

CHURCHES RESPOND TO

THE CHURCH

TOWARDS A COMMON VISION

VOLUME 1

Faith and Order Paper No. 231

Edited by: Rev. Dr Ellen Wondra
Rev. Dr Stephanie Dietrich
Dr Ani Ghazaryan Drissi



**World Council
of Churches**

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Introduction

The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV), the convergence document published in 2013, is a milestone in the ongoing conversation about the Church that has been a central focus of the modern worldwide ecumenical movement. This ecumenical conversation seeks to discern ways beyond the situation of long-standing ecclesial divisions toward the fulfillment of our Lord Jesus Christ's high priestly prayer that the faithful may be one as Christ is one with the Father, that the world may believe (John 17:21). As the churches have sought to work through their divisions and differences toward convergence and consensus, they have been able to grow closer together in communion and in mission. As a convergence document, *TCTCV* substantiates that growth, while it also offers possibilities and poses questions about how remaining issues might be approached.

TCTCV is the fruit of a concerted process of study and dialogue involving the Commission on Faith and Order in conversation over decades with churches and ecumenical bodies around the world. The present document builds on Faith and Order's first convergence document, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (1982) and the churches' responses to it.¹ It is also deeply informed by the important

work carried out by bilateral dialogues, consultations, commissions, and individuals at every level of the churches' life over many years. (This process is described in the Historical Note appended to *TCTCV*.)² The *BEM* process revealed that studying common understandings of the Church might help to address some of the remaining controversial issues that continue to divide the churches.³

At every stage, the Commission on Faith and Order has asked churches and ecumenical bodies for input, for responses to various study documents, and for guidance in structuring and pursuing its work. And churches, ecumenical bodies, ecclesial organizations, and various consultations have responded generously and constructively to

respond to BEM: Official responses to the "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" text, ed. Max Thurian. Faith and Order Papers Nos.129 (1986), 132 (1986), 135 (1987), 137 (1987), 143 (1988), 144 (1988), (Geneva: World Council of Churches).

2. *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. Faith and Order Paper No. 214 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), 41-46. *TCTCV* is available at <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/the-church-towards-a-common-vision>. Much of the work discussed in the Historical Note can be found in the Faith and Order digital archives, <https://archive.org/details/faithandorderpapersdigitaledition?sort=titleSorter>.

3. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry 1982-1990: Report on the Process and Responses*. (Geneva: WCC, 1990).147-151. <https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.156/page/146/mode/2up>

1. *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*. Faith and Order Paper No. 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982). *Churches*

state more clearly and more hopefully the depth and breadth of the real yet imperfect communion that Christians around the world already share. Thus, *TCTCV* reflects the churches' deep faith in the Triune God revealed in scripture and lived out in the churches' traditions; their reliance on word and sacrament; their embrace of various types of communion ecclesiology; their renewed emphasis on mission and evangelism as foundational for the Church; and their desire for the exercise of Christ-like authority in service to the Church.

Along the way, as various lacunae have been recognized, the many participants in the ecumenical movement have sought to expand their dialogue to include more voices from the churches of the Global South, and from emergent ecclesial movements and churches. Increased attention to the diversity of contexts in which the churches witness and serve has revealed ever more extensively the wealth of gifts the churches receive from God and offer to the world in hope.

The process leading to *TCTCV* has also sought to state as clearly and accurately as possible the convergences that have emerged in areas where divisions have in the past been much sharper and deeper than they are now. It is clear that the churches agree in more ways than they disagree. And this agreement on matters of faith and ecclesial life is more profound and extensive than has at times been evident. In areas that continue to be divisive, new approaches and methods, such as receptive ecumenism and mutual engagement in mission and service, have made significant contributions that show even more promise

for the future. All this is evident in the responses to *TCTCV* which are included in these volumes.

TCTCV asked five questions designed to help discern the extent to which *TCTCV* does express a convergence and to chart further work needed to move towards the full visible unity of the churches.⁴ This process of reception deliberately continues the pattern set out in *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry (BEM)* and followed with other work from the Commission on Faith and Order and other commissions and bodies of the WCC.

These present volumes are a collection of the responses received between 2013 and 2020. We are profoundly grateful to all those who have given time, thought and prayer to responding to *TCTCV*; and it has been a delight, as well as a challenge, to hear and to engage with the results of so many deliberations and consultations. Publishing these responses is itself a further response to *TCTCV*, one that allows the churches and other groups to receive each other's responses and *TCTCV* more fully. This further reception, in turn, may encourage and strengthen further

4. "• To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?

• To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?

• What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?

• How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement?

• What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?" (*TCTCV, Introduction, 2-3*).

participation in global ecumenical efforts to live into the prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ “that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” (John 17:23).

This publication in two volumes includes seventy-eight responses that have come from around the world, forty-five from member churches of the World Council of Churches and the Commission on Faith and Order (including united and uniting churches), and from other churches; thirty-six from a wide range of ecumenical bodies and groups, national and regional councils of churches, groups dedicated to ecumenism, university faculties and interested individuals. These responses are of great importance, and not only because they test the points of convergence and of difference identified in *TCTCV*. The responses express too the interests and concerns of many member churches and ecclesial bodies engaging in the work for Christian unity. They also provide invaluable insight and guidance for future work on ecclesiology by the Commission on Faith and Order and other interested groups and individuals. We offer these responses with limited editing, and with full references to the rich body of relevant sources that reflect churches’ own traditions and their involvement in ecumenical dialogue and interaction.

At the same time, a major focus of the Commission in recent years has been to go into more and wider conversations with churches who have not always been clearly or strongly part of the ecclesiological conversation before *TCTCV*, and whose understandings of ecclesiology would add

a valuable contribution to the ecclesiological dialogue. The analysis of the responses to *TCTCV* reconfirmed the real urgency of this need: geographically speaking, 97% of the responses came from the Global North; and, denominationally speaking, 92% of the responses came from churches or bodies which have traditionally already been part of the ecumenical movement (including the Roman Catholic Church). In other words, the fastest growing part of global Christianity has not responded or engaged with *TCTCV*. Their substantial input will be vital to Faith and Order’s future work on ecclesiology.

Therefore, in addition to the engagement with the responses received, the Ecclesiology Working Group of the Commission on Faith and Order has engaged in numerous direct and indirect encounters with voices from such churches (e.g., by consultations, conversations, analysis of official bilateral dialogues etc.), thus broadening the dialogue both regionally (churches from the Global South) and denominationally (e.g., Pentecostal, evangelical, charismatic, independent churches etc.). The fruits of these consultations will be published in 2021, after an additional consultation to be held in Asia. At the same time, the WCC and some of its member churches have heightened their interaction with partners such as the Global Christian Forum, the World Evangelical Alliance, the World Pentecostal Fellowship, and other ecumenical or interdenominational organizations which have much to contribute towards the broadening of the conversation. These efforts respond to a long-standing concern that the WCC has not yet been able to take into full consideration the faith

and order of all the world's churches in a way consonant with its mission to invite all churches "into full visible unity."

Further, members of the Ecclesiology Working Group have read and discussed together all of the responses received and identified key ideas and themes that are present in them. Group members have then written and discussed essays on these themes, and these essays will be published in 2021. These three volumes will accompany the Commission's message to the churches, summarizing the main discoveries made through this process of reading and reflecting.

We are deeply grateful to the Faith and Order Secretariat and Commission for all the work they have done with the Ecclesiology Working Group; to the Editorial Committee for this project, the Rev. Dr. Stephanie Dietrich of the Church of Norway, the Rev. Dr. Ellen K. Wondra of The Episcopal Church, and Dr. Ani Ghazaryan Drissi of the Armenian Apostolic Church, Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin.

We are particularly grateful to Mr. Alexander Freeman, who has carefully and meticulously

edited the responses for clarity of expression and facility of language. His involvement in the editorial process of the work was immense and extremely helpful. His work makes the responses more accessible to a worldwide audience.

We also thank all those churches and individuals whose efforts and funding made possible the global consultations and Faith and Order's work on ecclesiology, and especially the Nathan Soderblom Memorial Fund for their yearly support.

The reception process of *TCTCV* continues within the Commission on Faith and Order and the World of Council of Churches, as work on a common vision of the church continues to develop. Churches and other ecclesial bodies will, we hope, continue to engage with the document as they discern ways toward ever greater, though yet imperfect, communion with each other. We ask for God's blessing on our understanding and our efforts, as we seek to be faithful to the Good News of God in Christ.

Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca
Interim General Secretary
World Council of Churches

Rev. Dr Susan Durber
Moderator
WCC Commission on Faith and Order

RESPONSES FROM CHURCHES

SECTION 1

1. Church of Scotland

Preliminary remarks

1. The Church of Scotland commends those who have put together this document for the accessible language that is used throughout the document.

2. The following aspects are particularly welcomed:

a) the recognition that Reformed churches clearly belong in the church and that there is a recurrent theme of a continuing process of reform

b) the trinitarian flow of the document, particularly the way in which it follows the pattern of the Ephesian hymn (Eph. 1:3-14) with regard to the economy of salvation, holding together God's work and God's relationship with the world and all creation

c) the care taken in mentioning the Spirit whenever Christ is mentioned, thus avoiding the temptation to think that it is we who drive forward the mission of God when that is not the case

d) the realism in relation to the sinfulness of the church (§5) and the costliness of this (§6)

e) the way in which preaching of the gospel is mentioned alongside the sacraments (§§16ff.)

f) the summaries that come throughout the document, not least the one on the three functions of ministry (§20)

g) the attempt to form an ecclesiology of communion, though we do not think it quite works – because there is a blurring of the distinction

between God and the Church in the phrase “in communion with the triune God” (§23)

h) the expansion of the text from *The Nature and Mission of the Church* which addresses authority within the wider discussion on ecclesiology (§§48–51)

i) on the Ministry of Oversight (§§52–57) in which *TCTCV* takes up *BEM* (personal, collegial and communal) and the New Delhi Statement (the goal of unity), though we regret that it is a descriptive section and as such does not help to move the discussion on in relation to synodality and conciliarity

j) the sense of diversity of cultures which reminds us of Pope Gregory's advice when sending Augustine to Canterbury, that he use the customs he found there to help shape his liturgy. The Second Vatican Council and Pope Paul VI stated that the way in which faith is expressed is distinct from the deposit of faith.

3. One of the greatest regrets we find in the document is that it does not begin with a statement of the reality of the world Church. A small number of vignettes would have helped ground the doctrine of the Church in the particular.

(Question 1) To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?

There is much in the text that pleases us. However, we would like to make the following comments:

1. We are disappointed that this is a comparative question, unlike the question in *BEM* which challenged the churches to move from their stated positions to a consideration of “the faith of the Church through the ages.” The current formulation of the question leads us to state our ecclesiology as one that is set out in the First Article Declaratory of the Constitution of the Church of Scotland:

The Church of Scotland is part of the Holy Catholic or Universal Church; worshipping one God, Almighty, all-wise, and all-loving, in the Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, the same in substance, equal in power and glory; adoring the Father, infinite in Majesty, of whom are all things; confessing our Lord Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son, made very man for our salvation; glorying in His Cross and Resurrection, and owning obedience to Him as the Head over all things to His Church; trusting in the promised renewal and guidance of the Holy Spirit; proclaiming the forgiveness of sins and acceptance with God through faith in Christ, and the gift of Eternal Life; and labouring for the advancement of the Kingdom of God throughout the world. The Church of Scotland adheres to the Scottish Reformation; receives the Word of God which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and

New Testaments as its supreme rule of faith and life; and avows the fundamental doctrines of the Catholic faith founded thereupon.

It is, therefore, creedal as well as adhering to the Scottish Reformation. It takes seriously the Scots Confession and takes account of the First and Second Books of Discipline, the Book of Common Order and the Heidelberg Confession.

The Church of Scotland’s understanding of its catholicity is based on the particular ecclesiology of the Scots Confession, namely: God knows his people but there is also a visible church. There are three marks of the church: The Word of God truly preached, the sacraments purely administered and discipline rightly exercised. Catholicity is also symbolised in the Ordinal, for example in the Preface in the Service of Ordination:

In this act, the Church of Scotland,
as part of the Holy Catholic or Universal
Church,
worshipping one God, Father, Son, and Holy
Spirit,
affirms anew its belief in the Gospel
of the sovereign grace and love of God,
wherein through Jesus Christ, his only Son,
our Lord,
incarnate, crucified, and risen,
He freely offers to all people, upon repentance
and faith,
the forgiveness of sins,
renewal by the Holy Spirit, and eternal life,
and calls them to labour in the fellowship of
faith

for the advancement of the kingdom of God throughout the world.¹

2. The church *in via*. There are several questions that remain for us around whether the church has once been in a good place from which it has fallen or whether it is as it is, affirmed as an “eschatological reality” so that there has to be a “now” and a “not yet.” There is not sufficient acknowledgement throughout that the church is *in via*. This is in stark contrast to *The Nature and Purpose of the Church (NPC)* and *The Nature and Mission of the Church (NMC)*. The contraction from *NMC* is not helpful. Though carefully written, the eschatological dimension has been softened so much as to say once upon a time the church was undivided (§22). It puts the church as more an article of history than of faith. Here “being” and “becoming” are relevant factors. There is too much emphasis on unity based around an invisible concept. There is a need to balance this with the reality that the church is also not yet one.

3. Ministry

a) We welcome the greater awareness of non-episcopal churches than was to be found in *Baptism Eucharist and Ministry (BEM)* (§7). Nevertheless, in several paragraphs in *TCTCV*, where different traditions are acknowledged, the default “truth” is the threefold office with other traditions mentioned almost as an aside. We would have been happier if the different traditions had been treated a little more equitably.

b) The underlying theology of the document is what we would call “high church,” sacramental theology. There are those in the Church of Scotland who would identify with this but many more who would not. There is no account taken of this.

c) There has been a move from the priesthood of believers to the ministry of believers (§§18–20). This is problematic for us. We understand priesthood as having to do with standing before God, having access to God through Christ. Ministry, on the other hand, is about the gifts God gives to God’s people. We understand that priesthood cannot be separated from the prophetic and royal people – all are baptized into the ministry of prophet, priest and king and are accountable to one another. It was felt that the document could have made it clearer that it was not eliding the two aspects of priesthood and ministry. On the other hand, we welcome the statement that “ordained ministers . . . can fulfil their calling only in and for the Church; they need recognition, support and encouragement” (§19). So there can be no priests without people and no-one working freelance.

d) In relation to Ministry within the Church (§§45ff.), we were amazed and saddened that there is no section here on *laos* as the whole people of God (cf. Vatican II and *NPC* and *NMC*). Here the text goes straight into ordained ministry. Calvin uses the language of ministry as “sinews of the body,” to ensure the body functions and has shape. It would have been good to have had a statement pointing to the importance of the whole people of God in the mission of the Church.

1. *Services of Ordination and Induction to the Ministry of World and Sacrament* (Edinburgh: The Church of Scotland), 7.

e) There are underlying assumptions in this section (§45) of what is normative and what deviant. These need to be declared.

f) It is regrettable that the document is completely silent about the place of women in the Church. This is a serious omission.

g) In relation to The Gift of Authority (§50) we note that there are different ways of thinking about saints. Just as one local church needs to take cognisance of other churches so also there is need to recognize how particular individuals have shone their lights in a particular way. The Reformed churches always had a strong emphasis on the Communion of Saints which has today largely been forgotten. Our attention is drawn to the work of the Groupe des Dombes on *Mary in the Plan of God and in the Communion of Saints* which takes the discussion beyond ecclesial, denominational tradition and draws us into the life of Christ. We understand the ecumenical challenges around saints – for example, in relation to martyrdoms – and the difficulty in reconciling churches because it would, in effect, mean un-sainting those who had died for a particular view as they understood it. We are grateful for work being done in this area, for example the work of the Symposium at the Community of Bose published as *A Cloud of Witnesses* and the drawing up of a *Calendar of Commemorations*, a calendar of Scottish personalities who have shaped the life of our society over the centuries.

h) On the question of primacy (§§55–57) we can record that in 1997 the Church of Scotland's General Assembly approved a response to the appeal in the Encyclical of Pope John Paul II,

Ut unum sint.² In it we responded positively to the Pope's invitation "to enter into patient and fraternal dialogue."

We asked first for an acknowledgement that

. . . the church of Christ positively extends beyond her [the Church of Rome's] bounds. We believe that the Holy Spirit is blessing the worship and mission of Protestant churches; that Protestant churches have orderly structures and oversight, so that the Word of God is preached, the sacraments administered and the apostolic mission furthered, at present, without the service of the bishop of Rome and the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church.

We then indicated that we wished to enter into dialogue with the Bishop of Rome, acknowledging a shared spirit that affirmed a common need to hear one another in a desire for reconciliation. We continued:

Faithfulness to Christ's prayer for unity demands that we nurture bonds with one another Local or particular churches need to be held together: so also at a universal level. There are times when there is need for a moderator or president under Jesus Christ, the sole Head of the church. Conciliarity is an essential aspect of full communion. How precisely we journey forwards must grow out of

2. *The Church of Scotland, General Assembly* (Edinburgh: The Church of Scotland, 1997), 23/17–18.

recognising the full dimensions of the church universal.

We acknowledged our need

to do our history and theology together. With Pope John Paul II, we pray that any universal ministry “may accomplish a service of love recognised by all concerned.” We can go together where God leads And where God leads, we are to follow. . . . As members together in the body of Christ, we say “we need you”, to love and to be loved (cf. 1 Cor. 12:21). By prayer, by giving thanks, by hope founded in the new commandment, we shall journey together.

4. Legitimate diversity. There was some unease about the use of incarnational language, especially when equating it with legitimate diversity (§12). Such language can be used to give legitimacy to human ways of doing things, whereas it is not the case. Some things will be challenged – as is acknowledged later in the document (§30). “Legitimate diversity” is a very precious phrase if used in the right way. It has been around for decades yet it remains undefined. We realize that there are powerful interests in the background of the use of this phrase (§37). We continue to struggle with it within the Church of Scotland as we discuss sensitive issues in relation to doctrine, ministry and practice.

5. The nature of the Church. Here a number of issues arise:

a) Fundamental issues on the way to unity (following §10). This italicized section reminds us of the Scots Confession in which the Garden of Eden is understood as the one Church. This means that unity is inherent in our identity as the Church of Scotland, though we sometimes contradict it! We need to remind ourselves that the one Church is not coterminous with the Church of Scotland.

b) Mary as a model for the Church and the individual Christian (§15). We acknowledge that the Church of Scotland needs to hear this paragraph. It is a beautiful section, though that is not to say that all room for discussion is closed. We became silent about Mary because she became a flag for “the other side.” This is a nice reclamation.

c) We acknowledge that “the church as *creatura verbi*” (*Towards a Common Understanding of the Church* 3.2.1 [WARC-RC 1990]) and “the church as sacrament” (§27 and italicized section) are both saying that the church is God’s creation and not something we create. However, as a Reformed Church, we struggle with the language of the church as “sacrament.” To say it is *mysterion* (§26) does not give a definition. We recognize that for the Orthodox *mysterion* is understood as a sign of the kingdom and, in a sense, we also talk of the church as a sign of the kingdom. There is a danger in taking a term from another tradition and playing with it. You end up with a word that has too many meanings (for example, e.g., in relation to the sacraments: the Reformed recognize two; the Roman Catholics, seven; and the Orthodox churches will not be tied down to a specific number). From a Reformed perspective, rather than “the church as sacrament” some might say

“the church as depository of grace.” This understanding affects our ecclesiology and our understanding of authority and the extent to which we can bend in the wind of ecumenical discussion. We are, nevertheless, grateful that the ecumenical sphere continues to pose the questions so that we are challenged to give theological arguments.

d) We respond positively to the balanced way in which the use or non-use of the term “the church as sacrament” is explained (§27) and the reassurances that open up the possibility of finding legitimate differences of formulation compatible and mutually acceptable.

e) Developing further our comment above on the church *in via*, questions are raised for us by the section on The Church: Growing in Communion – Already but Not Yet (§§33–36). This section tries to hold together two views: the church can never err and it is a community that does so. The Reformers would have talked of systemic sin at the time of the Reformation. In our Reformed tradition, it is not evident how we could sustain the concept that the Church is without sin because we have not developed any concept of Christ as sacrament or the Church as sacrament.

6. The place of repentance. We have a question about ordering in the document. In the earlier sections two definitions are given of ministry and mission. There is much about coming to faith and a description of the purpose of the Church as helping human beings “to achieve the purpose for which they are created” (§25). In none of these instances is *metanoia*, repentance, mentioned. Only later do we find two passing references to

metanoia (§§36, 50). As it stands it could be interpreted as though there is little or no need for repentance.

7. Sacraments

a) In our Reformed tradition we have inherited the high sacramental theology of the Reformers. While the divine presence is acknowledged in all parts of our worship service, this is not always highlighted in our tradition. Acknowledgement of that presence in services where the sacrament is not celebrated was set out well in the eucharist section of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* and we are pleased to see it reiterated here (§16).

b) The description of baptism as “a basic bond of unity” (§41) might have gone further. For example, had this pushed towards ministry of people who have been baptized it would then have brought us to participation in the ministry of Christ. There is no reference to life-long growth in Christ. This document has reverted to baptism as a one-time event. We know that progress has been made in Reformed thinking and Baptist traditions, where the actual moment of pouring water is no longer seen as separate from that which is implied and followed through from it. Sanctification is mentioned, but it could easily be lost in the midst of the main thrust of the passage. Baptism is never a one-off in our thinking and we would have wanted this aspect to have been less hidden. We feel the text could have gone further back in the order of the liturgy (§42) to the call to worship and the declaration of forgiveness. We miss the movement towards going together to communion

– implied from baptism and the Lord’s supper with Christ as host.

8. The Church in and for the World. We note that in *NPC* this section was not a new chapter but the fifth part of “Essential Elements of Communion.” Making it a new section increases the risk to all of us that we “do” church on Sundays and something different from Monday to Saturday. The third mark of the Church in Calvin and the Scots Confession (discipline rightly exercised) is not recognized in this section (§§58–60). Many in the Church of Scotland would see evangelization in a more individualistic way than is referred to in this document.

9. “In the liturgy, the people of God experience communion with God and fellowship with Christians of all times and places” (§67). While this is a lovely sentence, it is not the reality. The danger of the two altars proposed by St John Chrysostom became evident in Eastern Europe under communism when it was assumed that the church had no role within society. It had only to worship within its own walls. A definition of Word and sacrament can push the Church into that place. This brings us back to our concern that this section should not be a separate section. There is a parallel situation in today’s secularised society where religion is seen as a private matter.

10. For some, brokenness and division does not just “hinder” the mission of Christ (§68). As with the “will of Christ for the unity of his disciples,” it “contradicts” it.

(Question 2) To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?

1. As a convergence document, *TCTCV* is in itself an achievement. We responded well to the italicized sections which we feel are very helpful in setting out questions that require further consideration by the churches. But the document also has its limitations.

2. We were concerned that this is still a very theoretical discussion which does not look at the reality on the ground of how we live as churches.

3. The document has limited scope as a basis for growth in unity among the churches because it is tentative and descriptive and, therefore, fails to move the discussion on.

4. It is important that churches do not think they can do their ecclesiology on their own, and to that extent this cannot be a final document but it is a helpful statement on the way.

5. There are no common definitions to determine the boundaries of diversity.

6. The document is strong in its beginning and in its conclusions. We feel there is much work to be done on the middle section which we do not think is able to sustain what is said in the conclusion, that is, the implications of our being broken, divided and having a final destiny – all of which imply that the Church is not there yet! Also the language of “dynamic” used in the beginning

– *dynamis*, energy, movement – should appear again in the middle section, but instead a rather static picture is given.

7. Too much in the middle section is implicit rather than explicit. The descriptive passages need to be more than a comparison of different positions

(Question 3) What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?

1. We need to do more work on legitimate diversity, and who is authorized to determine it.

2. We are challenged by the definition of catholicity (§22) which does not refer to a geographical universality. Some major documents in the Church of Scotland, for example, the preamble to ordination, speak of the Church of Scotland as being “*part of the Holy Catholic or Universal Church.*” This is not satisfactory as a definition of catholicity. The Church of Scotland “participates in” rather than “is part of” the Holy Catholic Church.

3. *How continuity and change within the Church relate to God’s will.* We feel this is one of the best of the italicized sections. It leaves us constitutionally open to the possibility that we could be wrong. It is a costly invitation and should perhaps come after the section on ministry (§§24ff.).

4. We are challenged to think again about what we mean by “local” (§§31ff.).

a) It was noted that the section on “communion of local churches” had been in a box in *NPC*, suggesting a lot of work still needed to be done on understanding “local.” In the Church of Scotland, “local church” is sometimes used of the congregation and occasionally in terms of the presbytery. It was noted that there has been slippage in the Church of Scotland’s understanding of “local.” In the past there had been the notion of the parish as a locale – an obvious geographical concept. This had to be reconceived following secessions and population explosion. However, there is no local congregation without the presbytery. We use the word “local” loosely.

b) In a Reformed definition of the Church as a community of Word, sacrament and discipline, it is important to emphasize catholicity, wholeness. In the 1960s the WCC tried to look at the missionary structure of the congregation using the term *zone humaine*, a geographical area in which the whole of life is lived, and not just where transactions take place. This basically pointed to the presbytery rather than the parish. There was a kind of parallelism with diocese with the bishop having the same powers as the presbytery. However, this notion moved away from an ecclesiology of the church being where the Word is preached, the sacraments administered and discipline exercised, something that happened in presbyteries in the past. At one time it was envisaged that presbyteries would be places where communion, worship and ministry of the Word were offered. Otherwise they are just administrative.

c) In thinking about the relationship between the local and universal church, we are challenged

to reflect on the description of The Church of Scotland in the first Article Declaratory as “*part of the Holy Catholic or Universal Church.*” It would be better to say the Church of Scotland “participates in” To be “part of” is to speak about lacks rather than celebrating the fullness of the presence of Christ.

d) Where the presence of Christ is, there the Church is created: What are we doing when we act as though other churches, where Christ is, are not really churches? We need to explore this.

5. The Church of Scotland recognizes two sacraments, on the basis that they are instituted by Christ (§44). It uses “ordinance” of marriage and funerals and ordination, etc., things which are not sacraments but are sacramental. For example, ordination is a measure of grace and in marriage each conveys grace to the others. The term “ordinances” is used more widely in the Declaratory Articles – “the ordinances of religion” (Article III). However, in the Book of Common Order, the title is “Sacraments and Ordinances of the Church.”

6. The text identifies the work that has begun on setting out parameters of the significance of moral doctrine and practice for Christian unity. We note the questions posed to the churches for joint engagement in a process of discernment as ones we need to look at (§§61–63ff.). Here we recognize that the recent Faith and Order study document *Moral Discernment in the Churches* is a useful resource.

7. The church in the creed is non-negotiable as an article of faith. However, the average church

member in the Church of Scotland thinks of faith in terms of God, not of the church.

(Question 4) How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement?

1. The Church of Scotland is committed to forming closer relationships with other churches – but not because we have read this statement! In its Articles Declaratory, the Church of Scotland has an obligation “to seek and promote union with other Churches in which it finds the Word to be purely preached, the sacraments administered according to Christ’s ordinance, and discipline rightly exercised; and it has the right to unite with any such Church without loss of its identity on terms which this Church finds to be consistent with these Articles” (Article VII).

2. The answer to this question will to some extent depend on the results of the ecumenical responses we are making to this document from the Joint Commission on Doctrine (Church of Scotland - Roman Catholic Church) and the Faith Studies response from Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS).

3. There are current issues that challenge unity within and between churches, for example, same-sex relationships, not recognizing ministries, issues that have to be addressed inside churches as well as between them, issues that are for some

church-dividing and for others not. What happens in a majority vote?

4. We recognize the need, in some instances, to discuss contentious issues between churches behind closed doors, saying nothing in public, but standing in solidarity with those seeking to influence the position of their churches.

(Question 5) What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

1. Towards the end of the document mention is made of the doctrine of justification by faith very briefly and with a suggestion that this has been solved (§61). We are acquainted with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification but remain unconvinced that all the issues around the doctrine of justification by faith have been resolved. We believe this merits further discussion within Faith and Order.

2. This is a helpful statement on the way. It is important to say that churches cannot do their ecclesiology on their own. However, as we said above, by asking the churches to reflect on how this document reflects their particular ecclesiologies we are not pushed to move beyond them.

3. There is a need to look again at the middle sections. This is important because there is a lot bound up with trying to be faithful. There is a danger that some within the Church of Scotland

will be content to have God at the beginning and at the end and to do what we like in the middle. The result is a lack of true accountability to one another. It is vitally important that there is not a distinction made between spirit and body – we cannot have a theology of the Trinity that does not have a structure. We need to recover a sense of mission as being not just about doing but also about the very being of the Church, as an expression of the *missio Dei*. The separation in thought is problematic for many.

4. We need to treasure what comes out of our confessions. It is important not to talk about taking this aspect from one tradition and another from another, etc. The “hermeneutics of confessionality” (Jean Tillard) give recognition to the parts of what we have stuck by and defined ourselves by, and that are important. This acknowledgement then needs to be followed by the reconciling of memories – for example, the phrase in the document that suggests the reconciling of the ministries of Peter and Paul (§55).

5. There is no purchase on inter-religious dialogue in the document.

6. We are disappointed that the current context facing many churches is simply stated and no attempt is made to address it (§7). “Emerging churches” needs to be defined. There is a difference between churches emerging as a programme within some western churches – new ways of expressing worship, being, vision – and emerging churches which may be based on the same principles but are new

churches rather than churches within existing ones. There is a problem with the inverted commas in that it is not clear what is meant. It needs to be clarified as there is an explosion of newer churches in some parts of the world.

7. Help needs to be given to the churches to unpack what it means to recognize in each other what the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creeds call “the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church” (§9). There need to be some common criteria agreed before a judgement can be made.

8. We would wish to see more discussion on sacraments and sacramentality (§§27ff.).

9. “Various Christian churches” is a phrase not seen before in the text. If what this is speaking about is that the Church is one, it does not quite work because, if ecumenical dialogue is about searching for and moving towards unity, it is clear we are not there yet. Where is the Church? The only possible answer to the question begins to be: nowhere yet! But we all want to say we know where it is even if we do not know its fullness. Does any church fit the bill to be “Church” with a capital “C”? We search for unity of the churches because the Church is one. The Church is both human and divine: it is both united and divided. We welcomed this whole italicized section and recognized the need for further work on this (§§30ff.).

10. More work needs to be done on the ordained ministry (§46). This paragraph is descriptive. It does not push us into a context where there can

be discussion. It omits all reference to the work done in the 1990s by Faith and Order on *episkopé* and episcopacy. The whole section is light on theology. Where does ministry come from? If Christ is not actively participating in the ministry of the Church, it could be doing anything. We do not see any way of moving on here. The text has kept to the particular forms of ministry but it is not just about forms. It is also about what the forms are there for.

11. It is good to have stated that the Spirit has guided the Church to adapt. There is a need for churches to acknowledge a dishonesty in us when it comes to ministry and categories of ministry, such as Roman Catholics and the Orders – not a threefold ministry. We forget the Columban tradition of monastic life which gave the church shape in our country (Scotland) – again not based on a threefold order of ministry. This section does not take us into contextuality nor fresh expressions, etc.

12. The italicized section on the authority of Ecumenical Councils (§§53ff.) comes out of the blue. The Church is not as pretty as this section makes out. In councils, do we meet as nations or denominations, etc.? There are questions to be explored. This section does not lead us into consensus on the authority of Ecumenical Councils.

Appendix

The following comments document reactions to particular aspects of the text. They are sent for information only. We realize that the text is not

to be redrafted but we hope the comments might help with any future work on ecclesiology.

1. §1: *koinonia*: We like the use of *koinonia* in this paragraph. However, we are not sure that God's purpose in creation was thwarted – perhaps, better would be “offended against” or “narrowed.”

2. “The church, as the body of Christ, acts by the power of the Holy Spirit to continue his life-giving mission . . .”: We would prefer “Christ continues his mission in his Church.” Peter healed not in the name of Christ but, rather, he says “Jesus heals you.”

3. §3: Reference to *missio dei*. It is a comfortable term when used in a Christian context. However, in some quarters it is understood as an inter-spirituality term, a recognition of the Spirit of God in many religions and understood as one mission. This understanding would cause some problems.

4. “Indissoluble link”: not saying what the link is yet. It is necessary to keep in the background a distinction between Christ and the Church (Barth, Kierkegaard). Because of a link between the work of God and the reality of the Church, we would expect the words used of each to be of a similar type in relation to work (doing) and reality (being). It is an affirmation of *creatura verbi*. The use of italics in reality draws attention to this. There are no churches where there is not the work of Christ. The test is to identify what is the work of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. We suggest the term used should be the “working” of God, a

more active term, thus emphasizing the being and becoming of the church.

5. The relationship between Christology and ecclesiology is not clear. It is an old problem as to whether the unity we are talking about is Christian unity or church unity. There is slippage at some points. There was more overt Christology in *NMC* with the centrality of the notion of the church as *creatura verbi* than there is in this document.

6. There is a problem with the way the document tries to use a capital “C” at the right point. What is the Church with a capital “C”? It is not clear in the end.

7. §10: We are not sure “adequately” is the right adverb in the final sentence of this section. We wondered whether “definitively” or “fully discerned” would not be better as the teaching only makes sense if we have both the visible and invisible church. However, if, in its origins, the church is God's work and its reality hangs on God's working, it is not for us to identify adequately or definitively. It is important that we work with visibility even if at the end of the day we depend utterly on God. The bounds of visibility are not nothing but neither are they everything. We recognize the importance of the recognition of communities, understood in terms of baptism, so that it is not “despite” but “because” someone is a member of, for example, the Church of Scotland that he/she is graced.

8. We would urge caution in how theological phrases are used, namely, “the church of Christ”

(§10). This is not a New Testament term. In Romans 16:16 it is “the churches of Christ.” “Churches” would be a better term to use in that it becomes a description or reference to various groups in different places.

9. Discerning God’s Will for the Church. §12: In this particular section, “incarnational and thus” could be dropped without dropping the sense.

10. §13: “to enter into a legally binding contract” has been omitted in the list of possible meanings of *koinonia*. It can be used as a business term. Otherwise this is a full range of the meaning of the term. We appreciated this paragraph as a whole.

11. §15: Some in our Church would prefer a literal translation of *theotokos* as “God-bearer” rather than “Mother of God.”

12. §22: Bullet point 4, second sentence, could do with a cross reference to later in the document. We are happy with the descriptions/explications in this paragraph.

13. §24: This section provides a good balance to the previous one.

14. §25: We would prefer “become” to “achieve the purpose” as it is not just about doing but also about being.

15. §35: Second sentence: there is no problem with this as a thought but if we add after Church “of Scotland” or “of Greece” or “of Russia,” etc.

– then we do have a problem with it. There is a vision of what Christ calls the Church towards, an understanding of the Church on the way. We acknowledge that in a situation of persecution talk is not of what the Church is becoming but of what the Church is. Development of thought in such contexts takes place through art (for example, iconography) and literature (for example, novels). For example, in Aleppo today it is natural to hold onto the eucharist. It is not a time to talk about anything else, even reconciliation.

16. §39: We are surprised by the lack of a footnote on Vatican II and the Montreal Statement on Tradition, tradition and traditions. The text also says nothing about the relation of scripture and Tradition to imagination, etc.

17. §47: It would have been better to keep §§90–92 of *NMC* which give the context. Here things are taken as read. Making these explicit would take us back to analysis rather than simply accepting a descriptive statement.

18. §51: The question of “reception of the guidance and teaching of ordained ministers” was lost after Vatican II where ideas were discussed with representatives of the whole people of God from different countries and then brought into the Synod of Bishops. Religious orders emphasized the importance of the “sense of faith” (*sensus fidei*).

19. We might even add “respected and revered” Christian leaders. It might have been helpful to refer to the authoritative teaching and then give

examples about peace and justice, ecology, youth work, etc.

20. §§54–57: In relation to the current text, we feel that this section on primacy is disproportionately large in comparison with the rest of the text.

21. §55: This section has been abbreviated too much to be helpful. The first sentence – primacy of the Bishop of Rome – needs to be more realistic about how we get there. The *NMC* section was more helpful.

22. Footnote 59: We note that many of the discussions about the Petrine ministry exclude the Reformed because of the response to *Ut unum sint* of WARC and the Waldensian Church. This is to be regretted, not least, given the Church of Scotland’s response as quoted above.

23. §61, footnote 64: This is not the right place for a reference to the Joint Declaration. There are other discussions where justification has been the focus, for example *Towards a Common Understanding of the Church* (WARC-RC 1984–1990), which ended with a proposal for the healing of memories. Also *The Church as Community of Common Witness to the Kingdom of God* (WARC-RC 1998–2005), especially chapter 5 on Dialogue and Common Witness.

24. The Moral Challenge of the Gospel, §62: “Commitment” might have been a better word than “values” which is liable to draw us back into law rather than gospel. Once again a reference to

the three “Costly” documents would have been helpful in holding together eucharist, mission and involvement in society. The language of justification fits less well. The mutuality of the final sentence of this paragraph is not just about ethics but about the whole life and witness of the Church.

25. The Church in Society §64, “the voice of the voiceless”: We would prefer Paulo Freire’s remark that the task is not to be the voice of the voiceless but to make the voice of the voiceless heard.

26. §65: This is one-sided. There is no mention of examples where synergy has come from collusion of the church with the state.

2. Methodist Church in Britain

1. The Methodist Church in Britain offers this formal response to *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (World Council of Churches, 2013) as part of our longstanding commitment to engage constructively with ecumenical texts produced by the World Council of Churches' Faith and Order Commission. Through our delegated representatives to the Commission and formal responses to its published papers, we have contributed to shaping these texts; and, in turn, the way in which we express our theological self-understanding as a Christian community has been shaped by an emerging ecumenical consensus.

2. The so-called Lima text, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (WCC, 1982), has become a landmark in ecumenical convergence statements and a theological reference point in our most recent teaching document on the Church, *Called to Love and Praise: The Nature of the Christian Church in Methodist Experience and Practice* (1999). Since the Lima text was published more than 30 years ago, a number of subsequent Faith and Order papers have prepared the way for this latest text, including its immediate predecessor *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement* (WCC, 2005), to which the Methodist Church in Britain made a formal response (*Conference Agenda* [2009], pp. 108–122). It is good to note that very many of our suggestions and

comments in response to *The Nature and Mission of the Church* have been incorporated into *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*.

3. In this present response, we summarize the main points of interest in each of the four chapters in *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (TCTCV) and offer brief comments from the perspective of a British Methodist theological tradition that seeks to be faithful to both the Apostolic Tradition, as received in the distinctive circumstances of our own particular history, and our cumulative experience as a renewal movement raised up by God to spread scriptural holiness and reform civic life. Recently, we have found it fruitful to prioritize our ecclesial life around the conviction that the Methodist Church's vocation in the world is to be "a discipleship movement shaped for mission." Our formal response is made with the intention of contributing positively to the discernment of a common vision of the Church on the way to visible unity.

The process leading to *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*

4. The "Historical Note" appended to the text identifies TCTCV as a significant achievement in "the long trajectory of Faith and Order reflection on the Church." This "present text is not a stage on the way to a further common statement;

it is the common statement to which its previous versions...were directed,” thus bringing “to completion a particular stage of Faith and Order reflection on the Church.” Furthermore: “The [Faith and Order] Commission believes that its reflection has reached such a level of maturity that it can be identified as a convergence text, that is, a text of the same status and character as the 1982 *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*.”

5. “As such, it [*TCTCV*] is being sent to the churches as a common point of reference in order to test or discern their own ecclesiological convergences with one another, and so to serve their further pilgrimage towards the manifestation of that unity for which Christ prayed.” We are therefore mindful of a responsibility to discern as authoritatively as possible the extent to which our vision of the Church coincides with that found in *TCTCV*. Accordingly, our annual Conference, the highest court in British Methodism, has endorsed the content of this response, which has been prepared by our Faith and Order Committee.

Chapter 1: God’s Mission and the Unity of the Church

6. “*The Church: Towards a Common Vision* opens with a chapter exploring how the Christian community finds its origin in the mission of God for the saving transformation of the world” (Introduction). Section A outlines “The Church in the Design of God”; section B describes “The Mission of the Church in History”; and section C considers “The Importance of Unity.”

7. *TCTCV* emphasizes that “[the Church] is by its very nature missionary, called and sent to witness in its own life to that communion which God intends for all humanity and for all creation in the kingdom” (§13). The opening chapter affirms that: “The mission of the Church ensues from the nature of the Church as the body of Christ, sharing in the ministry of Christ as Mediator between God and his creation. At the heart of the Church’s vocation in the world is the proclamation of the kingdom of God inaugurated in Jesus the Lord, crucified and risen” (§4). The purpose of the Church is to engage in mission: “The Church, as the body of Christ, acts by the power of the Holy Spirit to continue his life-giving mission in prophetic and compassionate ministry and so participates in God’s work of healing a broken world” (§1).

8. In the overall design of God, Jesus’ own intentions for the Church are summarized in terms of its witness, worship and discipleship: “It [the Church] was to be a community of witnesses, proclaiming the kingdom which Jesus had first proclaimed, inviting human beings from all nations to saving faith. It was to be a community of worship, initiating new members by baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity. It was to be a community of discipleship, in which the apostles, by proclaiming the Word, baptizing and celebrating the Lord’s Supper, were to guide new believers to observe all that Jesus himself had commanded” (§2).

9. The description of the Church as a “community of discipleship” reflects British Methodism’s

current ecclesiological emphasis on discipleship and is consistent with the classical Protestant definition of the Church as a community of the faithful in which the Word of God is rightly preached and the sacraments duly administered. On the basis of this definition, Methodists are able to recognize diverse Christian communities as true churches, irrespective of how their ordained ministry is structured or its relation to the historic episcopate.

10. The absence of a description of what it means for the Church to be “a community of worship” is regrettable. Insofar as worship is the source and summit of ecclesial life, it has a bearing on how churches understand the nature of the Church. Granted that “the purpose for which they [human beings] were created and in which their joy ultimately is found” is precisely “to praise and glorify God together with all the heavenly hosts” (§25), then a common vision of the Church requires a common vision of Christian worship.

11. The description of what it means for the Church to be “a community of witness” needs to be more closely related to “the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ” (§1). To say that the Church’s witness involves “proclaiming the kingdom which Jesus had first proclaimed” (§2) obscures the significance of his death and resurrection in salvation history, even though the text affirms that “the kingdom of God [has been] inaugurated in Jesus the Lord, crucified and risen” (§4). It is not the proclamation of the kingdom of God as such that provides the basis for inviting people to saving

faith but rather the proclamation of Jesus Christ as Lord. Thus, it is potentially misleading to identify the Church’s witness to Christ primarily with “the proclamation of the kingdom of God” (§7).

Chapter 2: The Church of the Triune God

12. “The second chapter sets out the salient features of an understanding of the Church as Communion, gathering the results of much common reflection both about how Scripture and subsequent tradition relate the Church to God and some of the consequences of this relation for the life and structure of the Church” (Introduction). Section A explores the vital ecumenical task of “Discerning God’s Will for the Church”; Section B describes “The Church of the Triune God as *Koinonia*”; Section C affirms “The Church as Sign and Servant of God’s Design for the World”; while Section D considers “Communion in Unity and Diversity”; and Section E reflects on the “Communion of Local Churches.”

13. As we ourselves seek to discern God’s will for the Church, Methodists accept that, because “Scripture is normative,” “the biblical witness provides an irreplaceable source for acquiring greater agreement about the Church” (§11). Even though “Subsequent interpretation within the Church, seeking always to be faithful to biblical teaching, has produced an additional wealth of ecclesiological insights over the course of history” (§11), Methodists do not accept that this bears the same authority as scripture. The status and role of scripture in relation to the history of its subsequent interpretation requires further ecumenical study if

the churches are truly to discern God's will in the form of a common vision of the Church.

14. In this regard, we are both challenged and encouraged by the statement that "The same Holy Spirit who guided the earliest communities in producing the inspired biblical text continues, from generation to generation, to guide later followers of Jesus as they strive to be faithful to the Gospel" (§11). The challenge for Methodists is to recognize, in dialogue with our ecumenical partners, how agreement about the Church cannot simply be reduced to an exercise in biblical exegesis concerning the earliest apostolic communities – as if the guidance of the Holy Spirit was withdrawn with the closure of the canon of scripture – but must also take account of the providence by which the Church developed in successive generations. Encouragingly, this same statement is consistent with our experience that being faithful to the gospel similarly involves recognizing how the Holy Spirit has continued to guide subsequent generations in the apostolic mission, fruitfulness being the criterion of divine providence (cf. 1 John 4:1; Matt. 7:16).

15. *TCTCV* raises the underlying issue of "How continuity and change in the Church relate to God's will," since "the same intent – to obey God's will for the ordering of the Church – may, in some, inspire commitment to continuity and, in others, commitment to change" (§24). The churches are invited "to reflect together about the criteria which are employed in different churches for considering issues about continuity and change" and the extent

to which such criteria are open to development in response to Christ's urgent call to reconciliation (§24). In agreeing that such a study is necessary, we consider that it is necessary first to discern from scripture how and in what ways God's will for the Church is unchanging, and how and in what ways it might change in response to the particular circumstances of salvation history.

16. Concerning "The Church of the Triune God as *Koinonia*," it is true to say that "The biblical notion of *koinonia* has become central in the ecumenical quest for a common understanding of the life and unity of the Church" (§13). We concur with much of what chapter 2 says in outlining the present state of ecumenical agreement concerning *koinonia* or communion ecclesiology. Thus the Church is "The Prophetic, Priestly and Royal People of God" (§§17–20); it is the "Body of Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit" (§21). The description of the four marks of "The One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church" (§22) is consistent with Methodist understanding.

17. We particularly welcome the emphasis on the royal priesthood of the people of God. "Every Christian receives gifts of the Holy Spirit for the upbuilding of the Church and for his or her part in the mission of Christ. These gifts are given for the common good (cf. 1 Cor. 12:7; Eph. 4:11–13) and place obligations of responsibility and mutual accountability on every individual and local community and on the Church as a whole at every level of its life. Strengthened by the Spirit, Christians are called to live out their discipleship

in a variety of forms of service” (§18). At the same time we would affirm that “the royal priesthood of the whole people of God (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9) and a special ordained ministry are both important aspects of the church, and not to be seen as mutually exclusive alternatives” (§20). Methodists explain “mutual accountability” among Christians in terms of the connectional principle, whereby every part of the Church is dependent upon every other.

18. “The Church as Sign and Servant of God’s Design for the World” reflects the communion of the triune God and serves the goal of gathering humanity and all of creation into communion under the Lordship of Christ (§25). “The Church, embodying in its own life the mystery of salvation and the transfiguration of humanity, participates in the mission of Christ to reconcile all things to God and to one another through Christ” (§26). Thus we agree that the Church, in participating in the mission of Christ, is “an effective sign and means” (or instrument) of the salvation to which it bears witness through the proclamation of the Word (§27). We therefore affirm that the Church, as a redeemed and redeeming fellowship, is “sacramental” in nature; in our theological tradition, however, we reserve the term “sacrament” to describe baptism and the Lord’s supper alone.

19. In considering “The Church as Sign and Servant of God’s Design for the World” in the face of global religious pluralism, *TCTCV* affirms two basic truths about the Church in relation to other religions, without attempting to settle all aspects of what is a complex and disputed issue among

Christians. First, concerning Jews, “There is a genuine newness in the covenant initiated by Christ and yet the Church remains, in God’s design, profoundly related to the people of the first covenant, to whom God will always remain faithful (cf. Rom. 11:11-36)” (§17). Secondly, “While respecting the elements of truth and goodness that can be found in other religions and among those with no religion, the mission of the Church remains that of inviting, through witness and testimony, all men and women to come to know and love Christ Jesus” (§25). Methodists hold a variety of opinions as to how they should bear Christian witness to people of other faith, but these two affirmations provide the parameters within which we would seek to develop a theology of religions in relation to the Church as sign and servant of God’s design.

20. The Church’s “Communion in Unity and Diversity” (§§28–30) means that “Legitimate diversity is not accidental to the life of the Christian community but is rather an aspect of its catholicity, a quality that reflects the fact that it is part of the Father’s design that salvation in Christ be incarnational and thus ‘take flesh’ among the various peoples to whom the Gospel is proclaimed” (§12). Thus “Cultural and historical factors contribute to the rich diversity within the Church” (§28). Nevertheless, “There are limits to legitimate diversity” if the gift of unity is to be preserved (§30). Here we agree that “A pastoral ministry for the service of unity and the upholding of diversity is one of the important means given to the Church in aiding those with different gifts and perspectives to remain mutually accountable to each other”

(§29). Under the connectional principle, however, the pastoral ministry, too, must be accountable to the Church, without undermining its essential service among the people of God. Despite affirming the importance of mutual accountability “at every level of its life” (§18), *TCTCV* does not explain how this might apply in relation to the Church’s pastoral ministry.

21. We agree, moreover, that the vital ecumenical task of distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate diversity in the Church will require: “(a) common criteria, or means of discernment, and (b) such mutually recognized structures as are needed to use these effectively” (§30). A positive step towards making common discernment possible would be for churches to involve their ecumenical partners in authoritative acts of discernment. The Methodist Church in Britain currently invites a number of other churches to appoint representatives to our annual Conference in order to participate in our Christian conferring and discernment. Their presence and contribution is greatly valued, and we commend this practice to other churches.

22. In *koinonia* ecclesiology, “The universal Church is the communion of all local churches united in faith and worship around the world” (§31). Although the Methodist Church in Britain does not have bishops or dioceses, and therefore does not define the local church in such terms, neither do we regard the local church as “simply the congregation of believers gathered in one place to hear the Word and celebrate the Sacraments” (§32). In Methodist understanding, the ministry

of oversight is a necessary element of being the local church, ensuring that each congregation or assembly is linked to all others.

23. Although “Each local church contains within it the fullness of what it is to be the Church,” we agree that communion among the local churches is “not an optional extra” (§31) but requires visible expression. Here, too, the connectional principle ensures that the interdependence and communion of local Methodist churches is visibly expressed in ecclesial structures, including Circuits and Districts, as well as through the ministry of oversight. That no one may preside at the Lord’s supper in the local church without authorization from the Conference signifies and maintains visible unity among all the local churches.

Chapter 3: The Church: Growing in Communion

24. “The third chapter focuses upon the growth of the Church as the pilgrim people moving towards the kingdom of God, especially upon several difficult ecclesiological questions that have divided the churches in the past” (Introduction). Section A, “Already but Not Yet,” asserts that “The Church is an eschatological reality, already anticipating the kingdom, but not yet its full realization” (§33). Section B surveys “Growing in the Essential Elements of Communion: Faith, Sacraments, Ministry.”

25. *TCTCV* relates the essential holiness of the Church to the reality of human sinfulness within an eschatological perspective that has the potential

to overcome significant differences among Christians. Thus “As a pilgrim community, the Church contends with the reality of sin” (§35). Methodists are among those Christians who believe that “it is appropriate to refer to the Church as sinning, since sin may become systemic so as to affect the institution of the Church itself and, although sin is in contradiction to the true identity of the Church, it is nonetheless real” (§35). Recognizing that other Christians emphasize the essential holiness of the Church, we find it helpful to acknowledge that “Holiness and sin relate to the life of the Church in different and unequal ways. Holiness expresses the Church’s identity according to the will of God, while sin stands in contradiction to this identity (cf. Rom. 6:1-11)” (§36).

26. It is fair to say that the essential ecclesial elements required for full communion within a visibly united Church can be summarized as faith, sacraments and ministry (§§37–57). As a result of the reception of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* in the churches, there has been “significant progress in convergence about these essential elements of communion, though less on ministry than on the other two” (§37). Since the sections on Faith (§§38–39) and Sacraments (§§40–44) mostly summarize the content of the Lima text, they will not be considered here because the Methodist Church in Britain is among those churches to register their broad approval of the way in which *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* described the sacraments.

27. The longest section in *TCTCV* (§§45–57) explores certain aspects of ministry within the

Church: “Ordained ministry”; “The Gift of Authority in the Ministry of the Church”; and “the Ministry of Oversight.” Though confusingly structured, this section accurately summarizes the competing views among Christians concerning ministry in the Church, revealing what is probably the most significant theological divergence among the churches and the greatest challenge in achieving a common vision of the Church. That “all churches would look to Scripture in seeking to follow the will of the Lord concerning how ordained ministry is to be understood, ordered and exercised” (§46) confirms both the possibility and the challenge of finding an agreed method of reading scripture in relation to tradition in order to discern God’s will for ordained ministry.

28. Even the structure of ordained ministry is disputed. “Some believe that the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon is a sign of continuing faithfulness to the Gospel and is vital to the apostolic continuity of the Church as a whole. In contrast, others do not view faithfulness to the Gospel as closely bound to succession in ministry, and some are wary of the historic episcopate because they see it as vulnerable to abuse and thus potentially harmful to the well-being of the community” (§47). Methodists acknowledge that the threefold ministry is a sign of the orderly transmission of the apostolic faith and mission and thus a sign, though not a guarantee, of apostolic continuity in the Church. While we believe that faithfulness to the gospel may be preserved in other ways, “In the furtherance of the search for the visible unity of Christ’s Church, the Methodist

Church [in Britain] would willingly receive the sign of episcopal succession on the understanding that ecumenical partners sharing this sign with the Methodist Church (a) acknowledge that the latter has been and is part of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church and (b) accept that different interpretations of the precise significance of the sign exist” (“Guidelines on *Episkopé* and Episcopacy,” *Conference Agenda* [2000]).

29. *TCTCV* associates the ordained ministry with the “gift of authority,” though much of what it says about the nature and exercise of authority in the Church is abstract and idealistic. “A relation of mutual love and dialogue unites those who exercise authority and those who are subject to it . . . the exercise of authority can call for obedience, but such a call is meant to be welcomed with voluntary cooperation and consent since its aim is to assist believers in growing to full maturity in Christ (cf. Eph. 4:11-16)” (§51). Continuing in idealistic vein, “Decision-making in the Church seeks and elicits the consensus of all and depends upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit, discerned in attentive listening to God’s Word and to one another” (§51). But what actual structures will ensure “the community’s effective participation in the discovery of God’s will and the guidance of the Spirit” (§52) so that the exercise of authority is not experienced as oppressive? For Methodists, it is essential that structures of authority are representative of the people of God and that discernment involves the active participation of lay people alongside ordained ministers. A common vision of the Church requires a common vision of

“synodality” and “conciliarity” (§53) as communal means of authoritative discernment in the Church.

30. We agree that “Authority within the Church must be understood as humble service, nourishing and building up the *koinonia* of the Church in faith, life and witness; it is exemplified in Jesus’ action of washing the feet of the disciples (cf. John 13:1-17). It is a service (*diakonia*) of love, without any domination or coercion” (§49). Moreover, we are encouraged to read that the exercise of authority is always shared and mutually accountable, albeit in unspecified ways. Thus “The authority which Jesus Christ, the one head of the Church, shares with those in ministries of leadership is neither only personal, nor only delegated by the community. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit destined for the service (*diakonia*) of the Church in love. Its exercise includes the participation of the whole community, whose sense of the faith (*sensus fidei*) contributes to the overall understanding of God’s Word and whose reception of the guidance and teaching of the ordained ministers testifies to the authenticity of that leadership” (§51). For Methodists, “the participation of the whole community” requires that lay people, and not just ordained ministers, actively participate in the actual structures of authority in the Church.

31. The ministry of oversight is “a ministry of co-ordination” so that the diversity of spiritual gifts and ministries “may enrich the whole Church, its unity and mission” (§52). It is exercised “in the service of maintaining continuity in apostolic faith and unity of life” (§52). Thus “In addition

to preaching the Word and celebrating the Sacraments, a principal purpose of this ministry [of oversight] is faithfully to safeguard and hand on revealed truth, to hold the local congregations in communion, to give mutual support and to lead in witnessing to the Gospel" (§52). There is widespread ecumenical agreement that "the ministry of oversight, as all ministry in the Church, needs to be exercised in personal, collegial and communal ways" (§52). But whether and how the ministry of oversight can be exercised simultaneously in ways that are personal, collegial and communal (as *TCTCV* appears to envisage), requires further study.

32. Conceiving the universal Church as a communion of local churches raises the question of primacy and whether a universal ministry of Christian unity has a place among the bonds of communion. Accordingly, *TCTCV* asks: "If, according to the will of Christ, current divisions are overcome, how might a ministry that fosters and promotes the unity of the Church at the universal level be understood and exercised?" (§57). The Methodist Church in Britain, responding to the encyclical of Pope John Paul II, *Ut unum sint*, confirmed its openness to exploring the idea of a universal ministry of Christian unity, though without conceding that such a ministry is strictly necessary under the will of God as revealed in scripture: "Methodists accept that whatever is properly required for the unity of the whole of Christ's Church must by that very fact be God's will for his Church. A universal primacy might well serve as a focus and ministry

for the unity of the whole Church" (*Conference Agenda* [1997], pp. 255–257).

Chapter 4: The Church: In and For the World

33. "The fourth chapter develops several significant ways in which the Church relates to the world as a sign and agent of God's love, such as proclaiming Christ within an interreligious context, witnessing to the moral values of the Gospel and responding to human suffering and need" (Introduction). Section A outlines "God's Plan for Creation: The Kingdom"; Section B describes "The Moral Challenge of the Gospel"; while Section C summarizes the role of "The Church in Society."

34. In God's plan for creation, "The Kingdom of God . . . is the final destiny of the whole universe" (§58). Since God intends the Church to serve the divine plan for the transformation of creation, "service (*diakonia*) belongs to the very being of the Church" (§58). Such service includes the proclamation of the gospel, the celebration of the sacraments, and "manifesting the newness of life given by [Christ], thus anticipating the Kingdom already present in him" (§58). Evangelization, which includes the promotion of justice and peace, is "one of the foremost tasks of the Church in obedience to the command of Jesus (cf. Matt. 28:18-20)" (§59).

35. The fact of religious pluralism and the vitality of various world religions undoubtedly present a challenge to evangelization and the way in which Christians witness to the gospel in word and deed

in accordance with God's will and design for the Church in and for the world. While "Evangelization should always be respectful of those who hold other beliefs" (§60), "Sharing the joyful news of the truth revealed in the New Testament and inviting others to the fullness of life in Christ is an expression of respectful love" (§60). Satisfying both of these requirements within the broad range of possible Christian approaches to mission remains a considerable challenge, but one to which Methodists in Britain are committed.

36. The question of whether and how those who do not come to saving faith in Christ may receive salvation has implications not only for the practice of mission but also for understanding the nature of the Church (§60). The Methodist Church in Britain does not believe that all people will necessarily be saved but that all can be saved: "Methodist Doctrine and the Preaching of Universalism" (*Conference Agenda* [1992], pp. 113–23). In the absence of saving faith in Christ, our emphasis on God's universal salvific will and prevenient grace leads us to hope that, in ways known to God alone, those who have not explicitly rejected the Gospel may yet be accepted by God, though they are without the assurance of Christian faith. Insofar as salvation may be possible in the absence of saving faith in Christ, we would maintain that it is necessarily "salvation in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit" (§60). Furthermore, since Christ is never without his body, the Church, salvation is never unrelated to the Church.

37. *TCTCV* invites the churches to consider how they might arrive at greater convergence about issues relating to religious pluralism in order to cooperate more effectively in witnessing to the gospel in word and deed (§60). We note that the text nowhere defines "salvation" (in Christ) but simply identifies it with "reconciliation" and "communion" without reference to Christian anthropology. Yet Methodists think of salvation as a staged process of growth in grace and holiness, beginning with justification and culminating in entire sanctification. Greater convergence among Christians in understanding the nature of salvation as an eschatological reality (and hence a present pledge of a future gift) would be a useful prelude to effective cooperation in witnessing to the gospel in a religiously plural context.

38. "The Moral Challenge of the Gospel" concerns the way in which Christians live their life. Since "human beings are justified not through works of the law but by grace through faith . . . the Christian community lives within the sphere of divine forgiveness and grace, which calls forth and shapes the moral life of believers . . . It is on the basis of faith and grace that moral engagement and common action are possible and should be affirmed as intrinsic to the life and being of the Church" (§61). In this regard, *TCTCV* rightly suggests that it is of significance for the reestablishment of unity that *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification between the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation* (1999) (JDDJ) "achieved consensus about the central aspects of the doctrine of justification by faith" (§61). We would add that

the World Methodist Council, following an extensive consultation among member churches, signed a tripartite statement of association with the JDDJ in 2006, thereby extending the agreement to include a third major world communion.

39. Since the gospel applies to the personal and communal aspects of human existence, “*koinonia* includes not only the confession of the one faith and celebration of common worship, but also shared moral values, based upon the inspiration and insights of the Gospel” (§62). For this reason, the “ethical reflections and decisions” (§62) of one church affect the lives of others. In view of the fact that “philosophical, social and cultural developments have led to the rethinking of many moral norms, causing new conflicts over moral principles and ethical questions” (§63), *TCTCV* asks “How might the churches, guided by the Spirit, discern together what it means today to understand and live in fidelity to the teaching and attitude of Jesus?” (§63).

40. Methodists, in company with others, have been wrestling with this question for a number of years, particularly over issues relating to human sexuality. For some, the traditional ethical teaching of the Church has always to be reassessed in light of the “attitude” of Jesus, which was inclusive, loving and compassionate. For others, the “teaching” of Jesus reinforces the moral absolutes contained in scripture which must not be compromised. In circumstances where Christian approaches to moral questions are often polarized, discernment is likely to be a gradual process in which diverse voices and

competing convictions have to be held together in tension within the communion of the Church (cf. “Living with Contradictory Convictions in the Church,” *Conference Agenda* [2006], pp. 237–50). Common discernment in moral issues is part of the wider task of common discernment in the Church for which it will be necessary to develop an ecumenical method of reading scripture in relation to tradition.

41. The role of “The Church in Society” is summed up in a number of activities: to work “for the transformation of the world”; “to help those without power in society to be heard”; “to work for a just social order, in which the goods of this earth may be shared equitably, the suffering of the poor eased and absolute destitution one day eliminated”; to “advocate peace, especially by seeking to overcome the causes of war”; and to “defend human life and dignity” (§64). To these can be added: “to share the lot of those who suffer and to care for the needy and the marginalized”; “to heal and reconcile broken human relationships”; and “to care for creation, which groans to share in the freedom of the children of God” (§66). We recognize in this brief description of the Church’s role in society many of the same emphases that John Wesley summed up in terms of Methodism’s vocation to scriptural holiness and reform of the nation.

Response to general questions

42. In their Introduction, the Faith and Order commissioners pose a number of general questions that churches are asked to consider in making a

formal response, though not necessarily to answer directly. Short answers to complex theological questions risk over-simplifying things in a way that may mislead ecumenical partners. Accordingly, our summary answers to these general questions should be interpreted in the light of our detailed comments in the foregoing paragraphs.

43. (Question 1) “*To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?*” We confirm that, to a large extent, the ecclesiological understanding of the Methodist Church in Britain is consistent with the description of the Church contained in *TCTCV*, though our particular emphases may differ in certain respects from those present or implied in the text. Where alternative views are described, our position falls within the range of options.

44. (Question 2) “*To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?*” The text offers an appropriate theological framework and secure foundation for further growth in unity, subject to achieving the necessary convergence in those issues where the churches have adopted contrasting positions.

45. (Question 3) “*What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?*” In our theological dialogue and ecumenical relations with other churches, the Methodist Church in Britain is challenged to give greater consideration to the value which our partners place on the tradition of the Church developed in the centuries between the

New Testament and the Reformation. Developing a greater awareness of Methodism’s continuity with the universal Church of the past is entirely consistent with John Wesley’s keen interest in the scholarship of the Church Fathers and theologians from subsequent centuries.

46. (Question 4) “*How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement?*” Since British Methodism already has an inclusive ecclesiology and minimal criterion for recognizing the reality of the Church in other Christian communities, we are readily able to form close relationships in life and mission with a wide range of other churches that broadly share our ecclesiological vision. Nevertheless, *TCTCV* encourages us to engage in theological dialogue and ecumenical relations with renewed vigour and a clearer focus on certain issues that require further study.

47. (Question 5) “*What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?*” The answer to this question is contained in our detailed response set out in the paragraphs above.

Concluding remarks

48. In their Introduction, the Faith and Order commissioners express a hope that *TCTCV* will serve the churches in three ways: “(1) by providing a synthesis of the results of ecumenical dialogue about important ecclesiological themes in

recent decades; (2) by inviting them to appraise the results of this dialogue – confirming positive achievements, pointing out deficiencies and/or indicating areas that have not received sufficient attention; and (3) by providing an occasion for the churches to reflect upon their own understanding of the Lord’s will so as to grow towards greater unity (cf. Eph. 4:12-16).” We consider that *TCTCV* serves its purpose admirably.

49. As a rich ecclesiological resource, *TCTCV* will aid British Methodists in our continuing dialogue and relations with our principal ecumenical partners in Britain as we seek to grow towards visible unity. In particular, it will be a useful theological reference in our continuing Faith and Order work under the Anglican-Methodist Covenant, which commits the Methodist Church in Britain and the Church of England to work together towards overcoming the remaining obstacles to our visible unity.

50. The Methodist Church in Britain acknowledges a debt of gratitude to the members and staff of the WCC Faith and Order Commission for their considerable achievement in producing such a significant convergence statement. We concur with the Commission’s Director and Moderator, who say: “The convergence reached in [*The Church: Towards a Common Vision*] represents an extraordinary ecumenical achievement” (Preface). As the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, says in his Foreword, this convergence text is a “gift” from the Faith and Order Commission to the churches

– “a fruit of their many years of work on ecclesiology.” As to the relevance of the text for the churches amidst competing priorities, we endorse Dr Tveit’s observation that: “Work on ecclesiology relates to everything the Church is and what its mission implies in and for the world.”

3. Scottish Episcopal Church

The Scottish Episcopal Church (SEC) welcomes the publication of *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)*, which it understands as a follow-up document to the WCC's 1982 Faith and Order Paper *Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry (BEM)*, building on the reception of *BEM*, and seeking in the same way to foster and deepen the relationships between churches. SEC values the fact that *TCTCV* addresses some of the open questions left by *BEM* in the area of Ministry. The SEC particularly welcomes the emphasis on shared mission articulated in *TCTCV*, and the recognition that shared mission and theological conversation are essentially related and that both can contribute to a deepening of communion. The SEC also welcomes the way in which *TCTCV* identifies and articulates the ecclesiastical aspects of a number of key critical issues which affect all churches, including the definition of local church, authority and primacy, and the extent to which ethics and moral theology are or are not church-dividing. The SEC values the opportunity to respond to *TCTCV*, which we do by addressing the questions raised by the WCC.

(Question 1) To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?

The text is intended to be a convergence document, and for that reason the SEC can indeed

affirm that its own ecclesiological understanding is reflected in it. Specifically, *TCTCV* clearly reflects the conviction, articulated in the first three articles of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral and reaffirmed in ecumenical agreements such as Porvoo and Reuilly, that the foundation for understanding and recognizing the church must be:

a. The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, “as containing all things necessary to salvation,” and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith.

b. The Apostles’ Creed, as the baptismal symbol; and the Nicene Creed, as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith.

c. The two sacraments ordained by Christ himself – Baptism and the Supper of the Lord – ministered with unfailing use of Christ’s words of institution, and of the elements ordained by him.¹

That is, *TCTCV* affirms the biblical and credal foundation and the sacramental life of the churches as fundamental to their existence (e.g., §§5, 11–12, 22, 39, 40–44). The SEC welcomes this.

1. Lambeth conference 1888, resolution 11, <http://www.lambethconference.org/resolutions/1888/1888-11.cfm>

TCTCV also emphasizes the need for an ordered ministry (see especially §§45–53). Indeed, the fourth article of the Lambeth quadri-lateral, which affirms the importance of “the historic episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the unity of his Church,” is, to a perhaps surprising degree, reflected in *TCTCV*. We note particularly the question as to whether “the churches can achieve a consensus as to whether or not the threefold ministry is part of God’s will for the Church in its realization of the unity which God wills” (comment following §47). The language of *episkopé* is not explicitly used in the context of this discussion, although the term is introduced in the context of the discussion of the ministry of oversight, which recognizes that all churches have a means by which continuity in apostolic faith and unity of life are maintained, local congregations held in communion, and the church’s role in bettering human life and the relief of suffering supported (§52). In the Porvoo agreement this proved a helpful insight: The shift of focus from the episcopate to *episkopé* provided the foundation upon which the Anglican understanding of the threefold ministry could be reconciled with the Lutheran concept of the one ministry in such a way as to enable a full interchangeability of ministry. The SEC has found it helpful to recognize that all ministry incorporates diaconal, presbyteral, and episcopal functions, and that all forms of ordained ministry are (as *BEM* found) exercised in personal, communal, and collegial ways.

In contrast, *TCTCV*’s tentative exploration of the role of universal primacy (§§55–57), even though it concludes that “Christians do not agree that a universal ministry of primacy is necessary or even desirable,” may go too far for some Anglicans and Episcopalians, as indicated by the very mixed reception of the ARCIC document *The Gift of Authority*. In this context, the question which follows §57, “how might a ministry that fosters and promotes the unity of the Church at the universal level be understood and exercised?” is an important one.

One of the strengths of *TCTCV* is its emphasis on the inter-relatedness of “God’s Mission and the Unity of the Church” (chapter 1), and on the role of the church “In and for the World” (chapter 4). The SEC recognizes the “marks of mission” as central to its self-understanding:

To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom;
To teach, baptise and nurture new believers;
To respond to human need by loving service;
To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation;
To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

These aspects of our church’s life are reflected in *TCTCV*, and particularly in chapters 1 and 4.

The SEC thus recognizes itself in the description of the church encapsulated in the structure of *TCTCV*: The SEC hopes – and consciously seeks – to manifest the triune God in its engagement

with the world and with other Christian churches. The SEC is committed to shared mission and witness, and to deepening our relationship with other churches and other Christians in Scotland and across the world. *TCTCV* makes a compelling case for the need for unity (especially §§8–10, 28–32), but it also offers an important reminder that identifying a common cause can deepen mutual understanding of each other and support unity (see §51). A section on mission was added to the Reuilly agreement (between the British and Irish Anglican churches and the French Lutheran and Reformed churches) for precisely this reason.

The SEC recognizes that unity is revealed both when churches work together in their mission and ministry and when they engage in theological work relating to questions of faith and order. Such relationships also deepen self-understanding. Thus, the processes which led up to both the Porvoo and the Reuilly agreements helped the SEC to clarify its own identity as well as deepening relationships between the churches involved, but also helped it to understand what areas of itself might be inessential or even sinful.

(Question 2) To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?

In their ecumenical relationships, Anglicans and Episcopalians have found it very helpful to enter into mutual affirmations in which they and their ecumenical partners recognize each other as churches. If it is widely received, *TCTCV* might well offer a basis which would enable churches which until now have been unable to enter into

such mutual affirmations to do so. It will be particularly interesting to see how the Roman Catholic Church responds to *TCTCV*, but this statement may also prove helpful in resourcing discussions with black majority churches or charismatic/Pentecostal churches.

We note, however, that recognition is not the same as reconciliation. Reconciliation emerges from deeper relationships, and these emerge from processes which bring churches closer together locally. The SEC has experiences of local ecumenical partnerships which are able to overcome differences to forge a new, joint identity, but also of congregations which exist alongside each other, for instance when sharing a building, but do not recognize each other as churches. We believe that on a more local level, *TCTCV* could be used in parish or ecumenical study groups to help Christians to engage more deeply with the lived reality of their churches and the theological underpinning of that reality. *TCTCV* might in this way stimulate theological discussion and deepening theological awareness.² This is important not only for our relationships with ecumenical partners, but also for deepening theological awareness within the SEC, and for stimulating discussion about (for instance) the relationship between local, national and international church structures. We applaud the way that *TCTCV* seeks to articulate the underlying issues, for instance the discussion as to whether sacraments are instrumental or

2. We welcome the ACC's publication of a study guide offering a structure for such discussions: http://www.aco.org/ministry/ecumenical/commissions/iascufo/docs/common_vision_anglican_study_guide.pdf

expressive (§§40–44 and the following comment). We believe that *TCTCV* will encourage churches to look more generously at their differences. The questions at the end of each section challenge churches to consider how far we can go together.

The SEC finds it particularly helpful that the question of the legitimate limit of diversity is raised by the *TCTCV* (§30): “Christians are called not only to work untiringly to overcome divisions and heresies but also to preserve and treasure their legitimate differences of liturgy, custom and law and to foster legitimate diversities of spirituality, theological method and formulation in such a way that they contribute to the unity and catholicity of the Church as a whole.” This may help churches to frame discussions of the extent to which they are already living unity in diversity or reconciled diversity.

TCTCV may also help churches riven by deepening differences over moral questions to place these questions in a broader theological framework. For instance, we note that very wide differences of views about human sexuality are held within the SEC: Despite the pain of our disagreements, our existence as a church somehow manages to transcend those differences, and *TCTCV* may be able to help us to understand why that is the case (§§30, 61–63).

We believe that *TCTCV* may also help Anglicans to think more deeply about the status of the Anglican Communion, and the extent to which it is – or is not – a church. In particular, *TCTCV* may, within the Anglican Communion, contribute to discussions of what it means to be a communion of churches, and of different ways in which

church-belonging is defined: as members of a congregation, of a diocese, of a regional or provincial church, as a member of a worldwide communion.

We note that in 1984, no-one could have judged the significance of *BEM*.

(Question 3) What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?

TCTCV challenges the SEC to take its engagement in prophetic witness and service more seriously as a constituent part of its being a church. In particular, *TCTCV* offers a reminder of the imperative to engage with issues such as social justice, peace, and the environment. This imperative is recognized in the Anglican Five Marks of Mission: to engage in the *missio Dei* is “to respond to human need by loving service,” and “to seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind, and to pursue peace and reconciliation.” The recent Jerusalem Report of the Anglican Lutheran International Commission focuses on the call to every Christian to engage in diakonia, not only as service but as prophetic engagement. The SEC will be engaging in the WCC’s Pilgrimage for Justice and Peace not least through ecumenical social initiatives in Scotland, particularly those combatting poverty and deprivation.

TCTCV also challenges the SEC to engage in exploration with a wide range of partners to discern how we can better affirm how we are connected by being churches together, and how our common vision might take lived shape. This calls the SEC through its status as a member church of Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS)

to face the challenge of finding meaningful ways of engaging with churches which are not yet partners or members of ACTS. Here too we note that recognition, although important, is only a first step: Accommodation/recognition needs to lead to reconciliation. The SEC hopes that it will be possible to call an early meeting of all the churches in Scotland who are invited to respond to *TCTCV* in order to begin this process. It is proposed that the SEC and Roman Catholic bishops might discuss *TCTCV*. The SEC also hopes to extend such engagement beyond the member churches of ACTS. The danger, however, is that churches continue to have conversations about having conversations rather than actually engaging with one another and seeking to affirm our shared mission.

As noted above, *TCTCV* raises the question of how churches might seek ecumenical agreement around to the exercise of universal authority. This could challenge the SEC to reflect more consciously on its own decision-making structures. *TCTCV* also poses questions about the definition of the local church and the relation of the local to the universal (§§31–32), offering a good expression of the complex reality of the SEC's experience of the local church as congregational, diocesan, and national. Although the SEC's theology of unity is centred on the diocese, the experience of individuals tends to be centred on either the immediate worshipping community or the national church.

We note that many Christians in Scotland (and indeed some within the SEC) would see the church as existing where two or three are gathered together in worship: This is a definition of church which does not appear in *TCTCV*. Rather,

TCTCV challenges churches to think beyond the immediate worshipping community to the larger picture. At the same time, it respects the fact that the definition of ecclesiology needs to pay proper attention to the sense of belonging and the ways in which people experience their ecclesiastical identity.

Finally, *TCTCV* might challenge the SEC to consider more carefully the place of synods in leading the church, and particularly in helping it to come to a common mind. It may be necessary to move away from adversarial forms of debate towards more conversational, consultative decision-making processes with a view to achieving consensus.

(Question 4) How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement?

The SEC seeks to work closely with other churches, but we remain conscious that the churches in our context still do much separately which they could do together. Our ecumenical experience suggests that historic structures of separation are not easily overcome even when mutual recognition is present.

The question of ministry – and particularly of threefold ministry, specifically episcopacy – remains one which separates the SEC from our ecumenical partners. In agreements such as Reuilly, Anglicans and Episcopalians have recognized churches which are not episcopally ordered as churches, and have affirmed their sacraments.

However, although these agreements lead to eucharistic hospitality, they do not (as yet) lead to (full) communion in the sense of interchangeability of ministries. We will wait with interest to see how these aspects of *TCTCV* are received by our partner churches and the extent to which *TCTCV* offers a basis for further developments in these areas.

The SEC will be particularly interested to see whether *TCTCV* will find acceptance within the Roman Catholic Church, potentially enabling the SEC, other Anglican churches and other churches of the Reformation to enter into a relationship of mutual recognition with the Roman Catholic Church. We hope that *TCTCV* might stimulate the SEC to engage more deeply with the Anglican Communion's dialogues with the Roman Catholic Church, and especially with the documents produced by ARCIC 2 and IARCCUM.

Perhaps an equally interesting question is that of how the SEC relates to those bodies which do not recognize themselves as churches as defined in *TCTCV*, such as the Salvation Army, the Religious Society of Friends, and some of the emerging churches.

(Question 5) What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

As noted above, *TCTCV* raises the important question of the extent to which diversity is part of the richness of God's creation – and thus a gift to the church – or a detraction from the unity of

the church. However, it leaves this question open: §30 asks what are the criteria for determining legitimate diversity, but gives no response to this central question. Earlier discussions of traditions of *adiaphora* may offer insights here; however, in the Scottish context, we are particularly aware that division can be caused by non-theological as well as theological questions, and by questions of order as well as questions of faith. The SEC also notes that it was the recognition of diversity in forms of *episkopé* which helped us to move forward in Porvoo.

The SEC has much to learn from the recognition that common mission should more actively inform theological convergence. We would also like to explore further the question of what kinds of diversity are such that they put us out of touch – or out of communion – with each other. This is clearly a question for on-going discussion and has implications for our understanding of what it means to pursue the vision of full visible unity.

4. Doctrine Commission of the Anglican Church of Australia

In 2013, the World Council of Churches released Faith and Order Paper No. 214 *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)*. This paper is the fruit of two decades of ecumenical work and offers a “convergence text” that identifies areas of agreement and continuing areas of disagreement in relation to ecclesiology. The paper invites response from national and international church bodies by 31 December 2015. The Doctrine Commission of the Anglican Church of Australia considered the WCC paper when it met in February 2015 and has produced this report for submission to the WCC in response to their request.

In the view of the Doctrine Commission, *TCTCV* is a useful resource that could provide a helpful stimulus for our national church to reflect on its life and mission, but we have some reservations about the emphases and approach in parts of the document.

A significant feature of *TCTCV* is that the exploration of ecclesiology has been set within the overarching context of God’s plan to reconcile all things to himself, and in particular, that “mission” is not merely an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. To paraphrase Jürgen Moltmann, it is not the church that has a mission, but the God of mission who has a church. We view

this movement towards a “missional ecclesiology” as a very welcome development, and a fruitful way to understand the mission of the church as an activity of God-in-Trinity.

Another welcome development is the “convergence text” approach, which seeks to highlight both agreement and disagreement. This is by far preferable to an approach that uses ambiguity and imprecision to mask disagreement. There were, however, points at which we felt that the document may have overstated the degree of convergence on some issues. For example, there is a strong sacramental theology underpinning the document’s approach to the life and practice of the church, and while this focus on the eucharist and baptism was appreciated by some members of the Doctrine Commission, it was recognized that this was not a universally held view. We recognize that a convergence text does not purport to express full consensus on all the issues under consideration, but even so the document is at times overly optimistic about the consensus that has been achieved. For example, §42 speaks of a “progress towards agreement about the Eucharist” which involves a shared acceptance that it involves (inter alia) “an invocation of the Holy Spirit to transform both the elements of bread and wine and the participants

themselves.” This understanding of the eucharist was not shared by all members of the Doctrine Commission. Other phrases used to describe our “common” understanding of the eucharist (such as “gathered around his table, Christians receive the body and blood of Christ”) are likely to be understood in very different ways by different groups. The strong sacramental theology underpinning the report and these occasional overstatements on the extent of convergence on this issue combine to result in what some members of the Commission see as an overemphasis on the significance of the sacraments in the life and mission of the church.

The paper could be enhanced by a fuller treatment of the place of the scriptures in the life of the church. In particular, the paper does not deal adequately with the normative place of the authority of scripture. A key reason for some of the continuing disagreement over church practice stems from different approaches to the authority of the scriptures in relation to church tradition and human reason. The approach taken in the report encourages pluralism and diversity, but without addressing the issue of the limits of diversity, and in particular about the role of the scriptures in establishing these limits.

The paper could also have been enhanced by a stronger eschatological underpinning of the purpose of the church, both in terms of the present expression and ultimate goal of the church. For example, in the present the church is a sign to the world of what the transformed creation will look like into eternity. Similarly, the discussion in the paper in relation to our present visible unity needs to be framed by our ultimate state, where we will

be one redeemed community gathered in worship around the throne of the Lamb.

Several members of the Doctrine Commission would like to have seen a fuller treatment of soteriology, and in particular how the saving work of Christ relates to the mission of the church. Although there is a repeated emphasis on the church’s mission to preach the gospel to the world, in the view of some members of the Doctrine Commission there was insufficient exploration of the content of that gospel message (that, for example, the gospel message involves the promise of the forgiveness of sin and a call to repentance).

Notwithstanding the reservations listed above, the Doctrine Commission views WCC Faith and Order Paper No. 214 on ecclesiology as a significant exploration of the *missio Dei* and the role of the church within that mission. We hope that it will be a helpful stimulus for our national church to reflect further on its life and mission.

The Most Rev. Dr Jeffrey Driver
Chairman
23 October 2015

5. Church of England, General Synod

A Note from the Council for Christian Unity

Introduction

1. In 2013, the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches (WCC) published *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)*.

The text was the culmination of two decades of preparatory work and built on a number of previous documents, while theological consideration of the Church has been at the heart of the international Faith and Order Movement since the 1927 World Conference. In their joint Preface, the Director and Moderator of the Commission identify two primary objectives in sending *TCTCV* out to member churches of the WCC: “renewal,” and “theological agreement on the Church.”

2. The Introduction describes it as “a convergence text, that is, a text which, while not expressing full consensus on all the issues considered, is much more than simply an instrument to stimulate further study.” It is only the second such document produced by the Commission, the first being *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, published in 1982. As with *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, the Commission is seeking an official response from member churches, to gauge how far the document takes us towards the goal of theological agreement. The deadline for such responses is the end of 2015.

That is why the Council for Christian Unity is bringing it to the General Synod for debate at this point.

3. The rest of this paper outlines the role of the Synod in finalizing such a response, the preparatory work that has already been done and some of the opportunities for growing in unity and mission that the wider process of reception of *TCTCV* offers to the Church of England.

4. The full text of *TCTCV* can be accessed at: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/faith-and-order-commission/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/the-church-towards-a-common-vision>

The role of the General Synod

5. The Church of England is one of the founding members of the WCC and makes a significant contribution to its finances, while there is a significant tradition of Anglican involvement in its work. In the case of a convergence text such as this, the Director of the Commission on Faith and Order and the Council for Christian Unity (CCU) are agreed that the requested response should be approved by the General Synod.

6. The previous convergence document from the WCC, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, was discussed by the General Synod alongside the Final Report of the first round of meetings of the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission. The two documents were given preliminary consideration in a take note debate at the July sessions in 1983, while in February 1985 it was agreed to consult diocesan synods. The Church of England's response was finalized through a series of specific motions in November 1986.

7. CCU does not believe such an extended synodical process is appropriate in this case. One reason for this is that *TCTCV* does not deal with matters that have such a direct relationship as *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* to areas of church practice that are the subject of frequent debate both within the Church of England and in its ecumenical dialogues. Indeed, some Synod members may find *TCTCV* somewhat abstract and uncontroversial compared to its famous predecessor. That is in part because it seeks to deal with the fundamental ideas we have about ecclesiology (the doctrine of the Church), ideas that tend to lie behind the positions we take on contested issues in the life of the Church. For that very reason, we may not focus on those ideas all that clearly, or even be very conscious that we hold them.

8. An important part of the purpose of the document, therefore, is to move towards identifying an underlying "common vision" of the Church, so that we can address more productively those dimensions of church practice that continue to

generate barriers between Christians. In order to evaluate its effectiveness in that task, the Church of England needs to draw on significant expertise in ecclesiology. As soon as the text became available, therefore, the Church of England's own Faith and Order Commission (FAOC) engaged in a careful process of analysis and evaluation, through a series of its meetings in 2013 and early 2014, inviting papers from outside experts as well as its own membership. FAOC's summary report was passed to CCU for consideration at its meeting in May 2014. CCU endorsed its analysis and its judgment and is now asking the Synod to approve the report as the Church of England's official response, affirming the consonance of the understanding of the Church in this convergence text from the WCC with the doctrine of the Church of England.

The response from the Council for Christian Unity and the Faith and Order Commission

9. The Introduction to *TCTCV* asked for official responses to be submitted "in the light of" five specific questions (p. 3):

- i) To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?
- ii) To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?
- iii) What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?
- iv) How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those

churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of Church described in this statement?

- v) What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

10. FAOC's report, shared with CCU, proposes that the Church of England can give broadly positive answers to the first two questions, which are evidently crucial. It notes a number of areas where we might wish to see further work done, emphasizes that it missed and limitations of its treatment at certain points, but it does not register significant concerns as to ways in which the document might directly contradict the teaching of the Church of England. The full report is available in Annex 1, with a brief summary provided in the paragraphs below.

11. Regarding question (i), *TCTCV* "is consonant to a high degree with the formal ecclesiology of the Church of England and the Anglican Communion, as reflected in documents from FAOC and IASCUFO . . . the Church of England can make a substantially positive response to the content of the report." The articulation of the relationship between the doctrines of Trinity, communion and mission is commended, although it is noted that there are some limitations, for example in the treatment of the imperative of unity and the nature of justice.

12. Regarding question (ii), *TCTCV* "offers a basis for growth in unity between the churches to a significant extent" and "raises helpful questions about both 'common vision' of Christ and 'limits to diversity' in the churches." Two areas are highlighted: pneumatology and apostolicity. With regard to the former, the report suggests that *TCTCV* offers resources for renewed theological engagement with Pentecostal churches. With regard to the latter, it notes that though there are some helpful insights, fundamental questions remain for Anglicans about the significance of episcopacy as a necessary sign of apostolic continuity.

13. Regarding question (iii), FAOC identifies two specific challenges: synodical governance and relations with "emerging churches," overlapping with Fresh Expressions in our context.

14. Regarding question (iv), agreement on ecclesiology as a key step on the way to greater unity has important precedents in the Church of England's ecumenical relationships. *TCTCV* provides a helpful articulation of the characteristics of the Church that can enrich dialogues with other churches.

15. Regarding question (v), FAOC suggests a number of areas arising from *TCTCV* as meriting further attention in terms of developing an ecumenical ecclesiology, including: worship; the Church across time; universal primacy; the Church as sacrament; and *koinonia* and conflict.

Opportunities for fruitful reception

16. The opportunity to participate in a global theological conversation about our understanding of the Church is clearly of great importance in its own right. By endorsing the report from CCU and FAOC as the Church of England's official response so that it can be sent to the Commission on Faith and Order of the WCC, the Synod would be enabling the Church of England to make a substantial contribution to that conversation. We can underline the extent of our agreement with the direction of travel within the WCC Commission on Faith and Order on this issue and also influence plans for further work that will follow up the publication of *TCTCV*.

17. Other member churches of the WCC within Great Britain and Northern Ireland will also be making their official responses in the course of this year. Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) is organizing a consultation on 24–25 September in Swanick, which will enable representatives to come together, compare their churches' responses and reflect on what new avenues may open up from that. There is also therefore an opportunity for reception of *TCTCV* to enable growth in unity among some of the major denominations in this country. Might it become a resource for ecclesiological thinking across denominational divides that can help us to consider in new ways some of the persistent issues that keep us apart?

18. CCU is also mindful that contemporary ecumenism requires serious engagement with growing

numbers of Pentecostal and “new” churches, which do not necessarily have a strong, national denominational self-understanding. In many urban contexts, such churches are emerging as primary partners in mission for Church of England parishes, yet there can also be significant differences in theological approach that may impede the development of cooperation and mutual commitment to shared work. Some of these are likely to cluster around ecclesiology, including the relationship between the local congregation and wider structures of communion, authority and accountability. *TCTCV* has the potential to open up this vital area of conversation. We believe this would best be done through working with Churches Together in England (CTE), and the General Secretary of CTE has already expressed a willingness to assist us in developing that. Such work could also intersect with our emerging dialogue with the Pentecostal churches, which is continuing to develop in significant ways.

19. Finally, we hope that the debate at the Synod can be the catalyst for further consideration of *TCTCV* within the Church of England, ideally in dialogue with members of other churches. This can be through discussion groups or study days at parish, deanery or diocesan level, or through sessions held at our Theological Education Institutions. Various resources have been produced that may assist that process, including a brief study guide on the Anglican Communion Office website, produced by the Inter-Anglican Standing

Commission on Unity, Faith and Order,¹ and a more extensive resource from CTBI.² It may be that the CCU could complement this provision with material for a stand-alone study session designed to facilitate initial engagement with some of the key ideas of this landmark document.

*The Bishop of Peterborough
Chair, Council for Christian Unity*

June 2015

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Church of England Council for Christian Unity & Faith and Order Commission

i) To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?

1. The text of *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)* is consonant to a high degree with the formal ecclesiology of the Church of England and the Anglican Communion, as reflected in documents from FAOC and IASCUFO. It gives evidence of a mature appropriation of the fruits of ecumenical endeavour and in matters of faith and order, constitution, calling and position of

1. See <http://www.anglicannews.org/news/2014/01/study-guide-available-for-the-church-towards-a-common-vision.aspx>

2. See <https://ctbi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/study-guide-the-church-towards-a-common-vision.pdf>

the Church in the purposes of God, the Church of England can make a substantially positive response to the content of the report. It stresses many ecclesiological themes that we would also wish to highlight from our distinctive perspective, including the calling of the Church to foster the well-being of the society in which it is placed, challenging injustice and acting jointly with other agencies where appropriate.

Communion, mission and unity

2. The emphasis on the relation between God's gift of communion and the missionary calling of the Church helpfully joins together two themes which have run through ecumenical endeavours since the 1960s and which the Church of England would want to stress: the link between missiology and ecclesiology, and *koinonia* as the concept to denote that unity which is the proper mark both of the Church and the fruit of her mission. As *TCTCV* affirms, citing *Confessing One Faith*: "... there is an indissoluble link between the work of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit and the reality of the Church" (§3).³ The origin of the Church in the purposes of the triune God is in accord with the teaching of the Church of England and the Anglican Communion and is reflected in her ecumenical agreements.⁴ That the Church is missionary by

3. Non-biblical references within the text here are to the paragraphs of the final published form of *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, as made available at <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/faith-and-order-commission/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/the-church-towards-a-common-vision>

4. E.g. *The Virginia Report: The Report of the Inter-Anglican*

its nature is a truth Anglicans have valued from scripture, and the Church of England is grateful to find it echoed in Roman Catholic documents.⁵ Furthermore, and this is another point of convergence, at least between Reformation traditions and Vatican II, the Church is said to be grounded in the gospel (§14).⁶ While the paradigm of *missio Dei* runs deep within *TCTCV* and bears with it a profoundly trinitarian ecclesiology, it is not entirely clear how the Church could be a “reflection” of the communion of the triune God (§25). This is one area where further consideration might be helpful as part of the reception of the text.

3. The discussion of the relation of unity and diversity is welcome to Anglicans, as is the tracing it back to the council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 in the section on “Communion in Unity and

Theological and Doctrinal Commission, 1997, available at <http://www.lambethconference.org/1998/documents/report-1.pdf>; *The Church of the Triune God: The Cyprus Statement Agreed by the International Commission for Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue 2006* (London: Anglican Communion Office, 2006); ARCIC II (1986), *Salvation and the Church*, available at http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/ecumenical/dialogues/catholic/arcic/docs/salvation_and_the_church.cfm; ARCIC II (1990), *Church as Communion*, available at http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/ecumenical/dialogues/catholic/arcic/docs/church_as_communion.cfm

5. E.g. Vatican II “Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church,” *Ad gentes* 2, available at http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html

6. Cf. Vatican II, “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” *Lumen gentium* 5, available at http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html

Diversity” (§§28–30). The Church of England recognizes that diversity belongs to the Church of God and that all rites and traditions need not be the same but properly may reflect respective cultures (Articles of Religion, 34). The Cyprus Report, referred to in a note here (§30), states: “As long as their witness to the one faith remains unimpaired, such diversity is seen not as a deficiency or cause for division, but as a mark of the fullness of the one Spirit who distributes to each according to his will.”⁷ Nonetheless, Anglicans have generally made a closer connexion between mission and visible unity than is to be found in this text. Moreover, they would also want to speak of the theological character of disunity as dangerous to the Church’s life and contradictory to God’s will (cf. §§68–69).

Characterizing the life of the Church

4. That the Church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic is integral to the presentation in *TCTCV* and also basic to the Church of England’s understanding of the Church (§22). That this is a matter of God’s gift and call is also something which we teach and that “believers, in all their human frailty, are constantly called to actualize.” There is a more extensive analysis of the four marks or notes of the Church here than was offered in the corresponding section of *The Nature and Mission of the Church*. This is welcome for general educational purposes, but also because it provides a richer pneumatological account of the Church’s identity and purpose.

7. *The Church of the Triune God*, p. 91.

5. *TCTCV* is particularly effective in holding the tension between those churches which are reluctant to attribute sin to the Church rather than to her members and those which teach that it may be attributed to her as such. The Church is holy because of God’s holiness, because of the gift of Christ’s love for her in the sending of the Holy Spirit. That the Church is essentially holy is a welcome statement, “witnessed to in every generation by holy men and women and by the holy words and actions the Church proclaims and performs in the name of God, the All Holy” (§22), as is also the recognition of the contradiction of this by sin and the Church’s consequent ministry of a call to repentance. The Church of England can make her own the statement of Vatican II that the Church is “*sancta simul et semper purificanda*.”⁸

6. The Church owes her apostolicity to the sending of the Son and the outpouring of the Spirit. This is rightly affirmed in the document, although there could have been a fuller treatment of the reality of Pentecost in the Church. Apostolicity is about being sent in space as well as time; and this requires expansion. Furthermore it denotes forms of life after the manner of the apostles, and such forms of life are not merely incidental to the *koinonia* of the Church. That apostolic succession in ministry, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is intended to serve the apostolicity of the Church corresponds to Anglican teaching.

8. *Church as Communion*, 8.

Ministry and church

7. The treatment of the threefold ministry in relation to visible historical continuity (§47) is welcome to Anglicans, though for them the bishop is a bishop in the church and in synod. Although it is traditional to talk of the succession of bishops, it is more accurate to talk of a succession of bishops in and of churches. This is because of the integral position of a bishop in a church and of the role of other members of the people of God in the church: lay participation in synods is something which Anglicans would want to stress. Thus while *TCTCV* talks about synodality (like *The Gift of Authority*), it does not explore the importance of lay participation in synods – which for Anglicans is an issue of importance. It merely says, “The churches currently have different views and practices about the participation and role of the laity in synods” (§53). Oversight is therefore properly described, following the formulation of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, as “personal, collegial and communal” (§52), and a welcome reference to the question of primacy is made in this context (§§54–57). The question of a universal primate has been addressed by the Church of England in such a way as to see such an office as embedded in the communion of the Church, which is in accord with the discussion in these paragraphs.⁹

Ethics and ecclesiology

8. Chapter 4 of *TCTCV* raises some particular questions in terms of congruence with the

9. E.g. ARCIC II (1998), *The Gift of Authority*, available at http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/ecumenical/dialogues/catholic/arcic/docs/gift_of_authority.cfm

theology of our own church. Anglicans will welcome the affirmation of ethics as rooted in God's creative work (§62). They may, however, find that the dynamic of resurrection and redemption is insufficiently stressed, together with the place of the Spirit as the subjective power of effective action. They might also want to say more about the Church being the ethics of the Kingdom, as distinct from promoting it, demanding it, recognizing it, etc., and about the redemption of the life of the human community as a whole.

9. It is a complicating factor for ethics in our age that we have to confront extensive changes in moral opinion, not merely as a historical fact to be observed, but as a project which some strands of thought urge forward with something like a crusading spirit. Anglicans may be inclined to think that the document gives too little recognition of this fact as a question for eschatology, and may suspect that in this light the concrete moral disagreements could appear rather less dramatic than the document assumes they are. There is a good case to be made that, within generous limits, Christians find themselves situated within certain points on a wider spectrum of late-modern morality.

10. The document's recurrent emphasis on the common moral concerns of the religions of the world will be congenial to Anglicans, but they may be concerned that it is stressed to the point of undervaluing, on the one hand, the shared character of human morality as such, religious or otherwise, so as to obscure the conception of the common good as an interest shared by all

humanity, and, on the other, the distinctiveness and controversiality of the evangelical demand as a "sign of contradiction."

11. In discussing political society our tradition has made a clearer distinction than can be found within the document between "state" and "society." In relation to the concerns of the state, Anglicans may feel that the document's talk about the "advocacy of peace" is not satisfactory as a way of referring to the role of the disciple as "peacemaker"; it suggests an a priori restriction of admissible responses on the part of political authority to acts of violence and war making, and at the same time limits the Christian contribution to peace to advocacy rather than action. The idea of a just society, on the other hand, receives what is, for our Anglican tradition, an unduly restricted interpretation in terms of the fair distribution of economic resources. The fundamental importance of the rule of law has been important to Anglicans, and they would also expect to see more recognition of the perennial importance of health-care and education to social life.

ii) To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?

Common vision

12. *TCTCV* offers a basis for growth in unity between the churches to a significant extent: several areas lend themselves to be taken further in future dialogue. The notion of a "common vision" even though the teaching and practice of churches

may appear to be contradictory is something that was explored in the ARCIC document *Life in Christ*.¹⁰ *TCTCV* raises helpful questions about both “common vision” of Christ and “limits to diversity” in the churches. Some particular themes that seem promising to us here are: embracing plurality whilst seeking unity of purpose; seeking diversity as an aspect of catholicity; and rooting this in the doctrine of the incarnation.

The “pneumatological turn”

13. *TCTCV* addresses more fully than previous work in this area the “pneumatological turn” in ecumenical ecclesiology, which reflects the growing recognition of Pentecostal and Charismatic approaches as well as renewed engagement with Orthodox thought within the WCC. While the dominant paradigm of the document is the avowedly trinitarian model of *missio Dei*, there is no question of the Holy Spirit being the “silent” or “hidden” person of the Trinity at work in the Church. Rather, it is under the power of the Spirit, through Spirit-inspired preaching and Spirit-endowed sacraments, that people are incorporated into the body of Christ. This body is in turn a temple of the Holy Spirit (§§12–14, 21). Pentecostal emphasis on the charismata of Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12–14 is amplified as the document goes on to insist that “every Christian receives gifts of the Holy Spirit for the upbuilding

of the Church and for his or her part in the mission of Christ” (§18). This giftedness in turn compels believers to pursue personal and collective holiness as an ethical corollary of the Church’s intrinsic oneness and holiness: They are thus to “lead a life worthy of their calling in worship, witness and service, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (cf. Eph. 4:1–3)” (§21). Likewise, the complementary gifts of the Spirit are bestowed on the faithful “for the common good” of society as well as for the wellbeing of the Church (§28). The Spirit is thus the “principal agent” in establishing the kingdom of God, as well as in “guiding the Church”: indeed, it drives “the whole process of salvation history to its final recapitulation in Christ to the glory of the Father” (§33, cf. §68). Engagement between the historic denominations and newer Pentecostal churches will be a critical area for growth in unity among the churches in the 21st century, not least here in England. *TCTCV* should provide a fitting reference-point and resource for this process.

Apostolic succession

14. *TCTCV* acknowledges that churches remain divided as to whether or not “the ‘historic episcopate’ (meaning bishops ordained in historic succession back to the earliest days of the Church), or the apostolic succession of ordained ministry more generally, is something intended by Christ for his community” (§47). Yet it does not define what it means by the “more general” apostolic succession of ordained ministry, or what this might look like without the historic episcopate. It also proceeds to introduce the concepts of “continuing faithfulness to the gospel” and “the

10. ARCIC II (1993), *Life in Christ: Morals, Communion and the Church*, available at http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/ecumenical/dialogues/catholic/arcic/docs/life_in_christ.cfm; see especially the section on “Shared Vision” (4–11).

apostolic continuity of the Church as a whole,” noting that some prefer to decouple them from succession in ministry and the historic episcopate – yet it does not define these concepts either. Given that the issues addressed in this paragraph remain among the most divisive in ecumenical debate, it would have been useful to have had a less compressed and elliptical treatment of them at this point.

15. In the matter of historic episcopal succession, the Anglican tradition has seen some significant developments, including, in the specific case of the Church of England, the acceptance in the Porvoo Common Statement and Declaration (1992) of “bearable anomalies” in certain regards. Related issues continue to surface as pivotal in the Church of England’s ecumenical relations, and therefore perhaps the central ecclesiological question posed by *TCTCV* for us lies in what a Lutheran would describe as the “*satis est*” of the Augsburg Confession: “The church is the assembly of saints in which the gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly. And it is enough (*satis est*) for the true unity of the church to agree concerning the teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions, rites, or ceremonies instituted by human beings be alike everywhere” (Article VII, translated from the Latin text). This is very similar to Article XIX: “The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ’s ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.” There is no “*satis est*” in the

Article but there is the rider, “As the Church of Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Antioch, have erred, so also the Church of Rome hath erred, not only in their living and manner of Ceremonies, but also in matters of Faith.” In its definition of the Church, according to Article XIX, the Church of England, like the Lutheran Church, takes a minimalist position and makes explicit its conviction that no earthly church is to be seen as inerrant (so all churches will experience conflict).

16. By this yardstick alone, *TCTCV*, taken together with *Confessing the One Faith*, usefully clarifies the criteria for mutual recognition by churches. For Anglicans, however, the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral also needs to be considered in this context. Its four articles are:

a) the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as “containing all things necessary to salvation,” and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith

b) the Apostles’ Creed, as the Baptismal Symbol; and the Nicene Creed, as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith

c) the two Sacraments ordained by Christ Himself – Baptism and the Supper of the Lord – ministered with unfailing use of Christ’s words of Institution, and of the elements ordained by Him

d) the Historic Episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the Unity of His Church.

17. Originally set down as the minimal basis on which Anglican Churches could enter into formal

unions with other churches, the articles' inclusion of episcopacy has been recognized throughout the Anglican Communion and played an important part in the negotiations by which episcopacy was taken into the united churches of South and North India. For contemporary Anglicans to regard *TCTCV* as a sufficient basis for unity with regard to ecclesiology, we would have to broaden our understanding of what "local adaptation" in the historic episcopate might mean in a radical and indeed unprecedented way.

iii) What adaptations or renewal in the life your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?

18. The fundamental challenge here is the renewal of our vision of Christ (cf. Rev. 1:12-18) – something which can only come through Spirit-led renewal in the life of prayer. With this must go both continuing conversations amongst Christians of differing points of view in which there is careful and humble listening to one another, and continuing conversations with those outside the churches who do not share the vision of Christ but have their own powerful vision of what it is to be a human being.

19. There is also a clear challenge here for us to renew our use of synodical governance – how it can be not a politicized or partisan process, but a means of upholding unity in diversity through the patient discernment of ways to walk together and build up trust. Work in this area is already in progress but there are important theological perspectives for the task in the statement.

20. A particular issue raised by the statement that is highly relevant for us concerns relations with the so-called "emerging churches," acknowledged in this text (§7) in a way they have not been previously. The impetus for this diverse new ecclesiological phenomenon is ascribed in large part to the "stupendous development of the means of communication" in recent times. This in turn has challenged churches "to seek new ways to proclaim the Gospel and to establish and maintain Christian communities." In striving expressly to meet these challenges, the emerging church movement is said to have proposed "a new way of being church" and to have modelled to other churches innovative "ways of responding to today's needs and interests in ways which are faithful to what has been received from the beginning." One intriguing aspect of this new reference to emerging churches in the WCC document is the fact that such churches are neither readily nor often associated with formal, historic ecumenism. Indeed, insofar as they have developed much looser, more ad hoc instantiations of Christian unity, they might well be seen as challenging and even critiquing the WCC's own approach to ecumenical ecclesiology.

21. In the English Anglican context, such churches were recognized and incorporated into the strategic planning of the national church in the *Mission-Shaped Church* report (2004).¹¹ Here they were called "fresh expressions" and were

11. Church of England Mission and Public Affairs Council, *Mission-shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context* (London: Church House, 2004).

characterized as having been formed in response to postmodern culture – most notably in relation to social “networks” rather than geographical “neighbourhoods” or “parishes.” They were described as typically meeting at times other than Sunday mornings, and as tending to be “post-denominational” in the sense that even if they formally remained within a historic denomination like the Church of England, they sat lightly to its structures and drew adherents from a wider range of Christian traditions, as well as those from no Christian background at all.¹² In 2012 the Church of England and the Methodist Church of Great Britain recognized the significance of these churches further in a shared book-length theological study.¹³ In its turn this text was able to draw on a burgeoning literature devoted to the ecclesiology of emerging and fresh expressions of church – both advocacy and critical.¹⁴ This is likely to be

12. *Mission-shaped Church*, 43–83.

13. *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church*, Report of an Anglican-Methodist Working Party, (London: Church House, 2012).

14. For example: Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003); D.A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005); Eddie Gibbs & Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (London: SPCK, 2006); John M. Hull, *Mission-Shaped Church: A Theological Response* (London: SCM, 2006); Ian J. Mobsby, *Emerging and Fresh Expressions of Church: How Are They Authentically Church and Anglican?* (London: Moot Community, 2007); *Evaluating Fresh Expressions: Explorations in Emerging Church: Responses to the Changing Face of Ecclesiology in the Church of England*, ed. Louise Nelstrop and Martyn Percy (Norwich: Canterbury

a key area for ecumenical ecclesiology to address, especially if the “emerging church movement” expands significantly beyond its current primary location in Britain and North America.

iv) How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement?

22. We have already been able to make significant progress towards such closer relationships through ecclesiological agreement that is very much in line with *TCTCV*. This is evidenced by the Covenant between the Church of England and the Methodist Church and the Meissen, Porvoo, and Reuilly Agreements. These provide for practical sharing and cooperation in ministry in a way that might be contrasted with the international theological dialogues of ARCIC and the Anglican Orthodox Commission. However, the work of the International Anglican Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission (IARCCUM) takes the work of ARCIC, synthesizes it (in a way not unlike *TCTCV*) and suggests a whole range of practical initiatives that can be taken together. Finally, we would mention the service of reconciliation between the Church of England and the United

Press, 2008); John Milbank, “Stale Expressions: The Management-Shaped Church,” in *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 21/1 (2008), 117–28; *Mission-shaped Questions: Defining Issues for Today’s Church*, ed. Steven Croft (London: Church House, 2008); *Fresh Expressions in the Sacramental Tradition*, ed. Steven Croft & Ian Mobsby (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2009); Andrew Davison and Alison Milbank, *For the Parish: A Critique of Fresh Expressions* (London, 2011).

Reformed Church in 2012 to mark the 350th anniversary of the “great ejection” as an initiative grounded in shared understanding of the nature and purpose of Christ’s Church.

23. We hope that careful reflection on *TCTCV* with our various partners can enable further growth in relationships, not least with Pentecostal churches as mentioned in the response to question (ii). It invites us to identify in ourselves and one another as primary characteristics of being a church that a church:

a) understands itself as being in communion with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and called to participate in God’s mission of bringing humanity and all creation into communion under the Lordship of Christ;

b) views itself as belonging to the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, in communion with all other local churches and with the Church universal;

c) acknowledges the normative role of scripture for Christian theology and the proclamation of the gospel;

d) proclaims the apostolic faith attested in scripture, transmitted through the living tradition of the Church and summarized in the Nicene Creed;

e) celebrates the two dominical sacraments of baptism and the eucharist;

f) believes in the common priesthood of the whole people of God, but also possesses an ordained ministry exercised in personal, collegial and communal ways and involving the proclamation of the

word, the celebration of the sacraments and the exercise of oversight;

g) witnesses to the gospel in word and deed by proclaiming the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ to all people, including those of other faiths, witnessing to the moral values of the gospel, responding to human suffering and need and caring for creation.

24. These characteristics correspond to the beliefs about the nature and mission of the Church which the Church of England holds, and to which it has borne witness by the way it orders its own life, by what it has said in numerous ecumenical agreements¹⁵ and by the assent it has given to the Anglican Communion’s Five Marks of Mission.¹⁶ Mutual recognition of such characteristics between churches could provide a constructive basis for engagement in shared mission and worship although, as noted above in the response to question (ii), further steps would be needed for the Church of England to be able to enter into full sacramental communion with another church involving the interchangeability of ministry.¹⁷

15. See *The Meissen Agreement – Texts* (London: CCU, 1992); *The Porvoo Common Statement* (London: CCU 1993); *Anglican-Moravian Conversations* (London: CCU, 1996); *Called to Witness and Service* (London: CHP, 1999); *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant* (London and Peterborough: CHP/Methodist Publishing House 2001); *Growing Together in Unity and Mission* (London: SPCK/CTS); *Healing the past – Building the future* (London: CCU, 2012).

16. <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/mission/fivemarks.cfm>

17. See *Called to Witness and Service*, §§26–27.

v) What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

25. The description of the Church as a community of witness, worship and discipleship (§2) is good, but the question of how these activities relate to one another might helpfully be explored further. The Church of England, for instance, gives a high value to the role of worship in the formation of disciples and the nurturing of witness, something which is grounded in the mission of God which creates the Church. More generally, one important theme for Anglicans that is not strongly present in *TCTCV* is the relation between the doctrine of the Church and the way she prays, prayer which in the Church of England has always been seen as in the first place corporate and accessible, “common.” While worship is referred to at numerous points (for example, §67), we would want to be more explicit that this is one of the ends for which the Church was created and redeemed and which belongs to her eschatological reality.

26. We would want to emphasize the need to maintain a vision of the life of the Church as spanning the generations and indeed embracing all of time. The departed faithful belong to her still and we continue to enjoy communion with them and are strengthened by their fellowship. This receives an eschatological reference in the conclusion (§68). Absent, save in the conclusion, is there any

exploration of the God-given glorification of the Church.

27. Questions about how a universal ministry of primacy in the service of the unity and mission of the Church might be received by Anglicans have been explored in dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁸ While the Church of England does not have a formal position on this matter, the extent to which it is a good that we should seek is an important area to be addressed in future ecumenical ecclesiology.

28. In §22 and §35, the report touches on the sensitive and tricky question of sin in the Church, on which it seems impossible to bridge the gap between Lutherans and Orthodox. Karl Rahner called this issue “one of the most agonising questions of ecclesiology.” Rahner’s own view was that, “The Church is a sinful Church: this is a truth of faith . . . and it is a shattering truth.”¹⁹ Again, more work is needed in this area, perhaps addressing the imperative of continual reform and renewal (which is a potential point of convergence between the Reformers and Vatican II). Similarly, we appreciated seeing the question of the Church as sacrament raised (§27), following the articulation of this theme at the Second Vatican Council in *Lumen gentium*. It has been adopted by the Church of England and much more widely in ecumenical dialogue through the language of “sign,

18. *Gift of Authority*.

19. Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 6 (Baltimore, MD: Helicon Press, 1969), 253, 260.

instrument and foretaste”²⁰ and represents a theologically creative response to one of the fault lines of western Christianity, namely the mediating role of the Church. Significant convergence between Reformation theology and modern Roman Catholic ecclesiology is possible on this issue.²¹ This is a particularly welcome discussion and merits further exploration.

29. While Anglicans can affirm the prominence given to *koinonia* in developing ecumenical ecclesiology, we would also note that this can obscure other significant areas of ecclesiological reflection. For instance, *koinonia* theology has tended to overlook or be actively hostile to canon law. In part, this is due to misplaced presuppositions about the transcending of law by grace. In its concern to move beyond restrictive ecclesiastical structures, *koinonia* theology has overlooked the importance of canon law in institutional churches where it may ensure that initiatives can be taken confidently and with a measure of security for the future. This may be reflected in the way that *TCTCV* has little to say about either commandment or rule and seems suspicious of “law” in the life of the Church. There is no reference to the positive role of canon law in the ordering of the Church and in facilitating the saving work of God; this is something which Anglicans have learnt to value.²²

20. E.g. in *Church as Communion*.

21. Paul Avis, “The Sacraments in the Mission of the Church,” Porvoo Theological Conference, Copenhagen, October 2012.

22. Norman Doe, *Canon Law in the Anglican Communion*:

30. In the same context, we would also want to highlight the importance of conflict in the life of the Church. *Koinonia* theology, rooted in the life of the Trinity, has been developed on the presupposition that it is a theology of unity and harmony. However, the unity and harmony of *koinonia* in Christian experience only comes about through the alienation and suffering of the incarnation and crucifixion of Jesus. The life of Jesus – from which comes the *koinonia* in Christ of the churches – is marked by conflict with his critics and even among the disciples. The conflicts of the early churches are manifest in Acts and Pauline letters like those to the Galatians and 1 Corinthians. Perhaps the most striking instance of conflict within the *koinonia* of the Church is when Paul “opposed [Peter] to his face, because he stood self-condemned” (Gal. 2:11). The fact that there are major conflicts in all the contemporary churches on sex and gender should not – in the light of the conflict over circumcision within the early churches – surprise us. The ecclesiological issue is how the churches deal with conflict. This was addressed in the Kuala Lumpur Report of the third Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission, *Communion, Conflict and Hope* (2008). Paragraphs 50–51 are particularly relevant:

50. Conflict arises because of real differences about our faithfulness to our Christian vocation. Conflict always involves suffering, puzzlement and distress. When harnessed

A Worldwide Perspective (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

creatively, it can however be a gift from God (e.g. Philippians 3.7-11, 4.11-13; cf. Genesis 33.10; Isaiah 58.4-11). The path towards resolving such conflict will involve following in the steps of the crucified Christ and allowing the presence of the Spirit to bring the conflicted parties to a place of new life. Situations of conflict can, through the power of the Spirit, become opportunities to enhance our mutual understanding and to grow in the faith. The experience of conflict can offer an opportunity for Christians in the midst of their disagreement to discover the love for the other that is at the heart of Christ's sacrifice and which characterizes our vocation in Christ. Our constant temptation is to grasp at the resolution of conflict by deployment of power and by manipulation. This is not the way of Christ. There is always need for a ministry of reconciliation to guide Christians in the way of Christ and to build up the Body of Christ. Sometimes we hear of Communion being broken, and often this language is used in rhetorical exchanges about particular issues in dispute. The greater reality, however, is the brokenness of the Church within which communion can and does flourish. Communion flourishes when we accept that discipleship in the Church is a call to the way of the cross in the brokenness of the Church to which we all contribute.

51. Such costly participation in the crucifixion and resurrection sharpens our sense of the hope we have in Christ. This hope will not permit the fallibility which we bring to

handling our conflicts to be the last word. Within the day-to-day process of reconciliation and growth in mutual understanding we grow up into that unity in Christ which characterizes the catholicity of the Church in all its fullness.²³

31. These paragraphs strike an ecclesiological note that comes from deep within Anglican experience. Their emphasis on the reality and ecclesiological importance of conflict may represent a distinctive contribution from Anglicanism to a convergence text like *TCTCV*. This is an important area for further exploration, not least in the light of the fact that for Anglicans questions of how one lives in communion include those areas covered by moral and ascetical theology.

23. Text available at http://www.aco.org/ministry/theological/iatdc/docs/communion_conflict_&_hope.pdf

6. Church in Wales

A Report from the Standing Doctrinal Commission

The background to the document

1. In 2013, the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches (WCC) published *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)*. The context of this document is important, and worth outlining in our first two paragraphs, before we move to our response to the document. The WCC had its origins, inter alia, in the Faith and Order Movement. Dame Mary Tanner, a distinguished Anglican theologian, international ecumenist, and for many years Moderator of the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC, wrote a paper in 1995 to introduce younger theologians to the work of Faith and Order. She said that:

It took from 1910 to 1927 to set up the first World Conference on Faith and Order held in Lausanne, Switzerland. In those years 70 commissions in 40 countries worked to prepare the meeting. Protestants, Anglicans and Orthodox were in the thick of it together. During the preparatory period the purpose of the meeting was defined as “comparative ecclesiology” with no attempt to commit any participating church and no direct promotion of unity schemes: such powers were clearly

recognised as belonging to the churches themselves . . . It was this first meeting of the expanding Faith and Order Movement in Lausanne 1927 with its high expectations, together with the belief that the goal of visible unity really was attainable, that outlined an agenda that has remained at the heart of faith and order work ever since: the call for unity; the nature of the Church; the common confession of the faith; the ministry and sacraments. This agenda has been focused since Lausanne in a series of World Conferences on Faith and Order: Edinburgh 1937; Lund 1952; Montreal 1963 and Santiago de Compostela, 1993.¹

2. This is the context of the 2013 document, *TCTCV*. It is important to be aware that there is over a century of ecumenical dialogue preceding the publication of *TCTCV*. The history can be briefly given here. From 1910 to 1927 there was the preparatory courtship, which resulted in

1. <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/xii-essays/what-is-faith-and-order-mary-tanner>

the setting up of the Faith and Order Movement. Twenty years later, and after another world war, Faith and Order merged with another movement, Life and Work, to create the World Council of Churches in 1948. In the 1960s, the Roman Catholic Church, after the change in attitude towards other churches at Vatican II, began a series of ecumenical dialogues, which are still ongoing. Although it did not become a member of the WCC, its representatives are members of the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC. Two great reports have been issued by the Faith and Order Commission, and together they frame all bilateral dialogues, and all conversations today about the possibility of ecumenism. One is the 1982 document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, which was agreed in Lima, Peru, and which is known as “the Lima text,” or simply as *BEM*. The second document is this one, *TCTCV*. It is, quite simply, that important a document.

3. The Introduction describes it as “a convergence text, that is, a text which, while not expressing full consensus on all the issues considered, is much more than simply an instrument to stimulate further study.” It is only the second such document produced by the Commission, the first being as noted above: *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, published in 1982. As with *BEM*, the Commission is seeking an official response from member churches, to gauge how far the document takes us towards the goal of theological agreement. The deadline for such responses is the end of 2015. That is why the bishops of the Church in Wales

have asked the Standing Doctrinal Commission to comment on the document.

The questions asked of each church by the document

4. The Introduction to *TCTCV* asked for official responses to be submitted “in the light of” five specific questions (p. 3):

i) To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?

ii) To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?

iii) What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?

iv) How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement?

v) What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

5. Our response will be in two parts. First, we will comment on these five questions, as we have been asked to do. Secondly, we attach a paper by a member of the Commission on the topic of the covenant with Israel, and the issue of anti-Semitism, which we discuss in our paragraph 18, under the heading of “areas for further study.”² Paragraph

2. [Not included with submission – Ed.]

25 of our response raises the issues briefly, which are then elaborated in the paper by Dr Patmore.

(i) To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?

6. On the first question, the Church in Wales certainly recognizes its own understanding in this text. The prefatory note to the Constitution, drawn up in 1920 after “the separation of the Welsh dioceses from the Church of England in 1920,”³ acknowledges as its supreme authority: “The Holy Scriptures as interpreted in the Catholic Creeds and the historic Anglican formularies, that is, the Thirty Nine articles of Religion, the Book of Common Prayer and the Ordering of Bishops, Priests and Deacons as published in 1662.”⁴ Clergy when taking office swear allegiance to these authorities, and the new Ordinal of 2004 also affirms “the Holy Scriptures as containing all things necessary for salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord.”⁵ In §45 of *TCTCV* we would want to affirm that “ordained ministry stands in a special relationship with the unique priesthood of Christ,” and that the sacrament of ordination is one that gives individuals particular priestly functions. In this we echo The Anglican - Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC)

report *Ministry and Ordination*.⁶ We return to this issue in paragraph 15 of our response when we discuss apostolic succession.

The living tradition

7. We spent much time reflecting on the phrase “living tradition,” and welcome the use of this term in §§11 and 38. The term has been used for some while in Orthodox theology (for example, by Vladimir Lossky), where tradition is seen as the life of the Holy Spirit in the church. It was also used by Yves Congar in *Tradition and Traditions*, and was of influence on the Vatican II text *Dei Verbum*.⁷ It was additionally used at the 1963 Faith and Order meeting in Montreal. The term thus finds resonances with the pneumatological emphasis of *TCTCV*.

8. The Church in Wales has a deep sense of its own tradition as something which lives and carries forward the living faith of the saints, and especially those of Wales of every age, and is present in the church today. Such attentiveness to tradition is itself longstanding. This can be seen, for example, in Bishop Richard Davies’ *Epistol at y Cembra* (*Epistle to the Welsh*), which was included as an introduction to the first Welsh translation of the New Testament in 1567. In this, Bishop Davies taught that the Christian faith had reached the Welsh directly through the hand of Joseph of Arimathea, and he further argued that the gospel

3. *Constitution of the Church in Wales, Prefatory Note*.

4. *Ibid*.

5. See the Church in Wales website <http://www.churchin-wales.org.uk/structure/representative-body/publications/downloads/ordinal-alternative-order>

6. *Growth in Agreement I*, 78-87.

7. “The words of the holy fathers witness to the presence of this living tradition,” *Dei Verbum*, paragraph 8.

had been preserved in its purity by the Old Britons and thus escaped the influence of Rome. Notwithstanding issues of historical accuracy, his objective in his Epistle is clear: to convince the Welsh that the new reformed faith that arrived in Wales on the crest of the Protestant Reformation was not a new foreign idea, but rather a reconnection to their Celtic Augustinian past. The idea of a living tradition was central to this argument. Similar arguments were used by Bishop Thomas Burgess in the early 19th century on the importance of Celtic Christianity as a tradition still alive in the Welsh church. We may also look to the translation of the Bible into Welsh in 1588 by Bishop William Morgan, and subsequent translations after this, as vital expressions of “the living tradition” (§11): the Holy Spirit guiding the followers of Jesus as they strive to be faithful to the gospel.

9. The disestablishment of the Church in Wales in 1920 also gave the Church in Wales a renewed sense of a living tradition, looking back to the saints who first established Christianity in Wales, but also looking forward as an authentic expression of Anglicanism in Wales. The importance of the Welsh language is central. Paragraph 38 speaks of the faith being confessed “in worship, life, service and mission.” The Church in Wales therefore welcomes the emphasis in §11 on the interpretation of scripture. It affirms that the role of tradition in interpreting scripture, while always seeking to be faithful to biblical teaching, has produced “an additional wealth of ecclesiological insights over the course of history.” This understanding of scripture, tradition, and biblical interpretation

bears closely on the church’s on-going relationship to the contemporary culture of which it is a part, and which it witnesses to in the name of Christ. This relationship is one which is deeply important in the life of the Church in Wales, and the teaching office of its bishops. It is a matter of seeking “to guide later followers of Jesus as they strive to be faithful to the Gospel” (§11).

Communion, mission and unity

10. We also very much welcome the emphasis on *koinonia* as constitutive of much recent ecumenical discussions, for example as in its centrality to the reports of the Anglican - Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC). The importance of communion has been prominent in many recent Anglican documents, such as the Windsor report, and we welcome the discussion in §§28–30 on “communion in unity and diversity.” We will comment later in our response on the issue of legitimate diversity, but we would stress that the Church in Wales has been deeply involved in contributing to the life and unity of the Anglican Communion, and to the life of the World Council of Churches.

11. One point which we would raise is that in *TCTCV* there is a strong emphasis on the term *koinonia*, and much less emphasis on the term “covenant.” This term has been central to other Welsh ecclesial traditions, such as the non-conformist churches.⁸ It is also fundamental to the

8. See the paper by Paul Fiddes, “Communion in and for the World”: a Constructive Theological Critique of the Final Part

1975 Enfys Covenant, made by the Church in Wales, the Committee of the Covenanted Baptist Churches in Wales, The Methodist Church, The Presbyterian Church in Wales, and the United Reformed Church.⁹ We wonder whether the use of the word “plan” (§58) strikes a note of being rather static, and lacks a certain dynamism, which is central to the contemporary theological understanding both of *koinonia* and covenant. Nevertheless, we affirm the centrality of the emphasis on unity, especially with its strong relationship to the missionary nature of the Church.

12. The Church in Wales sees itself as autocephalous, and therefore as a self-governing church within the Anglican Communion. This has had important implications in recent years in debates on the proposed Anglican Covenant, when the Church in Wales felt that it was important that the integrity of its governance was preserved, while seeking to participate fully in the life of the Anglican Communion. There is much in *TCTCV* which offers itself as a rich resource for further reflection on the tension between autonomy and interdependence, such as §53 on synodality and conciliarity. The point is well made in §53 that the “quality of synodality or conciliarity reflects the mystery of the trinitarian life of God, and the structures of the Church express this quality so as to actualize the community’s life as a communion.” The sometimes fractious life of the Anglican Communion

of *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (Faith and Order Paper No. 214). Quoted by permission.

9. <http://www.cytun.org.uk/covenant75.html>

in recent decades makes this comment a very searching one for Anglicans.

The place of the Virgin Mary

13. The Marian discussion in §15 would not be recognized by many congregations within our Church. However the medieval heritage of the Church in Wales is strong, and there was a deep devotion to Mary at that time. Some congregations would still very much reflect that emphasis today. The discussion in §15 is balanced and helpful, building on the ARCIC statement *Mary Grace and Hope in Christ*, and the report from the Groupe des Dombes. However we were surprised by the use of the term *Theotokos* in brackets after the reference to “Mary, the Mother of God” in this paragraph, and suggest a more neutral term could have been found.

(ii) To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?

14. *TCTCV* offers a basis for growth in unity and the importance of retaining a “common vision,” while every church in Wales struggles with issues of management and preventing decline, is of central importance. The early movement to closer unity in Wales, including the Enfys covenant, was deeply inspired by the work of both the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches (described in the first page of this submission) and the British Council of Churches.¹⁰ As noted above in paragraph 10 of our response,

10. <http://www.cytun.org.uk/covenant75.html>

the Church in Wales entered into a Covenant for Union in 1975 (later named Enfys) which brought together the Church in Wales, the Presbyterian Church in Wales, the Methodist Church (in Wales) and the United Reformed Church of England and Wales. In 1977 certain Baptist churches came into the covenant. Since 2005, this Covenant for Union – formerly called Enfys – has now found a new home within Cytun (Churches Together in Wales) and is called The Covenanted Churches within Cytun. It was this body which produced *The Gathering*.

15. Ecumenism needs to be taken forward in the very different world of the 21st century in a new way. This document offers a fresh language through which an understanding of vision and hope might inspire the ecumenical activity of the Church in Wales. Our hope is that as the early work of the World Council of Churches produced the Enfys Covenant, so *TCTCV* may inspire further activity in Wales, which includes but goes beyond *The Gathering*. We suggest that all the churches in Wales could arrange study groups on this document, such as Lent Groups, as a way of finding inspiration and hope for a rekindling of the ecumenical quest within Wales.

16. The Church in Wales is already deeply involved in the follow-up to *The Gathering*,¹¹ and is an active member of Cytun at the congregational, regional

11. Commission of the Covenanted Churches in Wales, Papers on *Church Governance, and Pastoral Oversight* (Cardiff: Cytun, 2012).

and national level, as well as participating in the umbrella body Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. *The Gathering* is a proposal by the Commission of the Covenanted Churches in Wales to bring about the reconciliation of ministries, and to work for a united church in Wales. The launch of *The Gathering* in Aberystwyth in 2012 was attended by Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches. We can certainly affirm this text as a valued and useful contribution to our search for greater unity among the churches.

Apostolic succession

17. Anglicans will have a particular concern for the threefold order of the ordained ministry in the Church. In our response to *The Gathering*, we said:

Anglicans will want to affirm the threefold nature of ministry, and to argue that ordained ministry is in continuity with a pre-existing tradition given by the Spirit, which establishes the authority and validity of its orders. Any pragmatic solution would put at risk the nature of Anglican ministry, and the unity of the Body of Christ. However what is of great value in *The Gathering* is precisely the way in which the act of reconciliation of ministries . . . can be seen as an enriching of Anglican order.

18. Therefore our approach to *TCTCV* would be the same as our response to *The Gathering*. Paragraph 47 of *TCTCV* refers to both the historic episcopate and the apostolic succession of

ordained ministry. The Church in Wales would want to affirm the importance of historic episcopal succession, while noting that the Church in Wales agreed to the Porvoo Common Statement and Declaration in 1992, with episcopal churches which have not always had continuity in episcopal succession. Apostolic succession as the continuity of episcopacy with the laying on of hands has always been valued for Anglicans not simply for its own sake but as a sign of the fullness of the church. Indeed, there have been a series of ecumenical reports from the Anglican Communion, such as the 1987 *Niagara Report* between Anglicans and Lutherans,¹² or the 1997 *Virginia Report*, which have both seen apostolicity in much broader terms than simply the laying on of hands. The *Virginia Report*, at paragraph 4:27, said:

The apostolicity of a particular church is measured by its consonance with the living elements of apostolic succession and unity: baptism and Eucharist, the Nicene and Apostles' creeds, the ordered ministry and the canon of Scripture. These living elements of apostolic succession serve the authentic succession of the gospel and serve to keep the

12. Paragraph 20 of the Niagara Report says: "Study of the life of the early Christian communities reflected in the pages of the New Testament should make it unthinkable for us to isolate ordination at the hands of someone in linear succession to the apostles as the sole criterion of faithfulness to the apostolic commission. . . . Thus to speak of 'apostolic succession' is to speak primarily of characteristics of the whole Church; and to recognize a Church as being 'in the apostolic succession' is to use not one criterion of discernment, but many."

various levels of the Church in a communion of truth and life.

The 1998 Lambeth Conference, at Resolution IV.1 also addressed this issue. It said that it:

recognises that the process of moving towards full, visible unity may entail temporary anomalies, and believes that some anomalies may be bearable when there is an agreed goal of visible unity, but that there should always be an impetus towards their resolution and, thus, towards the removal of the principal anomaly of disunity.

19. Anglicans accept that the process to unity will include the possibility of churches being in error, as Article XIX makes clear. However, at the same time, Anglicans will also want to cite the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral at this point. It is important to note that the Quadrilateral was conceived as a basis for reunion. It says:

- a) the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as "containing all things necessary to salvation," and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith
- b) the Apostles' Creed, as the Baptismal Symbol; and the Nicene Creed, as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith
- c) the two Sacraments ordained by Christ Himself – Baptism and the Supper of the Lord – ministered with unfailing use of Christ's words of Institution, and of the elements ordained by Him

d) the Historic Episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the Unity of His Church.

20. The inclusion of episcopacy remains central to the Anglican understanding of ecclesiology, although our response to *The Gathering* discussed how local adaptation could be possible if the other churches in Wales could receive episcopacy into their churches by an act of reconciliation of ministries. Such an understanding of episcopacy in *The Gathering's* report on Pastoral Oversight recommended that the non-conformist churches in Wales accept bishops into their own life, as part of a scheme of reunion, and at this point the phrase “locally adapted” would become important.

Pentecostal and non-denominational Christianity

21. One new factor in ecumenism in the last decade has been the emergence of Pentecostal churches in Wales, and especially new forms of Pentecostalism. These have often been active in local communities and church schools. The emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit in the document, referred to in our next paragraph on the renewal of the church, also offers considerable resources for dialogue with the Pentecostal churches. It is increasingly the case that globally the historical Pentecostal churches are beginning to grow in their engagement with other churches ecumenically, and this is also true within the Anglican Communion. We welcome this emphasis. Another emphasis is that

increasingly young people reject the traditional identification with denominations, preferring to focus on a Christological or pneumatological understanding of their faith. Equally their identification of themselves as Christians is often deeply experiential, affective and seen as a living reality somewhat at odds with precise doctrinal formulations. Young people in emerging churches, such as house churches, have an overriding concern for mission and evangelism, sharing their feelings about the “good news.” This means that such emerging churches are seldom identified with formal ecumenism and would often challenge the approach found in *TCTCV*. The growth of new expressions of church has so far not developed very far in Wales, although there are some signs in the capital city of Cardiff (in this respect the growth of new expressions of church is quite different from England), but it is important to realize that there is now a profound challenge to the ecumenical movement and its history. At the same time recent technological developments, such as the internet and forms of social media, have also facilitated such new forms of Christianity. There have been considerable studies of this development in England and it would be good if the churches in Wales could also carry out their own research.

(iii) What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?

Ministry Areas and Church Renewal

22. The emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit (pneumatology) is closely related to renewal on

page viii of the text. Paragraph 2 in the main text of *TCTCV* stresses the power of the Holy Spirit in Acts 1:8, while §3 looks to Pentecost, as the equipping of the disciples for the salvation of the world (sometimes called *Missio Dei*). Paragraphs 17–20 on the prophetic, royal and priestly people of God take further the sections on ministry in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. Paragraph 21 stresses the gifts of the Holy Spirit as central to the understanding of the Church, and this would again reflect the life of many congregations, as they seek greater renewal in the Spirit.

23. Much of the energy of the Church in Wales at the moment is taken up with renewal through the creation of “Ministry Areas,” and the search for new forms of mission. Such changes in the life of the Church in Wales work at many levels. They are both about structure, geographical boundaries, and also about governance, as the Church in Wales considers changes to its constitution drawn up in 1920. These changes are seen as vital for the release of the work of the Spirit. The on-going reorganization of the Church in Wales into Ministry Areas, where parishes are grouped into much larger areas which contain a partnership of laity and clergy for the sake of mission, echoes the discussion in §32 of *TCTCV* about levels of order.¹³ This is the primary focus of recent changes in governance inside the Church in Wales, and is a way of reshaping

13. §32 says : “Finally there is not yet agreement about how local, regional and universal levels of ecclesial order relate to one another, although valuable steps in seeking convergence about those relations can be found in both multilateral and bilateral dialogues.”

these relationships into a new pattern of ministry. The challenge to the Church in Wales is to enable the establishment of new Ministry Areas without slipping into a form of church management. The issue of “how local, regional and universal levels of ecclesial order relate to one another” (§32) raises the question of church governance, and this section of *TCTCV* is a helpful contribution to this debate.

(iv) How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement?

24. The Church in Wales is already deeply involved in much ecumenical activity, both within Wales, and through the Meissen, Porvoo and Reuilly Agreements. This text will be helpful in furthering these relationships. It is also deeply involved in the global Anglican dialogue, and the experience of this global dialogue needs to be kept in mind as the Church in Wales discerns its own future within Wales. We have already referred in paragraphs 14 and 15 to *The Gathering* process in Wales, which is central to the state of ecumenism within Wales at the moment. In particular, the references in *TCTCV* to ordained ministry in §§46 and 47, and also in §§52–53 on the ministry of oversight offer a resource for future discussions. There is at the moment some uncertainty as to how far “closer relationships in life and mission” will be achieved by the churches involved in *The Gathering*, but all churches in Wales acknowledge the importance of the call to unity by Christ in John 17:21. It should

also be acknowledged sadly that the development of new “Local Ecumenical Projects” has declined in Wales in recent years, with little engagement from Anglican parishes.

(v) What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

Relationships with the people of Israel

25. The World Council of Churches explicitly precludes supersessionism in §17 by asserting God’s faithfulness to the first covenant. The consensus reached in this paragraph is a genuine achievement, and the final text was agreed by the International Council for Christians and Jews. Nevertheless, because of the continuing reality of anti-Semitism, we suggest further reflection is necessary by the World Council of Churches. A paper by Dr Patmore giving our full reasons, which has been agreed by the members of the Doctrinal Commission, is appended to this response.¹⁴ It is important to note that because of the enduring reality of the first covenant, and its relationship to the new covenant in Christ, the relationship between the Church and Judaism is unlike other inter-religious dialogue.

The reality of conflict, and legitimate diversity

26. The Church in Wales has experienced the reality of rapid and intense cultural and personal

change across Welsh society in recent decades, especially in the areas of gender and sexuality. In part this has caused conflict within the life of the Church in Wales, and in part it has led to a new attempt to listen to what its members believe. So our second recommendation would be to study further the relationship between ecclesial life and ethics, and church life and conflict. The World Council of Churches has already done excellent work in this area,¹⁵ and §63 refers to this material: “Individual Christians and churches sometimes find themselves divided into opposing opinions about what principles of personal or collective morality are in harmony with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.” However, it is not simply about principles. It is also about processes, and we repeat again the experiential and affective nature of many newer forms of Christianity, that we noted in §21. What matters is that conflict is handled in a way that respects feelings and the deeply personal nature of church disagreement. We also note the impressive theological work of the Anglican Communion, through the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission, and the Indaba process, which has sought out ways of responding to disagreement and conflict.¹⁶ We suggest this work needs

15. *Moral Discernment in the Churches*, Faith and Order Paper No. 215 (Geneva: WCC, 2013).

16. *Communion, Conflict and Hope*, The Kuala Lumpur Report of the third Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission, 2008. The Anglican Communion began a process of dialogue and reconciliation after the 2008 Lambeth Conference, known as the Indaba Process. It is described at <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/reconciliation.aspx>. There is also Phil Groves and Angharad Parry Jones, *Living Reconciliation* (SPCK, 2014).

14. [Not included with submission – Ed.]

urgently to continue, across denominations. The WCC is well fitted to pursue such an engagement.

27. However the issue of legitimate diversity is related to that of conflict. We welcome the emphasis in §30 on “legitimate diversity” in the life of communion as a gift to be received, and not simply as a problem to be resolved, and this certainly is how the Church in Wales, with its many and varied ecclesial traditions, would see itself as it enters the 21st century. Nevertheless, the issue of competing understandings of salvation is a very real one. In §22 *TCTCV* says that “all the churches understand themselves as founded in the one Gospel (cf. Gal. 1: 5-9).” This is a bold claim and the referent of the term “Gospel” can be widely different for different users of the term. Christianity has affirmed unity in faith without always providing clarity on how that unity is expressed, especially on the doctrine of the atonement. The main point is that God has acted in Christ without stating precisely how this has been achieved. We suggest that it would be helpful if further work was done on soteriology in the churches within the WCC.

The Church in society, and the relationship of moral issues to that of doctrine

28. Another area which we draw attention to is the work of “The Church in Society,” especially in terms of caring for the needy and marginalized (§66). This has been very much a feature both of the life of the Church in Wales and of Cytun in recent years, as Wales suffers great poverty in some areas. Church leaders have spoken on many occasions about the challenges of economic, social

and cultural deprivation, and they have seen this expression of concern as an integral part of the Church’s mission. Much recent New Testament scholarship, such as that of Bishop Tom Wright, has linked the understanding of salvation found in the gospels and in St Paul, with the resurrection as the renewal of heaven and earth, and the establishment of a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17). This has profound implications for the relationship of soteriology to moral issues, and the challenge to the Church in mission to work for a social order that reflects this new creation.

29. We have two suggestions for renewed work by the World Council of Churches. One is to take further the relationship of moral issues to the doctrine of salvation. The other is that, since environmental issues have only two brief references in §§62 and 65, more work could be done on both these areas, in relationship to the doctrine of the Church. There has of course been study by the WCC on eco-justice,¹⁷ but it is important that this substantial ethical work is incorporated into the ecumenical discussion of ecclesiology, and related to the doctrine of salvation. Paragraphs 71 and 79 of the recently published papal encyclical *Laudato Si* link environmental ethics to the doctrine of salvation; and in paragraphs 233–6 offers a profound meditation on the doctrine of the sacraments to a concern for the beauty and wellbeing of the environment. “Thus, the Eucharist is also

17. <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/2009/report-on-public-issues/statement-on-eco-justice-and-ecological-debt>

a source of light and motivation for our concerns for the environment, directing us to be stewards of all creation” (paragraph 236).¹⁸ This encyclical is a challenge to the WCC to relate its own study of the sacraments (*TCTCV*, §§40–44) to an environmental ethic.

Canon Dr Peter Sedgwick
Chair, Standing Doctrinal Commission,
Church in Wales.
July 3, 2015: Feast of St Thomas

18. *Laudato Si'* (Catholic Truth Society, 2015), para 236, 2015.

7. Presbyterian Church in Canada

Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee

17 December 2015

Dear Dr Tveit,

On behalf of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, I would like to say thank you to all those involved, through the World Council of Churches, in preparing the documents *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, and *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*.

Both documents were introduced by our Committee at the annual General Assembly in June 2014, and the Assembly commended them to the denomination for study and report by January 2015. Although a deadline was necessary in order for the Committee to report to the next General Assembly in June 2015, we encouraged presbyteries, sessions, and others to use the documents and share their responses in the future as well. We were very much aware that the primary value in both documents would be to foster lively theological discussion within The Presbyterian Church in Canada both on the nature of the church, and on mission and evangelism in the church today.

Study guides were prepared by Rev. Dr Ron Wallace. These are attached for the interest of the

World Council of Churches.¹ Although the number of written responses from presbyteries and sessions were relatively few in number, we anticipate that both documents will serve as useful resources for our church in our mission, ministry, and ecumenical relationships.

Because the documents were distributed at the same time, there was a tendency among respondents to compare and contrast them, especially in terms of their accessibility and perceived usefulness. *Together Towards Life* was certainly experienced more positively because it was somewhat easier to read and understand, and there was a sense of its immediate applicability to congregations in their day-to-day ministry as well as their planning for future ministry and mission. For example, one presbytery reported that they were recommending *Together Towards Life* to their sessions and congregations as a six-week study that could help them re-evaluate the central purpose of their congregations. In contrast, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* was a very difficult read for many ruling elders in our presbyteries and sessions who attempted to study and report on it.

1. [The study guides were not included with the submission – Ed.]

Here are a few representative comments regarding *Together Towards Life*:

- [It is] a worthwhile document to study, and provides a perspective on evangelism and mission that is both challenging and horizon-expanding.
- The report offers constructive guidance in how we should approach mission in today’s diverse world. It also emphasizes our responsibility with respect to stewardship of God’s Creation in the face of a materialistic society and consumption-oriented economy.
- Along with the study guide, this document would make a very fruitful study for Lent.
- The Court felt this to be a strong, encouraging, and helpful document, and we agreed that “mission flows out of the love of the Trinity.”
- I like the idea that they stressed that “We tend to understand and practice mission as something done by humanity to others. Instead, humans can participate in communion with all of creation in celebrating the work of the Creator.”
- I was pleasantly surprised by the themes of social justice, respect for all human beings, active listening, attention to care of our planet, and to being a “living example” of God in the world.

Several responses noted that the document is challenging because it brings to light some of the things that we are not doing well at this time. Although the majority of responses were very positive about the document, some found the academic level of the writing difficult, and one took

issue with the treatment of free market capitalism as completely negative.

Although our committee received fewer responses to *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, some sessions, presbyteries, and individuals took considerable time to study and report on it. While some felt overwhelmed by the theological language and content, others responded quite positively:

The report effectively describes the current state of agreement among member churches of the WCC, as well as areas where there are still differences. By the use of questions it encourages churches to consider their positions to see if further agreement can be reached towards achieving unity. As such it warrants further study by the The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

The majority of respondents felt ill-equipped to read and understand such a complex theological document, and some indicated that any response from our denomination should be formulated by the Church Doctrine committee alone. Although some questioned the usefulness of such a theological document about ecumenism, they indicated that ecumenical cooperation was important and that it was already taking place at the local level. Indeed, one suggested that true unity can only develop at the local level. One response highlighted the need to respect differences in our beliefs, noting that “our bond of union is our service to the one Lord.”

One response from an ordained minister in our denomination warrants sharing in its entirety. The attached review by Rev. James T. Hurd includes detailed comments on the text from a Reformed perspective.² Hurd suggests that it would be helpful to clarify agreed “marks of the church” at the beginning of the document, and he outlines what Reformed Christians understand the marks of the church to be. He also points out a tendency in the document to over-emphasize the sacrament of the Lord’s supper over the sacrament of baptism, as well as to suggest that worship must always be eucharistic. He notes that there are many terms used in the document without definitions being provided (for example: apostolic succession, chrismation, faith, sacrament). While we may think that these terms do not need definition because we all know what they mean, we may encounter challenges when we discover that different churches understand them differently.

Although Hurd’s detailed analysis includes a healthy portion of critique, it also affirms many aspects of *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, and concludes:

On the whole, the document is an interesting summary of ecumenical conversations. The foregoing review is offered in a spirit of constructive response from a reformed, confessional position, and with the caveat that the length and complexity of the document is likely to prove challenging for most ruling elders within our communion.

2. [Not included with submission – Ed.]

Please be assured of our encouragement and prayers for the World Council of Churches, and especially for those who are receiving the responses of churches around the world at this time. May God continue to guide your efforts as together we seek the unity of the one Church of God for the sake of the world God loves.

Sincerely,

Rev. Amanda Currie, Convener
Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee
The Presbyterian Church in Canada

8. United Protestant Church of France

(Translated from the French)

The Faith and Order document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)* provides an important summary of 30 years of multilateral dialogue on ecclesiology. It highlights the points of agreement or convergence, the points on which major differences remain, and the points where the authors believe there is a divergence in vocabulary but a convergence of ideas. The general structure of the text, which concludes each part with a direct question to the reader, is skillfully designed because it allows everyone, and not just academic theologians, to take part in the discussion.

1. To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of our church?

Generally speaking, we have the feeling that there is a tension between chapters 1 and 2 on the one hand, and 3 and 4 on the other. Chapters 1 and 2 (God's Mission and the Unity of the Church, The Church of the Triune God) expound in a categorical tone the absolutes of an ecclesiology "from above"; chapters 3 and 4 (The Church: Growing in Communion, The Church In and For the World) open up a pleasant space for questioning and discussing open questions. As regards form and content, we find a much more faithful echo of

our ecclesiological conceptions and our practices in the last two chapters than in the first two.

In order to answer the first question in more detail, we would like to propose several substantive reflections which are grouped under headings, followed by a terminological clarification and several questions in return.

The holy and sinful Church in anticipation of the kingdom of God

Is the Church tasked with transforming the world in order to fulfill the promise of the kingdom? Is it the link between the world and the kingdom, the means by which we go from the first to the second? We believe we must answer "yes" and "no" to these questions, because the Church stands simultaneously under the "yes" of grace and the "no" of judgment. Our ecclesiology is well reflected in the assertion that the Church acts in the service of the kingdom only by "anticipation," and that it is "the Holy Spirit" who guides it "so that it can be a servant of God's work in this process" (§33). It seems essential to us to never lose sight of this assertion, because it wisely qualifies the text's passages which tend to make the Church, in its "essential holiness" (§22), a key and decisive agent in the destiny of the world and the history of salvation (§1). Instead of glorious visions

of the Church and its mission, we prefer ecclesiological models which are characterized more by the theme of the cross. In keeping with this, we believe we must emphasize the Church's belonging to the created world, its vulnerability to sin which can affect its structures. Contrary to what the document suggests in some places, it seems to us not only possible but theologically desirable to speak of the sin of the Church, and not only of the "sinfulness of the messengers" (§5), of "human sinfulness" (§6). Does this entail underscoring the sinful character of the Church to the detriment of its holiness? This was not Luther's intention when he declared in his sermon on Easter Day in 1531: "There is no greater sinner than the Christian Church,"¹ and this is not our intention either. But through the heritage of our reformers, we embrace the ancient theme of the Church as *casta meretrix*, as it was also highlighted anew in Roman Catholic theology at the time of the Second Vatican Council,² notably by Hans Urs von Balthasar³ and in

1. Luther's Collected Works, Weimarer Ausgabe, 34/I.276.7.

2. See Karl Rahner, "Sündige Kirche nach den Dekreten des zweiten vatikanischen Konzils," *Schriften zur Theologie* IV (Einsiedeln, 1965); see also Giuseppe Alberigo, "Péché et sainteté dans l'Église pèlerine," *Revue des Sciences Religieuses*, vol. 71, issue 2, 1997, 233–252. On the return and development of this theme of the *Ecclesia sancta simul et semper purificanda* in Paul VI, John-Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis, see Jacques Servais, "The Confession of the Casta Meretrix," *Communio* 40, Winter 2013, 642–662 (French version: "La confession de la Casta Meretrix," *Communio* XXXIX, 4 no. 234 [July-August 2014], 103–120).

3. See Hans Urs Von Balthasar, "Casta meretrix" [1948], in *Sponsa Verbi. Skizzen zur Theologie* II, (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1961), 203–305.

the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium* (§8): "While Christ, holy, innocent and undefiled (Heb. 7:26) knew nothing of sin (2 Cor. 5:21), but came to expiate only the sins of the people (cf. Heb. 2:17), the Church, embracing in its bosom sinners, at the same time holy and always in need of being purified, always follows the way of penance and renewal."⁴

The ordained ministry and the sensus fidelium

We question the considerable weight given to the ordained ministries throughout the exposition, particularly in §48. As footnote 19 appropriately points out, the "basic description" which this paragraph gives of "the authority of Jesus and its sharing with the Church closely paraphrases the description offered by the Orthodox-Roman Catholic Ravenna Statement (2007)."⁵ While the fact that this discourse on the authority of Jesus and its transfer to those who are "consecrated for the ministry of oversight" in the Church originates from an Orthodox-Catholic document obviously does not disqualify it *per se*, our Protestant point of view makes us ask if this transfer is not based on a confusion of two levels which it would be worthwhile to better distinguish between: the level of the spiritual authority of the person who proclaims the gospel and the level of the organizational authority of ecclesial structures. These reservations are, how-

4. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html

5. *TCTCV*, §27.

ever, counterbalanced by §19, which reminds us that “all members of the body, ordained and lay, are interrelated members of God’s priestly people.” Similarly, we appreciate that, after judiciously distinguishing between power and authority (§§49 and 50), the document declares: “The authority which Jesus Christ . . . shares with those in ministries of leadership is neither only personal, nor only delegated by the community . . . Its exercise includes the participation of the whole community, whose sense of the faith (*sensus fidei*) contributes to the overall understanding of God’s Word and whose reception of the guidance and teaching of the ordained ministers testifies to the authenticity of that leadership” (§51). This reminder of the importance of the *sensus fidelium*⁶ can only receive our full assent.

Which scale for which ecclesiology?

It would seem useful to develop an ecclesiological reflection on scales, particularly with regard to the ministry of “primacy” (§55). Are we talking about the same Church and the same unity when we are talking about two or three gathered in the name of the Lord, about a community which is responsible for a building, and about hundreds of millions of people throughout the world? The problems are certainly not the same, but is

6. See §51: “The ‘sense’ for the authentic meaning of the Gospel that is shared by the whole people of God, the insights of those dedicated in a special way to biblical and theological studies, and the guidance of those especially consecrated for the ministry of oversight, all collaborate in the discernment of God’s will for the community.”

the nature of the Church the same, and are the guarantees offered to testify to its unity the same? Regarding the ministry of “primacy,” is it enough to say that it expresses an image of unity which accords with the will of God? Should we not identify what it implies as a growing presence of the institution, as a development of systems of power, as a mode of communication and representation inside and outside the Church? Should we not also identify what speaking at the level of the whole of Christianity means, and to whom this speech is addressed: with which authorities and in which field of competence will it enter into dialogue, which new laws will it be subject to?

On the proper use of Trinitarian language

Trinitarian language obviously has its rightful place in our church. We consider it a very precious part of our spiritual and doctrinal heritage, but are wary of a lexical fetishism which would make trinitarian language a final vocabulary, a transcendental signifier, a master word which claims to reduce to univocality the generous polyphony of languages about God which the biblical tradition offers us. The emphatic use of the expression “Church of the Triune God” in the title of and throughout chapter 2 therefore elicits some reservations in us, and we would prefer to speak here of the “Church of Jesus Christ.” However, the expression “Church of the Triune God” is preferable to that of “God the Trinity” (see “Historical Note”), whose substantive nature seems more questionable to us.

What “secular” means (and does not mean): terminological precision

In the French translation of the document, §7 mentions the “advance of a global secular culture,” while §65 mentions Christians who “have at times colluded with secular authorities in ways that condoned or even abetted sinful and unjust activities.” In the first case, it would be better to speak of “secularized culture.” In the second, it would be more idiomatic to speak of civil or political authorities. In the context of French political culture and its internal debates over the theological-political question, it would be unwise and even counterproductive to give the word “secular” an anti-religious meaning which French law does not specifically intend to give it: “Secularism is not one opinion among others but the freedom to have one. It is not a conviction but the principle which authorizes all of them, subject to respect for the principles of freedom of conscience and equal rights. This is why it is neither pro- nor anti-religious.”⁷

Questions in return

a) The Preface mentions the “biblical vision of humanity,” quoting 1 Cor. 12:12-13.⁸ To us this seems like a strange extrapolation of Paul’s text, which is limited to the community of the baptized.

7. “La laïcité aujourd’hui.” Note d’orientation de l’Observatoire de la laïcité, 27 May 2014, §1.

8. Translator’s note: the English original of *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* reads “biblical vision of Christian unity.”

Wouldn’t it be better to speak here of a biblical vision of the Church, and not of humanity?

b) On several occasions, proclaiming Jesus Christ within an interreligious context is mentioned (see Introduction and §7). However, this context (depending on the country, of course) is largely an areligious context. Is not the mission of the Church expected here at least to the same degree?

c) The question of the ministry of unity (§§56 and 57) is perhaps less controversial than it seems at first glance. We are not opposed in principle to the very idea of a collegial ministry of unity. But is it possible to separate form and content here by deciding on the possibility of a ministry of unity without deciding on the conditions for its exercise?

2. To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?

We believe that growth in visible unity is a laudable objective and worthy of being pursued, but we are skeptical about the text’s assumptions and proposals on the nature of this unity and the means of achieving it. We endorse its basic intention, but it seems to us that the notion of visible unity requires conceptual clarifications which the text as it stands does not offer. What visible unity are we talking about? In which institutional bodies, in which ecclesiastical structures should this unity manifest itself or be concretized?

The text repeatedly mentions (particularly in §31 and 32) the relationships which should be

established between two ecclesiological poles: the local and the universal. But which local churches are meant here? And what is this universal Church which would face them in a meeting deprived of any confessional or denominational mediation? That the universality of the Church is the theological perspective of all particular churches is an obvious fact which does not lend itself to discussion *per se*. However, difficulties crop up once the universal Church ceases to be a theological abstraction and takes on substance, a consistency, institutional concreteness. This passage from the abstract universal to the concrete universal characterizes the passage from invisible to visible unity. Thus, care must be taken so as not to allow the theological meaning of unity or universality to take on an institutional significance and meaning without rigorously defining and delimiting the latter. In itself, there is nothing illegitimate about the transformation of an ecclesiological ideal into ecclesiastical politics; the problem instead arises from the surreptitious superimposing of a theological-spiritual meaning and a geographic-administrative meaning of the universal Church and its unity.

On the one hand, the text speaks of the local expression of the universal Church as if it were an entity which can be identified by territorial delimitation; on the other hand, in some passages the universal Church appears as a Church of churches, an authority whose jurisdiction encompasses all of the local churches and their respective territories. Even if we imagine that there is a union of churches which includes all of the churches throughout the inhabited earth, would this union be authorized

to identify itself as the universal Church? It seems to us that even in this purely hypothetical case, a strict distinction should be maintained between universality in the spiritual and theological sense, and universality in the administrative and territorial sense.

3. What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?

This text invites us to seriously reflect on a distinction between the ministry of the Church and the ministry of people (we attribute a part of the italic paragraph which comes after §44 to this distinction). A real reflection on this distinction would allow us to grow in communion, even in unity. The text also invites us to meditate on the forms of unity (particularly centered around §§56–57 and the subsequent italics). These paragraphs, among many others, call for exercises in ecclesiology-fiction from which our church can learn much. We also find interesting proposals regarding the question of recognized and ordained ministries, as well as good bases for starting a dialogue on these topics. Paragraph 19 deserves particular attention in this respect, because it tackles the question of each person's individual ecclesial responsibility in an innovative way. However, we would like to note that there is no well-constructed answer at the moment. Constructing it will undoubtedly require a reflection on shared authority and mutual submission. The text can also serve us as a starting point for thinking about the "maternity of the Church," a task for which Protestantism, particularly in its Calvinist tradition, is not as

devoid of resources as one might initially think. The text also encourages reopening the question of episcopal authority, both personal and collegial, but it would be worthwhile to undertake this work not only in light of the recent works on this subject by the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, but also in light of the experience of the *Reuilly Common Statement*, which demonstrates that the absence of episcopal organization is not an obstacle to eucharistic hospitality.

4. How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement?

This somewhat strange question calls for another question in return: is being able to “acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement” a precondition for strengthening relations between churches? It would be truly strange to make real relationships of convergence depend in this way on doctrinal elements. On the contrary, is it not in and through common action on the ground that ways of doctrinal convergence can also open up?

5. What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

Most of the points addressed in the document call for further discussion. These points are carefully listed, but is it not time to go beyond the inventory

stage? Problems relating to authority, the magisterium, ministry, etc., should no longer be just named and referred to the churches as questions; instead, concrete proposals should be submitted for discussion. Thus, could not the question of “divisive diversity,” which in the course of the debate could become “legitimate diversity,” be tackled more boldly and lead to real progress (particularly with regard to the understanding of ministry and eucharistic hospitality)? Taking account of the many bilateral dialogues over the past 20 years would contribute greatly to advancing the multilateral dialogue on these various issues. We believe that the multilateral dialogue favored by Faith and Order can and must serve as a framework and regulatory body for bilateral dialogues. But the time has come to recognize that multilateral dialogue will be sorely lacking in substance as long as it claims to ignore the concrete, limited, and undoubtedly ambiguous but very real progress made in bilateral dialogues.⁹

This question is obviously not unrelated to that of the local churches. The local churches as the WCC still understands them seem very theoretical

9. For example in the Report of the Third Phase of the International Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (1998–2005), *The Church as Community of Common Witness to the Kingdom of God* (2005), or in the rapprochement between the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation brought about in the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (1999) and in the report *From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017* (2012), or in the Reuilly Declaration (2001), fruit of the dialogue between the Lutheran and Reformed churches in France, and the Anglican and Episcopalian churches in the United Kingdom and Ireland.

to us. Local churches are always the local churches of a particular confession. The program of “abandoning confessional identities” and the corollary creation of a “conciliar fellowship of local churches” formulated at the Nairobi Assembly in 1975 no longer seem viable to us. Despite this, multilateral dialogue has lost none of its relevance and utility, but it must be understood from now on as a complement rather than as an alternative to bilateral dialogue (in the spirit of the works of W. Pannenberg¹⁰ and A. Birmelé¹¹ on this subject).

10. Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Faith and Order in der ökumenischen Bewegung,” *Ökumenische Rundschau* 31, 47–59.

11. André Birmelé, “L’Église, vers une vision commune. Un nouveau texte de *Foi et Constitution*,” *Positions luthériennes* 2014/2 (April–June 2014), 91–106.

9. Salvation Army

Introduction

The preface of *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)* sets out the primary purpose of the World Council of Churches Commission on Faith and Order: “to serve the churches as they call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one Eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world, and advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe.”¹

This “necessarily entails a mutual recognition of each other as churches,”² despite difference, not only in practice but also in ecclesiology. *TCTCV* is a welcome step in this process, and represents significant convergence in important areas without claiming full consensus on all issues considered. The notion of convergence is significant. It indicates a willingness to seek common ground and shared understanding where possible whilst not assuming that all differences have been resolved or are irrelevant. It is movement *towards* unity which acknowledges diversity.

The Salvation Army welcomes the invitation to respond to the document and the following is respectfully submitted as a contribution to the conversation.

The ecclesiological self-understanding of The Salvation Army places it firmly within the universal Church.

Salvationists are members of the one body of Christ. We share common ground with the universal church whilst manifesting our own characteristics. As one particular expression of the Church, The Salvation Army participates with other Christian denominations and congregations in mission and ministry. We are part of the one, universal Church.³

We believe that the Church, the Body of Christ on earth, often referred to in the New Testament as “the saints” (*hoi hagioi* – Ephesians 1:23), comprises all who are born not of natural descent, nor of human decision, or a husband’s will, but born of God (John 1:13). The Church Universal includes all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, confessing him as Saviour and Lord, and witnessing to that sacred commitment through loving mutual submission (Matthew 18:15-20; John 13:34, 35; Ephesians 5:21) and sacrificial service (Mark 8:34; Matthew 20:25-28; John 13:1-17).⁴

1. *TCTCV*, vii.

2. *Ibid.*, vii.

3. The Salvation Army 2010, *Handbook of Doctrine*, 247.

4. The Salvation Army 2008, *The Salvation Army in the Body of Christ: An Ecclesiological Statement*, 3.

There is much in *TCTCV* with which The Salvation Army is in accord and which reflects our focus and purpose. We would want to acknowledge these points of concord whilst acknowledging that there are areas in which our belief and practice diverge from the assumptions of the text.

The response will be framed according to the questions set out in the introduction of the document.

1. To what extent does the text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church? >

The text of *The Church* explores four key areas in order to seek common ground. In each chapter there is resonance with the ecclesiological understanding of The Salvation Army.

In chapter 1, the description of the church as “missionary,” finding its origin in the mission of God, lies at the heart of Salvationist self-awareness. It is reflected in the name; we are a *salvation* army, and the conviction that transformation is at the heart of the gospel message is fundamental to our faith. The description of a “community of witness, proclaiming the kingdom which Jesus has first proclaimed . . .,” a community of worship, and a community of discipleship (*CTCV* §2) encompasses key aspects of Salvationist life and ministry. The imperative to offer hope and healing to a wounded and divided world is a fundamental motivation, from the daily activities of the smallest local corps (church), to the strategic planning of International Headquarters.

The challenge of finding appropriate and respectful means by which to proclaim the Gospel, by word and deed, in a variety of contexts, languages and cultures (§6), is ever present. Similarly, the need to allow for contextual and cultural understanding, response, and Christian practice, without compromising the essential content of the message, is vital.

Chapter 2 notes that the normativity of the Bible ensures that ecclesiological understanding remains rooted in the purposes of God as revealed in scripture. It is further shaped by the historical interpretation of key biblical texts and the broad sweep of the biblical message. The significance of both the Old and New Testaments in ecclesiological understanding are explored. This is consistent with Salvationist faith and belief which affirms that “we believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God, and that they only constitute the Divine rule of faith and practice.”⁵

The chapter describes the Church as called into being by God, centred and grounded on the Gospel, and through the Holy Spirit believers are incorporated into spiritual union with Christ, nourished and empowered for service. The significance of *koinonia* for Christian unity is summarized succinctly: “As a divinely established communion, the church belongs to God, and does not exist for itself” (§13). *Koinonia* is therefore more than human acceptance or toleration.

Salvationist ecclesiological understanding affirms the importance of *koinonia*, recognizing

5. The Salvation Army 2010, *Handbook of Doctrine*, xv.

the call to the Church to be “a prophetic people, bearing witness to God’s word; a priestly people, offering the sacrifice of a life lived in discipleship; and a royal people, serving as instruments for the establishment of God’s reign” (§19). It finds resonance in the claim that the mission of the Church is fulfilled through the lives and proclamation of its people (§25), acknowledges the profession of the church as one, holy catholic and apostolic (§22), and welcomes the statement that “legitimate diversity in the life of communion is a gift from the Lord” (§28).

Affirmation of the “Father’s design that salvation in Christ be incarnational and thus ‘take flesh’ among the various peoples to whom the Gospel is proclaimed” (§12) is demonstrated in the accepted diversity of Salvation Army expression throughout the world.

However, there are also divergences, which mean that aspects of the above are understood differently from other parts of the church, and this understanding and its associated practice, for some, may place The Salvation Army beyond the scope of “legitimate diversity.” For example, the conviction that sacramental living and the possibility of a holy life do not require the institution of formal sacraments may be seen to be some to be divisive, or disqualifying (see 3 below). The question of who decides upon the legitimacy of diversity is significant. What might be an acceptable point of convergence in this instance, and where is the point of divisive diversity located?

Chapter 3 focuses upon the “growth of the Church as the pilgrim people moving towards

the kingdom of God.”⁶ As a pilgrim community, and the body of Christ, it claims the promise that the gates of hell cannot prevail against it (Matt. 16:18), yet acknowledges its vulnerability to both individual and corporate sin, although the text notes that there are significant differences in the ways in which Christians articulate these convictions, and define terms.

The growth of believers in discipleship is seen to be shaped by faith, sacraments and ministry (§§37ff.). These three are articulated in the aspirational statement relating to the unity of the Church:

The ecclesial elements required for full communion within a visibly united church – the goal of the ecumenical movement – are communion in the fullness of apostolic faith; in the sacramental life; in a truly one and mutually recognized ministry; in structures of conciliar relations and decision making; and in common witness and service in the world.⁷

The widespread consensus that the Church is called to proclaim, in each generation, the faith “once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3) finds agreement in Salvation Army ecclesiology, and commitment to it is evidenced by a wide range of practice throughout the world. The need for contextual interpretation that is consistent with biblical fidelity, and the historic witness of the church

6. *TCTCV* Introduction, 2.

7. *Ibid.* §37. Quotation from “The Church Local and Universal” (1990), §25.

is significant for The Salvation Army, which has a presence in 127 countries.

Throughout *TCTCV* the place of the sacraments in the life of the church is both assumed and expected. The Salvation Army accepts that this is relevant for a large majority of the Christian Church. However, despite the recognition of the need for a wider view than that of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, and acknowledging “those communities who affirm that their vocation does not include the rites of baptism and the eucharist, while affirming that they share in the sacramental life of the Church” (§40), there is a pervasive assumption throughout *TCTCV* that membership of the Church universal must include the celebration of the formal sacraments.

Salvation Army ecclesiology affirms the sacramental nature of the Salvationist community:

We are a sacramental community because our life, our work, and our celebrations centre on Christ, the one true sacrament. Our life together is sacramental because we live by faith in him and our everyday lives reveal and offer unexpected grace, his undeserved gift, again and again.

We also recognize that God uses human beings to bring grace to each other. In a similar way to the prophets and apostles, all believers are called to speak on behalf of God by their words and through their lifestyle. The call to holiness of life is a call to sacramental living – demonstrating the grace of God in the ordinary.

The Salvation Army is a permanent witness to the Church as to the possibility and

practicability, of sanctification without formal sacraments.⁸

We believe that our calling into sanctity without sacraments is not a contradiction of the ways of other churches, but is something beautiful for Christ, to be held in creative tension with the equally beautiful, but very different, practices of other denominations. In the overall economy of God there are no inherent contradictions, but there are creative paradoxes.⁹

Thus, whilst The Salvation Army appreciates the acknowledgment of alternative viewpoints in §40, it also notes its own divergence from assumptions of *TCTCV*. Whilst recognizing the fundamental importance of the sacramental life, Salvationist ecclesiology does not see the sacraments of baptism and eucharist as essential to the life of the pilgrim community.

The third section, ministry, focuses upon leadership and authority in the Church. It notes a variety of understandings of ordination and ministry and looks to the biblical text to give a broad pattern for church governance.

As in some other Christian denominations, ministry in the Salvation Army is essentially viewed as functional rather than as affording a particular status. Salvation Army officers are first of all soldiers – members of the church – and are marked by a calling from God to relinquish secular

8. The Salvation Army 2010, *Handbook of Doctrine*, 269–270.

9. The Salvation Army 2008, *The Salvation Army in the Body of Christ: An Ecclesiological Statement*, 13–14 .

employment and be available to the organization for deployment. Despite the use of the word “ordination” in a Salvation Army officer commissioning ceremony, the ministry of Salvation Army officership does not support a theology of ministry that is essentially different from that of the committed non-officer Salvationist. The Salvation Army believes that all the people of God are called to ministry, exercised according to each individual’s particular calling, gifts and graces.

As an outworking of the conviction that all people are equally created in God’s image, equally redeemed by Christ, equally gifted by God, and equally called to use those gifts as God directs, all forms of Christian leadership in The Salvation Army, at any level of seniority, are open equally to men and women.

The hierarchy of authority and governance in The Salvation Army is structural rather than ecclesial, practical rather than theological. This includes the ministry of oversight (§52). However, the call to understand authority as “humble service, nourishing and building up the *koinonia* of the Church in faith, life and witness . . . a service of love without any domination or coercion” (§49) reflects closely the ecclesiological understanding and aspiration of The Salvation Army. The distinction between power and the pursuit of truth which leads to holiness and therefore “a greater authenticity in relationship with God, with others and with all creation” (§50) finds an echo in the Salvation Army’s requirement that “by reason of the work to which they have committed themselves, and to which they declare themselves to be divinely called, it follows that officers must

first of all live godly lives.”¹⁰ Thus leadership is understood as spiritual leadership and any organizational authority is subservient to the spiritual authority which flows from a calling from God.

Chapter 4, which reflects upon the place of the church in and for the world, finds strong agreement in Salvation Army theology and practice. The imperative to proclaim to all people the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ is central to the Salvationist psyche. The need for respectful communication is taken seriously, whilst affirming that Jesus is the Saviour for all times and all people.

The Salvation Army notes and affirms that

The Church does not stand in isolation from the moral struggles of humankind as a whole. Together with adherents of other religions as well as with all persons of good will, Christians must promote not only those individual moral values which are essential to the authentic realization of the human person but also the social values of justice, peace and the protection of the environment, since the message of the Gospel extends to both the personal and the communal aspects of human existence. (§62)

The responsibility of the Church to proclaim words of hope and comfort stands alongside an obligation to offer practical assistance, and to become a voice for the voiceless, to stand

10. The Salvation Army 1997 *Orders and Regulations for Officers*, 2.

in solidarity with those who suffer, and to care for the marginalized. All of these find resonance in Salvation Army history, current practice, and in a Salvationist understanding of what it means to be the people of God in, and for, the world. *The Salvation Army in the Body of Christ* affirms a “worldwide tradition of service (arising out of the compassionate love of Christ for all persons) without discrimination or preconditions, to the distressed, needy and marginalised, together with appropriate advocacy in the public domain on matters of social justice.”¹¹ The challenge to avoid collusion with secular authorities when we should speak out against injustice resonates clearly with our experience, and calls to mind the brokenness of the Church in the present age.

2. To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?

The preface identifies ecclesiology as “the most elemental objective in the quest for Christian unity”¹² and notes that while visible unity entails mutual recognition of each other as churches there are divergences between confessional ecclesiologies that may be irreconcilable. As a convergence text, *TCTCV* contributes to the process of identifying common ground and raising questions for further conversation. Thus there is opportunity to celebrate what is shared, recognize and affirm the progress that has taken place, whilst still

11. The Salvation Army 2008 *The Salvation Army in the Body of Christ: An Ecclesiological Statement*, 7.

12. *TCTCV*, viii.

acknowledging difference, and to seek a constructive way forward.

The text also provides a common starting point for internal conversations, allowing individual churches to “benchmark” their own ecclesiology, and to find their place at the table.

The document describes a path to unity that looks to both confession of faith and life in the world. It may be that a unity that is expressed in terms of sacramental living, rather than in the Eucharistic fellowship, can be more easily countenanced by churches such as The Salvation Army, whose vocation does not include the rites of baptism and eucharist.

The text repeatedly affirms that service belongs to the very being of the Church (§§58ff.), and it is the mission of the Church to proclaim the Gospel in word and deed, through respectful evangelization, care for the marginalized and becoming a voice for the voiceless. When churches collaborate on these issues, focusing on the alleviation of human need, they begin to demonstrate the unity they are seeking.

3. What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?

The document is a reminder that any Christian community is part of the whole; that God’s church is broader and more diverse than our personal experience of it. There is much to learn from other traditions, and to celebrate within our own. The acknowledgement of legitimate diversity, despite the absence at this time of shared common criteria

for discernment, is a reminder that God works in many and varied ways in and through his people.

The challenge for the Church, and for The Salvation Army, is to learn to live, and work, together whilst respecting difference. Fidelity to the mission of God in, and for, the world, must be of paramount importance in our quest for unity.

The significance of worship in this process cannot be overestimated. Mission must be rooted in worship, and arise from it. The Salvation Army identifies itself as a community that is both gathered and scattered; gathered “in fellowship as one, sharing life together, growing up into Christ our head, discovering in him freedom from prejudice and sin” and scattered for witness and mission.¹³

The Church reinforces the truth that the gathering and scattering are deeply interconnected and that it is from our worship that mission and service flow. Furthermore, it is suggested that “in the liturgy, the people of God experience communion with God and fellowship with Christians of all times and places” (§67), so that the liturgy serves as a “dynamic paradigm” for the present age of the anticipated *koinonia* of the people of God. A challenge for The Salvation Army is to ensure that nothing is lost by its adherence to a form of worship that is not formally liturgical.

Chapter 3 identifies some aspects of Christian life and ministry that diverge from Salvation Army theology and practice, particularly in relation to the sacraments and understanding of ministry and authority in the church. There is always value in

reflection upon one’s own beliefs in the light of what we understand of those of other people. For example, by exploring issues relating to primacy, synodality and collegiality (§52) we may gain further insight into our own structure of leadership and governance. Similarly, The Salvation Army would traditionally locate sin and holiness in the individual and would not normally use the language of corporate sin, or corporate holiness (§§35-36). It may benefit from considering carefully the implications of this collective responsibility, and may also contribute to the conversation by highlighting the personal responsibility and calling to holiness of each believer.

4. How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement?

The Salvation Army affirms the outward focus of the document. The common purpose of the Church, to witness and serve, offers opportunity to seek the unity that Christ calls for in deed as well as in word. It may be that, if on the basis of this document, Christian communities can find the common ground that allows them to work together, a visible unity may emerge.

In practical terms, it is sometimes the case that The Salvation Army is able to mediate between churches because it is seen to be “different,” facilitating the development of a *koinonia* that does not rest on the sacraments, but upon service and proclamation. In many countries, practical unity is demonstrated as The Salvation Army partners

13. The Salvation Army 2010, *Handbook of Doctrine*, 250–252.

with a variety of churches to bring transformation and hope in a local community.

5. What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

The document takes a considered view that “mission” is at the heart of the church, but does not explore it in detail. Further work in this area could open up new conversations. How do individual churches perceive mission? What are the parameters surrounding acceptable practices in evangelization? What are the specific challenges that arise in relation to other faiths and cultures? Each of these could lead to further understanding of similarity and difference and therefore offer insights which may foster unity.

Conclusion

“The final destiny of the Church is to be caught up in the *koinonia*/communion of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, to be part of the new creation, praising and rejoicing in God forever (cf. Rev. 21:1-4; 22:1-5)” (§68) Until that time, it is called, in unity, to share in the mission of God to bring reconciliation and transformation to his world. The responsibility of the Church is clear and this document is a testament to those who are actively seeking for a path to unity, giving hope of further fruitful dialogue. However, there is also the salutary reminder that “our brokenness and division contradict Christ’s will for the unity of his disciples and hinder the mission of the Church” (§68).

Unity will only become a reality when each of the churches learn to recognize our own brokenness and, through the Holy Spirit, open our hearts and minds to a new and creative way forward with the whole people of God.

10. Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church

The Mar Thoma Church made a study of the document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* in the fora of bishops and clergy and would like to make the following response. The first response is a note of appreciation for the profound theological vision the document has constructed.

Some basic positions are appreciated and affirmed, such as, “. . . diversity is not accidental”; it is a legitimate part of creation. Further, God has designed “that salvation in Christ be incarnational and thus ‘take flesh’ among the various peoples” (*TCTCV* §12). The document also underscores the “historical reality of the church and the mystery of the church” (§34).

Another position the document has put forth is the affirmation of communion on the basis of the communion in the triune God – the relational identity of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, where communion is prior and persons belong to the prior-existing *koinonia*.

One of the key positions affirmed in the text is the understanding of each local church as catholic, as catholicity implies fullness. Each local church has the potential to grow into the fullness of Jesus Christ since the eucharist is celebrated in every local church, and each local church is a eucharistic community.

This implies that the local churches recognize in one another the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. The churches are to respect this

diversity, and diversity will be disturbed when one church considers its expression as superior. These are significant theological insights which must be carefully considered.

Now, we turn to the specific questions in the document for the response of the churches.

First, “To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of the church?”

The Mar Thoma Church certainly welcomes the communion ecclesiology developed in the document on the basis of the theological understanding of communion in the trinitarian life of God, the persons of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit existing in perichoretic relationship; that is, mutually indwelling and acting together. The perichoretic relationality is prior. It is communion par excellence. This paradigm of communion is taken to be the basic model on which relationships need to be built in the church and in the world.

This understanding has been internalized in the life of the church in an important sense. Indeed it has to grow and deepen further to reflect such a level of communion in its historical existence. Yet it is reflected in its life in the full communion the church has made with churches from other historical, ecclesial traditions or identities in India and abroad.

TCTCV, indeed, appreciates the emphasis that is given to the local church. Though the church gives significance to universality, the understanding of the local developed in the document is theologically significant. The local is where the eucharist is celebrated; therefore it is catholic. In the eucharistic celebration it has potential to grow into the fullness of Jesus Christ. In this sense the local is wholly the church, but not the whole church. The Mar Thoma church appreciates this ecclesiological stance.

The Mar Thoma Church can recognize in one another the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. The church also recognizes the contextual realities of culture, language, religion, symbols, sociality and so on, that are a vital part of the formation of the faith community, which also explains the differences between churches in the historical context. The Mar Thoma Church in its ecclesiological understanding recognizes that in God's purpose the Church is placed in the larger context of God's mission uniting everything in the reign of God. The church is, therefore, the sign and sacrament of the reign of God.

Second, "To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?"

The document opens wider possibilities for growth in unity since the text acknowledges and embraces differences: historical, cultural, linguistic, ecclesial and other. The text affirms the potential for growth in fullness in each local church. It is self-affirmation and affirmation of the other. The Mar Thoma Church has acknowledged this

ecclesiological position and has already established full communion with churches in the Protestant tradition such as the Church of South India and the Church of North India constituting the Communion of Churches in India, and with churches in the Anglican Communion such as the Protestant Episcopal Church in the USA, the Anglican Church of Canada and the Anglican Church in Australia. Currently the Mar Thoma Church is engaged in dialogue with the Old Catholic Church in Europe and the Syrian Jacobite Church in Kerala. The Mar Thoma Church recognizes similarities and differences with these churches and the Church hopes for the possibility of growth into fullness in them. The Mar Thoma Church is open to enter into dialogue with other churches as well. *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* challenges us to make these relationships rich and vital in the life of the church.

Third, "What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?"

Through the past two millennia the Mar Thoma Church has been placed within multi-religious, multi-cultural and multi-linguistic contexts in India. Major religions such as Hinduism, Islam and Christianity coexisted in a responsible way. The church has acknowledged the positive, humanizing and liberating contributions of religions in Indian society. The church is appreciative of the symbols, signs, meanings and religious experiences within religions. Interreligious cooperation and support has always been given for relief and restoration in the context of natural and

human-made disasters. The church moves towards fuller, richer and wholesome human and ecological experiences and values by working in relationship with other religious communities. Dialogues with other religious communities have been made for these purposes. In the local churches established in hundreds of villages of India through mission and evangelism, there are meaningful struggles regarding enculturation. Outside India, in North America, the United Kingdom, Europe, West Asia, Singapore, Malaysia and Australia, the Mar Thoma Church faces challenges from local cultures, which are being carefully addressed.

Finally, “What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?”

In this respect, smaller groups which work locally towards justice, peace and integrity of creation, must be identified and collaborated with. Where relationships can be established with secular movements in the North and the South of India, such relationships must be pursued. Such secular fellowships must be developed to construct common vision and praxis.

There must be efforts to engage smaller churches in terms of their ministerial emphases and invite them to explore ways of relating faith and reality leading to praxis. Some explorations can be made in this regard in regions and countries where ministerial candidates and theological educators from different ecclesial traditions pursue common theological education.

There are some further reflections on the document which touch on the question of history. It is necessary for the document to develop a theological understanding about history within which the churches must pursue their life of common vision and practice. This is significant since the *ecclesia* is placed in history and needs to transform its own life as it engages in the transformation of the local spaces in the eager anticipation of the reign of God. What are the transforming positions which the *ecclesia* has to make for itself and local spaces, and what is the relation between human struggles, issues of life and *ecclesia*? Further, the relation between christology, ecclesiology and eschatology need to be strengthened in the document. The document also needs to pursue insights from feminist, liberationist and environmentalist visions regarding the church.

Most Rev. Dr Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan
Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church

11. Evangelical Church in the Rhineland

The Evangelical Church in the Rhineland (EKiR) expresses its gratitude to the WCC's Faith and Order Commission for the intensive work that has led to this convergence text. It sees the text as an important step on the way to a theological understanding of the issue of the Church, and sharing the goal of renewing church life.

However, as a member church of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE), the EKiR regrets that the ecclesiological understanding and positive experiences of church fellowship as experienced in the CPCE were not explicitly taken up in the study. The search for unity in the diversity of different forms of Church has inspired the CPCE since its inception. In this search, it distinguishes “between those points where full consensus is required and those questions where legitimate diversity is allowed.”¹ Given this distinction, the EKiR welcomes that in the study presented by the Faith and Order Commission, the unity and catholicity of the Church is also understood as a space which does not restrict the wealth of different forms of church life and doctrine but preserves and fosters them. The EKiR therefore endorses the call “not only to work

untiringly to overcome divisions and heresies but also to preserve and treasure their legitimate differences of liturgy, custom and law and to foster legitimate diversities of spirituality, theological method and formulation in such a way that they contribute to the unity and catholicity of the Church as a whole.”²

In order to distinguish between “legitimate” and “Church-divisive diversity,”³ the EKiR together with the CPCE recommend the continuing assessment of existing diversity, “in its relationship to the origin and the mission of the church so that it remains legitimate diversity.”⁴ This is why, as set out in the study *The Church of Jesus Christ* – according to the understanding of the EKiR – distinguishing between the foundation, the shape and the mission of the Church is fundamental and crucial.

The *foundation* of the church is God's action to save humankind first in the people of Israel, then in Jesus Christ. In this fundamental action God himself is the subject, and consequently the church is an object of faith. Since the church is a community of believers the shape of the church

1. The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, *The Church of Jesus Christ. The Contribution of the Churches of the Reformation to Ecumenical Dialogue on Church Unity* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1988, 29) (Leuenberg Texts 1), III, 1.3.

2. *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, §30. On the relationship between unity and diversity see also §§12 and 22, 28–30.

3. Ibid. following §30.

4. *The Church of Jesus Christ*, III, 1.3.

has taken various historical forms. The one Church of faith (singular) is present in a hidden manner in churches (plural) shaped in different ways. The *mission* of the Church is its task to witness before all humankind to the gospel of the coming of the kingdom of God in word and action. In order to achieve unity of the Church in the diversity of these shapes it is sufficient “that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word” (Augsburg Confession, Art. 7).⁵

Based on this understanding of the Church, for the EKIR “the primary aim of hermeneutic efforts is not to unify structures and designations for ministry for their own sake, but to come to a deeper ecumenical understanding of the spiritual realities.”⁶ The EKIR believes that this goal includes recognition of one another’s specific characteristics and the encouragement of structures that can be mutually recognized.⁷

1. To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?

According to our understanding of the Church, as we find it set out in the Leuenberg Church Fellowship text *The Church of Jesus Christ*, the legitimacy of the diverse forms of the Church hinges upon

whether they serve the mission of the Church and are in accord with the foundation of the Church in God’s saving action.

1. *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)* comments on the *purpose* of the Church by recalling the “vision of God’s great design (or “economy”) for all creation” (§1). It correctly emphasizes that the Church serves the kingdom of God and yet is at the same time different from it (see §§33–36). The Church’s mission has its basis in the *missio Dei*, that is, in the “saving activity of the Holy Trinity” (§3). The EKIR can therefore agree with the statement that the Church is “by its very nature missionary, called and sent to witness in its own life to that communion which God intends for all humanity and for all creation in the kingdom” (§13). However, a clearer distinction should be made between God’s redeeming action and the ministry of the Church, and thus between the *opus Dei* and the *opus hominis*. (§33 rightly says: “The Holy Spirit is the principal agent in establishing the kingdom and in guiding the Church so that it can be a servant of God’s work in this process.”) Although it notes that the trinitarian understanding of the Church’s mission links the Church with Israel in a special way (§17), we believe that this should be further developed and deepened.

2. Although the study rightly notes that the Church has its foundation or origin in God’s activity, this statement requires further elaboration. What needs to be asked is how and by what means the origin of the Church is made evident

5. *The Church of Jesus Christ*, Introduction 1.4.

6. Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, *Ministry, Ordination, Episkopé* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2013, § 20) (Leuenberg Texts 13, 111).

7. *Ibid.*

through its action. The study repeatedly emphasizes that the fundamental event of the Church is a gift. The Church lives out this God-given gift of communion from which it receives its unity (Introduction, first paragraph; §§1 and 67). The EKIR sees this gift in essence as a gift conveyed through the word of the gospel. The Church is thus a *creatura evangelii*. We strongly support the sentence: “The Church is centred and grounded in the Gospel, the proclamation of the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, Son of the Father” (§14). At the same time we find it problematic when this definition of the Church is offered only as one of several other definitions (for then the life of the Church would only be described as being, among other things, a community which hears and proclaims the Word of God).

Knowing that the Church is essentially a *creatura evangelii*, the EKIR sees itself as being united with the other churches of the CPCE: “The foundation of the Church is God’s justifying, liberating action, which precedes all human action. It is testified to in the preaching of the gospel and celebrated in the sacraments. As a witness to the gospel in the world, the Church is called to be ‘an instrument of God for the actualisation of God’s universal will⁸ to salvation.’”⁹ The EKIR also sees the Church as “an effective sign of God’s presence and action” (*TCTCV*, italic paragraph after §27),

8. *The Church of Jesus Christ*, I.3.2.

9. “Stellungnahme der GEKE zum neuesten ekklesiologischen Dokument von Faith and Order” [included in this volume as the Response of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, adopted by the Council of the CPCE in December 2015], 2.2.

but in the brokenness of the *simul justus et peccator*. At the same time, the Church for us “is God’s people chosen in Christ, gathered and nurtured by the Holy Spirit, on its way through time towards its consummation in the Kingdom of God. The [C]hurch has its origin and lasting foundation in this all-encompassing action of God.”¹⁰

The EKIR does not wish to use the expression “the Church as sacrament” to describe this understanding. It will gladly take up and give further consideration to the question of whether “legitimate differences in wording are compatible with one another and mutually acceptable” (p. 13, No. 27) with regard to the different opinions on the expression “the Church as sacrament.”

Like the study, the EKIR also sees unity as a gift of God. Although it is a precondition for church life, it has never been fully realized in the history of Christianity. Speaking of the “restoration of unity” (§68) is misleading since it assumes that unity has already been realized in history. Already the history of early Christianity demonstrates that Christian faith takes shape in a multitude of forms. If diversity, which in principle is a richness to be treasured, is not to degenerate into segregation and merely living alongside each other, then a common effort is needed to grow into him who is the head, into Christ (Eph. 4:15-16, as quoted in the Barmen Declaration III), in continually returning to the foundation and origin of the Church.

As a member church of the CPCE, the EKIR believes that “the necessary and sufficient

10. *The Church of Jesus Christ*, I.1.1.

pre-requisite for the true unity of the Church is agreement in the right teaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the sacraments.”¹¹ “Unity in reconciled diversity” enriches our church life. Although we find elements of this understanding in the text, we believe it is necessary to use and set out the concept of unity in a clearer fashion.

2. To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?

On the path to promoting unity in the diversity of different churches, the study recommends a return to the creed of Nicaea-Constantinople and the characteristics of the Church mentioned in it (§§9 and 22). Thus, a basis is mentioned which the EKiR believes is both viable and promising, toward the growing unity among the churches. We expressly welcome the approach which takes the church of faith as its starting point.

1. The fact that different churches can say this confession together is already an expression of a unity in faith, which the EKiR values. The churches need to give greater expression to this in the practice or worship.

2. With this confession, a self-distinction is practised which is essential for the process of ecumenical understanding: None of the “visible” forms of Church is identical with the “one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church,” which is an article of the creed. Unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity

11. Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, *The Leuenberg Agreement*, 1973, 2.

should therefore be rigorously interpreted as gifts that have not been fully realized in any of the existing churches.

3. “Visible unity” is promoted precisely when churches are able to “recognize in one another the [better: an] authentic presence of what the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople (381) calls the ‘one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church’” (§9).

4. In particular, with this in mind, the understanding of catholicity seems to the EKiR to be more promising. In corresponding to the foundation of the Church, different churches can be “wholly Church,” but individually they are “not the whole Church” (§31). The Church is catholic in the diversity and abundance of its manifestations, provided that these – in the spirit of “authentic presence” – serve their purpose by pointing beyond themselves to the shared foundation in God’s saving action.

5. Our final point is that the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed also reveals the understanding of ordained ministry or service for the Church. It is the EKiR’s understanding that eligible women and men are ordained to promote the “one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church in their respective local church, in their regional church.”¹²

12. *Ordination, Dienst und Ämter nach evangelischem Verständnis [Ordination, service and ministries according to Protestant understanding]*. Resolution of the Synod of the EKiR, 14 January 2004, 13: “By serving in a particular church community, ordained preachers are committed to the one Church of Jesus Christ. Through ordination, they are entrusted with an

It is in this way that service for unity is institutionalized in our church. The question of whether and how an episcopal ministry “in service to the unity of the whole Church” (§55) can be developed on this basis requires further discussion. As for the question of a ministry of primacy for the Church, the EKIR welcomes its being placed within the broad context of *episkopé*. The EKIR has a presbyterian-synodical structure, according to which baptized Christians work together with ordained ministers in *episkopé*. Thus, for the EKIR a ministry of primacy would only be conceivable as a synodical collegial ministry which a woman could also preside.

3. What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this study challenge your church to work for?

Like the CPCE, the EKIR is ready to walk on the path of deepening and broadening the model of unity in reconciled diversity with all Christian churches. We support the statements saying that reconciliation, including that between churches, is experienced above all in the eucharist or the Lord’s supper. We foster table fellowship with many churches, especially with the communities of the CPCE and the United Evangelical Mission (UEM), with the United Church of Christ USA (UCC) and other partner churches. We are happy

overall responsibility which requires them to ensure that the existing church community remains or constantly becomes anew the Church of Jesus Christ, the one, undivided Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12; Eph. 4:4; Col. 3:15), In the concrete life of the local church, they are responsible for the ‘one, holy, universal (catholic), and apostolic Church.’”

to extend this table fellowship to other churches from other Christian traditions and their members, on the basis of a common understanding of the gospel. In the conviction that Jesus Christ himself is the host, we practice eucharistic hospitality and invite all people who are baptized to the Lord’s supper. Like the CPCE, the EKIR responds constructively to the invitation to work on ethical questions with other churches.¹³

4. How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this study?

The EKIR is happy to cooperate “with individual Christian churches and other communities or associations, despite existing differences in teaching, practice and church order. This includes cooperation in the areas of witness and service, particularly in exercising the public responsibility of the churches, in further theological dialogue and joint worship.”¹⁴

The EKIR therefore believes it to be its duty to approach churches and communities of other languages and origins, in the spirit of the communion (*koinonia*) of churches described in this statement and to search ways to work more closely with them in witness and ministry. The model of a communion (*koinonia*) of local churches, even of different confessions, can help overcome language

13. See CPCE Response, 4.3.

14. CPCE Response, 4.4.

and cultural boundaries and open up the EKiR's congregations to being more intercultural.

5. What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

The EKiR sees the need to formulate more clearly what is meant by the concept of “unity.” We share an understanding of the concept that associates the unity of the churches with a legitimate diversity of forms. For us “unity in reconciled diversity” includes mutual recognition of the churches in their diversity. At the same time, we are still concerned by the question of how to distinguish legitimate diversity from illegitimate diversity. The churches’ common work on criteria for this distinction (§30) continues to be important. We consider that the understanding of the apostolicity of the Church, in particular, requires clarification. According to our understanding, the unity, holiness, and catholicity of the Church can only be acquired through faithfulness to the origin of the Church, as handed down to us in the apostolic witness. In this respect, the way this is dealt with in *TCTCV* is inadequate, as the CPCE rightly points out in its response.¹⁵

15. See CPCE Response, 4.1.5: “The apostolicity of the Church is defined above all by fidelity to the apostolic origins of the Church, and to the apostolic mission and ministry. It should be noted that from a Protestant standpoint, fidelity to the apostolic origins of the Church is primarily fidelity to Holy scripture, which should be understood above all as a successor to the apostles. However, scripture is not even mentioned in *TCTCV*’s comments on apostolicity.”

In addition to what has already been noted, the EKiR has identified several areas in which a continuation of ecumenical dialogue would be fruitful for a deeper communion between the churches:

- The community of women and men in the ministries of the Church.
- The community of baptized and ordained Christians.
- God’s covenant with Israel and the new covenant in Jesus Christ, through which people “from the nations” have been brought into the covenant with God. The Church is linked to Israel’s election and is subject to eschatological reservation.¹⁶
- The understanding of the ethical challenge of the gospel.

Together with the CPCE, the EKiR encourages the WCC to raise its profile and to be seen once more as a central forum of global efforts toward church unity.

16. See CPCE Response, 4.1.4.

12. Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain

A Spirit-led Church

Prizing as we do our personal and corporate experience of God,¹ Quakers are very conscious of the limitations of language in conveying this experience. Yet we have a rich verbal tradition and we value the precision of language in our corporate decision-making. In responding to a theological document we are using more highly-wrought language than Quakers would usually deploy. We ask all our readers to bear in mind that religious language is necessarily metaphorical and partial, even as it seeks to express the deepest truths.

1. Published in January 2016 by the Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations (QCCIR). The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain made a similar response to the first Faith and Order convergence text, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva, 1982); this was published as *To Lima with Love* (London, 1987). We have also responded to both earlier drafts of the present paper, *The Nature and Purpose of the Church* (Faith and Order Paper No. 181) and *The Nature and Mission of the Church* (Faith and Order Paper No. 198). This second response incorporates the earlier one. These responses include references to the normative texts for Quaker ecclesiology, such as Robert Barclay's *Apology* (1678), which we have not felt it necessary to repeat here. There is also useful material on Quaker understanding of ecclesiology in "One in the Spirit" (1995), our response to the Churches Together in England "Called to be One" process, published in *From Friends, with Love*, book 1 (London: Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations, 2004).

1. Introduction: our vision for the church

1.1. Quakers in Britain have consistently felt called to offer gifts from the heart of our tradition to support the urgent task of ecumenical dialogue. The latest World Council of Churches (WCC) paper, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)* challenges us as Quakers not merely to articulate the sources of our faith, but to express how the spiritual treasures of our Quaker Way sustain us in the world today. What inspires us from our historical experience and what strengthens us in the present? At the heart of our Quaker faith is the vision of a church unmarred by bitter ruptures, held together in bonds of love. Yet unity does not consist in uniformity of belief or practice, but rather in a mutual recognition between people – expressed in care and a joyful acceptance of difference. Such an affirmation of diversity is rooted in our historic understanding of the universal ministry of Jesus. As the Quaker Samuel Fisher wrote in 1660: "Gentiles as well as Jews, Heathens and Indians as well as Englishmen and Christians (so called)...all have some measure of that Grace nigh them, which in the least measure is sufficient to heal and help them" (Hooks, *Works of Samuel Fisher*, London: 1660:656). Our task is to heed working of that grace, expressed in diverse

tongues (Acts 2:4). In harmony with this inclusive vision of the religious life, our meetings frequently include those from other faith traditions or none, who are drawn to our Spirit-led practice. By holding a space for the seeker, the pilgrim and the doubter, Quakers seek to safeguard the sources of prophecy in our midst. In opening our doors and opening our hearts to new light, we attempt to mirror the words of our Teacher: “I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd” (John 10:16).

1.2. Yet, such remarks beg the question; what is the church? For many the word has become connected with burdensome structures, moral condemnation and institutional navel-gazing at the expense of the building up of love and truthfulness. For those disillusioned with the path of discipleship, the word “church” may signify the letter and not the Spirit (1 Cor. 11:25). In place of the life-giving presence of a loving God, many feel the pressing weight of ritual conformity and soulless hierarchy. From our earliest days, Quakers have sought to return the church to that radical spirit which summoned Christian faith into being. We understand the church, not merely as another human institution, but rather as a gathered community of mind and heart, where each soul journeys into the love of God. Such a voyage of discovery can be undertaken anywhere and is not limited to premises set aside for “religious worship.” The still small voice of God can be found at all times and places. When done in a spirit of prayer, any aspect of life, no

matter how ordinary, can be made a pathway to the holy. It is not that Quakers refuse to say where the church is; only that we refuse to say where the church isn't. From this perspective, we understand the marks of true church in the lives of people corporately transformed by “the God of peace” (Heb. 13:20). And yet many churches continue to struggle with matters of outward form to the detriment of communal and personal transformation. Over the centuries much blood and ink has been spilt by Christians in disputes regarding the role of the sacraments and the organization of special priesthoods and yet they have done little but create hatred and distrust.

1.3. How should the church now find healing? At the centre of our corporate life as Quakers is our practice of silent worship. By affirming the potential sacramentality of all aspects of life, we have found ways of honouring God anew in the very midst of our lives. Springing from this experience, Quakers hold that Christian commitment cannot be limited to a system of numbered sacraments, nor can our obedience to Christ be measured solely according to formulaic modes of worship. In making this declaration, Quakers find no barren negation, but a drawing closer to the life and substance of Christ's leadings. As Jesus tells the Samaritan woman by the well: “An hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth...God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:23-5). In this teaching, Quakers find a beautiful expression of a great transformation in store for the people of God. In

place of the shadows of outward priesthood (Col. 2:17) those who are born again in the Spirit (John 3:5) are called to put aside the relative safety of outward observance and instead seek God in the temple of the heart. In these invisible cloisters, we find both the cleansing waters of baptism and the nourishment of the eucharist. As Jesus tells us again and again in the gospels, the path to communion with Him is simple. All we need is to be open to the possibility of God's call: "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me" (Rev. 3:20).

1.4. Yet, reconciliation between Christians will only be achieved if the roots of strife are addressed in the life and practice of the church. Just as our Quaker Way finds no need for outward sacraments, we also shun the need for physical defence of our spiritual priesthood. It is our abiding testimony that war and the preparation for war are inconsistent with the spirit of Christ. In the past, some within the Christian family have through formal structures looked for easy consolation in worshipping God by serving Caesar. At such times of confusion, these disciples of Jesus have made the mistake of measuring the glory of the church by the glories of the world. This has left some Christians feeling that they must adopt the patterns of the State. In this roving spirit, some have seen the church as a power among others, struggling for domination. Yet, in imitation of Jesus, we are called to refuse the tempting offer of "the kingdoms of the world" (Matt. 4:1-11) and instead content ourselves with the powerlessness

of the Cross. As Paul tells us: "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 6:12). By unburdening ourselves of these outward things, we find that we can better follow the Spirit which is the fountain of our religious life.

2. Finding the Spirit in an age of uncertainty

2.1. In the second decade of the 21st century, European Christianity finds itself increasingly ailing in the face of declining numbers and an emboldened atheism. The churches of Africa and Asia struggle to live faithfully in the midst of political instability, war and material inequality. Quakers have been here before. Quakerism was born in such an age of uncertainty. The people of the English Commonwealth had seen their faith in established religion and politics shaken to the core by the ravages of civil war. People sought the love of God, yet everywhere there was despair and spiritual fakery. The answer of early Quakers to such religious loss resounds down the centuries: "the kingdom of God is in your midst" (Luke 17:21). The church will not find renewal through structures alone. True unity can only come about if we look to the Living Christ within.

Only the guidance of the Spirit can sustain and refresh the church in its mission. What does our own context tell us about the character of the church's vocation? As Quakers living in an increasingly secular society, we sense new growing-points for energized discipleship and Spirit-led witness.

As Christianity's automatic privileges of political access and respectability decline, new opportunities emerge for western Christians to serve as radical voices in the face of political power. Instead of feeling "useful" in ways defined by the secular officialdom, a church living "after Christendom" can walk more faithfully in the way of Jesus; emptying itself of power and prestige; "taking the very nature of a servant" (Phil. 2:7). In this context, declining numbers and privilege is not merely a threat but a liberation. In putting aside models of state-sponsored protection and the allure of administrating "a Christian society," new-found powerlessness may teach Christians to attend to the powerless, the outsider and stranger. In making this claim, Quakers make no sectarian conclusions regarding the leadings of other confessions. We cannot see the future, nor do we have all the answers, but we offer this tentative response, in the hope that the universal Church will discover anew its counter-cultural voice in a divided world.

2.2. To recover such a radical tone we need the courage to be different. The universal Church is not one organization among many vying for worldly influence. Rather the gathering place of God's people is an expression of the divine will for the world; the triumph of cultures of peace over societies of strife. In ever-closer bonds of unity, the church may yet re-learn its own prophetic language capable of standing against cultures of callousness and carelessness. Yet such tides cannot be resisted unless and until love prevails among the disciples of Jesus. We cannot expect the world to heed the call of Christ generously unless his

disciples can make his call tangible in their own lives. For too long the disciples of Jesus have spoken to and for themselves, seeking their own peace and security in a world of faiths. The time for such insularity is long past. In an age when humanity is both ever more connected and yet seeming further apart, we must stand in solidarity with those who "dream dreams and see visions," offering them succour and encouragement. The Spirit is calling us to throw ourselves into the fray with all the love and courage we can muster.

3. Signs of the Spirit in the present age

3.1. The WCC text underlines for Quakers the pressing moral and spiritual challenges facing the church today. From the pace of technological change, the force of secularism and the challenges of environmental destruction, the document reflects:

[while] tensions about moral issues have always been a concern for the church, in the world of today, philosophical, social and cultural developments have led to the rethinking of many moral norms, causing new conflicts over moral principles and ethical questions to affect the unity of the churches (§63).

In recent years these challenges have been joined by the systemic failure of the global financial system and the rapid rise of fundamentalist forms of religious violence. Far from being "the end of history" the crises of our century are just as ominous as those of the last. How can the church speak faithfully in these turbulent conditions?

What parts of the church's moral language are needed to see us through? In finding a place to stand, Quakers reflect keenly on the promise of Jesus to his disciples: "I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). Our Divine Teacher does not abandon us even if it feels as if we are "sheep among wolves" (Matt. 10:1). Rather, the Spirit stands in solidarity with us, kindling the kingdom of God in our hearts; guiding our restless souls to their final rest. In the midst of worldly trial, the church must seek out-growing points for the Spirit of Christ in wider culture, ever ready to bear witness to the ongoing revelation of God in diverse lives. Ours is not an age of darkness, but an epoch of prophecy, if we heed the promptings of the Spirit.

3.2. What are these signs of prophecy? Firstly, we live in a time of intense spiritual hunger. In the rich nations, people are increasingly turning from the pursuit of worldly success and, in a deeply joyless culture, seeking connection, friendship and joy that is not to be found in consumerism. Likewise, in the "developing nations" we see people become scornful with prosperity for its own sake. More are asking: what is the purpose of wealth? And how can material wealth best serve the common good? If we wish to answer these questions adequately, we must reorientate the church away from vestiges of power and towards an ethic of service.

To contest materialism, there is need for the kind of home-spun spirituality favoured by Jesus himself. We must form a pattern of church capable of meeting people where they are: in their homes, at work, on the street. The rise of house churches

speaks of a new longing for the simplicity of the apostolic witness. Quakers welcome these questing communities and call on the wider church to cherish these new expressions as the work of the Spirit in our midst.

3.3. Alongside these new formations, the Spirit is equally at work in world politics. While the political upheaval of the present era is undoubtedly great, we know that God moves human hearts to justice. From the protesters of Tahrir Square to the global Occupy protests, we find the upsurge of a new culture able and willing to hear God's call afresh: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free" (Luke 4:18). In an effort to make this proclamation a reality, British Quakers continue to work for stability and peace in regions of the world torn apart by ethnic, political and religious hatred. Beyond these terrains of struggle and peace-making, Quakers know by experience that the Spirit is known in the ordinary and the everyday. In the care of family and friends, strangers and neighbours, we know ourselves trained in the ways of the Prince of Peace. As Jesus "emptied himself out" for the love of others, Christians daily and invisibly dedicate themselves to the wellbeing of others. In these acts, we see also the restorative power of the Spirit.

3.4. How does the church give these Spirit-led people the space to flourish? This is both an individual and a structural question for the people of God.

For Quakers such openness for service can only be established if each human being is understood as a precious and unique child of God. While such language is deeply figurative, this image of childhood has taught us that no person exists for themselves alone. We live in cities, communities, families and faiths. Our lives are not private possessions, but windows of grace, their possibility kindled by the tenderness of others. If we wish to foster service, the church must offer opportunities for genuine fellowship and hospitality. Because of our understanding of ministry, Quakers try hard to recognize and affirm one another's gifts. This is one way in which we recognize the experience of being the body of Christ. We welcome the text's inclusive claim that "every Christian receives gifts of the Holy Spirit for...his and her part in the mission of Christ (§18)... the church when articulated by any of its members" (§50).² We share the experience that "authority [emerges] wherever the truth which leads to holiness is expressed" (§50).³

3.5. Quakers see themselves as a Spirit-led church, with its origin in the experience of Pentecost, as the text describes (§§3, 21). We feel ourselves continually strengthened and renewed by the Spirit. In this way, we agree that "The Spirit...equips the church with its essential gifts, qualities and order" (§16). Recently, Quakers in Britain have experienced a remarkable example of the Holy Spirit outrunning our expectation. In 2009, after many

years of prayerful preparation, and during an exercise of corporate discernment and waiting on God, we came to understand that, in our experience, God was marrying same-sex couples and that we needed to recognize this and witness to it in our own procedures and in our relations with the state. We could not have foreseen that, five years later, the state would recognize same-sex marriage. We correctly foresaw that some in our own church, especially in other parts of the world, and many of our fellow Christians, would have difficulty in understanding why we had taken this step. The process of seeking to explain ourselves has been at times painful. But we are in no doubt that, in our efforts to follow the leadings we have been given, we have felt the Spirit working strongly among us.

3.6. We believe that the Spirit leads us into unity, and we welcome the increasing signs which the text identifies of churches working more closely together. We share the pleasure expressed in the text that

the churches have come so far in fellowship with one another that they are aware that what one does affects the life of others, and, in consequence, are increasingly conscious of the need to be accountable to each other with respect to their ethical reflections and decisions (§62)

Yet, accountability does not mean religion by consultation or faith by committee. It means being sensitive to where each community is on the walk of faith. It means listening generously,

2. [This is not a quote from TCTCV – Ed.]

3. [TCTCV §50 reads "authority is recognized wherever the truth which leads to holiness is expressed..." – Ed.]

showing patience, self-restraint and consideration for each member of the Christian family. Such virtues do not guarantee that there will never be dislocation, misunderstanding or hurt, but they do provide a foundation for continuing dialogue and collaboration.

3.7. The text rightly highlights the manifold ways in which Christians are presently divided by matters of moral discernment. Our responses to the sometimes emotive issues of abortion, same-sex relationships, euthanasia and capital punishment speak not only to problems of public justice, but point to a deeper question: what is the purpose of the human creature? How we respond to issues of sex and death reveals what we value most about human life. Those who have been characterized as “liberal” on these matters have been accused of being obsessed by personal freedom to the neglect of moral faithfulness. Opponents of “moral traditionalists” maintain that a church of arbitrary rules frequently silences the lived experience of those who live under such rules. Quakers do not pretend to have easy solutions to these persistent quandaries, but our historical experience places us on the side of radical openness. British Quakers have found that ethical reflection must be sustained by a deep act of faith. Moral discernment is not only related to immediate human needs and concrete institutions but serves as a channel for divine love and creativity. In this way our ethical practice must always be capable of transformation and adjustment if our behaviour conflicts with the character of a God of peace and justice. At the heart of this dynamic conception is a vision of life

which is framed by the ongoing revelation of God. To journey with such a God means to unlearn what we think we know in the name of love and truth. As Jesus declares: “I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth” (John 16:12-24). The text offers a challenge which Quakers in Britain would gladly accept, that of working with other churches to address the question “How might the churches, guided by the Spirit, discern together what it means today to understand and live in fidelity to the teaching and attitude of Jesus” (§63, italic text).

4. The role of the Spirit outside the church

4.1. Quakers warmly endorse the text’s recognition of the action of the Holy Spirit outside the body of Christ (§§25, 60). As we search for ecclesial harmony, Quakers also urge a closer allegiance with other faiths. While we should be wary of merely simplifying the distinctive logics of other religions to fit our own assumptions, we should nevertheless search gently and attentively for points of deep convergence between the religions in expectation that Truth will be found. Indeed, Quakers affirm that while the outward practices of human religiosity differ we know through experience that “[T]he humble, meek, merciful, just, pious and devout souls are everywhere of one religion.”⁴ Such people may not know the gospel in the discursive sense, yet our faith insists that they dwell invisibly and mystically with the Eternal Christ who enlightens

4. William Penn, *Some Fruits of Solitude*, 1682, 73.

all who come into the world (John 1:9). In this way “the gospel of salvation is preached to every creature under heaven” (George Fox, Epistle 388) even if this proclamation is beyond our mortal hearing.

In the light of these mysteries, we find ourselves in deepest unity with these words from the WCC document: “Together with the adherents of other religions as well as with all persons of good will, Christians must promote...the social values of justice, peace and the protection of the environment” (§62) and “Christians will seek to promote the values of the kingdom of God by working together with adherents of other religions and even with those of no religious belief” (§64). We count ourselves among those who “advocate peace, especially by seeking to overcome the causes of war” (§64), and we welcome the respect that is expressed in this text for “the elements of truth and goodness that can be found in other religions and among those with no religion” (§25). Let us go forward with this work with humility, a sense of adventure and above all a loving heart, for in our openness we may discern the face of Christ in unfamiliar places.

4.2. The text regrets that many in today’s world “question the very possibility of faith, believing that human life is sufficient unto itself, without any reference to God” (§7). While our worship-lives convince us as Quakers of a world full of spiritual depth and meaning, we recognize that the theological language of past centuries has the capacity to alienate, exclude and bewilder. As people of faith we need to be brave enough to find

new ways of speaking about God which sustain our reflection and worship. In this age of longing, we must attempt to articulate the Good News in ways which respond to the hopes of a world in need of love and grace. Such a renewed proclamation should not be tainted with superiority or egotism, but suffused with humility and love. In this open-handed spirit, we affirm and uphold those among us who struggle daily with the very idea of a personal God expressed in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. In our Meetings there are those who find the use of traditional Christian language problematic or spiritually deadening. To meet their need for spiritual guidance many seek a new language to express a sacred vision of life. It is our conviction as Quakers that this development is not to be feared, but mined for the riches it may contain. Our task as people of God is not to castigate or condemn people’s desire for a new way of speaking about faith, but to offer prayerful support for those who seek that eternal light which is in each one of us. In this task, what matters is unity in our desire to seek the right spiritual path rather than a conformity of words.

5. Belonging to the church: communal discipleship

5.1. At the core of the church’s life and teaching is the act of trust made in a living God who stands beside us, heals us and wipes away our tears. The assembly of God’s people is the place where that trust is found, tested and cherished. In prayer, worship and service we not merely come into relation with what we trust, but through the guidance of the Spirit, we are formed into new people, capable of

compassion, forgiveness and courage. The church can be a place of holy transformation, where weakness becomes strength and fear becomes hope. Yet in our contemporary culture the transformational dimension of church-life is all too easily obscured by an increasingly consumer attitude towards the treasures of faith. Instead of seeking to be renewed, an increasing number of people want the church to cater for their needs and conform to their personal expectations and preferences. In the West “shopping around for a church” is becoming more pressing than the demands and joys of discipleship. While the church should always be mindful to speak to the conditions of those it serves, the marketing of the Christian message in this way can sap the radical message of the gospel. Instead of staying put and waiting to be called, our contemporary world induces many of us to rootlessness. What is desperately needed is a return to a grounded vision of discipleship. In this mould the church is not a private club to satisfy a set of complacent members, but rather a window into a New Creation. In calling for a return to the language of discipleship, Quakers recognize that Christian vocation is a living, changing reality. In affirmation of this truth, we heartily embrace the endorsement which the text gives to legitimate diversity within the church: “Legitimate diversity is not accidental to the life of the Christian community but is rather an aspect of its catholicity” (§12) and “Legitimate diversity in the life of communion is a gift from the Lord” (§28).

5.2. We endorse the text’s view that the local church “is wholly church but not the whole

church” (§31). Springing from this sentiment, we believe that the statements of common purpose cannot be seen as an end in themselves, but rather an invitation for disciples of Jesus to come to know each other in the “things which are eternal”;⁵ a call to find something of that invisible catholicity which animates the inward lives of diverse confessions of faith. We hope and pray that the years ahead will see a greater nurture of this inward knowing, as Christians come to define themselves not by outward forms, but rather look to the eternal love of God to fortify and unite them. As the early Quaker theologian Robert Barclay observed in 1678, the church is not a collection of doctrines or institutions but rather “the society, gathering or company of such as God hath called out of the world and worldly spirit to walk in his light and life.” Barclay went on to write: “Under this church...are comprehended all, and as many, of whatsoever nation, kindred, tongue or people they be, though outwardly strangers and remote from those who profess Christ and Christianity in words and have the benefit of the Scriptures, as become obedient to the holy light and testimony of God in their hearts.”⁶

6. The experience of worship: experiential, mystical but knowable by all

6.1. At the core of our Quaker faith is a lament for a church in exile from itself. Scarred by

5. From Britain Yearly Meeting’s “Advices & queries,” section 1.02 of *Quaker faith & practice*.

6. Robert Barclay, *Apology for the true Christian divinity*, prop 10, sect 2; 1678.

spiritual coldness, ritualistic excess and callous privilege, early Quakers turned their backs on the diverse sects of Christendom and instead waited upon Christ to lead them “into all truth” (John 16:13). In their own “holy experiment” Quakers summoned the church back to the adventure of the apostles, to a community transformed by the leadings of the Spirit. In Quaker worship we are invited to experience the astonishing power of the Holy Spirit. In this energetic space, we can know salvation in the present. In worship, we become part of an eschatological community. As Quakers, we unite with the text’s conviction that the church is both a divine and a human reality (§23). Quakers entirely understand the concept of “already but not yet” (§33). We are a church which looks not to a future Second Coming but to the present experience of Christ in the heart. Quakers still hold dear George Fox’s core insight, that “Jesus Christ is come to teach his people himself.”⁷

6.2. To be truly in a state of worship is to participate in a community of moral imagining. In the act of opening ourselves to God, we are inducted into another way of seeing. By attending to the Light within, we are able to picture “the just earth,” without want, degradation or oppression. We are able to make a leap beyond the cynicisms and distortions of our injured world and glimpse something more. When we bring “the signs of times” to the still centre of Meeting for Worship, we believe we are led into the Way of Jesus. In

7. George Fox, *Journal*, ed. Nickalls, 1952, p. 48, entry for 1649 and passim.

the power unleashed by the gathered community, we come to understand that Christianity is more than a theory or philosophy of things, but ever and always a practical relationship. To walk with Jesus of Nazareth means to live as Jesus lived – as a healer, lover and restorer. We cannot be a Christian by virtue of some human vocabulary or outward set of rituals or precepts, but only by the inward experience of the Living Presence. Once we start conceiving of Christianity not as a sublime intellectual exercise but as a practical path to be trod, life becomes deeper and more wonderful than we dare to imagine.

6.3. The text specifically acknowledges “those communities who affirm that their vocation does not include the rites of baptism and the Eucharist, while affirming that they share in the sacramental life of the church” (§40). British Quakers are one such community. Our understanding of the sacramental activity of the church is grounded in a prayerful openness to the ongoing presence of the Spirit. The issue for Quakers is not whether we should use outward signs to express God’s work (since Quakers use the outward sign of speech in our worship) but what external forms allow God to be best heard. As people inspired by the simplicity of the early church, Quakers have found that sacramental rites in the ways practiced by other churches are not required for God’s love to be fully felt and fully heeded. Laying down our own will and action before the judgement of God is enough. Our Inward Teacher needs no ceremonial forms to accomplish the divine purpose. “Holiness,” “sanctification” and “grace” are words

for the invisible shaping of the human heart into the generous pattern of Christ. In this way, some Quakers use the language of “communion” and “baptism” as ways of describing their experience of God’s healing power in their daily lives.

6.4. Such a transformative encounter requires no man-made ritual to mark or confirm it. Rather, God’s action can be readily observed by its fruits: “in love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23). As Quakers we are invited to partake in the gifts of God whenever we eat together, offer hospitality or give comfort to those in need. It is these acts of care, prayerfully enacted, which constitute “the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5) “incorporating believers into the body of Christ and enabling them to share in the kingdom of God” (§41). This sense of sacrament as practical action emerges from our historic understanding of the outpouring of God’s Spirit on “all flesh” (Joel 2:28). When we allow ourselves to be led by the promptings of God, ceremonies and rites are not required. All our devising is subsumed into the living Word, which nourishes our action and speech. God is not removed from us – in need of secondary mediation – but in our midst (Luke 17:21).

6.5. In saying this, Quakers do not seek to condemn or belittle the experience of others. For Quakers the worth of any outward sign should be judged according to the intent of the one performing it. There is a world of difference between ritual and “ritualism.” As early as 1678 Quakers

have affirmed that the eucharistic rite continues to possess genuine spiritual value for many Christians. As the Quaker theologian Robert Barclay observed, if performed

from a true tenderness of spirit, and with real conscience towards God...in the same way and manner as did the primitive Christians recorded in scripture I should not doubt to affirm but they might be indulged in it and the Lord might regard them, and for a Season appear to them in the Use of these things.⁸

The key phrase is “for a Season.” It is a source of deep sorrow for Quakers that disagreements over the status of these practices continue to cause pain and distress among the disciples of Jesus. We hope and pray that the divisions the text describes regarding “who may be baptized, the presence of Christ in the Eucharist and the relation of the Eucharist to Christ’s sacrifice on the cross” will be left behind in the search for a deeper unity. The cause of building up love is not served by ceremonial conformity across churches, but in the recognition of the Spirit in the paths of others. In all these matters Quakers suggest that the wrong questions are being asked. The issue is not who should be baptized, since it is for God, and not for us, to say who is invited into a New Life. Similarly regarding the presence of Christ in the eucharist, we should ask rather: Where is the presence of God being denied in the church? Does the eucharistic table (however defined) help us model Jesus’

8. Barclay, *Apology* Prop 13. Sec.11.

ministry or is it a site of exclusion or oppression? On the matter of the relationship between the eucharist and the cross, we should ask ourselves: Do our practices of fellowship help us to imitate the sacrificial giving of Jesus? Do we learn a new way of living or are we ensnared in old patterns of thinking and acting?

7. Repentance and service: the church's vocation to the world

7.1. While Quakers work in hopeful expectation of human flourishing, our tradition teaches us that the human character is always partial, flawed and conflicted. Mirroring this universal predicament, the church continually falls short of its best hopes and visions. We welcome the document's clear-sighted recognition of our collective failings as people of faith. It acknowledges our complicity with secular authorities as well as the ways in which evangelization has been used to bolster colonial oppression (§§6, 65). At this time of commemoration of the First World War, we should also record our failure over the last century to speak out effectively against the waging of war on an unprecedented scale and the insufficient urgency given to international peace-building. Quakers have not been exempt from many of these failings; we continue to be complicit in the unjust economic structures of our own day. As Quakers living in the rich West, we are acutely conscious that the Quaker Way can become reduced to a privileged lifestyle for the few. We urge our ecumenical partners to remind and strengthen us, as we struggle to make our communities hospitable for all those in need.

7.2. In this convergence document, the question of the relationship between the church's holiness as the Body of Christ, and the reality of human sin, is left unresolved (§35). Quakers have no difficulty in recognizing that the visible church is scarred by imperfections. But in the long debate about original sin versus human perfection, our understanding is neither wholly optimistic nor pessimistic. While we acknowledge the continuing estrangement between God and humanity, we are confident that Christ can gift moral perfection to those who hold fast to the Inward Light. The early Quaker William Dewsbury expressed this experience of being perfected:

I was crying to the Lord, to free me from the burden I groaned under; the word of the Lord came to me, saying, "My grace is sufficient for thee, I will deliver thee." And by the power of this word, I was armed with patience to wait in his counsel; groaning under the body of sin in the day and hour of temptation, until it pleased the Lord to manifest his power to free me...I witness that I am regenerated and born again of the immortal seed, and having partaken of the first resurrection, over such the second death hath no power.⁹

7.3. Rooted in this dual knowledge of failure and restoration, we join thankfully in the document's passionate engagement with the church's mission for transformation in the world (§64). The historic

9. William Dewsbury, *The Life of William Dewsbury*, ed. Smith, 1836, p. 38–9.

Quaker concept of the Lamb's War (Rev. 17:14), a spiritual struggle waged against the spiritual forces of evil, seems to us to have increased resonance in today's chaotic world. We respond eagerly to Pope Francis' vision: "I see the church as a field hospital after a battle...heal the wounds, heal the wounds." We continue to try to live in solidarity with those who suffer oppression and indignity; we are conscious that walking with Jesus in this way cannot be without personal cost.

7.4. Quakers also try to perceive and contest the structural oppression which causes such human tragedies. Our traditional understanding of testimony leads us to witness for peace, truth, simplicity and equality; we are also being led to witness for sustainability, as we acknowledge the damage being inflicted on the world through avarice, neglect and ignorance. We believe we are being led by the Spirit towards both an individual and a collective response, for example in our recent decision corporately to disinvest from fossil fuel extraction companies. Quakers in Britain wholeheartedly endorsed the WCC text, "Economy of Life, Justice and Peace for All," and welcome the emphasis in the present text to "opposing the abuse and destruction of the earth and participating in God's healing of broken relationships between creation and humanity" (§66).

7.5. We fight the Lamb's War, not in an effort to hold back an impending darkness, but in a spirit of anticipation, at the breaking in of the living Christ into history. We rejoice in the coming together of the churches in this prophetic ministry and we

joyfully affirm these words of the WCC report, "One blessing of the ecumenical movement has been the discovery of the many aspects of discipleship which churches share, even though they do not yet live in full communion" (§68).

Appendix

The five WCC questions:

1. To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?

Although we bring our own understandings to these terms, we unite with the document's understanding that the church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic (§22). Quakers have a strong sense of the reality of the universal church, and though we frequently fall short, a sense of trying to be a particularly pure manifestation of it! We consider that the text is most valuable when it tries to describe what the life of such a church might be. We find those sections which try to identify institutional ways towards mutual recognition are less useful. We believe that the church, as the community which lives in and is sustained by the divine presence, can only be recognized by its fruits.

2. To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?

Our Quaker understanding is that church unity does not have to be created, it has to be recognized, realized and lived. So the question becomes, how can we help one another understand this more deeply, and act on it? This is a task which has to be undertaken as much within churches as

between them. Within Britain, the Religious Society of Friends wrestles to retain its core insights while being open to new light; worldwide Quakers differ greatly in their understandings of Christology and biblical authority and in liturgical practice. We have our own struggle to make mutual recognition a reality; yet we share a common conviction of the one Spirit as the source of all our lives, and we rejoice at the occasions when we can come together to express this.

So while we appreciate the inclusive spirit in the text which leads it to welcome legitimate diversity (§28), we are concerned at the corollary, that there are limits to diversity which can be identified by “common criteria” or “mutually recognized structures” (§30, italic text). It is our experience that this approach is not helpful. Rather we grow in unity as we recognize one another in the Spirit and join together to seek God’s will for the church.

3. What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?

We hope that the whole process of responding to this document, with its challenge to articulate how we understand our corporate life as a church, will help Quakers in Britain grow in unity. We hope this will be true of other churches too.

Back in the 17th century, Quakers believed other churches are “in the Fall,” and even in the 21st century some in our membership, especially those who have entered Quakers from other churches, still take this approach. But it follows from our insistence on the importance of mutual recognition that we no longer believe this; rather

we accept that the Holy Spirit has guided different churches into different ways that are appropriate for their own condition and from which we can learn. We made this point in our response to *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, WCC Faith and Order Paper No. 198 (our para. 3.10); we are happy to reiterate it here.

4. How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the church described in this statement?

We are willing to recognize and form closer relationships with other churches, not so much because they acknowledge any particular account of the church, but because they represent a visible sign of God at work in the world. We hope other churches could go forward in mutual recognition on this basis. We welcome the text’s invitation to churches “to recognize and honour each other’s commitment to seeking the will of God in the ordering of the church” (§24, italic text).

5. What aspects of the life of the church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

We particularly welcome the section on inter-religious dialogue, with its expression of appreciation of “whatever elements of truth and goodness are present in other religions” (§60). As we have indicated, for Quakers this is an essential part of witnessing to the gospel, and underlies our

peace-building work, including that with the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI).

We hope that addressing questions of religious pluralism will have an important part in the ongoing work of Faith and Order.

While welcoming the reference to the “abuse and destruction of the earth” (§66), this seems a faint echo of the work which the WCC has been supporting for decades on Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation. Can Faith and Order provide a stronger theological underpinning for this work, and bring it before the churches once again as a matter of urgency?

With regard to our comments on the validity or otherwise of legitimate diversity, we invite Faith and Order to help the churches engage with the key question:

How can we learn to recognize the Holy Spirit at work in each church's life?

13. Church of Sweden

It is with joy and gratitude that the Church of Sweden¹ has received *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, the second convergence text of the Commission on Faith and Order. This document is the result of many years' work where the churches have jointly reflected on and formulated their views on God's mission: what it means to be the church.

The Church of Sweden has provided a response to this important document out of a conviction that it is “a faith community that traces its history back to the oldest Christian churches and their profession of faith in Christ.”² The Church of Sweden belongs to the Reformation tradition which began in the 16th century, but also emphasizes that it did not arise at that time, but has its origins in the events of Pentecost and in the mission of the apostles.³

The starting point for our church's response to the questions of the document is the context in which our church has existed in the past and exists in the present. Developments in Sweden have

been rapid. In the last 150 years, Sweden has gone from being a predominantly agricultural society to an industrial society, and subsequently to a society based on services and knowledge. These changes have gone hand in hand with the development of democracy and of a strong NGO movement. Today, Sweden is a diverse country in terms of both ethnicity and faith traditions.

On the international World Values Survey Inglehart-Welzel cultural map, Sweden distinguishes itself as “being different” in a global comparison. Secular-rational values rate very highly, as does self-expression. However, how this ought to be understood is not self-evident. A common interpretation is that the “grand narratives” will grow weaker and the role of religious authorities will lose value in favour of individual interpretations and positions.

The Church of Sweden is an episcopal church with a democratic structure. Its elected representatives meet annually in the General Synod. Similarly, its dioceses and parishes are based on a democratic organization and a shared responsibility between the elected representatives and the ordained ministry. However, from the 16th century until the year 2000, the church was tied to the state by law. Until the early 1990s, all national population registers were administered by the Church of Sweden. Bishops were nominated by the church, and appointed by the Swedish Government. The

1. Response as adopted by the Church of Sweden General Synod on 18 November 2015 and translated in 2016.

2. *Church Ordinance of the Church of Sweden, Part 1, Introduction*.

3. See *From Conflict to Communion. Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017*, Report of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, §222, 2013.

situation is different today, but there is still an Act that governs the Church of Sweden.

For over a hundred years, the Church of Sweden has understood itself to be – like several other churches in the Nordic countries – a folk church. The Church Ordinance expresses it in these words:

The Church of Sweden is an open folk church with the mission of proclaiming the gospel in word and deed. The church has room for everyone, for the seeker and the doubter as well as the devout believer, and for those who have come only a short way as well as for those who have advanced further along the path of faith.⁴

On this reading, preaching the grace of God to the people of Sweden is fundamental to the idea of a folk church. The church's mission, to preach the gospel to all people within the borders of Sweden and to be an open fellowship for all those who come to the church, ought to determine the church's self-understanding in every age – even if its members do not constitute the entire population. The Church of Sweden must strive to fulfil this mission in our time with ecumenical openness and interreligious respect.

The Church of Sweden has been marked by the challenges that the church has faced throughout history and processed theologically. In modern times, missionary commitments, the ecumenical movement, and liturgical renewal, among other things, have had an impact. In on-going dialogue

with culture and society, the church has accentuated certain features that time and context have brought to the forefront. At times circumstances have changed rapidly, in other times less so, but the response of the church has always been to interpret the gospel anew. Today's churches, spread across the Earth, are all – according to the kind of ecclesiological understanding that the Church of Sweden often expresses – the result of a willingness to interpret and live the gospel for people in a particular time and in a particular place. In other words, it is necessary not only to interpret the gospel in order to be able to assist each other; this interpretation must also be made with great sense of respect and understanding for the circumstances and history of other churches. However, this does not mean that criticism and questions are never justified. Instead, it means the mode of expression and theology of each church is formulated as a response stemming from a willingness to let the gospel be heard, then and there.

Thus, the Church of Sweden does not claim that all should share our perspective. Like all churches, the Church of Sweden is constantly in motion. We are on the way. The aim is still ahead of us. The Church of Sweden is responding to these questions in the full knowledge that we are not yet where we ought to be, and that we share this with all other churches. The unity of the Church is given in Jesus Christ even as it continues to seek its earthly form. Our responses below should therefore be seen primarily not as conclusions but as contributions to an on-going conversation.

4. *Church Ordinance, Part 6, Introduction.*

1. To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?

The Church of Sweden's self-understanding is contained within the framework of the convergence text. The document paints a picture of the Church as containing many of the things that the Church of Sweden considers to be important in its own self-understanding. The gospel, baptism and eucharist are all indispensable, as are discipleship and mission. It is a picture of the Church that is understandable and recognizable, but that does not depict the Church of Sweden's own contextual response to the mission of the gospel in exactly all respects. Thus, some aspects of the document can be understood as interpretations of what the Church is in a given context, without necessarily being accentuated in the tradition of the Church of Sweden.

It is important to be aware of the fact that, just as churches are different from each other, there is great diversity within churches. Even if the mainstream of the church recognizes itself and is able to affirm the various parts of the document, some positions may be perceived as more fraught with difficulty by other groups or orientations. The Church of Sweden has a folk church tradition, as well as a high church and an evangelical tradition. Thus, the document's discussion of the Church as a sacrament is perceived in different ways, even within the Church of Sweden. In the confessional writings of the Church of Sweden, the sacraments are two (baptism and the eucharist), or three (baptism, the eucharist and confession). The Church itself is not presented as a sacrament

in these documents; rather, the church administers the sacraments. The Augsburg Confession expresses it thus: the Church is where the gospel is rightly taught and the sacraments are rightly administered. At the same time, the terminology describing the church as sacrament – which is often used in international ecumenical work on ecclesiology – has been discussed, for example, in dialogue between the Church of Sweden and the Roman Catholic Church, and the Church of Sweden and the Old Catholic churches in the Union of Utrecht. In its ecclesiological reflection, the Church of Sweden would really speak of the church's sacramentality in a figurative sense in relation to its mission of living out the gospel and the grace of God in human form. The analogy of the church as sacrament must be seen in relation to the images of the church in the New Testament and other ecclesiological themes, in particular in the Reformation tradition, for example, *Creatura Verbi* (the Creation of the Word). A broader use of the notion of sacramentality could be anchored in a sacramentality of creation – that God's presence is not only beyond the world but also within it. There is a pattern in all that God does: The love of God manifests itself in concrete forms.

In general, the text appears to paint an image in which the church itself becomes central and has an indispensable value. This can be affirmed by the Church of Sweden, but it has traditionally emphasized other matters. The Word of God in preaching and action is one such emphasis. The role and mission of the church in the world has often had a more central role in the theology and practise of the Church of Sweden. The document points to

the nature of the church which in turn gives rise to a mission, while the Church of Sweden more often understands the church on the basis of its mission to be salt and light in the world.

The document opens up to seeing our own church from new perspectives. One example in relation to the Church of Sweden concerns its identity as a folk church. What the document says about *koinonia* – communion – can help to illuminate and deepen reflection on the folk church as an open democratic fellowship. Sometimes the church is emphasized as the place of proclamation and sacrament at the expense of its communion aspect. The definition of the church in our own tradition involves both aspects when it is described as the communion where the gospel is rightly taught and the sacraments are rightly administered (see Article VII of the Augsburg Confession). This communion must not be exclusive. Rather, the notion of *koinonia* can reinforce the understanding of an inviting, diverse communion, offered through the gift of baptism. God's mission can also be related to the idea of a folk church by understanding the church as having been drawn into God's mission. The Church's sacramentality can also be related to this idea, by pointing out how the God of history acts in, and through, human schemes.

2. To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?

This document provides an important contribution to a conversation the Church of Sweden believes must be continuous. Unity must be a goal that every church strives for, but with the insight

that its consummation belongs to the kingdom of heaven. People are different and churches are too. Different circumstances and different histories always give rise to different practices, and this is as it should be. This is why continuous conversation is essential, not in order to create a unity or similarity that removes the influence of history and circumstance, but in order to create the understanding that ways of expression and belief that differ from one's own can be expressions of the true Church as well.

However, it is also important to emphasize that, although the Church is visible in different forms, there is a given unity. The Church is the body of Christ and the body is one. It relates to all the parts of the body and suffers in its entirety when any part of it suffers. The church is called to be what the Apostles' Creed expresses as: "the one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church." It is therefore important to consider the question of what kind of unity is necessary for the body to remain intact and on what issues unity does not need to be made visible. The difference between unity and unanimity ought to be considered: We can disagree without our unity coming to nothing. At times there is talk of seeking "unity in legitimate diversity."

Unity is thus given, but at the same time it is something to continuously strive for and live out. Unity may be sought through various paths. Ecclesiological challenges may be theologically worked through and responded to in ways that gain common acceptance. Another path implies recognizing that the church is not an end in itself, but is there to serve God's plan for the transformation of the world, or in other words, action leading to unity.

The approach used in the document is the former – a consensus of opinions leading to unity – but in the long run this approach can be problematized. There is always a risk that discussing formulations from a theoretical perspective will lead to bigger questions and ultimately to deeper divisions. It is therefore advantageous to supplement efforts to achieve unity through dialogue with efforts to achieve unity through joint meetings and actions in which unity can be experienced and lived out genuinely and credibly.

In relation to this, the question might be posed as to whether this document reflects questions of a bygone era, where demarcations in relation to others and the accentuations of each church's own doctrinal position were perceived as more important than they seem to be in more recent generations.

A further question that the document raises indirectly concerns the importance of being conscious of who you are and who you are speaking with in this dialogue. Increasingly – or at least in a clearer way than in the past – every church must learn to live with diversity both within and between churches. From the point of view of the Church of Sweden, the question of who is representing the churches in ecumenical discussions is important. The document represents an official church position in the form of an academic discussion. But it is also important to seek ways to include other voices constructively and wisely in the dialogue.

The Church of Sweden values that the process has now come so far, that a convergence text about the church has taken shape. The document

provides good insights into fundamental ecclesiological questions. The tone of the document is open and respectful. It is a relevant text for greater mutual understanding that, in a simple way, makes it clear why unity is an objective worth pursuing. That the document builds on convergence, rather than a minimum platform of consensus, highlights both the essential points of agreement and the remaining questions and disparities. Because unity is treated as an objective the church is striving towards, there is room for deeper and growing understanding of the questions raised. At the same time, important questions concerning the definition of unity remain in this document. What is the unity we are ultimately aiming for? And why this kind of unity in particular?

3. What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?

This document ought to provide a good point of departure for continuing dialogue, both within the Church of Sweden and in our encounters with other church traditions. Our experience of how it has been received within the Church of Sweden indicates that the document has occasionally been perceived as too abstract in relation to the reality and the issues facing parishes locally. Some have experienced the language of the document as difficult to understand. However, when the text is interpreted and formulated anew for a specific context, the questions raised in the document have been experienced as important to discuss.

The text can serve as an invitation to study the meaning of expressions that are experienced

as unfamiliar, such as the understanding of the church as a sacrament. Such a study could lead to the conclusion that a new concept expresses a consensus. The new concept can also serve as a corrective, or even an alternative, to previous understandings. In the latter case, this alternative can either enrich the Church of Sweden's understanding, or be something that the church rejects.

At this time, in the early 21st century, the Church of Sweden is involved in a number of major processes that are raising questions about the way the Church of Sweden formulates and lives out its identity as a church. The new legislation coming into force in the year 2000 has meant that the Church of Sweden is now on a more equal footing with other faith communities in Sweden than previously. At the same time, almost two thirds of Sweden's population belong to the Church of Sweden. Through worship services in connection with baptisms, confirmations, weddings and funerals, the church provides life-interpreting rites which a large proportion of the population makes use of and finds meaning in. As the church of the majority and the former state church, the Church of Sweden is accustomed to having a preferential right of interpretation on social issues and questions regarding the Christian faith. From this perspective, this document serves as a reminder that there are many ways to understand the church's mission, and that different historical contexts give rise to different outlooks.

For various reasons, the identity of the Church of Sweden as a folk church is problematized today. The number of registered members is gradually declining. The church's ambition of being open

to all can also be questioned in relation to other Christian churches and faith traditions in Sweden. The Church of Sweden as the church for the people of Sweden has a different meaning in an age of new mobility across national borders. However, right from the start the idea of a folk church was not solely defined on the basis of sociological criteria. The idea of the Church of Sweden as a folk church has had a theological justification linked to the church's mission in a specific historical and cultural context. The folk church is understood as an instrument in God's mission through which the gospel is offered to people in a given location with its specific presuppositions so that they can live in a communion of grace. The church building itself in the midst of the landscape has been perceived as a tangible reminder of this invitation.

The understanding of the church as *koinonia* challenges the Church of Sweden to think about, and put into practice, concrete expressions of church fellowship and how different types of communion, such as the relationship between belonging to the church and the fellowship of the worship service, relate to each other. The notion of the church as *koinonia* also touches on questions of power and authority in the church, and on questions concerning the relationship between spirit and structure. In these respects too, this document challenges the Church of Sweden to a deeper understanding of the special nature of the church.

The Church of Sweden needs to reinterpret its previous, dominant position and seek the expression of its identity in respectful interaction with other churches and faith communities, as well as

with those Swedes who choose not to be members of any faith tradition. The church also offers a Christian interpretation of life in a highly secularized context, in which formal membership of the church is not synonymous with either knowledge of, or notable participation in, the church's traditions. This requires both openness and clarity. The document can also function as a resource in the conversation within the Church of Sweden and between the Church of Sweden and other faith communities also seeking their identity in new circumstances.

A challenge the churches all have in common is the extent to which unity can be visible in the plurality in which we are living. What can churches do to help each other to see and understand unity in this plurality? The goal of the ecumenical movement has been, and is, to help churches in this work. How can we understand and overcome differences so that unity is made possible and made visible? The challenge is twofold, and every church must turn its gaze both inwards and outwards. In one's own tradition, what helps express the gospel and what rather masks the task and the mission of the church? In other churches, what is perceived as a positive expression of the gospel and what rather hides it?

A point where the document can contribute to continued reflection within the Church of Sweden is the document's view concerning the church's "being" and "doing." In an era orientated towards action and results, where the traditional authority of the church is being called into question, quantitative objectives risk gaining the upper hand and thus dominating the discussion within

the church. The focus of the document on the church as a communion based on the triune God here becomes a reminder of the importance of the church's being. At the same time, the church's being cannot be separated from its doing. The document's description of the church's mission in the world is challenging in that it points out that its mission and *diakonia* both belong to the being of the Church. The notion of God's mission in the world ought to force the Church of Sweden to continuously reflect on its particular role in our time, both locally and globally.

4. How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement?

The Porvoo Common Statement, bilateral church fellowships, and dialogues conducted in recent times show that the Church of Sweden is able to go a long way in forming closer relationships with other churches. In the ecumenical context, the Church of Sweden has been proud to be a bridge-building church. The historic significance of this broadens when the Church of Sweden takes steps that other churches do not choose to take. Today, the Church of Sweden is striving to both preserve important bridges to other churches and faith traditions around the world, and to build bridges to a society that has changed, with a new understanding of and new values surrounding gender and relationships, for example. Important bridge-building is also occurring in relation to people from other families of churches

and other religious traditions that are establishing themselves in Sweden. This often happens in concrete diaconal projects – work for human rights, for peace and the sustainability of creation. The Church of Sweden is prepared to go a long way in cooperating with other churches in this bridge-building, but also needs to listen to voices that represent a different understanding than its own.

The deepest dividing lines today are not infrequently within the bigger church traditions. The Church of Sweden seeks ways of holding together as a church, with the differences that exist both within its own tradition and in relation to other faith traditions. The issue of coexistence in diversity is a fundamental ecclesiological question that is addressed to our own tradition, but also to a world where people are persecuted for their faith and where peaceful coexistence is all too often being replaced by dominance legitimized by violence. Conversations about unity and diversity are thus inward-looking, and about how we understand our mission as a church. At the same time, questions concerning how we live together in diversity lead us to look outwards. The church's mission is to show how the triune God holds our world together in communion – in spite of everything that divides us.

The Church of Sweden is prepared to cooperate with all people of good will working for a world of peaceful coexistence. For the church, the roots of this position lie in the unity that is given in Christ, but this does not prevent our church from also recognizing the same efforts within traditions that are far away from our own.

The limit on how far the Church of Sweden is prepared to go for the sake of unity goes hand in hand with respect for human dignity. Where diversity is under threat and the will to live peacefully is lacking, the church must draw a line in order to respond to God's mission. However, even in such circumstances, the Church of Sweden also sees as its task to seek dialogue to mutual understanding beyond particular standpoints that for the moment appear to be impossible to reconcile.

A final perspective on the question of how far our church is prepared to go concerns prayer as a transformative power acting within us as individual Christians, as well as within the church and throughout God's world. We do not ourselves set the limit on the transformation that prayer leads us into. This transformation takes place in the encounter with what is radically foreign to us – in ourselves as well as in others. The Church of Sweden prays for the unity of the church and for its sister churches all over the world. We pray to be transformed ourselves so that we become open to listening to the voice of God even where we do not expect to hear it.

5. What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

In the discussions which ensued from the adoption of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982), it became clear that the divisions that remained between the churches had to do with underlying differences of an ecclesiological character. The

document is a result of a long process of studying these fundamental questions. At the same time a lot of things have happened within the various member churches concerning their views on baptism, the eucharist and ministry. With regard to the Church of Sweden, the changed relationship with the state in 2000, along with the processes that preceded and followed this event, has affected our position on these questions. Baptism became the basis for belonging to the Church of Sweden in a clearer way in 1996. The issue of the churches' respect for each other's baptisms has also been brought to the fore in a clearer way in the multi-faith context of Sweden today. The eucharistic revival in the Church of Sweden, which doubled the number of holy communions over a 40-year period, raises new questions about open communion between different church traditions and in relation to those who are not baptized, as well as the relationship between baptism and the eucharist, etc. The Church of Sweden has more clearly adopted the threefold order of ordained ministry with bishops, priests and deacons through the Church Ordinance of 2000. At the same time, our church has made it even clearer that the ministry is open to anyone who is suitable, irrespective of their sex or sexual orientation.

The shared responsibility between the ordained ministry and laity raises questions to do with power and authority. Spiritual authority, even if it comes from God and can be expressed in service and holiness, is exercised by actual people in specific structures that are influenced by different views of the church, its contexts and societal systems. Not all churches agree on the source of

authority, the bearer of authority, or an authority's areas of competence. Important dimensions which must be emphasized for discussions within and between churches, as well as in the relationship between the Church and society, are power, the preferential right of interpretation, gender perspectives, democracy, politics, economics and culture.

The Church of Sweden believes that, with the aid of the new ecclesiological achievements of this document, it would be of value for the Commission on Faith and Order to return to the issues of baptism, eucharist and ministry on the basis of the many new questions that have been raised in the member churches since 1982. This in order to see whether it is now possible to go even further.

Based on the experiences of these ecumenical processes, where it has been clarified how different interpretations have come into being, the Commission on Faith and Order could, in its future work, examine whether what is today still seen as divisive, instead could and should be seen as acceptable diversity.

A further question that the Church of Sweden sees as urgent and which is briefly touched on in the text, concerns the churches' attitudes to creation and sustainable development. Both *oikoumene* and the notion of the body of Christ are key ecclesiological starting points. The urgency of the climate issue calls on the churches to be a voice for taking joint responsibility.

The Church of Sweden also wishes to emphasize the importance of keeping these processes together so that the lessons learned from the theoretically focused discussion about the church are

combined with insights that have emerged from other processes within and between the churches. For example, the position in the document *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* ought reasonably to have implications for how the document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* is used, and vice versa. Likewise, the analyses in the Faith and Order study document *Moral Discernment in the Churches*, concerning factors that have led different church traditions to different ethical stances, would be applicable to ecclesiology in order to illuminate the question of why various views of the church have developed.

The Church of Sweden would also like to see a survey of new kinds of ecumenical issues that are becoming increasingly topical. These include growing theological differences, in particular between churches in the global North and churches in the global South, and the ecclesiological consequences of the rapid growth of charismatic and Pentecostal movements.

It is also very important to reflect on the relationship between ecumenism and interreligious dialogue, and how encounters with other religions in different parts of the world are influencing the understanding of what it means to be church in reflection and practice. The Church of Sweden has a calling “to seek the voice of God in the encounter with every individual, regardless of their faith tradition.”⁵ Close cooperation between people of different faiths is increasingly common and has implications for our self-understanding.

A clear trend in more recent ecclesiological research is an increased interest in the concrete church and its expressions. Through empirical studies, it has proved possible to identify implicit or operative ecclesiologies in practical examples of ecclesial life in the past and in the present. This could be utilized constructively in the future work of the Commission on Faith and Order.

5. *The Church Ordinance, Part 14, Introduction.*

14. Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

Council for International Relations Draft Statement

Introduction

We are grateful to the Commission on Faith and Order for the convergence document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)*. It comprehensively, yet clearly and concisely, addresses the basic question of how the ecumenical movement deals with the nature, purpose and mission of the church. This theme is at the heart of the ecumenical endeavour, and is no less important for the internal unity of the churches. The achievement of a common vision for the church requires much prayer and work.

On one hand, the document paints an effective picture of the results and rapprochement achieved through multilateral and bilateral theological dialogues. On the other hand, it outlines many questions which need further elaboration. The document contributes to a clearer understanding of the state of ecumenical discussion, cogently identifying those differences which are based primarily on language, culture, and tradition, and those that raise actual and substantial theological questions. It is especially to be welcomed that it states from the outset that the church's foundation lies in the salvific plan of the triune God, and in the sending of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit into the world.

Participation in the life of the triune God as a gift “by which the Church lives and . . . [by which] God calls the Church to offer to a wounded and divided humanity in hope of reconciliation and healing” (§1) provides a firm theological foundation for the interconnectedness of witness/mission, *diakonia*, fellowship (*koinonia*) and the building up of unity. At the same time, this foundation connects the concept of *Missio Dei*, important in the ecumenical discussion about mission, *diakonia* and evangelism, with ecclesiology. Current challenges, such as how the gospel can be proclaimed in a multireligious context, the extent to which moral questions pose a threat to unity, and the place of churches in different societal contexts are also highlighted by the document.

The document as a whole paints an encouraging picture of the extensive common understanding among churches concerning the nature and mission of the church in the world. In this light, those factors which still separate us appear not as hopeless obstacles but as challenges which, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the churches can face with confidence. We therefore wish to answer the five questions the document poses to the churches in order to give our input to the ongoing work of the Commission on Faith and Order.

In our answers, we have also taken note of the additional questions written in italics in the document following the working out of subthemes. Because the document challenges us to relate these questions specifically to the life and renewal of our church, we have amended the questions accordingly.

1. To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of our church?

The Augsburg Confession (1530, CA VII) states:

also they teach that one holy Church is to continue forever. The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered. And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike.

The Word of God, the sacraments, and the ordained ministry instituted for the teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments (CA V) are thus essential. The Augsburg Confession begins by stating that the Lutheran Reformation adheres to the ecumenical creeds of the early church in their western form, and thus to the classical understanding of the Holy Trinity and the two natures of Christ. The Confession concludes: “Only those things have been recounted whereof we thought that it was necessary to speak, in order

that it might be understood that in doctrine and ceremonies nothing has been received on our part against Scripture or the Church Catholic.”

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland aims to be an embodiment of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, that is, of the heritage of the undivided church, underlining loyalty to the clear word of the Bible and the grace of Jesus Christ as its centre. The Lutheran confessional writings seek to identify essential questions, rather than to present a dogmatic overview. For this reason, Lutheranism defines only certain basic features of the doctrine concerning the church. At the same time, our ecumenical strategy, as outlined by *Our Church: A Community in Search of Unity* (2009, p. 18), in describing the teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments as the sufficient precondition for the real unity of the church, emphasizes that “what is sufficient (*satis est*) for Church unity – that is, doctrinal agreement – is also necessary (*necesse est*) to achieve unity.” We do not support a method of “minimal consensus,” which would result in the content of the basic truths of the Christian faith remaining unclear.

Current ecclesiological reflection is closely related to the division of the church. The Lutheran emphasis that the church is “the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered” allows for different ecclesiological emphases, as long as there is an adequate articulation of the basic position. Many issues mentioned by the document are not traditionally regarded as ecclesiological in Lutheran theology. However, especially in an ecumenical context, it is natural to posit that

ecclesiology provides a framework for the consideration of matters such as baptism, holy communion and ministry. The identity of each church affects its understanding of the sacraments, for example. An emphasis on Word and sacraments – especially baptism and eucharist – is characteristic of the Lutheran approach. The document may be considered to accord with this emphasis, although it seems not to give an unambiguously church-defining character to baptism and eucharist. Yet the proclamation of the gospel is of itself church-defining, leading people to become members of Christ's body through the sacraments (§14). From a Lutheran perspective, this expresses the idea that the content of the gospel is ultimately Christ, the Word of God, who is present as the visible Word in baptism and eucharist.

The basis of “*koinonia*” ecclesiology, participation in the triune God in Christ as the source and focus of the life of the church, is well expressed by the document (§23). This principle is rooted in the heritage of undivided Christendom, providing a deep but sufficiently flexible basis to give expression to the fundament of the life and function of the church in the contemporary context. This is clearly expressed by the document's conclusion, which defines *koinonia* or *communio* as “communion with the Holy Trinity . . . manifested in three interrelated ways: unity in faith, unity in sacramental life, and unity in service (in all its forms, including ministry and mission)” (§67). Lutheran theology emphasizes justification by faith, but no less the interconnectedness of faith and love in Christ. Thus, *diakonia* and mission belong to the essence of the church as the body of Christ.

Our church's Bishops' Conference published the *Future Report of the Church, 2020* in 2011, which answers the question “what is church?” in the following way: “The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland confesses the faith which the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church of Jesus Christ has always professed. The Church of Christ dates to the time of the apostles, and today covers the whole globe. The church is thus in its essence one, although it appears diverse and is realized in local communality.”

According to this report, two principles should be followed in a changing working environment: “Lutheranism and ecumenism are not mutually exclusive, but belong together”; and “the unity of the church encompasses diversity in spiritual life.” Consequences of this are an ecumenically open attitude and a striving for an internal consistency in the church, evidenced by a joint commitment to the gospel of Christ in the various forms taken by spiritual life. In describing “ecumenical openness,” reference is made to our ecumenical strategy, according to which our church maintains its closest relationships with churches which “like our church, represent and respect the common legacy of undivided Christendom and who hold to the classic interpretation of Christianity and sacramental ecclesiology.” In addition, our church functions “with churches and denominations whose doctrine and confessions differ from our own.” *TCTCV* is thus in its general outline compatible with the stated positions of both our church's Bishops' Conference and our ecumenical strategy.

TCTCV well describes legitimate diversity in the life of communion as “the gift of the Lord”

(§28). It does draw a line, however, because diversity can go beyond its limits and become a threat to unity. Active measures are needed in order to prevent disintegration and to sharpen the teaching of the basic truths of the Christian faith. Yet legitimate diversity should be valued in liturgy, customs, and law, and should be promoted in the areas of spirituality and theological method and formulation. It is a criterion that promotes the unity and catholicity (or fullness and universality of faith) of the church. Arising from this, the exchange of “ecumenical gifts” must keep in sight the objective of visible unity if it is clearly to contribute to the unity of the body of Christ in all its diversity.

2. To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?

The document promotes growth in unity in many ways. Firstly, it outlines a general framework for discussing questions concerning the nature and mission of the church. The saving activity of the Holy Trinity in history “is essential to an adequate understanding of the Church” (§1–4).

It places ecclesiology at the heart of the Christian faith in a way that is both theologically profound and widely acceptable.

To the extent that it is currently possible, the document also sketches a common understanding of interchurch negotiations. This common understanding encompasses a presentation of the biblical teaching about the church that will be widely acceptable (§11–21), and a proposition concerning the attributes of the church as one, holy, catholic and apostolic (§22). It will serve to facilitate the

definition of the level of unanimity in the discussions between churches. For our church, it is important that this common understanding be described as extensively as possible, because we regard unanimity on the basic truths of faith as the necessary and sufficient precondition for unity (*Our Church: A Community in Search of Unity*, p. 18).

In addition, the document names several themes in which a far-reaching common understanding is not yet reality. These include questions of institutional structures (§24) and authority (§51), the status of sacraments or ordinances (§44), ministry (§45–57), continuity and change in the church (§24), the limits of legitimate diversity (§30), the relationship of local churches within the universal church (§32), religious pluralism (§60), and moral questions (§63). Concerning these, the document succeeds in drawing a map to assist churches to focus their discussions on those issues which contribute to greater unanimity. The document also challenges and inspires us to face difficult questions. For example, it is important for our church to seek reconciliation concerning those questions of morality which are currently divisive in relationships both between and within the churches.

The question *TCTCV* poses (II B) concerning the relationship between continuity and change in the church and the lively dialogue between them is very important, both from the perspective of Lutheran identity and, more generally, for the fresh expression of the apostolic gospel. We are happy to accept the invitation to reflect with other churches on our basic commitments concerning continuity and change and their possible development.

As *TCTCV* reminds us, the Nicene Creed affirms that the church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic. This is affirmed no less by Lutheran theology. For example, the Anglican-Lutheran Porvoo Common Statement, in referring to the understanding of the apostolicity of the church in the Faith and Order document *Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry* (BEM, 1982, *Ministry* §34), states: “The Church is called to faithfulness to the normative apostolic witness to the life, death, resurrection and exaltation of its Lord. The Church receives its mission and the power to fulfil this mission as a gift of the risen Christ. The Church is thus apostolic as a whole.” The Finnish-Swedish Lutheran - Catholic dialogue report *Justification in the Life of the Church* (JLC 2010) states: “We understand apostolicity as continuity in faith, in the life of the church and in the structures and ministry of the church. The ministerial succession serves the continuity of the life of the church in Christ and should thus be considered as both a constituent part and an expression of the apostolicity of the church. The same applies to the consecration of a bishop in historic succession through the laying on of hands” (JLC §361).

In addressing the catholicity and apostolicity of the church, the catechism of our church states: “The Church is catholic, i.e., universal, since it has been sent to serve all nations with God’s word. Finally, the Church is apostolic as it lives by the Gospel handed down by Jesus’ first disciples” (Catechism 21). In Lutheran theology, the basis for the evaluation of these four creedal marks of the church in its life in the light of the Bible is the doctrine of the gospel, the proper administration

of the sacraments, and the ordained ministry instituted for their celebration.

The “Church as sacrament” (*TCTCV* II C) and the related broader expression “sacramentality of the church” constitute an important theme, as the question of the church’s sacramentality is often seen as a point of division between churches, especially in Central European conversations. The document asks if the expression “the Church as sacrament” might allow for approval with differing emphasis. This would bring the discussion forward in a positive way. For example, *Justification in the Life of the Church* describes the incarnate Christ as the “original sacrament,” and states that the church, in providing a sacramental framework, serves as the “basic sacrament” (§144). At the same time, it should be remembered that §36 of *TCTCV* points out that although the church takes part in the fruits of Christ’s victory as the body of Christ, and “the gates of hell cannot prevail against it,” its members are “vulnerable to the power of sin, both individually and collectively.”

The document invites the churches to reflect on whether common criteria and mutually recognized structures might be created in order for the churches to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate diversity (II D). Achieving this will be important as the churches seek to address such challenges as are posed by both theological anthropology and moral questions for the unity of the church.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, communion ecclesiology has served as a basic Faith and Order model for understanding the relationship between the local and global churches, underlining

the importance of the local congregation as a worshipping community (II E). The model is clearly anchored in trinitarian faith and in the church as a spiritual community. Its definition of the church's mutual fellowship resonates with a variety of traditions.

The document brings welcome clarity to ecumenical work (III B, §37) by bringing the elements of full ecclesial fellowship together and stating that “. . . there is widespread agreement that the Church is called to proclaim, in each generation, the faith ‘once for all entrusted to the saints’ (Jude v. 3) and to remain steadfast in the teaching first handed on by the apostles” (§38). This faith is to be interpreted in changing circumstances. In many points of doctrine the churches are basically unanimous. For example, the Nicene Creed and its interpretation are mentioned. In its statements on the previous versions of *TCTCV*, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland has highlighted the importance of the apostolic faith and the ecumenical creeds in ecumenical work. A vital contemporary challenge – how the faith experience of the whole people of God, the insights of theologians and the discernment of the ordained ministry function together – is addressed by §39. The document thus assists in the identification of a shared challenge, and the different perspectives concerning it that need to be considered in the churches' discussions with each other.

The chapter dealing with sacraments adds nothing essential to the progress already articulated in the document *Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry* (1982), the compilation *Harvesting the Fruits* (2009) and the document *One Baptism: Towards*

Mutual Recognition (2011). In ongoing discussions to promote the visible unity of the church, other rites or sacraments should also be considered. For example, the Christian understanding of marriage is currently topical. However, as the headline at the end of §44 indicates, the deepest difference between the churches in this respect seems to lie in whether we can talk about “sacraments” or “ordinances.” In other words, do we speak of mediating grace or only of the expression or recognition of existing reality? According to the Faith and Order document *One Baptism*, which *TCTCV* quotes, most traditions affirm that these events are both instrumental and expressive, although they emphasize these dimensions differently. If we could agree that the difference lies less in doctrine than in emphasis (§44), we could proceed towards the recognition of a single Christian baptism on a much broader basis than is currently possible.

However, Lutheranism clearly follows the tradition of the early church in emphasizing baptism as an effective sign and medium of grace. At the same time, baptism is inherent to Christian initiation. Baptism and teaching belong together, as do baptism and a confession of the faith that can address the age in which it is proclaimed. According to our *Catechism* (Catechism 35): “Baptism makes us Christ's disciples and members of the Christian Church. . . . The Holy Spirit regenerates us, imparting faith with which we grasp hold of the promises of baptism.” It is encouraging that in the Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue, for example, there has been a growth towards a common

understanding of the relationship between baptism and faith.

The document incisively states that questions related to ordained ministry (§45) continue to “constitute challenging obstacles on the path to unity” and that solving them should be prioritized as important and urgent. A related aim is unanimity concerning “whether or not the threefold ministry is part of God’s will for the Church in its realization of the unity which God wills” (§47, italic text). In this respect, it is appropriate to underline that all authority in the church should serve the core function of the church, the gospel and its expression, in accordance with a normative interpretation of the revelation and the doctrine of the church.

The discussion about the normativity of the church’s teaching is connected with the question concerning the authority of the ecumenical councils. With good reason, the document expresses the hope that an evaluation of the normativity of the councils of the early church be undertaken together. This would at least serve to clarify the discussion, and would help to identify problematic issues requiring further elaboration. Indeed, there is growing interest in patristic research and teaching in the emerging spiritual traditions. The question concerning conciliar authority is linked with the discussion regarding ministry, which is meant to “foster and promote the unity of the Church at the universal level” (§57).

The document appropriately draws attention to two current ecumenical challenges: the development of a shared response to religious plurality, and the implication of questions of morality

for the mission and unity of the church. Clearly, questions concerning anthropology and morality have their place in ecumenical dialogue. From a Lutheran perspective, however, it is problematic that in relation to the gospel there is no mention in the document of the proclamation of God’s law as the prerequisite for its reception. Even where questions of morality are concerned, the document only refers to the moral challenge of the gospel (§61).

According to classical Lutheran theology, God’s word consists of demands and promises (law and gospel). The proclamation of the commandments of God belongs to the functions of the church. It is the foundation of Christian moral teaching. In both Nordic Lutheran and Roman Catholic theology, the concept of natural moral law has been applied in an explication of the universal character of God’s demand of love, and the common ethical ground for all people of good will which it provides. If moral self-criticism is neglected, ecclesiology tends to become unrealistic in its assessment of the moral strength of Christians. This is to compromise the pure gospel. Yet the gospel also includes the call to do good: Christian freedom is freedom to love one’s neighbour, even if incompletely. In this context, it is welcome that §36 clearly states that the churches “recognize the continual need for Christian self-examination, penitence, conversion (*metanoia*), reconciliation and renewal.”

The concept of the universal character of God’s law of love arises from faith in the triune God as Creator. More than just people, God loves the whole of creation. The concept of *koinonia*

also sees creation as reflecting the reality of God's self-giving love: "No creature is in existence only for itself, but for others, i.e., to further the life and welfare of other creatures." (*Climate Programme of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland*, p. 35.) In the midst of an environmental crisis an important element of our contemporary Christian way of life and calling is our care for the poor and for creation. The document might have been clearer in its articulation of the essential place the integrity of creation has in the concept of *koinonia*. However, this is emphasized in the document's conclusion (§66).

3. What adaptations or renewal in the life of our church does this statement challenge our church to work for?

The text calls our church to self-reflection on ecclesiology and our teaching in general. We should articulate more clearly what it means for communion ecclesiology to form the framework for the life of the church – that a local church is anchored by eucharistic worship and that it belongs to the global communion of local churches. We should also continue to work to identify common criteria for discussion about legitimate and illegitimate diversity and moral questions in the church, and in our efforts for unity between the churches.

Where sacraments are concerned, we should continue to strive for mutual recognition of baptism with those traditions which speak of ordinations rather than sacraments. Further discussion is also needed concerning rites other than baptism and holy communion regarded in Roman Catholic and Orthodox tradition as sacraments.

The question concerning ordained ministries and the related question concerning the clearer recognition of the threefold character of the ordained ministry also need further work by our church. Both within our church and in our encounters with other churches, such questions require constant reflection and a quest for a common approach. In our context, for example, in addressing the ordained ministry (of deacon, priest, and bishop) it may be possible to make progress in Catholic-Lutheran and Lutheran-Methodist dialogue. To this area belongs also the manner in which we address the ministry of universal unity and, especially with the Orthodox churches, the question concerning the normativity of the ecumenical church councils.

The challenges of secularization, religious plurality, and moral questions call us to find an authoritative balance between the faith experience of God's people, the insights of theologians and the discernment of the ordained ministry when considering the faith and doctrine of the church.

As a Nordic folk church, our traditional position in society is currently undergoing change. The loss of financial resources may be seen as an opportunity for the church to develop a more communal working structure and self-understanding. *Koinonia* would thus be realized more profoundly in the life of our church and her parishes. We are called to be less bureaucratic and less church worker centred, and to work towards more participatory methods so that parishioners may themselves more easily bear responsibility. The ecumenical welcome given to immigrants and the building of contacts

with migrant churches also call us to a new way of ecclesiological thinking (cf. §7).

Following the publication of the Lima Document (*BEM*), our church admitted children to holy communion, but we still need to strengthen the link between baptism and the eucharist (§42).

As we reflect on the link between decision-making in the church and the will of God, the WCC's experience of the consensus decision-making style may be of assistance to us in seeking to "give voice to the voiceless and to uphold unity in diversity" (§54).

4. How far is our church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement?

According to the ecumenical strategy of our church: "Church unity will be possible when there is sufficient doctrinal agreement between churches and when the sacraments and the ordained ministry are recognised." The Anglican-Lutheran Porvoo Communion, to which we belong and in which churches function together and treat each other's members as their own, is one example of a far-reaching fellowship. The Porvoo Common Statement and the Porvoo Communion of Churches, which are influenced by *BEM's* concept of the ministry of the bishop as a servant of the apostolicity of the whole church, serve as an inspirational example of lived conciliar ecumenism. Unanimity concerning the basic truths of Christian faith is comprehensively articulated by the Common Statement, and church representatives

– including the primates – meet regularly and consult with each other in matters of mutual importance for the churches. Space has also been given for factual contextual diversity. Our church also has altar and pulpit fellowship and mutual recognition of ordained ministries with the Finnish and Swedish speaking Methodist churches in Finland, which are part of the Episcopal United Methodist Church. *TCTCV* is a reminder to us that the achievement of unity in conciliar interchurch relations and in decision-making structures requires further development.

As already mentioned, *TCTCV* clearly sets out and respects the heritage of undivided Christendom and the interpretations of the Christian faith compatible with it, and expresses the hope that a sacramental ecclesiology might serve as a possible alternative for the expression of the presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit in those traditions in which such terminology is not used. In spite of our church's ongoing ecumenical dialogues with the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church family and the evangelical free churches (Pentecostals and Baptists), we still do not enjoy eucharistic fellowship with them. The approach suggested by *TCTCV* may bring us closer to the attainment of this objective. If the difference between those churches with a sacramental emphasis concerning the birth and growth of faith and those that speak of "ordinances" can be bridged in the way suggested by the document, new possibilities for building fellowship and unity with the Protestant free churches would also be created.

The document's presentation of areas of common understanding is helpful for our church's

work in seeking unanimity. Our church is committed to the heritage of undivided Christendom, while at the same time seeking to be open to the Reformation principle of renewal. This openness encompasses our position that the Word of God, the sacraments and those who are ordained to administer them, should be understood as constitutive concerning faith, salvation and church (*Our Church: A Community in Search of Unity*, p. 17). The common understanding presented by *TCTCV* concerning the trinitarian character of the birth of the church (§1–3), the importance of the ecclesiology of the Bible and the creeds (§11–22), and the church-defining character of gospel, baptism and eucharist (§14) is compatible with the positions of our church. It can therefore serve as an effective prerequisite in the quest for a broader unanimity.

In building fellowship with the charismatic and Pentecostal movements, whether in the Global Christian Forum or elsewhere, it is especially important to discuss the activity of the Holy Spirit in the ecclesiological context. From this perspective, §33 of *TCTCV* might build a bridge.

5. What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could our church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

The document clearly states that questions concerning the ordained ministry remain a significant obstacle on the way towards unity. Ongoing discussion concerning them is needed in order that the visible sign of unity between churches – eucharistic fellowship – may be further extended.

Questions related to this are the authoritative interpretation of faith and doctrine, legitimate and illegitimate diversity, and ministry as the servant of the universal unity of the church. The impact of moral questions on church unity also remains a burning issue. To this area belong questions concerning the Christian understanding of marriage and theological anthropology in general.

If we are to achieve mutual recognition of baptism, it will be necessary to elaborate the distinction between “sacraments” and “ordinances.” It would also be good to clarify the relationship of baptism and eucharist to other rites described as sacraments, and where the line between legitimate and illegitimate diversity lies in this respect.

The report of the Roman Catholic - Lutheran Dialogue Group for Sweden and Finland, *Justification in the Life of the Church*, may serve as a helpful example here. It states: “During the first thousand years of the history of the church, there was talk of both sacrament and ‘mystery’ and the number of the sacraments was not fixed” (*JLC*, §154). In Catholic theology it is symbolically important that there are seven sacraments, covering the whole course of human life. The dialogue report states: “From a Lutheran point of view, the old controversy about the number of the sacraments should not necessarily be considered as a church dividing issue.” According to the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, which belongs to the Lutheran confessional writings, confession, ordination and marriage might be regarded as sacraments, depending on definition (*JLC* §156). A growth towards a common understanding in this area thus seems possible.

It may also prove possible to develop a common understanding concerning the ordained ministry and the related issue of the historic episcopate. The document *Justification in the Life of the Church* concludes: “Against the background of our significant convergence on the character of the ministry and the apostolicity of the church, we believe that we must ask what the remaining differences between Lutherans and Catholics would be with regard to the criteria for a valid Episcopal ministry and a valid apostolic succession; and we ask this in order that a fuller communion between our churches might become a reality. This question is a significant one for a future dialogue” (*JLC* §363). *TCTCV* gives some hints of what these remaining questions might be. Global and multi-lateral dialogue is needed in order to identify them more clearly.

The goal should be that members of the World Council of Churches recognize each other as churches and proceed towards the full visible unity of the church, faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ and his prayer for the unity of his own. This would also create possibilities for building visible unity beyond the WCC’s current organizational limit.

The Faith and Order Commission might also reflect on the stages that might be set in the journey towards the full visible unity of the church. Ecumenical methodology should be developed in a more multiform direction, in order that gains made are not lost in global interaction and that new generations can continue the work of unity in the midst of a rapidly changing secular, multireligious and globally interconnected reality.

15. Moravian Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands

As the topic suggests there have been visions of the Church put forward before. These could speak more directly to particular “local church” or denominations (some larger than others) with their own vision for uniting the units, or provinces belonging to that denomination. However, as it relates to the objective of this document, our understanding is to arrive at a synthesis and a common vision(s) for the ecumenical Church that would galvanize the many towards a visible unity of the body of Christ. This is consistent with the prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is Head of the Church, as He prayed what is sometimes referred to as His High Priestly prayer in John 17:21 “that they all may be one.”

The WCC and the Faith and Order Commission in particular must be commended for their persistence and faith in God to fulfil this goal for the Church. We have seen movements and changes taking place by sectors of the Church that hitherto resisted any conversation with Protestants and reformers. These sisters and brothers are now prepared to dialogue, with an aim to achieve a convergence that would bring about visible unity, so that the world might believe. This is indeed a breakthrough which demonstrates signs of

hope and indicates that what we are engaged in is not an exercise in futility. God is able to do exceedingly more than we are able to ask, think or imagine. Our response is directly related to the issues raised on p. 3 of the introduction. Our reflections relate directly to what we understand to be the Moravians’ view on the issues raised.

1. To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?

In the document, the WCC General Secretary points out: “The work on ecclesiology relates to everything the Church is and what its mission implies to and for the world. *The Church* is rooted in the nature and mission of the Church.”¹

The *Unitas Fratrum* (Moravian Church worldwide) shares the view that the task of the Church is mission. This has been a core practice of this denomination/body of Believers. The history of The Moravian Church reflects strong emphasis on mission and Christian unity. The renewed *Unitas Fratrum* (Unity of the Brethren - Moravian Church) in the 1700s had its rebirth in a multicultural and

1. *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. Faith and Order Paper No. 214 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), vi.

interreligious context. Converts were encouraged to join an active congregation. There was no intent to establish a separate denomination.

In the Preface the writers note: “The goal of this mutual calling to visible unity necessarily entails a mutual recognition of each other as churches, as true expressions of what the creed calls the “one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.”²

The document calls for two distinct *measures* to evaluate our responses to the topic, namely: renewal (in search for an all-inclusive ecclesiology, a position which this paper is seeking to conclude from submissions gathered from all stakeholders to this document) and convergence (a theological agreement on the Church).

Moravians believe it is God who creates (calls her into being and remains her Author and Perfector), redeems (by vicarious crucifixion and resurrection) and sanctifies (makes her holy by His shed blood) the Church. This ought to lay the foundation for such a convergence.

Another measure of evaluation could be: that the kingdom will come and God’s will be done, as in heaven, so on earth, as expressed in the Lord’s Prayer in Luke 11:2. This calls for a degree of praxis which would propel us as people of God to acknowledge our dual citizenship and pay attention to what God wants.

2. To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?

The Christian understanding of the Church is that it is rooted in the vision of God’s design for all

creation, that is the kingdom promised by God and manifested in Jesus Christ. (Jesus declared: “repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand,” “your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.”) It is accepted that we were created with the capacity for *koinonia*/communion.

The Church has a mission to act by the power of the Holy Spirit to continue God’s life giving mission in prophetic and compassionate ministry and bring healing to a broken world. The Church is made of sinners saved by the grace of God. We ought to be able to empathize with sinners who are in need of redemption.

How do we maintain the relevance of the Church?

As we do Church in ministry we must respond in the face of rapidly changing circumstances, technological advances and religious pluralism. We must be careful that we do not make the mistakes of the past. We have a historical legacy of distortions, martyrdom, and intolerance, reformation and counter-reformation. We therefore express the need to call for repentance and forgiveness; and a call to set the captives free, to heal the broken hearted and to set at liberty those that are bruised (Luke 4:16-18). We hasten to identify possible obstacles, that is doctrine and practices. For a common vision we need to develop an understanding of these obstacles.

3. What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?

2. *TCTCV*. vii.

An authentic and ecumenical ecclesiology

Authentic meaning true to Scripture and affirming of a mutually acceptable recognition of cultures. It is of interest that the document seems to juxtapose scripture and tradition as an equally valid means to arrive at an authentic ecclesiology.

The Moravian Church ecclesiology also accepts that what the tradition of the Church has bequeathed through generations of prophets and saints are valid expressions of faith. However scripture has to be treated above tradition. The validity is measured by virtue of its consistent witness to the truth of scripture.

Acknowledges variety and diversity in ecclesiology

But even in such diversity the unity of the Church (people of God, body of Christ, temple of the Holy Spirit, Vine, flock, bride, household, soldiers, friends, etc.) must be upheld. See John 17:20-23; 1 Cor. 12, Eph. 4.

With mutual respect, recognition, affirmation of our diversities

To renew the emphasis on Peace

Church growth

4. How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the church described in this statement?

The Church described in this statement is: missionary; *renewing*; eschatological; compassionate; local and universal; originated by God for the good and healing of the nations; Church of the Triune God; fulfilling God's will on earth; whose members are people (followers of the Lord Jesus Christ); with traditional and contemporary components; charismatic; the Body of Christ; called to communion in unity and diversity; one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church; an all-inclusive Church. Jesus Christ remains the Head of this Church, her Chief Shepherd, Redeemer, Saviour and Lord. He is the author and finisher of her faith (Heb. 12:2). The Moravian Church identifies fully with the description of this Church. The motto of the Moravian Church says a lot: In things essential unity; in things non-essential liberty; in all things charity/love.

The Moravians have members of all ecumenical bodies within the places where we are established (e.g., USA, Africa, Central America, Caribbean and Europe), charter member of the World Council of Churches National Council of Churches USA, Jamaica Council of Churches, United Theological College of the West Indies,

Under faith, sacrament and ministry

Faith

Justification by faith is expanded to include love. Moravians read this issue of justification by faith and add the word love. *Justification*

by faith must be completed in love. Bearing in mind the greatest commandment in the law: love God, love your neighbour and love yourself (Matt. 22:36-40). Love is the fulfilment of the law (Rom. 13:10).

Sacrament

Moravians practice two sacraments: baptism and holy eucharist (Lord's supper or holy communion). The elements (of bread and wine) in the holy communion are seen as symbols, which we take by faith, fully discerning and remembering that Jesus Christ said: "do this in remembrance of me." Both elements are given commonly to members and visiting Christians who are in good standing with their Lord. The issue of the eucharist is one of the greatest hindrances to visible unity and common witness in the ecumenical project. Baptism is an initiation and incorporation into the Body of Christ. Candidates participate in the death and resurrection of the Lord. It is administered to children of believing parents and other believers. The modes of either sprinkling, effusion, dipping or immersion are used. The sacrament is administered in the name of the Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). Where there are doubts of a previous baptism, a rite of reaffirmation of baptism is applied.

Ministry

The constituted order of ministry are: deacon, presbyter and bishop. Ordination grants

the authority to administer the sacraments. "Orders are expressions of service rather than rank. Only one who is recognized as having authority in Himself: Jesus Christ Who also served."³ The office of bishop is pastoral and priestly, and not administrative. However, we do not teach apostolic succession as a kind of mechanical transaction. In the ancient *Unitas Fratrum* women were consecrated as bishops. This was discontinued. "In 1957 Church Order granted permission to each province to ordain women."

The Gift of Authority

We accept and teach that all authority in the church comes from her Lord and head, Jesus Christ. We further resolved since 1727 that Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church and Chief Elder (Col. 1:18), and all believers are brothers and sisters. It is understandable why a bishop in the Moravian Church is given the role of Pastor over the pastors, and priest as intercessor, chief officiating minister at ordination and consecration. He/she has no administrative powers and may only be given such duties if the provincial synod elects him or her to do so. Except for these particulars, that whole section is defensible.

Is there a need for common liturgy? The document shows that already we have format and creeds which are commonly accepted.

3. Church Order of The Unitas Fratrum (Moravian Church) 2009, 66, #682.

These are pivotal points for a forward movement. Could we, at the local church level, revise our liturgies to reflect the “spirit” of this common vision with mutual respect, recognition and affirmation of our diversities? In this forward movement we are called upon to match orthodoxy with orthopraxy, which means to put into practical living what we confess. This seems to capture in part the dilemma of the Christian life, how to apply what the church believes into everyday life.

5. What aspects of the life of the church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

There could be an improved recognition and wholeness of the visible Church. The fact is the Church is about people. More emphasis is urgently required on the redemption, liberation, edification and empowerment of the people of God. Among them are the voiceless, weak, oppressed, poor, destitute and defenseless. While much attention is given to formulating creeds and confessions, building institutions, cathedrals, edifices, maintaining heritage and traditions, forms of worship etc., we have neglected the people for whom those structures were constructed and without whom those structures have no meaning. We are destroying people, excluding people, denigrating people, killing people at the expense of preserving the other things. We must acknowledge that the *invisible Church* is also significant

and relevant and must be preserved, indicative of the fact that the Church goes beyond her visibility. She belongs to God, who bought her with a price. The attributes of salvation, holiness, justification, sanctification, liberation, reconciliation, discipleship, love, faith, hope and a whole range of virtues, values and vision are significant. Yet all of these would fall short if there were no human beings to give expressions to them. Therefore, it is our humble view that Jesus Christ drew attention to the human reality in Luke 4:16-18, Matt. 25:34-46 and Mark 10:45. Moravians have a strong commitment to a biblical faith inherited from the ancient *Unitas Fratrum* and a zeal for mission. The new vision for the Church going forward ought to include: *the Church's holistic salvation for the well-being of all humanity, especially those who are of the people of God.*

There could be a greater emphasis on the ministry of prayer and fasting as critical to the impact and effectiveness of the ministry of the Church.

Conclusion

The Unity of the Body of Christ includes the gift of *koinonial*/communion which God graciously bestows on humankind. This communion is seen in three interrelated ways: in faith, in sacramental life and in service. Our brokenness and division contradict the divine call for unity. Visible unity is a non-negotiable. We must work towards this.

May Jesus Christ be praised.

16. Moscow Patriarchate, Russian Orthodox Church, Holy Synod

30 September 2016

Dear Brother in Christ,

In your letter, which we received in August 2015, there is a request to answer the questions formulated in the Introduction to the document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, which had been in preparation by the Faith and Order Commission for several years. Through these questions the Commission wants to understand how the churches “experience and view the growing theological convergence on the nature and mission of the Church in the world”¹ as reflected in the new document.

Our common answer to the question of how far this text reflects the ecclesiological understanding of our Church is as follows: The Russian Orthodox Church cannot approve the document presented for consideration for a whole number of important reasons.

The document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* is a vivid example of ecumenical texts of convergent nature. Its concept of the Church

represents a certain vision constructed outside concrete living church traditions. Consequently, this document can be seen as a sort of project aimed at transforming the confessional Christian communities, which are called to betray their tradition for the sake of compliance with a theological construction proposed by ecumenical authorities. Many Orthodox believers see it as an attempt to reduce forcibly the Orthodox tradition to a certain theological minimum recognized by all Christians. The Orthodox Church cannot give a positive response to an ecclesiological convergence of this kind.

Certainly, there are in the document some fundamental views of the Church based on holy scriptures common for all Christians. This document is also based on the theology of communion and the eucharistic theology as special ecclesiological concepts shared by some Orthodox theologians. It should be noted however that neither the ecclesiology of communion nor the eucharistic ecclesiology are commonly recognized by or considered normative for the whole Orthodox Church.

One should also bear in mind the existing gap between ecclesiological concepts offered by individual Orthodox theologians and the real church awareness of the Orthodox clergy and

1. *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper No. 198 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005), §123.

laity. The eucharistic ecclesiology and the ecclesiology of communion laid in the basis of the document under consideration are not predominant in the church community. Thus, for instance, the eucharistic renewal observed in many Orthodox churches can be expressed both in a special emphasis on communion (*koinonia*) of Christians in the sacrament of the eucharist and a more frequent communion of individual believers.

It is important that attention should also be given to the fact that the Orthodox understanding of the Church in each Autocephalous Church is formed not only on the basis of common sources (images of the Church in holy scriptures, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, old canons, authoritative patristic writings) but also on the basis of its own local tradition. Accordingly, the interpretation of particular ecclesiological questions in one local tradition may not coincide and can even come into conflict with the understanding of the same questions in the other. Still under discussion are questions such as the prerogatives of the Patriarch of Constantinople as first among equals in the Universal Orthodox Church, and what is the correlation between an ecclesial and a national community, etc. Besides, sometimes a polemic develops between canonists and theologians who represent different local traditions (as in the example of the criticism levelled by Metropolitan John Zizioulas of Pergamon) against the concepts proposed by authoritative Russian theologians Protopresbyter Nicholas Afanasyev and V. N. Lossky.

In answering the question whether the text under consideration represents a basis for bringing

Christians of various confessions closer together, it should be emphasized that its approval, on the contrary, may cause serious theological differences and result in the emergence of new divisions. It may also make the Orthodox put forward the demands that the Russian Orthodox Church should withdraw membership from the World Council of Churches.

A serious obstacle for approving the document under consideration is also constituted by the fact that at the present time there is no consensus in the Orthodox Church as to even a mere designation of other Christian communities as churches, not to mention recognizing them as “true expressions of . . . the one holy, catholic and apostolic Church” (Introduction to the document). The discussion held around the draft document on *Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christians World*, drafted in the pan-Orthodox pre-Council process, and the discussion on it at the Council of ten Local Churches in Crete on 19–26 June 2016, have shown that the principle goal declared in the text *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, i.e., mutual recognition of Christian communities as churches, is rejected by a considerable part of Orthodox bishops, clergy and laity.

Standing in the forefront of this discussion is the fundamental question of how Orthodox Christians should perceive non-Orthodox Christians. The extreme stand is that non-Orthodox people should not be recognized as Christians at all. A more moderate stand, which considers the non-Orthodox to be Christians, leaves as an open question the possibility of recognizing non-Orthodox Christian communities as churches. For many

Orthodox Christians, the fundamental thesis of the document under discussion on the mutual recognition of Christian communities as churches – not in the sense of their self-designation but from a theological point of view – is unacceptable and for this reason cannot be accepted by the Orthodox Church as formulated in this text.

At the same time, the document *The Basic Principles of the Russian Orthodox Church's Attitude to Non-Orthodoxy* (2000) states that “The ecclesial status of those who have separated themselves from the Church does not lend itself to simple definition The existence of various rites of reception (through baptism, through chrismation, through repentance) shows that the Orthodox Church relates to the different non-Orthodox confessions in different ways. The criterion is the degree to which the faith and order of the Church, as well as the norms of Christian spiritual life, are preserved in a particular confession. By establishing various rites of reception, however, the Orthodox Church does not assess the extent to which grace-filled life has either been preserved intact or distorted in a non-Orthodox confession, considering this to be a mystery of God's providence and judgement” (Par. 1.16–17).

Therefore, the question of boundaries of the Church is a very acute one in the world Orthodoxy today, as the recognition of non-Orthodox communities as churches and the clarification of the degree of their ecclesial nature requires a deep theological justification, but the discussion on this question is still far from being completed.

In this connection, returning to the document under consideration, it should be noted

that it is insufficient in its coverage of the issue of the boundaries of the Church, which occupies an important place in the Orthodox ecclesiological thought. In the document, which claims to have a comprehensive description of the Church and to aim at bringing Christians of various confessions closer together, there is no room given to a theological analysis of church divisions in the context of the history of Christianity. To ignore the theological problem of the boundaries of the Church and the phenomenon of disunity among Christians is a serious oversight for a document of such a level and scale.

In evaluating the document under consideration as a whole, I should point out to the inertia demonstrated by the presented text in its ecumenical approach characteristic of the last century. The very ecumenical paradigm, which defines the creation of such convergent texts so that they may be accepted by various traditions and interpreted in the respective confessional clue, appears to be obsolete. This is most evident in the case of the texts devoted to ecclesiology, that is, the self-awareness of the Church. As applied to the document under consideration, the ineptness of this approach is shown by the fact that in the final sections of this convergent text the drafters have to fix considerable differences between confessional traditions.

In our view, in drafting such documents nowadays, reflection should be given to a new paradigm that could lie in a move (or a return) to the comparative approach. The aim of such an approach should lie not in a search for a minimal accord but on the contrary, in detecting the most

serious divergences among confessions against the background of the already identified unity in the basic provisions of Christian faith.

Today, the statement made by Archpriest Sergius Bulgakov, an Orthodox theologian and participant in the 1927 Lausanne Conference of the Faith and Order Commission, becomes relevant again:

What is the real basis of the Lausanne Conference and inter-faith unity movement and its dogmatic prerequisite? How is it possible if there are profound dogmatic divergences? Certainly, the least point here is any dogmatic amalgam or a new confession, which could arise on the basis of agreement, through extracting from the parenthesis things common for all confessions and rejecting all the rest . . . Such relativism alien to most confessions is completely incompatible with Orthodoxy, which is aware of itself as one true, apostolic church with the fullness and integrity of the tradition and the apostolic succession of the hierarchy . . . In Lausanne, the principle task was to establish the necessary unity of faith and initial unanimity, with elements of disagreement consciously bypassed and even pushed aside; now it is the time to come fearlessly to discussing precisely the problems of disagreement in a spirit of edification, patience and love and with the wish above all to understand each other, to comprehend the meaning and power of disagreement.²

2. Sergius Bulgakov, Archpriest, "The Papal Encyclical and the Lausanne Conference," *Put'*, Iss. 13, Paris, 1928.

The positive significance of the document under consideration is that it impels us to seek new strategies of inter-Christian cooperation in the sphere of doctrine and church order. The closeness and unity of Christians in doctrine and practice will be revealed most explicitly precisely when serious and sometimes radical differences between participants in the dialogue will be identified. It is only in this case that it will become possible to search for new ways of interaction.

With love in the Lord,

+ Hilarion
Metropolitan of Volokolamsk
Chairman of the Department for External Church
Relations

17. Methodist Church in Ireland

Introduction

This report begins by introducing and summarizing¹ *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)*. It goes on to offer a response on behalf of the Methodist Church in Ireland. The MCI is proud of its long-standing commitment to the ecumenical movement, both in Ireland and internationally. It sees God at work in the long and painstaking process of reconciling Christian churches and enabling them to serve together in the mission of God in the world.

One important strand of the international ecumenical movement is the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches. Its work brings together Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox Christians from around the world to work together on the issues that have traditionally divided them. Irish Methodists have been closely involved in this work, including the deliberations that led to this latest document.

From time to time the Faith and Order Commission issues a report that it believes will have crucial significance for the relationships between churches and for their common mission. These are called “convergence texts” and all churches throughout the world are invited to

offer a response to them. The aim is to use these texts so that each church discerns its own beliefs represented in them and each church accepts the challenge to work with their remaining differences with others. The first of these convergence texts was the so-called Lima text, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (WCC, 1982), which has become a landmark in ecumenical convergence statements and a theological reference point for teaching on these three topics. Since the Lima text was published more than 30 years ago, a number of subsequent Faith and Order papers have prepared the way for this latest text, including its immediate predecessor *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement* (WCC, 2005).

“*The Church: Towards a Common Vision* opens with a chapter exploring how the Christian community finds its origin in the mission of God for the saving transformation of the world” (Introduction). Section A outlines “The Church in the Design of God”; section B describes “The Mission of the Church in History”; and section C considers “The Importance of Unity.”

“The second chapter sets out the salient features of an understanding of the Church as Communion, gathering the results of much common reflection both about how Scripture and subsequent tradition relate the Church to God and some of the consequences of this relation for the life and structure of the Church” (Introduction).

1. We are grateful to the Faith and Order Committee of the Methodist Church in Britain for permission to adapt part of its own summary of *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*.

Section A explores the vital ecumenical task of “Discerning God’s Will for the Church”; section B describes “The Church of the Triune God as *Koinonia*”; section C affirms “The Church as Sign and Servant of God’s Design for the World”; while section D considers “Communion in Unity and Diversity”; and section E reflects on the “Communion of Local Churches.”

Chapter 3: The Church: Growing in Communion

“The third chapter focuses upon the growth of the Church as the pilgrim people moving towards the kingdom of God, especially upon several difficult ecclesiological questions that have divided the churches in the past” (Introduction). Section A, “Already but Not Yet,” asserts that “The Church is an eschatological reality, already anticipating the kingdom, but not yet its full realization” (§33). Section B surveys “Growing in the Essential Elements of Communion: Faith, Sacraments, Ministry.”

Chapter 4: The Church: In and For the World

“The fourth chapter develops several significant ways in which the Church relates to the world as a sign and agent of God’s love, such as proclaiming Christ within an interreligious context, witnessing to the moral values of the Gospel and responding to human suffering and need” (Introduction). Section A outlines “God’s Plan for Creation: The Kingdom”; section B describes “The Moral Challenge of the Gospel”; while section C summarizes the role of “The Church in Society.”

Along with other churches around the world, the Methodist Church in Ireland has been invited to give its response to this significant document. It will repay serious reading by Methodists. Churches Together in Britain and Ireland have also issued a study guide to *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*.²

The World Council of Churches has asked that responses be framed as answers to a number of set questions and the paragraphs that follow adhere to that format.

The response of the Methodist Church in Ireland.

Mission and unity are both at the heart of how we see the calling of God’s people. So we rejoice that the World Council of Churches has, through its Faith and Order Commission, produced a statement that brings these two themes together and invites Christians everywhere to rediscover their vision of what it is to be the Church. Through the participation of one of its own members in the Faith and Order Commission, Irish Methodism has played a part in the shaping of this document and so readily identifies with much of the vision it develops.

Methodists do, of course, have their own perspectives in ecclesiology and mission, so our reading of this WCC text is not uncritical; as well as identifying with it we will also want to share some questions.

2. <https://ctbi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/study-guide-the-church-towards-a-common-vision.pdf>

1. To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesial understanding of the Methodist Church in Ireland?

For Methodists, the Church has always been an important aspect of the Christian faith, though always within the overall sense of the saving purposes of God. Methodism has made very distinctive contributions to the ecumenical work on the Church, from the first days of the World Council of Churches.

The emphasis within the ecclesial understanding of the Methodist Church in Ireland is very much on mission. The Church is called into being to serve the saving purpose of God and is made up of those whom God has called as followers of Christ. Mission takes precedence over the inherited structures of the past (though these are still recognized and cherished) and Methodists are likely to see the Holy Spirit calling the Church to change its structures and activities in the present so as to participate more fully in the mission of God. A recent statement, *God's Mission, Our Mission*, adopted by the Irish Methodist Conference in 2014, re-envisioned mission for the 21st century.³

Recent statements by Methodist Churches (for example, the Methodist Church in Britain's *Called to Love and Praise*) have emphasized *koinonia* as a central aspect of ecclesiology. Within the Methodist Church in Ireland, the principle of connectionalism is one way in which such *koinonia* is expressed. Local churches, however much they may represent the fullness of ecclesial

life, have to be seen as mutually accountable and mutually constitutive. A local Methodist church is only the Church insofar as it is joined together with other Methodist churches within a structure of accountability and common mission. The annual Conference, together with those structures set up to develop work between conferences, is the practical expression of this connectionalism. Recent conferences of the Methodist Church in Ireland have given a particular focus to discerning how God is calling us to share in Christ's mission and how we are to express Christ's love in mutual encouragement and care.

2. To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?

The Methodist Church in Ireland is a core member of the Irish Council of Churches and Irish Inter-Church Meeting. Within these bodies *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* has been welcomed and discussed, alongside the equally-welcome WCC document, *Together towards Life* (2012).

Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes.

The interest within the Irish churches demonstrates that this text does indeed serve the purposes of unity. Significantly though, the text on mission and evangelisation has perhaps given more impetus to ecumenical dialogue and this reflects the central interest of Irish churches in mission during a time of cultural change and ecclesial uncertainty.

There has been a long journey of Irish churches from competition to collaboration and even towards unity. The Methodist Church in

3. <http://www.irishmethodist.org/sites/default/files/pictures/god%20c%20b%20mission%20our%20mission.pdf>

Ireland has had a particularly close journey with the (Anglican) Church of Ireland, with which it has been in a covenant relationship since 2002. Their shared understanding of what it is to be the Church has now enabled them to arrive at an agreed interchangeability of ordained ministries, even without having full agreement on patterns of *episkopé*.

On the other hand, the Methodist Church in Ireland would point out that the theological account of unity given in the text may miss some aspects of disunity in such contexts as Ireland; the historical, social and political factors leading to disunity are not always noted and addressed, yet these have a profoundly destructive effect on the *koinonia* of the Church.

3. What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?

a) First, a more communal and less individual understanding of Christianity and the Church.

With its roots in the evangelical revivals of the 18th century, Methodism has given prominence to the conversion of individuals and their growth in Christian discipleship. This discipleship has never been seen as a purely individual activity; our founder John Wesley taught that there was no holiness without social holiness and that therefore Christianity has to be communal. Nonetheless, the theological priority has tended to go to the individual and therefore the church has often been seen as an assembly of those who have come to believe. *TCTCV* helps the Methodist Church in Ireland recognize more fully the purpose of the

Church as the body of Christ and as that people which participates corporately in the holiness of God

b) **Similarly**, although the Methodist Church in Ireland holds to the belief that the Word and Sacraments are both of central importance in the life of the Church, the emphasis in its life and worship has more often been on the Word. This text reminds us of **the sacramental nature of the Church** and the way in which sacraments bind us together with Christ and with each other.

c) The development of *episkopé*.

Traditionally, the Methodist Conference represents a corporate understanding of *episkopé*, deciding on matters of policy as well as administering discipline, admitting to ordained ministry and deploying ministers. The President, elected annually, represents the Conference and as such is now described as an “episcopal minister” in the installation liturgy.

In recent years the Methodist Church in Ireland has given considerable thought to the way in which oversight, authority and leadership should develop within its life. This has been partly through ecumenical discussion about the relationship between ministries in different churches. It has also been in relation to its current mission context as it asks what forms of leadership are required in order to serve God’s mission in the present age. The text encourages MCI to look within the breadth and depth of the Christian tradition for understandings of *episkopé* that can enhance its development in the present.

d) **The relationship of the Church to creation.**

The Methodist Church has had as its central focus the calling of human persons to discipleship in Christ and serving human persons in the name of Christ. More recently, it has begun to recover John Wesley's understanding of the general redemption of all creation in Christ. This enlarges our understanding of mission and *koinonia*. This text is a helpful reminder of how the mission to which the Church is called is one that serves creation and collaborates with God within it.

4. How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement?

Our covenant with the Church of Ireland has been one of the most significant developments in Christian unity in Ireland in recent years. It has involved long and patient sharing and listening. The ecclesiology within this text will be one that both churches could largely share and this shared understanding of the Church has moved them towards their present agreement on the interchangeability of ministries.

Because mission is such a central priority for the Methodist Church, schemes of unity, whether they be at the local level or at the level of the whole of Ireland, are driven by the requirement to further God's mission. So, for example, where local conditions suggest that cooperation would serve mission then such cooperation is much easier to arrange than where that priority does not seem to be so obvious.

5. What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

The following areas are important for the Methodist Church in Ireland in the light of its history and context:

• **The relationship of the Church to culture.**

There is a danger that the language of *TCTCV* may be too abstract and idealistic, insufficiently grounded in the practical experience of historical churches and their social contexts. Too great an emphasis on the concept of *koinonia* (though this is of course, deeply biblical) may lead us to underestimate our human failures. Part of our recent Irish experience has been the need to unmask the sinfulness and abuse that can find a home in church life.

• **The relationship of the Christian Church to other faith communities.**

TCTCV reflects the divergence of between Christians on this issue, but there is more to be done. The substantial presence in Ireland of communities of other faiths is a new phenomenon with which we are only now engaging. We are seeking for ways of combining mission and evangelism with respect and solidarity.

• **The healing of ancient and entrenched divisions between Christian communities.**

In Ireland we are especially conscious of the way in

which differences between forms of Christian worship or forms of Church government can express sectarian confrontation rather than mutuality and diversity. This means that unity cannot come merely through agreement on theological affirmations (important though these are) but must involve contrition, forgiveness and healing within and between communities.

• **The sacramental nature of the Church in relation to its servanthood within the world.**

How is the *koinonia* between Christ and his body reflected in the Church's service within and mission to the world? Methodists have a strong tradition of responding to God's call to serve and transform society. *TCTCV* does affirm this but there is more scope to reflect on how the Church's participation in Christ and its participation in the world are both expressive of the one mission of God.

18. Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches

Preliminary Remarks

The contents of the following official response were developed in four sessions by a working group consisting of twelve delegates of the FSPC member churches and two representatives of the head office. The objective was to provide the WCC's Commission on Faith and Order with a response based on a broad consensus among the Reformed Churches in Switzerland. The following response aims to convey the consensus that emerged in the course of discussions and compiles the verbal and written votes of the working group members.

The FSPC Assembly of Delegates, held 19 to 21 June 2016, in Warth (TG), acknowledged the response and encourages its member churches to discuss the document in a useful manner and to review their church practices with reference to the topics addressed therein.

Regarding its contents, the response mainly focuses on the issues of "Church" and "Unity and Diversity" while also addressing topics of "Ministry and Authority" and "Church and Society."

Regarding its form, the response has been designed to be read either with or without reference to the actual study text and to be suitable for internal use within the FSPC. Therefore, the individual chapters will be prefaced with summaries of the study text. Structurally, the text approaches the individual topics with four basic questions: "What

does it say? What do we identify with? What are our concerns? Where do we allow ourselves to be challenged?" The questions posed by the Commission in the introduction of the study text, strongly encouraging readers to explore the text's potential to promote mutual recognition among the churches, are taken into consideration, but are not answered explicitly. The italicized passages interspersed throughout the study text referring to specific issues "where divisions remain" (Introduction) are referred to implicitly.

In the course of our sometimes controversial discussions, members of the working group lauded the study text's potential to promote unity among the churches by encouraging ecumenism while at the same time bringing about change that grows from learning from each other and also from being at odds with each other. In addition, the group stressed the necessity of relating the text to the reality of the congregation and its challenges.

Part I

A. The Church

What does it say?

The Christian church is rooted in God's great design for all creation. His kingdom was promised and manifested by Jesus Christ. God's design

for the world is for human beings to live in communion (Greek: *koinonia*) with God and with one another. This communion was destroyed by human sin. But it was restored and consummated in the incarnation and the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. The “origin of the church” is rooted in God’s plan for “humankind’s salvation” (§3); the Church, empowered by God himself, continues the work of the Holy Spirit “and so participates in God’s work of healing a broken world” (§1).

The Church’s mission is to proclaim the kingdom in word and deed and is rooted in Christ’s deeds in the world. This mission calls the Church into a threefold communion. It is to be a community of witness, i.e., it is to proclaim God’s kingdom and to invite all humankind to join it. The Church is to be a community of worship, characterized by initiating new members through baptism. And the Church is to be a community of discipleship, in which new believers are guided to observe Jesus’ commandments through the proclamation of the gospel, baptism and the eucharist (§§1–3).

The Church exists in four basic dimensions: It is (1) *koinonia*, i.e., communion with the Triune God who called it into being. The Church is (2) the witness and servant of God’s design for the world, i.e., it works towards the aim of gathering all of creation into communion with God. It is (3) a communion in unity and diversity, with diversity being a gift from God that, however, must not cause the Church to surrender its unity. Finally (4), the Church does not only consist of individual local churches, but it is also the universal Church (Ch. II).

The central notion of *koinonia* thus does not refer to a man-made association, but to a communion created by God. Therefore, the Church does not exist for itself, but belongs to God. Its existence is rooted in the mission of being the witness of creation and of God’s communion with all creation. The members of the Church are the holy nation called into discipleship according to their gifts. Christ is the head of his body, which he guides and leads. The Holy Spirit invigorates and equips the Church.

The Church is known as the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. Each of these attributes is rooted in God’s being and actions. God is one, God is holy, God desires all humankind to be saved and to come to know the truth, and God sent his son, who in turn sent the apostles. The Church is first and foremost a communion in God, but also a communion of those who participate in it; thus, it is both a divine and a human reality (§§22–23).

As such, the Church is an eschatological reality. It already anticipates the kingdom of God, but it is not identical with it. Thus, the Church continuously moves between the eschatological community (its signs being the baptism, the eucharist, diaconia, etc.) and historical reality. It consists of human beings who are subject to the conditions of the world. This means that as a pilgrim community, it contends with the reality of sin. However, Christ’s victory over sin is irreversible. Sin is real, but it stands in contradiction to the Church’s true identity (§§33–36).

What do we identify with?

First of all, the missiological beginning and approach is something we welcome and appreciate (§§1–4). The Church does not exist for itself and does not belong to itself; instead, it has its purpose in the mission given by God, and the Holy Spirit enlivens and empowers the Church to fulfill it. The Church is to proclaim the gospel in word and deed to all the world and to bear witness to the salvation in Jesus Christ. Thus, the vocation of the church as a community of witness, worship and discipleship (§2) is underlined and affirmed.

The Church is and forever remains bound to its Lord Jesus Christ. He is the head of his body (§21). The Pauline metaphor of the body of Christ is central to the Protestant understanding of the Church. In Christ, the differences between human beings are suspended, which enables communion with one another. Christians are parts of the one body of Christ, and thus connected in communion with and among each other. In the context of the communion of confessions, the individual churches can also be imagined as parts of the one body. Of course, this always implies that unity as the promise and solace bestowed by Christ is a given, that it precedes them.

The inclusion of the Four Marks of the Church from the early Christian creeds (§22) expresses that all confessions and denominations are a part of a much older and universal church. The history of the Reformed churches, too, is a part of this greater church history. A historically concrete church is never only a church all by itself, but an expression and manifestation of this one,

holy, catholic and apostolic Church. All of these characteristics attributed to the church are gifts of God. As such, they are neither its possession nor property and thus beyond the Church's power of control.

The Church possesses an idiosyncratic double character (§§33–36). The Church in the “already” of reality is not the whole Church: It is eschatologically anticipating its full realization. This represents its “not yet” character. The Church as a historical entity is not the final and complete realization of God's kingdom, but is moving towards it as a “pilgrim community.” On this pilgrimage, it contends with the reality of sin. This ties in with a central theme of Protestant ecclesiology: The biblical image of the wandering people of God (Heb. 13:14) expresses that the Church is still a work in progress and “not yet [the] full realization [of the kingdom]” (§33). Though it is protected by God, it does not have a lasting house and is in a state of constant movement.

What are our concerns?

Protestant ecclesiology emphasizes Christ as the center from which all else unfolds. This approach is not compatible with a sacramental or even hypostatizing concept of the Church (§27). According to our understanding, it is neither a conveyor nor an administrator of salvation. The individual sacraments are not an expression of the Church's own sacramentality, but instruments through which the Holy Spirit works in human beings. The Church's mission is to proclaim and bear witness to salvation, which means pointing

away from itself and towards Christ at the same time. God makes use of the Church, making his work in the world felt through it. In this sense, the Church can indeed be called a tool or instrument of God. However, this does not mean that the Church – as God’s quasi-representative – continues his work of reconciling the world.

The Church is rooted in God’s salvific and – in Reformed terms – reconciliatory actions, as described in Leuenberg Agreement, Article 3. From a Reformed perspective, this means that the vocation, structure and mission of the Church is entirely based on the Word of God, which means that theologically, the Church is to be thought of as a *creatura verbi Divini*. This notion is taken up in Leuenberg Agreement, Article 14, which states that the Church is centered and grounded in the gospel and that “some communities . . . call the Church *creatura evangelii*.” For Protestants, this figure means nothing but God is the prevailing subject-ness in Church, and this subject-ness is realized in the issuing of God’s Word. Therefore, from a Reformed perspective, the relativizing “a” in the sentence: “A defining aspect of the Church’s life is to be a community that hears and proclaims the word of God” should be replaced by the definite article “the.”

God becoming known as the abiding subject of his Church points to the limits of all ecclesial and thus human actions. It is God alone who gives human beings the gift of faith and gathers them into his communion. The Church has the mission of making this known. In its very being, it is a sign pointing towards God. Only in this sense, it can be said that the Church imparts faith in God by

proclaiming the gospel in word and deed. At the same time and just as importantly, however, there exists an immediate personal connection between every individual and Jesus Christ. From the Protestant point of view, the individual adoption of faith is equivalent to becoming a part of Christ’s body, and thus, the Church. However, this should not be mistaken for the Church acting as a mediator of faith. The tension of this, as it were, mediated immediacy must be maintained.

From a Protestant point of view, it is doubtful whether the Church can be thought of as being sinless (§§35–36). The text acknowledges the reality of sin, but placed it in fundamental contradiction to the Church’s true identity due to its holiness. The Protestant churches see the holiness of the Church as a reflection of the holiness of its head Jesus Christ. As the entirety of sanctified believers gathered to be his body, the Christian Church is the *communio sanctorum*, a community set apart from the rest of the world. But as part of the creaturely world, it is unholy just like creation itself, and sins with it, and relies on God’s justification. It is never its own holiness that the Church partakes of, but the holiness of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the church must acknowledge and confess its sin. Its characterization of “not yet” thus refers to the notion that no historical manifestation of the Church can claim to be the consummate expression of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, but at best an approximation (*analogia fidei*) to it in its respective context.

This brings us to another unresolved issue: To what extent is the Church with its structures and institutions congruent with the will of God

(§24)? What are the timeless characteristics of the Church? Which aspects are subject to time and thus changeable? The center of Protestant ecclesiology is the community gathered and called by God that bears witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ in its respective context: temporal, societal, geographical. Thus, its exterior form is to serve this witness and to give it expression. This means that the orders and structures of the Church are subordinate to this witness and designed according to its requirements. If any church should come to the conviction that its order no longer conforms to the gospel of Jesus Christ or does not accommodate it enough, it should and must give itself a new order (or allow one to be given to it).

The convergence text predominantly uses the term “salvation” to talk about God’s actions on human beings. In contrast, the Reformed tradition prefers to use “reconciliation.” Talking about God’s reconciliatory actions places a stronger emphasis on God’s all-encompassing, prevenient actions on all creation and qualifies them as acts of relationship in the course of a renewal of the covenant between God and human beings. Salvation is an important aspect of these reconciliatory actions of God that encompass his entire work of salvation. But ultimately, salvation is yet to come.

Where do we allow ourselves to be challenged?

In terms of ecclesiology, the Reformed churches of Switzerland focus on the individual congregation and its gathering in the worship service. There is awareness, both on the congregational and the governance levels, of being part of a global

Church, i.e., of belonging to a diverse community that is one in Christ, rather than to an association of individuals. In contrast, however, the readiness to take on responsibilities beyond the regional level is – due to historical or cultural reasons – in need of development. Here, the rich ecclesiology of the convergence paper with its manifold images of the Church can serve as an inspiration. It reminds us that being the Church necessarily goes beyond the parochial – on a regional and national level, but also in terms of participating in the ecumenical dialogue of the global Church.

This corresponds to the tendency in our churches to prefer an avowal of legitimate diversity and individual forms of faith while neglecting the community and/or unity of faith and membership in the body of Christ and thus in the universal Church. In this context, the (actually quite Reformed) notion of the election of community expresses that fellow Christians are at the same time our fellow elected, which is the prerequisite of true communion. This is not only to be applied to our immediate fellow congregation members, but also to the ecumenical world at large.

For example, the concept of the Church as part of God’s already realized will of salvation (the “already” character) is rather underdeveloped. Church orders are understood as being contextual. This may lead the Church to erroneously think of structures above its own congregation as purely functional and to limit itself, beyond the parish level, to administration, coordination and resource management. Here, we must remember that our ecclesial mission is universal and that we need the appropriate structures to fulfill it.

In Switzerland, there is also a wide range of confessional diversity. In the late 19th century, Switzerland adopted the principle of confessional freedom. This principle is based on the conviction that any confession only possesses relative authority and always must be measured against the words of the scripture. Accordingly, there is no obligatory confession that has been agreed upon as the valid interpretation of the gospel. A confession is rather a *norma normanda* than a *norma normata*. Confessional freedom on the one hand ensures freedom of faith within the church, which enables a great diversity of religious forms and content. On the other hand, the Swiss churches as a community lack a common ground for creating unity and identity. This creates the risk of religious beliefs becoming arbitrary because of the absence of public discussion, since reaching a consensus is not necessary. In the face of the increasing individualization of religion, it is important for the Church to ensure that the discourse on faith and its contents is continued. This is essential for *koinonia*. The Church is communion with one another and with God; to find common ground is a necessity. With this statement, the study reminds us of the strength of such an understanding of confessions: It is necessary to continuously and productively discuss their contents.

B. Unity and diversity

What does it say?

The unity among Christians in Christ is a reflection of the biblical vision of God's desire for communion with human beings and among human

beings. This kind of communion is *koinonia* and a gift from God. To represent the unity of the Church, the convergence text uses the strong image of the body of Christ, symbolizing the communion with God that has been restored and consummated by Christ (§§1, 8).

“There is a growing consensus that *koinonia*, as communion with the Holy Trinity, is manifested in three interrelated ways: unity in faith, unity in sacramental life, and unity in service (in all its forms, including ministry and mission)” (§67). The eucharistic community is a symbol of unity and its visible expression. It corresponds to the will of God. The shared eucharist is the realization of “unity in love and truth” (§53).

Thus, unity is a gift from God, and at the same time the continuous mission and goal of the Church. The ecumenical movement calls the churches to “visible unity in one faith and in one Eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world, and [to] advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe” (Preface).

Visible unity means the overcoming of tensions and schisms. Unity demands that the churches be capable of recognizing other churches as churches. This means to “recognize in one another the authentic presence of what the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople . . . calls the ‘one, holy, catholic and apostolic church’” (§9). Every church should develop an awareness of the fact that it is a church entirely, but not the entire church.

This unity allows for diversity (“Unity in legitimate diversity,” §38). Diversity – historical, cultural – is even considered a gift from God, if it

does not result in the task of unity being neglected. Diversity is compromised wherever a church considers its interpretation of the gospel as the absolute truth (§28). Diversity is unified in the shared faith in Jesus Christ. However, legitimate diversity has its limits, e.g., wherever the divinity of Christ is put into question. Without those limits, unity would be at risk (§§28, 29, 30, also cf. §12). The unity of the Church can also be compromised by diverging ethical positions if their compatibility with the faith seems doubtful.

What do we identify with?

The text shows a tendency towards a concept of Church unity that is dynamic and processual, relating unity to God's mission for the church, rather than primarily dogmatic, which would relate it to the common Creed and the understanding of scripture and ministry. Thus, the first chapter is titled "God's Mission and the Unity of the Church." This title puts the main focus on God's call to the Church to fulfill its mission. According to its essentially missionary nature, the Church is to be a community of witness for God's kingdom. In order to fill this role authentically, it must bear witness as a whole – in unity. The unity of the Church is intrinsically related to this mission. The unity of the Church is never an end in itself. It also has political significance with respect to reconciliation and peace in a strife-torn world. The unity of the church is related to the unity of the whole of humanity and of creation, "since Christ, who is head of the Church, is the one in whom all are to be reconciled" (§37).

The Church also is to be a community of discipleship guiding believers to observe God's Commandments. This confirms the Reformed concern that one part of the covenant God made with humankind and reaffirmed in Christ is discipleship, i.e., the believers living life guided by Christ's example.

The ecumenical movement serves the unity of the Church by bringing remote churches closer together so that they can learn about one another's faith and life in and for the world, and so that they may recognize that the others, too, are a part of the universal Church of Jesus Christ.

Since its beginnings, the ecumenical movement has been accompanied by grief and lament about the schisms between the churches. As a consequence, the issue of "diversity" has mostly been associated with negative connotations. The convergence text, however, takes a remarkably positive stance on diversity (cf. §§6, 28, 30, 67).

The important thing is to understand the communion of the Church, of which unity is a characteristic, as a communion in unity and diversity. "Unity in diversity" (used only in passing in the text, §54) is given in Christ. The shared avowal of him is the one criterion for the unity of the Church. Legitimate diversity does not threaten but enriches it. The Church as a communion of believers developed differently in various parts of the globe and has been shaped by different persons. Diversity is an aspect of the Church's catholicity.

Unity is the mission and goal of the Church and is best described in terms of being on a journey. It is both a prerequisite of the Church and its

as of yet unfulfilled goal. The image of movement, of being on the way towards a common goal, relativizes the differences among the various confessional ecclesiologies.

Baptism, about which there is increasing conceptual convergence, is the fundamental bond of unity, and its mutual recognition is an important step on the way towards visible unity (§41).

What are our concerns?

As member churches of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE), the Reformed churches in Switzerland are committed to a Reformed understanding of unity that seeks unity primarily in that which constitutes the Church, i.e., the proclamation of the gospel in word and sacrament (cf. Leuenberg Agreement, Article 1). What is needed to increase the authenticity of the Church and its commitment to justice and peace in the world is the unanimous common effort of the churches rather than unity as uniformity in all forms of church life and practices (e.g., church order, ministry) (e.g., LA Art. 36 and 45).

And in that which constitutes the church, its unity also becomes visible. Therefore, we reject a too-narrow concept of visible unity that primarily seeks unity in terms of “uniformity” in questions of governance and that completely focuses on the unity of the eucharistic community. The concept of unity must be a comprehensive one that in the same way encompasses all of the Church’s life and actions. And this concept of unity must be a dynamic one, since unity is bestowed by the Spirit.

The question of how much unity in the sense of uniformity and unanimity is needed by the churches – regarding their worship practices, their church orders and their diaconal and social services – must always be answered from the starting point of the Church’s mission. After all, this is the convergence text’s objective as well. At the same time, the concept of unity underlying the text needs further clarification. There is palpable tension between the traditional concept of visible unity that is explicitly referred to in the Foreword, Preface and Introduction, and the understanding of unity expressed in the text, which is determined by the combination of unity and the Church’s mission. Likewise, it should be made clearer that unity cannot be created by human beings (“full realization of unity,” Introduction), and that in striving for unity, one must always be aware of its eschatological character. Striving for unity in the Church is also never devoid of struggle, and thus has been and always will be connected to guilt and suffering (cf. Leuenberg Agreement, Article 1). The understanding of *unitas ecclesiae* and the church’s visibility must be free of reminiscences of the Constantinian state church.

When the convergence text talks about “legitimate diversity” as a “gift from the Lord” (§28) that is determined by “cultural and historical factors,” it refers to the diversity of the gospel’s linguistic and iconographic means of communication and to the diversity of theological and spiritual ways of expression in the churches. Before defining a focus on the “essentials’ (Acts 15:28)” as the basic

principle for addressing unity and diversity (§30), the text stresses the importance of a “pastoral ministry for the service of unity and the upholding of diversity” (§29). In our opinion, diversity should also be an aspect of the ministry question.

The churchly communion with God and all fellow Christians is manifested as unity in faith, unity in sacramental life, and unity in service (cf. §67). All three forms of manifestation are important, and they are interrelated. None of them may claim the spotlight all for itself. However, experience has shown that convergence in theological questions is harder to achieve. The vision of unity for the sake of preserving the authenticity of the Christian witness encourages us to overcome our self-sufficiency and lethargy in the face of social and political challenges and to look for possibilities of practical cooperation even though the way to complete unity in faith and sacramental life is still long. This underlines the situational event character of unity. Unity happens wherever we are on the way together, and in doing so discover “the many aspects of discipleship which churches share” (§68).

Where do we allow ourselves to be challenged?

The Reformed churches in Switzerland are themselves a federation of various churches. Therefore, they tend to emphasize diversity while sometimes not giving enough attention to unity. The concept and significance of unity must be deepened in our Reformed churches; we cannot simply resign ourselves to the fact that there are churches caught up in rivalry against each other even in the smallest of villages.

Our participation in the ecumenical movement obliges us to acknowledge unity as an abiding task of the Church, both in ecumenical dialogue with our sister churches and within our own.

As churches in Switzerland, we are only one part of the global Church that is moving towards “fulfillment in the reign of heaven” (§49). In order to realize the *koinonia* and unity given in Christ, we stand in a relationship of solidarity and learning with other churches. Through communication and communion with other churches, our local churches experience renewal and change. In this context, it is particularly important for us to strengthen unity with respect to our common Christian mission.

This relates to our need to contemplate the question about where the limits of diversity are for us (cf. §30, box on p. 17). If unity is bestowed on us by Christ, how much agreement in theological-ecclesiological issues do we need in order to fulfill our mission?

Protestants emphasize the invisible unity in Christ and prefer to think of unity in terms of a purely futuristic eschatology. They favor the ecumenical model of “unity in reconciled diversity,” thereby running the risk of cementing the *status quo* instead of striving for change. The convergence text reminds us of the necessity of a visible unity that is as far-reaching as possible and opposes the tendency to hastily devise theological legitimizations for existing differences between the churches, as could happen due to a misunderstood concept of “unity in reconciled diversity.”

C. Ministry and authority

What does it say?

Within the ecumenical world, there are diverging views on the concept of the ordained ministry. While there is a certain consensus about the special status of the priestly service, the question of whether ordination is a sacrament or not is highly contentious (§45).

Diversity in this respect is already a tangible presence in the New Testament. However, the threefold ministry (bishop, presbyter, deacon) is a widespread structure. Like the scriptural canon, dogma and liturgical order, ordained ministry has played an important role in maintaining the apostolicity of the Church (§§46, 47).

All authority in the Church comes from Christ. It stands under the eschatological promise of the Church's consummation in the reign of heaven. However, the Church's authority is always a humble service and does not refer to power over others (§§49, 50).

The diversity of gifts within the Church requires a certain level of coordination. For this reason, the ministry of *episkopé* has been created. This ministry also serves to maintain "continuity in apostolic faith and unity of life." It needs to be exercised "in personal, collegial and communal ways" (§52, cf. §29).

Diverging concepts of ministry are "challenging obstacles on the path to unity" (§45 ff.).

What do we identify with?

In including the prophetic, priestly and royal people of God (§§17–20), the paper takes up a doctrinal development that has its origins in Reformed thinking, viz. the *munus triplex Christi*.

The ministry of proclamation is a central aspect of the Church. This notion expresses the Church's dependence on the word of God that it receives.

From the statement that all authority comes from Christ and that the Church participates in his ministry, the Reformed churches deduce that the Church's authority and ministry fundamentally lie with the congregation, which executes them through synodical structures.

Authority as a humble labor of love is an apt description. The Church is called upon to serve the world and humankind. It is from this mission that the Church derives all of its authority.

What are our concerns?

One particular concern is the issue of the ordination of women. The convergence text does not even discuss this topic in detail, but only mentions it in passing by noting that the limitation of ordination to men only is a controversial issue. For the Reformed tradition, the ordination of women results from the nature and mission of the gospel and is not up for negotiation.

In general, for Reformed readers, the ordination issue takes up an exceptionally large portion of the study text and comprises a significant portion of the interspersed italicized passages on

controversial issues. With respect to the Catholic and Orthodox traditions, where the ministry is essentially tied to the unity, catholicity and apostolicity of the Church, this focus is understandable. In contrast, from a Protestant point of view, the ministry's significance in the Church is a different one. While it also is rooted in the ministry of Christ, it is not a continuance of his ministry, but a service to his word. Accordingly, it necessarily belongs to the Church.

Based on the Christological (threefold ministry of Christ) concept of the "priesthood of all believers" and the Pauline doctrine of the diversity of gifts (charisms), the Protestant concept of ministry includes the service of all believers in the Church's proclamation. This universal participation in the threefold ministry of Christ focuses on God as the primary subject of the Church. Since there are various forms of ministry, and since a substantial part of our church life today is carried by volunteers, the question of ministry should not exclusively be focused on ordained ministry. Protestants agree that formalized ministry (an "order of ministry," CPCE) is needed in order to strengthen ministries and to maintain order in the Church. This, however, does not imply a hierarchic structure such as the threefold ministry (deacon, priest, bishop) or any other special minister status; in the case of the *ministerium verbi divini*, the Reformers emphasized its character as a profession.

From a Protestant perspective, the authority tied to the ministry does not hinge on the ministry *per se*, but is related to the theological competence and mandate with which the ministers interpret

the word of God that is the foundation of the Church.

Regarding the concept of *episkopé*, the text correctly states that it must be exercised in personal, collegial and communal ways (§52). For Reformed Christians in particular, synodical leadership is of special significance in this context. The text's statements on *episkopé* do not sufficiently take into account that in Protestant churches, synod members and thus officers of *episkopé* are frequently persons who have not been ordained to the service of word and sacrament, yet take responsibility for congregational and church leadership.

When, at the end of the study text, it is said that "unity in service" has various forms, "including ministry and mission" (§67), we acknowledge this as a starting point for thinking about what "unity in legitimate diversity" means for the question of ministry.

Where do we allow ourselves to be challenged?

The concept of ministry, and particularly that of ordained ministry, remains a significant challenge for the ecumenical dialogue. The Reformed churches in Switzerland are also tasked with contemplating to what extent the concept of ministry separates them from or unites them with their sister churches. This also includes the continued internal communication of the Reformed church about this complex topic (based on the CPCE's doctrinal conversation report "Ministry, Ordination, Episkopé" and the FSPC position paper 10, "The Reformed Perspective on Ordination"). On the one hand, the significance of the ordained

ministry for the unity of the Church and the spreading of the Gospel must be recognized; on the other hand, the other ministries in the Church must be acknowledged and strengthened in their specificity. In particular, we need to contemplate what it actually means for our church governance structures to exercise the ministry of *episkopé* in personal, collegial and communal ways.

D. The Church and society

What does it say?

God's relationship to his creation is characterized by love. His kingdom is the final destiny of the universe. In the world, the Church serves the divine plan for the world's transformation. Its mission is to tell the world about the salvation brought about by Jesus Christ and to bear witness to the reconciliation, healing and transformation of creation. This mission is the wellspring of the Church's engagement for justice, peace and, in the face of religious pluralism, for religious freedom. Encountering other religions is to be an act of respectful love, and the relationship between interreligious dialogue and proclamation must be reflected upon (§§58–60).

The gospel imparts a moral obligation that must not be mistaken for justification by works. The ethics of Christians as disciples is rooted in God. It takes shape wherever churches strive to recognize the will of God in the circumstances given to them. Together with their fellow human beings, Christians are to promote individual and social values. Common moral values that are based

on the gospel are also an expression of *koinonia* (§§61–63).

The Church must care for those who have no power and no voice. This means that it must play an active part in creating a just social order. The source of its commitment is faith in God. Scripture provides the equipment and guidance for the faithful. Furthermore, the Church takes a stand for peace, defending human rights and human lives (§64).

The relationship between Church and state is always contextual and shaped by historical, cultural and demographic factors. In general, Christians should have a positive relationship to the state. In this respect, however, the Church has often incurred guilt – for example, when its collusion with secular authorities condoned or even abetted injustice. Whenever the Church raises its prophetic voice, however, it must expect to face persecution and suffering (§65).

What do we identify with?

The gospel means discipleship, and this in turn means moral obligation. In the Reformed tradition, the aspect of sanctification is seen as equiprimordial with justification. The offering of the gospel is, at the same time, a demand on the justified sinner. There is no faith without the obedience of faith. This applies both to the individual and to the collective level. In its diaconal service, the Church actively supports the weak, the persecuted and the powerless. It is a Church for others and must stand up for justice and peace both on

a small and a large scale. The Church must not think itself to be too good for going where it hurts.

The Church should play a constructive role in the sociopolitical discourse and thus contribute to the maintenance of the state. However, wherever the boundaries of human dignity are transgressed or where human lives are put at risk, it must resist with all its might. This means that it will speak out on political issues and questions of social order. It does so on the foundation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel is not the private matter of Christians, but claims for itself to be the gospel for all humankind. Accordingly, the Church's actions are public actions. Christian proclamation does not tell people what they want to hear, but preaches that which it believes to have received from God. At the same time, this means that the Church must continuously measure itself against the gospel, that it must scrutinize itself and always strive for renewal.

Interacting with other religions has become a continuous challenge, both on an institutional/social level and an everyday/personal level. We appreciate that the study acknowledges the fact of religious pluralism in today's world and stresses the importance of respectful interactions. This includes interreligious dialogue that is geared towards reciprocity. The text also wants us to honor the "positive truths and values" (§60) of other religions. We consider this a good starting point for institutionalized dialogue, as well as for interpersonal encounters with our fellow human beings.

What are our concerns?

Positions on moral, ethical and political questions in the ecumenical world are very diverse and sometimes diametrically opposed. According to the convergence text, *koinonia* also includes shared moral values rooted in the gospel (§62). The question arises which values those could be, or how generalized they must be if they can mean opposite things in practical application. The recognition of a sister church as an expression of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church can be impaired by different approaches to an ethical problem. For the Swiss Reformed churches, for example, a church community is impaired if it rejects the ordination of women or discriminates based on sexual orientation. The church community is put into question (*status confessionis*) whenever discrimination based on gender or race is "legitimized" with the gospel and claimed to be scriptural.

Where do we allow ourselves to be challenged?

The Reformed churches in Switzerland are not a homogenous entity. Not all of them share the same political or ethical convictions. How can such a polyphonic church community endeavor to speak with one voice? Is there a forum where we can discuss our issues and problems and grapple with our diverging convictions?

On the other hand, because of its diversity, Switzerland has been fortunate enough to gain experience in how to be a community despite diverging opinions and views. It can apply this experience to the ecumenical dialogue. The Swiss

churches face up to the challenges of finding greater internal unity – both in confessional and in political-ethical issues; at the same time, they will not give up their historically gained quality of tolerating dissenters.

How do our sociopolitical positions relate to the exegesis of the gospel and thus to the positions of other churches? How do we deal if a sister church comes to a different conclusion than we do? The holy scripture is the binding foundation of all Christian churches. However, the way churches relate to it and interpret it is strongly shaped by cultural and historical factors. How strongly do we let ourselves be inspired by interpretations of the scripture originating from other cultural, academic and spiritual traditions? In our European culture, our views are shaped by a historical-critical approach to scripture. Maybe encountering other cultures that use scripture in a less refracted way and without these substantial hermeneutic steps of filtration can teach us to deepen our own approach to scripture.

Part II

Suggestions to the WCC regarding future developments

The FSPC working group that developed this response shares the hope that “ecclesial convergence on ecclesiology will play a vital role in the mutual recognition between the churches” (Preface). At the same time, after addressing individual aspects of the study text, the fundamental question was raised to what extent it is actually feasible and necessary to achieve the broadest possible

consensus in ecclesiological and ecclesial questions, and if the focus on visible unity is indeed a theological imperative. We consider further work on the following three aspects to be promising:

A. Unity

The convergence text does not offer an elaborate theological concept of unity and the ecumenical objective in this respect. It remains unclear how unity among the WCC churches is conceived of and what it is supposed to look like. The situation regarding the question of legitimate diversity is just as diffuse. Apparently it was impossible to formulate common criteria for distinguishing legitimate from illegitimate diversity. It is our view that fundamental reflections on the concept of unity should be given the highest priority.

B. Ecclesiology

The WCC must clarify what significance and function it attributes to ecclesiology, particularly regarding the five declarations set forth in the continuously relevant document *Common Understanding and Vision* of the WCC (CUV 1.12) of 2006.¹ The ecclesiological work conducted by the WCC cannot aim at an ecclesiology that is

1. “The WCC is not and must never become a superchurch. The purpose of the WCC is not to negotiate unions between churches (which can be done only by the churches themselves). The WCC cannot and should not be based on any one particular conception of the church. Membership in the WCC does not imply that a church treats its own conception of the church as merely relative. Membership in the WCC does not imply the acceptance of a specific doctrine concerning the nature of church unity” (CUV 1.12).

“binding” for all churches or that would elevate the WCC to a church-like position, but instead must serve to promote the unity among the churches, or at least mutual understanding of the churches gathered under the WCC. Before this background, the question arises whether just as much energy as is expended for ecclesiological work should be applied to working on models of conciliation that include questions of practical cooperation, i.e., that strengthen the connection of *faith and order to life and work*.² In a community of churches that is so highly diverse, it will be extremely difficult in any case to agree upon an ecclesiology that can be accepted by all; it is precisely for this reason that committed practical cooperation is so important.

The reflections on the prophetic role of the Church could be expanded on. The functional determination of the Church with regard to its goal of communion with God needs to be translated into a constructive-critical description of the Church’s role in a widely differentiated society. An analogous role in interreligious dialogue also needs more elaboration.

C. Ministry

The ministry question remains one of the most problematic issues in the ecumenical community. In order to achieve progress here, we would recommend addressing this topic separately. From

2. In this respect, we consider the WCC document *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes. New WCC Affirmation on Mission and Evangelism* (2012) a useful guide pointing the way ahead.

a Protestant view, the ministry is more than ordained ministry.

Therefore, we consider it necessary to deepen the connection between the ministry concept and the priesthood of all believers, which also means honoring the status of “lay” volunteers.

One particular concern is the issue of women’s ordination. Being in a church community with a church discriminating against persons based on sex when it comes to the ordained ministry is highly problematic.

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19. Episcopal Church

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*Gracious Father, we pray for thy holy Catholic Church. Fill it with all truth, in all truth with all peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in anything it is amiss, reform it. Where it is right, strengthen it; where it is in want, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it; for the sake of Jesus Christ thy Son our Savior. Amen.*¹

Introduction

The Episcopal Church (TEC) is grateful to the World Council of Churches and its Commission on Faith and Order for its second convergence text: *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)*. *TCTCV* grows from Faith and Order's first convergence text, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM)*, recognizing that the main topics of *BEM* can be understood only in the context of the church. As a convergence text, *TCTCV* "express[es] how far Christian communities have come in their common understanding of the Church" (p. 1) while also identifying areas that need further work. We find both hope and encouragement in the great extent of convergence among the churches that *TCTCV* identifies.

In the United States, Christian churches and, in different ways, other religious traditions struggle with changes in societal views of religious organizations, with the survival instincts these changes trigger within religious groups, and with the temptation to nostalgia and self-absorption that ensues. The lack of unity, mutual recognition, and co-operative mission among religious groups and within Christianity only accentuates the negative perception of Christianity.

We rejoice in the progress toward unity brought about by the many stages in developing this text, including previous studies, responses from individuals and churches, and careful crafting and revision. We look forward to the future work of Faith and Order, shaped by the churches' responses to *TCTCV*. We recognize that many issues remain, some of them apparently obdurate at this time. At the same time, while we do not know the shape of the future united church, we pray for and commit ourselves to the unity of the church, along with other churches and with our Lord Jesus Christ. Living into the unity of the church is not an easy task, but it is one we cannot renounce. The Episcopal Church is committed to finding the fullness of the church that makes our witness credible, however arduous and difficult that may seem.

We have studied and learned from *TCTCV*, and we find that this text does reflect TEC's

1. Prayer for the Church, 1979 Book of Common Prayer of the Episcopal Church, 816.

ecclesiological understanding of the church. We also find that this text reflects our vision for the unified church for which we pray and toward which we work. We welcome further movement in this direction, including in areas where TEC may be willing to say more than *TCTCV* is able to. We elaborate our findings in answering the questions that *TCTCV* poses to the churches.

1. To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?

TCTCV reflects TEC's understanding of the church in a very high degree. *TCTCV* §22 is entirely consistent with three of the four articles of the Chicago/Lambeth Quadrilateral as TEC has interpreted them in its 1979 Declaration on Unity and its 1982 Principles of Unity.²

TCTCV also further clarifies the nature and purpose of *episkopé*, which in the Episcopal Church is expressed in the historic episcopate. For the sake of the unity of the church, TEC has interpreted this fourth article of the Quadrilateral to make possible the sharing of the episcopate with churches that are willing to receive it, such as the ELCA and the Moravian Church - Northern and Southern Provinces. We continue in dialogue with churches whose tradition is corporate *episkopé* (e.g., Presbyterian Church USA) and look forward to the day when churches are able to agree concerning the limits of legitimate diversity in this area.

2. See Appendix 3 for these statements, and the Chicago/Lambeth Quadrilateral.

We welcome these elements in *TCTCV* that are particular emphases of Episcopal and Anglican ecclesiology:

- *Incarnational theology* that ties together both the earthly ministry of Christ and the ministry of the Church as the body of Christ. We include here *TCTCV*'s affirmation that both baptism and the Lord's supper effect in a real way what they promise.
- *The mission and the working of the Holy Spirit*. As *TCTCV* indicates, the Church is intended to serve God's plan for the transformation of the world. God's mission for the church is to proclaim in word and deed the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ. As Anglicans, we recognize that this view of mission is consistent with the Marks of Mission formally and informally embraced throughout the Anglican Communion and TEC.³
- *Koinonia* as the fundamental characteristic of the church and so of ecclesiology suited to our contemporary

3. The Marks of Mission affirm that the mission of the Church is the mission of Christ. This mission requires the church to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom; to teach, baptize and nurture new believers; to respond to human need by loving service; to seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation; and to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth. <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/page/five-marks-mission>

global context. We welcome *TCTCV*'s affirmation of the eschatological character of *koinonia*, even as we are committed to receiving the gift of *koinonia* in our churches in our journey in history. We are grateful for the significant work done in the last several decades to elaborate the meaning and practice of *koinonia* within and between the churches. We hope for more discussion of the opportunities given to us by God through conflict, which can become an opportunity "to enhance our mutual understanding and to grow in the faith."⁴ Christians already share a real yet imperfect communion through the power of the Spirit, and seeking reconciliation within communion is an integral part of the process of growing up into full unity with Christ.

- *The priesthood of all the people of God.* The ecclesiology expressed in TEC's 1979 Book of Common Prayer and other liturgies is based in the baptismal covenant that strongly affirms that all baptized persons are ministers of the gospel and empowered for the mission of the church.⁵ TEC's Catechism teaches that "The ministers of the

church are lay persons, bishops, priest, and deacons."⁶ All baptized persons have in baptism been called to ministry and given authority for the mission, guidance, and governance of the church in every area at every level. TEC is in the process of restructuring itself to express this understanding more fully in our structures, policies, and practices. TEC affirms that the ministry of the baptized is enhanced and encouraged by the leadership of those ordained and those otherwise commissioned.

- *Legitimate diversity.* In seeing ourselves as participating in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church, TEC and other Anglican churches affirm that, because of "the sheer richness of the Gospel of Christ,"⁷ there is legitimate diversity in doctrine, discipline, and worship, and in morals and mission, within the one church. We recognize legitimate diversity as enriching, not dividing. We welcome *TCTCV*'s identification of the need for common criteria and structures for assessing diversity. We commend the approach taken in the statement "Communion, Conflict and Hope" of the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission, which has been useful

4. "Communion, Conflict and Hope" of the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission, §50 <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/107653/communion-conflict-and-hope-the-kuala-lumpur-report.pdf>

5. *Book of Common Prayer* (1979), 301–309.

6. *Ibid.* 855.

7. "Communion, Conflict and Hope," §109.

both within and beyond TEC and the Anglican Communion.

- *The necessity of the churches engaging in mission together* unless this is impossible for legitimate reasons related to faith and order. TEC attempts to follow this principle at every level, even while we acknowledge that this is something we are able to do more fully than is currently the case, perhaps particularly at the local level.
- *The necessity of exploring all issues, including morals, “in a spirit of mutual attentiveness and support”* (§36). We would expand this to say that such attentiveness and support includes common prayer and worship, humility and the willingness to repent, and a habitual presumption of the good will and intentions of others. These dispositions are even more necessary when the issues under discussion are particularly difficult, whether because of historic divergences or current disagreements.

2. To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?

TCTCV makes clear the very significant extent to which the churches already agree on fundamental issues, such as those we have noted in our answer to question 1 above. *TCTCV* helps to legitimize the catholicity of all the churches, taken as a whole. Further, *TCTCV* sets out a basis for growth

in unity in many other ways, including but not limited to the following:

- “The Church, as the body of Christ, acts by the power of the Holy Spirit to continue his life-giving mission in prophetic and compassionate ministry and so participates in God’s work of healing a broken world” (§5). The Church is intended to serve God’s plan for the transformation of the world. We would add that the Holy Spirit also works in worship and prayer to empower the Church for its mission.
- The unity of the church is visible when churches “recognize in one another the authentic presence of . . . the ‘one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church’” (§8). We would state further that such recognition takes place in shared life, mission, and work, in worship and in prayer, and in instances where the baptized of different traditions acknowledge that they share a common faith and can live into a shared ministry. That is, the unity of the church may be visible in areas where formal recognition is not yet forthcoming, as §43 notes. As *TCTCV* says, the Church is “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic” because of the nature and work of God, not on its own account.
- “Legitimate diversity” contributes to the “unity and catholicity of the Church as a whole” (§17). We recognize that the

meaning of the term “legitimate diversity” is deliberately vague in *TCTCV*, reflecting the churches’ differences on this point. We agree with *TCTCV*’s statements that there is need for common criteria and mutually recognized structures to distinguish in which areas diversity is enriching, in which it is divisive, and in which it is church-dividing. Developing ways to distinguish legitimate from illegitimate diversity, including in matters of faith and order, also entails a nuanced consideration of conflict in the church.

- “Each local church contains within it the fullness of what it is to be the Church. It is wholly Church, but not the whole Church The universal Church is the communion of all local churches united in faith and worship around the world” (§18). This view of the church is implicit in the Chicago/Lambeth Quadrilateral as interpreted by TEC, as well as in foundational documents of Anglicanism and of TEC. From the English Reformation forward, Anglicans have understood Anglican churches to be part of, but by no means the whole of, the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. We hope and aspire to believe as the one church believes, and we hope and aspire to do what the one church does. We recognize that the fullness of the church is eschatological, at the same

time that that eschatological reality is already anticipated in the Church’s life now and throughout history.

- All authority comes from Christ and is to be exercised in the light of how Christ exercised authority. His transparency, authenticity and above all his truth-telling not only drew the attention of the people; these qualities also created the vulnerability that led to his death. In this sense, Christian authority is distinguished from mere power. Leadership is “neither only personal, nor only delegated by the community. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit destined for the service (*diakonia*) of the Church in love” (§28). Faithful leadership should include the participation of the whole community. All churches need a ministry of oversight (*episkopé*) that is “exercised in personal, collegial and communal ways” (§29). TEC affirms that the exercise of *episkopé* does entail the “quality of synodality or conciliarity” that “reflects the mystery of the trinitarian life of God” (§30). The decision-making and other governance structures and processes of TEC are already personal, collegial, and communal, in that TEC is structured to require synodality and conciliarity at every level. We would hope that all churches may affirm the importance of the synodal as well as conciliar aspects of *episkopé*.

- Ethics is rooted in God and not isolated from “the moral struggles of humankind as a whole” (§35). The Anglican - Roman Catholic Consultation in the USA (ARCUSA) has published an agreed statement on ethics and moral life, “Ecclesiology and Moral Discernment: Seeking a Unified Moral Witness.”⁸ This document closely examines the processes of moral discernment and teaching that the two churches have in common, identifying some areas where the teachings of the two churches are consonant with each other (e.g., migration and immigration), and some where potentially divisive differences persist (e.g., same-sex relations). The statement affirms that the two churches share a common vision of full and visible unity to which diversity is integral, noting that unity need not entail the reconciliation of all differences. We encourage the Commission on Faith and Order to consider this agreed statement in its further work on how the church is both in and for the world.
- “Even now, divided Christian communities can and do” act “jointly to bring relief to suffering human beings and to help create a society that fosters human dignity” (§36). At a time when ecumenical agreement in faith and order seems hard

to achieve, we rejoice that the expressions of joint work to relieve suffering and create a just society are so strong and widespread. TEC is thankful to be able to participate in such efforts, which we see at local, regional, and global levels. We note that a century ago such common witness would not have been possible, but we have since grown together in unity. This gives us hope that the challenges we face in the present day need not be insurmountable. We believe that bringing this form of common witness together with the discussion of doctrine and discipline would be of great benefit to discussions of faith and order, as well as to recognition of the degree of communion which the churches already share.

Further, in stating the areas of difference and disagreement that still remain, *TCTCV* is most helpful in clarifying the work that must be done, and suggesting possible ways in which it might proceed. We elaborate further in our answer to question 4 below. Even so, we consider it important to distinguish between real differences that are obdurate, and perceived differences that may be resolvable through careful study and honest discussion.

At the same time, we note that *TCTCV* does not identify the barriers or challenges to unity posed by the massive historic and current inequities along socio-economic lines, such as gender, race/ethnicity, and legacies of colonialism, which are ecclesial as well as geo-political. Nor does *TCTCV*

8. http://www.episcopalchurch.org/files/ecclesiology_and_moral_discernment.pdf

at any point refer to the role of women with men in the churches, though this has been a matter of considerable discussion over the decades. We consider these highly significant omissions. While social, economic, and cultural inequities may not be stated as doctrine, we think that a strong argument can be made that these are lived doctrine, and that they certainly influence doctrinal formulations. We believe such issues must be addressed within the context of faith and order, because such inequities are significant elements of the contexts of our day-to-day faith.

The Episcopal Church has focused historically on racial reconciliation as a primary aspect of ecumenical cooperation and work toward unity. Our church “understands and affirms that the call to pray and act for racial reconciliation is integral to our witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ and to our living into the demands of our Baptismal Covenant.”⁹ In 2009 the Episcopal Church repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery¹⁰ and currently supports Native Americans and others in increasing both tribal and environmental integrity and sustainability.¹¹ Our work toward ecclesial unity is increasingly rooted in seeking deeper connection with historically African American denominations,

9. General Convention Resolution C019 to Establish Response to Systemic Racial Injustice, http://www.generalconvention.org/gc/2015-resolutions/c019/current_english_text

10. General Convention Resolution D035 to Repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery, http://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution-complete.pl?resolution=2009-d035

11. <http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/ens/2016/08/25/episcopalians-rally-behind-native-american-protests-of-nd-pipeline>

in our continuing participation in the Consultation on Church Unity and its successor Churches Uniting in Christ,¹² and in active dialogue with churches such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the Moravian Provinces in the USA, whose own longstanding commitments to diversity and inclusion inspire us.

3. What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?

TCTCV challenges TEC in these areas:

- *Episkopé*, especially whether the historic episcopate is intended by Christ for the future united church, and what this might mean about other forms of *episkopé*. The question of primacy is clearly a part of this.
- Primacy, especially the role of a universal primacy. TEC is not ready to say yes to universal primacy of one or more bishops. Anglicans have typically emphasized the importance of dispersed authority within the structures of the church. We believe that primacy need not entail centralization. Historically and currently, Anglicans hesitate to centralize authority and governance in what might be called primatial bodies, let alone in an individual primate at the communion level.

12. <http://churchesunitinginchrist.org>

- Reception and non-reception. Especially in the absence of criteria and structures for assessing legitimate diversity, it is not clear how the churches are to understand important decisions by other churches before we are closer to unity. We acknowledge the need for a hermeneutics of generosity, even as we note that such decisions and their implementation do have bearing on how statements of doctrine, discipline, and moral teaching by a particular church are received.
- The range of legitimate diversity. TEC sees this range as quite broad. Unless diversity infringes the church's true vocation, diversity helps the church pursue its mission in the widely varied contexts in which it is set. We are inspired by the motto of the Moravian churches: "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, and in all things love."¹³ We tend to assess diversity in relation to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the church. Yet in TEC there is wide disagreement about the outcomes of such an assessment in some instances. We acknowledge that our view is not shared by some provinces of the Anglican Communion, or by some

other churches. With other Anglican churches, TEC remains hesitant to say that this range can be decided at a central or worldwide level without direct involvement and even approval at the local and regional levels.

- The moral challenge of the gospel. Here we are particularly aware of the disjunction between our biblically-based creedal faith and the massive historic and current inequities that are such a significant aspect of the context in which we live out our lives. We are grateful for the prophetic and pastoral calls for repentance and conversion presented by other churches here and around the world, and by a wide range of social movements that are not affiliated with any church.
- The importance of deepening and expanding our engagement with other churches, especially those that have not been part of the ecumenical movement, including so-called new and emerging churches as well as evangelical and Pentecostal churches.

Finally, all ecumenical and interreligious efforts, including *TCTCV*, challenge us constantly to assess the extent to which TEC, its leaders and its members, have the will toward the unity for which Christ prayed. We must constantly ask ourselves and each other, "What must we do to foster and maintain our will toward unity?"

13. http://www.moravianchurcharchives.org/thismonth/12_05%20In%20Essentials.pdf The Episcopal Church is in full communion with the Moravian Church (USA) - Northern and Southern Provinces.

4. How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement?

The Episcopal Church has a long history of engagement with other churches, with fruitful outcomes in both life and mission. Appendix 4 lists all current official ecumenical efforts in which The Episcopal Church is represented. In addition, Episcopal churches are deeply engaged in local mission engagement in “life and work.” TEC also participates in the ecumenical work of the Anglican Communion in a variety of ways.

In addition, *TCTCV* §7 and chapter 4 discuss the challenges presented to the churches by religious pluralism. We believe that TEC has made significant contributions to this discussion: Representatives contributed to the drafting of the NCCC Policy Statement on Interfaith Relations adopted in 1999, as well as making two significant statements of its own in 1991 and 2009.¹⁴ In our ecumenical and inter-religious work we also express our commitment to racial reconciliation, noted above.

5. What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

We encourage Faith and Order to continue work on the areas where the churches differ or disagree.

14. http://www.episcopalchurch.org/files/statement_on_interreligious_relations_branded_9-2015.pdf

We note that most if not all *TCTCV*'s questions and suggestions about what may be needed to move toward greater convergence are at least amenable to Episcopalians/Anglicans. Indeed, the principal questions about what is needed for the One Church are things the Anglican Communion has been wrestling with within itself for its entire history.

We believe that the following areas may fruitfully be considered now:¹⁵

- Consideration of intermediate steps between division and full visible unity that entails reconciliation of ministries. TEC and the Anglican Communion are able to affirm the concept of degrees of communion. That is, we share a degree of communion with all baptized Christians, and find it helpful and encouraging to bring to light the extent of communion that churches already share. Doing so relativizes the importance of remaining differences. We welcome IARCCUM's vision of unity as “a eucharistic communion of churches: confessing the one faith and demonstrating by their harmonious diversity the richness of faith.”¹⁶ We rejoice

15. In Appendix 1, we have commented on other areas where further work will be needed, areas that we consider to be of less urgency at this time than the ones discussed here.

16. International Anglican - Roman Catholic Commission on Unity and Mission, *Growing Together in Unity and Mission*, 13. <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/relationships/ecumenical-dialogues/roman-catholic/iarccum.aspx>

that the Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Bishops' Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops have now both affirmed the areas of agreement in *Declaration on the Way: Church, Ministry and Eucharist*.¹⁷ We look forward to seeing some way for churches to recognize each other as holding the same faith even when there are outstanding issues.¹⁸ We look for ways to be reconciled with others through mutual/reciprocal recognition of church as churches.

- Further discussion on the relationship between worship, doctrine and order, and mission. As Anglicans, we believe that worship and common prayer contribute strongly to the rule of faith, doctrine, and mission, and are in turn shaped by these.
- Common criteria and mutually recognized structures to distinguish legitimate

17. http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/ecumenical-and-interreligious/ecumenical/lutheran/upload/Declaration_on_the_Way-for-Website.pdf

18. The nine churches of Churches Uniting in Christ (of which the Episcopal Church is one) intends to celebrate just such a recognition of ministries. Moreover, TEC has entered into agreements of Interim Eucharistic Sharing with ecumenical partners when it is possible to say that (a) there are no outstanding, significant doctrinal issues to resolve; and (b) the next stage is full communion that includes reconciliation of ministries.

from illegitimate diversity, including in matters of faith and order. Particularly pressing for TEC is the extent to which differences on moral questions are appropriately seen as “church-dividing.”

- The relationship of the movement of the Holy Spirit to institutional structure and ministerial order, and thus the extent to which these may be changed. This is a crucial aspect of the discussion as to Christ's intention for the church in regard to *episkopé* and the inextricably related qualities of synodality and conciliarity. TEC believes that the historic episcopate is intended by Christ for the coming united Church, at the same time that many Episcopalians and Anglicans would say that this does not invalidate other forms of *episkopé* in the past or the present. We suspect that making it clear that apostolic faith is more fundamental than and prior to apostolic succession would advance greater understanding and agreement in ecclesiology as well as theology. We find that the Orthodox churches' approach to different types of apostolicity is very helpful.¹⁹

19. For example, The North American Orthodox/ Roman Catholic Bilateral Consultation, “Apostolicity as God's Gift in the Life of the Church” (1986); Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue, *The Church of the Triune God* (2006); and some of the preparatory documents for the 2016 Holy and Great Council.

- Further elaboration of what the churches can already say together about the various aspects of authority. We would welcome a convergence statement that takes fuller account of the work done by many bilateral and conciliar dialogues throughout the world. A statement addressed to the local churches and congregations and their members would be most helpful at this time.

We recognize that much work is needed in the particular churches for further agreement to emerge on the following:

- Mutual recognition of various forms of baptism. TEC recognizes the validity of all baptisms performed with water “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Our official policy is that any baptized Christian may receive communion in the Episcopal Church.
- Governance and decision-making, including the synodal/conciliar aspects that accompany the exercise of *episkopé* and other forms of authority. TEC, along with other Anglican churches, affirms that *episkopé* implies synodality/conciliarity, and vice versa. Further, we are convinced that an adequate account of reception must include the principles of subsidiarity and of mutual,

widespread consultation that influences decisions.

- How Christians respond to religious pluralism. We point again to TEC’s work on this, noted in our response to question 4, above.

We think that further work on the following areas is contingent on further progress in the areas we have already noted:

- The significance of tradition and the “traditioning process” in discernment of the movement of the Holy Spirit in the new contexts of the post-colonial world. We note here the significance of this discussion for determining whether ordination is reserved for men only, and what role the consideration of personal qualities (including sexual and gender identification) plays in determining who is fit for ordination. TEC ordains women (including lesbians) and gay men to all offices of ordained ministry. We do not believe that these practices need be church-dividing, though we recognize that these practices may impair communion to some extent, as is the case within the Anglican Communion.
- How visible unity is expressed concretely in communion in the fullness of apostolic faith; in sacramental life; in a truly one and mutually recognized ministry; in structures of conciliar relations

and decision-making; and in common witness and service in the world (§22). While none of us knows what the future church will be, it is imperative to present some concrete possibilities so that the people of God can grow in the vision of and commitment to the coming church.

- A more precise understanding and agreement on the appropriate relations between various levels of a united church and what kinds of leadership are needed to serve these relationships. This includes further work on the matter of the primacy of one or more bishops.

Appendix 1: Other areas where work is needed

In the body of our response, we have made suggestions about important work that we would like to see the Commission on Faith and Order pursue in the near term. Below are other issues we consider important, with brief comments on each.

Sin and the church. TEC affirms that the church is created by God and entrusted to human beings, who continue to sin even as they grow closer to Christ. We also believe that God the Holy Spirit will preserve the church indefectible. Confessing the sins of the church as an organization does not compromise the church's nature and mission. Particularly in instances of widespread injustice, the church's confessing its sins is a necessary and desirable part of the church's participation in the work of God.

The tension between the already and the not yet. We welcome *TCTCV's* emphasis on the eschatological aspect of ecclesiology and would like to see it developed further. We believe such work will also advance the discussion of sin and the church.

The church as transformative influence in society. As Anglicans, we strongly affirm the transformative role of the church in society. We believe this is integral to the mission of the church. We encourage further discussion of this area that takes into account the post-colonial situation of all the churches across the world.

Scripture, preaching, and worship. In the body of our response we point to the importance of liturgy and worship as foundational to the church. We look forward to greater convergence on the role and authority of scripture as it is used in worship, including its interpretation through preaching.

Reception. Recognizing the important work done on reception by WCC, various ecumenical dialogues, and a wide range of scholars, we would welcome further development, particularly in relation to the question of how the church discerns the extent to which reception is taking place and the extent to which it is not. What are the criteria for discerning reception, particularly in contexts where rapid solutions to problems are valued highly?

Greater realism in discussing points of convergence. We are not convinced that convergence is as strong or widespread in all instances as *TCTCV* suggests. We consider it necessary to assess church practices as well as statements in discerning convergence.

Morals in relation to salvation. We believe that further discussion of the relationship of salvation, sanctification, and holiness would be of great assistance in the discussion of any area of morals. This is a theological as well as pastoral issue.

Appendix 2: Response of the Episcopal Diocese of the Honduras²⁰

Hacia Una Vision en Comun de Nuestra Iglesia

Gracias a la Iglesia Episcopal (DFMS), y el Consejo Mundial y la Comisión de Fe y Orden iglesias que están trabajando en este proyecto destinado a la Unidad de la Iglesia. Que no será una tarea fácil, pero lo que sugiere el documento se basa en la unidad del cuerpo de Cristo. La respuesta de la Iglesia Episcopal es guiado por el Catecismo, la obra del Espíritu Santo, y la eclesiología Episcopal Anglicana. Una cosa que notamos es el uso de ambas palabras Episcopal y Anglicana como si fuéramos dos iglesias. Es cierto que nuestro contexto es Episcopal pero también lo es que somos parte de la Comunión Anglicana.

Durante mucho tiempo hemos recorrido dividido eclesiásticamente, esta división se alimenta la nostalgia de la humanidad. Este documento de la Iglesia Episcopal se compromete a manifestar y trabajar por la unidad que tenemos en Cristo y ahora tenemos que encontrar la plenitud de hacernos testigos creíbles de la fe cristiana. reconocimiento mutuo de los ministerios eclesiales, la profesión

de una “Iglesia” es una tarea a la que no podemos renunciar ardua y difícil como puede parecer.

También nos hemos dado cuenta de que por medio de este documento veo que tratar de “legitimar” la catolicidad de la Iglesia en su conjunto.

Esta es la opinión de nuestro proyecto de documento Episcopal Diócesis de Honduras que nos ha enviado, oramos para que el Espíritu Santo del Señor nos guiará para lograr una Iglesia unida a caminar a la luz de su palabra, una iglesia profética para anunciar la buena noticia en todo tiempo y lugar.

Appendix 3: The Chicago/ Lambeth Quadrilateral, Declaration on Unity, and Principles of Unity

The Chicago/ Lambeth Quadrilateral (1886/1888) affirms that the following elements “supply a basis on which approach may be by God’s blessing made towards” the unity of the church:

(a) The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as “containing all things necessary to salvation,” and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith.

(b) The Apostles’ Creed, as the Baptismal Symbol; and the Nicene Creed, as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith.

(c) The two Sacraments ordained by Christ Himself – Baptism and the Supper of the Lord – ministered with unfailing use of Christ’s words of Institution, and of the elements ordained by Him.

(d) The Historic Episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying

20. The Diocese of Honduras is one of nine Latin American dioceses that comprise Province 9 of the Episcopal Church.

needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the Unity of His Church.²¹

Declaration on Unity (1979), approved by the General Convention of the Episcopal Church

The visible unity we seek will be one eucharistic fellowship. As an expression of and a means toward this goal, the uniting Church will recognize itself as a communion of Communions, based upon acknowledgment of catholicity and apostolicity. In this organic relationship all will recognize each other's members and ministries. All will share the bread and the cup of the Lord. All will acknowledge each other as belonging to the Body of Christ at all places and at all times. All will proclaim the Gospel to the world with one mind and purpose. All will serve the needs of humankind with mutual trust and dedication. And for these ends all will plan and decide together in assemblies constituted by authorized representatives whenever and wherever there is need. We do not yet see the shape of that collegiality, conciliarity, authority and primacy which need to be present and active in the Diocese with its Parishes as well as nationally, regionally, universally; but we recognize that some ecclesial structure will be necessary to bring about the expressions of our unity in the Body of Christ described above. We do not yet know how the particular traditions of each of the Communion will be maintained and developed for the enrichment of the whole Church. We do not see how the Church will be shaped by the particular

histories and cultures within which she is called to fulfill her mission. All Christians are challenged to express more fully among themselves the biblical call to mutual responsibility and interdependence. We believe ways can now be found to express this call to a communion of the Churches in the Body of Christ. As the Churches become partners in mission they will move from present interrelatedness to interdependence.

Principles of Unity (1982), approved by the General Convention of the Episcopal Church

The 67th General Convention of the Episcopal Church re-affirm[s] the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral as found on pages 876–878 of the Book of Common Prayer as a statement of basic principles which express our own unity, and as a statement of essential principles for organic unity with other churches, and affirms the following as an explication of that basic document without denying anything contained therein: that

1. The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the word of God as they are witness to God's action in Jesus Christ and the continuing presence of his Holy Spirit in the Church, that they are the authoritative norm for catholic faith in Jesus Christ and for the doctrinal and moral tradition of the Gospel, and that they contain all things necessary for salvation.
2. The Apostles' and Nicene Creeds are the forms through which the Christian Church,

21. *Book of Common Prayer of the Episcopal Church*, 876–878.

early in its history under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, understood, interpreted and expressed its faith in the Triune God. The continuing doctrinal tradition is the form through which the Church seeks to understand, interpret and express its faith in continuity with these ancient creeds and in its awareness of the world to which the Word of God must be preached.

3. The Church is the sacrament of God's presence in the world and the sign of the Kingdom for which we hope. That presence and hope are made active and real in the Church and in the individual lives of Christian men and women through the preaching of the Word of God, through the Gospel sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, as well as other sacramental rites, and through our apostolate to the world in order that it may become the Kingdom of our God and of his Christ.

4. Apostolicity is evidenced in continuity with the teaching, the ministry, and the mission of the apostles. Apostolic teaching must, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, be founded upon the Holy Scriptures and the ancient fathers and creeds, making its proclamation of Jesus Christ and his Gospel for each new age consistent with those sources, not merely reproducing them in a transmission of verbal identity. Apostolic ministry exists to promote, safeguard and serve apostolic teaching. All Christians are called to this ministry by their Baptism. In order to serve, lead and enable this ministry, some are set apart and ordained

in the historic orders of Bishop, Presbyter, and Deacon. We understand the historic episcopate as central to this apostolic ministry and essential to the reunion of the Church, even as we acknowledge "the spiritual reality of the ministries of those Communion which do not possess the Episcopate" (Lambeth Appeal 1920, Section 7). Apostolic mission is itself a succession of apostolic teaching and ministry inherited from the past and carried into the present and future. Bishops in apostolic succession are, therefore, the focus and personal symbols of this inheritance and mission as they preach and teach the Gospel and summon the people of God to their mission of worship and service.

Appendix 4: Official ecumenical relations of The Episcopal Church

The Episcopal Church is in full communion with the following churches:

- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- The Moravian Church – Northern and Southern Provinces
- Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht
- Philippine Independent Church
- Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar, India
- Provinces of the Anglican Communion

By virtue of its participation in the Anglican Communion, TEC also has communion relations

with union churches formed with the participation of Anglican dioceses:

- Church of Bangladesh
- Church of North India
- Church of Pakistan
- Church of South India
- The Episcopal Church and the Church of Sweden acknowledged a formal relationship of communion on two occasions in 2015: at the 78th General Convention in Salt Lake City on 28 June; and on 18 November in Uppsala at the General Synod of the Church of Sweden.

The Episcopal Church participates in these ecumenical conciliar bodies:

- World Council of Churches
- National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA
- Churches Uniting in Christ
- Christian Churches Together in the USA

The Episcopal Church participates in bilateral dialogues with these churches:

- United Methodist Church - Interim Eucharistic Sharing agreement

- Presbyterian Church USA
- The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

The Episcopal Diocesan Ecumenical and Interreligious Officers Network is active in most dioceses and co-sponsors the annual National Workshop on Christian Unity.

The Episcopal Church at local, regional, provincial, and global levels is involved in mission efforts with many churches in the USA and around the world. TEC is in partnership with Church World Service.

20. Union of Welsh Independents

1. The Union of Welsh Independents (*Undeb yr Annibynwyr Cymraeg*) is a union of independent, largely Welsh-speaking, local congregational churches in Wales (with a small number in England). As churches in the congregational tradition, we believe that the local church, meeting under the authority of the Word of God in scripture and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is the only and final arbiter in all matters of worship, faith and witness. Our local churches are in fellowship with one another through regional county unions and nationally through the Union of Welsh Independents. These wider bodies offer to the local churches advice, support and pastoral care in all the areas that pertain to the churches' life and witness but do not exercise any authority over local congregations. However, we share a conviction that these local churches should not live in isolation from one another. Rather, we believe that fellowship and partnership in the gospel with other churches within the local community, the region, the nation and the global Christian community are fundamental to our identity as the people of God. Our response to *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* seeks to reflect this self-understanding, to offer our insights to the wider Church and to learn from the perspectives and experience of our sister churches around the world.

2. We warmly welcome *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* as a valuable and enriching contribution to our own understanding of the Church and to the growing mutual understanding of the worldwide community of God's people. We hope to develop resources to enable our local congregations to study the document and thus enrich their own Christian life and witness.

Chapter 1

3. We find the missional context of the document encouraging, and fully endorse the emphasis, in sections A and B, on the Church's calling to witness to the gospel in the world as a foundational aspect of its identity. The key question for us, therefore, is: How can the Church, rooted in history, be constantly restored and renewed in order more effectively to fulfil its role in the *missio dei*? We affirm the claim of *Confessing the One Faith* that: "The origin of the Church is rooted in the plan of the Triune God for humankind's salvation" (§3) and recognize that "one challenge for the Church has been how to proclaim the gospel of Christ in a way that awakens a response in the different contexts, languages and cultures of the people that hear that proclamation" (§6). We perceive this as a challenge that we ourselves must address in our own context of decline within the traditional churches and continual change and growing secularism

within Welsh society. We believe that we must face these challenges in partnership with other Christians locally, nationally and globally and regard our membership in Cytûn: Churches Together in Wales, the Council for World Mission, the World Council of Churches and other confessional organizations as central to our life and mission.

4. While we appreciate the emphasis of this document on the visible unity of the Church, locally, nationally and globally, as fundamental to its identity, we question the degree to which visible unity is central to the Church's mission and believe that a clearer definition of "visible unity" may be needed, given the range of meanings that this term has had over recent decades. There are those among us who believe that visible unity means "organic union" within "the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church" (that is, the bringing together of independent denominations and churches into one united or uniting church) and would welcome continuing commitments among the churches towards achieving this goal. Others among us (probably the majority) would understand visible unity in terms of denominations and churches recognizing in one another "the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church," and so seeing one another and being seen by others (hence the use of the term "visible") as partners in the gospel, recognizing as authentic one another's sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper and being able, therefore, to share and exchange ministry and membership in the service of the Church's witness. Our experience in Wales suggests to us that a definition of and a commitment to visible unity in

these latter terms can creatively serve the churches' mission in our context while we maintain the hope that God, through the Holy Spirit, may bring us to a fuller and deeper union as our partnership in Christ grows and develops.

Chapter 2

5. We warmly endorse the fundamental affirmation of the opening sentence of this chapter that "All Christians share the conviction that Scripture is normative, therefore the biblical witness provides an irreplaceable source for acquiring greater agreement about the Church." However, we would question whether the term "normative" is wholly appropriate here. We would prefer to describe Scripture as "the final authority" in our understanding of the Church. We further agree that "the New Testament provides no systematic ecclesiology." For us, the implication of this conviction is that the churches should be able to recognize the "one, holy, catholic and apostolic church" in one another and should recognize in one another – in all their ecclesiological diversity – the true Church of God insofar as their self-understanding is rooted in Scripture. This call to a mutual recognition of ecclesiological diversity is further affirmed for us by the helpful reminder in §12 of the rich imagery of the Church that is to be found within the New Testament.

6. We sense some ambiguity in §11, with regard to the terms *Tradition* and *tradition*. We affirm the statement from the Fourth Faith and Order Conference that "By *the Tradition* is meant the gospel itself, transmitted from generation to generation

in and by the Church.” Thus, if we may so express it, Tradition = gospel. However, we are aware that among all the churches “transmission” has frequently become “interpretation” which has become in its turn “normative” or authoritative. Tradition can, in this way, be a distortion of the gospel. Our historical and contemporary conviction is that only the gospel as witnessed to in Scripture has final authority for the Church. The process of transmission within different ecclesiological communities can do no more than offer insight and guidance for the interpretation of Scripture within the life of the churches.

7. We welcome the understanding of the Church expressed in §§13–14:

In the Church, through the Holy Spirit, believers are united with Jesus Christ and thereby share a living relationship with the Father, who speaks to them and calls forth their trustful response It is by its very nature missionary, called and sent to witness in its own life to that communion which God intends for all humanity and for all creation in the kingdom The Church draws life from the gospel and discovers ever anew the direction of her journey.

8. We were rather surprised to find the example of Mary inserted rather out of context in §15. With other Christians, we recognize in Mary an example of humility and obedience offered to individual Christians and to the whole Church as an inspiration for their life of discipleship, although

we would find difficulty with the description of her as *Theotokos* (the Mother of God, or more correctly, God-bearer). However, we cannot accept that she provides an authoritative foundation for ecclesiology and so see this paragraph as an unhelpful insertion into a section that is otherwise insightful and helpful. But given the emphasis of this paragraph on Mary as “a symbol and model for the Church,” we would wish to draw particular attention to Mary’s ministry of humility and obedience and her role in “bringing forth” the gospel as “a symbol and model” of ministry and therefore as an affirmation of the equal calling, commitment and recognition of women and men within the Church’s ordained ministry of word and sacrament.

9. We find the section on “The Prophetic, Priestly and Royal People of God” particularly helpful. This perspective echoes very clearly the Reformed tradition’s emphasis, especially within the work of John Calvin and the Geneva reformers, on the call of the Church as the fellowship *of* Jesus Christ to become what she should be. The Church is called to fulfil Jesus’ threefold ministry in the world: to proclaim the gospel without compromise; to be a sign of reconciliation and forgiveness in the world; and to live out the reign of Christ by seeking to extend his humble, suffering lordship within every aspect of her members’ lives in service (*diakonia*) in the world. Every member of the Church shares in this threefold ministry which is Jesus’ gift to his Church.

10. In view of this, we welcome the emphasis in §19 on the inclusive nature of this threefold

ministry within the Church. “*All* members of the Church share in this vocation *All* members of the body, ordained and lay, are inter-related members of God’s priestly people [our emphasis].” This perspective is central to our understanding of ministry within the Church and the churches since we believe that the ordained ministry of Word and sacrament must always be fundamentally understood and practised as being within “the priesthood of all believers.”

11. We find the explication of the creedal understanding of the Church as “one, holy, catholic and apostolic” in §19 particularly helpful. We believe that our congregational and reformed understanding of what it means to be a local church as well as the Church universal would be greatly enriched by a study of these paragraphs.

12. In response to the invitation “to reflect together about the criteria which are employed in different churches for considering issues about continuity and change” (p.15) we offer the following comments:

i. We believe that both continuity and change within the life of the Church and the churches are inspired and enabled by the Holy Spirit and so reflect the will and purpose of God as revealed in Jesus Christ and made known in the scriptures.

ii. The essential continuity of the Church and the churches rests solely in their calling and commissioning as the body of

Christ in the world, empowered by the Spirit. We cannot, therefore, accept that the historical forms of the various church traditions over the centuries can represent the Church’s essential continuity through history.

iii. Since the Church and the churches are constituted of sinful people “who have fallen short of the glory of God” in their turning away from God, their disobedience and their self-seeking, the fundamental energy of their life and witness (and therefore that of the Church and the churches) is the forgiveness, love and grace of God in Jesus Christ.

iv. The structures, forms and patterns of the life of the Church and the churches are always open to reformation (*semper reformanda*) as the Holy Spirit brings new insights, perspectives and challenges to bear on the churches’ life and witness in response to particular contexts at particular times in their history.

v. The sole and ultimate test for any changes in the life of the Church and the churches is whether the changes are discerned as being in accordance with the witness of the Scriptures that are the ultimate authority for the Church.

We would welcome an opportunity to explore further the criteria for continuity and change that emerge from the worldwide responses to this document.

13. There is much in section C that we would endorse, and we welcome the understanding of the Church as “a Sign and Servant of God’s design for the world.” However, we cannot agree with all that is said here. First, some of us feel uncomfortable with the description of the Church as “the privileged means for bringing about God’s design of salvation.” If by this is meant that the Church and the churches are always and everywhere unworthy of their *privileged* calling by God to be instruments of God’s purposes and that their life and witness is always and everywhere completely dependent on the grace of God, then we would accept this understanding of the Church. The Church and the churches are indeed blessed by God. But if it suggests that the Church is understood as having a uniquely privileged status as the sole instrument of God’s purpose in the world, we would find this to be contradictory to our vision of the Church and the churches as humble servants (or even slaves [*douloi*]) of God’s purposes which are fulfilled by the means that God chooses in every age and place. We believe, therefore, that the term “privilege” must be used with care and sensitivity in this context.

14. Secondly, we would not use the term “sacrament” to describe the Church, preferring terms such as sign, servant and instrument as being more in keeping with the New Testament understanding of the Church. However, we understand why some Christian traditions find in the term “sacrament” a helpful theological paradigm as they seek to express what they mean by the Church as “sign.” In general, we would agree that this may be an area

in which “legitimate differences of formulation are compatible and mutually acceptable.”

15. We find section D, “Communion in Unity and Diversity” helpful. We recognize that the term “legitimate diversity” has become recognized widely as an authentic model for Christian unity, although some among us would question whether this model of unity places sufficient emphasis on the continued significance of the search for the deeper union that would enable such diversity to become mutually enriching in the lives of all the churches. We certainly welcome the emphasis on diversity as a key characteristic to be encouraged and nourished as the churches grows into deeper unity. We recognize this diversity within our own denomination as well as in our relationships with other churches and denominations within Wales and more widely. Thus “unity in diversity” and “diversity in unity” represent for us key perspectives in any search for deeper unity among Christians. We also appreciate the longstanding use of “legitimate” in this context as indicating that diversity cannot be without limits. But we are also aware of a great variation in what different traditions regard as legitimate. What may be legitimate for churches in the congregational tradition may not be legitimate, for example, for the Roman Catholic Church or Churches in the Orthodox tradition, since the criteria for determining legitimacy may well vary greatly between the traditions. There is also considerable variation in the processes by which such legitimacy is judged. For churches in the congregational tradition, such decisions would normally be made within the church meeting of

the local congregation, whereas in other traditions such decisions are made by the wider councils of the church at national or international level. In view of these divergences, we welcome the suggestion (p. 17) that consideration be given to developing common criteria of discernment in this area and seeking to develop mutually recognized structures that would be needed to reach appropriate agreements on “legitimate diversity.”

We would encourage the Faith and Order Commission to continue to engage with the task of developing criteria that could be agreed by the worldwide Church.

16. As an initial contribution to developing such criteria we offer three insights:

i. At the heart of any understanding of diversity we would place “confessing Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures.” Any church that professes a faith that denies this central confession should not, in our judgement, be regarded as “legitimate.” So one criterion must be: “Does this church confess Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures?”

ii. “Legitimate diversity” should not be defined in such a way that the worship, life and self-understanding of any church falls outside the New Testament’s imagery and theology of the Church. So a second criterion should be: “Does this church’s

understanding of itself reflect the theology of the Church as found in the New Testament?”

iii. We believe that “diversity” in this context must also include “human diversity.” In this sense, the Church and the churches can only be regarded as having “legitimate diversity” if the fellowship of the Church is regarded as a fully inclusive community (see, for example, Gal. 3.28 and Col. 3.11, verses that we believe need to be interpreted in terms of the contemporary realities of division and exclusion within the societies in which the churches are set). So a third criterion should be: Does this church have a fully inclusive understanding of membership and ministry within its church family?

17. Our consideration of the term “legitimate diversity” in §§15–16 above leads us to raise the possibility that this may not be the most appropriate term for what this model of Christian unity seeks to nurture among the churches. We wonder therefore whether the term “catholic diversity” may better serve the churches by avoiding the concept of legitimacy with its unclear criteria and ambiguous understanding of ecumenical authority. We suggest that the term “catholic diversity” sets diversity within the creedal vision of the catholicity of the Church and the churches. In this context, we recall the words of §23: “The essential catholicity of the Church is undermined when cultural and other differences are allowed

to develop into division” and §30 which calls for differences to be understood “in such a way that they contribute to the unity and catholicity of the Church as a whole.” We believe that such an understanding would enrich the Church’s vision of unity in diversity.

18. As a denomination in the congregational tradition we particularly welcome the emphasis on the local church in section E. We understand the local church to be the gathered congregation of God’s people who are in covenant with one another in any local community or neighbourhood, seeking to be obedient to our Lord Jesus Christ under the authority of God’s Word in Scripture and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Decisions are to be taken in a church meeting in which every member of the local church has an equal right under God to be heard and to speak and thus contribute to the decision making process. In general, we find our own tradition represented by the first two paragraphs of this section. For us the relationship between the only two ecclesial communities that we recognize as authentically reflecting New Testament ecclesiology, namely, the local church and the universal Church, is central to our self-understanding. Similarly, most of the definition of the local church quoted from “The Church: Local and Universal” represents our understanding of the Church. However, whereas we respect the ministry of a personal *episkopé* within our partner churches in Wales and more widely, we ourselves do not understand *episkopé* as being “exercised by bishops or other ministers in serving the community” since we do not regard *episkopé* as solely a

personal or individual responsibility but rather as being exercised in partnership between lay and ordained within the local and wider communities of God’s people and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in any one place. This partnership in communal oversight (*episkopé*) and pastoral care is essential to our understanding of the Church. We further believe that historical realities (such as the moral, doctrinal and social aberrations of the way in which *episkopé* has been exercised during various periods in the Church’s history) provide evidence for the wisdom of this understanding of *episkopé* and our unwillingness to regard personal *episkopé* as of the *esse* of the Church.

19. We particularly welcome the understanding of local church expressed in §31, namely, that “each local church . . . is wholly the Church but not the whole Church.” We believe that this expresses the essence of the congregational understanding of the Church. We also believe that it could offer a basis for a fuller worldwide understanding of the relationship between the local church and the universal Church.

Chapter 3

20. There is much that we welcome in §§33–34. Most especially, the vision of the Church as “the eschatological community that God wills” as outlined in §34 (lines 3–12) fully reflects our own self-understanding. As we reflect on §35, we share the creedal understanding of the Church as “one, holy, catholic and apostolic” In our view, the holiness of the Church consists in its being called, set apart and sanctified by God to be the sign and

instrument of God's kingdom in the world. But although we therefore believe the Church to be "holy," we cannot regard the Church as "sinless," since the Church and the churches, even as signs of the Body of Christ in the world, consist of sinful human beings who are in covenant with God and with one another solely through the mediation of God's grace in Christ. Therefore, in our view, while "[holiness] expresses the Church's identity according to the will of God," it is possible also to describe the Church and the churches "as sinning, since sin may become systemic so as to affect the institution of the Church itself." In this sense, we recognize that the Church and the churches are in the process of renewal, restoration and sanctification, in and through the death and resurrection of Christ, towards that eschatological perfection expressed by the Apostle Paul: "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for it, to consecrate and cleanse it by water and the word, so that he might present the church to himself all glorious, with no stain or wrinkle or anything of the sort but holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25-27).

21. We would also question the definition of "sin" in the final section of §35. Fundamentally, "sin" in our view is a matter of humankind's individual and corporate disobedience to the will and purpose of God in Christ (see Rom. 3:21-26). It is this disobedience ("falling short of the glory of God") that may lead to "moral imperfection" or "a break in relationship"; but these are consequences of disobedience and not the essence of "sin" itself. In this sense, we have no difficulty in recognizing with repentance the anthropological truth that

individual and corporate "sin" may lead to a systemic "sin" that affects the very core of individual and global social and economic relationships.

22. Yet again, there is much in section B (Growing in the Essential Elements of Communion) which we welcome and endorse. However, we would highlight a number of key issues that raise questions for us:

I. Faith

We welcome the recognition that the one faith of the Church is expressed historically within the ancient creeds, most especially the Nicene Creed (which is not used normally in regular worship within our churches but has nevertheless been included in our books of worship services as an expression of the faith of the Church throughout the centuries), the Tradition of the Church (which, in our understanding [see §6 above], is the gospel itself) and scripture are inter-related as the foundations of the faith "once for all entrusted to the saints." We would welcome some further reflection on how these factors are inter-connected within the life and witness of the local church.

II. Sacraments

a) Our denomination, in common with many other traditions that share similar historical roots to ours, recognize only two sacraments, namely, baptism and the Lord's supper. We fully endorse the understanding of baptism in §41 (and on this basis we use the ecumenical common certificate of baptism made available to our churches through Churches Together in Britain and Ireland) and

welcome the conclusion, as expressed in that paragraph that “Baptism is *thus* a basic bond of unity” (our emphasis). On this basis, we would endorse the “call for the mutual recognition of baptism” as the fundamental foundation for the mutual recognition and reception of members across the diversity of ecclesial communities around the world. We find no difficulty within our self-understanding in receiving baptized members of other churches as members with us in our own covenanted local churches. We would hope that other ecclesial traditions would be able to offer similarly open welcome and hospitality.

b) We question the use of the term “transform” in §42, line 16. We do not regard the *epiklesis* as a prayer for the transformation of the essence of the bread and wine of the Lord’s supper, but rather as a prayer for the presence and action of the Holy Spirit. Within that prayer as found in the orders of service for the Lord’s supper in our current book of services, the prayer for the Holy Spirit takes two forms:

- i. “. . . we pray that the bread and wine will become, through faith, visible signs of Christ’s body broken for us and of his blood poured out for us”
- ii. “. . . we pray that you may renew us through your Holy Spirit, so that we may worthily share in the body and blood of our lord Jesus Christ”

c) A previous version of the eucharistic prayer included the phrase “that this bread and this wine

may become, to our faith, the body and blood of our lord Jesus Christ.” We understand these phrases from the various Eucharistic prayers available for use by our local congregations to confirm that the *epiklesis* is essentially a prayer for the Holy Spirit to transform those who share in the Lord’s supper and to transform the significance and meaning (but not the physical essence) of the “gifts” of bread and wine.

d) Our churches would use both “sacrament” and “ordinance” for baptism and Lord’s supper and would not see the use of these terms as contradictory but mutually complementary. The one term emphasizes the importance of the sacraments as signs of the grace of God at work through the Holy Spirit; the other emphasizes that the authority for these rites rests in the commandment of our Lord Jesus Christ. We recognize the significance of both terms as complementary aspects of baptism and the Lord’s supper.

We would welcome further dialogue on the questions raised in relation to “sacraments” in the italicized paragraph at the end of this section.

III. Ministry

a) Our key concern in this context is the understanding of the ordained ministry as “priesthood.” We recognize the centrality of “the priesthood of Christ” as a foundation for ministry but understand this ministry of Word and Sacrament as being set within “the priesthood of all believers.” Although we would never use the term “priests” for our ministers of Word and Sacrament, nevertheless

we believe that those who are ordained into this ministry among us exercise a “priestly ministry” that is rooted in the priesthood of Christ, the High Priest of our salvation, and “the priesthood of all believers.” In the words of R.P.C. Hanson, later to become a bishop within the Church of Ireland,

This type of priesthood is not sacerdotal in the sense of gathering into its hands all sacramental power nor in the sense of ruling and controlling the Church as a hierarchical caste independent of the Church. It is . . . one which “acts representatively and in conjunction with the laity’s exercise of its priesthood.” It is a priesthood central to, and representative of, the Church, not external to it, a priesthood which concentrates and expresses within the Church the priestly function which the whole Church corporately possesses because it is united with Christ, the High Priest *par excellence*.¹

b) We offer this insight because we believe that such an understanding of ministry among us could become a bridge between those who use the term “priest” and those (like ourselves) who see ministry as “priestly” even though they would not use the term “priest.” This diversity of understanding of ministry reflects, we believe, current New Testament scholarship. In this regard, we welcome the opening statement of §46 that “[there] is no single pattern of ministry in the New Testament.” If such an agreement could be reached it could open up

the possibilities of mutual recognition of ordained ministry in which diversity would be seen as enriching of rather than a hindrance to deeper unity.

c) In this context, we wish to reaffirm that the equal place of women and men within the ministry of word and sacrament has never been a question for us. We have welcomed the gifts that both women and men bring in enriching the worship and witness, service and pastoral care of our churches. Any suggestion that the exclusion of a person on the basis of their sex is absolutely contrary to our understanding of God’s calling of women and men to ordained ministry within the Church.

d) We believe that every Christian tradition would be in agreement that the threefold pattern of ministry as *episkopos*, *presbyteros*, and *diakonos* is validly derived from the New Testament. Within our history we have recognized the ministry of oversight exercised by ordained ministers in partnership with others within the churches; we have a tradition – no longer practised within most of our churches – of “elders” (*presbyteroi*) that have a responsibility, in partnership with the ordained minister, for growth and nurture in faith and spirituality. “Deacons” have, regrettably, taken on a largely administrative role within the majority of our churches. We believe that their contribution to the life and witness of our churches would be enriched if the true meaning of *diakonos* as service could be renewed among us. In this sense, the whole ministry of the Church is a ministry of *diakonos*, “a service of love, without any domination or coercion” (§49).

1. R. P. C. Hanson, *Groundwork for Unity, Plain Facts about Christian Ministry* (London: SPCK, 1971).

e) In this context, we would also claim (with regard to §47) that our ministry is founded on an apostolic succession of faith and faithfulness to the call of God through the apostolic ministry entrusted to the whole Church, symbolized by the laying on of hands by representatives of the local and wider church and by prayer that the person being ordained “be filled with the spirit of truth and grace.” Thus the Church and the churches are themselves the guardians of the apostolic faith from generation to generation rather than a personal historic succession of ordained ministry.

f) We welcome much that is said in §48ff. with regard to authority within the Church as being derived from its head, Jesus Christ, and must, therefore, be seen as “humble service, nourishing and building up the *koinonia* of the Church in faith, life and witness.” However, we would question whether such Christ-derived authority appropriately rests in a special way solely within the ordained ministry itself but rather is a gift offered to the whole Church as it engages in proclaiming the gospel (see Matt. 28:16-20) and witnessing to the kingdom of God (see Matt. 10:1 ff.).

g) We also question the claim in §50 that “[throughout] history the Church has recognized a certain authority in the lives of the saints, in the witness of monasticism” Whereas we recognize the significance of the lives of the saints, not least the saints of Wales, as examples of Christian life and witness, we do not regard them as having “authority” in the sense used here. We would rather

use the term “witness to the gospel” in this context. Similarly, whereas we recognize that monasticism has been a valuable example in Christian living, we also need to acknowledge that there has been much in the secular powers exercised by monasticism (as in the Church more broadly) that must be condemned as contrary to the gospel. As a result, we find the term “accordingly” at the beginning of the final sentence to be a *non sequitur*.

h) We welcome the definition of “authority” in §51, line 5ff. and note particularly the emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit in inspiring the gift of “authority” within the Church. In this context, we believe that the wording of the sentence that begins, “Decision-making within the Church” should continue as follows: “. . . depends upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit and seeks and elicits the consensus of all” We were concerned to note that all the examples given at the end of the paragraph were men. We would have hoped that it would have been possible to bring examples of women, such as Mother Teresa, who have had “an effect beyond the boundaries of their own communities.”

i) With regard to §52, we note that in the most recent Welsh language translation of the Bible (2004), *episkopoi* is rendered throughout as *goruchwylwyr* (those with oversight). As previously noted, we recognize the need for *episkopé* but believe that such *episkopé* must always be exercised in partnership. In this sense, it is personal but not enshrined in one person. We noted particularly Lausanne’s emphasis (1927) on the need to

recognize the congregational system, alongside the episcopal and presbyteral systems, as being “essential to the good order of the Church” (footnote 24). With regard to the penultimate line of §52, we would not use the term “collegial” in our context, and would regard the “communal” as taking priority over the “personal.”

j) We have no major difficulty with recognizing the significance of the Ecumenical Councils of the early centuries of the Church but question the appropriateness of regarding these as “irreformable expressions” of the faith. As a denomination in the reformed tradition we believe that the forms and expressions of the faith are constantly being reformed as the Holy Spirit guides the people of God in particular times and places to find ways of expressing and communicating the faith that speak to particular people in particular places at particular times.

k) We do not believe that “universal primacy” (§55) would be necessary or desirable nor that any “primacy” should be lodged in any one person. We believe that Christ alone can exercise such primacy within the life of the universal Church.

Chapter 4

We greatly appreciate this chapter and warmly welcome much that is said here, especially in the introductory §§58–59.

23. Since we live within a multi-faith society, we are aware of the challenges of evangelism in such a context and so recognize the need to hold

in creative tension the uniqueness of the gospel and its invitation to faith in the offer of salvation in and through Jesus Christ, and the need to respect those of other living faiths among us. In this regard, we completely condemn any form of persecution on the basis of religion. In response to the question posed in the italicized paragraph on p. 34 we believe that there are key principles that should be the basis for developing relationships between people of different faiths:

i. We respond warmly to the emphasis at the beginning of this section on God’s offer of salvation to all through Jesus Christ, according to the will and purposes of God.

ii. We affirm the centrality of Christian mission as bearing witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

iii. We believe, therefore, that there should be complete freedom in all contexts to witness to the faith, to engage in conversation and debate and, most especially, willingness to listen to one another as people of different faith communities.

iv. We believe that inter-faith collaboration in advocacy and public engagement in matters of justice, peace and service within our communities is itself a witness to the gospel and should be encouraged among us.

v. As a fundamental principle, we believe that mutual respect is central to all

relationships between people of different faith communities.

24. Our denomination has a long tradition of being engaged in issues of church and society within Wales, but also on a worldwide basis. Most especially we have borne what we believe to be powerful witness to peace and reconciliation, not least during the First and Second World Wars (despite tensions among us during these periods), and continue to bear witness to peace, reconciliation and non-violence in the face of contemporary challenges in our land and worldwide. We are deeply concerned, in the light of the recent US presidential election, that the issues highlighted in §64 will intensify the challenge to humankind during the coming period and will demand a courageous and faithful witness, denominationally, nationally and globally. In this we believe that the ability of the WCC to be a voice for the churches within the global debate must be strengthened and resourced.

25. We recognize that the relationship between church and state is important (§65), but reject any idea that the Church should be in any way tied to the State. Such a relationship could compromise our Christian witness, undermine our public advocacy for and engagement in justice and peace, and threaten our freedom to hold the government of the day accountable.

26. Naturally, we recognize the reality that “[the] Church is comprised of all socio-economic classes . . .” (§66). However, we believe that we should

say more; namely, that the Church is in existence to transcend socio-economic (as well as racial, ethnic, cultural and gender) divisions and inequalities within its own life and community, and to challenge all that maintains and nurtures such inequalities within the churches. We cannot address inequalities within our societies if these same inequalities characterize the life of our churches. Thus, *koinonia* in justice and freedom within the Church is an essential prerequisite of its credible witness.

Conclusion

27. We find in §66 many echoes of our own understanding of *koinonia* within the Church. Most especially, we welcome the emphasis on the inter-relatedness of unity in faith, unity in sacramental life, and unity in service. The final sentence of §64 expresses clearly and movingly the high vocation of the Church to compassionate service and prophetic advocacy. We find here a powerful reminder of the continuing calling of our own churches.

28. The reference to “brokenness and division” and to the need for “the restoration of unity” has challenged us to reflect on the marks of unity as we understand them today:

- i. Our starting point is the vision of the invisible unity of the Church as a present reality for the Church.

There is no barrier between two worlds
in the Church,
The Church militant on earth
Is one with the Church triumphant in
heaven,
And the saints are in this Church which
is two in one.

Dewi Sant (St David), Waldo Williams

ii. Our visible unity on earth is a reflection – marred and imperfect – of this greater eternal unity.

iii. Our unity is rooted in Jesus Christ, our one lord, in a communion of love through the life of the Triune God.

iv. This unity has to be lived out in mutual sharing, in partnership in mission and witness and in shared sacramental life.

v. Shared liturgy, ministry and mission must become living signs of our unity, showing forth our unity in Christ.

vi. The unity of the Church is enriched by its diversity; the diversity of the Church is brought into harmony and wholeness through the Church's unity.

29. In this sense, we do not believe that the search for unity is about “the restoration of unity” but about recognizing the unity that already exists as God's gift to the Church, living out that unity in our communion together as Christian communities and looking towards the fulfilment and perfection of that unity when God shall bring into unity

all in heaven and on earth, with Christ as Head (Eph. 1:9-10).

30. In summary, we offer the following brief responses to the questions posed to the churches on page 3 of Faith and Order Paper No. 214:

1. We have been greatly encouraged as we have studied this text to find a recognition, and indeed, in places, a celebration of the congregational tradition in which we share. We believe this to be a particularly significant contribution to the ecclesiological understanding of the worldwide Church.

2. We believe, therefore, that if this aspect of the report's understanding of ecclesiology, as outlined throughout our own report, is taken with full seriousness in future conversations towards unity, the congregational perspective could offer a basis for growth towards unity for many churches around the world. In this context, we believe that reflection on the concept of “catholic diversity” could enrich our self-understanding as churches.

3. a) We believe that *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* and our response to it could form an important basis within our own denomination for a renewed self-understanding of our own tradition and therefore equip our churches as they seek deeper partnership in mission and service with one another and with churches of other traditions in Wales and more widely.

b) We believe that our reflections on ministry – especially in the context of the threefold ministry of prophet, priest and king – could offer enriching insights as we seek to reflect on ministry for our time.

c) In this context, we believe that our reflections on “priestly ministry” within our own understanding of the ordained ministry could also offer new insights.

d) At a time of decline among many of our churches and of increasing challenges from within our own society, we believe that a renewed understanding of the marks and goals of unity (as outlined in §28 above) could challenge and encourage our churches in their search for deeper unity in mission.

4. We treasure our ecumenical relationships nationally through Cytûn: Churches Together in Wales, through Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, and at a world level through the Council for World Mission, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, the International Congregational Fellowship and the World Council of Churches. It is our hope that any shared insights gained through our study of *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* will strengthen and deepen our relationships with other churches through these ecumenical instruments. In this respect, we will encourage study of the churches’ responses to this report within Wales and reflection on its implications for our common life.

5. We have identified a number of issues that, in our view, merit further study:

a) What are the criteria for continuity and change that emerge from the churches’ responses?

b) Can there be agreed criteria and processes for determining the limits of legitimate diversity? Does our concept of “catholic diversity” offer a helpful contribution to this conversation?

c) We particularly commend the insight in §31 of Faith and Order Paper No. 214 that “each local church . . . is wholly the Church but not the whole Church” as needing further elucidation as a means towards a fuller understanding of the relationships between the local church and the universal Church.

d) While recognizing that the relationship between Tradition, tradition and Scripture has been studied by Faith and Order over a very long period we would welcome further study of the ways in which these factors are inter-connected within the life of the local churches.

e) We encourage Faith and Order to undertake further study of the issues relating to sacraments as outlined in the italicized paragraph on pp. 25–26.

f) We believe that *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* places less emphasis than we would wish on the equality of women and men not only in the life of the Church, but more specifically, in the ordained ministry of Word and Sacrament within the Church. We encourage further study of the implications of these developments, not least in relation to episcopal oversight, and their creative and enriching significance for the life and witness of the churches.

21. Holy Council of the Polish Orthodox Church

Letter from Metropolitan Sawa of Warsaw and All Poland to the WCC General Secretary

26 November 2016

Dear Rev. General Secretary!

I greet you cordially in the name of Lord Jesus Christ and inform you that the Holy Council of the Polish Orthodox Church discussed the text *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* and decided that it shall to be thoroughly overworked.

Sending you this information I remain in Christ,

+Sawa

Orthodox Metropolitan of Warsaw and All
Poland

22. Evangelical Church of Berlin-Brandenburg-Silesian Upper Lusatia

(Translated from the German)

The Evangelical Church of Berlin-Brandenburg-Silesian Upper Lusatia (EKBO) welcomes the study presented by the WCC's Faith and Order Commission as a significant convergence document on questions concerning the enabling of visible unity between the churches. In it, our regional church recognizes a reflection on the nature, form and purpose of the Church characterized by mutual goodwill and care of ecumenical partners for one another.¹ Considerable progress can be observed, particularly in controversial questions concerning ordained ministry. However, as elsewhere in this document, this progress consists primarily in asking further questions and less in providing answers. Nevertheless, the different positions are clearly identified.

The use of biblical quotations in the formal structure of the individual sections reinforces the aspiration to credibly bear witness to the unity of faith of the worldwide Church. The four chapters set out the most important aspects of the understanding of the Church: the origin of the Church (chapter 1: God's Mission and the Unity of the Church), the characteristics of the Church (chapter 2: The Church of the Triune God), its growth as a pilgrim people (chapter 3: The Church: Growing

in Communion), and its relation to the world (chapter 4: The Church: In and For the World).

This response will follow the key questions proposed in the study.

1. To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?

Guiding principles

This study contains (a) statements that are fundamental for our self-understanding as the Church of Jesus Christ, but reveals (b) an overall approach that taken as a whole differs from the predominant approach in our church.

Regarding (a): The missionary identity and purpose of the Church (*TCTCV*, chapter 1.A) is presented as unity in Christ through the Holy Spirit created by God's saving action. The bond in the fellowship of churches with one another is based on this. This accords with the fundamental affirmation of our church: "The Evangelical Church of Berlin-Brandenburg-Silesian Upper Lusatia stands in the unity of the one, holy, universal and apostolic Church, which is everywhere where the Word of God is properly preached and the sacraments are correctly administered and celebrated in accordance with the commission of Jesus Christ" (Constitution, Art. I.2). It derives from this a common

1. Convergence means "inclination" in Latin.

eschatological and missionary mandate: “Through its cooperation with the churches of the *oikumene*, it participates in the realization of the community of Christ on earth, and in spreading the gospel in its own country and throughout the world” (Constitution, Art. I.10). In this way, in everything it does it sees itself as participating in the *missio Dei*, the mission of God:² in its proclamation of the gospel, its invitation to fellowship, in fulfilling its responsibility for education, in its exercise of pastoral care, and in encouraging people to love their neighbors and work for the preservation of creation and for human rights.³ “It recognizes and calls to mind that God’s promise remains valid for his people Israel: God’s gifts and calling shall not be taken back” (Constitution, Art. I.12).⁴

Regarding (b): In presenting its understanding of the Church, the starting point of the study is the vision of the Church as a whole and its role in God’s universal plan of salvation (*TCTCV* chapter 1.A). According to some communities, a defining aspect of the Church’s life is, among other things, “to be a community that hears and proclaims the word of God” (*TCTCV* §14). We welcome the

2. See “Wort des Bischofs auf der 3. Tagung der 4. Landessynode der EKBO,” November 2015, *Verhandlungen der Landessynode*, 33.

3. See “begabt leben – mutig verändern” (2014), Thesis 1.

4. We would like to draw attention to the risk that the wording of *TCTCV* §17 may lead to a misunderstanding of the lasting significance of God’s covenant with Israel, as emphasized in Rom. 11. Here the study says: “The covenant with Israel marked a decisive moment in the unfolding realization of the plan of salvation.” This sentence would be unambiguous if “covenant” were replaced by “the entering into the covenant.”

explicit description of the Church as a “creature of the Gospel,” but see its *fundamental* calling as being the creature of the word (*creatura verbi*), a worshipping community that listens to the word and partakes in communion at the Lord’s supper (Constitution, Art. I.1; 2). Thus, in its thinking, our church takes as its starting point the reality of fellowship in worship and its manifestation in everyday life. The meaning of God’s universal plan of salvation and the Church’s role in it⁵ does not serve as a guiding principle in its reflections, since it always involves the danger of exaggerating the concept of the Church. This is the understanding that underlies the comments that follow.

The visible unity of the Church

Given this basic approach, organizational specifications dealing with the question of visible unity between churches have not been a fundamental theological concern of our church up until now. In accordance with our faith, credible church action strives instead for ecumenical fellowship in concrete relationships and tasks.

In our view, the unity of the Church, which is guaranteed in Jesus Christ, is a unity of faith which must be lived out in mutual recognition, liturgical praxis and through action toward common goals. The call to be part of the communion of saints (Constitution, Art. I.1) and unity in confession make it possible to engage in a whole variety of

5. Coming to a head in the formulation, which in the Reformation tradition is open to misinterpretation, as being “instruments for the establishment of God’s reign” (*TCTCV* §19).

efforts for justice, peace, and the protection of creation, for gender justice, ecumenical learning and sharing, and for achieving understanding with people of other religions and world-views (Constitution, Art. I.11). The ecumenical commitment of our church is primarily geared toward visible fellowship in action,⁶ rather than toward visible unity in matters of church organization. Nevertheless, this is also possible, as the history of our United church shows. The criteria for enabling ecumenical communion must always be based on the guiding theological principle of unity in faith in Jesus Christ.

The holiness of the Church

Faith in the unity of the Church is expressed through visible external signs and through that which is invisible. In it, God acts in and through people. It can therefore be called holy but not in itself divine, for it is sanctified through Jesus Christ's prophetic, priestly and royal action which always precedes and accompanies its own action.

Along with the study (TCTCV, §33), our church confesses Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit as the one truly at work in the Church: "The Christian Church is the community of brethren (sic) in which, in Word and Sacrament, through the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ acts in the present as Lord" (Barmen Declaration III). "God himself prepares his community, the Church of Jesus Christ, from those who listen to his Word and receive the

6. As exemplified, for example, in the Ecumenical Council of Berlin-Brandenburg

Sacraments, by awakening faith in them through the Holy Spirit and by calling on them to bear witness to their Lord and serve their neighbours. The Holy Spirit builds and guides the community through diverse gifts and ministries" (Constitution, Art. II.1-2). This guidance often occurs in a hidden way and in the brokenness of earthly existence, but this does not mean that the Church of faith can be separated from the visible Church (Defense of the Augsburg Confession VII and VIII).⁷ It is therefore (see above) sanctified as a creature of the divine word (*creatura verbi divini*), but is not divine itself.

In view of this, it seems misleading to call the Church a "reflection of the communion of the Triune God,"⁸ Its participation "in God's work of healing a broken world" (TCTCV, §1) should be understood as a manifestation of God's grace; for the Church and not only the people gathered within it,⁹ is a sinner in need of God's justification. The Holy Spirit works and inspires faith "where and when it will."¹⁰ The Church trusts that it will be engaged for this purpose.

The understanding of ministry

The understanding of ministry in our church is firmly rooted in the one ministry of witness and invitation to

7. "The Christian Church does not consist in the fellowship of outward signs alone, but especially in the inward communion of eternal blessings in the heart, as of the Holy Spirit, of faith, of the fear and love of God." *Defense of the Augsburg Confession*, VII.5.

8. TCTCV §25. Jesus Christ alone is the reflection of God. See 2 Cor. 4:4.

9. This is apparently the assumption in §27 and §36.

10. *Defense of the Augsburg Confession*, 5.

the Christian faith, entrusted to all believers. Authority, as the study notes, can therefore be understood only as service as sisters and brothers in the exercise of authority. There can be no ministries that are vested with hierarchical power. In our church, final decisions are made only by synodical bodies. It does not seem to us that a perspective exists for an ecumenical ministry of primacy that fulfills these criteria, which is why this is not an issue for discussion in our church. From our point of view the apostolic succession can be described in terms of the authentic transmission of the gospel itself, and not as a transmission of ministerial authority through the laying on of hands.

The lasting tension between the holiness and sinfulness of the Church is particularly reflected in the question of authority. This must not include hierarchical powers.¹¹ No minister is immune from the temptation to abuse their office. The authority which comes with ministry is thus always exercised in a conciliar and synodical manner. Those who exercise authority in our church must therefore answer to elected church bodies which include significant lay participation. These positions, as well as the highest elected offices in our church, are held for a fixed period of time. Ordination to the ministry of the public proclamation of the word and the administration of sacraments is to be understood in accordance with scripture as a particular lifelong commission, not as entering into irrevocable holy orders with a threefold ministry set apart from other Christians.¹² The fact

11. Constitution, Art. II.4.

12. See the study's question in connection with the italic

that for some churches such an understanding of the consecration of ordained ministry forms the basis of their understanding of ministry, as well as the refusal to abandon the biblically unjustifiable restriction of the ordained ministry of the word to men alone, means that there is still no scope for discussing further an ecumenical ministry of primacy.

We reject the linking of the apostolic succession to a particular ritual practice, since this spiritually exaggerates a human tradition.

Sacraments

We share the hope for an increasingly explicit recognition between churches of the two sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper, which in this study is linked to a presentation of the outcomes of ecumenical discussion in convergence texts. However, we are convinced that speaking of a "transformation" of the elements of bread and wine (*TCTCV*, §42) can only, according to our conviction, be described as a transformation.¹³

Church history

We consider it a linguistic and factual error in the study to speak – within the context of the "reestablishment of [the] unity" of church communion – of the "two communities," "whose separation was triggered by the Protestant Reformation" (*TCTCV*,

paragraph following §47, which asks "if the churches can achieve a consensus as to whether or not the threefold ministry is part of God's will for the Church in its realization of the unity which God wills."

13. See *Leuenberg Agreement*, 1973, 18–19.

§61, German text).¹⁴ Linguistically, because it was not a question of two communities that were separated, but of one Church within which a division occurred. Factually, since this division was not triggered by the Protestant Reformation, but by theological disputes within the European church of the 14th and 15th centuries. With their theological insights, the Reformers developed a spiritual foundation for focusing reform efforts for the renewal of the European church and were committed to implementing this renewal.

The significance of Mary

The figure of Mary plays no prominent role in our understanding of the Church. Nevertheless, the comments provided by the study (§15) are not unknown to churches of the Lutheran tradition. However, what should be added to this tradition is her role as a paradigm for the Church characterized by physical and social humility.¹⁵ Theologically, Mary stands not for a triumphant Church but for one who understands her divine election; her standing at the cross is an encouragement to accept a humble social standing and material poverty for the church, and in this context to listen to God's voice and mandate.

14. *TCTCV* §61. [Translator's note: the German translation of *TCTCV* quoted here by EKBO differs significantly from the English text. The German text quoted reads "deren Trennung durch die protestantische Reformation eingeleitet wurde," which means "whose separation was triggered by the Protestant Reformation." The English text of the Faith and Order Commission's study instead reads "whose separation marked the beginning of the Protestant Reformation."]

15. See M. Luther, *Das Magnificat verdeutscht und ausgelegt* (1521), StA 1, Berlin 1979, 329, 16–20.

2. To what extent does this text provide a basis for growth in unity among the churches?

This text can be read as a vision that takes church unity beyond considerations of a so-called ecumenism of the return. However, it makes it clear that persisting in a mere acceptance of existing differences between the individual churches is not enough to do justice to the striving for unity which we owe to the world as a witness to God's reconciling action in Jesus Christ. How can the Church credibly bear witness to the reconciliation in Jesus Christ if it accepts its own severe divisions as a given and does not even suffer from them? The study raises awareness of the scandal which the lack of visible unity also represents for churches of the Reformation: "Current divisions within and between the churches stand in contrast to this oneness" (*TCTCV*, §22).

The study also examines a possibility in the development of church doctrine which has been neglected so far in the Reformation tradition, namely the question of how not only church divisions which have *already occurred*, but also ones that are *looming* can be addressed and given due theological consideration: "The essential catholicity of the Church is undermined when cultural and other differences are allowed to develop into division" (*TCTCV*, §22). In view of the increasingly differentiated confessional landscape, this is a question which must be urgently examined not only from the standpoint of instrumental rationality, but also theologically.¹⁶

16. A factual correction should be made to footnote 5 of

3. What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?

In our church, the understanding of the Church is shaped by the Reformation's focus on living the life of the Church by proclaiming the word, administering the sacraments, and through local action in faith. As the "salt of the earth," it is not the Church's location in God's plan of salvation which is at the forefront, but rather the question of how it can help shape social reality in accordance with its mission. At the same time, the study challenges us to examine how this "existential" fundamental understanding of the Church can be convincingly embedded and communicated: in ecumenical discussions with churches for which the notions of God's great plan of salvation and the central role that the Church of Jesus Christ plays in it represent some of the key ideas of their understanding of the Church.

4. How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement?

It is in the interest of our church to further deepen existing ecumenical relationships. This study, seen as a whole, can serve as a basis for this.

TCTCV §10: the dialogues mentioned here ("Meissen, Reuilly, Waterloo, etc.") refer not only to Anglican-Lutheran agreements, but also to those concluded by Anglicans with Reformed and United churches.

5. What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

In our view, further discussion will have to take place at least on those points already mentioned in this response, namely, on questions concerning

- the acceptance of the divinity of the Church and the fundamental understanding of it as a "creature of the divine word,"
- the understanding of the Reformation, and
- the acceptance of the ordination of women.

In addition to clarifying the above-mentioned questions, we suggest that the Faith and Order Commission address courageously and intensively the fundamental set of issues mentioned, to take one example, in §22 of the study, that concern the need to find theological answers to the question not only of how the unity of the Church can be restored, but also to how its further division can be prevented.

23. United Reformed Church

The report of the World Council of Churches *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* is elegantly and graciously written – obviously with much thought and care and respect for all the different churches. Rather than confronting head-on great differences between different Christian denominations, it steps back and looks at the process of how we discuss and reason with each other – with the intention of listening to and understanding each other.

The responses below relate to the indicated sections of the document itself and the questions in italics are quoted from *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*.

Introduction

1.1 To what extent does the text reflect the ecclesiastical understanding of the URC?

1.1.1 In many ways the report reflects the values and principles of the United Reformed Church. We are one in Christ, yet the Church in the world is imperfect and we have different histories, traditions and styles of worship that mean there is diversity of expressions of the Christian faith. The URC would agree with the understanding in chapter 1 that the church is to further God's work of healing and reconciliation accomplished through Christ Jesus by worship, initiating new members by baptism, by discipleship and celebrating Holy Communion, proclaiming the

Word of God and acknowledging that Christ is crucified and risen. As a church in the Reformed tradition, the URC understands the church as the body of Christ where the Word is preached making known his saving love, the sacraments of baptism and holy communion are practiced, and where members are called to love and serve one another and all people everywhere and to grow in grace and in the knowledge of God.¹ There is a recognition that the church is fallible, full of “sinners saved by grace,” and therefore needs to be continually reformed. One manifestation of its fallibility is divisions which prevent Christians from fully knowing, experiencing and communicating the life of the one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church (The Basis of Union, p. A1). There is a strong emphasis in the URC on unity and a real desire to work ecumenically wherever possible and to work towards organic unity with other churches.

1.1.2 In addition to providing worship and pastoral care, the URC has a history and strong focus upon social action: Our faith should be lived out in our lives, not only as individuals, but corporately, and we should stand alongside the poor, sick and oppressed of our world, and work for

1. United Reformed Church in the United Kingdom, “The Basis of Union,” in *The Manual* (London: URC, 2000), A3,4.

justice and peace. We should be good stewards of our environment – that God is reconciling the whole world through Christ. This is seen in our work with the Council for World Mission, Christian Aid and the Fairtrade movement.

1.2 To what extent does The Church: Towards a Common Vision offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?

1.2.1 The URC acknowledges the gracious, patient and sensitive work that was involved in forming the WCC report and agrees that it offers a basis of understanding from which to develop greater unity among churches.

1.2.2 The URC affirms, along with the other churches in the World Council of Churches, the catholic faith witnessed in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, included in the Basis of Union Para 18 and the Nature of Faith and Order of the Church, Para 4 and also in the URC hymnbook, *Rejoice and Sing*.

1.2.3 The URC also affirms its right to make new declarations of faith according to the leading of the Holy Spirit. This can cause division and needs to be handled carefully and patiently, using proper procedures. The URC recognizes that churches hold different views on how to live as Christians – for example: (a) in the URC women may hold any position in the church; (b) in the URC, as well as holding up marriage to one partner for life as an ideal, yet because it is a human institution as well as God's design, we recognize that some marriages may fail and individuals in

this situation may seek God's forgiveness and new beginnings in a new relationship. The URC upholds the rights of personal and denominational conviction and so allows some differences of opinion, such as the case of same gender marriage, which it seeks to hold within its wider unity.

1.2.4 The identification of common core beliefs of Christians in the text of the report is a helpful means of sustaining our commonality. Identifying how we then live out our faith may change in different historical and cultural situations. This would be one possible criterion for acknowledging overriding unity with diversity of lifestyle – and allowing some diversity without division.

1.3 What adaptations or renewal does The Church: Towards a Common Vision challenge the URC to work for?

1.3.1 One of the areas that the URC is challenged to adapt in order to share commonalities with other denominations is in the area of worship. The URC is more open and understanding towards more sacramental forms of worship than our Protestant forebears. The URC acknowledges that God is mystery and so there is a place for mystery in worship, yet we could continue to learn from more contemplative and Anglo-Catholic styles of worship. An example of convergence already can be seen in URC styles of worship. Although the URC was formed by some who were dissenters reluctant to use a set liturgy as in the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England, today worship leaders tend to follow the URC Service Book

or Worship Books.² It is also quite common for churches in the URC to use the Revised Common Lectionary that we share across different traditions for weekly scripture readings during worship.

1.4 How far is the URC able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches that can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in The Church: Towards a Common Vision?

1.4.1 This is a difficult question in the UK today as many Christian denominations are solidifying their patterns of ministry and worship with the decline of membership numbers. The primary way in which many local churches are able to form closer relationships with other churches at present is on the ground rather than structurally at a denominational level. There are many Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs), in which the URC and one or more other denominations form one worshipping congregation. And the URC is open to forming new LEP relationships. These do not represent the organic unity of different denominations at a local level but the partnership of distinct traditions. In practice, however, they can be experienced as organic unions which represent a challenge to the parent denominations as to how this can be both acknowledged and a source of fruitful dialogue.

1.4.2 The URC holds a strong positive view of the unity of the Church and seeks to work towards

organic unity of the church in conversations and forming agreements where possible. This is recorded in its Basis of Union: “The URC sees its formation and growth as a part of what God is doing to make his people one, and as a united church will take, wherever possible and with all speed, further steps towards the unity of all God’s people.” The URC celebrates our fellowship with the other Covenanted Churches in Wales, through which we recognize the ministry of one another. Such ecumenical understanding has come through prayer, compromise and hard work, and the URC is keen to work for other examples of visible unity within Wales, the UK and beyond.

1.4.3 The URC seeks to work ecumenically wherever it can in mission projects with other local churches through Churches Together and in social action such as with the Fairtrade movement, Christian Aid and ecology groups. Another example is the Joint Public Issues Team where the URC works with Methodists, Baptists and the Church of Scotland on common concerns. The URC is one of the members of Fresh Expressions, an ecumenical missionary movement of the Church of England, Church of Scotland, Methodist, Congregational Federation, the Salvation Army. (A *fresh expression of church* is a new form of church for a fast-changing world that serves those outside the existing church, listens to people and enters their culture, makes discipleship a priority and intentionally forms a Christian community.)³

2. Worship: from the United Reformed Church Books 1 and 2 (London: URC, 2003).

3. Fresh Expressions of Church: <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk>

1.4.4 Local congregations of the URC often work together with churches from other denominations on mission projects and joint events through Churches Together in England, CYTUN (Churches Together in Wales) or ACTS (Action for Churches Together in Scotland). At the institutional level, however, there is a struggle to reconcile our differences. Some of our differences come from the Reformation and a past of conscientious dissent, which our forebears gave their lives to achieve. Perhaps identifying, acknowledging and jointly declaring our shared Christian principles of justice, love, tolerance, freedom of belief, etc., would help us to listen and work alongside each other more cooperatively.

1.4.5 The URC recognizes a need in its local churches for more house groups and Bible studies to enable people to grow and deepen their level of devotion and discipleship. An affirmation that all Christians are pilgrims growing in faith and knowledge of God throughout their lives might encourage life-long discipleship. The URC could learn from other denominations which have good resources for study discussion and worship. A positive example is the annual Lenten Course produced by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland.

1.5 What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could the URC offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

1.5.1 The URC has a statement of its ecclesiology in the Basis of Union. It affirms one Church called into being through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. It considers the Church holy because God has redeemed and consecrated it through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and because Christ dwells with his people. It views the Church as apostolic because Christ continues to entrust it with the Gospel and the commission to proclaim that Gospel to all peoples. Yet the URC acknowledges that failure and weakness mar the life of the Church, requiring it to ever be renewed and reformed by Christ's mercy and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (The Basis of Union, p. A1). The ecclesiology of the URC includes an acknowledgement that the church has a call to repent of what has been amiss, including divisions in the church in the past, and to be reconciled. The URC believes that the church should take wherever possible and with all speed further steps towards the unity of all God's people.

1.5.2 Yet there are some hard won values and principles of the URC that the church would be reluctant to let go of. One of its main distinguishing features is its more participative church structure. It is encouraged by the increased use of conciliar methods of church government in other denominations as a result of ecumenical dialogue.

1.5.3 One value of the URC is the equality of opportunity for all its members, regardless of gender or marital status, to be in positions of leadership within the church. There are some questions that the URC might consider as it seeks to form

closer relationships with other churches. How should the URC respond with strength and solidarity supporting freedom and equality of women and those with different beliefs, yet also with graciousness, humility and respect for others' views? How can Christians of different denominations show respect for those of different cultures and sexual orientations? It would be helpful to form agreements with other Christians on URC concerns about our consumerist, Western ways – for example, the overt use of violence and sexuality in TV and advertising. Yet it would be good to acknowledge where we differ; in the URC we believe that women should be able to have education and leadership roles. The WCC could speak to and guide the different churches so that we could offer Christian perspectives on current issues in the world.

Chapter 1: God's Mission and the Unity of the Church

2.1 Fundamental issues on the way to unity

2.1 "Ever since the Toronto Declaration of 1950, the WCC has challenged the churches to 'recognize that the membership of the church of Christ is more inclusive than the membership of their own church body.' Moreover, mutual regard between churches and their members has been profoundly encouraged and advanced by ecumenical encounter. Nevertheless, differences on some basic questions remain and need to be faced together: How can we identify the Church which the creed calls one, holy, catholic and apostolic? What is God's will for the unity of this church? What do we need to do to put God's will into practice? This

text has been written in order to assist the churches as they reflect upon such questions, seeking common answers." (§10)

2.2 Fundamental issues of justice and peace and respect of all people are important aspects of unity within the worldwide Church of Christ. The main way that people in society can identify the Church as universal and apostolic is for the people of the church to follow Christ's way of "taking up our crosses" rather than "taking up our swords" in church life and ministry. As followers of Christ we are called to imitate his ways, display his humility and further his ministry of healing, welcoming the outcast, feeding the hungry, challenging evil and showing self sacrificial giving in our service towards each other and people in the world.

Chapter 2: The Church of the Triune God

3.1 How continuity and change in the Church relate to God's will

3.1.1 "Through their patient encounter, in a spirit of mutual respect and attention, many churches have come to a deeper understanding of these differing sensitivities and convictions regarding continuity and change in the Church. In that deeper understanding, it becomes clear that the same intent – to obey God's will for the ordering of the Church – may, in some, inspire commitment to continuity and, in others, commitment to change. We invite churches to recognize and honour each other's commitment to seeking the will of God in the ordering of the Church. We further invite them to reflect about the criteria which are

employed in different churches for considering issues about continuity and change. How far are such criteria open to development in the light of the urgent call of Christ to reconciliation? (Matt. 5:23-24) Could this be the time for a new approach?” (§24)

3.1.2 The United Reformed Church affirms the faith of the apostles and also recognizes that “the Holy Spirit may lead us to make new statements of faith in ever new obedience to the living Christ” as indicated in our Statement concerning the Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church:

3.1.3 “We conduct our life together according to the Basis of Union in which we give expression to our faith in forms which we believe contain the essential elements of the Church’s life, both catholic and reformed; but we affirm our right and readiness, if the need arises, to change the Basis of Union and to make new statements of faith in ever new obedience to the Living Christ.”

3.1.4 This means that the URC affirms the Protestant Christian understanding that people are saved by faith and not by practice (although the faith that saves is never alone, but followed by good works). The Christian faith is always experienced in person. It is not a set of propositional truths, but a relationship with the living God which is lived in a particular culture, society and generation. As society changes it is appropriate for Christians to change their expectations of themselves to be appropriately good and decent in the society in which they live. This may mean a woman wearing a head covering in some societies and it may mean

not so in others. The Church will evolve as it seeks to live out the will of God in bringing peace, justice and wholeness to all. This has been shown in the church’s response against slavery, which took many years to realize, the recognition of women’s ministry in some denominations and an ongoing searching and discovery of what is healthy and wholesome sexual identity and behaviour. One of the important principles is the recognition that some churches in different societies will have different understandings and expectations and therefore we should allow difference and respect for each other as pilgrim people. One of the United Reformed Church’s ways of living this out is to revise the Basis of Union for the essential elements of the Church’s life through General Assembly, and for local churches to work out in the local Church Meeting more specifically local issues that are important to them.

3.2 The expression, “the Church as sacrament”

3.2.1 *“Those who use the expression ‘the Church as sacrament’ do not deny the unique ‘sacramentality’ of the sacraments nor do they deny the frailty of human ministers. Those who reject this expression, on the other hand, do not deny that the Church is an effective sign of God’s presence and action. Might this, therefore, be seen as a question where legitimate differences of formulation are compatible and mutually acceptable?” (§27)*

3.2.2 This would not normally be an expression used in the URC. The URC would agree that the church is a “sign” or “foretaste” of the Kingdom.

It is a place of God's presence and action in the world, but is imperfect and not the Kingdom of God, but supposed to point to it. The URC acknowledges the work of the Holy Spirit beyond the church to draw people to God. One of the first of the Five Marks of Mission adopted by Anglican, Methodist and URC churches is to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom. One URC church quotes this statement and says, "This is central to our worship in which we honour Christ whose Kingdom is coming and which we are called to anticipate."⁴

3.3 Legitimate and divisive diversity

3.3.1 "Ecumenical dialogue in search of the unity for which Christ prayed has, in large part, been an effort by representatives from various Christian churches to discern, with the help of the Holy Spirit, what is necessary for unity, according to the will of God, and what is properly understood as legitimate diversity. Though all churches have their own procedures for distinguishing legitimate from illegitimate diversity, it is clear that two things are lacking: (a) common criteria, or means of discernment, and (b) such mutually recognized structures as are needed to use these effectively. All churches seek to follow the will of the Lord yet they continue to disagree on some aspects of faith and order and, moreover, on whether such disagreements are Church-divisive or, instead, part of legitimate diversity. We invite the churches to consider, what positive steps can be taken to make common discernment possible?" (§30)

4. Taken from the Mission Statement of Emmanuel URC, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, UK.

3.3.2 It would seem legitimate for Christian churches to agree on the main historical orthodox statements of faith while having some differences of opinion on local cultural ways in which they express their faith. If churches follow the teaching of the Book of Acts and the Letter of Paul to the Romans, which refused to place unnecessary burdens of the Law on Gentiles to prevent them from coming to God, then churches should recognize that there are differences of personal conviction relating to lifestyle and not judge each other. This would mean that it would be helpful to identify the principles and practices that should characterize all Christian churches, such as valuing and respecting all people, because God created us in his image; and to work towards justice and peace and to respect the environment, a responsibility given to human beings by God in Genesis. Churches may differ on minor matters, acknowledging that no church is perfect, but seeking to follow Christ faithfully in their location and generation. One of the worst witnesses to the gospel in the history of the church was the violence and force used by some Christians against others through the Spanish Inquisition and the European Reformation. So it would be important to refuse some churches from calling others heretical which is a divisive diversity, but to allow churches to work out their own faith and church life through discussion and discernment under the leading of the Holy Spirit.

3.4 The relationship between local and universal church

3.4.1 "Many churches can embrace a shared understanding of the fundamental relationship and

communion of local churches within the universal Church. They share the understanding that the presence of Christ, by the will of the Father and the power of the Spirit, is truly manifested in the local church (it is 'wholly Church'), and that this very presence of Christ impels the local church to be in communion with the universal Church (it is not 'the whole Church'). Where this fundamental agreement is found, the expression 'local church' may nonetheless be used in varying ways. In our common quest for closer unity, we invite the churches to seek more precise mutual understanding and agreement in this area: What is the appropriate relation between the various levels of life of a fully united Church and what specific ministries of leadership are needed to serve and foster those relations?" (§32)

3.4.2 The URC is linked in various ways to other bodies of Christians: at the world level it is a member of the World Council of Churches, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, the Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council and the Council for World Mission. At the regional level, it is a member of the Conference of European Churches and the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe. In the British Isles it is a member of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland as well as the ecumenical instruments of England, Scotland and Wales. These relationships are manifested in various ways in the life of the URC. They provide a basis for recognizing members and ministers of other member churches; they also provide a network of contacts between people and places resulting in exchange visits and partner

congregations, which bring the universal Church to life in a very local way.

3.4.3 Ministers of Word and Sacraments are trained for three to four years with a year placement, often in ecumenical settings sharing teaching with other denominations, and therefore would have similar academic standards to other churches in Britain. This would mean that we will recognize the ministry in other denominations. If individuals wish to transfer to our denomination, we acknowledge and recognize their ministry; however we would require them to take some training about the United Reformed Church.

3.4.4 URC ministers often serve in Local Ecumenical Partnerships. These are partnerships of local churches usually worshipping as one congregation, bound together by covenant whereby the ministry of a pastorate may be provided by different denominations at different times or as part of a team. With the exception of Roman Catholic involvement, this allows the ministers of different traditions to fully cooperate and share in ministry on an equal basis including in the celebration of the eucharist. This shared training and experience would be helpful in seeking to deepen the understanding of ecumenical cooperation across different traditions and to develop the skills needed to minister across the range of traditions and cultural differences that are often so challenging.

Chapter 3: The Church: Growing In Communion

4.1 Sacraments and ordinances

4.1.1 *“In the light of the convergences on Baptism and Eucharist and of further reflection upon the historical roots and potential compatibility of the expressions ‘sacrament’ and ‘ordinance,’ the churches are challenged to explore whether they are able to arrive at deeper agreement about that dimension of the life of the Church that involves these rites. Such convergence could lead them to consider several additional questions. Most churches celebrate other rites or sacraments, such as chrismations / confirmations, weddings and ordinations within their liturgies and many also have rites for the forgiveness of sin and the blessing of the sick: May not the number and ecclesial status of these sacraments or ordinances be addressed in ecumenical dialogues? We also invite churches to consider whether they can now achieve closer convergence about who may receive baptism and who may preside at the Church’s liturgical celebrations? Further, are there ways in which fuller mutual understanding can be established between the churches which celebrate these rites and those Christian communities convinced that the sharing of life in Christ does not require the celebration of sacraments or other rites?” (S44)*

4.1.2 The United Reformed Church recognizes only two sacraments: holy communion and baptism. The URC holds a Reformed understanding of Holy Communion as a sacred symbolic meal. There is recognition of the mystery of the presence of Christ in the meal through the Holy Spirit. However, this is an area of diversity within

our denomination. In the URC Worship Book II baptism is described as *publicly marking* the beginning of a person’s life as a Christian and as belonging to the body of Christ the Church. This means that baptism in itself does not make a person a Christian; that is done by God’s grace and calling. Also, in the URC there is an understanding that God’s love and grace is wider and broader than the Church and so those who are not baptized may, through Christ, be accepted and welcomed into the kingdom of God.

4.1.3 The church is willing to offer infant baptism as well as believers’ baptism, as the URC recognizes baptism to be an outward expression of a response to God’s prior love for all people. Infant baptism is based on the parents making a confession of faith and promising to bring their children up in the life of the church and a congregation promising to provide Christian teaching and example, with the hope that the children will grow up to make their own commitment of faith. However, while the URC will perform both infant and believers’ baptism there is an acknowledgement of different hermeneutical views on this and the URC upholds the importance of personal conviction through enabling ministers to act according to their own discernment and conviction. If a minister does not wish to perform infant baptisms, then they are expected to enable someone else to conduct this sacrament.

4.1.4 When someone who has been baptized as an infant wishes to make a confession of faith, they are considered already properly baptized at birth

and so the United Reformed church would not re-baptize them, but would invite them to confirm their faith and be welcomed into church membership, with the rights and responsibilities of making decisions at church meetings and supporting others in fellowship and financially. An acknowledgement that members of the same tradition can differ over their understanding of something so significant is both a challenge for the denomination and, we believe, a working example of how diversity and unity can both be lived out within the institutional church.

4.1.5 Other rites would be considered services of blessing or welcome into membership, or of healing, etc. They could be offered by a minister or an elder and may be designed appropriate to a situation. URC worship leaders may use liturgical resources from different denominations for such occasions.

4.2 Ordained ministry

4.2.1 *E*cumenical dialogue has repeatedly shown that issues relating to ordained ministry constitute challenging obstacles on the path to unity. If differences such as those relating to the priesthood of the ordained prohibit full unity, it must continue to be an urgent priority for the churches to discover how they can be overcome.” (§45)

4.2.2 A difference which may be a barrier to unity with other churches is the URC understanding of ministry. There is an understanding in the URC that both men and women may serve as Ministers of Word and Sacraments. The URC will also accept

for ministry people of any marital status or sexual orientation. In the URC we would recognize that some people may be called to celibacy – but probably a very few people. Not all in ministry are able to fulfill this calling and nor should it be required of them. In 2017 the URC marks the centenary of the ordination of women in the mainline churches in Britain, and offers their experience to the wider church.

4.3 Threefold ministry

4.3.1 *“Given the signs of growing agreement about the place of ordained ministry in the Church, we are led to ask if the churches can achieve a consensus as to whether or not the threefold ministry is part of God’s will for the Church in its realization of the unity which God wills.”* (§47)

4.3.2 In the URC, we do not normally use the language of a threefold ministry. Synod moderators, while in office, would have a somewhat similar role as bishops, having oversight of ministers, but hold no special status among ministers once their period of service as a moderator is over. There is a difference between an Anglican understanding of priest and a church minister in the United Reformed Church. Although we would have similar training to Anglican priests, URC ministers have different practical experience and different expectations to meet. The URC has a different understanding of ordination. Ordained Ministers of Word and Sacraments are not held as a separate order but are simply recognized and set apart to serve as ministers. The use of the word “minister” reflects the role as servant of the church, following

Christ's example of servant leadership. Ministers serve alongside elders and are led by decisions of the local Church Meeting rather than having authority and power over a local pastorate.

4.3.3 The URC commissions Church Related Community Workers who have the role of supporting local churches with their communities. They have gone through the assessment process and been accepted as a candidate; and they complete prescribed training like a Minister of Word and Sacraments with a focus on community and social issues, and are appointed to a post approved by the URC.

4.3.4 Ministers of Word and Sacraments work alongside a team of elders. The role to which an elder is ordained is not equivalent to an Anglican deacon or a Methodist deacon. In the URC, elders share with the minister in the pastoral oversight and leadership of the local church. They work in teams with each other to provide pastoral care. In the elders' meeting they take counsel together for the whole congregation. They are responsible for making provision for Christian worship and education; for maintaining proper standards of membership; and for promoting witness and service to the community, mission at home and abroad, and the peace, unity and welfare of the Church. So in a sense the URC has a fourfold ministry

4.3.5 As Elders have become trustees under state legislation, "it is their duty to arrange for the proper maintenance of church buildings, and to ensure the oversight of church finances. Some

represent the local church in the wider councils of the Church, and by virtue of their membership of these councils also represent the whole Church to the local church."⁵

4.4 Authority in the Church and its exercise

4.4.1 *"Significant steps towards convergence on authority and its exercise have been recorded in various bilateral dialogues. Differences continue to exist between churches, however, as to the relative weight to be accorded to the different sources of authority, as to how far and in what ways the Church has the means to arrive at a normative expression of its faith, and as to the role of ordained ministers in providing an authoritative interpretation of revelation. Yet all churches share the urgent concern that the Gospel be preached, interpreted and lived out in the world humbly, but with compelling authority. May not the seeking of ecumenical convergence on the way in which authority is recognized and exercised play a creative role in this missionary endeavour of the churches?" (§51)*

4.4.2 The URC has a participatory form of government in which authority is shared among the different councils of the church under the leading of the Holy Spirit. One of the main features of the United Reformed Church is its conciliar style of church government in which decisions are made in councils from the local Church Meeting, to synod and through General Assembly. The URC has four levels of church councils: (1) the Church Meeting

5. From the URC Worship book.

of a local church, in which decisions affecting the local church are made; (2) the locally elected elders meeting, which makes decisions as Church trustees and gives leadership to the Church Meeting; (3) synod level of region or nation, which deals with matters of wider concern, taking actions from General Assembly and bringing forward concerns to General Assembly; and (4) General Assembly, held biennially, which is the central organ and final authority on matters of doctrine and order of the URC. Each council makes decisions and reports; proposals and suggested actions travel from wider to local church level or from the local level to the wider church. This encourages a shared use of power to reduce the likelihood of abuse and increase the regular accountability of leaders. This conciliar model of church government is valued highly by the URC and we would want to hold it up as a positive model of church government.

4.4.3 The URC understanding of authority in ministry is that it should be exercised by those who are authorized but always accountable to the councils of the church. The role of minister or synod moderator is one of servant leadership rather than authoritarian position over others. It is based on a calling by God, confirmed by the community of faith. In the URC there is recognition that a woman may be called by God to a form of ministry and may hold any position in the church. This is seen as recognition of God's call. The church seeks to discourage discrimination on any basis of race, culture, age, gender, sexual orientation or marital status within the URC and to promote full inclusion.

4.5 Authority of ecumenical councils

4.5.1 *“While most churches accept the doctrinal definitions of the early Ecumenical Councils as expressive of the teaching of the New Testament, some maintain that all post-biblical doctrinal definitions to be normative and therefore irreformable expressions of the faith. Has ecumenical dialogue made possible a common assessment of the normativity of the teaching of the early Ecumenical Councils?” (§53)*

4.5.2 The URC recognized the early ecumenical councils as being normative for the Christian Church, but it would be open to holding further ecumenical councils according to the Statement of the Nature, Faith and Order of the URC: “but we affirm our right and readiness, if the need arises, to make new statements of faith in ever new obedience to the living Christ.” There is recognition in the URC that each culture, social class, gender and generation of churches may interpret the scriptures in different ways; the Christian faith is an incarnational faith that is expressed slightly differently in different places and times. Definitions of orthodoxy need to be discerned by each generation and place, acknowledging that there is a breadth of understanding.

4.6 A universal ministry of unity

4.6.1 *“If, according to the will of Christ, current divisions are overcome, how might a ministry that fosters and promotes the unity of the Church at the universal level be understood and exercised?” (§57)*

4.6.2 The Church universal should show unity as reflecting the prayer Jesus made in John 17. Yet

the reality is that it is divided by different denominations, church governments, styles of worship and polity and practice of the Christian faith. The URC understands the apostolic succession of the Christian faith is found in the councils of the church under the leading of the Holy Spirit.

4.6.3 In order to regain or form greater unity, one of the fears of the URC as a small denomination is that some of its good distinctive features and emphases might be lost in the union. It would require significant representation by smaller churches in negotiations towards unity with larger, more powerful churches so that the positive features of different smaller churches might be valued and maintained. Smaller churches may be more adaptable to cultural and societal changes.

Chapter 4: The Church: In and for the World

5.1 Ecumenical response to religious pluralism

5.1.1: *“There remain serious disagreements within and between some churches concerning these issues. The New Testament teaches that God wills the salvation of all people (cf. 1 Tim. 2:4) and, at the same time, that Jesus is the one and only saviour of the world (cf. 1 Tim. 2:5 and Acts 4:12). What conclusions may be drawn from these biblical teachings regarding the possibility of salvation for those who do not believe in Christ? Some hold that, in ways known to God, salvation in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit is possible for those who do not explicitly share Christian faith. Others do not see how such*

a view sufficiently corresponds to biblical passages about the necessity of faith and baptism for salvation. Differences on this question will have an impact upon how one understands and puts into practice the mission of the Church. Within today’s context of increased awareness of the vitality of various religions throughout the world, how may the churches arrive at greater convergence about these issues and cooperate more effectively in witnessing to the Gospel in word and deed?” (§60)

5.1.2 Within the URC there are some who emphasize a more exclusive approach, focusing upon individual salvation through faith and baptism. There are others who would invite a more Universalist understanding of salvation regarding God’s coming kingdom and the vision of all things being brought into the New Jerusalem at the *Parousia*. The URC is a church that respects a range of beliefs of salvation among its members.

5.2 Moral questions and the unity of the Church

5.2.1 *“Ecumenical dialogue at the multilateral and bilateral levels has begun to sketch out some of the parameters of the significance of moral doctrine and practice for Christian unity. If present and future ecumenical dialogue is to serve both the mission and the unity of the Church, it is important that this dialogue explicitly address the challenges to convergence represented by contemporary moral issues. We invite the churches to explore these issues in a spirit of mutual attentiveness and support. How might the churches, guided by the Spirit, discern together what it means today to understand and live in fidelity*

to the teaching and attitude of Jesus? How can the churches, as they engage together in this task of discernment, offer appropriate models of discourse and wise counsel to the societies in which they are called to serve?” (§63)

5.2.2 This is a very difficult area to address. Perhaps further sharing of biblical scholarship and study would help churches to acknowledge cultural adaptations to contemporary moral issues. The Western church has had a tendency to focus on sexual behaviour, which Jesus spoke about very little. He had much more to say about the love of wealth and the oppression of others and self-righteousness. He disobeyed some temple rules of purity saying that the rules are for the people, not the people for the rules. Jesus summarized the commandments as to love God and love our fellow human beings. The URC affirms the Ten Commandments and Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew (and on the plain in the Gospel of Luke). Jesus’ demands are almost impossible to follow and show that all are sinful in need of God’s grace.

5.2.3 A recognition that there are differences in how Jewish and Gentile Christians would be expected to live their Christian lives, even within the same generation, in 1st century Palestine, and an acknowledgement of changes down the centuries since then might help churches recognize that different churches in different places and times may express their faith differently and still be faithful to the overriding commandment by Christ to love God and to love one another. This

would mean that there need not be unanimity on this in order to have unity.

5.3 The role of the Church in mission

5.3.1 This seems to be an area in *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* that has been insufficiently addressed. Jesus’ final words in the gospel of Matthew 28:18-19 are his commissioning of the disciples to make disciples of all nations. There are many models in the scriptures that speak of the church as being a witness to the world. The URC acknowledges in its Basis of Union that Christ continues to entrust the commission first given to the apostles to proclaim the gospel to all peoples. There are different metaphors used in the gospels referring to being a witness to the world: salt and light in Matthew 5, salt to preserve the world and light to be a visible presence in which Christian good works may be seen and give glory to God. Jesus sent out the first disciples to proclaim the good news and to bring healing and wholeness to people. The main model of mission in the scriptures is the kingdom or realm of God. Luke’s gospel ends with the risen Lord saying repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem. John’s gospel was written so that people may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah. John’s letters challenge Christian disciples to love one another and in this way they are to reveal God’s love to the world. The URC affirms the importance of mission and the role of congregations as a witness in their local communities, and so mission is to be appropriate for their local context.

5.3.2 One of the effects of missionary efforts is often a reciprocal change upon the Church. The Church finds that it needs to adapt to the culture in which it is set, either to emphasize its distinctive values, where it becomes “counter-cultural,” or to find points of contact and similar interest to open up opportunities for sharing the gospel. Our pluralistic societies teach us about tolerance and respect of different values, cultures, races and customs. Modern technology opens up new methods of communication and affects how relationships are formed and developed. Fresh Expressions of Church in the Western world is an attempt by churches to adapt styles and patterns of worship to contemporary interests and customs.

RESPONSES FROM CHURCH WORLD
COMMUNIONS, NATIONAL COUNCILS
OF CHURCHES AND REGIONAL
ECUMENICAL ORGANIZATIONS

SECTION 2

24. International Old Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Union of Utrecht

In Collaboration with representatives of the Philippine Independent Church, the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar, the Spanish Reformed Episcopal Church and the Old Catholic Church of the Mariavites

Introduction

In a spirit of prayer and fellowship, the International Old Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Union of Utrecht met with bishops of the *Mar Thoma Syrian Church*, the *Philippine Independent Church* (IFI), the *Spanish Reformed Episcopal Church* and the *Old Catholic Church of the Mariavites*, who responded to an invitation to participate in an extraordinary session of the former body, at the *Landelijk Dienstencentrum* of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, in Utrecht, 14–18 September 2014. The context of this meeting was provided by the celebration of the 125th anniversary of the establishment of the Union of Utrecht of Old Catholic Churches (1889).

The goal of the meeting was to formulate a response to the questions posed to the churches by the convergence text *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (TCTCV), published by the World Council of Churches' Commission on Faith and Order (Faith and Order Paper No. 214, WCC Publications, Geneva 2013). To this purpose, the

meeting benefited from presentations by the Rev. Canon John Gibaut, Director of the Commission of Faith and Order, introducing the document and its background. By discussing the text in this manner, the bishops of the participating churches, joined by theological advisors, sought to engage in a next stage of their “pilgrimage of justice and peace,” travelling together as catholic churches that intend to live together in a global communion of communions of churches.

It was the second time that bishops of these churches met (the first time was in 2010), and it was the first time that they jointly discussed a reaction to a World Council of Churches document. Some of our churches are in full communion with each other or engaged in an official dialogue. Together, we represent churches in the catholic tradition, attempting to jointly articulate the faith and practice of the early church for a new age, recognizing each other in this endeavour, and hence seeking to be catholic churches in communion.

For this response, the five questions asked by the Commission on Faith and Order in the document's introduction (p. 3) will serve as a guideline.

1. To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?

The representatives of the three churches recognize a common ecclesiological vision in *TCTCV*. Our churches particularly welcome:

- the fundamental role that is given to communion (*koinonia*) ecclesiology
- the importance given to the local church, as a eucharistic *communio* around a bishop, encompassing all the faithful in a given place, discerning the life of faith in communion, characterized by a life of *diakonia*, *leitourgia* and *martyria*, through an interplay of episcopacy and synodality
- the consequent understanding of the “universal” church as a conciliar communion of communions
- the way in which the ordained ministry is treated and the emphasis placed on the exercise of *episkopé* in its personal, collegial, and communal dimensions
- the way in which contextuality is stressed, which implies respect for a legitimate diversity within a relationship of communion
- the document's underlining of the church's mission and service in the world, understanding the church as “sign and servant” of God's kingdom.

In this way, we recognize in *TCTCV* an adequate and authentic articulation of the faith and order of the early church for today.

2. To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?

The text moves beyond mere formal recognition between churches towards the possibility of speaking out together in society and practically working together in the service for the world. If the text is widely accepted, it could help to bring in contact not only churches with similar ecclesiologies, such as the churches involved in this meeting, but it could also forge unexpected connections with churches which do not seem to share the same kind of understanding of the church at first sight. This text will help growth in unity, when the text and the responses to it will be shared widely, such as has happened in the reception process of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982).

3. What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?

Our discussion of this text challenges us already, as we hear each other's interpretations of the document in the context of the different religious, social, economic and political situations of our churches. The document's emphasis on the *missio Dei* is challenging all our churches. Examples of such challenges are the following. Old Catholics are challenged to develop a broader sense and understanding of mission (proclaiming the gospel in a multicultural and multi-religious society) and of the church as a moral/ethical communion

(in the broad sense as advocated in chapter 4 of *TCTCV*). For the IFI, the document could be helpful for strengthening its theological self-understanding in relation to the current process of renewal of its constitution and canons, in order to relate their ecclesiology more strongly to their contemporary challenges. The long-standing experiences of the Mar Thoma Church in a multicultural and multi-religious environment could be made fruitful for dealing with more recent experiences of pluralist societies in Europe.

4. How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement?

If a church recognizes itself in this text, as we do, it probably has an ecclesial self-understanding that we might be able to recognize as “catholic” in the sense of the Bonn Agreement, as well as in the sense of subsequent ecumenical statements by bilateral dialogues of the Old Catholic Church.

The text of the 1931 Anglican - Old Catholic Bonn Agreement was used in 1961 (and onwards) for the establishment of communion between the IFI and the Churches of the Anglican communion, and in 1965 in order to establish communion between the Old Catholic Churches, the IFI, the Spanish Reformed Episcopal Church and the Lusitanian Catholic Apostolic Evangelical Church. Further documents of bilateral dialogues of the Old Catholic Church include: the documents of the dialogue with the Orthodox Church

(*Koinonia auf altkirchlicher Basis*, 1987), with the Roman Catholic Church (*Church and Ecclesial Communion*, 2009), with the Mar Thoma Syrian Church (*Sanghitiri, Hippolytus and Munnar Statements*, 2011–2014), and with the Church of Sweden (*Uppsala and Utrecht*, 2013).

Such joint recognition of the vision of *TCTCV* implies the recognition of each other’s catholicity and the joint search for a fully shared ecclesial life (along the lines of the communion ecclesiology of *TCTCV*: one eucharistic gathering around one bishop in one place). This search includes the discernment of possible common institutional structures, which should enhance the churches’ shared life in communion, while leaving room for legitimate diversity for cultural and practical reasons. This is in line with the principle of “one bishop in one place.” Should other churches be able to recognize themselves in the ecclesiological vision outlined in *TCTCV* to the same extent as we do, such joint recognition of the same ecclesiological vision provides a venture point for discerning being in communion.

5. What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

We are looking forward to learning the responses of other churches to this document. Therefore we would favour a reception process similar to that of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, in terms of the publication and analysis of the responses of the churches to *TCTCV*.

We would like to receive further guidance regarding possible procedural aspects of common reflections on moral and ethical questions that divide the churches in our present time.

We would advise churches and the WCC to continue to make use of the experiences of minority churches and to ascertain their inclusion into accounts of the history and presence of Christian churches in the ecumenical endeavour. In this way, these churches' rich and significant experiences regarding working together with other churches can be made available as a resource for others. As representatives of such churches, we consider sharing these experiences as one of our gifts to the ecumenical movement.

Bishops

Old Catholic Church:

Rt. Rev. Dušan Hejbal, Bishop of the Old Catholic Church in the Czech Republic

Rt. Rev. Dr John Okoro, Bishop of the Old Catholic Church of Austria

Rt. Rev. Dr Harald Rein, Bishop of the Old Catholic Church of Switzerland

Rt. Rev. Dr Matthias Ring, Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Old Catholics in Germany

Rt. Rev. Dr Dirk Jan Schoon, Bishop of Haarlem (Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands)

Most Rev. Dr Joris Vercammen, Archbishop of Utrecht (Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands)

Most Rev. Dr Wiktor Wysoczański, Bishop of the Diocese of Warsaw and Leading Bishop of the Polish Catholic Church

Philippine Independent Church:

Rt. Rev. Delfin Callao Jr., Bishop of Agusans and Surigao Sur

Rt. Rev. Ronelio Fabriquier, Bishop of Romblon and Mindoros

Most Rev. Ephraim Fajutagana, Obispo Maximo

Spanish Reformed Episcopal Church:

Rt. Rev. Dr Carlos López Lozano, Diocesan Bishop

Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar (observer):

Rt. Rev. Dr Isaac Mar Philoxenos, Bishop of the Chennai-Bangalore Diocese

Old Catholic Mariavite Church (observer):

Rt. Rev. Ludwik Jabłoński, Bishop of the Diocese of Warsaw-Płock and Prime Bishop

Excused:

Rt. Rev. Mike Klusmyer, Bishop of West-Virginia, permanent observer to the International Bishops' Conference of the Union of Utrecht on behalf of the presiding bishop of The Episcopal Church, USA.

Rt. Rev. Michael Burrows, Bishop of Cashel and Ossory (Church of Ireland), permanent observer to the International Bishops' Conference of the Union of Utrecht on behalf of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

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25. National Council of Churches in Australia

Faith and Unity Commission

June 2015

The Faith and Unity Commission studied *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)* over a number of meetings. The document was received with enthusiasm, recognizing that it represents a significant convergence and a milestone on the road to that unity for which Christ prayed.

While we received responses from individual Commission members for our member churches, the major benefit of our study was the dialogue it provoked among the Commission members. Accordingly, this response is not intended to take the place of responses made by each of our member churches directly to the Faith and Order Commission. Rather, in making this response we have endeavoured to present the fruits of the dialogue that has occurred among us as we have studied the text and presented our individual church responses. Our dialogue has brought about two important ecumenical achievements: (1) it has assisted each individual church in its own dialogue with the text and reflection on its own ecclesiological self-understanding; and (2) it has focused our dialogue with each other.

Common affirmations

Together we affirm the starting point for understanding the Church, namely “the vision of God’s great design (or ‘economy’) for all creation” (§1). We appreciated the biblical basis of this vision. We believe that we are able to share a common understanding of this biblical foundation. We can affirm that, created in God’s image, men and women bear “an inherent capacity for communion (in Greek *koinonia*) with God and with one another” (§1). The drama of human sin and disobedience damaged the communion between God, human beings and the created order. Human history is a history of God’s mighty work to restore that communion. We recognize that while we have not always shared a common theology of sin and grace, we can nevertheless affirm that “the dynamic history of God’s restoration of *koinonia* found its irreversible achievement in the incarnation and paschal mystery of Jesus Christ” (§1).

We welcome the focus on the Holy Trinity and *koinonia*. This is a laudable corrective to ecclesologies that focus too narrowly on Christological or institutional aspects of the Church. Instead, there is a bigger vision of the Church that encompasses the creator God, the saving mystery of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit continuing the

mission of God in the world. Accordingly, we embrace the statement, “Communion, whose source is the very life of the Holy Trinity, is both the gift by which the Church lives and, at the same time, the gift that God calls the Church to offer to a wounded and divided humanity in hope of reconciliation and healing” (§1). We recognize in this statement an affirmation that the Church exists by the grace of God, and that the Church shares in the mission of God.

The biblical vision of the Church points to the close link between unity and mission. We acknowledge that among our churches this link has not always been made. We affirm the importance of unity as expressed in the document. We have been encouraged to learn from the New Testament churches, which recognized that tensions are present and can create division. The Church was born ecumenical! This reminds us of the imperative to seek unity. The experience of the New Testament churches and the ways they sought to maintain unity are instructive of our own search for unity.

Most of our member churches were able to affirm the list of ecclesial elements identified in §37: “communion in the fullness of apostolic faith; in sacramental life; in a truly one and mutually recognised ministry; in structures of conciliar relations and decision-making and in common witness and service to the world.” While Commission members are not agreed on what Church unity will ultimately look like, the convergence expressed in the text is a good basis for further dialogue. Our members that do not practice liturgical sacraments appreciated the recognition of their

affirmation “that they share in the sacramental life of the Church” (§40).

We have moved much closer to each other in reaching a common understanding of the place of diversity in a “united church.” We affirm the fundamental principle identified in §30 and based on Acts 15:28, viz., that no burden beyond what is essential should be imposed on churches. However, while each of us has our own criteria for legitimate diversity, these criteria are not held in common. Moreover, the criteria are not always shared even within an ecclesial tradition.

Some of our churches affirmed the statement about the eschatological reality of the Church. This was one of the most fruitful sections of the document for the Commission’s dialogue. We recognize that previously two different approaches to eschatology gave rise to different visions of church unity. For some, unity was an eschatological gift for the future, while for others, unity could find concrete expression in our own time. We hope that the affirmation that “the Church is an eschatological reality, already anticipating the kingdom, but not yet its full realization” (§33) will open up ways of thinking more deeply about the Church. This may help us to tell the story of the Church in a reverse direction, as it were: from the end time until now. In the words of the text, there are “visible and tangible signs which express that this new life of communion has been effectively realized” (§34).

We want to affirm the equally strong emphasis on the Church in history. This history of salvation approach accords well with the biblical foundation that opened the text. It reminds us that the

Church has its own role in the unfolding of God's saving work in Christ through the Holy Spirit. The Church, in this approach, is not some abstract ideal, but is manifest in concrete places. We recognize that this historical approach does not amount to a sociological view of the Church, nor should it be reduced to this, but is a genuine theological understanding. We affirm this emphasis on the Church as part of God's saving plan for the world as it exists in history.

Areas that our churches are willing to consider in a new context

We have experienced great grace in studying *TCTCV* in a multilateral context as a national ecumenical council. We have found that the insights of one church have shed light on particular sections of the text so that other churches have been able to gain a deeper insight into the text. We have also noted how some churches have been able to prompt others – in a charitable way – to identify how the text challenges their own faith, life and witness. Our member churches have identified a number of areas where they have been challenged to think in fresh ways.

For some, the idea of Church as sacrament is not language they use, and they have been suspicious of using such language for the reasons identified in the text (cf. §44). The text, however, has challenged them to consider this language within a larger context of the place of the Church in the economy of salvation, and as sign and instrument of the kingdom.

Not all our member churches have a threefold ministry or a personal episcopate. While taking

such a step would be challenging for some of these churches, they recognize that the proposal in the text that the episcopate may be an important sign of the Church's continuity with the apostolic faith places the question in a new context – with a focus on the apostolic faith (cf. §52). For this reason they are not opposed to studying the question further. They also ask if there might be a reciprocal recognition that an episcopate is not a sufficient condition of apostolicity.

Some of our members have identified the impetus the text is giving to their church to address questions of renewal in their own church life and practice. They identified an urgent need to study further the section of the text on the priestly, prophetic and royal people of God with a view to addressing the role of the laity in the Church and their place in decision-making and discernment on matters of faith and morals. Others, for whom the distinctive function of a ministerial order or office is less robustly valued, are also challenged to look at their own structures of authority and decision-making.

All of our member churches recognize that *TCTCV* attempts to transcend the particular ecclesiological self-understanding of any one church. Some have heard a challenge to consider their corporate identity in a new light and to take seriously the emphasis on the *missio Dei*. Others described the challenge in terms of thinking about the Church theologically and not simply sociologically. This may raise the question as to what extent some of their own cherished traditions could be re-examined in the light of the convergence achieved in the text.

A basis for growth in unity

As we studied this text we have been very aware that we are all signatories to *Australian Churches Covenanting Together*. This national multilateral and multi-dimensional document has affirmed the unity that we already share and set out the ways we can be together as a result of that unity. We see a challenge to make use of *TCTCV* in reviewing the commitment already expressed in the covenanting document and in looking for ways to take further steps towards unity. This will involve examining each dimension of the covenanting arrangement to see if it can be deepened.

We have also been aware that most of us have a strong commitment to bilateral dialogue and that most of our churches are in dialogue with more than one other church. Some of us acknowledged that many of the key foundational concepts in *TCTCV*, such as *koinonia* or *episkopé*, have been the subject of bilateral dialogues. Churches have been able to bring their experience of bilateral dialogue to bear on their study of the text in a multilateral context. In general there is a harmony between the advances made in the bilateral dialogues and the expression of convergence in the WCC text.

Recognizing that we already share a deep degree of *koinonia*, some of our members have identified a challenge to find suitable ways to give expression to the unity we already share. For some, this could take the form of a genuine church fellowship and cooperation even if at this stage it is a limited fellowship.

Conclusion

The members of the Faith and Unity Commission wish to express their deep gratitude to the World Council of Churches, and in particular the Commission on Faith and Order for *TCTCV*. Our response represents a first stage in our reception of the document. In offering this response, we also hope that it will assist the member churches of the National Council of Churches in Australia to continue to engage with the text and to receive it. We are very mindful of the statement from the Third Assembly of the WCC (New Delhi 1961) that the unity of the Church will involve nothing less than the death and re-birth of many forms of church life as we currently know them. In other words, the unity that Christ prayed for will be realized through renewal in each of our churches so that we become ever more faithful to the Gospel. The Church is always in need of renewal and reform under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We receive this document as an instrument of renewal. It offers a way for each of us to work with our ecumenical partners as we listen to the voice of the Spirit in our own time.

26. Vermont Ecumenical Council and Bible Society

The Faith and Order Committee

September 2012

Our committee worked through this document over the course of six months. We read through the document, reflecting and commenting as we discussed it during our meetings. Some reservations we had during our initial reading centered on the need to deal in more detail with the Church as “communion” and with the eucharistic and eschatological dimensions of the church’s life. While these were dealt with many times in the paper we believed they should be central to it.

Thus, when we reached the concluding chapter of the essay, we were almost overcome by the powerful affirmations expressed in its three paragraphs! In compressed fashion they articulate clearly the Church as communion and its eucharistic and eschatological dimensions. We felt at that point that these should be the opening paragraphs of the document, giving shape to all that followed. After some reflection we realized that their power in part came from the accumulated energy of the preceding chapters. We still believe that the document would gain in focus and cohesion were something like these paragraphs to open the essay. Then the ensuing chapters should be explicitly organized

around the theme of “communion” in the Body of Christ.

All of our churches believe that “communion” in the Body of Christ is central to their lives. How that is supported, lived in practice, and understood may differ yet in ways that need to be divisive. In fact, among our small group we find ourselves speaking out of our own ecclesial experiences yet also cherishing the experience of colleagues from very different traditions. If the experience of our small group is indicative, the sharing of these experiences often elicits from each of us a desire for “communion” which could encompass and include our differences.

Before we go on to deal with some specific suggestions regarding various parts of the essay we have two more general comments:

First, we felt that it would be good were the “Historical Note” at the end of the document to be presented at the outset because it would give all who read it the background out of which the present essay developed. This might be in a lengthy preface; if the present position is kept, it should be noted in a preface that some may wish to begin their reading with the “Historical Note” to understand the developments leading to the present document.

Second, we suspect that the paragraphs of the Conclusion are sufficiently concise, and important enough, to receive the same bold face typographical treatment as the key paragraph about “all in each place” in the New Delhi Statement.

When it comes to the body of the paper, we believe, in the in the light of our comments, that the first chapter should be chapter 2 and that its opening paragraph should be “B. The Church of the Triune God as *Koinonia*.” Paragraph 13 would thus become the opening paragraph of the body of the paper and set its major themes. It indicates at the outset that “communion” gives rise to “mission.” The material in §§11–12 could be, with little revision, integrated with §14. (The Marian material in §15 might be received more easily by some if it were to appear after the affirmation of scriptural authority.)

The relation of communion to mission is again stressed in §23. It would be good if this paragraph could be structured so that it indicates that communion is the thread which holds the sections together in this chapter – particularly since section C develops the theme in detail.

As we noted earlier, our group developed a desire for deeper experiences of communion and §29 resonates with us. We believe that, as people begin to realize that “each local church is in communion with the local churches of all times and places,” they will sense a connection to other traditions, times, and places they had not experienced before. (We suspect that although there is ongoing discussion of what is meant by “local church” ambiguity at this point actually can increase commitment to an ecumenical vision.)

Chapter 3 articulates both the Church’s being in communion at the present and holds a vision of its deeper communion in the eschaton. The quotation cited in §37 might well receive bold face status since it is such an apt accompaniment to the New Delhi statement on the unity of “all in each place.” To wit: **“The ecclesial requirements for full communion within a visibly united church – the goal of the ecumenical movement – are communion in the fullness of the apostolic faith; in sacramental life; in a truly one and mutually recognized ministry; in structures of conciliar relations and decision-making; and in common witness and service to the world.”**

The opening (§58) of chapter 4 does not mention the word “communion” at all, yet the whole purpose of mission and service is to enable others to experience communion and its fruits. What else is the kingdom of God but perfect communion with Him? It would help tie the various chapters together were the connection made a bit more explicit here.

Paragraphs 61–63 do an excellent job, in short compass, in dealing with the communal dimension of ethics: “as the community seeks to understand God’s will within the various circumstances of time and place.” We experienced this difficulty ourselves as we discussed from our various perspectives the matter of same-sex marriage. On the other hand, we dealt with different perspectives yet came to agreement to oppose a state initiative on euthanasia. There is no easy way here; yet it is incumbent on us to deal *together in community* with precisely those issues on which we disagree, especially when “some believe that moral questions

are not of their nature ‘church-dividing’ while others are truly convinced that they are” (§63). Here is where living with a keen sense of community provides both pain and growth.

The moral dimension of communion is further expanded in §64 when it points out that the course for our “passion for the transformation of the world lies in communion with God in Christ Jesus.” These are “moral obligations on churches as well as individuals.” This is so because as communities we are called to “carry out such discernment together” and act on the basis of our conclusions.

Additional Observation

We would prefer the use of the term “denominations” rather than “churches,” when “churches” is used with a lower case “c.”

27. Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council

Overview and general affirmations

The Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council (DECC) is grateful to the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches for *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTVC)*. The stated goal of the Commission in developing this text is the same vision and on-going goal of the Disciples – that is, the visible unity of the Church. The situation of ecclesial division with the church is, as a Disciples ecumenical pioneer Dr Peter Ainslie III averred, “Christianity’s scandal – no mere ‘abnormality,’ but sinful.”

The DECC believes that *TCTCV*, along with decades of ecumenical dialogue, engagement, and cooperation, advances lines of ecclesiological and theological convergence from the promise of *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry (BEM)*. We, therefore, welcome this document as a significant marker on the long journey towards a vision of the visible unity of the one church “so that the world may believe” (John 17:21).

We affirm the understanding of the church as “the vision of God’s great design for all creation” (§1), and the biblical base on which this statement stands.

We also affirm the strong emphasis on the mission of the church in this text, and agree that Christian unity is an imperative of faith in the service of a more effective mission of God’s

reconciling love. For Disciples, there is no impediment to recognizing other Christian traditions as “church.” We see mission as most effective when it is carried out locally, and beyond, as practically as possible; this often results in working jointly with other churches.

We affirm the call for “unity-in-diversity.” Our founding principle as a Christian community has been stated as “in essentials, unity; in non-essentials, diversity; in all things, love.” Along with other churches we admit that we have not always found it easy to agree even among ourselves what constitutes the “essentials” or “non-essentials”; this document presents a fresh call to humility as well as a fresh call to love.

Many Disciples are unfamiliar with the concept of the church as “sacrament.” More common ways among Disciples are to speak of “giving witness; being participants in; or, being agents or instruments on behalf of God’s ultimate purposes of reconciling love.” However, there is much food for thought in the challenge to consider this language of “church as sacrament” as we think about, and teach about, baptism and the Lord’s supper, and to continue to explore the riches of God’s work in us as we take part in these acts of worship and obedience.

Our mutual life has been enriched by many encounters with the church life of other traditions. For example, our spirituality has been deepened by

the stronger emphasis of some on the Spirit and the life of the Trinity which has balanced our strong emphasis on Christ. We have strengthened our forms of leadership and pastoral care of ministers by considering models of an episcopacy and oversight. We have thought more deeply about how each congregation (often understood as being “autonomous” in our Disciples’ polity) expresses its life as part of the body of Christ through commitment to councils and conferences of churches that balance autonomy with accountability to our fellow Christians.

Responses to Questions

1. To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?

The text’s structure and key emphases, summarized in the Introduction (p. 2) aptly reflect the ordering of topics for the Disciples by heritage and our on-going church discussions, dialogues and activities.

The church is of God’s creation for God’s salvific purposes. Its unity and calling are God-given. Its historic disunity impairs the authenticity and effectiveness of its mission.

The church is a communion of communions, reliant upon scripture, Tradition and traditions (as well as human inquiry and experience) in order to discern how best to witness to God’s good news.

The church is a pilgrim people, seeking to witness to and embody visible signs of God’s love of the whole of creation.

The text’s chapter 4, dealing with the church’s life in the world as a sign and agent of God’s love,

is a welcome expansion of *BEM*’s discussion of the church’s ministry in and to the world.

2. To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?

For Disciples, this text invites serious exploration, and thoughtful and prayerful reflection, on our part and those of other communions with regard to differing current understandings of ecclesiological foundations and their implications.

3. What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?

The text prompts the Disciples to consider and re-consider the relatedness of the scripture, the Tradition, and diverse traditions in order to advance the cause of Christian unity for the sake of making manifest the reconciling love of God in Christ Jesus.

The text prompts Disciples to renew and extend efforts to engage with other communions in efforts to proclaim Christ in an interreligious context, to witness to the Gospel’s imperatives of grace, and to respond to human suffering and need.

4. How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the church described in this statement?

The Disciples have myriad relationships in life and with other churches acknowledging in a positive way the vision of the church described in this

statement. These relationships are widely varied, including congregational, regional and church-wide opportunities for joint efforts of ecumenical dialogue, worship, fellowship and service in the world.

5. What aspects of the life of the church could call for further discussion and what advice could your Church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

This text's statement on the topic "legitimate diversity" is a massive advance beyond historic conflicts of "orthodoxies versus heresies." Even so, the polarity of legitimate/illegitimate diversity remains a front-loaded framing of the issue. Diversities are many and various – national, cultural, ethnic, economic, and certainly ecclesial, to name but a few. Some must be called "contrary to the gospel," and challenged on that ground. Many if not most others, however, are due to some historic or contemporary "hot-button" issue, doctrinal or ethical, or even mere leadership personality clashes. Further reflection by Faith and Order regarding *not* what is illegitimate, but on the recognizable diversity within the Christian faith is perhaps the more productive approach.

An "interreligious context" is by no means new, but it surfaces in contemporary times as a matter of great force. Further focus and guidance from Faith and Order on the issues relating to the Christian faith among other faiths of the world would be welcome.

Alerts for future work and consideration

One of the Disciples' responders to *TCTCV* offered a statement that the DECC believes presents an important reflection on the text that should be taken into account as the Faith and Order Commission continues its work on this important effort of seeking theological convergence on the nature and mission of the church. This response is presented below:

When this Paper was published in 2013, I read it and thought it a good summary of where we were thirty years after *BEM*. Since I was not involved in any of the groups which might be responsible for preparing any kind of response, I put it on a shelf and thought no more about it. . . . Then about six months ago I overheard the tail-end of a conversation in which it was commented that the document was rather "inward-looking"; so I re-read it to see why.

Immediately I noticed the balance of the document: two substantial main chapters (2 and 3), each around twelve pages long – "The Church of the Triune God" and "The Church: Growing in Communion." Redaction criticism suggested that these were the original main chapters, being an exposition of 'koinonia' ecclesiology as a solution for (or at least a new way of looking at) some traditional Western problems. By its nature such an ecclesiology is primarily concerned with the fellowship within the bounds of the church, however understood. For my own part I find such an ecclesiology a useful tool

for understanding the church, rather along the lines that the International Commission for Dialogue between the Disciples of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church explored in its second round in the 1990s on “Apostolicity and Catholicity.”

There are then two outlying chapters (1 and 4), each around six pages long (i.e., half the length of the others): “God’s Mission and the Unity of the Church” and “The Church: In and For the World.” Each of these chapters has great potential for a full statement on ecclesiology, but the first is diverted by questions of Christianity and other faiths, which are not resolved or the direction of a solution indicated; and the second lapses into an all too brief statement of traditional “Life and Work” concerns, updated for the 21st century. But, in my reading, it was also clear that any further development of the first chapter would sacrifice a smooth entry to the second, just as the fourth led uneasily into the Conclusion.

Essentially the statement deals with European (and North American) concerns, rather than those of the church in the rest of the world. Although it should be helpful to that restricted (though still significant) area of the world, there is little sign of a readiness to address issues characteristic of those parts of the world in which Christianity is growing most rapidly, and where its diversity is intensifying . . .

What was new about *BEM* was the six volumes of responses, together with a

subsequent assessment, *BEM at 25*.¹ Some of the most challenging of those responses came from churches in the non-Western world, raising questions about the way in which *BEM* largely ratified the existing order of things in the West as normative.

But the wider church scene has moved on. The “Five Marks of Mission” adopted by the Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Communion (1988) have themselves become a normative tool for assessing church life in much of the UK, and in other countries as well. David Bosch’s *Transforming Mission* (1990) embodied a new way of looking at mission that sought to emancipate it from neo-imperialist suspicions. More recently, in the mid-2000s, the book *Mission-Shaped Church* has become a different way of ordering the priorities of church life. On such questions *The Church Towards a Common Vision* is resoundingly silent. There is not even a reference to Rowan Williams’s magnificent keynote address to the Porto Alegre WCC Assembly in 2007 about a new understanding of Christian witness in relation to other faiths. One is bound to wonder whether, if such an approach had been adopted in the early church, it would ever have grown significantly at all. A kind of de facto universalism seems to have invaded the thinking behind this part of the document, despite the fact

1. *BEM at 25: Critical Insights into a Continuing Legacy*, Thomas F Best and Tamara Grdzeldize (Geneva, Switzerland: WCC Publications, 2007).

that, for Protestants at least, the modern ecumenical movement had its origin in the Third World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910.

The 21st century needs a more specifically focused mission agenda for its ecclesiology, not only among the declining churches in Europe and North America, but also to contextualize the permissible norms for diversity in those areas where Christianity is growing most rapidly. The fears of the Orthodox in Eastern Europe of proselytism are understandable, but norms for diversity would be of help here too, and in any case Christianity is not an inherited religion. Such an agenda would also address those “exceptional” areas in ecclesiology – Catholic religious orders, which have been to the fore in evangelization since the 6th century, or Protestant missionary societies in the West that fit uneasily into traditional ecclesiological structures. What would a non-Western non-imperialist view of mission look like in the 21st century? (More like St Patrick, or St Boniface?) How is the contrast between “top-down” and “bottom-up” approaches to evangelization (which have significant ecclesiological implications) squared? What can we learn from anthropological studies of the relation between individuals and the communities to which they belong for processes of evangelization? What is the significance of the fact that the initial growth of various Western missions in Asia and Africa in the 19th century depended on

recruitment from the sick and orphans for whom the churches cared?

None of this is intended to nullify the significance of the convergence registered in chapters 2 and 3 on *koinonia* ecclesiology. But it is intended to point out some of the areas of weakness of the existing text (which, for example, makes no reference to the Jewish origins of Christianity and provides no criteria for distinguishing between that which may be rightly used from the Old Testament scriptures and that which is inconsistent with the new revelation in Jesus Christ in the construction of any ecclesiology).

Further questions and issues for consideration

1. Issues of reception obviously differ from communion to communion. Care to write as clearly and as directly as possible is evident, and especially in the language used to describe points where divergences block convergence. Even so, it is often hard to tell if and when various terms and phrases are to be taken as descriptive or normative, as literal or some ecclesiological doxological metaphor. The text (perhaps deliberately?) often shifts from a critical to an uncritical use of scripture, telling at one moment, e.g., *that according to Acts* this was said or done, and then at another moment the text states *that Jesus said or did* . . .

2. Likewise variable are statements of what the Church (capital C) is and what it is *called* to be and do. Often the text very patiently explains that there is much churchly or scholarly agreement on

some point; often it just states a point with a Bible citation in parenthesis. It takes a reader many pages to figure out what the term “the Creed” refers to (as though there is just one and everyone knows it) and even at the document’s end it is not clear how many of the early Christian creeds (Nicene, Niceno-Constantinopolitan, Chalcedonian, Athanasian) are “*the Creed*.”

3. For Disciples, a consensus/convergence document has to be accessible and resonant with people other than those trained in formal church or academic discussion. This Faith and Order document’s potential as an instructional and educational resource is high. Suggestion: Perhaps there could be a consensus/convergence document for official ecclesial consideration, as well as a separate educational resource for use in church school classes and various other training sessions.

4. Searching for exactly the best words and phrases to express the deepest mysteries and convictions of the Christian faith is a labor of Christian love. Faith and Order’s dedication over the years has offered to Disciples, and other communions, insights and challenges, advisories and opportunities for our church’s commitment to God’s calling to faithful mission and service. Yet perhaps the task of the Christian unity we seek as churches is to press for consensus/convergence regarding where we feel bound by faith to agree to disagree.

5. While the DECC member churches are united in their deep appreciation for the significant advance represented by *TCTCV* in naming

and identifying core theological understandings of the church and its mission, we recognize the urgency at this stage in our history of pursuing work on a host of issues relating to the visible unity of the church – in particular, in identifying potential structures of ecumenical discernment and decision-making in the life of the church. We also would state that every Christian community today is challenged by the fast-changing social and ecclesial context to develop more adequate structures of communion and visible unity.

Conclusion

For the DECC, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* provides a mature reflection on what it means to be the church and to live out, together, the call to mission. Around the world, Disciples churches have invested much time and many resources over many years into efforts in both multilateral and bilateral conversation and relationships. In many places, these efforts have borne much fruit that must now be harvested. Once harvested, these results must be put into practice: What *practical steps* can churches take today to make their unity in Christ more visible, and more effective, in the world?

We heartily commend this document to our churches, especially to our seminaries and theological schools, in the hope that they will be shaped by it, drawing practical consequences from it in structuring their life, their ministry, and their relationships with other Christian communities. We believe that the consensus reflected in *TCTCV* can provide a solid foundation for new steps toward

the mutual recognition and future reconciliation of other churches and communions within the one Church of Christ and for our common Christian witness and mission in the world.

July 2016

28. Canadian Council of Churches

Commission on Faith and Witness

14 October 2016

Greetings in Christ from the Commission on Faith and Witness of the Canadian Council of Churches.

This letter concerns the WCC document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, to which the WCC Faith and Order Commission has invited responses from various groups, including “national and regional councils of churches.” Our Commission discussed this document in March and November of 2015, and in April 2016. The Commission would like to share some of the key points and comments raised during our discussions. We hope that these will be useful to Faith and Order in reflecting on the good work done in this document, as well as on your Commission’s future projects.

In the first place, the Commission on Faith and Witness appreciates the immense labour that is so evident in the final text of *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, as well as the surprising amount of convergence that the text has been able to attain. Members of our Commission were able to recognize the faith of their own churches reflected in the document. Some noted that they discerned their church’s distinctive “fingerprints”

on the text, while others simply observed that it resonated with the theology of their own church.

The following are some of the themes raised during our discussion, as well as some of the comments shared.

The Church as Sacrament: Members of the Commission expressed appreciation for the idea of the Church as sacrament, while recognizing that such terminology is foreign to some Christians and that the understanding of what a sacrament is varies among Christians.

Authority in the Church: It was proposed that the concept of synodality may point a way forward in navigating this complex and controverted problem (cf. §53).

Eucharist and Communion: Appreciation was expressed for the role of eucharistic ecclesiology in bringing about communion. However, it was also noted how ironic it is that the eucharist (or Lord’s supper) is also the nexus of so many doctrinal divisions.

The Church’s Mission: A desire was expressed for a broader understanding of mission. At the same time, it was noted that at times the Church’s nature and mission were viewed in the document almost as two

distinct things, whereas it would be preferable to hold them together in order to emphasize that the Church's nature itself is to participate in the *missio Dei*.

Pentecostal Christianity: It was noted that, unfortunately, the document does not deal with Pentecostal Christians, who are the fastest growing group in Christianity today.

Prayer: It was felt that the document could deal more substantially with prayer as central to the life of the Church.

Tradition and Ecumenical Councils: Appreciation was expressed for references to the first two Ecumenical Councils, although some found it disappointing that the document did not include specific references to any later councils. It was noted that, while many Christian Churches appreciated the emphasis on Tradition in the document, others may not be comfortable with this.

We hope that our relatively brief comments will provide encouragement and helpful guidance as the World Council of Churches continues the essential work of fostering the unity of Christians.

With greetings of peace in Christ on behalf of the Commission on Faith and Witness,

Prof. Richard Schneider
Chair, Commission on Faith and Witness
Canadian Council of Churches

29. Christian Council of Norway

The Norwegian Theological Dialogue Forum

Introduction

The members of the Norwegian Theological Dialogue Forum (Norwegian Theological Dialogue Forum [*Norsk teologisk samtaleforum*] NTSF) would like to thank the Faith and Order commission for their work and for what has been achieved through recent decades within the ongoing ecumenical dialogue concerning the understanding of the church and its mission. The current document is the result of efforts and dialogue over time, and is a resource for further dialogue and for exploring ecclesiology.

Since its founding in 1983, NTSF has been a broad ecumenical forum for discussing theological questions. Since 2000, NTSF has been defined as the Norwegian ecumenical Faith and Order group, which consequently discusses the documents from Faith and Order on behalf of the board of The Christian Council of Norway. Accordingly, NTSF has discussed *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* during the course of the year.

One of the strengths of NTSF is that it has great ecumenical breadth, consisting of representatives from the following churches: The Anglican Church, The Norwegian Baptist Union, The Catholic Church in Norway, The Church of Norway, The Evangelical Lutheran Free Church, The

German speaking Evangelical Congregation in Norway, The Mission Covenant Church of Norway, The Salvation Army, The United Methodist Church, The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Norway, The Orthodox Church in Norway - Holy Nikolai Church, The Pentecostal Movement in Norway and The Seventh-day Adventist Church. The Orthodox and Pentecostal representatives were not present for the final 4–5 meetings.

We are grateful for the privilege of working with the document on the Church, and the opportunity to provide our response. First, we celebrate that the ecumenical dialogue has reached such a consensus and mutual respect, as this document testifies. We especially appreciate that the focus on ministry in the world is as central in the ecumenical dialogue, as it is in this document. Thus there are numerous strengths to this document that we will not address further.

This document is both the conclusion of decades of dialogue on the Church (helpfully summarized in the historical note) and an opening for further dialogue. Therefore, the main purpose for our response is not to provide an in-depth discussion on all aspects of the document, but rather to share some of our reflections, based on our discussions regarding the document. These reflections

are provided with the hope that they will facilitate new avenues and departures for future ecumenical dialogue.

Reflections and challenges to the ecumenical dialogue

Four main reflections surfaced during our discussions. These reflections, expressed in the following four points, comprise our response to the document. These four points are related in particular to the five main questions in the document. Nevertheless, we think that they are equally relevant to the general ecumenical dialogue.

1. How representative is the document?

We appreciate that the intention of the document and the work behind it is to be representative, and we are aware that our dialogue forum is broader than the WCC and the group that have participated in dialogue to form this document. Our response is thereby to be viewed as suggestions from a broader forum, and not meant as a critique.

At many points in the document, other formulations would have served to provide a broader representation of the churches and of their various ways of expressing ecclesiology. It is our impression that the mainline churches, with their focus on the sacraments, have influenced the document in such a way that the broader spectrum of churches (that NTSF represents) have difficulty in seeing the document as fully representative or relevant. The mainline churches in our forum have no trouble in agreeing with the content of the document, but

we see that even broader formulations would represent an even broader spectrum of the Christian church. Examples: In §2, the Acts of the Apostles are interpreted as though the church receives new members through baptism. Some churches practice the experience of becoming a new member of the church differently. In §16, some feel that the fellowship in the sacraments is overemphasized. Fellowship is important in all of the churches, but it is not necessarily bound to the sacraments. The section §§19–20, with its focus on the ordained ministry, which entails “a ministry of word, sacrament and oversight,” is similarly not common to all the churches.

The radical reformation is not mentioned, neither how traditions from this epoch contribute to a common ecclesiology. The perspectives of denominations such as The Salvation Army and the Quakers, that do not practice the traditional sacraments as such, but that do see Christ as the sacrament, and believe in material manifestations of God, are not included in the document. This is especially the case when convergence as ecumenical method is accentuated. It becomes incomplete when such a large part of the church is defined outside of the common ecclesiology, as it is presently formulated in the document. If convergence as ecumenical method is to be sustained, it is important to include the churches and ecclesiological perspectives that have not been participants at the dialogue table, either due to self-chosen absence, or due to a lack of invitation to participation. This would include both churches that are not members of WCC, emerging churches,

and marginalized parts of the church family. Further dialogue should include their perspectives if possible.

We would venture to suggest that it would be helpful to question whether the method of convergence in ecumenism is the most appropriate for our time. This document aims for a common text with common expressions. We share that aim. However, in our work, we focus on sharing the stories, perspectives and insights from each individual church tradition, and allow these to stand beside one another. In this way, all stories are represented at the table. It would be exciting to see what the document would look like, if such a method of dialogue were employed.

A large group of churches are not represented in the document, and are not a part of our committee either. Namely, the voices of the South do not seem to have been present in the dialogue process. In §7, it is regrettable that growing churches expressing new ways of being church were not present at the discussion table when the document was made, but simply mentioned in the end-product of the dialogue. When these are not present, important perspectives of ecclesiology are left out, or barely mentioned. Consequently, the insights of these large groups of churches are not a contributing voice in developing a joint ecclesiology. We find this both sad and disturbing, because both the voices of the South fractures, and the mentioned growing churches who represent alternative methods of being church will be important as a part of the church of the future. In other words, we cannot leave out the churches that are actually growing.

We appreciate the focus on the one church in its many facets. However, we miss a focus on the one church as something we are *now*, in all of its many facets, and not merely something we are to achieve in the future. The many fractures of the one church can indeed be seen as an expression of sin. However, it can also be seen as God using something negative positively, where the many expressions of being church can be seen as God establishing the one church to effectively communicate the gospel of Christ to the world in a variety of ways.

We would also like to add that the mission document, which we received at the same time as the church document, works from a very different perspective. There are differences between these documents, and we believe the mission document has qualities that the church document lacks. In summary, we believe the document lacks many perspectives of ecclesiology and is thereby not as representative as it aims to be. Churches that do not belong to the mainline churches are not visible in the document, and growing churches and churches of the South have not had the influence on the document that they should have. Including these voices would of course make the dialogue even harder and the process longer, but it is important because these voices have important stories to tell that can enhance the understanding of ecclesiology for the rest of us.

2. The Church as a sacramental fellowship

As already mentioned, the representatives of some churches do not find themselves included

in the ecclesiology described, especially when the church is described as a sacramental fellowship. Examples are §§5, 27, 40–45.

On the other hand, we find it positive that the diversity present among the churches is lifted up and acknowledged at this point of the document. We are challenged to discuss how we can embrace these differences, by acknowledging that they can be valuable in enabling the church to be woven into different cultures, through communicating with a vast diversity of people. At the same time, we acknowledge that diversity can be seen as painful and can create conflicts. We find this area requires further in-depth dialogue.

The church as *ecclesia* is also something we would like to explore further in this context – *ecclesia* as “called out.” This aspect has many facets missing in the document which could enhance our understanding of each other’s perspectives. *Ecclesia* as “called out” could unite the perspectives of the church as sacramental fellowship and church as sacrament in and for the world, and can give further depth to the continuing dialogue.

3. *The Church in and for the world*

Chapter 4 of the document has several points that could be the starting point for further ecumenical dialogue. There is a tension in this headline that is unresolved, also in the lives of Norwegian churches. It involves letting more voices be heard, especially voices from the margins. It also involves recognizing the unity in the Spirit, and that all these voices in all their diversity

relate to and express the same God and a relevant perspective of ecclesiology.

The church is a part of a pluralistic world; how does this shape the church and ministry in the world? Moral questions are a big challenge to the entire church, where different answers and perspectives concerning these issues exist side by side. How can churches embrace the differences in answers, and how can churches find models of discourse and wise counsel for themselves and for society at large? How can the church in the best way possible be a voice for the voiceless in a world that bears so many wounds? At this point, it is vital that the church describe itself accurately. The church can never be a *we*, who are going to help *them* (the poor). The poor, voiceless, and marginalized are a part of the church; they are a part of the *we* of the church. This should be made much clearer in the document. It is quite clear in the mission document, and it would be very fruitful for further dialogue to hold these two documents together.

An additional question was raised as to why the poor are mentioned here, and not in the chapter on sacraments? The perspective on the poor is not just a diaconal one; it is also a question of fellowship. This question confirms that the description of the church as sacramental is too narrow. The poor are not merely recipients of grace; they are givers as well.

At this point in the document, some aspects of the mission document would provide other perspectives, for instance a more positive view of the world.

4. *Lack of eschatological perspectives*

To some of our committee members, the lack of eschatological perspectives in the document is troubling. The church as a symbol of the future, the kingdom of God, eternal life, with all that is included in that term, is not as present in the document as it should have been. The *parousia* is not mentioned, and it should be emphasized that it is God that is the one acting, through the church. The Church as a community of hope could be explored further. The document is written for the present Church and not for the eternal Church, which makes eschatological aspects vague and almost absent.

The churches have different views on how important this perspective is, but because it is of great importance to some, it should have been included within such a large work on ecclesiology. Some churches emphasize the church as a community of God's children that awaits an eternity with him. Other churches emphasize that the church is a community in struggle for a better and more just world, so that when the church and God together achieve their aims, the new creation will include a just world for all. In other words, eschatological aspects involve the church as both called out of and into the world. There are other perspectives as well that connect ecclesiology and eschatology, and in future dialogue these connections should be expressed for further exploration.

At the close of our response, we would like to emphasize that NTSF is a dialogue forum. This implies that those who have participated in the process do not necessarily agree on all the points

mentioned in our response, nor that the response, as a whole, is ratified by their churches. We hope that ongoing ecumenical discussion of the nature of the church will be furthered by our reflections and questions. Finally, we pray for the Church and for success for the ongoing ecumenical dialogue.

Christian Council of Norway
Knut Refsdal
General Secretary

RESPONSES FROM ECUMENICAL
ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS

SECTION 3

30. Focolare Movement

(Translated from the Italian)

Premise

In response to the request expressed in the introduction of the document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, we offer the following contribution to the process of reception of this significant convergence text. By way of introduction, we offer a brief presentation of our ecumenical experience.

The Focolare Movement founded in 1943 by Chiara Lubich seeks the unity of all Christians in Christ in the light of the mystery of the Holy Trinity (cf. John 17:21), and the realization of fraternity between individuals and peoples, cultures and religions, in order to arrive at the goal of a united world.

Our ecumenical experience, which dates back to 1961, involves Christians, lay people, ordained ministers and church leaders, from over 350 churches. A relationship of communion and collaboration has also begun with ecclesial movements and communities especially as part of the ecumenical initiative “Together for Europe.”¹ This builds bridges between the churches and is engaged in promoting a common witness within society, something of special urgency in today’s multicultural and multi-religious context and in the face of current challenges regarding peace and justice.

1. Cf. <http://together4europe.org>

Christians from different churches, fully faithful to their own communities, have been part of the Focolare Movement since the 1960s. Living the same ideal of unity, they experience a profound communion in Christ and a mutual exchange of gifts among their respective churches. In this way, on the basis of the *sequela Christi*, their life in the Spirit and their love for one another, they already live in a sense as *one people* that gives a common witness of their life together in Christ. In different ways they commit themselves to renewing human society at all levels in the light of the gospel.

The *spirituality of unity* or *spirituality of communion*, which lies at the base of this experience, has been illustrated on different occasions by Chiara Lubich. Because of its ecumenical significance she was also invited to share it at the World Council of Churches.² Here we emphasize the cornerstones of this spirituality, centred around the Testament of Jesus for unity (especially John 17:21). Briefly they are: the commitment to put into practice the Word of God in daily life as a reply to his love

2. We are referring in particular to the talk “Towards a Spirituality of unity” that Chiara Lubich presented to the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey on 26 October 2002, and to her talk on “Unity and Jesus Crucified and Forsaken: Foundations for a Spirituality of Communion” given at the World Council of Churches on 28 October 2002. Cf. C. Lubich, *Living Dialogue* (London: New City, 2009), 18–34, 52–69. Earlier visits to the World Council of Churches headquarters in Geneva took place in 1967 and in 1982.

(cf. Matt. 7:21-27); the observance of the New Commandment of Jesus (cf. John 13:34) which brings us to love not just the other as myself, but the church of the other as my own; Jesus crucified and forsaken (cf. Mark 15:34; Matt. 27:46) as the key to a “kenotic” lifestyle and as a source of the Spirit who opens the way to unity; the experience of the living presence of Christ among those who are united in his name (cf. Matt. 18:20) as a mature fruit of such love that is expressed in a unity that encompasses plurality and diversity and as such mirrors the mystery of the Holy Trinity.

The people who, living this spirit, are part of the Focolare Movement contribute to renewal within their respective churches and at the same time give rise to a *dialogue of life* that encourages the development of other forms of relationship among the churches: in prayer life, practical sharing and doctrinal understanding.

At the same time we are committed to building bridges also with the followers of other religions, with people who have non-religious convictions and with representatives of different cultural environments.

It is in the light of this experience that we seek to offer our contribution to the reception of the document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, replying in particular to the last question indicated in the Introduction, which asks: What aspects of the life of the Church call for further discussion and what advice could you offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

1. Appraisal and points of special importance

First of all we would like to express our joy and our heartfelt appreciation for the enormous work, patience and great dedication that has permitted the completion of the document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. This text opens up interesting pathways for the ecumenical pilgrimage of the 21st century. We think that the method followed and its contents will be of great help on the road towards full and visible communion, and for the witness and service we as Christians are called to give to humanity today.

We appreciate in a special way and would like to draw attention to:

0.1. *The method* which aims at elaborating, using as its departure point scripture and the Tradition of the Church, an ecclesiological vision that could be widely shared, coherent but not uniform, respecting legitimate diversity, but which is at the same time attentive to indicating the divergent points that require further study.

0.2. The focus on God’s plan, but also on the contemporary world, stimulating all the churches to become aware of the *urgency of the visible unity* of Christians.

0.3. The underlying theological perspective that, putting the accent on the kingdom of God inaugurated by Jesus for the salvific transformation of the world, presents the Church as a sign and instrument at the service for the *great plan of God* (“*economy*”), the *divine mission* that aims at

reaching every person and every expression of social life.

0.4. The understanding of the *Church as communion (koinonia)* which finds its source and its supreme model in the mystery of the Holy Trinity and has an immediate and strong *anthropological relevance*.³ Thanks to this it is easier to see how the Church is placed at the service of the person, of the whole humanity and of the entire creation.

0.5. The underlining of the *kenosis of Christ as a paradigm of ecclesial life and of the ecumenical journey*, in particular as an indispensable reference point for an authentic exercise of ministry (cf. §49).

0.6. The accent placed on the *co-responsibility of all the baptized* and on the common priesthood, together with the attention dedicated to the specific role of ministry, conceived (in line with the document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* of 1982) in its triple dimensions: personal, collegial, communitarian.

0.7. The invitation extended to the churches *to live as a people on a journey*. This implies constant conversion and renewal (*ecclesia semper reformanda*).

0.8. The understanding that unity is above all a gift of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit and

3. Cf. the reference to man and woman “created in God’s image (cf. Gen. 1:26-27), so bearing an inherent capacity for communion (in Greek *koinonia*) with God and with one another” and to communion as the “gift that God calls the Church to offer to a wounded and divided humanity” (§1).

therefore the choice of underlining the *one Church of Christ*, rather than a multiplicity of churches.

We fully share these ecclesiological perspectives in which we recognize decisive orientations for the life and mission of the Church in the world today. We find also valuable keys for understanding how to face the divergences that still exist, in such a way as to reach, in our ecumenical journey, an increasingly shared vision of the Church.

1. Suggestions for further study

While appreciating the proper attention given to faith, to the sacraments and to ministry as constitutive elements of the Church and spheres in which to increase communion, we suggest highlighting in an even stronger way:

1.1. *The Word of God* together with faith. The Word is mentioned in different points of the document (for example, §§14, 16, 19, 20, 31), but we believe it deserves to be emphasized even more as a constitutive element of the Church (*creatura verbi*).

It would seem important to us, in this context, that *the Word is not only proclaimed and preached* (cf. for example, §31), *but also lived* by each person and by the community as a whole (cf. the emphasis on “words and facts” in §§5 and 59, witness to the Word of God at §19 and the allusion to Mary as the model of the Church at §15). Here we are dealing with a dimension that we consider decisive for the renewal of the churches and for the journey towards visible unity, as hoped for in the document.

1.2. *Charisms and the charismatic dimension of the Church.* Charisms are also mentioned in diverse points (for example, in §§16, 18, 21, 28), but it is worth bringing more light to bear, in faithfulness to the biblical data, that they are a constitutive dimension of the local and universal Church, together with a ministerial and institutional element.⁴ The charismatic dimension is a decisive factor for a constant renewal of the churches and an ever new realization of the mission of God and the Church in the bosom of humanity. Many movements born of the Spirit, in our time as in the past, have energized church life and the spread of the gospel. In this sense the definition of the local church could be made more complete, for example in §31 and maybe also in some way in chapter 3.B.

1.3. We think that the theme of the *mission of the Church in the world* (chapter 4) should be developed more. For a more integrated and clear vision, the consequences could be drawn from the ecclesiological framework developed in the preceding chapters.⁵

4. In this context we think it is significant that John Paul II on some occasions did not hesitate to affirm that the institutional and charismatic dimensions are “co-essential” for the life of the Church. Cf. Speech of The Holy Father Pope John Paul II Meeting with Ecclesial Movements and New Communities, 30 May 1998. http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1998/may/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19980530_riflessioni.html

5. Cf., for example, chapter 1: “Communion, whose source is the very life of the Holy Trinity, is both the gift by which the Church lives and, at the same time, the gift that God calls the Church to offer to a wounded and divided humanity in hope of reconciliation and healing” (§1); chapter 2: “As a divinely established communion, the Church . . . is by its very nature

Individual fields of commitment are indicated that are extremely important and space is justifiably given to the phenomenon of religious pluralism and to serious ethical questions. In our opinion, however, a unifying vision, which is evident in a significant way in other parts of the document, does not emerge sufficiently here: the Church as a sign and instrument of communion, at the service of God’s plan, who wants to communicate his life to humanity, also in the “secular” dimensions such as economy, politics and so on (the “new *areopagi*”). The proclamation of the gospel, living the Word of God and the celebration of the sacraments aim at putting people in communion not only with God but also with *each other*, making them “new” creatures, called to live and promote at all levels communitarian relationships as the inauguration of a fuller and truer sociality. Similarly, this theme could be developed so as to indicate how the Christian presence in society is not limited just to *diakonia*, to service, to overcoming the innumerable forms of poverty and of exclusion, to promoting peace, justice and the care of creation, but also (almost by an osmosis process) that it introduces into society the potential for communion, mutuality and sharing that could animate and renew all the dimensions of everyday living. This could be

missionary, called and sent to witness in its own life to that communion which God intends for all humanity and for all creation in the kingdom” (§13); “The Holy Spirit enlivens and equips the Church to play its role in proclaiming and bringing about that general transformation for which all creation groans (cf. Rom. 8:22-23)” (§21); “The Church, embodying in its own life the mystery of salvation and the transfiguration of humanity, participates in the mission of Christ to reconcile all things to God and to one another through Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18-21; Rom. 8:18-25)” (§26).

like divine “leaven,” that, responding to the many “whys” of humanity today, makes it grow towards a “new heaven and a new earth.”⁶

2. A possible contribution from the current experience of the Focolare Movement

We are convinced that, in the current stage of the ecumenical pilgrimage,⁷ it is increasingly necessary, as the document underlines,⁸ to have a dialogue that *renews the Churches* and in a certain sense, *transforms them*, bringing them to root their life more profoundly in the gospel of Jesus and in his paschal mystery. We are convinced that the specific gift of each church could be realized more fully in practice and bear greater fruit, inasmuch as they are renewed by the gospel; and, guided by the Spirit, they will have the courage to escape any kind of self-absorption and defensiveness. In this way we can walk, as the disciples of Emmaus did, with the crucified and risen Christ and face together the questions that today trouble Christian communities and the whole of humanity. We are sure that Jesus among us will give us a more

6. We remember here the vision of early Christianity as expressed for example in the Epistle to Diognetus (6,1: Christians are like the “soul of the world”) or in Augustine of Hippo (the Church as an expression of a “reconciled world”) cf. *Sermones* 96, 7, 9, *PL* 38, 588, but also the strong image that we find in Ezek. 47, that of the “waters” coming out of the Temple, healing and fertilizing all the earth, a promise of the Spirit fulfilled at Pentecost.

7. Cf. *Join the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace*, Message of the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Busan, South Korea, 8 November 2013.

8. Cf. Introduction; and italic section following §24: “Could this be the time for a new approach?”

profound understanding of scripture, will inflame our hearts and open us up a new future.

We hope that some useful suggestions may be drawn from our spirituality, its culture of unity and from our experience so as to contribute in some way to this journey. In particular:

2.1. *The “dialogue of life.”* Relations among individual Christians and the churches can have ever more openness and mutual understanding within an increasingly shared evangelical style of life, based on following Christ together, the life of the Spirit and the commitment to putting the Word of God into practice, and in particular the new commandment of mutual love (cf. John 15:12-13). This will also bear fruit within various forms of dialogue, including theological dialogue.⁹ Realizing the many things we agree upon and which could be shared and witnessed to together, we could give a greater witness to being “already” the one Church of Christ without letting ourselves be paralyzed by the “not yet” of full communion among the churches and by things that remain still to be clarified. We are convinced that this kind of “ecumenical lifestyle”¹⁰ could prepare the way for the Risen Lord – in his time and through the steps that he has foreseen – to give us, even earlier than we think, the gift of full visible unity.

9. In this context the “five ecumenical imperatives” put forward in chapter 6 of the document *From conflict to communion* of the Lutheran-Catholic Commission on Unity (2013) could be of light.

10. Expression coined by Rev. Philip Potter during Chiara Lubich’s visit to the World Council of Churches in 1982.

2.2. The spirituality of unity, as Chiara Lubich has illustrated on various occasions at the World Council of Churches¹¹ and elsewhere, with the aim of facilitating an ever-greater communion and sharing, underlines some *elements* inherent to a specific “*art*” of unity or of *koinonia*. Inspired by the Word of God, it has the potential of undergirding and strengthening the “consensus method”¹² in the search for shared decisions: love everyone (cf. Matt. 5:45); take the initiative (cf. Rom. 5:6, 8); see Jesus in the other person (cf. Matt. 25:40); love your neighbour as yourself (cf. Matt. 22:39; Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14) and therefore love the Church of the other Christian as your own); love your enemies (cf. Matt. 5:44); serve (cf. Mark 10:45; John 13:14-15). According to our experience these and other gospel attitudes are ideal for breaking down barriers, overcoming prejudices, creating new openings and bringing about a mutual welcome, to the point of constantly building relationships of trinitarian *koinonia*.

2.3. On the basis of this kind of commitment to live mutual love, it is possible to experience the truth and life-giving nature of Jesus’ promise:

11. Cf. C. Lubich, *Living dialogue*, 18–34, address to the Second European Ecumenical Assembly, Graz, Austria 23 June 1997 in C. Lubich, *Essential Writings* (London, New City Press, 2007), 325–33; C. Lubich, *A spirituality of Unity within Diversity*, in *Searching for Christian Unity* (New City Press, Hyde Park New York, 2007), 190–203.

12. Cf. Consensus procedures in the Guidelines for the conduct of meetings of the World Council of Churches, 14 February 2006.

“Where two or more are gathered together in my name, I am among them” (Matt. 18:20). In fact, in ecumenical circles, over the last 50 years, we have experienced *the living presence of the Risen Lord* among his disciples united in his love – between an Anglican and a Catholic, between a Reformed Church Christian and an Orthodox Christian, etc. His presence embraces and pervades their life and work, among them and ultimately among the churches, as a powerful cement of union to the point of saying: “If Christ has united us, who can separate us from him and from each other?”¹³

2.4. An indispensable key for such an experience of *koinonia*, that prepares the way for full and visible communion in the Church of Christ, is love for Jesus crucified and forsaken (cf. Mark 15:34; Matt. 27:46). It is he who has assumed, redeemed and bridged every division and disunity; and it is through faith in him and the love that comes from this that we are able to observe, even among

13. Cf. Gal 3:28: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” At an ecumenical meeting of bishops, friends of the Focolare Movement (Rocca di Papa, Rome, 26 November 2003), Chiara Lubich explained the experience of the Risen Christ among his disciples in this way: “Jesus in our midst gives life to his mystical body; with him in our midst we became ‘living cells’ of this body In the Catholic Church and other churches and among the members of the different churches, fragments of Christianity, united in the name of Jesus, are formed and are forming, while awaiting the final bond of unity, the Eucharist, when God wills” (*Voi siete tutti uno in Cristo Gesù – la presenza di Cristo in mezzo ai suoi e il dialogo della vita*, “Gen’s – rivista di vita ecclesiale” 35 [2005/1] pp. 6–11).

churches still divided, that “rule of community” which the apostle Paul expressed thus: “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who . . . emptied himself, taking the form of a slave . . . he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:3-8). The experience of the Focolare Movement has shown that we have to be willing to live this *kenosis* if we want to go beyond obstacles and arrive at unity.¹⁴ It is not by chance that the

14. Cf. Chiara Lubich, *Voi siete tutti uno*, 11: “You cannot, in fact, enter the soul of a person to understand it, if your spirit is rich with a worry, or a prejudice, or a thought . . . whatever. Love and mutual love demand the highest poverty of spirit; only with this is it possible to achieve unity. Now, only Jesus forsaken who lost everything . . . can teach you to detach yourself from everything, everything, everything. This maximum outer detachment, but above all inner, makes everyone able to understand others and be open to receive the gifts that others bring.”

Cf. also the talk at the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey in C. Lubich, *Living Dialogue*, 31–32: “In our experience, an ecumenical spirituality will be fruitful in the measure that those who dedicate themselves to it see in Jesus crucified and forsaken, who re-abandoned himself to the Father, the key to recomposing unity with God and with one another.” It is necessary to have hearts “deeply touched by him, . . . [that] do not flee from him, but love him and find in him the light and strength not to remain in the traumas and in the rifts caused by division, but always to go beyond them.” In this sense, Chiara Lubich said she was convinced that Jesus forsaken is “the star’ of the ecumenical journey.”

The then General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, Konrad Raiser, during Chiara Lubich’s visit there on 28 October 2002, remembered that already the message of the World Conference of the nascent ecumenical movement in Stockholm in 1925 had expressed a similar idea that “the closer we come to the cross of Christ, the closer we come to

Faith and Order Commission, at the 5th World Congress in 1993, defined the crucified Lord as “the pattern and patron of reconciliation which leads to *koinonia*.”¹⁵

2.5. In the context of a growing convergence on ecclesiology,¹⁶ centred particularly on *koinonia* as the Church’s gift and vocation (for example, §37),

one another.” (Cf. *Message §14, in The Stockholm Conference 1925. The Office Report of the Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work held in Stockholm, 19–30 August, 1925*, ed. G.K.A. Bell [Oxford University Press, London, 1926], 710–16.) “Our search for unity,” continued Raiser, “is not an effort to construct an edifice, but rather a process of divesting, of emptying ourselves of all that keeps us separate from Christ and from one another.” In C. Lubich, *Living Dialogue*, 70. Chiara Lubich and Konrad Raiser affirmed on the same day, in a joint message addressed to “ecumenical partners committed to the unity of the Churches”: “As churches come together to manifest a sincerely sought unity, attitudes towards God and to each other must be changed. They are called to *metanoia* and *kenosis* as the way to practise genuine penitence and to live authentic humility.” <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/general-secretary/joint-declarations/spirituality-of-unity>

15. World Council of Churches, Fifth World Conference of Faith and Order, in *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia*, Faith and Order Paper No. 166, ed. T. Best & G. Gassmann (World Council of Churches Publications: Geneva, 1994), 233.

16. Cf. the definition of the local church generally shared by Christians as quoted in §31: “a community of baptized believers in which the word of God is preached, the apostolic faith confessed, the sacraments are celebrated, the redemptive work of Christ for the world is witnessed to, and a ministry of *episkopé* exercised by bishops or other ministers in serving the community. (Cf. the report of the Joint Working Group of the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, *The Church: Local and Universal* §15, in *Growth in Agreement II*, 866. ‘Local’ should not be confused with ‘denominational’ in this description).”

it would be interesting to see how, on the basis of a spirituality of communion, institutional structures (especially regarding personal authority and the practice of conciliar decision-making) and a common life in Christ can be mutually strengthening. In fact, in our experience, in a living communion according to the trinitarian model, the various forms of authority (personal, collegial and communal) reinforce each other and converge with each other. We hope that this can cast greater light on the relationships between churches and on the synergy that exists between the different forms of authority, including the exercise of the Petrine ministry.

In summary, we think it fundamental, as it is increasingly emerging within the World Council of Churches,¹⁷ that the way towards a common vision of the Church be based upon an *ecumenical spirituality* and therefore on a *life commitment* that aims at sealing, existentially too, what has already been given to us in Christ, through his Word and the sacraments. We believe that by focusing our life in Christ, crucified and risen, it will be possible, despite the barriers that still exist, to grow in an *experience of koinonia* that will in time arrive at full visible unity. Deepening the implications

17. In our day we are increasingly aware of the need for the ecumenical movement to be grounded in spirituality. Cf. also Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, Appendix B *Be renewed in the Spirit. The Spiritual Roots of Ecumenism* (Geneva-Rome, 2013), 104–10. Cf. Konrad Raiser “Your dedication to the spirituality of unity has been extremely important in maintaining and rekindling the commitment to the unity that Christ wills for his Church.” in C. Lubich, *Living dialogue*, 46.

of this kind of spirituality, possibly with a specific study project, could be an important avenue of research in the “ecumenical pilgrimage” towards full communion.

With a renewed gratitude, we express our best wishes for the continuing journey and we assure not only our prayers, but also the active commitment of the Focolare Movement to strengthen further the bonds of communion between all Christians, to witness together and to foster fraternity between persons and peoples, religions and cultures and thus contribute to a world that is more just, ecologically sustainable and has a lasting peace.

Dr Maria Voce, President of the Focolare
Movement

Rev. Jesús Moran, Co-President of the Focolare
Movement

in collaboration with:

Mirvet Kelly, Syrian Orthodox Church

Rev. Dr Callan Slipper, Church of England

Rev. Prof. Stefan Tobler, Evangelical-Lutheran
Church

Dr Joan Patricia Back, Roman Catholic Church

Rev. Dr Hubertus Blaumeiser, Roman Catholic
Church

31. Response by Mr Peter H. Rempel

Preface

The fundamental work of the denomination [is] theological identity formation.

—James Nieman¹

The theological dimensions of Christian denominational identity are best appreciated in terms of their relation to the ecumenical future.

—Steven R. Harmon²

Mennonite Church Canada (henceforth MC Canada), the denomination in which the author of this appraisal is a member and holds a leadership role as moderator of one of its area churches and as member of its General Board, is currently engaging in two major discernment processes, both with significant ecclesiological assumptions and implications for the unity and theological identity of the denomination. The “Future Directions” process is attempting to discern roles to its national and regional levels. “Becoming a Faithful Church” is guiding the denomination in its discernment

1. James Nieman, *Church, Identity and Change: Theology and Denominational Structures in Unsettled Times*, (Eerdmans, 2005), 635.

2. “Free Church Theology, the Pilgrim Church, and the Ecumenical Future,” in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 49.3 (Summer 2014), 420.

of God’s will for the denomination’s position on issues of sexuality.

Thus, with a view toward the ecumenical future, it would be very timely and potentially beneficial for MC Canada to receive and study the “synthesis of ecumenical dialogue on ecclesiological themes” provided in *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* produced and circulated by the World Council of Churches (WCC). This document can serve MC Canada in the same ways it is intended to serve the member churches of the WCC, namely (1) “to provide [it with] a synthesis of ecumenical dialogue about important ecclesiological themes”; (2) “to appraise the results of this dialogue”; and (3) “to reflect upon [its] own understanding of the Lord’s will so as to grow towards greater unity” (Introduction, p. 2).

An appraisal of this document from a perspective formed within a denomination in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition, though not a member church in the WCC, might also be informative and stimulating to other churches.

This appraisal is a personal one by someone with lifelong participation and broad observation in MC Canada. It is not an official response on behalf of the denomination. At most it surmises the prevailing views of MC Canada’s membership and Mennonites generally, based on familiarity with the history and membership of denomination.

Overall the document accords in general and in many specific points with a Mennonite perspective on the Church. Rather than comment affirmatively repeatedly on the many points in the document, most comments will focus on points which have a special resonance with a Mennonite perspective and those which differ from this perspective.

Henceforth the comments are placed under the headings used in the document and the numbers refer to the paragraphs in the document.

Introduction

It is notable that the document begins with a focus on one of the four marks of the Church: oneness or unity and addresses the other marks of the church (catholicity, holiness and apostolicity) secondarily and through the prism of unity.

In the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition, pursuing and ensuring the holiness or purity of the Church has often been a higher priority than maintaining unity – with the consequence that the unity of the Church has been neglected. On the other hand, churches which sought to dominate their society often imposed “unity” through discrimination, vilification, coercion, and persecution, thereby sacrificing the holiness of the Church to violence.

Obviously the ecumenical movement and the present document reject the imposition of unity upon societies and individuals, but perhaps starting this important ecumenical document on the basis of the four classic marks of the church, rather than only one, would be more appropriate and consensus-forming for a convergence

document pointing “toward a common vision” of the Church. The remaining marks are discussed later in the document but should be included and integrated in its Introduction.

Chapter I - God’s Mission and the Unity of the Church

A: The Church in the Design of God (§§1–4)

The account of God’s will for creation and for the role of the Church accords very well with current Mennonite theology, especially the summary of Jesus’ desire for the Church, which highlights several concepts treasured by Mennonites, namely that it be a *community of witness, worship and discipleship* (§2).

B: The Mission of the Church in History (§§5–7)

The initiators of the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement in the 16th century were very intentional and active in proclaiming the gospel and forming new communities within a Christendom which they considered corrupt. Their theology also had implications for witness beyond Christendom which they hinted at but could not and did not implement. Not until 300 hundred years after the start of their movement did Mennonites begin to engage in cross-cultural mission, initially on the coattails of Christians from other denominations but eventually through their own mission agencies.

Mennonites have also erred in their mission efforts by not according due respect for the

cultures and values of the people to whom they sent their missionaries. But also along with other denominations, Mennonites have learned and are now engaged in fruitful and mutually respectful relationships with the growing number of Mennonites and believers of other faiths around the world. In particular Mennonites need “to deepen their reflection about the relation between the proclamation that Jesus is the one and only Savior of the world . . . and the claims of other faiths” (§7).

C: The Importance of Unity (§§8–10)

At the outset of the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement during the Reformation era, Anabaptist believers rejected the claims of the main churches to be Christian, whether Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican or Orthodox, often with extremely harsh attitudes and words. And in turn these churches regarded the Anabaptist conventicles and the Mennonite churches which emerged from them to be heretical sects. Consequently these churches, in concert with the states in which they were dominant, persecuted the Anabaptists with executions, expropriations and exile. Eventually they shifted to milder forms of discrimination and restrictions.

Since then the various Mennonite denominations have taken each of the mentioned approaches toward recognizing the presence of the marks of the Church in other denominations: identifying the Church exclusively with their church; acknowledging a real but incomplete presence of these elements (that is, lacking the conviction of non-violence); joining in

various covenants (for example, with “evangelical churches” in mission or with other “peace churches” in advocacy). At this time probably most members of MC Canada “believe that the Church of Christ is present in all communities that present a convincing claim to be Christian” and are willing to collaborate with a wide range of Christians in various causes.

Chapter II - The Church of the Triune God

A. Discerning God’s Will for the Church (§§11–12)

The assertion that “the same Holy Spirit who guided the earliest communities in producing the inspired Biblical text continues, from generation to generation, to guide later followers of Jesus as they strive to be faithful to the Gospel” is very pertinent and valuable to offset the claim that the Bible alone is authoritative. In actuality, this latter claim is usually accompanied by the unacknowledged presumption that one’s own particular interpretation of the Biblical text is the only true one. Thus it is appropriate to draw upon “insights from the Tradition” as well as upon the “biblical witness” (§12).

However it should be emphasized that Tradition is to be a living dynamic because the Holy Spirit *continues* to guide the followers of Jesus. Therefore the current Tradition of the Church as well as any church community can be superseded by the ongoing guidance of the Holy Spirit. Too often a frozen Tradition has been exalted and presented as authoritative.

B. The Church of the Triune God as Koinonia

The Initiative of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (§§13–16)

The assertions that “the Church belongs to God” and is “sent to witness in its own life to that communion which God intends for all humanity” (§13) could be strengthened by noting here that the communion within the triune God forms the model of communion and manifests the will of God for the Church and humanity. This point is made in §24.

The listing of the several New Testament episodes as demonstration of *koinonia* (§14) indicates that communion among church communities is not only or not primarily mutual recognition of the way in which they conduct the sacraments or ordinances of the Church. Mennonites have enjoyed various forms and levels of communion with other Christians despite different tenets of belief or understandings of the sacraments.

The juxtaposition of the statements that “human beings come to saving faith, and by sacramental means, are incorporated into the body of Christ” and that “believers are united with Jesus Christ” implies that believers, that is persons who comprehend and accede to faith and beliefs, form the Church, the body of Christ. This would be compatible with the Anabaptist-Mennonite conviction that adult believers join the Church through baptism as well as with the majority belief that infants can come to a saving faith through the faith of their parents and with the practice of “incorporating” infants into the Church through

baptism. But here and elsewhere in this document Christians generally, and members of the Church specifically, are referred to or assumed to be believers and disciples (cf. §§18, 19, 21, 23), thus signaling (intentionally?) a convergence with Mennonite theology.

The description of Mary as a model for the Church and the individual Christian (§15) is helpful to Mennonites who have avoided honoring Mary out of a reaction to the exaltation of Mary they critique in other church communities. But giving her the title “Mother of God” is unfamiliar to Mennonites.

The Prophetic, Priestly and Royal People of God (§§17–20)

Statements such as “every Christian receives gifts of the Holy Spirit,” “Christians are called to live out their discipleship” (§18), and “all members of the body, ordained and lay, are interrelated members of God’s priestly people” align well with Mennonite beliefs.

Mennonites have borrowed the assertion that the Church is a “priesthood of all believers” but, in their reaction to sacramentalism and their fear of the exclusive power of priests, have minimized the “priestliness” of the members of their church communities. The description of the interdependence of lay and ordained members (§19) is a helpful reminder.

In the matter of who is competent to make final decisions for the community (§20), Mennonites usually place the ultimate authority with the entire membership of their churches. Their main

deliberative assemblies at the global, national and regional level include lay members and ordained ministers with every member having the right to speak and each member having one vote. Ordained ministers, while having influence by virtue of their leadership abilities and roles, are a minority in comparison to the lay members.

In the larger Mennonite denominations, lay members also form the majority on the senior governing councils or boards at the national, regional and local levels. At the congregational level the decisions are made or reviewed by assemblies of the members.

On many matters the ordained ministers lead and guide their local church in implementing the theological and ecclesiological decisions of their denomination but are accountable primarily to the lay membership of their congregation.

In the more conservative and smaller Mennonite denominations, the ministers and bishops form the senior governing council, but they too are accountable to the lay membership and can be removed from office or lose their membership if their leadership is unsatisfactory to the members of the denomination.

The difference between the insistence by Mennonites and other church communities on democratic, and hence lay-dominated, decision-making in the Church and the exclusion or limitation of laity from formal decision-making in other churches may well be the most significant obstacle to full unity, even after differences over doctrinal issues are resolved. (See more at §52.)

Body of Christ and Temple and Holy Spirit
(§21)

Here as in §14 it is asserted that human beings become members of the body of Christ by faith *and also* through rites or sacraments of initiation. It is not clear whether these two ways are distinct, complementary or successive, or equally sufficient on their own. From a Mennonite perspective they are distinct, and faith by the person precedes the rite or sacrament. Notably the calling placed upon “believers” in the document seemingly consists of expectations of an adult rather than upon infants and children, even if they have become members of the Church.

Generally, the document mentions children only twice – more or less in passing – and devotes very little, if any, explicit commentary on the relationship of the Church to children. This is surprising because church communities, whether they baptize infants or only adult believers, have children in their communities. Surely this concern warrants some attempt at articulating converging and diverging beliefs in an ecumenical convergence document.

The One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church
(§§22–24)

As noted above in the comments on the Introduction, these paragraphs which outline all four of the attributes of the Church would be more appropriate for the introduction to the whole document rather than left until the second third of the document.

Recently Mennonite churches have emphasized that the Church is “missional,” using a term whose meaning is equal to the literal meaning of “apostolic.” This raises the question why the description of the “apostolicity” of the Church here emphasizes the link of the Church to the apostles and the reference to the mission of the Church is secondary.

Churches do indeed have different convictions about whether and which aspects of the Church’s order were instituted by Christ as permanent (§24). A good place to begin dialogue on these differences would be for churches that claim continuity with permanent orders to admit that they have made changes, and for churches that call for change to admit that they regard some aspects as permanent.

C. The Church as Sign and Servant of God’s Design for the World (§§25–27)

The overview of God’s design “to gather humanity and all creation into communion under the Lordship of Christ” and of the mission of the Church (§§25–26) accords well with Mennonite missiology. Also the parallel missiological assertions – that God wills that all people be saved, that God reaches out to those who are not members of the Church, that elements of truth and goodness can be found among those of other religions or no religion, and that the Church’s mission remains that of inviting everyone to know and love Jesus Christ – are helpful to Mennonites who uphold the assertion of God’s universal will and presence but refrain from inviting others to know Christ,

and also to those who give priority to inviting others to know Christ while overlooking or denying the universal presence of God.

Mennonites do not refer to the “church as sacrament,” but in actuality probably regard it as such in accordance with the definition offered, that is, “an effective sign and means of the communion of human beings with one another through their communion in the Triune God” (§27), even though they deny the “sacramentality” of the sacraments, preferring to consider these rites to be “ordinances” instead.

Could Jesus’s statement “This is my body broken for you” be understood as referring to the Church as well as to his physical body? The Church has indeed been broken – with God’s permission – into many parts by culture, theology, language, nationality, personality, etc., so that salvation is accessible to all manner and types of people and within the limits of human knowledge and understanding (cf. §§28, 30). Then we are grateful that it was broken even as we look forward to the day when the broken Body of Christ will be re-assembled; indeed we strive toward this.

D. Communion in Unity and Diversity (§§28–30)

“Legitimate diversity” (§28) is a helpful concept for balancing diversity and unity, especially if it is coupled with a “genuine unity,” that is, a unity limited to essentials and not imposed (§30). Mennonites have been inclined to consider their expressions of the Gospel to be the only authentic ones and then impose them on their fellow

members or judge other Christians by them. They then separate if they are not able to impose their view.

E. Communion of Local Churches (§§31–32)

The relationship between local and universal Church

The “appropriate relation between the various levels of life of a fully united Church and what specific ministries of leadership are needed to serve and foster those relations” is currently under review in Mennonite Church Canada. A recent proposal for re-structuring the denomination states that “the congregation is the foundational unit of the church” and considers the regional and national levels of the denomination to be primarily servants and instruments of the member congregations.

Several statements in this document which speak of the “communion of local churches” provide a helpful balance to such congregationalism:

- The local church “is wholly Church, but not the whole Church”
- “The universal Church is the communion of all local churches . . .”
- “It is not merely the sum, federation or juxtaposition of local churches, but all of them together are the same Church present and acting in this world” (§31)
- “This very presence of Christ impels the local church to be in communion with the universal Church.”

As MC Canada seeks to clarify this relationship internally, it should also be attentive to the understandings and dialogues of and between other churches as cited in footnote 18.

As stated, the role of bishop (*episkopé*) merits special attention and conversation (§32). Whereas some smaller Mennonite denominations have continued under the leadership of bishops, MC Canada and other larger Mennonite denominations have discontinued this office, replacing it with a governance structures at the regional and national level analogous to secular corporations: a board overseeing an executive director (or executive minister). At both levels there are “area church ministers” or “directors of ministerial leadership” who tend to the policy, pastoral and procedural concerns related to pastors and ministers, especially of local congregations. Often they work with a committee, but they are subordinate to the executive director of the regional or national church.

It would seem timely for MC Canada to recover the office of bishop or overseer for the senior leadership role, especially as heirs to the Anabaptists who stressed a restitution of the early church rather than conformity to the world (for example, corporate structures). The nature and title of its leadership should have primarily an ecclesial rather than corporate quality. The re-conceptualizing and re-designating of its leadership as overseers or bishops would also facilitate relationships and dialogue with other church communities.

Chapter III - The Church Growing in Communion

A. Already but Not Yet (§§33–36)

With reference to the relation between the Church's holiness and human sin, see comments above on the Church as the "body of Christ broken for you" (§§25–27).

The consistent reference to "believers" as forming the communion which is the Church (§§34, 36), and the comprehensive list of their (adult) practices which are signs of their communion, raises the question of how children, whether baptized or not, relate to the Church. Again the assumption seems to be that believers are adults. Is there an ecumenical convergence toward regarding the "Church" to be a "Believers Church?" Mennonites would welcome this.

B. Growing in the Essential Elements of Communion: Faith, Sacraments, Ministry (§§37–57)

Mennonites should participate in the quest for full communion within the Church. The elements of such communion are also commendable as a framework for striving for unity among Mennonite denominations at the national and global levels: communion in apostolic faith, sacramental life (ordinances), ministry, conciliar relations and common witness and service (§37).

Faith (§§38–39)

Mennonites share in the appreciation of the apostolic faith and in the task of interpreting and applying it to current issues and various contexts (§38).

While Mennonites accede to the Nicene Creed along with other Christians (§39), they have noted that it passes from the birth of Jesus to his death without mention of his ministries of proclaiming, teaching and healing. Was this omission by the early Church Fathers due to an intense preoccupation with a particular theological controversy, or to the pressure of an emperor to unify a church under his domain, or to the inability of the Church to agree on the practical implications of Jesus's proclamation and teaching for their context? Whatever the causes, the omission of any reference to Jesus' words and deeds during his life on earth has made the Nicene Creed inadequate, perhaps even suspect, to Mennonites. Should and could the Church attempt to fill this gap in one of its primary creeds as part of recovering the apostolic faith and moving toward an ecumenical future?

Mennonites would affirm that "the ecclesial interpretation of the contemporary meaning of the Word of God involves the faith experience of the whole people, the insights of theologians, and the discernment of the ordained ministry" (§39). Compared to some other church communities, Mennonite churches have given more prominence to the participation of the people who form their membership – albeit facilitated or even guided by a council, by theologians and by ordained leaders – and would insist on this in a future united Church.

The summary of the convergence in the understanding of baptism (§40) accords well with a Mennonite understanding, especially as it speaks of “incorporating” and “consecrating” *believers* and of “confession of sin, conversion of heart” and other actions of which adult believers (only?) are capable. Again the question arises, is there a convergence by other churches toward “believers baptism” as propounded traditionally by Mennonites?

Similarly the summary of a converging understanding of the Eucharist (§§41–42) – as a re-affirmation of baptismal faith, a gift of grace for faithful living, a celebration for Christians, a proclamation of the Gospel, a glorification of God the Father, a memorial of Christ Jesus, an invocation of the Holy Spirit, an anticipation of the Kingdom, a sending into mission and a reconciliation within the family of God – is also compatible with Mennonite convictions, especially if the phrases “receive the body and blood of Christ” and “transform the elements of bread and wine” may be understood as symbolic rather than literal.

Because Mennonites have held that these attributes of the Eucharist can only be understood and upheld by believers who have publicly committed themselves to be disciples of Jesus Christ, Mennonite churches have traditionally served communion only to baptized believers, sometimes even limiting this to members of their particular congregation. However, many Mennonite churches have recently served the communion elements to the unbaptized children in their community, out of a desire to include them in this community- and

faith-shaping ordinance. Interestingly, this more lenient welcome is occurring as churches which baptize infants are continuing or even emphasizing the preparation of children before they receive the Eucharistic elements. Is this convergence or passing by one another?

Mennonites have preferred to speak of “ordinances” rather than “sacraments,” but would probably accept that at this point the difference could be more a matter of emphasis than substance. Furthermore, Mennonites have usually highlighted baptism, communion (Eucharist) and ordination as the three necessary ordinances of the Church. However, Mennonites have also conducted marriages, child dedications and commissioning for specific time-limited ministries.

Generally MC Canada recognizes the sacraments of all other Christian churches and might be open to reviewing its beliefs and practices in light of theirs. While recognition by other churches of MC Canada’s ordinances would be welcomed and appreciated by MC Canada, it is confident that these are consistent with the instructions of Jesus Christ, in the tradition of the apostolic church, with channels of the Holy Spirit’s action, and are acceptable to God as signs of its faithfulness. Thus it is not anxious about whether other churches recognize them as valid. That other churches do not recognize the ordinances and ministry of MC Canada does not hinder MC Canada from cooperating with them in service to the world, though it may be an obstacle for them to engage in discernment, worship and witness, and fellowship together with MC.

Ministry within the Church

Ordained Ministry (§45)

Mennonites ordain ministers but do not label them as “priests,” as this title is associated with a sacramental understanding of the ordinances, i.e., that they are effective indefinitely and irrespective of the attitudes and actions of the one undergoing the rite. On the other hand, as mentioned above, Mennonites often say that they practice the “priesthood of all believers” and are laxer in permitting lay members to perform “priestly” acts such as serving communion when an ordained minister is not present.

MC Canada and its sister denomination MC USA do ordain women for ministry – and do so gladly, confidently and to the benefit of their denominations and churches (§45).

The Threefold Ministry (§§46–47)

The larger Mennonite denominations such as MC Canada no longer ordain bishops. Mennonite rejection of or indifference to the episcopate is not based on a biblical argument but is more a consequence of a democratic mindset of the members and pastors reacting to past domination of Mennonite church life by a small number of bishops. It can be inferred that MC Canada does not at this time regard the bishop role within the threefold order of ministry as being required for the Church to be faithful to Christ’s commands (§47). The cited Lutheran position (footnote 17) probably reflects a typical Mennonite stance toward the

episcopate; that is, “the difference . . . is not so radical that [it] stands in opposition to the Catholic assertion of its ecclesial indispensability.” (See more at §§52–53)

Mennonites honor a succession in ordained ministry in that only ordained ministers officiate in ordinations, though usually an ordination is only conducted upon the request of the congregation in which the minister is or will be serving. Mennonites have regarded their ordinations to be in continuity with the apostolic ministry by presence of the Holy Spirit even if there may have been a physical interruption in the “apostolic succession.”

In any case, for Mennonites a significant consideration in restoring an episcopal office and submitting to its oversight would be how and by whom bishops would be chosen, and then how they would work with and be held accountable to the membership of the Church.

The Gift of Authority in the Ministry of the Church (§§48–51)

The assertion that all authority in the Church comes from Jesus and that those to whom it has been passed on should exercise their authority as servant leaders is a necessary and appropriate message to church leaders in whatever order of ministry they are placed (§§48–51). “Seek[ing] and elicit[ing] the consensus of all and depend[ing] upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit, discerned in attentive listening to God’s Word and to another” (§51) has been a frequently re-asserted goal for Mennonites, though not always practiced.

Mennonites have stressed “the participation of the whole community” in the exercise of the Church’s authority and the importance of “reception of the guidance and teaching of the ordained ministers” for testifying to “the authenticity of that leadership” (§51). Alas, the relationship between the community and its leaders has not only been one of unifying “mutual love and dialogue.”

Authority in the church and its exercise

Mennonites “share the urgent concern that the Gospel be preached, interpreted and lived out in the world humbly, but with compelling authority.” They would advocate for a significant role for the laity to the “seeking of ecumenical convergence on the way in which authority is recognized and exercised.”

The Ministry of Oversight (Episkopé) (§§52–53)

Mennonites see a need for a ministry of oversight (§52), but in the larger Mennonite denominations, including MC Canada, oversight is provided at the regional and national level by the combination of a board elected by the membership and an executive director who oversees the staff of the area or national church. The staffing includes an area or national church minister who specializes in supporting ordained and non-ordained pastors and monitoring their credentials for ministry.

From a Mennonite perspective, the summary of the principal purposes of the ministry of oversight would be modified so as to ensure the participation of the membership as follows:

- “to safeguard and hand on revealed truth,” adding “to facilitate and guide the ongoing discernment of entire God’s will by the entire Church” (as asserted in §54)
- “to hold local congregations in communion,” adding “in accordance with their mutual commitment”
- “to give mutual support,” adding “to the local churches for their worship, witness and service”
- “to lead in witnessing to the Gospel,” changing to “to encourage the entire Church to be active in witnessing to the Gospel.”

At this time the oversight of the “various Christian service organizations” through which Mennonites attempt “to better human life and relieve suffering” (§52) has been entrusted to separate agencies governed by boards composed of representatives – mostly lay members – from several Mennonite denominations. Thus the current “overseers” of Mennonite churches, that is, their boards and executive directors, are not directly giving oversight to service organizations. Perhaps this linkage should be strengthened.

One argument for re-instituting the office of bishop in Mennonite denominations would be to permit a more compatible leadership office for relating “to those who exercise such a ministry in other local churches” or denominations (§52).

Mennonites would fully affirm the statement that “the exercise of the ordained ministry is rooted

in the life of the community and requires the community's effective participation in the discovery of God's will and the guidance of the Spirit" (§52); and they have developed specific mechanisms for such rooting and participation. These include membership meetings, election of ordained and non-ordained leaders by the membership, and communal study of the Bible and current issues.

Mennonites would also affirm that "each member of the Body of Christ, by virtue of baptism, has his or her place and proper responsibility in the communion of the church" (§53). An implication of this for Mennonites is that the "profound unity and love between the members and their presiding minister" through which they experience synodality or conciliarity includes mutual accountability between them. Another implication is that the laity and ordained ministers participate in Mennonite assemblies and governing bodies with equal status, albeit with a lay majority.

The authority of ecumenical councils

Mennonite acceptance of "the doctrinal definitions of the early ecumenical councils as expressive of the teaching of the New Testament" is tempered by their view that the adoption/imposition by Emperor Constantine of Christianity as the religion of the Roman Empire compromised the Church's faithfulness to Jesus Christ and the apostolic Church. Thus the doctrinal decisions of early ecumenical councils would be open to scrutiny and could be superseded by later deliberations guided by the Holy Spirit and in continuity with the scriptures. However, Mennonites would

probably not give priority to revising the wording of these decisions and statements.

The need and expectations regarding the presiding over gatherings of the Church (§54) are well-stated and applicable to any ecclesial gathering.

A universal ministry of unity

Out of a desire for global fellowship, Mennonite churches around the world have formed and expanded a global communion in the Mennonite World Conference (MWC). Gradually MWC has moved from intermittent global assemblies of adherents for worship and fellowship to facilitating a network of service and mission agencies, providing moral and pastoral support to churches, and articulating a shared set of "Anabaptist" faith convictions. However MWC is not regarded as having authority over any aspect of its member churches; nor is it likely that such authority will be conferred upon it in the future.

Thus, while Mennonites could in theory affirm "a universal ministry of unity," they would limit its role to facilitating worship, fellowship, discussion and networking on a global scale. They would not accord primacy over doctrine or polity to any existing office or structure. Perhaps they will in the distant future if that office was accountable to the laity of the Church.

Chapter IV - The Church: In and For the World

A. God's Plan for Creation: The Kingdom (§§58–60)

God's intention for the Church within his divine and loving plan for the transformation of the world resonates with current Mennonite understandings: service, which includes proclaiming the Gospel (§58), and evangelization, which includes the promotion of peace and justice (§59). Instead of celebrating sacraments as a service to the world (§58), Mennonites have emphasized the conducting of ordinances and empowering new churches to continue these ordinances.

Ecumenical response to religious pluralism

The biblical and appropriate stance vis-a-vis believers of other religions and religious pluralism is also a current topic of discussion among Mennonites. The document provides a good summation of the issue and Mennonites would benefit by participating in ecumenical discussions on this topic (§60).

B. The Moral Challenge of the Gospel (§§61–64)

That Lutherans and Roman Catholics have come to a consensus on the doctrine of justification by faith (§61) allows hope that Mennonites, who distinguished and separated themselves from both of these two during the “Protestant Reformation” might also share in such a consensus. The prominence of the terms “discipleship” and “disciples,” key concepts also for Mennonites, in this document, strengthens this hope.

Moral questions and the unity of the church

It seems that divisions over moral questions do not necessarily coincide with divisions of doctrinal issues as implied (§62). Rather, divisions over

moral values run through virtually every church and proponents of one position in a current debate often find similarly minded proponents in other churches. This suggests that divisions over moral values have other bases or roots than traditional doctrinal divides between churches, and that there are unifying factors which supersede doctrinal and ecclesial divisions. Ecumenical discussions should also attempt to identify these non-doctrinal factors and mitigate the divisive ones and strengthen the unifying ones within churches as well as between them.

C. The Church in Society (§§64–66)

Mennonites share with other Christians “the passion for the transformation of the world,” of which the source “lies in their communion with God in Jesus Christ”; and also share the commitment to “live as disciples” of Jesus, emulating the various ways in which he ministered to those in need of advocacy, relief, health care, and equitable sharing of the goods of this earth (§64).

Mennonites have emphasized that “as followers of the ‘Prince of Peace’ Christians advocate peace,” and after several centuries of withdrawal from the affairs of general society, have increasingly sought “to overcome the causes of war,” acknowledging that the “principal among which are economic injustice, racism, ethnic and religious hatred, exaggerated nationalism, oppression and [especially] the use of violence to resolve differences” (§64). On the basis of their pacifist convictions, Mennonite churches have traditionally taught, and to a large extent Mennonite individuals have

practiced, the refusal to serve in military forces. Mennonites would encourage other churches and other Christians to draw similar conclusions from a Christian rejection of violence.

Mennonites have collaborated with other Christians of other churches in a wide range of service and witness to society, sometimes despite different teachings about peace and violence, and also finding more Christians who hold pacifist views.

After centuries of abstention, Mennonites in North America have increasingly felt “led . . . to engage with political and economic authorities in order to promote the values of the kingdom of God, and to oppose policies and initiatives which contradict them.” From the history of their origins and also from the experiences of fellow Mennonites in other countries, Mennonites are well aware that such witness in imitation of “the servanthood of Christ . . . will entail the way of the cross, even to the point of martyrdom” (§65). In the face of such a prospect, the unity of the Church is “crucial.”

The summary of the calling of the Church (§66) merits repeating and affirming here:

The Church is comprised of all socio-economic classes; both rich and poor are in need of the salvation that only God can provide. After the example of Jesus, the Church is called and empowered in a special way to share the lot of those who suffer and to care for the needy and the marginalized. The Church proclaims the words of hope and comfort of the Gospel, engages in works of

compassion and mercy and is commissioned to heal and reconcile broken human relationships and to serve God in the ministry of reconciling those divided by hatred or estrangement. Together with all people of goodwill, the Church seeks to care for creation, which groans to share the freedom of the children of God, by opposing the abuse and destruction of the earth and participating in God’s healing of broken relationships between creation and humanity.

An appropriate Mennonite response to this statement would be to cite the shared vision statement of MC Canada and MC USA:

God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and by the Holy Spirit to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace so that God’s healing and hope flow through us to the world.

Conclusion

Mennonites would affirm “the growing consensus that *koinonia* . . . is manifest in three interrelated ways: unity in faith, unity in sacramental life, and unity in service (in all its forms, including ministry and mission)” (§67). They have also experienced and enjoyed “the discovery of the many aspects of discipleship which churches share, even though they do not yet live in full communion” (§68).

Though “our brokenness and division contradict Christ’s will for the church and *hinder the mission of the Church*” (§69), it could also be stated that the breaking of Christ’s body – both his

physical body and the Church – was permitted by Christ for the salvation of the world; and, furthermore, that our efforts to overcome our brokenness and division to attain the unity willed by Christ *enhance the mission of the Church.*

Respectfully submitted

Peter H. Rempel

Winnipeg, Canada

September 2015

32. Catholic Association for Ecumenism and Ecumenical Forum for Catholicity

After the publication of *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)* (Faith and Order Paper No. 214) in 2013, a number of ecumenical seminars and meetings were organized in the Netherlands. Several churches, organizations and institutions initiated discussion of this important Faith and Order text: the Consultation Group Faith and Church Community of the Council of Churches, the Ecumenical Forum for Catholicity, the Catholic Association for Ecumenism, and Free University Amsterdam. Ton van Eijk, former chairman of the Council of Churches, translated the paper into Dutch. The Dutch translation was ready at the end of 2013 and was made available free of charge via the websites of the Council of Churches in the Netherlands and the Catholic Association for Ecumenism.

In 2014 and 2015, the Catholic Association for Ecumenism and the Ecumenical Forum for Catholicity, in cooperation with bishoprics and provincial Council of Churches, organized a series of five meetings about *TCTCV* for the purpose of making the text known and of discussing it with people locally active in ecumenism. Admittedly, the interest in these meetings was considerably less than was the case in the 1980s, when people in the forefront of the ecumenical movement, such as

Herman Fiolet and Anton Houtepen, gave many talks about the Lima Report *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry (BEM)*. Herman Fiolet, former secretary of the Council of Churches, alone held 180 talks about the report. There is much less attention and enthusiasm for meetings about ecumenical texts now than there was in the 1980s.

A positive atmosphere characterized all the meetings. The number of participants varied between 25 and 80, of which many were priests, ministers and theologians of different churches. Each meeting included a slide show presentation about the creation of the document and its contents, and group discussions. To facilitate the group discussions, questions were provided for each chapter. The four chapters were discussed using these questions (see Attachment 1). The group size varied from 7 to 20 persons.

This paper summarizes the reactions which came to the fore in the group discussions.

1. A good basis for ecumenical dialogue about the nature and the mission of the Church

The most important result of the meetings is perhaps that all the discussions about the document occurred in a positive atmosphere. *TCTCV*

appeared to provide a good basis for ecumenical dialogue between people from different churches as to the nature and the mission of the Church. For many participants, it was an eye opener that the text was based on the reactions to *BEM*. Many people have the impression, an incorrect one, that the ecumenical movement came to a standstill after *BEM*. In the document under discussion, the results of *BEM* are taken to hand and come to fruition in the quest for a common vision of the Church. From the reports it is evident that participants in the discussion listened closely to each other, both to the contributions on content and to stories of personal experiences. It appeared that some had experienced joy in reading the text. The document has a positive tone and a clear basis. Whereas some participants objected to having to read a theological document, others expressed satisfaction about that. It also came to the fore that some participants found support in this theological text for answering questions that might come up in day-to-day church life about what it means to be a Church.

2. A yearning for unity and the possibility of experiencing this unity

Participants in the meetings were primarily people who had been working on ecumenism for years. Since the 1970s and 80s, partly inspired by the enthusiasm and the expectations induced by *BEM*, ecumenical services of scripture and communion have been celebrated frequently. People involved in this way are often critical about the way ecumenism has gone during the past fifteen years. Bishops of the Roman Catholic Church

specifically request pastors and parishes to conform to the Ecumenical Directory (1993), in which the guidelines for ecumenical cooperation are laid down. In addition, a trend towards a steadily declining interest in ecumenism can be discerned in churches in general as a result of individualization and the dominance of small, informal groups. There is little room for ecumenical experiments. Criticism about the present state of ecumenism turned up frequently in the discussions on *TCTCV*. People find it hard to accept that things that were possible before are no longer allowed. Others, however, saw this as a reason to argue for a change in the approach to the subject. Instead of being fixated on what is not possible, we should do what is possible. Ecumenism is flourishing again in places where that occurs. The yearning to experience the unity of the Church came to the fore frequently. There was a comment that we too often speak about the church in lower case, about the building and the organization. We need to be more involved with the Church spelled with a capital letter. The document under discussion is a good point of departure. The dialogue on this text leads to a better understanding of our own and each other's church and to self-examination.

3. Recognizing each other as the Church in brokenness

Christians of many churches have found one another as brothers and sisters in Christ on the way to restoration of the *communio* in the one Church. In the Church community, unity in Christ also involves faith, sacraments, and regulations governing church life with the prospect of the kingdom of

God to come. *TCTCV* shows a great convergence in the vision concerning the Church. This consonance is expressed most strongly in the first two chapters and in the first part of Chapter III. With respect to the ordained ministry in the Church and moral questions, it appears to be impossible, as yet, to bridge existing differences. These are obstacles in the restoration of the one Church. Fortunately, on the matter of ordained ministry there are a few points of conciliation to report. The Faith and Order documents since Lima posit that the personal, collegial, and communal dimensions of ministry should be in balance in an ecumenical theology of ordained ministry. When one of these three dimensions is accentuated too much, something goes wrong. All churches could learn from this. The ecumenical meaning of ordained ministry based on these three dimensions connecting communities and churches could be further developed.

In the Netherlands, ecumenical cooperation is pursued by Catholic and Protestant churches. One of the points of pain in our situation is the fact that there is no recognition of each other as the Church. This was frequently expressed in the group discussions. "It is a problem for me that the Roman Catholic Church does not recognize the Protestant churches as a full-fledged Church and that the Orthodox Church asserts that it is the true Church, basing its claim on the first seven Councils." It is to be hoped that the agreement that has been achieved in the understanding of the Church, provided that it is affirmed by the members of the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, will provide a basis for

churches to recognize one another as true forms of the Church of Christ. This would mean a great deal in the future of the ecumenical movement.

4. Unity in legitimate diversity

The ecumenical situation in the Netherlands is characterized by a great diversity of churches and denominations. This colorful diversity has a historical background. The diversity became even greater as a result of migrations to the Netherlands in the mid 20th century. Against this background, there is a great need for a common vision of the Church. The strength of *TCTCV* is that the document essentially describes in what way the Church is one but that, on the other hand, unity goes hand in hand with "a legitimate diversity." However, no matter how important this diversity is, in practice it is difficult to adopt as long as the limits of legitimate diversity are not defined. The question is: Where does legitimate diversity end and when is it a case of differences in beliefs that rupture unity? It is good to consider that great differences, discord, and even struggle can exist within the same denomination for a long time without creating a formal rupture of the bond of unity. Sometimes an ecumenical bond is stronger than the community experienced in one's own church in spite of differences in beliefs. In the group discussions the difference between legitimate diversity and division came up many times. In the ecumenical movement in the Netherlands we have difficulty distinguishing between legitimate diversity and differences in beliefs that create division. Many cherish the idea of a community that is welcoming and hospitable, where everyone may enter and no

one is excluded. In some contributions, however, the tension was clearly expressed: “It is a theme in my life. I am living in an ecumenical community consisting of Catholics and Protestants; I lived in Russia for twenty years before that. The main thing is living together in the Word: We try to live the gospel message among ourselves. But when everyone goes to his/her own church on Sunday, we feel the pain of division, yet the feeling of unity continues even more strongly. We believe that a time will come when we can drink together from the one cup.”

On this note, we are temporarily closing off an intensive and successful trajectory. We were not at all certain before starting this journey that we would be able to achieve some good discussions on *TCTCV* in our country. The interest, the openness, and the positive response to this document have surprised us and cheered us. As one of the participants put it, “We often have a plan that eventually breaks down. The fact that God has a plan gives us confidence that it will carry through!”

We look forward to the official reactions of the churches and hope that this document and the reception process will strengthen the community of churches.

The committee consisted of the following people:

Geert van Dartel, Rob van Uden (Catholic Association for Ecumenism)

Hans Kranenburg, Henk Schoon (Ecumenical Forum for Catholicity)

* * *

Questions for the discussion about *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* at the meeting on 5 June 2015

Chapter I

The vision of the Church is embedded in the great story of God’s plan for all creation. That is what part A of chapter I is about. In part B an overview is given of the mission of the Church through the ages. Part C is about the importance of unity. At the end of the chapter, several fundamental questions are identified which need attention on the path to unity.

1. What is your understanding of the mission and the calling of the Church?
2. Is the unity of the Church a dream, a realistic possibility, or a reality?

Chapter II

An important insight is that the Church as a community (*koinonia*) brings us into a living relationship with the triune God. Biblical images are used to express what the Church is: people of God, body of Christ, temple of the Holy Spirit. Since the Second Ecumenical Council held in Constantinople in 381, all Christian churches confess that the Church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic. The great diversity of churches raises the question wherein the unity of the Church lies and how unity can be safeguarded.

1. What is your view of the relationship between belief in the triune God and the community of the Church? To what extent are the images used for the Church helpful?
2. In your view, what are the limits of legitimate diversity? In other words: On which points is unity actually necessary?

Chapter III

As an eschatological reality, the Church waits for the coming of the Kingdom; as a community of pilgrims, the Church struggles with the burden of sin. The ecumenical movement exists within this tension. The growth toward a community of churches is centered in three areas: faith, sacraments and ordained ministry.

1. How do you, in our ecumenical context, experience growth in community with respect to faith, sacraments and ordained ministry?
2. What is your experience of authority in the Church? How do you view the relationship between authority and ordained ministry in the Church? Try to identify a profile of “the ideal bishop” or “the ideal pope.”

Chapter IV

The Church does not exist for itself. God’s plan for creation involves the coming of the Kingdom. Religious pluralism requires an ecumenical answer with respect to the call to proclaim the gospel and to ethical issues.

1. Is more agreement and consensus about moral questions necessary among the churches?
2. What can churches do to change and renew our broken world?

33. Christian Law Panel of Experts

The Christian Law Panel of Experts¹ acknowledges the considerable achievement of the Faith and Order Commission in producing Paper No. 214, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)* (2013) and offers this reflection and response addressing law, order and polity as a further dimension to the continuing dialogue concerning the ecumenical endeavour.

I am the true vine, and My Father is the vine-dresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit . . . (John 15:2)

I. Introduction

In November 2013 an invited Symposium was held at the Venerable English College in Rome. The participants (listed in the Appendix) attended in their personal capacities, not as representatives of their denomination, but were selected for their expertise in the church law (or order/polity) of particular Christian churches, namely: Anglican, Baptist, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, Orthodox, Presbyterian, and Reformed. The aim of the Symposium was to explore critically

the extent to which different Christian churches share common principles in their laws and other instruments of internal governance, and the ways in which these principles and instruments may contribute creatively to ecumenism. The members offer themselves and their studies as an independent Panel of Experts.

The Panel found broad consensus on the following general conclusions, as ventured by Professor Norman Doe in his book, *Christian Law: Contemporary Principles* (Cambridge University Press, 2013):

1) there are principles of church law and church order common to the Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, Reformed, Presbyterian and Baptist traditions and their existence can be factually established by empirical observation and comparison;

2) the churches of each Christian tradition contribute through their own regulatory instruments to this store of principles;

3) the principles have a strong theological content and dimension of weight and are fundamental to the self-understanding of Christianity;

4) these principles have a living force and contain within themselves the possibility of further development and articulation;

5) these principles demonstrate a degree of unity between the churches, stimulate common

1. This response was sent to the secretariat of the Faith and Order Commission at the World Council of Churches in December 2015.

Christian actions, and should be fed into the global ecumenical enterprise to enhance fuller visible unity.

The Panel considered that implicit in or underlying each church's respective regulatory instruments are the following general principles:

1) church law and church order exist to serve a church in its mission and in its witness to the salvific work of Christ;

2) laws are necessary to constitute the institutional organization of a church and facilitate and order its public activities but cannot encompass all facets and experiences of the Christian faith and life;

3) laws are the servant of the church and must promote the mission of the church universal;

4) theology shapes law, and law implements theological propositions in norms of conduct; and

5) church laws should conform to, and are subject ultimately to, the law of God, as revealed in Holy Scripture and by the Holy Spirit.

The Panel agreed that a consideration of church law/order/polity may provide a new medium, within the context of receptive ecumenism, for the ecumenical enterprise: namely that law (as a discrete element of the ecclesiological self-understanding of Christian churches) should be conceived as an instrument for ecumenism. Identifying juridical similarities and differences is likely to be important for ecumenical understanding.

To test this hypothesis further, the Panel met again in October 2014 to discuss how its work might

feed into that of the World Council of Churches by means of a response to the WCC Faith and Order Commission Paper No. 214, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)* (2013). The Panel noted that over the years there has been interest in the role of church law and church order in the ecumenical enterprise, but that this has not been developed. For example, in 1974 the WCC Faith and Order Commission called for an ecumenical discussion of "church law" on the basis that "The churches differ in their order and their constitution" (Document IV.8). However, this call of the Faith and Order Commission was not pursued.

The Panel, therefore, considers that a juridical response to *TCTCV* would be valuable. First, *TCTCV* does not consider church law or its role in ecumenism. Yet the thrust of *TCTCV* is convergence in belief (the primary stimulus for law) and in action (the primary focus of law) and its language is often normative (the primary character of law). Many themes in *TCTCV* surface in church laws. Exploration of these would enable the WCC to see how church laws:

1) articulate ideas in *TCTCV*;

2) translate these into norms of conduct; and, in turn,

3) generate unity in common action (across the church families).

Secondly, church laws are applied ecclesiology. They also shape the ecclesiology of churches. Third, such exploration would enable the WCC to understand how systems of church law help or hinder ecumenism.

The paper in Section II of this submission is the work of Professor Doe and develops some of the themes in his book *Christian Law*. It indicates how comparing church laws facilitates the articulation of principles of law common to the churches; enables reconciliation of juridical difference in the form of underlying principles of law; provides a stable ecumenical methodology through its focus on concrete textual data; offers a practical guide for Christian life; and defines both achieved communion and opportunities for and limits on future progress. The Panel commends Professor Doe's paper for its coherent synthesis of a vast range of regulatory instruments and its scholarly analysis. Re-imagining ecumenism through law, as applied ecclesiology in the form of norms of conduct, would advance the idea of *TCTCV* that "common action" is "intrinsic to the life and being of the Church" (§61).

The Panel of Experts proposes that comparative church law would be of value to ecumenism and should feed into the work of the WCC. At its third meeting in September 2015 the Panel produced a statement of agreed principles on two distinct topics: Church Discipline and Church Property. These are set out in section III below. The Panel of Experts has agreed to continue its work to discern and articulate principles of law common to Christian churches worldwide on matters such as governance, ministry, doctrine, worship, ritual, church-State relations, and ecumenism itself. A further meeting is planned for 2016 and, in the meantime, work will continue through correspondence.

The example of agreed Principles is offered to the Faith and Order Commission with a view, in

the longer term, towards adoption by the WCC so that the Christian Law endeavour will be of lasting value to the ecumenical movement in its quest for greater visible Christian unity. More immediately, the Panel of Experts invites the Faith and Order Commission to engage in a dialogue in which the Christian Law project can be used as an expression of institutional unity and a means of practical ecumenism.

Professor Mark Hill QC
Convenor
Panel of Experts in Christian Law
Advent Sunday, 2015

II. Discussion paper: "Beyond Theology: the Ecumenical Value of Comparative Church Law"²

Introduction

TCTCV, which took twenty years to prepare, represents "an extraordinary ecumenical achievement" in ecclesiology.³ However, it does not explicitly consider church law-order-polity in its ecclesiology or in ecumenism generally (as help or hindrance). But the thrust of *TCTCV* is convergence in belief (the primary stimulus for law) and action (the primary focus of law) and its language is often normative (the primary character of law). The Church on earth, manifested in different

2. By Norman Doe, Professor of Law and Director of the Centre for Law and Religion, Cardiff University.

3. Paper No. 214 of 2013: *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), viii.

institutional churches, has no single humanly-created system of Christian Law. Rather, each institutional church has its own regulatory system of law-order-polity dealing typically with ministry, governance, doctrine, worship, ritual, property and finance. Each regulatory system is the servant of that church; seeks to facilitate and order its life, mission and witness to Christ; binds the faithful in duties and rights for the maintenance of ecclesial communion; and translates the church's theological self-understanding into norms of conduct. Law is applied ecclesiology. A comparison of these norm-systems contributes greatly to ecumenism. It discloses profound similarities between them and, therefore, high levels of juridical unity across the global church families. From these similarities it is possible to induce shared juridical principles.⁴ Their existence may be factually established by observation and comparison. Churches of each tradition contribute through their own regulatory instruments to this store of principles. These principles have a theological content, a dimension of weight, and are fundamental to the self-understanding of Christians. They have a living force and potential for further development and articulation. Above all, they demonstrate unity

4. For the purpose of this project, a principle of law common to the churches of the Christian traditions studied here is a foundational proposition or maxim of general applicability which has a strong dimension of weight, is induced from the similarities of the regulatory systems of churches, derives from their juridical tradition or the practices of the church universal, expresses a basic theological truth or ethical value, and is implicit in, or underlies, the juridical systems of the churches. See N Doe, *Christian Law: Contemporary Principles* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 388.

between the churches, stimulate common Christian actions, and should feed into the global ecumenical enterprise to enhance fuller visible unity.⁵

TCTCV, sent to the churches “to encourage further reflection on the Church and to seek their formal responses,” has “an important role in the coming years for discerning the next steps toward visible unity.” Moreover, as “ecclesiology relates to everything the Church is and what its mission implies in and for the world,” so “agreement on ecclesiology has long been identified as the most elemental theological objective in the quest for Christian unity.”⁶ Similarly, it is suggested here, a key pursuit of comparative church law is the systematic search for visible juridical unity through exposure of similarities between the regulatory systems of churches, and their articulation as shared principles of law-order-polity. This juridical unity, and the common action it stimulates, may itself be understood as an “elemental aspect” of ecumenism relevant to *TCTCV*'s principle of “convergence.” Indeed, juridical convergence is, to borrow words from *TCTCV*, one of the “aspects of ecclesial life and understanding which has been neglected or forgotten” (viii), and fits neatly its call for responses to be “theological, practical, and

5. These were the findings of the Panel of Experts which met in Rome in November 2013 at the Christian Law Symposium. The panel, chaired by Professor Mark Hill QC, consisted of lawyers and theologians from each of the eight traditions; see M. Hill, “Christian law: an ecumenical initiative,” *Ecclesiastical Law Journal* 16 (2014): 215–216. The Panel met again in October 2014 to work on a formal response to *TCTCV* to be submitted to the WCC. Key to its work is L.J. Koffeman, *In Order to Serve: An Ecumenical Introduction to Church Polity* (Vienna: Lit, 2014).

6. *TCTCV*, Foreword and Preface.

pastoral” (ix). Church law exhibits all three qualities – it is the product of theological reflection; it translates theology into practical norms of action; and its pastoral quality is evident in the principle that juridical norms are the servant of the community of the faithful seeking to enable and order life in witness to Christ.⁷ That *TCTCV* does not refer explicitly to, or consider, church regulatory systems and their place in ecumenism is perhaps related to the historical position of the Faith and Order Commission that “church law” is about *difference*, not convergence.⁸ It is suggested that this outlook is misplaced: Law and its ecumenical study is fertile ground for convergence.

The Church and the sources, forms and purposes of church law

TCTCV presents a rich theological understanding of the Church (universal) – an ecclesiological portrait of its nature, purposes, and composition. The regulatory systems of churches may be used to test whether the churches share the *TCTCV* view of the Church and translate this into their own self-understanding as institutional churches.

The Nature and Objectives of a Church

For *TCTCV*, the Church has a “threefold mission”: to proclaim the Gospel, administer the sacraments and worship, and give pastoral service.

7. See N. Doe, “Juridical ecumenism,” *Ecclesiastical Law Journal* 14 (2012): 195–234.

8. “The Ecumenical Movement and Church Law,” Document IV.8 (1974); see Doe, *Christian Law*, 1–2.

Moreover: “The Holy Spirit nourishes and enlivens the body of Christ through the living voice of the preached Gospel, through sacramental communion, especially in the Eucharist, and through ministries of service.”⁹

The regulatory instruments of churches echo this theological posture. They provide that each institutional church, which may be configured at local, regional and/or international level, is an autonomous community which asserts its place in the Church of Christ and which exists to preach the Gospel, to administer sacraments and worship, and to provide pastoral service.¹⁰ An Orthodox Patriarchate may have an international character and be in a relationship with autocephalous and autonomous churches as well as communities in diaspora. The Romanian Orthodox Church, for example, asserts that it is “a community of Orthodox Christians”;¹¹ similarly the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America exists “to proclaim the Gospel of Christ, to teach and spread the Orthodox Christian Faith, to energize, cultivate and guide the life of the Church,” to sanctify “the faithful through Divine Worship,” to build up “the spiritual and ethical life of the faithful,” and to serve as a “witness of the message of Christ to all persons.”¹² Likewise, in the Protestant traditions, a Lutheran church is a national or local assembly of the

9. *TCTCV* §16; also §§5, 6, 14, 29.

10. Doe, *Christian Law*, Ch. 1.

11. Romanian Orthodox Church (ROMOC), *Statutes*, Arts. 1–2.

12. Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America (GOAA), *Charter*, Art. 2.

faithful shaped by authoritative Reformation texts and its “biblical foundations”; as “part of the whole Church of Christ,” its objects include to “declare the teachings of the prophets and apostles and seek to confess in our time the faith” and to engage in “worship and Christian service.” It may also belong to the Lutheran World Federation.¹³ Similarly, in the Reformed tradition, a Reformed, Presbyterian and Congregational church (which may belong to the World Communion of Reformed Churches) asserts, typically, its place in the church universal, its doctrinal inheritance from the Reformation, its autonomy, and its purposes (for example, establishing fellowships, preaching the Gospel, worship, providing pastoral care and engaging in community service).¹⁴ Within the Baptist World Alliance, Baptist Unions, Conventions and churches have the same outlook.¹⁵

The sources and forms of regulation

For *TCTCV*: “All Christians share the conviction that Scripture is normative.” Also, “Tradition has been acknowledged by most communities; but they vary in assessing how its authority relates to that of Scripture” (§11); and tradition is important to interpret Scripture (§39). However, *TCTCV*

neither addresses the treatment of Holy Scripture and Tradition in churches’ systems of law-or-order-polity, nor the normativity of these regulatory systems as a function of ecclesial life shared across traditions. Importantly, it refers to “law” only once: “Christians are called to work untiringly to overcome divisions and heresies but also to preserve and treasure their legitimate differences of . . . custom and law” (§30).

Church regulatory instruments indicate the importance of Holy Scripture and Tradition, and that these operate with other regulatory entities which also shape church life normatively.¹⁶ For instance, the Roman Catholic Church has a Code of Canon Law (1983) which recognizes custom and often presents canons themselves as derived from divine law.¹⁷ An Orthodox church is “governed by the Holy Scriptures,” the “moral law of the Church,” “canon law,” “charters,” “constitutions,” “statutes,” “regulations,” “canonical tradition,” and “custom.”¹⁸ Methodists recognize “God’s Law,” see Scripture as a record of divine revelation,¹⁹ and have “Methodist Law,” “Church law,”²⁰ “usages,” and Articles

13. The Reformation texts include the Augsburg Confession (1530) and Formula of Concord (1577); see, for example, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), *Constitution and Foundational Texts* (2003) Chs. 1–4, 8.73.

14. Presbyterian Church of Wales (PCW), *Handbook of Rules*, 1.1.

15. Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB), *Constitution*, Arts. 1–4.

16. See Doe, *Christian Law*, Ch. 1.

17. *Codex Iuris Canonici* (CIC) (Code of Canon Law 1983 of the Latin Church), cc. 24, 207, 331, 1249.

18. GOAA, *Charter*, Arts. 1, 2 and 22, and *Regulations*, Art. 18.3; Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), *Statute*, III.4 and X.18; GOAA, *Regulations*, Art. 18.3. See also ROMOC: Statutes, Art. 123(9); P. Rodopoulos, *An Overview of Orthodox Canon Law* (Rollinsford, NH: Orthodox Research Institute, 2007), 3, 17, 21.

19. Free Methodist Church of North America (FMCNA), *Book of Discipline*, §112: “God’s law.”

20. Methodist Church in Great Britain (MCGB),

of Religion.²¹ A Presbyterian church receives its authority from Christ,²² “the Word of God” is the supreme “rule of faith and life,”²³ and church courts and officers must “uphold the laws of Scripture.”²⁴ Reformed and Presbyterian churches use, variously, “law,” a “code,” a “book of order,”²⁵ a constitution, and normative doctrinal texts;²⁶ they may also recognize customs, and use soft-law.²⁷ In the Baptist tradition: Christ is “sole and absolute authority in

Constitutional Practice and Discipline, Deed of Union, 25(b); Methodist Church in Ireland (MCI), *Constitution*, s. 6: “Manual of Laws”; s. 5: “Rules and Regulations.”

21. Methodist Church of New Zealand (MCNZ), *Laws and Regulations*, 2.26.1; United Methodist Church - United States of America (UMCUSA), *Constitution*, Div. I, Art. III, Div. 2.3, Art. I: Articles of Religion etc.

22. Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI), *Code*, I.I.IV.15.

23. Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand (PACNZ), *Book of Order*, 1.1(2).

24. Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), *Book of Church Order*, Preface, II.3; also II.7.

25. JL Weatherhead (ed.), *The Constitution and Laws of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh, Church of Scotland, Board of Practice and Procedure, 1997), p. 16; *Manual of Practice and Procedure in the United Free Church of Scotland* (2011); *The Code: The Book of the Constitution and Government of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland* (2010); *The Book of Church Order of the Reformed Church in America* (2010).

26. PCI, *Code*, Constitution and Pt. III.15: Trustees’ Bylaws; for Westminster Confession of Faith; PCANZ, *Book of Order*, 1.1(3)–(4); Reformed Church in America (RCA), *Book of Church Order*, Preamble: the Doctrinal Standards include the Heidelberg Catechism 1608 and Canons of the Synod of Dort 1619.

27. United Reformed Church (URC): *Model Constitution for Local Churches* (2010); Presbyterian Church of America (PCA), *Book of Church Order*, III.58.8: custom; PCW, *Employee Safety Handbook* (undated).

all matters pertaining to faith and practice”; and: “Each Church has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer His Laws.”²⁸ As such, Baptist norms recognize Holy Scripture as a revelation of God,²⁹ part of “the constitutions and laws” of a Convention, or “the rule of church law.”³⁰ A national Baptist Union or Convention may have a constitution, with “laws” and bylaws,³¹ and normative doctrinal standards (for example, a Confession of Faith).³² Within a Union or Convention, a regional Association of churches may have a constitution, and a local church a constitution, trust instrument, a “covenant” of members’ commitments, and doctrinal texts.³³

The structure and binding character of church norms

TCTCV often uses words importing juridical concepts: “order” (§16); “institutional structures

28. Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB), *Constitution*, 1.3.1; Model Trusts for Churches 2003, 2.8.1.

29. Ibid., 2.8.1 and 6.1, *Constitution*, 1.3; Bethel Baptist Church (Choctaw, USA), *Constitution*, Art. VI.

30. National Baptist Convention - USA (NBC-USA): *Constitution*, Art. X.5; American Baptist Churches in the USA (ABC-USA): Bylaws, Prologue; Canadian National Baptist Convention (CNBC), *Constitution*, 3.

31. Jamaica Baptist Union (JBU), *Constitution*; Baptist Union of Scotland (BUS), *Constitution and Bylaws*; NBC-USA, *Constitution* (2002), Preamble: the Convention has “constitutions” and “laws.”

32. Baptist Union of Southern Africa (BUSA), *Model Constitution for Local Churches*, 4: Statement of Faith.

33. BUGB, *Model Trusts*, 2.12; Riverside Baptist Church (Baltimore): *Constitution*, Art. IV: “Church Covenant.”

and ministerial order” (§24); “ecclesial order” (§32); “authority” and “power” (§50); “normativity” (italic paragraph following §53); “requirements” (§52); “functions” (§52); “obedience” (§51); “cooperation and consent” (§51); “good order” and “process” (§54); “duty” (§54); “custom and use” (§55); “jurisdiction” (§55); and “obligations” (§64). Each of these words, and the juridical category signified, is part of the ecclesiology in *TCTCV*, but the document does not explain the terms as juridical in form and theological in context. Nor does it tease out implications for the normative dimension of its ecclesiology. Needless to say, these concepts are commonplace in the juridical instruments of churches and should be recognized ecumenically as a shared, binding and natural function of ecclesial life.

For example, Anglican laws contain “principles, norms, standards, policies, directions, rules, precepts, prohibitions, powers, freedoms, discretions, rights, entitlements, duties, obligations, privileges and other juridical concepts.”³⁴ The Roman Catholic Code of Canon Law binds all the faithful.³⁵ Orthodox laws and court decisions are “binding for all clergymen and laymen without any exception.”³⁶ For some Lutheran churches, a precondition to membership is acceptance of the constitution and bylaws,³⁷ or classes of

member “covenant” compliance.³⁸ In Presbyterian churches, typically: “All members of congregations and any other person affected by any provision in the Book of Order must comply with the Book of Order”;³⁹ and Baptists may explicitly require “strict adherence” to “rules and regulations.”⁴⁰ Church regulatory instruments also have mechanisms to enforce and to relax their norms.⁴¹

The purposes of church norms

The absence of explicit discussion in *TCTCV* of the role of church law impoverishes its treatment of normativity in church life beyond coverage of Holy Scripture and Tradition. *TCTCV* might usefully, therefore, have pointed to the ecumenical value of the study of the purposes of church law to underscore fulfilment of the three-fold mission of the Church.

Within our church families, regulatory instruments seek to order and facilitate ecclesial life – to guide the faithful in their mission and witness to Christ. For instance, Orthodox canon law is “at the service of the Church . . . to guide her members on the way to salvation,” and to assist “the spiritual growth of the faithful.”⁴² Lutheran laws

34. *The Principles of Canon Law Common to the Churches of the Anglican Communion* (2008) (PCLCCAC), Principle 4.5.

35. CIC, c. 1; cc. 11–12.

36. ROC, *Statute*, VII.8.

37. LCGB, *Rules and Regulations*, Congregations, 1.

38. Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC), *Constitution*, X.3.

39. PCANZ, *Book of Order*, 2.2; PCA, *Book of Church Order*, 5.8.

40. JBU, *Constitution*, Art. V.

41. Doe, *Christian Law*, Ch. 1.

42. L Patsavos, “The canonical tradition of the Orthodox Church,” in *A Companion to the Greek Orthodox Church*, ed.

provide “organizational principles, structures, and policies for good order,” and so “guide, direct, and assist [the church] in mission and ministry.”⁴³ Reformed church law is “to declare the corporate identity of the Church and to ensure that all things are done decently and in order within it (1 Cor. 14.40).”⁴⁴ For one United Church: “The purpose of law within the church is to order procedures and to provide for the consistent resolution of differences, and so to help to achieve order and justice.”⁴⁵ Also, Baptist norms are to “govern,” “regulate,” and “enable,”⁴⁶ namely, “For the purpose of preserving and making secure the principles of our faith” so that “this body be governed in an orderly manner”; “for . . . preserving the liberties inherent in each individual member of the church”; and, to present “this body to other bodies of the same faith.”⁴⁷

The faithful and lay officers

For *TCTCV*, the Church (universal) consists of Christ’s followers (people of God), with “obligations of responsibility,” all of whom are

“interrelated.” Each institutional church has its own “membership,” for which faith in Christ is essential, their discipleship sustained by the Holy Spirit.⁴⁸ The faithful share “communion” (*koinonia*), a key concept in ecumenism embracing “participation, fellowship, [and] sharing.” “As a divinely established communion, the Church belongs to God and does not exist for itself”; it is “missionary,” called and sent “to witness to that communion which God intends for all humanity” (§13). The Holy Spirit “equips the Church with its essential gifts, qualities and *order*” (§16).

The juridical norms of churches reflect, but indicate substantially deeper agreement beyond, these *TCTCV* propositions about the faithful and the communion they share. While “communion” is a theological category (central to *TCTCV*), it also has normative-judicial aspects, particularly apposite in light of the *TCTCV* focus on communion as shared action and order: As spiritual communion is about relationships, so juridical systems seek to facilitate and order the communion of the faithful associated together in a church.

The concept of church membership and equality

Each church has a membership in which there is a fundamental equality but a key distinction between the laity and ordained ministers. The Roman Catholic faithful constitute the “people of God” and each one “participates in their own way in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ” in order “to exercise the mission which

FK Litsas (New York: Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, 1984), 137–141 (reproduced in L Patsavos, *Manual on Orthodox Canon Law* [New York: Hellenic College, Holy Cross Orthodox School of Theology, 1975], Part II (un-numbered page).

43. Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC): *Constitution*, Introduction and Preamble.

44. Weatherhead, *Constitution and Laws*, p. 1.

45. United Church of Canada (UCC), *Manual*, Introduction.

46. BUGB, *Model Trusts*, Schedule 4.1–4.6.

47. Riverside Baptist Church (Baltimore), *Constitution*, Preamble.

48. *TCTCV* §§7, 12, 14, 16, 18, 19, 21, 23, 27.

God entrusted to the Church to fulfil in the world”; but “by divine institution, among Christ’s faithful there are . . . sacred ministers [and] others called lay people”; yet all enjoy “a genuine equality of dignity and action.”⁴⁹ As in Anglicanism, in which laity and clergy are “equal in dignity before God,” the Orthodox distinguish “clergy” and “laity,” both related on the basis of “the fundamental principle of the equality of all the faithful”; nevertheless, “the laity does not have the special property of the priesthood, even though they participate through baptism in the triple office of the Lord.”⁵⁰ For Lutheran churches too, the “people of God” embraces “the priesthood of all believers,” but there is a distinction between lay and ordained persons; and Methodists enjoy a “spiritual equality.”⁵¹ Similar distinctions appear in Reformed, Presbyterian and Baptist churches.⁵²

Admission to church membership

All churches studied here regulate admission to membership. For example, in Anglicanism, “membership in a church” may be based on: baptism; baptism and confirmation; baptism, confirmation and communicant status; and/or regular

attendance at worship.⁵³ Lutherans too define their membership. For example, a voting member is a baptized person aged 18 or over who has publicly confessed the faith after instruction in Lutheran teaching and is duly received into the congregation.⁵⁴ Methodist church members are, for example, “those who, desiring to be saved from their sins through faith in . . . Christ, and to associate themselves with the people of God in Christian fellowship, have been received into full membership in accordance with the Rules and Regulations of the Conference”; candidates must show commitment to Christ and accept church discipline.⁵⁵ Reformed, Presbyterian and Baptist churches have similar conditions.⁵⁶

The duties and rights of the faithful

Churches have elaborate norms on the functions of the faithful. For instance, Orthodox must “uphold Christian values and conduct,” and “respect” the clergy; they are “obliged to take part in the divine services, make confession and take holy communion regularly,” “observe the canons,” “carry out deeds of faith,” “strive for religious and moral perfection,” and be “an effective witness” to the faith. Their rights include participation in, for example, the parish meeting, if in “good

49. CIC, cc. 205, 207, 208.

50. Rodopoulos, *Overview*, p. 117; PCLCCAC: Principle 25.

51. UMCNEAE, *Book of Discipline*, §125; also LCA, *The Ministry of the People of God, Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations* (CTIR) 1992, 1; and *Constitution*, Interpretation; MCI, *Constitution*, s.1.

52. URC, *Manual*, A.16; PCANZ, *Book of Order*, 1.4; BUGB, *Baptists in Local Ecumenical Partnerships*, s. 3.

53. PCLCCAC, Principle 27.

54. LCGB, *Rules and Regulations*, Individual membership in a Congregation, 1.

55. MCI, *Regulations, Discipline and Government*, 2.03–2.07.

56. URC, *Manual*, A.16, Sch. A; PCW, *Handbook*, II; Riverside Baptist Church (Baltimore), *Bylaws*, Art. 1.

standing.”⁵⁷ Lutherans must, typically, “make regular use of the means of grace, both Word and Sacraments”; “live a Christian life in accordance with the Word of God”; “support the work of the congregation”; “proclaim the Gospel”; and, if qualified, they may participate in the governance of the church.⁵⁸ Methodists have “privileges and obligations,” for example, to “partake . . . of the Lord’s Supper,” “united prayer,” and Christian service. Some are exercisable in private life, for example, to act as “helpers of one another” and abstain from alcohol. Their rights include entitlement to “receive pastoral support” from ministers and, if eligible, to participate in governance.⁵⁹ Reformed, Presbyterian and Baptist churches are similar.⁶⁰

The ordained ministers of the church

TCTCV has a detailed discussion of ordained ministry: patterns of ministry; authority and ministry; and the principle of oversight. Each of these issues is regulated in the churches. Juridical analysis is valuable as it discloses convergence in terms of principle and action.

Ordained ministry and process of ordination

For *TCTCV*, The “triple function of the ministry” (word, sacrament, guidance), is “given by

57. ROC, *Statutes*, XI.3; GOAA, *Regulations*, Art. 18.

58. ELCA, *Model Constitution for Congregations*, Ch. 8. For Anglicans, PCLCCAC, Principle 26.

59. MCI, *Regulations, Discipline and Government*, 1.03 (General Rules of our Societies, 1) and 2.04–2.08.

60. Doe, *Christian Law*, 60–62.

Christ to the Church to be carried out by some of its members for the good of all” (§20). Moreover: “All . . . affirm the biblical teaching that . . . Jesus, our high priest . . . offered his redeeming sacrifice ‘once for all.’” Thus, ordained ministers “may appropriately be called priests” as “they fulfil a particular priestly service by strengthening and building up the royal and prophetic priesthood of the faithful [in] word and sacraments,” “prayers of intercession,” and “pastoral guidance” (§45). Also, some churches consider that ordained ministry has “a special relationship with the unique priesthood of Christ”; they “believe . . . some persons are ordained to a particular priestly function through the sacrament of ordination”; others “do not consider ordained ministers as ‘priests’, nor do some understand ordination in sacramental terms”; and “Christians disagree . . . over the traditional restriction of ordination . . . to men only” (§45).

TCTCV recognizes an “urgent priority” to discover how these differences may be overcome: (a) “There is no single pattern of ministry in the New Testament,” but all churches “would look to Scripture” as to “how ordained ministry is to be understood, ordered and exercised”; at times, “the Spirit has guided the Church to adapt its ministries to contextual needs (cf. Acts 6:1-6).”; (b) The threefold pattern (bishop, presbyter, deacon) became “generally accepted” and is “still considered normative by many” but some, “since the . . . Reformation, have adopted different patterns” (§46). In this respect: “Almost all Christian communities today have a formal structure of ministry. Frequently this structure is diversified and reflects . . . the threefold pattern.” But, (c) Christians are

“divided . . . whether or not the ‘historic episcopate’ (meaning bishops ordained in apostolic succession back to the earliest generations of the Church), or the apostolic succession of ordained ministry more generally, is . . . intended by Christ.” Some see the threefold pattern as “a sign of continuing faithfulness to the Gospel and . . . vital to the apostolic continuity of the Church as a whole”; others “do not view faithfulness to the Gospel as closely bound to succession”; and some are “wary of the historic episcopate . . . as vulnerable to abuse and thus potentially harmful to the well-being of the community.” *TCTCV* encourages “a consensus” as to whether “the threefold ministry is part of God’s will for the Church” (§47). Juridical analysis yields extensive consensus in principle and practice.

Suitable, qualified persons may be called to and ordained or otherwise “set apart” for ministry, which is understood across the traditions to be of divine institution. By way of illustration, Roman Catholic law provides that: “By divine institution some among Christ’s faithful are, through the sacrament of order, marked with an indelible character and are thus constituted sacred ministers”: deacons, priests and bishops.⁶¹ Lutheran and Methodist ordained ministers engage in “holy ministry,” which is “the gift of Christ to the church”; “the church does not create the office of the public ministry, but it does call and ordain persons into that office” who are “qualified by personal qualities, gifts and training.” “God instituted the office of the ordained ministry,” namely, “a separated

and ordained ministry.”⁶² In the Reformed tradition, too, ordained ministry is conceived as instituted by Christ; and ministers, elders and deacons “represent Christ” (be they men or women);⁶³ and for Presbyterians, typically, Christ, “for the edification of the visible Church . . . has appointed officers not only to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments, but also to exercise discipline for the preservation both of truth and duty.”⁶⁴ Some Baptists practice “ordination.” Others do not: but they have “ministers.”⁶⁵ Baptists in the United Kingdom see ordination as the norm for ministry, especially where full-time ministry is in mind. Lay pastors are appointed where, for example, a small congregation is unable to afford full-time ordained ministry. Those who are ordained will normally be called by God; trained at a recognized college; called by a church congregation; and ordained and inducted. At a service of ordination, it is usual for the history of the call to be outlined with the call recognized through a resolution of the Church Meeting: “In ordination a person’s call from God to the pastoral ministry of Word and Sacrament is given public recognition as he or she is set apart to serve and to lead.”⁶⁶

62. LCA, *The Ministry of the People and Public Ministry*, 1992: citing Acts 6.4; MCI, *Constitution*, s. 1.

63. RCA, *Book of Church Order*, C. I, Pt. I, Art. 1: “Ministers are . . . men and women . . . inducted . . . by ordination.”

64. PCA, *Book of Church Order*, 7.1; PCW, *Handbook*, 4.1–2: “A minister at . . . ordination is set apart.”

65. Bethel Baptist Church (Choctaw), *Constitution*, Art. IV; Riverside Baptist Church (Baltimore): BL, Art. II.

66. Baptist Union of Great Britain, *Patterns and Prayers for Christian Worship* (Oxford University Press, 1991), 170.

61. CIC, cc. 1008–1009.

Ordination itself is the process by which the vocation of individuals to serve as ministers is recognized and by which they are “set apart” for ministry. Like the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church ordains clergy by way of the laying on of hands; ordination cannot be repeated. Candidates must be of the Orthodox faith, male, of sufficient age; married persons may be ordained, but unmarried clergy cannot marry.⁶⁷ In Lutheranism, typically, “By the rite of ordination the church sets a person apart” for ministry, and in Methodism a “Minister is constituted by the Call of God, the consent of the members of the Church, the election of the Conference, and the ordination to the office and work of a Minister in the Church of God by prayer and the laying on of hands.”⁶⁸ Similarly, in Presbyterianism: Candidates must have an “unimpeachable character,” “a deep experience of the truth of the Gospel,” “the calling of God by the Spirit, through the inward testimony of a good conscience, the manifest approbation of God’s people, and the concurring judgment of a lawful court of the Church”; “A minister at . . . ordination is set apart.”⁶⁹ Churches also have norms on appointment/election to

67. CIC, for example, cc. 1024–33. For the Orthodox, see, for example, Patsavos, *Manual*, 66–74.

68. MCI, *Constitution*, s. 4. For Lutheranism, see, for example, ELCA, *Constitution*, Ch. 7.31. The Reformed tradition also requires the laying on of hands: Protestant Church of the Netherlands, Order 3.5.7.

69. PCW, *Handbook*, 4: qualities; PCA, *Book of Church Order*, 16: vocation etc.

ministerial posts, tenure and termination of their ministry.⁷⁰

The functions and authority of ordained ministers

For *TCTCV*, ministers “assemble and build up the Body of Christ by proclaiming and teaching the Word of God, by celebrating the sacraments and by guiding . . . the community in its worship, its mission and its caring ministry,” reminding “the community of its dependence [and their own] on . . . Christ,” as the Church “has never been without persons holding specific authority and responsibility” (§19). Indeed: “All authority in the Church comes from her Lord and head, Jesus Christ”; receiving “all authority in heaven and on earth,” Jesus shared his authority with the apostles and their successors (§48). But the authority Christ shares with “ministries of leadership is neither only personal, nor only delegated by the community. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit destined for the service (*diakonia*) of the Church”; it is exercised alongside “the whole community, whose sense of faith (*sensus fidei*) contributes to the overall understanding of God’s Word and whose reception of the guidance and teaching of the ordained ministers testifies to the authenticity of that leadership”; a relation of “mutual love and dialogue unites those who exercise authority and those who are subject to it” (§51).

The norms of churches studied here clearly reflect the authority, functions and lifestyle of ordained ministers as envisaged in *TCTCV*. For instance, an Orthodox priest is “the spiritual father of his parish,”

70. Doe, *Christian Law*, 86–93.

must “treat his parishioners as his parochial family,” deliver homilies, provide liturgy, instruct the faithful, visit parishioners, direct parish life, and reside in the parish.⁷¹ Roman Catholic clerics must “seek holiness in their lives,” refrain from associations inconsistent with the clerical state, and lead a simple life avoiding worldliness.⁷² In Lutheranism, “Leaders in this church should demonstrate that they are servants by their words, life-style, and manner of leadership,” recognizing “their accountability to the Triune God, to the whole Church, to each other, and the [church] . . . in which they serve.”⁷³ Likewise, for Methodism: “Christ’s Ministers in the Church [are] Stewards in the Household of God and Shepherds of His Flock.”⁷⁴ Within Presbyterianism, “A minister at his/her ordination is set apart by the Church to lead it in . . . preaching the Word, the administering of the Sacraments, the pastoral care of members and their instruction in the Christian faith.”⁷⁵ Ministers are accountable for the exercise of their ministry to competent authority as prescribed by law.⁷⁶

The principle of oversight

For *TCTCV*: “The Church . . . is built up by the Holy Spirit through a diversity of gifts or

71. OCIA, *Guidelines for Clergy*, Priests and Deacons, 1–19; this cites Luke 22.27.

72. CIC, cc. 276–287: holiness; continence; celibacy; study; common life; simple life; residence; dress.

73. ELCA, *Constitution*, Ch. 5.

74. MCI, *Constitution*, s. 1.

75. PCW, *Handbook*, 4.

76. Doe, *Christian Law*, 93–101.

ministries”; “diversity calls for a ministry of co-ordination so that these gifts may enrich the whole Church.” Oversight (*episkopé*) under the gospel by persons chosen/set apart for this is “a requirement of fundamental importance.” But different structures have been devised to maintain “continuity in apostolic faith and unity,” to “safeguard and hand on revealed truth, to hold the local congregation in communion, to give mutual support and to lead in witnessing to the Gospel.” “All these functions . . . are exercised by persons who relate to the faithful of their communities [and to] those who exercise such a ministry in other local communities”; so oversight “needs to be exercised in personal, collegial and communal ways” (§52).

Oversight is addressed in the laws of all churches studied here, and is exercised principally by an ordained minister, usually in collaboration with others (who may have a determinative or consultative voice).⁷⁷ Norms provide for numerous personal ministries of oversight at regional and/or national level; but the scope of their jurisdictions differs as between traditions – such as Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican bishops in their dioceses and beyond them archbishops, Methodist district superintendents and presidents of national Conference, and regional Presbyteries and moderators of General Assemblies.⁷⁸ Some allow global jurisdiction. Like the Roman Catholic Pontiff (with teaching, sanctifying and governing authority over the global faithful), Orthodox

77. This is often formalized through assemblies such as a presbytery, consistory, classis, regional or general synod.

78. Doe, *Christian Law*, 102–113.

Patriarchs enjoy an international jurisdiction (such as the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople with authority over Greek Orthodox churches worldwide).⁷⁹ However, in Anglicanism, the Archbishop of Canterbury has no general jurisdiction over the autonomous churches of the worldwide Anglican Communion, but has “primacy of honour” as “focus of unity.” Provincial law may provide otherwise.⁸⁰ Similarly, the Presidents of the Lutheran World Federation, World Communion of Reformed Churches, and Baptist World Alliance exercise general oversight within these global bodies but not coercive jurisdiction.⁸¹

Ecclesiastical governance: institutions

For *TCTCV*, (1) Christ is the source of authority in the Church; it must be exercised in this light with the Holy Spirit its guiding agent.⁸² (2) However, authority “can call for obedience . . . to be welcomed with voluntary cooperation and consent since its aim is to assist believers in growing to full maturity in Christ” (§51). (3) So, an “essential element of communion” is “structures of conciliar relations and decision-making” (§37), but “churches differ about who is competent to make

79. CIC, c. 331: the Pontiff has “supreme, full, immediate and universal ordinary power”; Rodopoulos, *Overview*, 213–221: Constantinople; see also ROC, *Statute*, 1: the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia.

80. PCLCCAC, Principle 11.4; for example, an extra-provincial diocese such as Puerto Rico, *Constitution*, II.5.

81. LWF, *Constitution*, Arts. VII–VIII; WCRC, *Constitution*, Arts. XI–XII; BWA, *Constitution*, Art. VI.

82. *TCTCV* §§21, 33, and 49; §50: authority is distinct “from mere power.”

final decisions.” This may be, variously “restricted to the ordained”; enjoyed by laity; instituted by Christ. Or “no single institutional order” may be attributed to God’s will; or “a break in institutional continuity” may be required (§§20, 24). (4) “Decision-making . . . elicits the consensus of all and depends upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit, discerned in attentive listening to God’s Word and one another”; then, by “active reception over time, the Spirit resolves possible ambiguities in decisions.”⁸³ Yet churches should “honour each other’s commitment to seeking the will of God in the ordering of the Church” (§24). Thus (5) “the whole Church is synodal/conciliar, at all levels . . . local, regional and universal,” reflecting the Trinity so each, “by virtue of baptism, has his or her place and proper responsibility in the communion of the church” (§53).

Regulatory instruments provide concrete evidence of the commitment of churches to these ideas and of different approaches to the location of authority identified by *TCTCV*. A church may have an episcopal, presbyterian, congregational, or other form of government as required or permitted by its conception of divine law with Christ as the head of the church universal in all its manifestations. Across the traditions studied here, governance is exercised through a hierarchical system of international, national, regional and local institutions. The authority which an institution has at each level varies between the traditions and their

83. *TCTCV* §51: the sense of the whole people of God, insights of biblical scholars and theologians, and guidance of ordained ministers “all collaborate in the discernment” of God’s will (§51).

doctrinal postures. In the Roman Catholic (with its “hierarchical constitution,” in which “the power of governance” vests only in the ordained ministers) and Orthodox churches (with a “hierarchic structure of governance”), the highest authority is an international institution (the Pope and/or College of Bishops, or a Patriarch and Holy Synod) and authority descends to national, regional and local institutions (such as a Diocesan Synod or below that a Parish Council). In the Congregational and the Baptist traditions, authority resides primarily in the local church (and is shared by laity and ministers) and ascends (for limited purposes of common action) to regional, national and international institutions – such as a Baptist Association (regional), a Baptist Union or Convention (national), and the Baptist World Alliance – but these entities cannot interfere in the exercise of the autonomy of the local church. In Anglicanism, Lutheranism, Methodism, and Presbyterianism, authority is located in an institution at the national level (for example, an Anglican or Lutheran General Synod, a Methodist Conference, and a Presbyterian General Assembly, all composed of both lay and ordained persons). Authority then descends to regional institutions (for example, an Anglican or Lutheran Diocesan Synod and a Presbyterian Presbytery) and local institutions (such as a Parish Council or Kirk Session). In turn a limited authority ascends to international institutions but these have no general legislative power over the member churches (for example, the Anglican Communion, Lutheran World Federation and World Communion of Reformed Churches). Nevertheless, while

they have authority appropriate to their own level, these institutions are interdependent.⁸⁴

The regional and local church

For *TCTCV*, the local church is “a community of baptized believers in which the word of God is preached, the apostolic faith confessed, the sacraments are celebrated, the redemptive work of Christ for the world is witnessed to, and a ministry of *episkopé* exercised by bishops or other ministers in serving the community.” The local church “shares with all other local communities all that is essential to the life of communion” and “contains . . . the fullness of what it is to be the Church”; it “is wholly Church, but not the whole Church” and so exists not “in isolation from but in dynamic relation with other local churches.” Thus, “the communion of local churches is thus not an optional extra”; “interdependence” is critical. In turn, “The universal Church is the communion of all local churches united in faith and worship around the world . . . not merely the sum, federation or juxtaposition of local churches, but all of them together are the same Church present and acting in this world” (§31). Some churches consider the bishop (as apostles’ successor) essential to the local church (a diocese with parishes). For others, “local church” is not defined by reference to a bishop, but is rather a congregation gathered in a place to hear the Word and celebrate the sacraments. And for some it is “a regional configuration of churches gathered . . . in a synodal structure

84. Doe, *Christian Law*, Ch. 4.

under a presidency.” Importantly, “there is not yet agreement about how local, regional and universal levels of ecclesial order relate to one another.” So, *TCTCV* asks, “what is the appropriate relation between the various levels of life of a fully united Church and what specific ministries of leadership are needed to serve and foster those relations?” (§32)

Turning to the regulatory instruments, within their structures at national level, the churches generally organize themselves on the basis of regional and local territorial units. Roman Catholics, Orthodox and Anglicans have dioceses (each led by a bishop). In the Protestant tradition, Lutheran churches have dioceses or synods and, within these, districts or circuits. Methodists too have districts and circuits. Reformed and Presbyterian churches have synods, presbyteries and districts. Typically, Baptists Unions or Conventions have associations. Regional units are further composed of local units. Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican dioceses are divided into parishes; for instance, an Orthodox parish is “a community of Orthodox Christians under the supervision of the diocesan bishop and guided by a rector.”⁸⁵ Lutherans and Methodists have congregations and, sometimes, parishes, in which the church universal is present and where members gather for (for example) proclamation of the gospel and administration of the sacraments.⁸⁶

85. ROMOC, *Statutes*, Arts. 43–48; PCLCCAC, Principle 21; CIC, cc. 374 and 515.

86. LCBG, *Rules and Regulations*, Definition of a Congregation, 1–2; MCGB, *Constitutional Practice and Discipline*, Deed of Union, 1(v)–(vi); SO 500–517: a circuit: a unit of one/more local churches and “the primary unit in which

In the Reformed, Presbyterian, Congregational and Baptist models, regions and districts are typically composed of circuits, congregations and local churches. For example, a Reformed congregation is “a body of baptized Christians meeting regularly in a particular place of worship.” Similarly, in Presbyterianism, “A particular church consists of a number of professing Christians, with their children, associated together for divine worship and godly living.” And in Baptist polity, “The local church, being a manifestation of the universal church, is a community of believers in a particular place where the Word of God is preached and the ordinances of Believers’ Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are observed.”⁸⁷

In turn, each local unit has its own assembly for governance. A Methodist Circuit Meeting is typical: Composed of the circuit superintendent, ministers and elected representatives for each local church, it is “the principal meeting responsible for the affairs of a Circuit” and “circuit policy”; it exercises a “combination of spiritual leadership and administrative efficiency,” and is the focal point of “the working fellowship of the churches in the Circuit, overseeing their pastoral, teaching and evangelistic work.” In turn, the Church Council is “the principal meeting responsible for the affairs of a Local Church” or “Society.” Composed of ministers and lay representatives elected

Local Churches express and experience their interconnection in the Body of Christ.”

87. RCA, *Book of Church Order*, Ch. 1, Pt. I, Arts. 1–6: these may also be styled “parishes”; PCA, *Book of Church Order*, 4–5; BUSA, *Model Constitution*, Art. 4: the “congregational principle.”

by the annual General Church Meeting, it has “authority and oversight over the whole area of the ministry of the church.”⁸⁸

The relationship between local churches and regional and national institutions

In the traditions studied here, the local church may be subject to the control or direction of regional and national institutions but nevertheless enjoy autonomy within its own sphere. For example, Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican parishes are subject to the norms and directions of diocesan institutions, for example, diocesan bishop and/or diocesan assembly, as well as institutions at national level (such as the Roman Catholic Episcopal Conference, an Orthodox Holy Synod, and an Anglican General Synod).⁸⁹ Similarly, Lutheran assemblies at national or regional level may exercise control over the local church and its assemblies but each local church enjoys such autonomy as is prescribed by the general law of the church: “The power of the Church shall be exercised through the General Synod,” which shall be “the highest constitutional authority of the Church,” and each district synod exercises “general supervision over . . . the congregations.” But a congregation has “authority in all matters that are not assigned . . . to synods.”⁹⁰ In Presbyterianism,

a (national) General Assembly may “enact, alter or abrogate a law of the Church.” At the regional level the Presbytery is “responsible for corporate oversight of the congregations and causes assigned to it by the General Assembly”: it “superintends” the “spiritual and temporal affairs of its congregations,” but the autonomy of a congregation is protected in its own sphere.⁹¹ In Baptist polity, a national Union has more limited power: policies may be formulated by a Council for approval by the Assembly, which may amend the Union constitution, but not interfere with the autonomy of a local church; and a regional association assembly may issue policy resolutions which may be freely adopted by autonomous local churches. These represent universal Baptist principles.⁹²

International governance and primacy

For *TCTCV*, when “the Church comes together to take counsel and make important decisions, there is need for someone to summon and preside over the gathering for good order and to facilitate the process of promoting, discerning and articulating consensus.” and: “It is the duty of the ones who preside to respect the integrity of local churches, to give voice to the voiceless and to uphold unity in diversity.” “Primacy” originated in “the custom and practice” of the early church

88. MCGB, *Constitutional Practice and Discipline*, Deed of Union 1(iii) and SO 61.

89. CIC, cc. 447–455, 460–466; ROMOC, *Statutes*, Art. 19–34; PCLCCAC, Principles 19–20.

90. LCA, *Constitution*, Art. VII; ELCA, *Constitution*, Ch. 9.

91. PCI, *Code*, §§104–112: General Assembly; §§61–79: Presbytery (which monitors the Kirk Session).

92. BUGB, *Constitution*, I. and II; ABCUSA, *Constitution*, XIII: regional association.

and was later exercised by the Pope.⁹³ Some have expressed “an openness” as to “how such a ministry might foster the unity of local churches throughout the world and promote, not endanger, the distinctive features of their witness.” But, given sensitivity on the issue, “it is important to distinguish . . . the essence of a ministry of primacy and any particular ways in which it has been or is currently being exercised.” All agree that it would need “to be exercised in communal and collegial ways.” So, “how might a ministry that fosters and promotes the unity of the Church at the universal level be understood and exercised?”⁹⁴

The traditions studied here already provide for international oversight and leadership, with varying degrees of authority attached to it, in juridical norms applicable to global ecclesial communities which either constitute or are constituted by an institutional church. In the Roman Catholic Church, with the Pontiff, the College of Bishops exercises power over the universal church; and its decrees, if confirmed by the Pope, are to be observed by all the faithful.⁹⁵ In Orthodox polity, an autocephalous patriarchate exercises jurisdiction over its local churches across the world through, for example, the Patriarch and a Holy Synod.⁹⁶ However, at international level the institutions of

the Anglican Communion (for example, the Lambeth Conference), Lutheran World Federation (Assembly, Council and Secretariat), World Methodist Council, World Communion of Reformed Churches (General Council), and Baptist World Alliance (Congress) exercise no coercive jurisdiction over their autonomous member churches. Nevertheless, these international entities co-ordinate their work in matters of common concern on the basis of an authority conferred individually by those member churches. The autonomy of each member church must be respected; however, some of these international ecclesial communities may discipline churches (for example, suspension) by way of a special process.⁹⁷

Church discipline and conflict resolution

For *TCTCV*, the Church is called “to manifest God’s mercy” (§25). However, “As a pilgrim community the Church contends with the reality of sin.” For some traditions, “the Church is sinless since, being the body of the sinless Christ, it cannot sin.” For others, “it is appropriate to refer to the Church as sinning, since sin may become systemic so as to affect the institution of the Church itself.” Some see sin as “moral imperfection,” others as “a break in relationship.” Nevertheless, “All churches

93. *TCTCV* §§54–55: Canon 34 of the Apostolic Canons (still honoured by many) provides that the first among the bishops would only make a decision in agreement with the other bishops.

94. *TCTCV* §§54–57.

95. CIC, cc. 336–348, 360–361 and 754.

96. Rodopoulos, *Overview*, pp. 213–221; ROMOC, *Statutes*, Arts. 1–9: the Holy Synod is the “highest authority.”

97. PCLCCAC, Principle 11–13; LWF, *Constitution*, Art. IV: the Federation is “an instrument of its autonomous member churches”; Arts. VI–VIII: bodies; WCRC, *Constitution*, Arts. VII–IX: General Council is “the main governing body”; its decisions “concerning its organization and institutional activities shall be binding” but its decisions “involving the life and witness of the member churches are advisory in character”; BWA, *Constitution*, Preamble: it “recognises the traditional autonomy and independence of Baptist Churches.”

acknowledge the fact of sin among believers and its often grievous impact” and a “need for Christian self-examination, penitence, conversion, reconciliation . . . and renewal.” “Holiness expresses the Church’s identity according to the will of God, while sin stands in contradiction to this.”⁹⁸ Whatever the theological position of churches about sin within the Church, the juridical instruments indicate that all the churches here recognize the capacity of the faithful to engage in wrong-doing contrary to the normative standards of the church in question. Each church has norms to address wrong-doing, resolve internal disputes, and maintain church discipline.

The nature and purposes of church discipline

The churches studied here share basic ideas about the nature and purpose of ecclesiastical discipline. Typically, “Discipline in the Church is an exercise of that spiritual authority which the Lord Jesus has appointed in His Church. The ends contemplated by discipline are the maintenance of the purity of the Church, the spiritual benefit of the members and the honour of our Lord.” Moreover, “All members and Ministers of the Church are subject to its government and discipline, and are under the jurisdiction and care of the appropriate Courts of the Church in all matters of Doctrine, Worship, Discipline, and Order in accordance with the Rules and Regulations from time to time made by the Conference” (the central

98. *TCTCV* §§35–36 (cf. Rom. 6:1-11).

governing body).⁹⁹ Discipline is for “correction of the offender,” to “protect the reputation and resources of the church.” It is “not punitive,” and “Ecclesiastical discipline shall be carried out in an evangelical manner in accordance with scriptural principles and upholding the rules of natural justice. At all stages of the procedure the purpose . . . to gain a member, is to be observed.”¹⁰⁰

Quasi-judicial discipline and dispute settlement

The instruments of churches commonly provide for the settlement of disputes by means of a procedure short of formal judicial process. Hierarchical recourse is used in the Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican churches.¹⁰¹ In Lutheranism, a College of Presidents may be charged to give leadership in the resolution of conflicts; in Presbyterianism a congregation may refer a matter to the Presbytery for advice; and several Baptist churches employ arbitration.¹⁰² Churches also employ visitation to monitor and address discipline.¹⁰³ In

99. MCI, *Constitution*, s. 5. See also, CIC, c. 135; Patsavos, *Manual*, p. 111; PCLCCAC, Principle 3.5.

100. ELCA, *Constitution*, Ch. 4.03; PCANZ, *Book of Order*, 15.1; Bethel Baptist Church (Choctaw), *Constitution*, Art. VII: a member ceasing to meet the standards of the NT “will be subject to the discipline of the church.”

101. CIC, cc. 1732–1739; ROC, *Statutes*, X.5: a dean must resolve “misunderstandings” among clergy and laity “without formal legal proceedings”; Scottish Episcopal Church, Canon 55: resolution by the bishop(s).

102. LCA, *Constitution*, Arts VIII and *Bylaws*, VIII.F; PCI, *Code*, §21; BUSA, *Constitution*, 10.

103. For episcopal visitation, CIC, cc. 396–399; ROC, *Statutes*, X.18; PCLCCAC, Principle 23.

Presbyterian polity, for instance, the Presbytery must carry out a visitation of each congregation “to seek the improvement of Church life and work in the congregation . . . by inquiry into all matters affecting the congregation, by the encouragement of members in their Christian witness and service, and by advice or correction in anything found amiss.”¹⁰⁴ Methodism is similar.¹⁰⁵

Church courts and tribunals – judicial procedure

Most churches have a system of courts or tribunals for the enforcement of discipline and formal and judicial resolution of ecclesiastical disputes. These courts/tribunals may exist at international, national, regional, and/or local level.¹⁰⁶ They are established by competent authority, administered by qualified personnel, tiered as to original and appellate jurisdiction, and exercise such authority over members as is conferred on them by law.¹⁰⁷ Every effort must be made by the faithful to settle disputes amicably, lawfully, and justly; recourse to church courts and tribunals is a last resort.¹⁰⁸ Judicial process may be composed

of informal resolution, investigation, a hearing and/or other stages as may be prescribed by law including an appeal. Disciplinary procedures at trial must secure fair, impartial and due process on the basis of natural justice. The parties, particularly the accused, have the right to notice, to be heard, to question evidence, to silence, to an unbiased hearing, and, if appropriate, to appeal.¹⁰⁹

Disciplinary offences and sanctions

Most churches have a system of ecclesiastical offences, typically apostasy, heresy, schism, “immorality” or “violation of the moral norms of the church,” infringing doctrine, neglect of duty, acting inconsistently with ordained ministry, and conduct “censurable by the Word of God.”¹¹⁰ The churches studied here assert their inherent right to impose spiritual and other lawful censures, penalties, and sanctions upon the faithful provided a breach of discipline is established objectively. Sanctions must be lawful and just and may include admonition, rebuke, suspension, excommunication and ultimately removal from office or membership or withdrawal from spiritual privileges for

104. PCI, *Code*, §70, §§246–251.

105. MCGB, *Constitutional Practice and Discipline*, SO 111: the Conference may visit any Circuit.

106. ROC, *Statute*, I.8, VII, XI: Diocesan Court and General Ecclesiastical Court; ELCIC, *Constitution*, Art. XVIII: Court of Adjudication; PCI, *Code*, §§104–109: the General Assembly is “the supreme court”; PCANZ, *Book of Order*, 8: “A presbytery may exercise . . . judicial . . . powers.”

107. Doe, *Christian Law*, 164–171.

108. See UCCSA, *Procedure*, 15.1; CIC, c. 1446; PCLC-CAC, Principle 24.2; ELCSA, *Guidelines*, 5.

109. CIC, c. 221: vindicating rights; c. 1476: the right to bring an action; c. 1456: judicial impartiality; cc. 1458–1462: hearing; cc. 1501–1655: process and appeals; UOCIA, *Statutes*, Art. XII: “due canonical procedure”; LCGB, *Rules and Regulations*, Disciplinary Procedure for Pastors in the Church; PCW, *Handbook of Rules*, 2.5: complaint, investigation; hearing; appeals; MCGB, *Constitutional Practice and Discipline*, SO 1100–1155.

110. CIC, cc. 1364–1399, 1436–1437; ROMOC, *Statutes*, Art. 14; Church of Ireland (Anglican): *Constitution*, VIII.53; PCI, *Code*, pars, 131–132; UCCSA, *Procedure*, 13–15.

the remedial or medicinal purpose of the reform of the offender and the welfare of the church. Churches enable removal of sanctions on the basis of, for example, forgiveness and restoration to the full benefits of ecclesial association.¹¹¹

Doctrine and worship

TCTCV proposes that proclamation of the faith is an integral action of the Church, as is unity in and protection of the apostolic faith (§37). It is a faith invoked by the Word; inspired by the Spirit; attested in Scripture; transmitted through living tradition; confessed in worship, life, and mission; interpreted in changing contexts; lived out in active service; and spoken to personal-social situations (§38). Interpreting the Word involves the experience of the whole people of God, insights of theologians, and discernment of ordained ministers. The challenge is for churches to agree on how these factors work together (§39), reach “a normative expression of its faith,” reconcile differences as to “an authoritative interpretation of revelation,” consider how teaching authority is recognized/exercised (§51) and reflect on the importance of the doctrinal definitions of the early Ecumenical Councils (§53).

TCTCV also recognizes the need for legitimate diversity. (1) “Legitimate diversity is not accidental to the life of the Christian community but . . . an aspect of its catholicity” (§12) and “a gift from the Lord.” Cultural and historic factors contribute to diversity, as the Gospel needs to be proclaimed in languages, symbols and images

relevant to particular times/contexts. But (2) “Legitimate diversity is compromised whenever Christians consider their own cultural expressions of the Gospel as the only authentic ones, to be imposed upon Christians of other cultures” (§28). Churches must be “mutually accountable to each other” in this regard (§29). Thus, (3) churches should recognize “the limits of legitimate diversity” (§§12, 28–30): When diversity “goes beyond acceptable limits it can be destructive of . . . unity.” So, Christians should work “to overcome divisions and heresies” and “to preserve and treasure their legitimate differences of liturgy, custom and law” and “spirituality, theological method and formulation [so] that they contribute to the unity and catholicity of the Church as a whole” (§30). (4) Though “all churches have their own procedures for distinguishing legitimate from illegitimate diversity . . . two things are lacking: (a) common criteria or means of discernment; and (b) such mutually recognized structures to use these effectively. All churches seek to follow the will of the Lord yet they continue to disagree on some aspects of faith and order and . . . whether such disagreements are Church-divisive or . . . part of legitimate diversity.” So, “what positive steps can be taken to make common discernment possible?”

Juridical systems tell us about the extent churches themselves are united, through their norms and action prescribed by them in the proclamation, protection, interpretation, and promotion of the faith. The systems also offer models about the preservation of the inherited faith, the development of doctrine, and the authority and interpretation of Scripture so as to balance loyalty

111. Doe, *Christian Law*, 182–186.

to the apostolic faith and legitimate diversity of interpretation, doctrine, and worship.

The sources, definition and development of doctrine

Churches consider doctrine as the teaching of the church on matters of faith and practice. Their norms include the following. The doctrine of a church is rooted in the revelation of God as recorded in Holy Scripture, summed up in the historical Creeds, and expounded in instruments, texts and pronouncements issued by ecclesiastical persons and institutions with lawful authority to teach.¹¹² Doctrinal instruments include Catechisms, Articles of Religion, Confessions of Faith and other statements of belief.¹¹³ The doctrines of a church may be interpreted and developed afresh, by those persons or institutions within it with competence to do so, to the extent and in the manner prescribed by the law of that church provided this conforms to the catholic and apostolic faith of the church universal. In the Catholic and Orthodox churches the control over doctrine vests in the episcopate;¹¹⁴ but in other churches

112. GOAA, *Charter*, Art. 2: the church adheres to “the Holy Scriptures, Sacred Tradition, the doctrines and canons of the Ecumenical and Local Synods . . . as interpreted by the Great Church of Christ in Constantinople”; URC, *Manual*, A.12: scripture is “the supreme authority for faith”; see also BUGB, *Model Trusts*, 2.8.

113. Doe, *Christian Law*, 188–194.

114. CIC, cc. 749–753: the *magisterium* belongs to the ordained ministers and supreme teaching authority vests in the Pope and College of Bishops; ROMOC, *Statutes*, Art. 14: the Holy Synod may resolve any “dogmatic issue.”

doctrinal development is assigned to assemblies of ordained and lay persons.¹¹⁵

The proclamation of the gospel and evangelical work

For all the traditions, proclamation of the Word of God is a fundamental action of the church and a divine imperative incumbent on all the faithful for the evangelisation of the world. Preaching is a key function of ordained ministry but authorized lay persons may also preach. For example, Anglican clergy have the responsibility to preach sermons, but the laity may be authorized to do so; the preacher “must endeavour with care and sincerity to expound the word of truth according to Holy Scripture, to the glory of God and to the edification of the people.”¹¹⁶ In Methodism, “the main doctrines of the Christian faith should be more plainly and systematically set forth in public preaching, so that the Methodist people may be established in the faith”; preaching the Gospel is an ordinance of the church.¹¹⁷ Instruction of the faithful may be by way of catechesis, Sunday school or other classes; and the faithful

115. LCA, *Constitution*, Arts. VI, VII and XII: a General Synod “decision on a matter of doctrine” is “governed by the will of Christ as revealed in Scripture”; MCGB, *Constitutional Practice and Discipline*, Deed of Union 5: the Conference has “the final authority . . . concerning the interpretation of [the church’s] doctrines.”

116. PCLCCAC, Principles 48 and 51.

117. MCGB, *Constitutional Practice and Discipline*, SO 524; see also PCW, *Handbook*, 9: preaching the Gospel is an ordinance; URC, *Manual*, A.13; Riverside Baptist Church (Baltimore), *Constitution*, Art. II.

should study Scripture.¹¹⁸ Each church has a right to enforce its own doctrinal standards and discipline. The faithful should believe church doctrine; ordination candidates and others may be required to subscribe or otherwise affirm their belief in or loyalty to that doctrine. The faithful should not publicly manifest, in word or deed, a position contrary to church doctrine; those who do so may be subject to correction by means of disciplinary process.¹¹⁹

The nature, forms, administration and conduct of worship

For all the churches studied here, the public worship of God is a fundamental action of the church and divinely instituted; it involves an encounter between the church corporately and the faithful individually with the presence of God.¹²⁰ Each church and those persons or bodies within it competent to do so (from bishops to assemblies of ordained and/or lay persons) may develop liturgical texts or other forms of service for the public worship of God, provided these are consistent with the Word of God and church doctrine. The forms

of service for worship may be found in a book of rites or liturgy (Roman Catholic and Orthodox),¹²¹ a book of common prayer (Anglican),¹²² “orders of worship” (Lutheran),¹²³ a directory of worship (Presbyterian),¹²⁴ and other service books lawfully authorized for use.¹²⁵ A church must provide for public worship;¹²⁶ and ordained ministers are responsible for its conduct in accordance with the authorized forms of service.¹²⁷ The faithful must engage in regular attendance at divine worship, particularly on the Lord’s Day, Sunday.¹²⁸ The administration of worship is subject to supervision by designated church authorities.¹²⁹

118. CIC, cc. 773–777; PCLCCAC, Principle 48; LCGB, *Rules and Regulations*, Congregations, 2; ELCSA, *Guidelines*, 2.7; MCI, *Regulations*, 10.71–74; PCI: *Code*, 37 and 77; BUGB, *Model Trusts*, 5.1.4.

119. PCLCCAC, Principle 53; LCMS, *Constitution*, Art. III: schism and heresy; MCGB, *Constitutional Practice and Discipline*, SO 010(1); BUSA, *Model Constitution*, Art. 9.2: “erroneous belief.”

120. GOAA, *Constitution*, Art. 2 and *Regulations*, 15.3; ELCSA, *Guidelines*, 2.1; PCW, *Handbook*, 1.1 and 2.1.

121. CIC, cc. 2, 455, 826, 838: the Pope has authority over the formulation of liturgical texts; ROC, Statute, II.5 and III.4: the Bishops’ Council and Holy Synod are responsible for the approval of liturgical texts.

122. PCLCCAC, Principles 54–55.

123. LCA Resolution 269 of the 1987 General Convention, Order with Holy Communion.

124. PCANZ, *Book of Order*, 1.1: Directory of Worship (1995); PCW, *Handbook*, 9: the Book of Services.

125. UCA, *Regulations*, 3.6.5: the Assembly “may approve orders of service.”

126. LCGB, *Rules and Regulations*, Definition of a Congregation, 2; MCNZ, *Laws and Regulations*, s. 1.5; Riverside Baptist Church (Baltimore), *Constitution*, Art. II: the church must provide for “public worship.”

127. MCNZ, *Laws and Regulations*, s. 1.5; PCANZ, *Book of Order*, 1.7; RCA, *Book of Church Order*, Ch. 1, Pt. I, Art. 2.11: “worship . . . shall be in accordance with . . . the principles . . . in the Directory of Worship.”

128. GOAA, *Regulations*, Art. 8; PCI, *Code*, II.6; JBU, *Constitution*, Art. III.

129. Doe, *Christian Law*, 224–232.

The rites of passage

TCTCV identifies several ecumenical challenges with regard to ritual: who may be baptized; the presence of Christ in the Eucharist and its relation to His sacrifice on the cross; chrismation or confirmation; and those who do not affirm baptism and Eucharist but do affirm that they share in the Church's sacramental life (§40). Whether baptism, Eucharist and other rites should be termed "sacraments" or "ordinances" is another challenge.¹³⁰ Whichever term is used, though, most traditions "affirm that these events are both *instrumental* (in that God uses them to bring about a new reality), and *expressive* (of an already-existing reality)." In any event: "These rites express both the 'institutional' and 'charismatic' aspects of the Church. They are visible, effective actions instituted by Christ and, at the same time, are made effective by the action of the Holy Spirit who, by means of them, equips those who receive [them] with a variety of gifts [to edify] the Church and its mission." Therefore, churches should explore: "deeper agreement" about ecclesial life which involves these rites; the status of others (chrismation/confirmation, weddings, rites for forgiveness of sin and blessing the sick); who may receive baptism and preside at liturgical celebrations; and mutual understanding between churches that celebrate these rites and communities convinced that

130. TCTCV §44: *Sacrament* (used to translate the Greek *mysterion*) "indicates that God's saving work is communicated in the action of the rite . . . *ordinance* emphasizes that the action of the rite is performed in obedience to Christ's word and example. These two positions have often been seen as mutually opposed."

sharing life in Christ does not require celebration of sacraments or other rites (§44).

The legal evidence substantiates the differences in approaches between the traditions in terms of the classification of some rites as sacraments. The churches studied here classify baptism and the Lord's Supper as sacraments (or sometimes ordinances) which have been divinely instituted.¹³¹ Most churches have norms on marriage and some on confession and funerals.

The rite of baptism – and confirmation

TCTCV recognizes growing convergence among churches about baptism: "Through Baptism with water in the name of the Triune God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Christians are united with Christ and with each other in the Church of every time and place." Baptism is "the introduction to and celebration of new life in Christ and of participation in his baptism, life, death and resurrection"; and "the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit . . . incorporating believers into the body of Christ and enabling them to share in the kingdom of God." It "involves

131. CIC, cc. 840–841: sacraments are actions of Christ and church (baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, confession, marriage, anointing, and ordination); SOCA, *Constitution*, Art. 148: the 7 sacraments; PCLCCAC, Principles 11, 61, 66: baptism and holy communion are dominical sacraments; for Protestant churches baptism and Lord's Supper are classified variously as "sacraments" or "ordinances" and "means of grace" - LCGB, *Rules and Regulations*, Statement of Faith, 5; MCGB, *Constitutional Practice and Discipline*, Deed of Union 4; PCW, *Handbook*, 9; UCCSA, *Constitution*, 3.5.1; and BUSA, *Constitution*, 2.

confession of sin, conversion of heart, pardoning, cleansing and sanctification”; it is “a basic bond of unity.” Moreover, “Some churches see the gift of the Holy Spirit as given in a special way through chrismation or confirmation,” considered by them as a sacrament of initiation. “[G]eneral agreement about baptism has led some who are involved in the ecumenical movement to call for the mutual recognition of baptism” (§41).

Juridical instruments echo these theological propositions. In Roman Catholic law, baptism (infant or adult), the gate to the sacraments, is necessary for salvation in fact or intent, frees from sin, constitutes a rebirth as children of God configured to Christ and incorporates into the church. For Lutherans, “In Baptism we are incorporated into Christ.” For Presbyterians, “Baptism is an act of the Church, and . . . of God” in which “individuals are received into the fellowship of the Church” signifying God’s “gracious purpose to save us into eternal life.”¹³² Baptism is validly administered with water in the name of the triune God.¹³³ It is administered ordinarily in public in the presence of the faithful by an ordained minister, but extraordinarily in cases of necessity privately by a lay person.¹³⁴ A church may practice infant and/or believers’ baptism and a baptized person should

be nurtured in the faith by duly qualified sponsors or other designated entity.¹³⁵ A baptism should be registered in books and cannot be repeated; but, in the absence of proof of a prior valid baptism, a conditional baptism may be administered.¹³⁶

The eucharist, holy communion or Lord’s supper

According to *TCTCV*, “a dynamic and profound relation” exists between baptism and the Eucharist: “The communion into which the newly initiated Christian enters is brought to fuller expression and nourished in the Eucharist, which reaffirms baptismal faith and gives grace for the faithful living out of the Christian calling.” In sum: “The Lord’s Supper is the celebration in which, gathered around his table, Christians receive the body and blood of Christ.” It is “a proclamation of the Gospel, a glorification of the Father for everything accomplished in creation, redemption and sanctification (*doxologia*); a memorial of the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus . . . accomplished once for all on the Cross (*anamnesis*); and an invocation of the Holy Spirit to transform both the elements of bread and wine and the participants themselves (*epiclesis*).” It impels us to share in mission (§62). “Just as the confession of faith and baptism are

132. CIC, cc. 849–878; LCGB, *Rules and Regulations*, Statement of Faith, 5; PCANZ, *Book of Order*, 6.1.

133. PCLCCAC, Principle 61; LCGB, *Rules and Regulations*, Statement of Faith, 5; MCGB, *Constitutional Practice and Discipline*, SO 010A; PCW, *Handbook*, 9.2; URC, *Manual*, A.14.

134. CIC, cc. 849–878; OCIA, *Guidelines for Clergy*, Mystery of Baptism; ELCSA, *Guidelines*, 1.8.

135. CIC, cc. 849–878; ELCSA, *Guidelines*, 1.4–8; PCW, *Handbook*, 9.1; BUGB, *Constitution*, 3.2: Believers’ Baptism “an act of obedience to . . . Christ and a sign of personal repentance, faith and regeneration,” by “immersion in water into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”

136. CIC, cc. 849–878; ROC, *Statute*, XI.20; PCLCCAC, Principles 63–64; UMCNEAE, *Book of Discipline*, §226; PCI, *Code*, I.I.II.39.

inseparable from a life of service and witness, so too the Eucharist demands reconciliation and sharing by all . . . in the one family of God” (§43).

The juridical unity between these churches may be articulated in a number of principles. The Eucharist, Holy Communion or Lord’s Supper, instituted by Christ (though churches have different doctrines about its nature), is central to ecclesial life; the faithful should participate in it regularly. It is administered by ordained persons, or those otherwise lawfully deputed, normally in a public church service and exceptionally at home such as to the sick. Also, it is administered through the distribution of bread and wine or equivalent elements. A church by due process may exclude from admission to the sacrament those whom it judges unworthy to receive it. These norms are to be found in the Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican churches.¹³⁷ The same norms are also found in Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian and Baptist churches.¹³⁸

Marriage and divorce

Other rites which *TCTCV* does not deal with include marriage. Churches have complex norms on marriage, which is defined typically as a life-long union between one man and one woman, instituted by God for the mutual affection and

137. CIC, cc. 897–958; cc. 897–898: nature; cc. 899–911: celebration and minister; cc. 912–923: participation; cc. 924–930: wheat bread and wine from grapes of the vine and not corrupt; cc. 915–916: excommunication; GOAA, *Regulations*, Art. 18.1: parishioners “participate regularly”; PCLCCAC, Principles 66–69.

138. Doe, *Christian Law*, 250–254.

support of the parties and which may be ordered to procreation.¹³⁹ To be married validly in church, the parties must satisfy the conditions prescribed by church law and instructed in the nature and obligations of marriage.¹⁴⁰ The norm is marriage between church members but this may be relaxed. It is celebrated at a public service in the presence of an ordained minister and witnesses, and must be registered.¹⁴¹ A marriage is dissolved ordinarily by the death of one of the spouses and extraordinarily when recognized as such by competent ecclesiastical authority, though a minister may solemnize the marriage of a divorced person whose former spouse is still alive, to the extent that this is authorized by the law of a church and conscience of the minister.¹⁴² Similar principles may be induced from church norms on confession and funerals.¹⁴³

139. CIC, c. 1055; ELCSA, *Guidelines*, 7.2–7.8: “God has installed marriage as an order of creation. He unites man and woman towards an inseparable communion”; MCGB, *Constitutional Practice and Discipline*, SO 011A: it is “a gift of God and it is God’s intention that a marriage should be a life-long union in body, mind and spirit of one man and one woman”; PCW, *Handbook*, 9.4: the essential permanence of marriage.

140. CIC, cc. 1057–1064; OCIA, *Guidelines for Clergy*, Mystery of Marriage, 2: preparation; PCLCCAC, Principle 71: validity; MCI, *Regulations etc.*, 2.09: form of service.

141. CIC, cc. 1108, 1115–1120; UOCIA, *Instructions*, Policy on Marriages, 3; PCLCCAC, Principles 72–73; ELCSA, *Guidelines*, 7.2–7.8; MCGB, *Constitutional Practice and Discipline*, SO 011A; PCI, *Code*, §85.

142. CIC, c. 1055; Patsavos, *Manual*, pp.137–138; PCLCCAC, Principles 74–75; LCA: Marriage, Divorce and Re-Marriage, II, edited 2001; MCGB, *Constitutional Practice and Discipline*, SO 011A.

143. Doe, *Christian Law*, 265–272.

Ecumenical relations

TCTCV invites “leaders, theologians, and faithful of all churches to seek the unity for which Jesus prayed (Jn. 17.21)” (§8). “The ecclesial elements required of full communion within a visibly united church . . . are communion in . . . apostolic faith; in sacramental life; in a truly one and mutually recognized ministry; in structures of conciliar relations and decision-making”; and in “common witness and service in the world” (§37).¹⁴⁴ Visible unity requires churches “to recognise in one another the authentic presence of . . . the ‘one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church’”; this may “depend upon changes in doctrine, practice and ministry, . . . a significant challenge for churches in their journey towards unity” (§9). Moreover, the Church is called to be ever faithful to these apostolic origins; infidelity in worship, witness or service contradicts the Church’s apostolicity (§22). Currently, “some identify the Church of Christ exclusively with their own community”; some see in others “a real but incomplete presence” of the Church; some have joined “covenant relationships”; some believe the Church is “located in all communities that present a convincing claim to be Christian”; and others maintain that “Christ’s Church is invisible and cannot be adequately identified” (§10).

Juridical instruments tell us about a church’s commitment to and participation in ecumenism. Some churches have well-developed ecumenical norms; others less so. Whilst divided denominationally, each church teaches that there is one,

144. From “The Church: Local and Universal” (1990), §25, in *Growth in Agreement II*, 868.

holy, catholic and apostolic church universal,¹⁴⁵ and it is a portion, member or branch of it, or else the church universal subsists in it.¹⁴⁶ Ecumenism seeks the restoration of visible Christian unity – a divine imperative – and its goal is full ecclesial communion.¹⁴⁷ A church must promote ecumenism through dialogue and cooperation, which must be prudent and lawful so the discipline of each is respected;¹⁴⁸ protect the marks of the church universal; and define what ecclesial communion is possible.¹⁴⁹ Ecumenical activity is generally in the keeping of a central authority, but ecumenical duties may be given to the local church and to ordained ministers; and provision may exist for the ecumenical formation of the faithful.¹⁵⁰ A

145. OCIA, *Guidelines for Clergy*, Ecumenical Witness; PCLCCAC, Principle 93; ELCISA, Guidelines, 11 and 12; URC, *Manual*, A.18.5; MCI, *Constitution*, 1; CNBC, *Constitution*, 2; Statement of Faith, XIV.

146. CIC, c. 204; SCOBA, *GOCER*, Pt. I, Orthodox Ecumenical Guidelines, 1; LCGB, *Rules and Regulations*, 2; PCANZ, *Book of Order*, 1.1; MCGB, *Constitutional Practice and Discipline*, Deed of Union, 4 and SO 500.

147. For ecumenism as a divine duty (John 17.21) and definitions see: the Roman Catholic *Ecumenical Directory* (1993), §20; PCLCCAC, Principle 93; UCCSA, *Constitution*, Preamble; PCW, *Handbook*, III.3.4.4.

148. CIC, c. 755 and *Ecumenical Directory*, §§23,106–107; OCIA, *Guidelines for Clergy*, Ecumenical Witness: “duty”; MCNZ, *Laws and Regulations*, Introductory Documents, II Pastoral Resolutions: “commitment.”

149. Catholicity and apostolicity are spelled out in the objectives of churches; see above.

150. CIC, c. 755: Bishops’ Conferences; *Ecumenical Directory*, §§55–56: all the faithful; ELCIC, *Administrative Bylaws*, Pt. IX: the National Church Council; URC, *Manual*, 2(6): General Assembly.

church in agreement with its ecumenical partner decides when dialogue reaches a stage allowing ecclesial communion, typically when a church believes the other to hold the essentials of the church universal.¹⁵¹

Ecumenical norms may enable interchange of ministers, the sharing of the sacraments, mixed marriages and sharing property. But such norms are usually in the nature of exceptions to general rules which confine such facilities to the enjoyment of the faithful within the ecclesiastical tradition which created those norms.¹⁵² For example: “The Church recognises the ordination of ministers of all denominations provided the ordination has been carried out by an authority representing a recognised branch of the Universal Church.”¹⁵³ Norms may also enable church members to share in spiritual activities such as common prayer, spiritual exercises, funerals, and in mission and social justice initiatives.¹⁵⁴ The extent and terms of ecclesial communion or other relationship between churches of two/more traditions may be set out

151. *Ecumenical Directory*, §§17, 18; PCLCCAC, Principle 94; LCA, *Theses on the Church*, 26.

152. SCOBA, *GOCER*, Pt. 1, Preaching on Ecumenical Occasions, 1, and Sacraments, 1 and 2: the Divine Liturgy is “restricted to . . . Orthodox Christians alone”; ELCSA, *Guidelines*, 3.9: “members of other churches may only be admitted as guests to the Lord’s Supper”; CIC, c. 1124: 25: mixed marriages.

153. UFCS, Statement of the General Assembly, Special Constitutional Features.

154. *Ecumenical Directory*, pars, 62–65; SCOBA, *GOCER*, Pt. 1; MCI, *Regulations etc.*, 10.69.

in a constitutional union, concordat, covenant or other agreement between them.¹⁵⁵

Church property and finance

In its discussion of the Church and society (for which see below), *TCTCV* makes no mention of the temporal assets of the churches – their property and finances – and the uses of these. This too is a fertile ground to identify juridical unity amongst the separated churches.

Ownership of property and sacred places and objects

Churches studied here commonly assert their right to acquire, own, administer, and dispose of property (which may be held at international, national, regional or local level, depending on the church in question).¹⁵⁶ Places of worship and prescribed objects should be dedicated to the purposes of God – with norms often made which are applicable to their design – and the activities carried out in relation to sacred property should not be inconsistent with the spiritual purposes which attach to that property.¹⁵⁷ Typically, “No minister shall permit anything to be done in any Church under the responsibility of such Minister which is not in accord with the laws and usages of the Church.”¹⁵⁸ Items of church property include

155. Doe, *Christian Law*, 304–308.

156. *Ibid.*, 310–319.

157. CIC, cc. 1205–1218; ROC, *Statute*, X.18; LCA, *A Lutheran Approach to the Theology of Worship* (2001), Pt. 4; UMCNEAE, *Book of Discipline*, §2518ff; PCI, *Code*, 57.

158. MCNZ, *Laws and Regulations*, s. 2.26.1. See also

places of worship and their contents, associated buildings, burial grounds, church registers and records. The use, care and maintenance of sacred places and objects should reside in a designated and local person or body.¹⁵⁹ Moreover, oversight of the administration of property vests in a competent church authority and a periodic appraisal of its condition may be the object of a lawful visitation.¹⁶⁰ Provision may also be made for access to churches and for clergy residences.¹⁶¹

The control of finance: budgets, accounts and audit

A church has the right to make rules for the administration of its finances. The civil law on financial accountability should be complied with, and each ecclesiastical unit, through designated bodies, should prepare an annual budget for approval by its assembly. A church must provide, as to each unit, for the keeping of accounts for similar approval and ensure that these are audited

PCLCCAC: Principle 81: dedication and protection.

159. CIC, cc. 1219–1243; ROC, *Statute*, XI.43; LCGB, *Rules etc.*, Responsibilities and Duties of Pastors, 1–24; PCA, *Book of Church Order*, 9.2; URC, *Manual*, B.2.

160. CIC: c. 1222: oversight; c. 535: registers; ROC, *Statute*, V.28: the Holy Synod is responsible for “the proper state” of the architecture, iconography, etc.; PCLCCAC, Principle 81: inspection; MCGB, *Constitutional Practice and Discipline*, SO 015: archives; PCI, *Code*, 82: “The minister shall be entitled to use the place of worship and other church buildings for the purposes of his office, subject to any direction of the Presbytery.”

161. PCLCCAC, Principle 80: access; for manses, MCI, *Regulations etc.*, 12.01–03 and PCW, *Handbook*, 4.10.

annually by qualified persons to promote proper stewardship.¹⁶² Moreover, a church has a right to receive funds to be spent on its objects.¹⁶³ The faithful must contribute financially to church work and church officers should encourage the faithful in this. Typically, “The Holy Scriptures teach . . . God is owner of all persons and all things and that we are but stewards of both life and possessions; that God’s ownership and our stewardship should be acknowledged . . . [in] the form . . . of giving at least a tithe of our income and other offerings to the work of the Lord through the Church of Jesus Christ.” Thus members should engage in “regular, weekly giving, systematic and proportionate offerings.”¹⁶⁴ The local church may be the subject of assessments made by regional, national, or international authorities.¹⁶⁵ A church may invest money prudently in ethical ventures consistent with its standards.¹⁶⁶ Moreover, a church should insure its property against loss;¹⁶⁷ remunerate min-

162. CIC, cc. 228, 492–494, 537, 1271–1277, 1287; ROC, *Statute*, XI.43, 46; PCLCCAC, Principles 84–86; PCI, *Code*, 76; URC, *Manual*, B.2; BUSA, *Model Constitution*, 18.

163. CIC, cc. 1260; ROC, *Statute*, XV.1; ELCA, *Constitution*, Ch. 4.03; MCNZ, *Rules etc.*, 1.2; PCI, *Code*, 235.

164. PCA, *Book of Church Order*, 54; and, for example, MCI, *Regulations etc.*, 1.01, 2.06; BUSA, *Model Constitution*, 8.3.

165. CIC, cc. 1263–1264; UOCIA, *Statutes*, Art. XI.6; PCLCCAC, Principle 88; ELCIC, *Administrative Bylaws*, Pt. V.8; MCI, *Regulations etc.*, 13.13ff; PCI, *Code*, 76; BUGB, *Constitution*, 7.

166. CIC, cc. 1294, 1305; PCLCCAC, Principle 89; ELCA, *Model Const. for Congregations*, Ch. 12.05; MCGB, *Model Trusts*, 16; PCW, *Handbook*, 3.2.3; BUGB, *Model Trusts*, 11.

167. CIC, c. 1284; OCIA, *Guidelines for Clergy*, Priests and Deacons, 16; PCLCCAC, Principle 90; ELCA, *Constitution*,

istry;¹⁶⁸ and make financial provision for ordained ministers who are in ill-health and who retire.¹⁶⁹

Church, state and society

Each church studied here has norms on the authority of the State in its own secular sphere of governance, the institutional separation of the church from the State, the requirement on the church to comply with State law, the involvement of its members in political activity, the promotion of human rights, and engagement with society in charitable and other activity. These juridical facts find a direct echo in theological propositions found in *TCTCV*.

Church and state

TCTCV proposes: “Many historical, cultural and demographic factors condition the relation between Church and state, between Church and society. Various models of this relation based on contextual circumstances can be legitimate expressions of . . . catholicity. It is altogether appropriate for believers to play a positive role in civic life,” but not to collude with “secular authorities” in “sinful and unjust activities.” Also, “The explicit call of

Ch. 15.13.A10; MCI, *Regulations etc.*, 10.06; PCI, *Code*, 47(2); CBNC: Const., §124.

168. CIC, c. 281; GOAA, *Regulations*, Art. 17; PCLCCAC, Principle 91; ELCIRE, *Constitution*, Art. 21; MCI, *Regulations etc.*, 13.01; PCW, *Handbook*, 4.11.

169. CIC, cc. 281, 538 and 1274; ROMOC, *Statutes*, Art. 194; PCLCCAC, Principle 92; MCGB, *Constitutional Practice and Discipline*, SO 805–907; PCI, *Code*, 125A; JBU, *Constitution*, Art. XV.5.

Jesus that his disciples be the ‘salt of the earth’ and the ‘light of the world’ (cf. Matt. 5:13-16) has led Christians to engage with political and economic authorities . . . to promote the values of the kingdom of God, and to oppose policies . . . which contradict them,” through “critically analysing and exposing unjust structures,” “working for their transformation,” and “supporting initiatives of civil authorities” for justice, etc., even to the point of persecution or martyrdom, and sharing the lot of those who suffer (§§65–66). Juridical norms mirror these ideas.

The norms of the church traditions studied here provide that the State is instituted by God to promote and protect the temporal and common good of civil society, functions fundamentally different from those of the Church.¹⁷⁰ There should be a basic separation between a church and the State; but a church should cooperate with the State; in matters of common concern.¹⁷¹ Churches

170. *Catechism*, Roman Catholic Church (CCC) (1994), §§1918–1924, 1927: “political community and public authority are based on human nature and . . . belong to an order established by God”; “the State [is] to defend . . . the common good of civil society”; Rodopoulos, *Overview*, pp. 205–210: “the State is a product of . . . Divine Providence”; Augsburg Confession (Lutheran): Art. 16: “All government and all established rule and laws were instituted by God”; PCA, *Book of Church Order*, 3.4: “The power of the Church is spiritual; that of the State includes the exercise of force”; CNBC, *Constitution*, 3, Statement of Faith, 17: “Civil government being ordained of God.”

171. CCC, §§1918–1924, 1927: “in their own domain, the political community and the church are independent from one another and autonomous” but they should develop a “mutual cooperation”; ROMOC, *Statutes*, Art. 4: the church “establishes relations of dialogue and cooperation with the

(or entities within them) may negotiate the enactment of State laws specifically devoted to them, and enter agreements with the State and civil authorities to regulate matters of common concern.¹⁷² The faithful may participate in politics to the extent permitted by church law. Clergy in some churches cannot hold office involving the exercise of civil power; and norms often provide that church units cannot participate in or support financially political parties or allow church property to be used for political ends.¹⁷³ The faithful should comply with State law; but disobedience by the faithful to unjust laws may be permitted.¹⁷⁴

State”; ELCSA, *Guidelines*, 12.4: “the state does not rule over the Church nor the Church over the state”; PCA: BCO, Preface, I.1–13: “No religious constitution should be supported by the civil power further than may be necessary for the protection and security equal and common to all others”; BUSA, *Bylaws*, 4.2.7: “the principle of separation of church and state.”

172. N. Doe, *Law and Religion in Europe*, Oxford, University Press, 2011, especially chapter 4.

173. CIC, c. 285: clerics must not “assume public office whenever it means sharing in the exercise of civil power”; OCIA, *Guidelines for Clergy*, A Selection of Clergy Disciplines, 8: “Clergy must not run for political office”; Augsburg Confession, Art. 16: “Christians may without sin occupy civil offices”; MCI, *Regulations etc.*, 10.75–76: “all party political questions shall be strictly excluded from . . . the Council.”

174. NALC, *Standards for Pastoral Ministry*, B.7: there is to be no disciplinary action against ministers “where the violation of a law was to protest or to test a perceived unjust law or as an expression of civil disobedience”; MCNZ, *Laws and Regulations*, Introductory Documents, III Ethical Standards for Ministry, Responsibilities to the Wider Community, 2: ministers declare “While respecting the law, I will act to change unjust laws”; BUNZ, *Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice for Ministry Personnel*, 6: ministers must “obey the laws of [the] government unless they require disobedience to

Also, the faithful should not resort to State courts unless all ecclesiastical process is exhausted.¹⁷⁵

Human rights and religious freedom

TCTCV sees “religious freedom as one of the fundamental dimensions of human dignity and, in the charity called for by Christ,” Christians should seek “to respect that dignity and to dialogue with others . . . to share . . . the Christian faith” (§60). The exercise of religious freedom is particularly important in so far as the advance of “a global secular culture challenges the Church with a situation in which many question the very possibility of faith, believing that human life is sufficient unto itself, without any reference to God.” It also becomes important to meet “the challenge of a radical decline in membership” as faith is seen by many as “no longer relevant to their lives.” This might stimulate what some see as “the need for re-evangelisation”: “All churches share the task of evangelization in the face of these challenges” (§7). Dialogue with and respect for other faiths is also an ecumenical issue.¹⁷⁶

Church law-order-polity has potential to
the law of God.”

175. ROC, *Statute*, I.9–10; UFCS, *Constitution*, V.II.8; BUSA, *Bylaws*, 2(b).

176. *TCTCV* §25. See also §60: Christians should consider how “to appreciate whatever elements of truth and goodness are present in other religions” by, for example, “interreligious dialogue.” “[R]eligious pluralism challenges Christians to deepen their reflection about the relation between the proclamation that Jesus is the one and only Saviour . . . and the claims of other faiths.” For norms, see Doe, *Christian Law*, 377, n. 243.

convert the promotion of human rights and religious freedom in particular into norms of action for the faithful. Under their regulatory texts, for each church tradition studied here, all human beings are created in the image of God and as such all humans share an equality of dignity and fundamental human rights.¹⁷⁷ In turn, the State should recognize, respect and promote basic human rights.¹⁷⁸ Moreover, the church should protect and defend human rights in society for all people; and, like the church, the State and society should not discriminate against individuals on grounds of race, gender, and color.¹⁷⁹ Also, the State should recognize, promote and protect the religious freedom of churches corporately and of the faithful individually, as well as freedom of conscience.¹⁸⁰

The Church and social responsibility

TCTCV proposes that the first attitude of God to all creation is love. So, as God intends the Church to transform the world, “service (*diakonia*) belongs to the very being of the

177. LCGB, *Rules etc.*, Statement of Faith, 9; UMCNEAE, *Book of Discipline*, §147, Confession, Art. XVI.

178. Lambeth Conference 1988, Res. 33; UMCNEAE, *Book of Discipline*, §147, Confession of Faith, Art. XVI: governments should respect “human rights under God.”

179. CIC, c. 204; PCLCCAC, Principle 26; LWF: Const., Art. III; MCNZ, *Laws etc.*, Introductory Documents, II, Pastoral Resolutions; WCRC, *Constitution*, Art. V; see also BWA, *Constitution*, Art. II.

180. *Gaudium et Spes*, 96; PCI, *Code*, I.III.13; BUSA, *Constitution*, Art. 5.3.

Church” (§58); and “a constitutive aspect of evangelization is the promotion of justice and peace” (§59). In this churches should discern together moral values uniting them (§§61–63). In turn, the Church should help the powerless to be heard; “work for a just social order, in which the goods of this earth may be shared equitably” (to ease poverty and eliminate destitution); and advocate peace, seeking to overcome causes of war. Christians must “acknowledge their responsibility to defend human life and dignity, . . . obligations on churches as much as on individual believers.” Christians who have “acted jointly” to foster human dignity, and who may work with other religions in this, set a good example (§64).

Once more, church regulatory systems are valuable to translate these exhortations into action. Each church within the traditions studied here recognizes for itself a responsibility to promote social justice and engage in charitable activity in wider society. Provision is also made for caring for the whole of God’s creation. As such, churches have institutions to guide, initiate, and implement programmes for Christian action in society; and ordained ministers are to lead by example in the field of social justice and responsibility. Also, the faithful are to engage directly in the promotion of social justice and charitable work. Churches present engagement in social responsibility as a function of faith and law.¹⁸¹

181. CIC, c. 839: charity; cc. 215 and 222: social justice; ROC, *Statute*, XI.20; PCLCCAC, Principle 21: “social” activities; ELCA, *Constitution*, 4.02: meeting human needs; WCRC, *Constitution*, Art. V: promoting “economic and

Conclusion

When compared, there are profound similarities between the basic elements of the normative regimes of the churches across the ecclesiastical traditions studied here. This is not surprising: juridical unity is often based on the practice of churches to use a common source in shaping their laws (chiefly Holy Scripture), and their adoption or adaptation of norms of the mother church, in the case of those churches within a single tradition, or at least elements of them in the case of churches which have broken away from that tradition. From these similarities may be induced common principles of Christian law. The existence and articulation of these principles may be of some interest to the World Council of Churches, its Faith and Order Commission, and its *TCTCV* project.

Regulatory systems of churches shape and are shaped by ecclesiology. These systems also tell us much about convergence in action, including and beyond the matters addressed in *TCTCV*, based on common norms of conduct, as well as the commitment of churches to ecumenism. While certain dogmas divide churches, this does not negate that profound similarities between their norms of conduct produce juridical convergence. This reveals that the juridical norms of the faithful, whatever their various denominational affiliations, link Christians through their stimulation of common forms of action. As laws converge, so

ecological justice”; PCW, *Handbook*, 2.2: “service to society”; BWA, *Constitution*, Art. II: human need.

actions converge. Whilst there are key differences, similarities between the norms of conduct of churches indicate that their faithful engage in the visible world in much the same actions as other Christians. This must count for something in the ecumenical enterprise. In turn, comparing church law-order-polity systems, themselves forms of applied ecclesiology, enables the articulation of principles of law-order-polity common to the churches; enables the reconciliation of juridical difference in the form of underlying principles of law; provides a stable ecumenical methodology through its focus on concrete textual data; offers a practical guide for Christian life; and defines that degree of achieved communion as well as opportunities for and limits on future progress. In short: dogmas may divide, but laws link Christians in common action. This is significant – as *TCTCV* states: “common action” is “intrinsic to the life and being of the Church.”¹⁸²

III. Principles of Christian law common to component churches¹⁸³

Specimen Agreed Principles on Church Discipline and Church Property

182. *TCTCV* §61.

183. For the purposes of this document, the expression “law” encompasses a variety of regulatory instruments and other norms, including constitutions, canons, covenants, books of church order, and other polity documents.

CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Ecclesiastical discipline

1. A church as an institution has the right to enforce discipline and to resolve conflicts amongst the faithful.

2. The right to exercise discipline has a variety of foundations including divine and spiritual authority.

3. A church may exercise discipline in relation to both lay and ordained persons to the extent provided by law.

4. The purpose of discipline is to glorify God, to protect the integrity and mission of the church, to safeguard the vulnerable from harm, and to promote the spiritual benefit of its members.

5. Discipline is exercised by competent authority in accordance with law.

Informal dispute resolution

1. Ecclesiastical disputes may be settled by a variety of formal and informal means, including administrative process.

2. The competent authority may settle the matter in a process short of formal judicial process in the manner and to the extent provided by law.

3. Anyone with a sufficient interest in the matter may challenge a decision by recourse to the relevant and competent authority.

4. Visitation is exercised pastorally by a regional or other competent authority in relation to the local church or other such entity in the manner and to the extent provided by law.

5. The aim of visitation is to monitor, affirm and improve the life and discipline of the entity visited.

Church courts and tribunals

1. A church has a system of courts, tribunals or other such bodies to provide for the enforcement of discipline and the formal and judicial resolution of ecclesiastical disputes.

2. Church courts, tribunals or other such bodies may exist at international, national, regional and/or local level to the extent permitted by the relevant law.

3. The establishment, composition and jurisdiction of judicial bodies are determined by the law applicable to them.

4. Church courts, tribunals and other such bodies are established by competent authority, administered by qualified personnel, and may be tiered in terms of their original and appellate jurisdiction.

5. Church courts, tribunals and other such bodies exercise that authority over the laity and ordained ministers as is conferred upon them by law.

Due process

1. Every effort must be made by the faithful to settle their disputes amicably, lawfully, justly, and equitably, without recourse in the first instance to church courts and tribunals.

2. Formal process is mandatory if church law or civil law require this.

3. Judicial process may be composed of informal resolution, investigation, a hearing, and/or such other stages as may be prescribed by law, including an appeal.

4. Christians must be judged in the church according to law applied with equity; and disciplinary procedures must secure fair, impartial and due process.

5. The parties, particularly the accused, have the right to notice, to be heard, to question evidence, to an unbiased hearing, and where appropriate to appeal.

Ecclesiastical offences and sanctions

1. A church may institute a system of ecclesiastical offenses.

2. Ecclesiastical offenses and defenses to them are to be clearly defined in writing; and a court, tribunal or other body acting in a judicial capacity must give reasons for its finding of breach of church discipline.

3. A church has a right to impose spiritual and other lawful censures, penalties and sanctions upon the faithful, provided a breach of ecclesiastical discipline has been established.

4. Sanctions should be lawful and just. They may include admonition, rebuke and excommunication. They may be applied to the laity, clergy and office-holders, to the extent provided by law. Their effect is withdrawal from some of the benefits of ecclesial life. Sanctions are remedial or medicinal.

5. A church may enable the removal of sanctions.

CHURCH PROPERTY

The ownership of property

1. A church has the right to acquire, administer and dispose of property.

2. A church and/or institutions or bodies within it may seek legal personality under civil law to enable ownership of property.

3. A church may have rules about the acquisition, ownership, administration, sale or other form of disposal of church property.

4. A church may have in place provision for its own dissolution or that of units within it, and for the distribution of property on dissolution.

5. Property which vests in institutions is held on trust for the benefit of the church and its work and such institutions are required to exercise proper stewardship of that property.

Sacred places and objects

1. A church may dedicate or otherwise set aside a building or other space, prescribed objects, and other forms of property, for worship and other sacred purposes.

2. A place of worship, or other space, or sacred object must be used in a manner which is consistent with its dedication.

3. Responsibility for the use, care and maintenance of sacred places and objects vests in a designated person or body.

4. Oversight of the administration of church property vests in competent ecclesiastical authority; a periodic appraisal of its condition may be the object of a lawful visitation.

The control of finance

1. A church has the right to make rules for the administration and control of its finances.

2. The civil law applicable to financial accountability must be complied with.

3. A church must ensure sound financial management, including the framing and approval by competent authority of an annual budget.

4. A church should provide, with regard to each entity within it, for the keeping of accounts for approval by a competent authority.

5. A church must ensure that financial accounts are audited annually by qualified persons in order to promote proper stewardship in the church.

Lawful income

1. A church has a right to receive funds.

2. The faithful must contribute financially, according to their means, to the church's work.

3. The officers of a church should encourage the faithful in the matter of offerings and collect and distribute these as prescribed.

4. The local church and other entities may be required by competent authority to make a financial contribution to meet the wider institutional costs and needs of the church.

5. A church which invests money should do so prudently and in ventures which are consistent with the ethical standards of the church.

Ecclesiastical expenditure

1. A church should require the designated authorities within it to insure church property against loss.

2. A church should support and sustain those engaged in ministry according to their need and circumstance.

3. A church should make suitable provision for ordained ministers who are in ill-health and for those who retire.

* * *

APPENDIX

Participants, Acknowledgments and Meetings

The Panel of Experts

Convenor

Professor Mark Hill QC (Cardiff University, Pretoria University, King's College, London)

Members

Rev. John Chalmers (Former Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland)

Professor Norman Doe (Director of the Centre for Law and Religion, Cardiff University)

Rev. Ken Howcroft (Former President of the Methodist Church in Great Britain)

Aidan McGrath OFM (Secretary General of the Franciscan Order)

Robert Ombres OP (Blackfriars Oxford, formerly Procurator General of the Dominican Order)

Professor Leon van den Broeke (Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam)

Professor Leo Koffeman (Protestant Theological University, Amsterdam)

Professor Nikos Maghioros (Aristotle University, Thessaloniki)

Anna Trônet (Diocesan Lawyer, Church of Sweden)

Rev. Dr John Weaver (Former Principal, South Wales Baptist College)

Observers

Fr Tony Curren (Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, Vatican)

Archbishop Sir David Moxon (Archbishop of Canterbury's Representative to the Holy See)

Rev. Marcus Walker (Associate Director, Anglican Centre in Rome)

Tim Macquiban (Methodist Church)

Rev. Dr Peter Stevenson (Principal, South Wales Baptist College)

Corresponding member

Mary McAleese, formerly President of Ireland

Acknowledgments

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Cardiff University

The Venerable English College, Rome and its Rector Mgr Philip Whitmore

His Excellency Nigel Baker, HM Ambassador to the Holy See

The Anglican Centre in Rome and its Director, Archbishop Sir David Moxon

Meetings

13 November 2013: Invited Symposium,
Venerable English College in Rome

1 October 2014: Second Symposium, Venerable
English College in Rome

30 September 2015: Third Symposium,
Venerable English College in Rome

34. International Ecumenical Fellowship

Introduction

The story of the International Ecumenical Fellowship (IEF) is the story of pilgrims from many places, journeying together towards the same destination: the renewal and unity of the Christian Church. In the more than 40 years of our history, our story has been one of a community of largely grassroots Christians, inspired and encouraged to work in our own localities for Christian unity. Our inspiration has been the vision and the experience of *living today the Church of tomorrow*. It is significant that IEF's name includes the word *fellowship*: We experience ourselves as a *koinonia*, a community bound together by the Holy Spirit, rather than an organization. We hope that what makes IEF distinctive can make a contribution to our common ecumenical journey.

IEF came into being in 1967, following the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). Members founded the ILAFO (International League for Apostolic Faith and Order) in 1951 and met in Fribourg in 1967. Their membership was predominantly Old Catholic, Anglican and Evangelical-Lutheran, enriched by some Orthodox, Reformed and (since 1966) Roman Catholic individuals. At this conference they decided to reconstitute themselves as the International Ecumenical Fellowship (IEF).

IEF sees its task as being to work towards the visible communion between churches and

Christians. Above all, this task is carried out through meeting for worship, common prayer and possibilities of eucharistic sharing; but also through Bible study, healing and reconciliation and the exploring of each others' different church traditions. It is through international conferences over the years that the life of IEF has developed; but there are also regional events.

IEF is constituted by members from ten countries of the Europe region (Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Great Britain, Hungary). Recently a new IEF Chapter in East Africa was inaugurated with its own independent life. The General Assembly, with representatives from each region, is the main decision-making body. Within this there is a Theological Committee with members from all traditions and regions. It is through this committee that we want to make our contribution and reflection towards the document of Faith and Order, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*.

Contribution

1. We welcome with joy and hope the work of many years reflected in this document which the churches want to convey to all members, a document of great ecclesiological importance. It is the beginning of a path which the churches must now build upon. The document follows a direction already begun in previous documents (*Baptism*,

Eucharist and Ministry), and we must now move forward with hope and courage as the Lord's Spirit blows us towards new challenges. There are passages where the document explores and questions the grounds on which it is building up consensus. In general, the text reflects ideas from Canberra and Santiago. Thus, the Church's communion, already present among Christians, reflects the life of the Trinity and is grounded in one baptism. Through *koinonia*, the community partakes in God's *oikonomia*, serving in mission as a royal priesthood (I Pet. 2:9-10) and as an instrument to establish the Kingdom. Communion justifies diversity; catholicity itself is valued as a quantitative reality and challenges all churches to recognize in each other the one, true Church of Jesus Christ. However, in order that diversity will not be divisive, authority and conciliarity safeguard the unity of the Church. Hierarchy is secondary to faith and the Gospel, because apostolic succession is subordinated to apostolic faith and not correlated to it.

2. IEF considers it important to bring to attention some shortcomings of the document. The reader is confronted over and over again with passages that acknowledge the remaining differences between the churches concerning many important questions: competences of the ministry (§20); different notions of institutional structures (§24); the Church as a sacrament is not universally accepted (§27); different understandings of the "local church" (§32); church and sin (§35); restriction of ordination to the ministry to men only (§45); threefold ministry bishop-presbyter-deacon

not universally accepted (§47); universal ministry of unity (primacy) not universally accepted or even desirable (§57). In some cases, the disagreement exists even within churches (i.e., universal primacy). The overwhelming and unavoidable impression is that the differences have not been diminished so far, or at least not diminished substantially.

This brings forth a question, maybe a provocative one, whether overcoming these differences is desirable. In this regard the position of the document is rather ambiguous. It builds upon the notion of "legitimate diversity," but in the following pages the text understands remaining differences more as obstacles on the way to unity than as expressions of this legitimate diversity. It is unclear whether the desired aim is to overcome all differences, or just the most serious and divisive ones, and which ones are the most divisive. Thus it is unclear which differences are legitimate and which need to be overcome.

3. What is surprising is the direction the text seems to take by subverting the tie between *koinonia* and service. The document gives the impression that mission founds *koinonia*. Because of this, some aspects lose their inter-confessional strength. As praiseworthy as the debate on authority may be, for example, it loses its impact when it is rooted in the service of the Church and not in its inner communion. It is true that by doing this, the ministry's authority is safeguarded from human abuses; yet this affects also the relation between the hierarchy and the Church's being. Thus, the hierarchy speaks more about the actions of the Church than about

its essence. The document does not find a solution that would bring about ecumenical consensus on this matter.

In the chapter about ordained ministry, the document states that “there is no single pattern of ministry in the New Testament.” Why not then recognize that, as there is no single pattern of unity in the NT, there is also no single pattern in the understanding of most of the divisive matters in the ecclesiology of Christian churches today? In seeking to understand unity we must also face and understand legitimate diversity.

4. The other criticism that we would address to this document is that it seems to presume a Constantinian model of Christianity and of the Christian Church. The Emperor Constantine wanted a clear belief and faith that he could impose upon the Roman Empire, but as one Orthodox writer once put it, Jesus prayed that the Church might be one as He and the Father are one, not as the Roman Empire was one. That Constantinian model did in fact come to reality in the medieval world, in which the Church was at the centre of the entire life of society, so much so that it is even incorrect to talk of “Church” and “State” in this period. Society was one reality centred on the Church. This document seems to have an unconscious assumption that this kind of world can once more be established amongst all the nations of the world. It still seems to see the Church as an empire that must grow and cover the whole world. Is this what we believe? Although mention was made of the inter-faith world in which we now live, the document did not profoundly explore what this

means for Christian belief. The former Chief Rabbi in Great Britain, Jonathan Sacks, once wrote in his book *The Dignity of Difference* that, for the Jewish faith, the God of Abraham is seen as the God of all mankind, but it does not presume that the faith of Abraham is the faith for all mankind. Although Christianity and Islam took much from their Jewish origins, they did not take this particular outlook. This document seems to work with the assumption that the faith of Christianity should be the faith for all people: “It is God’s design to gather humanity and all creation into communion under the Lordship of Christ (Eph.1:10). . . . While respecting the elements of truth and goodness that can be found in other religions and among those with no religion, the mission of the church remains that of inviting, through witness and testimony, all men and women to come to know and love Christ Jesus” (§25). What do these statements realistically mean?

a) It seems to us that this document feels largely like one written by the Western Church for the Western Church, a document of the North rather than a document embracing the Global South, as well as the Pentecostal churches.

b) This document seems a very conceptual one, working with beliefs and convictions set out in words. But there are other ways into unity. Why not make simpler agreements such as the one signed at Bonn in 1931 between the Anglican Church and the Old Catholic Church, who agreed on the following clauses: (1) Each communion acknowledges the catholicity and the autonomy of the other one but maintains its own (respect of

diversities). (2) Each communion accepts that the members of the other one can participate in their sacraments. (3) Intercommunion does not demand that either of the two communions should adopt all the doctrinal opinions, the forms of sacramental piety, or any liturgical practices proper to the other one but it implies that each one believes that the other one perseveres in what is essential in the Christian Faith. This agreement seemed to us to be a simpler way than the search for a ministry of unity which may be difficult to reach.

c) Action rather than words, service rather than beliefs, can be ways of meeting with each other and with those of other faiths, ways that can prove fruitful. This document seems to rest mainly on the conviction that beliefs are the principal things to be established as a foundation. It seems to us that the vision of IEF is to offer another way into ecumenism, one that does not start with words but with living together, worshipping together, praying together—that is to say, a lived ecumenism, a grassroots ecumenism. Liturgy and prayer are essential to our approach to the search for unity and take up large parts of our international conferences, unlike at other ecumenical gatherings. The document speaks of liturgical and sacramental agreements but does not give weight to what can be achieved when people actually pray and worship together on a regular basis for their ecumenical search. It is here that we believe IEF has the most to contribute to the way forward in new understandings.

5. It is also remarkable to note that the document is most persuasive in the passages devoted to

the mission of the Church and to its commitment to social justice, peace and protection of the environment. The examples of common ecumenical authority are mostly from this field (Archbishop Tutu on apartheid, Patriarch Bartholomew on ecology, Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI on promoting peace). Whenever the document deals with more strictly ecclesiological questions, there is less consensus and more differences.

Especially for a Czech Christian, whose countryman Jan Hus was burned at the stake as a heretic just 600 years ago, there is one specific passage in the document that is unacceptable. Speaking about the “limits to legitimate diversity,” it understands heresies and schisms, together with political conflicts and expressions of hatred, as both in the same way threatening God’s gift of communion. What is sorely missing in this paragraph is a word of condemnation of the cruel treatment of heretics throughout Christian history. It is also arguable whether heresies can be placed at the same level as political conflicts and expressions of hatred, and in our opinion such an equation is deeply erroneous.

We can ask some questions that have arisen from the discussion on the text:

a) How can such a text be received by grassroots Christians? This is very important, as the text says (§31): “Each local Church contains within it the fullness of what it is to be the Church. It is wholly Church, but not the whole Church.” It then appeared important to us that this text should be known and discussed in our churches: It would be the beginning of a uniting process. The officials of dioceses and parishes could then

organize meetings to give information about and an exegesis of this text in order to motivate more the Christians to ecumenism.

b) The final version of this document was presented in June 2012 to the Permanent Commission of Faith and Constitution. Since then, many changes have occurred in the world and in the Church. Are such theological reflections still valid? Should we not put a greater emphasis on solidarity, as it is developed in the chapter 4 of the document?

c) Is this document dynamic enough to motivate young people who, probably, wish other forms to express their faith and a greater proximity with the gospel? Does it meet their anxiety concerning a more and more precarious future? Does inter-religious dialogue not motivate them better? Inter-religious dialogue is indeed essential, but it should not prevail over ecumenism, as Christians have to unite to give a true and acceptable testimony.

d) The world is undergoing a serious crisis, with climate change, economic uncertainty and the rise of Islamic fanaticism—a crisis that can only be overcome by a great resistance based on our common Christian values, and only in faith and fidelity to God, in the face of uncontrollable migrations with their countless victims. This document, which is three years old, cannot ignore such drastic changes.

Conclusion

The text as a whole is a valuable step towards the recognition of ecclesiological plurality in the various churches and towards that unity which is in Jesus Christ. This is presented with an

ecclesiological conception that arises from the very existence of the Church in history. *TCTCV* offers a greater chance of meeting in the ecumenical journey, because it takes the *concrete ecclesial experience* as a decisive factor, a factor which must not be forgotten when constructing a theological reflection on ecclesiology.

The Church is not called to division, but to unity, respecting diversity. It needs to consider the local reality where the actual ecclesial experience is lived: this is a necessary and indispensable element.

The assessment of the possibilities of initiating, maintaining and developing relations between different faiths also presents us with a field that is truly open. The acceptance of inter-religious dialogue is a positive and necessary way of mutual enrichment without falling into the dissolution of identity, nor into an attitude of proselytism. Growth in communion underlines the ecclesial importance of maintaining a genuine balance between service (*diakonia*), witness (*martyria*) and worship (*leitourgia*). The union of these three areas enables a coherent understanding of mission and a real promotion of justice and peace. Nor can we forget the positive experience of living the Eucharist, as the central point in the mission of the Church both in its centripetal perspective (concentration) and in its centrifugal dimension (expansion), both aspects leading us on a path that is truly ecumenical.

At IEF our task has always been to try relentlessly to live today the Church of tomorrow. Therefore we are aware of the difficulties, but we live in hope of reconciliation and do not lose sight of the

hope that in the near future a visible unity among Christians will be reached. To meet and reach consensus implies to see the face of the other, to see in that face God, who loves us all.

Prof. Andrés Valencia P.
Chairman, IEF Theological Committee

Dr Filip Outrata
Moderator, IEF Theological Committee

December 2015

35. North American Academy of Ecumenists

The North American Academy of Ecumenists (NAAE) has its origins in the North American Faith and Order conference at Oberlin, Ohio, in 1957. Participants at the 1957 conference established the Association of Professors Teaching in Ecumenics. Ten years later the North American Academy of Ecumenists held its inaugural conference and the Association of Professors Teaching in Ecumenics was dissolved. The academy includes “ecumenically active clergy and laity as well as professors and students. It is an ‘academy’ by virtue of its members’ shared concern for theological reflection and scholarship.” The academy meets annually and has members from throughout Canada and the United States. Almost all Christian traditions present in North America including the Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Disciples of Christ, Reformed, Methodist, Pentecostal, United Church, and Evangelical traditions are represented among the members.

The North American Academy of Ecumenists devoted its 2014 and 2015 annual conferences to *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)*. The 2014 conference took place at the Western Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America’s Cathedral of St. Leon in Burbank, California. The papers from this conference, “Exploring

a Common Vision for the Church for a North American Context,” have been published in the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Spring 2015, Volume 50, Number 2.

The 2015 NAAE conference took place at the Mount Carmel Spiritual Centre in Niagara Falls, Ontario. Its purpose was to generate a NAAE response to *TCTCV*. The meeting followed what is known as an “Open Space Meeting” process. This meeting model allowed for a spontaneous interaction of those present with aspects of *TCTCV* that were of particular interest to them, rather than a systematic study of the text. This interaction took place in a number of small group forums that reported out to the whole. The conference named a committee to draft a response and called for the committee’s draft to be submitted to all the participants at the conference for their consideration. The completed NAAE response to *TCTCV* incorporates suggestions made to the draft by participants.

The drafting team consisted of Rev. Dr Christopher Agnew, Rev. Dr Sandra Beardsall, and Dr Catherine Clifford. This response represents the results of a group process that took place in a weekend conference by the Academy members who are listed at the end of this document, as a contribution

to the teaching vocation and ecumenical witness of the North American Academy of Ecumenists. The members participated as scholars, but in this response process were speaking personally, not as official representatives of their churches nor of the institutions for which they work.

Chapter 1: God's Mission and the Unity of the Church

A. The Church in the design of God

There were no small group forums that specifically addressed the material in this section. This lack of focus should not be taken as a rejection of the insights offered with regard to creation, *koinonia*, the working of the Holy Spirit in the church and the mission of the church. Rather, it is an indication of the widespread acceptance of these insights and the work of Faith and Order in recent decades.

B. The mission of the Church in history

Paragraph 7 of this same section states: "Today the proclamation of the kingdom of God continues throughout the world within rapidly changing circumstances.... Awareness of religious pluralism challenges Christians to deepen their reflection about the relation between the proclamation that Jesus is the one and only Savior of the world, on the one hand, and the claims of other faiths, on the other."

The importance of the challenge of religious pluralism is underscored by another of our forums, being devoted to this challenge. This forum focused on chapters 2 and 4, and not chapter 1.

C. The importance of unity

Paragraph 9 states: "Visible unity requires that churches be able to recognize in one another the authentic presence of what the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople (381 CE) calls the 'one holy, catholic, apostolic Church.' This recognition, in turn, may in some instances depend upon changes in doctrine, practice and ministry within any given community. This represents a significant challenge for the churches in their journey toward unity."

We experience that challenge. While most of the participants can affirm the concept of there being "one holy, catholic, apostolic Church" and the importance of doctrine handed down from the ancient church, there are some who challenge this assumption. Acceptance of the Creed is not a given among North American Churches. Significant numbers of churches including some Emergent, Pentecostal, or Evangelical Churches challenge the assumption that the creed of Nicaea-Constantinople is normative. In one of the forums it was asked, "Are Christian unity and lives of Christian faith expressed in doctrine? In order? If not, what are the lived mechanisms through which God's grace, healing, redemption and reconciliation are at work?"

Chapter 2: the Church of the triune God

A. Discerning God's will for the Church

Of all the chapters touched upon in our discussion, this one may be said to have elicited the greatest level of agreement. The fundamental consensus reflected here attests to the importance of engaging together in the discernment of God's will for the followers of Christ. We affirm the normative role of the biblical witness for the life of the

church, while recognizing that a single, systematic theology cannot be found in the New Testament to guide the structuring of ecclesial life, worship, and ministry. For this reason, we welcome the inclusion of a variety of images and metaphors which serve to express the identity of the Church, as none can exhaust the meaning of the life that we are called to share together through our common confession of faith in the Triune God, and into which we are initiated through baptism. Together we recognize that the earliest Christian communities received the witness of the Apostles, to which the scriptures attest, in a legitimate variety of ways. Guided by the Holy Spirit, and seeking to remain faithful to the gospel, their life in communion was mutually enriched by the diverse expressions of liturgical, spiritual, and theological traditions and ecclesial polities.

In our time, as the churches continue to grow in unity and seek to heal the wounds of division, we wish to reaffirm that the unity we seek is not to be confused with uniformity, nor with the “absorption” of any one church by another. The model of ecclesial communion that emerges from the New Testament witness and the life of the early Christian communities is one of unity in diversity. We seek to deepen our recognition of the ways in which each church, in the evolution of its unique tradition and ethos, has sought to be faithful to the gospel and to remain open to the guidance of God’s Spirit. This implies that each church might learn and receive from the insights that other communities have arrived at, and which have shaped their unique expressions of faith, worship, and mission. In this mutual exchange of gifts,

each church is enriched and the catholicity of the church comes to fuller expression.

B. The Church of the triune God as koinonia

The biblical understanding of the Church as *koinonia*, communion, or fellowship, which has “become central in the ecumenical quest for a common understanding of the life and unity of the church” (§13), has assumed a growing importance in the self-understanding of the life of our respective churches and confessional families. Communion is more than an image or a metaphor. It speaks to us of the very nature of the church and underlines the inseparability of our relationship with God, with other persons, and with all of creation. It helps us to understand that the life of the church flows from our participation in the very life of the tri-personal God, and calls us to share in the mission of Jesus and the Holy Spirit to share the love of the Father with others. The biblical notion of *koinonia* cannot be reduced to a spiritualized participation in the divine life with no concrete, visible expression. It is expressed in charity and the care for the poor and in mutual support and encouragement. It is celebrated in the breaking of the bread and in common praise (Acts 2:44-47; 4:32-35). Division between communities contradicts the fundamental nature of the church and undermines its capacity for mission. The divided churches cannot resign themselves to the status quo. The emerging consensus reflected here invites each church to examine its lack of fidelity to the demands of genuine *koinonia* and to set out anew on the path of conversion and renewal.

People of God, body of Christ, temple of the Holy Spirit: Holding together the notions of the church as *koinonia* and people of God enables us to appreciate that the church is both a divine and human reality (cf. §23). The image of the prophetic, priestly, and royal people of God (1 Pet. 2:9-19) helps us to understand the church as a community of flesh and blood human beings – still subject to sin, a pilgrim people, still moving through history towards the fullness of God’s design. We believe that this people of the new covenant has a common mission within, and at the service of, the whole human community. We welcome the affirmation that ordained ministers – which some of our churches call “priests” – are chosen from within the priestly people to serve through the ministry of Word and sacrament. While they “remind the community of its dependence on Christ” (§19), it may be helpful to underline more clearly that Christ remains our one “High Priest” (Heb. 5:1-10:18). The ministry of the ordained enables all the baptized to realize the priestly character of their vocation through the “spiritual sacrifice/offering” (Rom. 12:1) of their daily life and witness.

We applaud the balanced reflection on the church as the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit (§21), in particular the insight concerning the interdependence of Christ and the Spirit throughout the New Testament. Increased attention to the role of the Spirit is important, not only for the development of a more balanced ecclesiology, but also as we seek to deepen our common understanding of suitable structures for and practices of discernment.

One, holy, catholic and apostolic: We regret that the document’s discussion of the “apostolic” character of the church moves immediately from the sending of the Son and the Spirit to the “Apostles and prophets” and to those entrusted with a ministry of oversight. The fundamental insight that the whole church is called and sent in God’s Spirit, that the whole church is truly “apostolic,” might be affirmed more forcefully (as it was, for example, in *BEM*, M 1–6), so as to strengthen our common conviction that all ministry “is intended to serve the apostolicity of the [*whole*] Church” (§22).

In the present context, our churches are confronted by many new questions and are challenged to discern how to respond in fidelity to the gospel. They struggle to maintain an adequate understanding of the balance between continuity and change within the dynamic of tradition. We welcome and affirm the recognition of the need to pursue a greater common understanding of criteria to guide the churches as they seek the will of God in the ordering of the church, and in responding to new questions as they arise (§24, italics). We encourage Faith and Order to pursue the exploration of differing structures and processes for discernment, in order to promote greater agreement on the ways of decision-making most suited to the discernment of God’s will for the church (e.g., *Moral Discernment in the Churches*).¹

1. *Moral Discernment in the Churches: A Study Document*, Faith and Order Paper No. 215 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2013).

C. The Church as sign/sacrament

Despite the diversity of ecclesial backgrounds represented at our gathering, participants had no difficulty in recognizing the terms “sacrament” and “sign” as equivalents. This holds when the use of “sacrament” in reference to the Church is properly qualified, and the notion of sign is understood as a truly efficacious reality: as a visible word, not an empty figure. When Paul applies the metaphor “body of Christ” to the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 12:27), repeating the language used to speak of the sacramental “body” of Christ in the Lord’s supper (1 Cor. 11:24), the church is not confused with the body of the Incarnate Word, or his sacramental body in the eucharist. The sacramental presence and action of Christ in the eucharist is unique. In an analogous sense, Christ is present and active in and through his Spirit, when through their living witness to the gospel the community of his disciples becomes a sign and agent of his presence in the world. The notion of the church as a pilgrim people helps us to hold this conviction in tension with the humble recognition that at times, the sinful actions of members of the church – both as individuals and collectively – make the church a counter-sign of God’s presence in the world. No single image or metaphor exhausts our understanding of the mystery of our communion with God in the church.

D. Communion in unity and diversity

As we have indicated above (II.A.C) many participants are concerned to affirm that as the churches are reconciled, the unique ethos of their respective ecclesial traditions will not be lost. Have we grown

sufficiently in unity to arrive at a clearer articulation of what distinguishes legitimate diversity from heresy and schism? Our communities must examine more deeply the extent to which they impute the motives of good faith, namely, the intention to remain in the communion of faith, to other Christian communities. We welcome the recognition of the need to elaborate a set of common criteria and mutually recognized structures for such a discernment (§30, italics). Such an agreement might assist the churches to embrace more fully the fundamental principle of the early church to impose no greater burden than is necessary (Acts 15:29) for the recognition of unity in faith.

While the Faith and Order Commission points to a number of the essentials required for ecclesial unity – a common confession of faith, common baptism, a mutually recognized ministry, a structuring of communion and common decision-making, and common witness in service to humanity – might our churches have come to a point where they can affirm a legitimate difference in models or “types” of church, within which these essentials have taken shape?

E. Communion of local churches

An understanding of the whole church as a communion of diverse local churches has helped us in moving towards a shared understanding of the church. While some understand the local church to mean a diocesan structure over which a bishop has oversight, the weekly experience of most Christians is focused on the life of the congregation, where they hear the proclamation of the Word and take part in the celebration of the

sacraments. We urge that this empirical reality be taken more seriously as we reflect together on the theological understanding of the church. In this respect, we concur on the need to arrive at a “more precise mutual understanding” of the expression “local church” and of how the interdependence of the local churches might be appropriately expressed on regional and universal levels. Christianity is only now coming of age as a truly global reality. In this context, the churches have need of one another as they discern the structures best suited to maintaining the bonds of communion on multiple levels. It is to be desired that each confessional family accord a place for the voice of ecumenical partners in structures of discernment and decision-making at every level. Such practices already assist many of our communities to walk more closely together as they grow towards full communion.

Chapter 3: faith, ministry and authority

If chapter 2 of *TCTCV* presents a “celebration of ecclesiological themes about which Christian communities in dialogue seem to agree,” chapter 3 has been said to represent areas where the churches have “made progress in their discussion of ecclesiological themes about which there is still disagreement.”² Offering the churches a review of the work that is underway but not yet complete on the road to Christian reconciliation, it is not surprising that chapter 3 attracted the most interest among the

2. William Henn, Presentation to the World Council of Churches Faith & Order Commission at Busteni, Romania, 18 June 2015.

participants in the Academy discussions. Three “Open Space” groups gave substantial attention to issues raised in chapter 3 “The Church: Growing in Communion.”

The Academy applauds and shares the fundamental vision of this chapter: That the unity of the church is already but not yet; that is to say, unity is a gift of God not yet fully manifested. Ecumenists are not poking among ashes, but striving both to clarify issues where we have found tantalizing similarity, and to revisit courageously those topics that have proven difficult to reconcile. Paragraph 37 summarizes the marks of a visibly united church, and within these we largely find affirmation of the “fullness of the apostolic faith” and increasingly “common witness and service in the world.” We see increasing convergence on the understanding of baptism and its relationship to the eucharist (§§41–42). We rejoice in the shared notion that the eucharist “calls us to be in solidarity with outcast and to become signs of the love of Christ” (§43).

The deeper reflections undertaken by the Academy relate to the topics of chapter 3 in which ecumenical consensus is either wanting or still in its developmental stages. Three topics in particular caught our attention: faith as it relates to experience, categories of ministry, and the structures of authority.

A. Faith and experience

TCTCV §39 notes that “on central aspects of Christian doctrine, there is a great deal that already unites believers.” We did not debate this affirmation. Rather, the discussion centered on

what some felt was missing: the language and categories for describing the *life* of faith, as lived out relationally. They identified an excess of emphasis on the “order” of faith and order, and suggested that an explicit focus on doctrine erodes both the love at the heart of faith, and the spiritual connections out of which Christians live. We would like to see more experiential language in describing Christian faith.

Another group, which was reviewing the Ministry sections of *TCTCV*, also noted that theology needs to reflect the views particularly of those who are already immersed in ecumenical lived experience: chaplaincies, local ecumenical parishes/shared ministries, and interchurch families.

B. Ministry – from laity to primacy

We discussed §§19–20, 45–47 and 55–57 with a view to uncovering the emerging issues relating to ministry.

Lay ministry: §§19–20 highlight the theological foundations of ministry, and that ministry belongs to the “whole people of God,” who are “called to be a prophetic people, bearing witness to God’s word.” *TCTCV* says little more about the ministry of the laity. The role of the laity is not an ecumenically church-dividing issue, but one that has evolved across denominational lines in North America. There are lay persons in official, sometimes paid, “ordered” ministries, both in “secular” and “religious” Christian communities. As a result, we need to reflect further on “laity” in ministry. What are the boundaries between lay and ordered ministry? Who decides?

Threefold ministry: We agreed that the italicized portion of §47 (“The threefold ministry”) poses the wrong question: We should not begin with an affirmation of the threefold ministry, but with an exploration of the underlying theologies of such a ministry. We recognized that even those churches that claim to have a threefold ministry do not exercise it fully. Also, some expressed concern that §47 claims for the threefold ministry marks that properly belong to *episkopé* (“vital to the apostolic continuity of the church as a whole”).

Diakonia: We also agreed that the theological considerations of *diakonia* need to be expanded, including harvesting the fruits of bilateral dialogues that have worked on diaconal ministries.

Working through the challenges for ordained ministry: We agreed that “issues relating to ordained ministry constitute challenging obstacles on the path to unity” (§45, italics). We note that some of these issues (such as ordained women) stem from a “development in tradition.” We suggest that ecumenists need to ask: What are the criteria for recognizing a legitimate development in tradition? We need to *presuppose the good faith of others* before we assess their decisions. Such good faith needs to apply more generally to the recognition of others’ ministries. Ecumenists could be helpful in providing a broader framework for these challenging discussions, rooted in the mutual respect we have built over decades of dialogue.

Primacy/universal ministry of unity: The wider questions of “authority” occupied a different discussion, but there was enthusiasm in the group for discussion of primacy (§§55–57). This stems partly from our collective positive experience

of Pope Francis. He exercises his ministry in a way that non-Roman Catholics can receive, and thereby models the possibility of a universal ministry of unity. Some in the group asked: “Does Pope Francis give us an opportunity to discuss the issue of ‘degrees of communion’ with one another?”

C. Authority

When discussing “continuity and change” we found ourselves largely addressing questions of authority. Recognizing that change requires decision and action, we cannot discuss it without reference to “structures of conciliar relations and decision-making,” one of the ecclesial elements required for full communion and visible unity (§37).

Trinitarian basis: We welcome the attempt to work from a Trinitarian understanding of the faith to build a communal ecclesiology (§53). We agree that there is more work to be done to demonstrate how churches recognize “the guidance of the Holy Spirit” in the exercise of authority.

Participation: We affirm *TCTCV*’s emphasis on the recovery of synodical decision-making processes (variously structured), and the participation of the baptized faithful – the *sensus fidei* – that must be part of the exercise of authority (§50). This affirmation implies strengthening and clarifying the relationship of the differing levels of ecclesial life: local, regional, and universal. Further, those who do theology in and for the churches should have their voices heard in processes of discernment and decision-making, even as such voices may introduce a creative tension into the decision-making process.

Integrity (including ecumenical integrity) and authority: We agree that authority arises out of the integrity of the processes and structures of discernment. Those who exercise authority need to be strongly formed in the faith and clearly committed to the pursuit of truth, as intimated in §§48–51. Those who exercise authority must resist isolation; they must communicate well, and listen to many voices, including those of ecumenical partners. Ecumenical observers and guests should be norms for decision-making bodies. Further, the role that context and culture play in the exercise of authority needs to be acknowledged and clarified. We recognize that a serious stumbling block is our lack of faith that the processes of traditions other than our own might lead to a faithful decision. We are pleased that Faith and Order is continuing to work on the processes of decision-making through the study document, *Moral Discernment in the Churches* and its follow-up.

The authority of ecumenical convergence: We strongly affirm the statement in §50 that “a certain kind of authority may be recognized in the ecumenical dialogues and the agreed statements they produce.” We urge the churches to recognize the authority of ecumenical convergence, and accept it as a potential agent of change. We further encourage the churches to continue to harvest the fruits of ecumenical dialogue, including *TCTCV* itself, as they exercise their ministries of authority.

In sum, chapter 3, in counselling the churches to stay on the ecumenical journey, offers opportunities to engage without fear in learning from the voices and experience of the many, including the many who already posit and practice ministries of

reconciliation and unity. We express gratitude for its summary of so many hopeful signs of unity, even in the midst of division on some difficult topics.

Chapter 4: the Church: in and for the world

A. God's plan for creation: the kingdom

Paragraphs 58 and 59 did not receive the attention that was accorded to §60. This may have indicated a general acceptance that “service (*diakonia*) belongs to the very being of the Church” and that “a constitutive aspect of evangelization is the promotion of justice and peace.”

One of the nine small group forums took up the topic “Pluralistic World and Interfaith Relations.” Clearly we are not of one mind on the question of evangelism in a pluralistic world and have more questions than answers with regard to the relationship of Christianity to other faiths. Based on the conversation in this forum, we can affirm that “within the contemporary context of increased awareness of religious pluralism, the possibility of salvation for those who do not explicitly believe in Christ and the relation between interreligious dialogue and the proclamation that Jesus is Lord have increasingly become topics of reflection and discussion among Christians” (§60).

One of the participants noted that “the questions around interfaith [interreligious] relations reveal contradictions within Christian theology.” Another asked, “Do we have something outside of the conversion model; and if so, what is it? Do we have another paradigm to understand transformative action? Is that how we understand who we

are as the church?” Those that participated in this forum affirmed that more could be done with the material in this section of chapter 4, and encourage further development of the insights regarding the relationship of *koinonia* ecclesiology and interfaith dialogue.

B. The moral challenge of the gospel

Another small group forum took up the topic of moral decision-making. While issues of moral decision-making have become very divisive at times, they need not be. As a participant in this forum observed:

The moral statement of one group of Christians might be something my community disagrees with, with respect; the question is whether I choose to divide over it. The question becomes: Can we impute positive motives to the other; that they are trying to be faithful Christians? Can we respect the processes by which other churches come to those conclusions? Positive motives and a reasonable process might bring respect. It is not the issue but the reaction to the other person's conclusion.

Another responded, “The question on same sex marriage – it is church dividing. The process doesn't necessarily redeem the conclusion.” This exchange illustrates the problematic of §62. If “*koinonia* includes not only the confession of the one faith and celebration of common worship, but also shared moral values, based upon the inspiration and insights of the Gospel (§62),” then are *koinonia* and Christian unity possible?”

The dialogue of this forum validates the conclusion of §63: “Individual Christians and churches sometimes find themselves divided into opposing opinions about what principles of personal or collective morality are in harmony with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Moreover, some believe that moral questions are not of their nature ‘church-dividing’ while others are firmly convinced that they are.”

It is important to note that a moral challenge on which we are united is care for the integrity of creation. Our churches are also engaged in many forms of common witness and service with and for those who suffer (§§64, 66). Our churches stand together in solidarity with those who are persecuted for their prophetic witness to the gospel (§65; Matt. 5:1-12). A century ago such common witness would not have been possible, but we have since grown together in unity. This gives us hope that the challenges we face in the present day need not be insurmountable. Again we note that a way forward may be offered in the continuing work of Faith and Order on the study of moral discernment in the churches.

Conclusion

The members of the North American Academy of Ecumenists are united in their deep appreciation for the significant advance represented by *TCTCV*. Through common study, we have come to recognize in the work of the Faith and Order Commission a significant reflection of the progress achieved through the sustained efforts of dialogue over many years. Most of our communities will recognize themselves in the theological convergence expressed here. At the same time, we

recognize the urgency at this stage in our history of pursuing the work of dialogue on a host of issues relating to the actual structuring of communion; in particular, to structures of discernment and decision-making in the life of the church. While it is possible to speak of a broad consensus on the theological understanding of the church, including the constitutive elements that nourish and build up the body of Christ, disagreements persist in the actual outworking of that theory in the practical life of the churches.

Most of our churches agree that our relationship of communion in Christ is expressed in a structured synodality where the personal, collegial, and communal dimensions of the church are held in balance. Nonetheless, there are important differences today regarding the adequate expression of these realities in structures of communion, discernment and oversight. The emergence of new disagreements on a host of recent decisions relating to human sexuality has contributed to mistrust and disagreement with regard to what constitutes adequate processes or structures for discernment in communion. The practice of synodality cannot be reduced to either a parliamentary democracy or to governance by diktat. It is fair to say that every Christian community today is challenged, in a fast-changing social and ecclesial context, to develop more adequate structures of communion. These are questions that the churches must address together on the basis of what they affirm together regarding the nature of the church.

We therefore encourage the Faith and Order Commission to undertake a comprehensive study of this matter, on the firm basis established in

TCTCV's consensus. What can we learn from the scriptures and from the practice of spiritual discernment by Christians throughout the centuries regarding the most effective habits of communal discernment and decision-making? How do communities discern and recognize the presence and action of the Holy Spirit? Churches differ widely in their views of how best to include the voice the laity in discerning the sense of the faithful. What qualifies a person to contribute to the deliberations of the church on matters of doctrine and Christian witness? What place is accorded to the contributions of the theological community in synodical processes of discernment? How do we attend to the sense of faith at work in other Christian churches? To what extent is it possible to envision a differentiated ecclesial recognition, one that transcends differences of ethos, structure, and ecclesial practice, but is verifiably informed by genuine theological consensus? What processes are appropriate to arrive at mutual recognition between the churches?

Our communities have invested much time and many resources into efforts of dialogue in both multi-lateral and bi-lateral dialogues over many years. These efforts have born much fruit that must now be harvested. We heartily commend this document to our churches in the hope that they will let themselves be shaped by it, drawing practical consequences from it in the structuring of their ecclesial life and in their relationships with other Christian communities. The consensus reflected in *TCTCV* provides a solid foundation for new steps towards the mutual recognition of ecumenical partners as churches in the communion of the

one Church of Christ, and for concrete measures of progress towards full, visible unity. No longer in divided camps, and impelled by the love of Christ, the churches can with confidence give an increasingly common witness to the world.

36. French Informal Ecumenical Group

(Translated from the French)

Our small informal and ecumenical group examined Faith and Order's text *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* in 2013, and would like to share with you some of our reflections.

This group met 11 times in two-hour sessions. It was comprised of four men and four women, four Catholics and four Lutherans, namely: three Benedictines from the Priory of Chauveroché (a dependent priory of the Pierre-qui-vire Abbey located in Franche-Comté in the Territory of Belfort); a Catholic laywoman from Alsace; three pastors and one laywoman, Lutherans from the Pays de Montbéliard, and members of the United Protestant Church of France: Brother Alain, Brother Basile, Brother Germain, Rosine Forster, Gwenaël Boulet, Mirana Diambaye, Pascal Hubscher and Marie-Christine Michau.

The Church: Towards a Common Vision is a convergence text, but at the same time work in the area of ecclesiology continues to move forward. Theological research and mentalities do not progress at the same pace, and church leaders must take this into account.

Yet how can the issues be recast in order to re-launch the dialogue between the churches?

Substantive remarks

1. The document attempts to make our respective traditions converge. Scriptural quotes are used throughout the text. Yet it would seem that as long as we do not start from the Bible and particularly from the New Testament, which constitute our common language, our efforts will not achieve the desired result.

The New Testament does not take the *missio Dei* (the mission of the Son and the Spirit) as its starting point, but the humanity of Jesus of Nazareth, his preaching, death and resurrection. This is characterized by its great diversity (see for example Raymond Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind*, 1984), and is a treasure of inexhaustible meaning.

If diversity is set as normative, it enriches the theological work which has to take it into account. But it is no longer the only point of departure. Scriptural references should not become a pretext. The following question remains unanswered: How can we come to terms with the possible diversity of ecclesiologies originating from the New Testament?

Two points should be explored further.

- The normativity of the New Testament compared to tradition. An early draft

of Vatican II's dogmatic constitution on revelation maintained that scripture judges tradition. The final version simply says that scripture guides tradition. However, it is difficult to deny that scripture is an authority which allows us to critique subsequent tradition. Otherwise scripture runs the risk of being cited as a pretext for irrelevant arguments. But if we take the Bible seriously as a normative foundation, how can we come to terms with the diversity of ecclesiologies of the New Testament so as to overcome the current deadlock, while taking account of the history of the churches?

- The difficulty particularly associated with fundamentalist/literalistic readings of the New Testament is not discussed in the document, although it is a key point in ecumenical dialogue. What about biblical hermeneutics?

2. The document remains attached to a conception of unity which, if not unrealistic, is at least unsuitable for certain partners in ecumenical dialogue. Instead of envisaging a single and unique structural and institutional Church, would it not be more appropriate to work towards achieving a communion of churches which recognize each other?

3. Certain terms should be clarified: "local churches," "community," etc. It appears that in the

discussions, not everyone associates these words to the same realities.

Our reflections as we go through the pages Chapter 1

§3: The word "Church" has many meanings. It denotes both the universal and local Church.

§5: Sin of the messengers of the gospel or sin of the Church? Why this resistance to applying the *simul justus et peccator* to the churches, based on an exclusive recourse to the letter to the Ephesians, which speaks of the Church in the singular? See §35.

§6: Missionaries sometimes preceded colonization, at least in Africa. Sometimes they also distanced themselves from it, as in Latin America, although this was not always the case. In Europe, assistance from the former mission countries is valuable but is sometimes a problem for local pastoral work.

§9: The issue of recognizing the presence of "the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church" in another church by the dialogue partners is at the heart of the ecumenical journey. In this text it is drowned out by other considerations.

Chapter 2

Paragraphs 11–12: "All Christians share the conviction that Scripture is normative, therefore the biblical witness provides an irreplaceable source for acquiring greater agreement about the Church." Why was this not made the document's

point of departure? But if scripture is normative for all, it is not so according to the same modalities. If we do not reflect on the normativity of scripture, we cannot go any further. The question of a shared hermeneutics of scripture should be discussed.

Moreover, the formulation can be reminiscent of the theory of two sources (Scripture and Tradition) rejected by the Second Vatican Council. This impression is reinforced by the last sentence of §12, which mentions the treasures of biblical witness and Tradition.

Furthermore, while the New Testament provides “no systematic ecclesiology,” it does propose several ecclesiological tracks which open up new perspectives for ecumenism.

§14: “A defining aspect of the Church’s life is to be a community that hears and proclaims the word of God.” By speaking of the Church in the singular, is it the universal or the local Church that is meant? Here we have the impression that we are trapped in different levels of terminology.

§27: The notion of the Church as sacrament has given rise to heated debates. But it has become clear that this 19th century notion, which was transposed by Vatican II, does not fall within the purview of sacramental theology but within the theology of mission. The sequence: Christ as sacrament, the Church as sacrament, the sacraments of the Church should be rejected. But we can speak of Christ as sacrament, the sacraments of Christ, the Church as sacrament for evangelizing the world. In this sense, the expression “Church as sacrament” is not Church-dividing.

We must distinguish the sacraments lived in the Church and the Church as sacrament (*mysterion*). To what extent is the Church an instrument of salvation beyond the administration of the sacraments, if the *simul justus et peccator* is applied to it? The Church as sacrament can perhaps be understood from the perspective of the great blessing in the letter to the Ephesians, which links its mystery to the mystery of Christ. The Church as sacrament is the Church of Christ, not the ecclesial institution as such.

Another response: it does not seem that the problem has to do with the sacramental function of the Church. (It is a fact in its practice and function.) But the subject becomes thornier when one rushes to define the Church’s being as sacramental, because then it makes salvation not what the Church can offer, but what it fundamentally is. It is not clear here if what is at issue is only a difference in formulation, as the paragraph in italics “The expression, ‘the Church as sacrament’” would suggest.

§28: “Legitimate diversity is compromised whenever Christians consider their own cultural expressions of the Gospel as the only authentic ones, to be imposed upon Christians of other cultures.” The problem is more radical: legitimate diversity is threatened every time a Church wishes to impose its own tradition, even if this tradition is consistent with the New Testament, even if it is venerable and recognized by other churches as a fruit of the Holy Spirit.

This is the same remark as that concerning the sin of the Church or the sin of Christians.

Why make only Christians responsible for flaws and errors, despite their unity? The somewhat unpleasant impression that emerges is that the Church as such remains irreproachable. This is an example of an old understanding of the Church's holiness which is not recognized by all partners of the ecumenical dialogues.

Another response: in the Old Testament, the sin of the people is sometimes postulated. Are we not being somewhat hasty in saying that it is the institution of the Church that is sinful?

Paragraph 31–32: What is a local church, a local community? Because this is not stated at the outset, we are in total confusion. Paragraph 32 comes too late. However, §31 provides an interesting perspective on understanding the catholicity of the Church. It is a pity that this is not examined more deeply.

“A fully united Church”: what does this mean? Are we aiming for a single and same Church for all, which would be utopian? A communion of denominational churches living in full mutual recognition on the basis of different traditions seems more realistic.

The question of *episkopé* appears alongside the question of local churches. It would still be necessary to question the link between *episkopé* and the catholicity of the Church.

Chapter 3

Paragraph 35: Sin of church institutions or sin of the churches? See §5. The Church is both sinful and justified by pure grace.

Paragraph 37: “Full communion within a visibly united church – the goal of the ecumenical movement”! If the unity of the Church is given, the unity of the churches cannot be sought other than in the form of a communion between churches.

Is not what the document says just one way of seeing things? Is it really necessary to agree on everything from the start? If we wish to settle everything beforehand, if we set the bar too high, we will never achieve our goal. It is always possible to recognize the other without necessarily agreeing with everything he does.

Paragraph 44: The sacraments: “visible, effective actions instituted by Christ . . . made effective by the action of the Holy Spirit.” The institution of the sacraments by Christ is a real subject for discussion which we cannot pass over quickly.

The institution of the eucharist by Jesus of Nazareth on the eve of his passion is not called into question. The institution of baptism as the gateway to the Church is post-paschal in origin, even if it is related to Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist (see Légasse, *Naissance du baptême*, Cerf, Paris, 1993).

It would still be necessary to question the churches in order to know what they do and what they experience during a sacrament. It is not a matter here of “*in persona Christi*” which, however, does give rise to a number of discussions.

Other questions: what did Christ really institute on Easter day? What are we celebrating? Is it the meal or is it the meal in the light of Easter? In other words, is holy communion the celebration of Jesus' last supper or the celebration of his death

and resurrection? We cannot obscure the prophetic and anticipatory dimension of the last supper of Jesus of Nazareth, who celebrated in advance his death and hope of resurrection.

The number of sacraments depends on how we define a sacrament. The real question is not about the number but about each of the sacraments.

Paragraph 45: “[O]rdained ministers ‘may appropriately be called priests because they fulfil a particular priestly service . . .’” The word “priests” and the adjective “priestly” are not used here in the sense of the New Testament.

In the Catholic Church, the fact that priestly ordination is reserved for men has not been the subject of a proper *ex cathedra* definition. And the question of the ordination of women does not seem to be on the agenda.

The text asks, how can the difficulty relating to the ordained ministry be overcome on the way to unity? There is no other prospect than to return to the New Testament and its pluralism. But the road will be long.

Until there is agreement on the understanding of ministries, we will not get any further. The issue at hand does not have to do with ministers but ministries in the Church. This calls for a full examination of the ministry of the Church.

The last sentence on the non-recognition of a ministry of the word and the sacraments for women indicates a disagreement, but it is not on the same level of analysis as the rest of the paragraph. The fact that the Roman Catholic Church does not ordain women to this ministry does not prevent other Christians from recognizing the

Roman Catholic Church as wholly Church. Are the people who are the ministers constitutive of the being of the Church?

Paragraphs 46–47: The threefold structure *episkopos, presbyteros, diakonos* is not found in the New Testament and cannot be recommended as being normative. The insistence of Ignatius of Antioch that the eucharist be celebrated only by the bishop or his delegates can be better understood as a later discipline which had not yet become widespread (R. Brown).

Vatican II recognizes that the distinction between bishop, priest and deacon is not of divine institution; it is a product of history. And Vatican II refused to say that the ordination of priests can only be undertaken by bishops – in contrast to an early draft of the dogmatic constitution on the Church – not least because Rome allowed the ordination of priests by a priest until the 14th century.

Nevertheless, we cannot eliminate the threefold ministry. But we will no doubt have to be careful to distinguish between minister and ministry and ask ourselves who bears the ministries, in the name of what, and for what?

Paragraph 53: “[T]he whole Church is synodical/conciliar, at all levels of ecclesial life.” It should become so. Even Pope Francis recognizes that the Catholic Church is still wide of the mark.

The normativity of the ecumenical councils: The truth may lie in a middle way. They are authoritative in what they wished to affirm within their historical context, but one council can reinterpret another, and it is always possible to re-express what it said in another language. But how

far can we go in interpretation – up to saying the opposite of a previous council?

“The early ecumenical councils” – what exactly does this mean? Which ones are we talking about? The first four, the first seven?

Chapter 4

Paragraph 59: “Evangelization is thus one of the foremost tasks of the Church.” It is the foremost task, if one does not limit it to activities directed toward the outside and if one does not separate the four dimensions of the Church: *koinonia*, *martyria*, *leitourgia*, *diakonia*. *Koinonia* expresses the being of the Church, above and beyond what it is called to do.

Paragraph 60: “[T]he possibility of salvation for those who do not explicitly believe in Christ.” Here we must take into account all the data from the New Testament. In the synoptic gospels, Jesus of Nazareth never asks those he healed to follow him, but dismisses them saying: “your faith has saved you.” And in the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount and the first part of the account of the last judgment in the gospel according to Matthew, those who are called blessed of God have everything (they are children of God, heirs of the kingdom, they will see God . . .) except confession of faith and baptism (see Philippe Bacq). Christian faith and baptism maintain their importance for those who are called to become disciples, but what must be differentiated are salvation (which is open to all) and the certainty of salvation which faith gives.

What does “those who do not explicitly believe in Christ” mean? People have the right

not to identify themselves as Christians, and even to call themselves atheists. Is it for Christians to refuse what people say about themselves? Inclusivism is based on this perspective and understanding of having to call absolutely everyone, in one way or another, into the Christian framework. If salvation belongs to Christ, let us leave it to him. We proclaim the gospel, and that is already a lot.

Paragraph 62–63: “[M]oral questions are related to Christian anthropology.” One cannot speak of anthropology and Christian ethics in the singular.

Catholic and Protestant anthropologies are not identical, no doubt due to different conceptions of sin and grace which underlie at least two theologies of creation. It seems important to us to examine this subject in depth and not to pretend that there is one Christian anthropology.

Even within the Roman Catholic Church, there is room for several anthropologies. For example, the official discourse of the Catholic Church often appeals to the notion of “nature,” which the Letter of the Bishops to the Catholics of France took care to avoid in the third part of the central section devoted to morality.

Paragraph 66: Care for creation. Nature (in the modern sense of the word) is neither good nor bad in itself. In the eyes of God, creation (the project) is good; it is an act of love. But we look at things in a short term way.

It is possible to read creation as a dynamic. It is a process which God continues with the world.

37. Response by Prof. Dr Edmund J. Rybarczyk, Ph.D.

As a historical theologian¹ myself, having participated in formal ecumenical dialogues, I have a profound appreciation for the “convergence text” *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)* (cf. 1, 46). That there is a constant and steady direction towards ecclesial unity repeatedly integrated with an awareness that substantial divergences remain across the global Church seems both fitting and wise to me. Any personal affinities and critiques will be secondary in my attempt to answer the questions below in a way that represents my own denomination, the Assemblies of God (hereafter AG), Southern California Network, in the United States of America.

1. To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?

TCTCV is a text that is centered around the triune God and God’s calling and commissioning of the Church to go out into the world and proclaim the Kingdom of God, especially as that is “inaugurated in Jesus the Lord, crucified and risen” (§4). So the Trinitarian and Christic character of this text is something that the AG would sincerely appreciate and affirm. At my own Southern California minister’s organizational meeting in May

2016 the plenary address was given by George Wood, the AG’s General Superintendent (i.e., national leader); his emphasis was on the power of preaching Christ Jesus, crucified for all mankind. Therefore, the AG would certainly affirm the theocentric nature of *TCTCV*.

“The Church was intended by God, not for its own sake, but to serve the divine plan for the transformation of the world” (§58). This document’s emphasis upon mission and our shared missionary mandate (§2) is one that my denomination would heartily affirm. The AG began as a missionary organization and today has sent thousands of missionaries around the entire planet. Pentecostals, driven by a profound missional impetus, are changing the human race as I now type this morning. One day the world is going to arise and ask itself, “what on earth just happened?” Pentecostals know that the Gospel of our Lord is the only hope for the human race.

There is much, too, that the AG would affirm in terms of mercy ministries (in *TCTCV* more commonly put along the lines of justice) that characterizes Pentecostals in their Christian mission. Pentecostals are renowned for starting bible schools, elementary schools, orphanages, medical clinics, and food banks to care for the poor and needy. Indeed, Pentecostals are more driven by mission than they are by theological formulation, though they would want to carefully articulate

1. Professor of Historical Theology, Vanguard University; Ordained Minister, Assemblies of God.

that. Pentecostals are pragmatic: they want to get things done. We, as a denomination, are less interested in labored theoretical formulation. However, I should qualify, in many respects the indigenous principle of missionary strategy is itself an Assemblies of God dynamic initiated back in the 1920s.

Let me say more about mission. Justice and peace is a wonderful refrain that dotted *TCTCV*. Pentecostals truly are missional. Again, they are missional before they are theological, although they will always testify that their mission is driven by Christ Jesus. Pentecostals, at least in the United States and Latin America, avoid the phrase “social justice.” I was glad, and so would be my AG leaders, that *TCTCV* did, too. “Social justice” is a phrase that is now layered with so many meanings, some of which accord with the Gospel and some of which oppose it, some of which are benign and some of which are politically loaded. I know that in the United States Pentecostals are wary of the phrase “social justice” because it is often a phrase used (by media, politicians, and varied academics) to beatdown the Church for being too Christian, and not political enough. A missionary friend of mine, who served for 10 years in Latin America, said that on that continent Pentecostal missionaries and church leaders avoid altogether the term “social justice” because it is a politically laden term that is divisive and distracting. Pentecostals are busy serving, feeding, educating, giving medical aid to the poor, widows, and orphans; but they prefer not to politicize that. I was pleased, and my denomination would be too, that justice was the preferred term in *TCTCV*. My denomination here in the USA has been concerned that the WCC

has been a tool of Marxist ideology, so the very nuanced use of terminology with regard to social outreach as a constituent calling of the Christian mission was something I was delighted to read.

More affirmation would come from the AG along pneumatological lines. Truly inspiring were the number of integral (not merely passing) references to the life, power, person, work, and equipping of God’s Holy Spirit. Nearly every single page, if not every single sub-section, made reference to the Holy Spirit and the central role of the Spirit in the Church’s being and work. With *TCTCV* and its widespread acknowledgement of God’s Spirit, we have certainly entered a new era in ecclesial history and formation. Pentecostals would voice a hearty “Amen!” hereon. This should be a huge selling point (excuse the market reference) for the WCC as you relate to Pentecostals and Charismatics around the world.

Divergence from my denomination would come in at the heavy sacramental tone of *TCTCV* along formal ecclesial lines. While there was a lucid section on the priesthood of all believers (§18-20) which affirmed the laity as true servants in the Gospel mission, the ecclesiological weight of the text falls upon a liturgical and episcopal church structure and church essence. Every single buttressing quotation from a historical figure – save the Taizé leader Brother Roger Schutz – was from the Orthodox or Catholic tradition. As a historical theologian, I believe quoting patristic authors was genius; it draws from a period when the two oldest traditions were still one. Put differently, the ecclesial emphasis was upon a high church (episcopal), not low church (congregational), structure. My

AG pastors and denominational officials would read this and immediately recognize that both the theological language and terminology about polity are resolutely high-church. I do not know if this would be a break-faith issue, but it is one that starkly manifested to me. I was pleased that in the italicized end-of-section comments there was recognition that divergence and diversity remains along these lines. Yet the WCC has a real challenge in determining how to include the 1 billion Christians (namely, Pentecostals, independents, and Evangelicals; some 41% of all global believers) who are neither high-church nor resolutely liturgical/sacramental.

2. To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?

The grounding of the identity of the Church with the apostles is something the AG would openly affirm. Times and contexts change and require fresh interpretation, but “these interpretations must remain in continuity with the original witness and with its faithful explication throughout the ages” (§38). The apostolic witness, as given to us in Holy Scripture, is a foundation the AG would never compromise. This is a good and biblical way to include Pentecostals. AG Pentecostals are renowned for being open to the fresh and new leading of God’s Spirit; yet that does not mean these Pentecostals are willing to forsake biblical or apostolic moorings.

In light of my remarks above about the dire challenge of ecclesial essence and polity, my following response here will go to tone and attitude.

Because *TCTCV* repeatedly acknowledged the divergences, both theological and polity-wise, within the global Church, I am hopeful. There will be no small-c catholic unity apart from sincere humility. The tone of the entire document was humble, inviting and welcoming. Even the section on Mary, a topic that can alarm Pentecostals, was understated (“Mary is an important example for all who seek to understand the full dimensions of life in Christian community” [§15] – something that I myself whole-heartedly affirm).

Having myself been deeply touched and transformed by ecumenical study and engagement, I teach both my undergraduate and graduate students that they need to learn to ask and look where Christ may be present in the other. None of us has God’s perfect perspective. None of us can see immediately into the heart of the other. We need humility if we are to follow the risen Christ. We need humility if we are to be attuned (von Balthasar’s *Stimmung*) to the daily leading of God’s holy breath, his Holy Spirit. *TCTCV* constantly read and rang with a tone of clarity-but-humility. The authors and contributing dialogue partners are to be commended hereon.

Let me emphasize this further. Western civilization has entered a fully postmodern era. I will not take the time to delineate that, but for the younger postmodern Christians – whether they are Pentecostal, Evangelical, Mainline Protestant, Anglican, or Roman Catholic – humility is a seminal attribute. As a generation, they are leery of arrogance and certitude. They steer clear of those leaders who speak as though they know everything. (The postmodern attitude, too, has its own

pitfalls, but I will not belabor that here.) For the WCC, as you think towards the future and how to involve the younger generations, I encourage you all to continue to write, speak, and lead from a heartfelt posture of humility. And again, *TCTCV* had a wonderfully sincere tone of humility woven throughout. Well done.

3. What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?

First, we need to inculcate a recognition that *we* are not the only ones in Christian mission. It was refreshing to read such a strong emphasis upon mission throughout *TCTCV*. I suppose it is normal and natural, given the contingencies, demands and the sin-nature that belongs to all human beings for organizations to focus only on themselves. My pastors and denominational officials would be surprised and pleased to learn that there is such a heavy accent in the ecumenical movement on mission. All Christ-centered believers want to participate in and encourage the Gospel mission.

Second, the recognition that there is good will on the part of our non-Pentecostal sisters and brothers around the world. Again, owing to our sinfulness, it is sadly natural that we Christians do not give the benefit of the doubt to one another. (This accords with *TCTCV* §10: “the WCC has challenged the churches to ‘recognize that the membership of the church of Christ is more inclusive than the membership of their own church body.’”) Too many Christian churches/groups exist in close geographical and cultural proximity

to one another and yet have nothing to do with one another. Indeed, in light of Jesus’ statement in John 17:21, and Paul’s statement in Galatians 3:28, it is shameful how much suspicion and distrust there is throughout the entire Church. Perhaps the looming power and intent (no longer carefully disguised) of the world-spirit to silence the Church will cause us to finally work together. Lord, have mercy.

4. How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement?

As you know, there is a vast difference between “is able” and “is doing.” I find not only the process of ecumenical reception to be an enormous challenge, but the inability, or the unwillingness, of local AG pastors to invite guests and guest speakers from outside of their own ecclesial tradition is a dire hurdle, too. Again, that *TCTCV* so clearly articulated the role and place of mission will be a good place from which to build trust and goodwill. You have undoubtedly heard this countless times, but pastors are usually very busy people. They are concerned with the daily and weekly routines that clamor for their time. Because our AG congregational polity places much weight on what the pastor does, it occludes his (usually) vision and perception about the life of the local church. Very little, if any, reflection goes into ecumenism or even the mission of the global church.

That Pentecostals view the Lord’s supper as a memorial and/or ordinance, and not a sacrament,

let alone *the* sacrament, presents a substantial ecumenical and practical challenge. In our AG churches, anyone who confesses Christ as Lord and Savior may receive the elements with us. We do not require someone to have been water baptized or chrismated (or confirmed) in one of our churches in order for a guest or visitor to share in that communal rite with us. That we are prevented from doing so in Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches is no small issue. If the Council of Nicea recognized believers on the basis of their having been baptized in the name of the Triune God, is that not sufficient today for shared sacramental-memorial-ritual worship?

5. What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

Sincerely, I appreciated the articulation about church tradition in §§38 and 39. For my part, after years of study on the matter, I myself see tremendous continuity between the New Testament witness and sub-apostolic developments. But tradition, not just church tradition, of any sort is and will be an ongoing point of contention with AG Pentecostals. I note this less to place a burden on the WCC than to clarify that continued work on the role and “grace of the Holy Spirit, attested in Scripture and transmitted through the living tradition of the Church” (§38) will be central to Pentecostal concerns as it pertains to ecumenism. It is just not the case, despite my denomination’s stereotyped views, that tradition is always a bad

word. Everyone likes tradition, if it is theirs. More work, more education, more awareness needs to be inculcated concerning the Spirit’s work in and through tradition.

The following is a small but important point for me. Of course the aim and thrust of the WCC’s work is to help build trust, relationship, and unity among the varied churches. “The Church is one because God is one” (§22). Yet is it not also the case that God is three? In other words, is there not an essential place for churchly diversity in light of God’s own self? One could argue for diversity along historic lines (something *TCTCV* did in light of the New Testament and patristic history), but one can well argue it along Trinitarian lines. The Father is not the Son; Catholics need not be Baptists. The Son is not the Spirit; Eastern Orthodox need not be Pentecostals. The Spirit is not the Father; Evangelicals need not be Anglicans. This is where the high churches, committed as they are to an episcopal and hierarchical model of ecclesial structure, need to make more room for diverse ecclesial forms. Yes, the Church is One in Christ, but it is also diverse in the Spirit. St. Paul put it this way: “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work” (1 Cor. 12:4-6). Unity? Always. Diversity? Absolutely. Diversity is not secondary to unity, not subordinate to unity. Diversity belongs to the very fabric of God’s design for creation. Relationship itself assumes diversity. I cannot love you if you are me.

All of that aside, thank you for your work.

In the minds of most church leaders, ecumenists often work off in the shadows, talking and writing and formulating about subtle matters. Me, I believe there is a gift of peacemaking, of building up the body.

May God continue to bless your earnest work for the Kingdom of our great and beautiful Lord, Jesus Christ.

Sincerely,
Edmund J. Rybarczyk

June 2016

38. Ecumenical Meeting Ain-Savoie-Haute-Savoie

13 October 2016

Reflection on the document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*

Chapter IV – In and for the World

(Translated from the French)

1. What is the mission of the Church in this world?

To proclaim to all people, in word and deed, the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ!

However, although we may have the same words, we do not all have the same ways of acting (meditation/activism). The churches sometimes differ greatly in their understanding.

How can we agree on Jesus' saying: "Go to the people of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit?"

The disciples were themselves divided.

Let us recognize the division of the churches as enrichment; diversity can be a source not only of hardening but also openness, of a search for understanding, of evolution.

Listening and entering into dialogue: the complexity leads us to talk to each other in order

to seek and retain what is essential – *to put love first, to converge in this same goal: salvation in Jesus Christ.*

2. How might the churches discern together what it means today to understand and live in faithfulness to the teaching and example of Jesus?

This document must take root in Christian people and not remain only among theologians; it must be disseminated in the churches and explained; and we must return to the source of Christ's words. It is a tool for living ecumenism, bringing together Christians who are inclined to lose interest in it and withdraw to their churches. If Christians lose interest in ecumenism, it is also out of fatigue and impatience since the advances are not visible.

How can we give meaning to this?

We have already sown because we can see over time that Christian initiatives have been taken up

in the life of the laity, and that some churches have undertaken joint action.

A Christian seeks in conscience to act with Christ, who is *source*, guide, strength, who precedes each of us and leads us on the way.

3. Moral questions are the cause of divisions in the Church. Can we allow a plurality in view of these questions?

We must begin by getting to know each other in view of the plurality of biblical translations and interpretations. The Pope himself said, “Who am I to judge?” Mercy and listening to one’s heart and to others is what is needed.

Within what limits? Should we adapt morality to the evolution of the world or explain morality by the evolution of the world?

Are we not taking the place of the Creator?

Let us recognize our fundamental cultural and intellectual differences, which can explain our various ways of operating, and cultivate our discernment.

4. How can the churches serve the societies they live in?

We have to make commitments in education, in politics: to act with our children, promote the Alpha courses open to everyone, to not be afraid of proselytism. Prayer, witness and mission should be lived together.

We must have strong concern for the *transformation of the world*, for God wanted the Church not for itself but to serve the divine plan for the transformation of the world.

Thus, it is about being transformed by the

word of God, going back to the sources and thereby nourishing oneself.

Because you can change the world only if you transform yourself.

To us, this text seems to bring religious freedom, human dignity and our engagement into harmony.

39. South Australia Dialogue of the Roman Catholic and Uniting Churches

Introduction

The reflections which follow are our response to the invitation extended by the World Council of Churches to groups of ecumenical interlocutors on Faith and Order Paper No. 214, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)*. The Uniting Church in Australia and the Roman Catholic Church in Australia formed a dialogue to reflect on theological and related issues common to both churches. This is a national dialogue that has been meeting since 1993. Three years earlier, in 1990, a local dialogue was established in South Australia and continues to be the only local one in Australia. From this unique, local perspective and engagement we offer our reflections below.

Our reflections have concentrated on how *TCTCV* shows connections with receptive ecumenism, and where it might place more emphasis on how this newer approach to ecumenism might assist churches to move towards closer relationships and cooperation as they learn from each other's gifts to be more fully Christ's Church universal.¹

1. For an overview of receptive ecumenism and the principles that have guided the SAUCRC in engaging *TCTCV*, see South Australian Council of Churches, *Healing Gifts for Wounded Hands: The Promise and Potential of Receptive*

In our discussion, the South Australian Dialogue of the Roman Catholic and Uniting Churches (SAUCRC) focused on four major characteristics of receptive ecumenism which we see as the lens through which to view *TCTCV*:

- 1) collegiality and communion,
- 2) inclusive dialogue,
- 3) receptive learning, and
- 4) ongoing conversion to the re-defined "family of God."

Chapter 1 - God's Mission and the Unity of the Church

Collegiality and communion

We, as Church on the journey towards greater visible unity and faithfulness to serving God's mission, have always new things to learn (and relearn) from reflecting on the way God relates to humanity and creation. We affirm the document's initial focus on God's design for all of creation in section A, "The Church and the Design of God"; and that this section speaks of the sending of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We think there is scope

Ecumenism (Adelaide, 2014); http://www.sacc.asn.au/_data/healing_gifts_for_wounded_hands_may_2014.pdf

to emphasize God's overflowing love which God shares in the creation of the universe, life and humanity.² It is a fullness of life which God shares and into which we and all of creation are invited. This graciousness, generosity and reaching out are made evident in the two missions of the Word and Spirit from the beginning of creation, particularly made visible in the Christ and Pentecost events. In this presence and activity of God in these two missions, we can come to recognize God who is relating with us and is in dialogue with us and creation, being outwardly what God is as a Trinitarian communion of love.

This inspires and challenges our understanding of how we as Church journey to visible unity in vision, life and mission: God's inner dialogue of love and outward relationship with creation reveal a profound respect and love for "other." We can see this in the way Jesus is inclusive of everyone by especially going out to relate to and embrace the poor and those who have found themselves marginalized by society. We can come to recognize this in the gentle presence of the Spirit in all cultures throughout history and in all of creation.³

We think that the principles of receptive ecumenism can offer some illumination about how

the Church can grow towards greater visible unity, communion and faithfulness through a profound respect and love for "other" which God reveals. The question receptive ecumenism asks is: What can we – and what do we need to – learn and receive, with integrity, from the other traditions? Receptive ecumenism encourages us to make a safe space for learning, for receiving the giftedness of the other, for conversion and for growing more fully into who God made us to be, of becoming more authentically what God has called us to be."⁴

Inclusive dialogue

This and the other principles of receptive ecumenism speak not only to our relationships with the "ecumenical other," but more broadly to the other in all people, especially with people at the margins who have historically been discriminated against and with those who are discriminated against today. We agree with the draft document's observation that "at times, the cultural and religious heritage of those to whom the Gospel was proclaimed was not given the respect it deserved, as when those engaging in evangelization were complicit in imperialistic colonization" (§6). The example of Jesus challenges this. The existing presence of the Spirit in people's lives and their cultural and religious heritage challenges this.

We consider that we are called to a fresh understanding and deeper appreciation of the missionary mandate (as expressed in §2); our missionary

2. While the place of creation in God's design is included in §1, it is not evident in §3 and we encourage its inclusion.

3. The Uniting Church's preamble to its constitution names this in the Australian context: "The First Peoples had already encountered the Creator God before the arrival of the colonizers; the Spirit was already in the land revealing God to the people through law, custom and ceremony"; https://assembly.uca.org.au/images/resources/regulations_policies/constitution_regulations2015.pdf

4. See *Healing Gifts for Wounded Hands* (South Australian Council of Churches, 2014); http://www.sacc.asn.au/_data/healing_gifts_for_wounded_hands_may_2014.pdf

work needs always to incorporate a disposition of inclusive dialogue.

Receptive learning

We think that receptive ecumenism offers a way for the church to review and redesign the approaches to evangelization which it has employed. Authentically sharing the good news involves respecting and learning from the other, and not “a preaching to” approach which impoverishes this fundamental expression of humility, love and communion seeking. Receiving what the other has to offer as gift invites us to see the face of Christ in the other and to honor and learn from the Spirit already present, so that we are continually transformed by the missions of the Word and Spirit.

In this way, we are enriched by being open to learning from the other. Additionally, in and through this openness, the gift of who we are and the gift of the message of the good news we offer can be transformed by the Spirit to greater authenticity to the Word revealed in Jesus.

Ongoing conversion to the re-defined “family of God”

This task of growing to a renewed understanding of our mission as Church is further challenged by recognizing and honoring our relationship with all creation and creatures as “rooted in the vision of God’s great design . . . for all creation” (§1). This seriously challenges conceptions of mission in which God’s love of people, particularly the poor, and God’s love of creation and all creatures

are not held together by us in an “integral ecology.”⁵ We think that the understanding of salvation expressed in §3 should reflect this and an inclusive understanding of the document’s reference to creation in §1.

We wish to also offer a reflection on the final sentence of the chapter, which reads: “This text has been written in order to assist the churches as they reflect upon such questions, seeking common answers.” The journey towards greater visible unity we think is better served, in the spirit of receptive ecumenism, by seeking answers *together* rather than by seeking *common* answers. There may not be common answers to some questions, and receptive ecumenism can show us that we can live in unity without common answers to all of our questions. That is, we can do so on a satisfying ground in our common humanity as we stand together – especially with those who are suffering – in the one Spirit who breathes life, and open to the one Word who speaks truth, both of whom reveal the one God of love and mercy. Diversity and unity can exist together, as the Trinity reveals. The paradox of diversity and unity authentically existing together confronts us with dilemmas but also provides richness for the ongoing dialogue that we need to embrace more deeply within and amongst our traditions, and indeed with *all peoples and all creation*.

5. See the Encyclical Letter of Pope Francis *Laudato Si’ (On Care For Our Common Home)* (2015); http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

Chapter 2 - The Church of the Triune God

Collegiality and communion

Scripture is normative for the Church, as is the living tradition. Yet there is variation in how authority relates to scripture, how we read and hear the scriptures. This variation is a legitimate expression of the diversity in the churches.

Koinonia is central to a common understanding of the life and unity of the church. *Koinonia*, meaning “to have something in common,” reminds us that the Church is a divinely established communion and is by its nature missionary. Through the sacraments we are incorporated into the body of Christ in which community we hear and proclaim the word of God. It is the Spirit that nourishes and enlivens the body of believers through sacramental communion, the living voice of the preached gospel, and ministries of service.

Ordained ministry exists only within the Church and so needs the Church’s recognition and support. There continues to be diversity as to who may be recognized and who has authority to make final decisions for the Church.

Faith in Christ is fundamental to belonging to the body of Christ.

It is God’s design to gather humanity and the whole creation under the lordship of Christ. The Church is a reflection of this communion of the triune God and is intended to help human beings achieve the purpose for which they were created.

Inclusive dialogue

The Church is centred around the gospel. It is the Spirit that guides believers and bestows faith, thus equipping the Church with essential gifts.

The Church has professed to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic body since the time of the second ecumenical council (381 CE). God calls believers to embody and enact this understanding. The Church is thus a communion in the triune God, whose members partake in the life and mission of God.

We understand that each local church contains within it the fullness of what it is to be the Church: wholly Church but not the whole Church. Ongoing communion between local churches has been a feature of our life together since the first century.

Receptive learning

Mary as *Theotokos* has been seen as a symbol and model for the Church for individual Christians. Churches also have differing understandings of the way in which the Holy Spirit is active in the Church in relation to institutional structures.

Patient encounter has built greater respect for these differing understandings and the way continuity and change is expressed and the will of God discerned, in the various communities of the Church.

There is variation between the churches in their desire to express the Church as being sacrament. Those who do see the Church as an effective sign and means (*instrument*) of communion with each other and with the triune God. This is a potential area for further exploration and learning as churches learn from each other. Diversity then

is a gift from God. Disciples are called to be fully united while being respectful and enriched by the diversity across the Church. It is recognized that the gospel needs to be proclaimed in ways appropriate to cultural and language contexts. Unity as a goal must not be surrendered in the face of cultural variants.

Unity and diversity have been proclaimed since the early Church, yet there are limits to legitimate diversity. Beyond certain limits, diversity can be destructive to the unity to which Christ calls us. We are to work towards overcoming these divisions, but also to treasure those variants that contribute to the catholicity of the Church.

There have also been some differences in the ecclesial understandings of local churches in relation to the whole Church, or, for example, in the role of bishops. In some traditions the “local church” is defined differently from a diocese with its own bishop, more likely to mean simply the local congregation.

Ongoing conversion to the re-defined “Family of God”

Believers are called to express in their lives the reality of being called a “royal priesthood.” All Christians are invited to use the gifts of the Spirit to enable them to take part in the mission of God. When filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, believers are enabled to lead a life of worship, witness and service and bring about the transformation for which all creation groans. Through the Spirit, the whole people of God are called to be a prophetic, priestly and royal people. Ordained ministers, as members of God’s people, assemble

and build up the body of Christ through proclamation and teaching God’s Word, celebrating the sacraments and guiding the life of the community in mission. Overall, the mission of the Church is fulfilled by the witness of the members through their lives and open proclamation of Jesus Christ, wherever this becomes possible.

God reaches out to those who are not explicit members of the Church, in ways that may not be evident to others. The mission of the Church remains as the ongoing invitation to women and men, through witness and testimony, to come to know and love Jesus Christ. The mystery of salvation and the transfiguration of humanity enables participation in the mission of Christ to reconcile all things to God and so one another. The Holy Spirit supports our ongoing discernment of what is necessary for unity and what is legitimate diversity.

There is need of ongoing conversation about how local churches will relate to synodal structures and regional and universal levels of ecclesial order. Local and national dialogues have been an important instrument of movement in this area. The presence of Christ in the local gathering impels the local church to be in communion with “the whole Church.”

Chapter 3 - The Church: Growing in Communion

Collegiality and communion

Chapter 3 details the diversity between denominations in all aspects of the Church. In wrestling with this diversity, our relationship and communion with our trinitarian God should be our primary focus.

One of the issues identified is the way *power* is exercised in the Church. The document needs to further develop this theme. The focus could be to encourage modes of power that reflect the way Christ used his power in imitation of God, not in a manner that reflected “power-over.” Rightfully, the relationship between power and authority is identified, but these are inadequately defined. How these both relate to *episkopé* is a critical issue for the churches. “Synodality,” implemented differently by denominations, also relates to the exercise of power at every level, in all decision-making councils internationally, nationally, regionally and locally. If we are to grow towards “collegiality and communion” within and between denominations, the exercise of power and our structures for decision-making may teach our people and the general community in ways that often contradict what we say about the God we believe in. Form follows function, and the form or structure itself teaches. Therefore denominations may need to re-consider their power structures and decision-making processes in relation to how they nurture collegiality and communion.

We affirm the emphasis Pope Francis has given to encouraging synodality. We also affirm the principle of subsidiarity, important in the Roman Catholic Church. We see that synodality and the principle of subsidiarity are essential gifts in the consideration of receptive ecumenism. We attach a diagram and commentary setting out a possible continuum of power modes and how these relate to theology and ecclesiology as a possible approach to the discussion of power.⁶

6. See Marelle Harisun, *Power, polity and politics: An ethnographic analysis of theological and ecclesiological understandings*

The several councils of the denominations need to ask these questions when considering their decision-making approaches and structures:

- Where is *episkopé* exercised?
- Where is the synodality function evident/exercised?
- Where is primacy exercised?
- What approaches to power are being exercised in our processes and structures?

Power needs to be exercised in ways that ensure full participation in decisions that are synodal and conciliatory, rather than in a manner that is “top-down” or “power-over.” The issue then is, How can we help this to be a reality? How do we reflect the trinitarian nature of God in the ways we structure our organization and exercise power?

Inclusive dialogue

Chapter 3’s emphasis on dialogue is welcome, with its stress on synodality. Receptive ecumenism depends on inclusive dialogue so that people gather and listen to each other in their diversity. We all need to emphasize that our dialogue is with each other and with God. Different people respond in different ways and this diversity needs to be celebrated and affirmed. Paragraph 37 lists five attributes as a helpful framework for maintaining unity in diversity.

and the praxis of power in the Uniting Church in Australia, Unpublished PhD Thesis (Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia, 2007), Figure 12.1.

When discussing ordained ministry, the document seeks less diversity across denominations. We believe this is a challenging desire, given the increasing diversity in evidence in the forms of ordained and lay ministry across the churches.

Further, we commend the consensus model of decision-making used in the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) in all councils. We believe this would assist all denominations to engage in inclusive dialogue within and across denominations.⁷ This model involves actively listening to all points of views; respecting the persons who hold those views; building relationships of love, grace and justice; and allowing the Spirit's voice to be discerned in coming to a consensus decision. Our question is: How do we develop a "culture of collaborative listening" and inclusive dialogue as we engage ecumenically?

Receptive learning

Receptive learning is a process of discerning the *gifts* brought by the "other" denomination. This is different from an approach which assumes that we have the better way and need to convince the "other" to change to our way. We suggest that a mutual process of learning from each other becomes more truly what we are meant to be in imitation of Christ. In this process, the Spirit inspires and leads the denominations to rethink and reinterpret their own tradition. It does not seek to convert the "other" but to accept the other's interpretations as of value and learn from them.

7. See Uniting Church in Australia, *A Manual for Meetings*, Revised Edition, (Collingwood, Australia: Uniting Church in Australia Assembly, 2001).

In the present social upheaval, we need to reflect on our practice, using current theology and ecclesiology. We need to reinterpret our faith for today's context. The encounter with other interpretations and practices broadens our learning; this process can occur in both public and local (private) arenas. This suggests the following question: "What guidelines could be useful to denominations to engage in receptive learning at all levels?"

Ongoing conversion to the re-defined "family of God"

The SAUCRC believes that we need to keep before us the vision of the Church: We are called to be the whole people of God, a pilgrim people, "on the way to the promised goal of the reconciliation and renewal of the whole creation."⁸ We believe the Spirit is active amongst us today and thus we engage with each other as members of this broad "family of God."

Receptive ecumenism and learning invites the local and universal church to repent and acknowledge our imperfections. We need conversion to this broader vision, rather than to denominationalism. We are encouraged by the statements of Pope Francis calling us to work for reconciliation. Without a conversion to the vision-in-action of a reconciled and reconciling community of Christ, there can be little reconciliation between denominations and in the world. In our ecumenical worship, we recognize the pain of our inability to share in the eucharist together as a group, and across our two denominations.

8. Uniting Church in Australia Assembly, *The Basis for Union* (Sydney: MediaCom Education Inc., 1992 Edition).

We also believe that we need to listen to the poor, oppressed and marginalized of the earth and of the whole creation, in working towards this reconciliation and renewal, for without justice and grace for “the poor” there can be no peace.⁹

Chapter 4 - The Church: In and for the World

Collegiality and communion

The emphasis in chapter 4 of the WCC document is on the Church’s evangelizing mission in the world. This focus means that there is no direct reference to modes of governance, that is, to collegiality and synodality as expressed within and between denominations. With regard to *koinonia* (communion) as an intentional characteristic of receptive ecumenism, *TCTCV* rightly states that confessing one faith and celebrating common worship is not enough.¹⁰ Worship must be accompanied by shared moral and social values based upon the inspiration and insights of the gospel.

Some consider that new conflicts over moral principles and contemporary ethical issues, once non-existent, have the potential to divide the church. For others, this is not the case. Receptive ecumenism can offer valuable direction to churches as they explore these issues “in a spirit of mutual attentiveness and support.”¹¹

9. See Francis, *Laudato Si*.

10. World Council of Churches, *The Church: Toward a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper No. 214, §62.

11. *TCTCV*, §63.

Inclusive dialogue

In the context of the Church’s mission to evangelize, chapter 4 of the document also offers important guiding principles in regard to religious pluralism. This is a topic of paramount significance in today’s world.

Inclusive dialogue as a core characteristic of receptive ecumenism honours religious freedom. This is a fundamental human right. Consequently, evangelization “should always be respectful of those who hold other beliefs.”¹² The reality is not always the case. The churches throughout history have erred in this matter. At times they have disdained indigenous belief systems. As a result, the Church’s mission has suffered. In more recent times we have come to realize that God is greater than any faith system can fully express or understand. As Christians we have much to learn from each other’s traditions, from those of other faiths, and even of no faith. The principles of receptive ecumenism show us the pathways to a healthy religious pluralism.

Receptive learning

The document’s treatment of an ecumenical response to religious pluralism (see above) is a clear example of receptive learning that comes from inclusive dialogue. In the context of inter-denominational learnings between Christians, mention is given to the consensus that has been achieved since the Protestant Reformation regarding the doctrine of justification by faith. This doctrine was once a major focus of disagreement between

12. *TCTCV*, §60.

Catholics and Protestants, but in recent decades, one of surprising agreement.

Ongoing conversion

Chapter 4 states very clearly the need for ongoing conversion and repentance. This can be enabled through a spirit of receptive ecumenism. With such a spirit, Christian churches become accountable to each other in their ethical decision making. Such conversion also entails the capacity to stand with the poor and the outcast. These people challenge our assumptions. They call us to act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with God and each other.

Possibly the greatest call to global conversion in our time is how together we care for the earth in an age of unprecedented abuse. This is something that could be more emphatic in the document. Pope Francis has brought this to universal consciousness in *Laudato Si'*, a document that has the capacity to unite all: Christians, all who care about promoting justice and peace, and those committed with others in working to reverse Earth's destruction and poverty. We recognize the importance of collaborating together as churches as we seek to renew the whole of creation and promote the Realm of God. This "Realm" is God's plan for all Creation.

Summary

In summary, we thank the WCC for this particular Faith and Order Paper. We offer suggestions that we hope would contribute positively to *TCTCV*. In studying the document, we have applied four characteristics of receptive ecumenism that we

find most valuable: collegiality and communion, inclusive dialogue, receptive learning, and ongoing conversion. We believe that these qualities can add a tone and spirit to the document that would represent a fruitful way forward for the Church Universal. We suggest that this would lead to a greater unity for the Body of Christ as the whole People of God in its journey towards the "reconciliation and renewal of the whole Creation." This, we affirm, is Christ's will for his Church.

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Appendix

Figure 12.1: A typology of power in relation to UCA theology and ecclesiology

Power modes	Synergistic		Co-active		Capacity			Commodity: zero-sum		Win-lose	Combative: Win at all costs	
	Energy-in-community	Interactive: Friendship	Networking	Cooperative	Gift-charism:	Leadership: Influence	Prophetic:	Bureaucratic:	Manipulative:	Paternalistic:	Patriarchal/Kyriarchal:	War-like/Oppressive:
	Power-between-and-among	Power between	Power with	Power with	Power to/within an individual	Power to/within an individual	Power to/within an individual	Power over	Power over	Power over	Power-over-against	Power-over-against
Metaphor for God	Trinitarian <i>Perichoretic</i>	Christological		Pneumatological			<i>Judge</i>		<i>Father/King/Lord</i>			
Model for church	Pilgrimage	Inclusive community	<i>Ekklesia</i> Body of Christ		Organism led by the Spirit			<i>Haven</i>		<i>Fortress</i>		
Approach to conflict	Resolution	Dialogue	Dialogue		Persuasion			<i>Freeze or Fright or passive aggression</i>		<i>Aggression</i>		<i>Violence</i>

The right hand end of the continuum (highlighted in grey) indicates approaches inconsistent with the Uniting Church theology and ecclesiology as set out in the Basis of Union, policies and doctrines issued since 1977.¹³

13. Harisun, Marelle. 2007. *Power, polity and politics: An ethnographic analysis of theological and ecclesiological understandings and the praxis of power in the Uniting Church in Australia*. Unpublished PhD Thesis (Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia, 2007), Figure 12.1.

Explanation of the typology of power¹⁴

Modes of power consistent with our theology and ecclesiology (above) include power exercised

a) synergistically, as energy-in-community, where the totality of power is more than the sum of the individual parts (or members), in imitation of the triune, perichoretic power of God, characterized by grace, the spirit of shalom with compassion towards the Other, restorative justice, and mutuality in a learning community that grows through reflection-on-experience, towards transformation of reality;

b) co-actively, interactively with others in relationships where friendship and networking power is exercised;

c) cooperatively, where we seek to follow common norms, procedures, within agreed structures, enabling us communally to be more effective, accountable and relational;

d) as capacity, individually and through our power as leaders and persons of influence, using our God-given gifts (or charisms);

e) prophetically, led by the Spirit to suggest new insights or ways forward for the Church.

Some Inconsistent modes, all seen to exist in UCA decision-making councils, include power operating as a commodity, power over others, where the exercise of power by another is seen as diminishing, even threatening, our own power. Power is perceived as being of a fixed sum or, alternatively, zero [sum], owned by some but not by

all, even to the point where some believe they have a right to power (and to win) while others do not (and lose). This broad approach to power can be exhibited in

f) manipulative power, using others to achieve one's own ends, by way of misinformation, misleading, dissembling, and sometimes passive aggression.

g) bureaucratic power, invoking rules, regulations, structures to disempower others, to control process and outcome;

h) paternalistic power, where a male (or a female) "knows what is best" for the Other, and wants to decide for the Other;

i) patriarchal/kyriarchal power, where a male "lord" lords it over others who owe him servitude and servility (slavery), oppressing those considered less or lower on the hierarchy of status and importance;

j) combative power, being aggressive in words, perhaps even in deeds, bullying and even violent towards others, taking a war-like stance in oppressing and attempting to control others, in order to "win at all costs."

These are all based on inequalities of power between individuals and groups, and therefore contradict God's nature and our understandings of church.

14. Extracts from Harisun, Marelle. 2007.

This publication and its companion volume collect the responses received to *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)* between 2013 and 2020. The responses address the Church's mission, unity, and its being in the Trinitarian life of God in order to encourage and advance the churches' growth in communion with each other in apostolic faith, sacramental life, mission, and ministry for the sake of God's world.

These responses are of great importance, not only because they test the points of convergence and of difference identified in *TCTCV* but also because they express the interests and concerns of many member churches and ecclesial bodies engaging in the work for Christian unity. They also provide invaluable insight and guidance for future work on ecclesiology.



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