has about 7 million members in the US and 12 million worldwide. In the US, the average Catholic parish size is about 4,000 people, while the average Methodist church size is about 200 people. Different sizes have different benefits, challenges, and outcomes. Being bigger usually means more resources are available to you (both manpower and finances), which also means you can probably find any type of ministry you fancy (that you can help with or that can help you). On the other hand, when faced with the same challenge, smaller entities can choose to rise up to it and strive to do as much with less. MLUMC is one such entity, resulting in a higher per capita engagement rate. When you step into that church, you can see it buzzing continuously on Sunday mornings.

People in smaller communities also tend to know each other better because they see the same people more frequently. There are other downstream effects to this: we are more likely to listen to people who we perceive to care about us, and any call-to-action from those people (such as for events and activities) gets more of our attention. More attention to calls-to-action means higher likelihood of actually acting on them.

Kenneth: "Indeed, I do feel like everyone knows everyone else when I go to the United Methodist Church. It has a homey feel to it. I am lucky enough that Duquesne University

Chapel has a homey feel for me too, but that is because I am part of the ministry there and the ministry itself is a small community.” “Before being active in church choirs, I was also fortunate enough to have family and friends who also went to church regularly. My social circle encouraged me to attend church; going to church became both a religious and social event.” “When I moved to Danbury, Connecticut, right after college graduation, I was without friends or family, and it was a pivotal moment in my life where I could have chosen to not continue going to church. I went to several Catholic churches in the area and was a little discouraged at first, but ended up attending one that I was more hopeful about. I felt it had more “energy.” After mass, I talked to a churchgoer I ran into in the parking lot and ended up having a good conversation with her about my situation for about an hour. I went back the next week, and the next, and became a choir member for the next seven years before I packed my bags for graduate school in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. In retrospect, part of the reason that I was drawn into that church was a prospect of belonging. I could see there was community, there was activity.”

If community, particularly a tight-knit community, and activity are important, and smaller communities tend to accentuate these, how do we have the best of both worlds, what aspects can we learn from both worlds? Indeed, many organizations have realized this and are actively pursuing inroads to combine them. I used to work at UPMC Enterprises, an investing arm of UPMC (University of Pittsburgh Medical Center). UPMC is a large institution with around \$5 billion in revenue. UPMC Enterprises, on the other hand, is an attempt to spur innovation by injecting “startup” elements using the large pool of resources. (Startup companies are well known for their ability to do more with less.) PNC Bank, with \$16 billion in revenue, is another example. It launched NUMO, an equivalent to UPMC Enterprises, less than 2 years ago. Kenneth: “This is not to say that neither the Roman Catholic Church nor the United Methodist Church has realized this. The lesson I have learned by being part of both worlds is that it is not enough to just make the size smaller to reap its benefits, but it is more important to remove barriers to action (such as bureaucracy) and promote interaction among the group members. One concrete way we can leverage our strengths is to foster collaboration. Each denomination has strengths that can complement the other.”

Church Structure and Liturgy

Roman Catholicism has a uniform structure of the Mass throughout the world, with uniform responses, prayers, and creeds. This uniformity serves as an anchor for its members as they transition throughout their lives, where a disruption in one part of life can cause discontinuity in another. In Kenneth’s own experience, this uniformity is one reason of his continuing practice of Catholicism while transitioning from Jakarta to Austin to Danbury to Pittsburgh. Kenneth: “Something that I learned about change management is that change can breed anxiety and one way we can minimize this anxiety is by being able to hold onto things that stayed the same. When everything else changes, the constant provides refuge.”

Another side effect of the uniformity of the Catholic liturgy is that the audience’s mind is freed up to focus on aspects that are different. In Catholicism’s case, these are the

readings, petitions, homily, and announcements, among others.

Methodist pastors have a lot of freedom in planning liturgy. They can insert and delete certain liturgical elements as they see fit to accommodate the congregation's worship needs and the issues of the day. This flexibility allows for a wide variety of worship styles. Such flexibility in the service structure for each congregation certainly enables the individual churches to cater to its local needs and its members' age distribution. For example, MLUMC has a number of young children and it dedicates part of the service for the pastor to gather the children and speak directly to them as a group. It can also direct the messages and responses to issues that are pertinent to the day's issues. MLUMC also has a number of mentally disabled members and has established a Sunday school class that caters to their needs and interests.

Hymnody and Communion

Each religious tradition prioritizes certain elements over others. Unless congregants were willing to attend four-hour services, certain liturgical elements must be prioritized over others. Methodism celebrates a long and vaunted history of hymnody. Catholicism cherishes tried and tested traditions of frequent (if not daily) Eucharist. Each tradition can learn from the other in these four areas.

Methodism celebrates a long and vaunted history of hymnody. Catholicism cherishes tried and tested traditions of frequent (if not daily) Eucharist.

In Methodism, the hymnal with its ancient and modern hymns, psalms, and prayers is a book of theology as well as liturgy. Hymn writing and singing formed an integral part of the development of Methodist thought. Clergy taught both theology and Bible to parishioners through hymns. John and Charles Wesley combined wrote over 6,000 hymns, which elucidated Scripture, served as a sung catechism, and assisted believers in memorizing Scripture. Methodists have been a singing people since the beginning.

Kenneth: "Often in a Catholic Mass, only the first two verses of a hymn are sung. There are wonderful scriptural illustrations and rousing lyrics that are missed if we never sing beyond verse two. Catholics can learn from Methodists that the music is not just there to have some background music while we wait for the next part of the liturgy to begin. Rather, hymnody is a rich tradition that can teach, inspire, and challenge. We ought not restrict ourselves to two perfunctory verses, but sing heartily and enthusiastically through the entire hymn on occasion."

Catholicism has long emphasized frequent, if not daily, Eucharist. Methodism's practice of periodic Eucharist was shaped by its shortage of clergy in the New World more than its theology. John Wesley advocated frequent communion, certainly each Sunday, but the Methodists were unable to maintain this frequency in the New World. Clergy in early America were circuit riders who traveled far distances between parishes. They would arrive at a parish and spend a week or two and then travel on horseback to the next parish hundreds of miles away. This shortage of clergy led to the practice of quarterly communion. Once more clergy were educated and ordained, the tradition of quarterly

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communion remained. In the liturgical revival, most Methodist churches shifted to monthly communion.

Kimberly: “Methodist churches no longer have to wait several months before seeing their pastors again. We can learn from Catholicism that frequent communion can be sustaining and life-giving. The weekly celebration of the Eucharist in the Mass can maintain our focus on Jesus’ sacrifice and his salvific acts for us in ways that monthly communion does not. Gone are the clergy shortages that prevented us from celebrating the Eucharist at each Sunday worship service. We ought to invite our congregations into an exploration of how more frequent communion would sustain them and enrich their faith.”

Conclusion

An orchestra contains many different instruments and a choir many different voice parts. They each have different tunes, but play their own part in contributing to the one vibrant body to make beautiful music. And so, a well-tuned interfaith relationship can make for a richer relationship with God. In our reflection, we highlight that communication, an open mind, respect, understanding, a focus on the big picture, and spirituality enable this journey. There are certainly differences between Catholicism and Methodism - age, size, church structure, and liturgy among other things - but we choose to view the differences as strengths and learn from them.

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*Rev. Kimberly Greway and
Kenneth Hendrata, Pittsburgh*

Endnotes

¹Free Press, 1989, 2004.