

Ecumenical Education in a Global Context

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Have you ever experienced something and just had the feeling that it was a dream? That somehow you had vividly remembered the most epic dream ever? That is how my time at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute feels. Being back “stateside” feels surreal; and having left US soil during the Presidential election and returning to active airport protests only enhances that “dream-like” feeling.



For 5 months I lived with people from around the world. Our cohort of 35 represented 20 countries (Bangladesh, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, China, Cuba, Egypt, Georgia, India, Myanmar, Netherlands, Nigeria, Poland, Romania, Russia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Togo, Ukraine, and USA). We lived, ate, and sat in class together. We traveled to visit parishes in Switzerland; the Taize community in France; and the Vatican, including meeting the Pope and participating in the week of prayer for Christian Unity.

This was an academic semester, with people enrolled in either the Complementary Certificate, or Certificate of Advanced Studies, or in the Master of Advanced Studies in Ecumenical Studies. We studied how people of different Christian denominations (Orthodox, Reformed, Roman Catholic) have worked together for the real and visible unity of the Church, learning from international faculty, conducting research, and needing to pass our oral exams!

And yet while all this is true, it does not capture the fullness of what God is doing at Bossey. If you have the opportunity to consider study at Bossey, please do! Life is a gift from God and is not guaranteed. While at Bossey I experienced things I never dreamed of. It was great fun, hard work, and I missed family and friends greatly. And yet, I was invited into this international community, this sampling of the fullness of the body of Christ, and we became family – we fell in love with each other. We sought to see God in each other, to understand each other, and to grow together. We slowed down to consider the “Lord’s prayer” asking what each word meant in different languages, contexts, and cultures. We engaged topics like baptism, communion, women in ministry, gender, and race. We prayed together daily. And occasionally we disagreed or even fought! We did not leave our passion, convictions and identities in our home countries, we each were seeking true unity in diversity that respects the fullness of the body of Christ and the realities we each live.

Bossey is life-changing, and for me it will continue to shape me throughout my life. There are stories to share, like spending a few hours in Lichtenstein with my Orthodox friend from Russia before we visited a Swiss parish for a weekend; or giving Pope Francis chocolates from the group and asking him to dance, and I will share them. But what I learned from the experience which is more powerful than anything is

the humble hospitality I saw and received again and again, and the very real understanding of the grace and humility necessary if unity in the body of Christ will ever be found.

In a world where there are no guarantees, let me end saying Ecumenism in general and Bossey particular are gifts of grace, and any experience with grace (love) changes you, and this too is gift.