

***THE ONE BODY OF CHRIST:  
MINISTRY IN SERVICE TO THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD***

Roman Catholic – Reformed Dialogue of the United States  
Round Eight: 2012-2017

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## Abbreviations

- BEM *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 111, The World Council of Churches (1982)
- CCC *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1997)
- CCCWKG *The Church as a Community of Common Witness to the Kingdom of God*, Report of the Third Phase of the International Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (1998-2005)
- EEQVU *Episkopé and Episcopacy and the Quest for Visible Unity*, Two Consultations, ed. P. C. Bouteneff and A. D. Falconer, Faith and Order Paper No. 183, World Council of Churches (1999)
- Institutes* John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), ed. John T. McNeill and trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 Vols. Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960)
- JDDJ *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, Dialogue between the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Lutheran World Federation (1999)
- LG *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, Second Vatican Council (1964)
- NMC *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper No. 198, World Council of Churches (2005)
- NMC-PCUSA Presbyterian Church USA Response to *The Nature and Mission of the Church* (2009)
- NRSV New Revised Standard Version of the Bible
- TCTCV *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order paper No. 214, World Council of Churches (2013)
- PCCW *The Presence of Christ in Church and World*, Dialogue between the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity (1970-1977).

- TBL *This Bread of Life*, Report of the Roman Catholic – Reformed Dialogue of the United States (2012)
- TCUC *Towards a Common Understanding of the Church*, report of the Second Phase of Reformed/Roman Catholic International Dialogue (1984-1990).
- TLW *These Living Waters*, Report of the Roman Catholic – Reformed Dialogue of the United States (2007)

## Glossary

Acknowledgment – An interim step in which we agree that we have experienced the signs of the Spirit, even beyond the bounds of our present systems and structures.

Apostolic function of *episkopé* – The apostolic function of those who oversee the ministry of the Church, as reflected in various New Testament texts, is the function exercised by the apostles in spreading the Gospel and exists so that the Church maintains its witness to Jesus Christ.

Apostolic succession – Continuity with the ministry of the early Church, especially the disciples of Jesus. Reformed and Roman Catholics believe that there is an apostolic succession, though they locate that succession differently.

Apostolic era – The period of the history of Christianity when the original apostles of Jesus were still alive.

Apostolic salutation – The greetings that are part of the letters in the New Testament.

Belgic Confession – A sixteenth-century statement of faith, which is a standard of the Christian Reformed Church in North America and the Reformed Church in America.

Catholicity – As described in the baptismal catechesis of Cyril of Jerusalem, refers not simply to geographic extension but also to the manifold variety of local churches and their participation in the fullness of faith and life that unites them in the one community.

Communion(s) – The community gathered at the table together. Since we have not yet realized the goal of all churches being in communion with each other – essentially recognize our being one Church as Christ prayed we would be – we are different communions gathering at different tables with only imperfect unity in Christ.

*Diakonia* – The ministry of service. Many churches ordain deacons, in others deacons are officers of the Church but not ordained.

Ecclesiology – The theology of the nature and purpose of the Church.

Ecumenicity – The character of being ecumenical – being concerned with the unity of the churches.

Episcopacy – The office of oversight of the Church and its ministry. Every Church has some way of overseeing the Church, keeping it faithful to the Gospel, fostering its unity, and overseeing the work of the ministry and the work of the Church in service to the world. In this dialogue, we

have focused on episcopacy as a central ecumenical issue. Thus in this document the meanings of episcopacy are somewhat different in each communion.

*Episkopé* – a Greek word meaning “oversight” from which we get the English word “episcopal,” indicating reference to a bishop, or the liturgical/sacramental leadership and/or governance of a bishop. In ecumenical dialogue, the use of the word *episkopé* has become the standard way to refer to the ministry of oversight, which for the Catholic tradition resides in the office of bishop, and for the Reformed traditions is generally exercised through a communal body such as the classis. This use of *episkopé* has also become a way to invite those churches that have not retained the episcopal office to recognize that the ministry of that office is nevertheless present in and vital to their churches.

Feast of Eucharist – The Lord’s Supper, the word “Eucharist” means “thanksgiving,” the feast of the Lord’s Supper is a meal of thanksgiving. Catholics speak of it as “the Holy Sacrifice, because it makes present the one sacrifice of Christ the Savior and includes the Church’s offering” (CCC 1330).

Koinonia – A Greek word meaning community, communion, or fellowship.

Legitimate diversity – Legitimate diversity is diversity that does not violate a legitimate norm. Churches differ in what they consider legitimate diversity to include. “The Unity of the Church: Gift and Calling--The Canberra Statement” of the World Council of Churches, 1991 states that, “Diversity is illegitimate when, for instance, it makes impossible the common confession of Jesus Christ as God and Savior the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb. 13:8); salvation and the final destiny of humanity as proclaimed in Holy Scripture and preached by the apostolic community.”

Liturgical marker – A part of a liturgy or element of worship characteristic of a particular kind of rite or service. For instance, use of water in Baptism, the exchange of vows in a wedding, or in this case the markers of ordination – laying on of hands and invocation of the Holy Spirit.

Mediator – The theological understanding of the incarnate Christ as the meeting point or union between divine and human.

Paschal mystery – The death and resurrection of Christ.

Presbyterian and presbyterian – presbyterian refers to a form of Church organization in which the governance of the Church is in the hands of the elders (*presbyteros, oi* in Greek). Presbyterian with a capital P is the name of particular churches, which characterize themselves by their presbyterian polity.

Recognition - "Accept[ing] the legitimacy and authenticity of other churches as the Church in the dialogical process towards fuller communion." (Timothy T. N. Lim, *Ecclesial Recognition with Hegelian Philosophy, Social Psychology, and Continental Political Theory* [Boston: Brill, 2017], 5.)

Sacrament: The Greek word *mysterion* was translated into Latin by two terms: *mysterium* and *Sacramentum*. In Catholic teaching the sacraments are "efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us." (CCC 1131) The seven sacraments are the signs and instruments by which the Holy Spirit spreads the grace of Christ the head throughout the Church which his body (CCC 774).

## Contents

Glossary	4
Introduction	7
Chapter 1: Ecclesiology: Mutual Affirmations	11
Chapter 2: Ministry, Ordination, and Oversight: <i>In Service to the Church and the World</i>	23
Chapter 3: A Vital Reconsideration: <i>Episkopé</i> in History and Practice, both Roman Catholic and Reformed	33
Chapter 4: Hope for Advancing the Dialogue: Lived Episcopacy as Expressive of Diversity and Unity	55
Conclusion	64
Appendices	73
Appendix One: Gifts Received: A Study Guide for <i>This One Body of Christ</i>	74
Appendix Two: Prospectus for the Roman Catholic Reformed Dialogue of the US (Round 8)	77
Appendix Three: A Chart of Ecumenical Dialogue Documents	78
Appendix Four: Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession	79
Participants in the Roman Catholic - Reformed Dialogue of the United States (Round 8)	81

## Introduction

In Christ all Christians are one. Yet we are not fully one. Full visible unity of the one body of Christ remains elusive. If through prayerful ecumenical dialogue, Christians desire progress toward greater visible unity, then deep reflection on ecclesiology is indispensable. Fresh consideration of *Church* is vital.

The partners involved in this dialogue are the Roman Catholic Church, the Christian Reformed Church in North America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the United Church of Christ, and the Reformed Church in America. This dialogue represents the eighth round of Roman Catholic – Reformed dialogue in the United States. Although we have been engaged in deep dialogue for nearly fifty years, reconciliation remains an unfinished project and an urgent matter. The persistent division of the Church, especially during these five hundred years since the Reformation, is both a continuation of the sin of disunity and an occasion for pain for believers who remain divided, most centrally at the Lord’s Table.

Discussion of ecclesiology during the eighth round of the Roman Catholic – Reformed dialogue in the United States stems from the dialogue’s seventh round of discussion, the topics of which were Baptism and Eucharist. While the seventh round did not focus extensively on questions of ministry and ordination, questions about these topics arose repeatedly. Many of them were put on hold, as this quote from the document *This Bread of Life* notes:

We must also acknowledge that our deliberations were hampered by several ecclesiological issues that arose which were sometimes the cause of considerable tension. Thus we believe that it would be good for us in the future to explore together these ecclesiological issues which still stand before us, including how our sacramental theology relates to the theology of ministry and ordination, the relationship between an individual congregation and the universal Church, understanding each other’s polity, and the nature of the Church and how authority is exercised within that understanding in service to the Body of Christ. Particular emphasis may be paid to how the charism of *episkopé* is understood and exercised in Roman Catholic and Reformed traditions. (60)

These questions informed the prospectus for the current round of the dialogue (see appendix).

Along with uncovering afresh these significant questions about Church, the seventh round of dialogue generated a profound outcome, namely, “The Common Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Baptism.” This shared declaration was drafted communally by the delegates and, eventually, recognized officially by each of the ecclesial bodies participant in the Dialogue. In adopting this declaration, the communions together affirmed, as part of the first in a series of important claims, that “Baptism establishes the bond of unity existing among all who are part of Christ’s body and is therefore



the sacramental basis for our efforts to move towards visible unity.” A mutually renewed awareness of the significance and meaning of Baptism – alongside an explicit agreement to recognize one another’s administration of Baptism – puts a certain urgency upon exploring together, in a fresh way and with a new hope, the topic of *Church* specifically from the perspective of its *ministry*. The Dialogue’s discussion, now distilled in this document, sets forth not a comprehensive ecclesiology, but *an ecclesiology formulated by attending closely to the practice of ministry and the exercise of oversight in church bodies*.

The fruit of the ecumenical movement continues to ripen. We have taken up discussion of ecclesiology in a changed and continually changing context. Especially since Vatican II, ecumenical discussion has focused on a number of ecclesiological issues. This dialogue is heir to those ecumenical advances and used many of the reports from those dialogues in our own work.

This changed and continually changing ecumenical context is made all the more significant for the current Roman Catholic – Reformed Dialogue because of our expressed mutual recognition of Baptism. We have trusted that taking up the discussion at such a time as this might give rise to new insights, or to a new iteration of old insights. Our hope? That Roman Catholic and Reformed communions, as they acknowledge the ministry of Christ in one another, might find themselves on the way to recognition of one another as Church.

**Our dialogue has developed around three areas of work:**

- **as ecumenical partners with a complex and contested history, we give thanks for an opportunity to review—and, with God’s help, to reconcile—our theologies, practices, traditions, and memories;**
- **at this stage in our journey, we have opened ourselves to one another in honest and searching dialogue, in order to come to a clearer understanding of what we hold in common and how we differ; and**
- **with fervent hope and trust in God, we pray that we may continue to move towards deeper acknowledgment of one another as Church—and eventually towards formal recognition and full visible unity.**

The organization of this document proceeds along theological and practical lines. It begins, in Chapter 1, with major theological affirmations, largely received from other dialogues, demonstrating how our work stands on these previous statements about the nature and mission of the Church. This work becomes the theological foundation for all that follows.

Chapters 2 and 3 offer a discussion of Church leadership and oversight from two perspectives. First, in Chapter 2, we consider the theology and exercise of ministerial leadership, ordination, and oversight in the present day; this discussion again grows out of previous dialogues, but also focuses on practical aspects of ministry as it is experienced at a local level. Then, in Chapter 3, we offer important historical perspective, both Roman Catholic and Reformed, on the theology and exercise of ecclesial oversight in our communions; special attention is given to the ways in which our telling of history needs to be reconsidered and understood afresh. Finally, in light of the content of both Chapters 2 and 3, in Chapter 4 we return to the prominent ecclesiological topic of unity and diversity already raised in Chapter 1.

More specifically, in Chapter 1, we offer, as concisely as we are able, what our communions mutually claim about the Church. Harvesting riches from prior national and international Reformed – Roman Catholic rapprochements on ecclesiology, we offer contemporary, forward-looking affirmations about: God Triune and the Church, the Church as covenant community, the Church as a “creation of the word” and as a “sacrament of grace,” the mission of the Church, and the unity and diversity in the Church. These points provide significant common ground for the chapters that follow.

In Chapter 2 we explore ecclesial ministry and oversight, uncovering a rich, unified and unifying affirmation that ecclesial ministry and oversight are undertaken personally and collegially, in service to the Church, not just for the Church’s own sake, but for the sake of the world God so loves. Significant to this discussion of ministry is consideration of one another’s understanding and practice of ordination. Important similarities emerge. Given what our communions mutually affirm with respect to ministry and ordination, how might those steps advance our common understanding of the Church? In reaching for a formal recognition of one another’s ministry, what gifts might we discover in one another, and even receive from one another, to enrich each our own practices?

In Chapter 3, we examine the history and practice of the ministry of oversight. Many Christians speak of the ministry of oversight in the Church using a formal ecclesial term for such oversight, namely, *episkopé*. Although this term is not commonly used in Reformed communions, both Roman Catholic and Reformed communions exercise *episkopé*, that is,

oversight. As this chapter attempts to show, the ministry of oversight developed differently in the various Reformed communions. Regrettably, misunderstandings and caricatures of one another's structures of oversight, or *episkopé*, abound, fostered in no small way by how we each tell and experience Church history. So we return to history, to seek a richer appreciation of one another's – and each our own tradition's – understanding and exercise of *episkopé* since the reformation era. Might a mutual reconsideration of history and a fresh take on the development of ecclesial leadership and oversight yield for us common theological language about *episkopé*? And could this common theological language for *episkopé*, well-received by one another, actually take us past a significant ecumenical impasse?

In Chapter 4, we proffer a shared response to this last question. We return to the ecclesial principle of unity and diversity and unashamedly acclaim that the body of Christ is one and diverse. Given the new situation the ecumenical movement has brought about, *do* we experience the ministry and oversight of one another's communions afresh? We have, in fact, discovered that there is more that unites us than divides us. There is more similarity than difference in how we inhabit *Church* and practice *ministry*. Furthermore, our diverse understandings of Church, when considered alongside each other, give a fuller picture of the nature and mission of the Church of Christ.

In the pages that follow, we celebrate several convergences in our respective ecclesiologies and ecclesial structures. Our appreciation of these convergences gives us confidence that we can make genuine progress in addressing the differences that still divide us. In the light of this, we think it important that the individual points made in this document not be read in isolation but seen in the light of the whole. We often have to acknowledge that the agreement we hope for is far from being fully achieved; at the same time, we rejoice that we can find some common ground as fellow pilgrims on the way to the Reign of God. Ultimately, we pray that growing in our mutual understanding of one another as Church might bring us closer to our desired end, namely, *unity*, marked by sharing together the feast of the Lord's Table, the feast of Eucharist, the feast of thanksgiving for the redeeming work of Christ, in whom we are one.

## CHAPTER 1

## ***Ecclesiology: Mutual Affirmations***

The opening affirmation of *The Common Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Baptism* produced in the seventh round of this Dialogue (2003-2011) reads: "Together we affirm that, by the sacrament of Baptism, a person is truly incorporated into the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13 and 27; Ephesians 1:22-23), the church." Acknowledging that Baptism establishes the bond of unity existing among all who are part of Christ's body we seek to understand how to deepen this unity and perfect this incorporation with yearning and hope towards complete participation in Eucharistic communion.<sup>1</sup> In light of our shared understanding of Baptism we seek here to illumine a deeper appreciation of the Church into which baptism incorporates us.

As indicated in the Introduction above, our aim in this monograph is not to set forth a comprehensive ecclesiology but an ecclesiology broached through the practice of ministry and the exercise of oversight in Church bodies. Accordingly, our examination of the Church will focus on these particular topics in ecclesiology: Trinity, covenant, Word and sacrament, mission, and the unity and diversity of the Church.

Our work draws not only on our own five-year conversation, but also the Reformed-Roman Catholic reflections generated out of ecumenical conversation in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. All of these exchanges inform our dialogue's convictions regarding a new ecumenical situation and fresh opportunities for mutual understanding, not least because they have advanced a more united conception of the Church. The forthcoming discussion of the Church's identity and mission aims not to proffer but to receive a refreshed Reformed-Roman Catholic perspective, in order that, based on a platform of these recent reflections, the remainder of our dialogue's contribution might help us all move deeper into a common understanding of one another as Church.

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<sup>1</sup> Vatican II's Decree on Ecumenism points out, 'baptism, of itself, is only a beginning, a point of departure, for it is wholly directed toward the acquiring of fullness of life in Christ. . . toward a complete profession of faith, a complete incorporation into the system of salvation such as Christ himself willed it. . . and finally toward complete participation in Eucharistic communion" (UR 22).

## The Trinitarian Foundation of the Church

The existence of the Church begins with the Holy Trinity. It is the Triune God who creates all things, sustains all things, redeems all things, and draws all things to their eschatological fullness through the mysterious and incomprehensible work of the Holy Spirit in the person of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God. This saving work is ultimately accomplished in and by Jesus Christ, and it is in and through Christ that God draws into unique communion with the Godhead a people who would participate in both Trinitarian communion and mission.

God is the source of the Church's existence. God has willed it to exist. In the opening of the letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul proclaims, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love; he destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:3–6 NRSV). Thus, the Church was and remains constituted by God in Christ "to share in the life which comes from the Father," as it is expressed in *Towards a Common Understanding of the Church* (§54). The end, or goal, of such communion is that all in Christ might "grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body . . . , promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love" (Eph. 4:15–16 NRSV).

This ecclesial communion — or *koinonia*, as it is attested to throughout the New Testament (cf. TCTCV 13) — springs from the profound communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is, in part, what the apostolic salutation promises: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion [*koinonia*] of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor. 13:13 NRSV). God longs to share with those created in God's image nothing less than God's very life, and, in this life, perfect freedom (cf. PCCW 51). This understanding of the Church and of the Christian life is particularly emphasized in Roman Catholic doctrine, as when the Catholic *Catechism* says of the sacrament of baptism that it signifies and enacts "entry into the life of the Most Holy Trinity through configuration to the Paschal mystery of Christ" (CCC 1239 in TLW 5.g). While such teaching is not emphasized in Reformed doctrine, such teaching is certainly

consonant with Reformed thought. In his commentary on Psalm 24:7, John Calvin himself states, “It is an instance of the inestimable grace of God that, so far as the infirmity of our flesh will permit, we are lifted up even to God by the exercises of religion. What is the design of the preaching of the Word, the sacraments, the holy assemblies, and the whole external government of the Church, but that we may be united to God?”<sup>2</sup> In *The Nature and Mission of the Church* (2005), the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches echoes both the Roman Catholic *Catechism* and Calvin’s commentary in saying, “The Church is not merely the sum of individual believers in communion with God, nor primarily the mutual communion of individual believers among themselves. It is their common partaking in the life of God (2 Pet. 1:4), who as Trinity is the source and focus of all communion” (NMC 13).

### **The Church as Community of the Covenant**

A traditional Reformed understanding of the Church begins with God’s covenant with Israel, noting that God takes those who had no identity beyond themselves and calls, claims, and forms them as a covenant people. The Church, then, is manifested already before the incarnation of the Son of God. It is constituted by way of God’s summons upon Abraham, Sarah, and their descendants, a summons which, according to the genealogical witness of the gospels, extended beyond the bounds of mere progeny, and which, according to the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Romans, is not ended. As noted in *Towards a Common Understanding of the Church*, Christians see themselves as included in the body of God’s covenant people:

Through the law and the prophets, God calls this [covenant] people and prepares them for a communion which will be accomplished at the sending of Emmanuel, “God with us” (cf. Mat 1.23). The novelty introduced by the incarnation of the Word does not call into question the continuity of the history of salvation. Nor does it call into question the significance of the interventions of that same Word and Spirit in the course of the Old Testament revelation. For God has not rejected this people (Rom 11.1). (§81)

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<sup>2</sup> *Calvin’s Commentaries: Joshua and the Psalms*, trans., Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company/Associated Publishers and Authors, Inc.) 303.

For Christians, the covenant relation between God and God's people is mediated solely by Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup> Both Reformed and Catholic Christians emphasize that, "Nothing and nobody could replace or duplicate, complete or in any way add to the unique mediation accomplished 'once for all' (Heb 9.12) by Christ, 'mediator of a new covenant'" (Heb 9.15; cf. 8.6 and 12.24). This mediation is still present and active in the person of the risen Christ who "is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he ever lives to make intercession for them" (Heb 7.25) (TCUC 72).

Christ's mediation is not just between God and humankind, but also between God and all creation as God makes visible in the covenant with Noah. *Towards a Common Understanding of the Church* advances this point, noting that Christ's "reconciling mediation opens up for us a vision of his mediation in creation: he is 'the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth... all things were created through him and for him' (Col 1.15–16). He is the Word and 'all things were made through him' (Jn 1.3). The mediation of Christ has thus a cosmic universality: it is directed towards the transformation of our world in God" (TCUC 73).

While we emphasize the role of Christ, we also want to emphasize the role of the Spirit in forming the covenant community. Already at Pentecost, the Spirit was at work in the proclamation and hearing of the gospel by a disparate group of people and shaped them into a new *koinonia* and a renewed humanity in Christ. The same Spirit is at work today, calling a diverse people into covenant community with the Triune God.

### **Church as Creation of the Word and Sacrament of Grace**

The Spirit makes Christ truly present in the covenant community through the preaching of the word and the celebration of the sacraments. In fact, "Word and sacrament alike are of the very nature of the Church" (TCUC 94). With this tight claim, the writers of *Towards a Common Understanding of the Church* suggest that the identity and mission of the Church

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<sup>3</sup> This is repeatedly affirmed in an international Roman Catholic – Reformed dialogue about Church. "In Jesus, the unique mediator, in his death and resurrection, we are radically freed from this situation," namely, an alienation from God that we have brought upon ourselves: "From the beginning we hid ourselves from God, and this is why God is hidden from us." TCUC 69.b.

cannot be well understood apart from the presence of Jesus Christ revealed to the gathered and sent community through the proclamation of the word and celebration of the sacraments. John Calvin taught that word and sacraments together are the defining marks or notes of the true church: “Wherever we see the Word of God rightly preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ’s institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists” (*Institutes* 4.1.9).<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere, Calvin asserted the parallel and complementary nature of word and sacrament: “let it be regarded as a settled principle that the sacraments have the same office as the Word of God: to offer and set forth Christ to us, and in him the treasures of heavenly grace” (*Institutes* 4.14.17). In this dialogue, a renewed understanding of the complementary nature of Word and sacrament emerged as a gift to both our communions.

While the Roman Catholic and Reformed churches alike proclaim the Word and celebrate the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, we have tended to emphasize one understanding of the Church over the other in our respective traditions, and this difference informs our ecclesiology. The Reformed tradition has tended to understand the Church as *creatura verbi*, the “creation of the Word.” In this view, the Word has a threefold form: Jesus Christ, Scripture, and proclamation. The Word and Spirit together “establish, preserve, and guide the community of the Church in and through human history” (TCUC 98). The Roman Catholic tradition has tended to understand the Church as *sacramentum gratiae*, a “sacrament of grace.” In this view, the Church is understood to be a “sign of intimate union with God,” the “universal sacrament of salvation,” and the “visible sacrament of this saving unity” (TCUC 110). For Catholics, nowhere is the Church’s sacramental identity more clearly manifested than in the celebration of the Eucharist.

These ways of understanding the Church are not mutually exclusive or contradictory. However — particularly important for the present study — these two concepts do contribute to divergences in our understanding of ecclesiology and ministry (TCUC 113). For the purpose of this reflection on the Church’s identity and mission, both concepts of the Church are

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<sup>4</sup> This is a notably generous ecclesiology, providing for the recognition of a variety of expressions of Christian community as belonging to the “church of God.”



illuminating. As a **creation of the word**, the Church's *identity* comes from its nature as a community of those belonging to God in Christ — people claimed by the word who seek to respond to God's call. The Church's *mission* is found in its proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of the world. As a **sacrament of grace**, the Church's *identity* comes from its members' incorporation into the body of Christ through baptism, and the perfection of that incorporation through the Eucharist.<sup>5</sup> The Church's *mission* is found in sharing with the world the grace that it has received by, among other things, making disciples, baptizing, celebrating the Eucharist, teaching and in loving and serving others as Christ has done for us.

We are grateful to previous dialogues that have formulated these concepts, and we reiterate our conviction that they are mutually enhancing views of the Church and its ministry, and they should not be seen as alternatives. These two conceptions “can in fact be seen as expressing the same instrumental reality under different aspects, as complementary to each other or as two sides to the same coin.”<sup>6</sup> With previous dialogues, we affirm that, “neither of these visions of the church can wholly exclude the other, but are mutually dependent. Both are basic to an understanding of the nature of the church.”<sup>7</sup> We share their assertion that a “sacramental church that does not give proper place to the Word of God would be essentially incomplete,” and that a “church that is truly a creation of the Word will celebrate that Word liturgically and sacramentally.”<sup>8</sup> These strong statements demonstrate the way in which, taken together, these conceptions of the Church — creation of the Word and sacrament of grace — bring to us a fuller understanding of the nature of the Church.

## **The Church in Mission**

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<sup>5</sup> From the earliest times, following the Lord's command, Christians met “to break bread”( Acts 20:7). Down to our own day “the celebration of the Eucharist has been continued so that today we encounter it everywhere in the Church with the same fundamental structure.” (CCC 1343). That structure, preserved throughout the centuries, is that “The liturgy of the Word and the liturgy of the Eucharist together form ‘One single act of worship’; the Eucharistic table set for us is the table both of the Word of God and of the body of the Lord” (CCC 1346).

<sup>6</sup> TCUC 113.

<sup>7</sup> CCCWKG 230.

<sup>8</sup> CCCWKG 193.

Recent Roman Catholic – Reformed reflections on ecclesiology have consistently emphasized that the Church is not simply an end in itself.<sup>9</sup> The Church exists at the gracious initiative of God, who has drawn into unique communion with the Godhead a people who would participate in the Trinitarian communion and mission of redemption. In covenant with Christ and through the Holy Spirit, the Church is on the move.

Prior rounds of Roman Catholic – Reformed dialogue have yielded strong statements on this matter. So, too, does *Nature and Mission of the Church* clearly and concisely formulate the Church's Trinitarian calling, covenantal identity, and missional nature:

The Church is called into being by the Father 'who so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life' (Jn 3:16) and who sent the Holy Spirit to lead these believers into all truth, reminding them of all that Jesus taught (cf. Jn 14:26). The Church is thus the creature of God's Word and of the Holy Spirit. It belongs to God, is God's gift and cannot exist by and for itself. Of its very nature it is missionary, called and sent to serve, as an instrument of the Word and the Spirit, as a witness to the Kingdom of God (§9).

*The Church: Towards a Common Vision* expands on this, declaring that the Church "is called specifically to witness to the *communion or koinonia* of God," a communion that God "intends for all humanity and for all creation" (11) The international Reformed-Catholic dialogue summons the church to be a "prophetic sign" to the kingdom of God: "The church is meant to serve the establishment of the kingdom as a prophetic sign and an effective instrument in the hands of God" (CCCWKG §64).

In sum, the Church does not serve itself, but participates with Christ by the Spirit in God's work in the world for the transformation of human life and the renewal of all creation. The proclamation of the gospel and the ministries of compassion compel the Church and its members to attend to the world. As attested by the baptismal and Eucharistic liturgies of each of our communions, the body of Christ is to live forward, turning its face to the eschatological horizon of the kingdom of God.

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<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that in some sense the church CAN be described as the end, as CCC 760 states: "Christians of the first centuries said, 'The world was created for the sake of the Church.' God created the world for the sake of communion with his divine life, a communion brought about by the 'convocation' of men in Christ, and this 'convocation' is the Church."

The previous round of the Roman Catholic – Reformed Dialogue in the United States (2003-2011) develops the implications of the relationship between the sacraments and the Church’s mission. Key to this section is addressing this question from our prospectus: “What do we understand to be the mission of the Church in light of our shared study on Baptism and Eucharist?” *These Living Waters* connects the Church’s mission to its theology and practice of baptism: “The Church baptizes in obedience to the command of Christ (Matt. 28:19, Mk. 16:16) in order to initiate persons into the life of the Church” (5b). Thus the Church’s practice of baptism is an enactment of and sharing in Christ’s mission. The Reformed and Catholic traditions agree on this matter, as declared in the *Common Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Baptism*: “Together we affirm that baptism is a sacrament of the church, enacted in obedience to the mission confided to it by Christ’s own word” (TLW, Agreement 5). Baptism can also be understood as a call to mission. As *These Living Waters* affirms, “Baptism is the first of the sacraments that a person receives. It is a means of grace through which God works in a person and that marks the reception of a person into the life and mission of Christ’s Church” (5a). Furthermore, baptism is a sign of God’s mission in the economy of salvation: “The water of baptism echoes the water of creation, the Flood, of the Red Sea during the Exodus, and of Jesus’ own baptism. Baptism is the sign of God’s covenant with the church, a covenant that not only stretches back to God’s covenant with Abraham and his descendants but also binds those who are members of this covenant to God as God’s children” (TLW 5d). Baptism saves us from sin and bestows new life in Christ and his Church. Baptism is described in TLW as an entry into a new way of life in Christ: “Baptism is an important source for a life of Christian faith and discipleship. For those baptized as infants, faith and discipleship are the expected fruit of baptism. For those baptized as adolescents or adults, typically faith and discipleship precede baptism. Nevertheless, whether administered to an infant or an adult, baptism is intended to nurture Christian faith and discipleship. Working with the Word of God, the sacraments — including baptism — nourish the faith of God’s people and motivate them to follow God’s will as Christ’s disciples” (TLW 5e).

Finally, *These Living Waters* offers this statement on baptism and ecclesiology: “Baptism is the sacramental bond that effects membership in the visible Church. As an ecclesial

sacrament it is also the basis for the real communion that Christians enjoy in their churches and among the various ecclesial communities as they strive to overcome separation and division in a more full and perfect communion” (5f). Part of the Church’s baptismal mission, then, is responding to Christ’s call for the Church to be united and reconciled in him.

*This Bread of Life* does not address the Church’s mission as fully or directly as did *These Living Waters*, but some insights may be found within its discussion of Eucharist and discipleship. *This Bread of Life* offers the following point of convergence or consensus: “The Reformed and Roman Catholic traditions both strongly affirm the connection between Eucharist/Lord’s Supper and Christian discipleship” (3e). *This Bread of Life* affirms that communion with Christ has implications for daily discipleship: dying to sin and living for God, commitment to social justice, Christian ethics, concern for the poor, and an eschatological foretaste of God’s *shalom*. The Church’s mission is ordered to the salvation of humanity, the renewal of God’s creation, and the glorification of God.

### **Unity and Diversity**

As noted in the introduction, in Christ all Christians are one; yet God also wills that tremendous diversity exists in the body of Christ.<sup>10</sup> The nature of the Church is that it is both diverse and one. Christians are part of one body formed by one Spirit, believe in one Lord, share one faith and one baptism, and worship “one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:4-6). In short, “The Church is one because God is one,” and also because the apostolic faith, new life in Christ, and the Christian hope are one (TCTCV 22). As people, who are created in the image of a Trinitarian God, whose very being is a unity in diversity, and who are scattered across many lands and cultures, Christians form one body of Christ that is also diverse, with many different gifts and expressions of faith. Both Reformed and Catholic traditions are united in the sense that diversity in the Church exists as a source of vibrancy and that it is central to the Church’s identity as it seeks to unite the fullness of God’s creation in

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<sup>10</sup> There are, for example, within our communions, diverse forms of communal life, diverse gifts of the Spirit, diverse cultures, diverse spiritualities, diverse charitable practices, diverse doctrinal understandings (within specified limits), diverse forms and practices of governance, and a diversity of religious orders and charisms among others.

Christ. Additionally, both agree that legitimate diversity should not be suppressed, since the Holy Spirit bestows a variety of complementary gifts on the faithful for the common good (cf. 1 Cor. 12:4-7) and these gifts are given for men and women to strengthen the Church and advance its mission.<sup>11</sup> Both Roman Catholic and Reformed traditions affirm that the unity and diversity that necessarily exist within the Church should not be seen as competitive, but as strengthening one another and relying on one another.

Already in 1977, the international Reformed-Roman Catholic dialogue recognized one key point of unity: “in Jesus Christ, God has made joint cause with sinful humanity and aims at the renewal of the world. Therefore all those who are connected with the name of Jesus Christ have the joint task of bearing witness to this Gospel” (PCCW 13). In the 1984-1990 international round of Catholic and Reformed dialogue, elements of unity were celebrated and highlighted in *Toward a Common Understanding of the Church*:

We have discovered anew that the Roman Catholic and the Reformed Churches are bound by manifold ties. Both communions confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, affirm the Trinitarian faith of the apostolic Church through the ages, and observe the one baptism into the threefold Name. In recent years Reformed and Roman Catholic Christians have begun to share the experience of fellowship and to seek fuller communion in truth and love for the sake of our common service of Jesus Christ in the world. Our churches share more common ground than previously we were able to see (TCUC 4).

While confession of Jesus Christ as Lord is common to both communions, commonality is further explicated in two areas of fundamental agreement: that our Lord Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and humankind, and that we receive justification by grace through faith. It follows that together we also confess the Church as the community of all who are called, redeemed and sanctified through the one mediator (TCUC 8). This shared understanding

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<sup>11</sup> The term “legitimate diversity” comes out of the Canberra Statement (“The Unity of the Church: Gift and Calling—The Canberra Statement”) of the World Council of Churches, 1991. The Canberra Statement defines the bounds of diversity in this way: “Diversity is illegitimate when, for instance, it makes impossible the common confession of Jesus Christ as God and Savior the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb. 13:8); salvation and the final destiny of humanity as proclaimed in Holy Scripture and preached by the apostolic community.” Each communion determines, through a variety of processes, what types of diversity are legitimate. There is a tendency in some of our churches to define what is “legitimate” according to issues of moral or spiritual purity. Therefore, we use this term reluctantly, but want to emphasize that there are still bounds to diversity—not only in belief but also in action (failure to relate justly to or love one’s neighbor or God, for instance, represents an illegitimate diversity).

of the Church informs the unity and diversity that come to expression in the Church.

The Holy Spirit bestows “diverse and complementary gifts” on the community and raises an important question: “How, according to the will of God and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is the life of the Church to be understood and ordered, so that the Gospel may be spread and the community built up in love?” (BEM, Ministry 6). “The Church lives through the liberating and renewing power of the Holy Spirit... The Spirit calls people to faith, sanctifies them through many gifts, gives them strength to witness to the Gospel, and empowers them to serve in love” (BEM, Ministry 3). In this is framed the ever-present diversity of the Church – united but not uniform, exhibiting a diversity that is also the gift of God. The Holy Spirit brings the diversity of gifts or ministries to life in the Church:

The Church as the body of Christ and the eschatological people of God is constituted by the Holy Spirit through a diversity of gifts or ministries. Among these gifts a ministry of *episkopé* is necessary to express and safeguard the unity of the body. Every church needs this ministry of unity in some form in order to be the Church of God, the one body of Christ, a sign of the unity of all in the kingdom (BEM, Ministry 23).

In addition, both Reformed and Roman Catholic traditions affirm that diversity is also a gift of God to the Church. It is a gift given to all who are members of the Church. “Diversity appears not as accidental to the life of the Christian community, but as an aspect of its catholicity, a quality that reflects that it is part of the Father’s design that the story of salvation in Christ be incarnational. Thus, diversity is a gift of God to the Church” (NMC 6). As *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* recognizes, the New Testament canon sees plurality as compatible with the unity of the Church, “though without denying the limits to legitimate diversity” (12). Christians are called not only to overcome divisions 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” (TCTCV 30). “Catholicity, as described in the baptismal catechesis of Cyril of Jerusalem, refers not simply to geographic extension but also to the manifold variety of local churches and their participation in the fullness of faith and life that unites them in the one *koinonia*” (TCTCV 31). Thus the diversity of the Church is “an aspect of its catholicity” and “a gift of God to the Church” (NMC 16).

The gift of diversity is given for the strengthening of the Church. In that, diversity brings strength to the life of the Church: “All members of Christ are given gifts for the building up of the body (cf. Rom 12:4-8; 1 Cor 12:4-30). The diversity and specific nature of these gifts enrich the Church’s life and enable a better response to its vocation to be the servant of the Lord and effective sign used by God for furthering the Kingdom in the world” (NMC 8).

While Roman Catholic and Reformed communities agree about the importance of both unity and diversity in the Church; questions remain about what constitutes each and regarding the proper relationship between these two central aspects of the Church. Previous rounds of dialogue identify open questions and encourage further thinking on this topic that sets disagreements and divergences in the context of our common understanding and the “living relationship” which stems from it (TCUC 8 and 160). Central among these topics are questions such as, “What constitutes legitimate diversity?” and, “Who decides what constitutes legitimate diversity?” As *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* notes, resolving these questions is complicated because we lack common criteria and mutually recognized structures for discerning legitimate diversity:

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 had 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 churches to consider: what positive steps can be taken to make common discernment possible? (TCTCV 30)

Although our dialogue will not be able to “solve” the mystery of the relationship of unity and diversity which is, in many ways, inherent to the nature of the Church itself, we hope to make progress towards developing some “common criteria” and “mutually recognized structures” needed to cultivate greater shared understanding.

Differences between Roman Catholic and Reformed teaching on the relationship between unity and diversity in the Church must be seen in the light of the significant marks of

unity that we share. Those differences also must be seen in the light of our overall approach to unity and diversity, both within our own communions and in our relations with other Christian communions. Two important questions to consider in this connection are these: Might some of our differences be compatible with or even an enhancement to unity? Where do we have differences that one or both sides see as unacceptable or destructive of unity?

As this chapter has shown, Roman Catholic and Reformed communions mutually affirm that the Church, which is founded in the Trinitarian being of God, has a covenantal character. It is a creature of the Word, called into being by the Holy Spirit and serves as a Sacrament of grace in mission to the world. Further, we mutually affirm that, reflecting its roots in the Trinity, the Church is realized in its unity and diversity. The ministry of the Church is to preach the Word, administer the sacraments, and work in the world for the transformation of human life and the renewal of all creation. In order to understand this calling of the ministry, we need to explore more fully the ministries of oversight and unity in the Church. Chapter Two begins this exploration.



## CHAPTER 2

### **Ministry, Ordination, and Oversight: *In Service to the Church and the World***

Our mutual affirmations about the Church, as expressed in the previous chapter, put the ministry of the Church and the activities of its ministers into proper perspective. The Church's identity and mission flow from the grace, love, and communion of the holy, triune God. The Church's ministry belongs, first and foremost, to Jesus Christ, who is the head of the Church. Christ shares his authority with his disciples, who minister in his name by the power of his Spirit.

Previous rounds of ecumenical dialogue have done fine work on several questions concerning ministry and ordination. From the published contributions of these dialogues, we have identified five key, mutual affirmations about ministry and ordination. These affirmations serve as essential groundwork for our own discussion, and for consideration of the areas of convergence and difference that we have identified. They also lay the groundwork for ways in which we might claim a mutual acknowledgment of ministries.

#### **Mutual Affirmation**

At the outset of this particular Roman Catholic – Reformed discussion of ministry and ordination, it is fitting to review our already-forged, mutual affirmations about the Church's ministry. As suggested in our introduction, we hope the experience and celebration of these signs of Christ's ministry in one another may move us closer to full communion together.

(1) *Our Common Ministry*: Together we affirm that Christian ministry involves the whole people of God in the apostolic mission of the Church. As one, we are called by the Spirit to follow Christ and sent by the Spirit to serve him in the world. Through the anointing of baptism, all members of Christ's body share in Christ's priestly ministry. It is therefore incumbent upon the baptized to discern by the Spirit gifts received from the Spirit and, by the power of the

Spirit, to exercise those gifts for the edification of the Church and the reconciliation of the world. (See PCCW 93, 94, 95; BEM, Ministry, 5; CCC 871; TCUC 135).

(2) *Ordained Ministry*: While we affirm this common ministry of the whole people of God, we also mutually affirm a unique ministry of certain members of God's people. These particular members are set apart through ordination and entrusted with the proclamation of the Word, the administration of the Sacraments, and oversight. The power and dignity inherent in this service are conferred ultimately by God in Christ through the Spirit and only in the context of the covenant community of faith. Furthermore, reflecting the Church as *creatura verbi* we mutually agree that a primary responsibility of those called to ordained ministry is the proclamation of the Gospel (PCCW 97).<sup>12</sup> Reflecting the Church as *sacramentum gratiae* we affirm together that a primary responsibility of those called to ordained ministry is the celebration of the sacraments.

(3) *The Three-Fold Pattern of Ministry*: Together we recognize that the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter, and deacon "became the generally accepted pattern in the Church of the early centuries and is still retained today by many churches" (PCCW 97). Though this pattern of ministry is received and reformed differently in each of our traditions, we continue to acknowledge this pattern as a gift from the life of the early Church and inspired by the Holy Spirit. For Catholics, it is a divinely-established pattern.

(4) *The Collegial Nature of Ministry*: We believe that the Church and its ministry are collegial in nature. While this collegiality is expressed in distinct ways in our two traditions — through the episcopal college in the Roman Catholic tradition and through conciliar polity in the Reformed tradition — still, both traditions embrace collegiality as an essential principle of ministry. Accordingly, we both recognize that ordained ministry is exercised in personal, collegial, and communal ways, and we affirm the need for balance among these modes of ecclesial oversight (BEM, Ministry, 26; PCCW 102; CCC 877).

(5) *Ministry as Service*: Finally, we maintain that all authority in church leadership is to be seen as a vocation of service for the common good, in imitation of and participation in the

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<sup>12</sup> For example, Vatican II, following the Council of Trent, affirmed that 'Among the principal duties of bishops the preaching of the Gospel occupies an eminent place' (*Lumen gentium*, No. 25)."

servant leadership of Christ. All of the ordained, to whatever office, are to model their ministry after the example of the servant Christ. Indeed, all authority in the Church is ministerial, a service to the community of faith. As the World Council of Churches has declared: “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” (TCTCV 51; TCUC 132; PCCW 93; BEM, Ministry, 15. See also CCC, 876).

### **Areas of Convergence: New Realizations**

Building on the work of previous dialogues, our present discussions have attempted to determine whether there might be new realizations over points of convergence in our respective understandings of ministry and ordination. We have been surprised and gratified by the number of areas in which the Reformed and Roman Catholic communions are growing closer together and discovering common ground on matters about which we seem to hold much different views and practices. Areas of real divergence between us notwithstanding, we discern the following five areas of convergence.

(1) *The Triune God as the Source of the Church’s Mission*: Our work in this round of dialogue has been shaped by an emerging clarity and conviction about the centrality of trinitarian, Christological, and pneumatological concerns as these relate to the theology of ordination and ministry. In particular, we are compelled to underscore our mutual understanding that Christian ministry flows from the mission of the triune God — God’s self-giving love for the world, revealed in the saving mystery of Jesus Christ and sealed through the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. Whatever authority is to be found in Christian ministry and ordination, that authority is wholly dependent upon, subject to, and humbled by the authority of Jesus Christ. Similarly, whatever power can be attributed to Christian ministry and ordination, that power is utterly reliant on the gift, the direction, and the power of the Holy Spirit. We believe these areas of theological convergence are fundamental to the other matters, both theological and practical, that follow.

(2) *Baptism as the Foundation for Ministry*: Christian ministry and ordination flow from

the gift and calling of our baptism. Through baptism, all Christians are called to share in Christ's priestly, prophetic, and royal offices and participate in the mission and ministry of the Church. Some of the baptized are called and explicitly ordained to build up of the body of Christ, to encourage and equip the baptized to fulfill their participation in Christ's ministry, and to foster order in the life of the Church. Catholics would emphasize here the importance of the ministry of the sacrament of Holy Orders.

(3) *Ordination to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament:* Those who are ordained as pastors/priests are ministers of both Word and Sacrament. Their primary role in the community of faith is to share the good news and grace of God through the proclamation of the gospel and the celebration of the mysteries of faith. This is the ministry of the whole people of God — it doesn't belong to priests and pastors alone; yet pastors and priests, through their Christian vocation, are equipped and called by God in a particular way to carry out their ministry in a manner that is faithful to Christ's teaching and service.

(4) *The Call to Ministry:* The call to ordained ministry begins with the discernment of Christ's call to a baptized member of the body for such service. Such discernment involves the interplay of a person's own personal sense and realization of call to ministry, and a similar sense and realization within the community of believers of that person's call to ministry. Both the person and the community, *together*, through both formal and informal proceedings, discern the Spirit's affirmation of that person's call to ministry. Upon recognizing signs of God's call to ministry and experiencing a desire to follow the leading of these signs, one must humbly submit oneself, as well as one's desire, to the discernment and governance of the communion one seeks to serve. This is so in both the Roman Catholic and any Reformed communion.<sup>13</sup>

(5) *Preparation for Ministry:* Preparation for ministry includes an organized process of discernment and education that contributes to the order of the Church for the sake of the flourishing of God's kingdom. The ordained offices originate in and are authorized by Christ, who bestows them as a gift to the community and continually guides those who exercise them in the life of the church (PCCW 98). Although Reformed and Roman Catholic traditions affirm

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<sup>13</sup> CCC 1578; CRCNA Church Order, Articles 6, 7, and 10 in particular; PCUSA Book of Order G-2.05-2.09.

differing offices, the ministry of Word, Sacrament, and oversight are common to all and mutually understood to be “given by Christ to the church for the good of all” (TCUC 132).

(6) *Common Liturgical Practices:* While there are distinct differences in ordination practices (for example, the offices to which our communions ordain, and the order and wording within the ordination liturgies), a comparison of ordination rites shows striking similarities and common threads:

- All services are presided over by the one(s) representing the ministry of oversight.
- In the Roman Catholic tradition, the Bishop ordains; in the Reformed tradition, it is a group of persons representing or authorized by a governing body or assembly, variously identified as a presbytery, association, or classis that ordains one to the ministry of the Word. The similarity, then, is that a figure or body of oversight ordains.
- All ordination rites include statements on the meaning of ordination.
- All ordination rites include questions asked of a candidate and/or vows taken by the candidate.
- Most significantly, all traditions make prominent use of the classic liturgical marker of ordination—the invocation of the Holy Spirit, often in the ordaining prayer, with the laying on of hands.
- In Roman Catholic and Reformed ordination liturgies, there is a place where the gathered congregation assents to the ordination or promises to support the one ordained.
- Various gestures of welcome are extended to the newly ordained (e.g., the kiss of peace, a greeting, or the right hand of fellowship).
- In the Roman Catholic tradition and in most Reformed traditions, appropriate symbols of office (e.g. a robe and/or stole, Bible, or certificate of ordination) may be given.

### **Differences that Remain**

Although there is a growing mutual consensus around the topics listed above, the Reformed and Roman Catholic communions still differ in their understandings of several aspects of ministry and ordination.

(1) *Appointment to Service*: While both Reformed and Catholic communities have an organized process of vocational discernment, preparation for ministry, and authorization for ordination, the process differs when it comes to appointment for service. In the Reformed communions, ordination requires a call from the people of God, ordinarily a congregation, to a particular form of ministerial service. That call is then confirmed or approved by a regional body such as a presbytery, association, or classis. In Roman Catholic tradition, a person is ordained by a bishop for a particular diocese or religious community; assignments to ministry, after consultation, are made by the bishop or religious superior. So in both cases, the local congregation and a person or body representing the larger Church have a role in ordination, although significant differences remain in how the process occurs.

(2) *Ordination as Sacrament and a Foundation for Ordained Ministry*: Both traditions affirm that ordination is a means of grace by which the body of Christ is built up. Historically, however, Reformed Christians do not perceive ordination as a sacrament, holding that it was not commanded by Christ.<sup>14</sup> For the Roman Catholic Church, ordination is one of the seven ritual sacraments instituted by Christ. Roman Catholics recognize that all sacraments flow from Christ, the high priest, whose singular sacrifice on the cross communicates grace and establishes the Church. The Sacrament of Holy Orders flows out of this sacrificial act and empowers the episcopal office for sacramental ministry as distinct from the common priesthood of all believers. According to Catholic teaching (LG 10) the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood “differ from one another in essence and not only in degree”, though each of them “in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ.” Moreover, Catholic doctrine recognizes two degrees of ministerial participation in the priesthood of Christ: the episcopacy and the presbyterate. The diaconate is intended to help and serve them. All three are conferred by the sacrament of Holy Orders (CCC

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<sup>14</sup> Although the Reformed do not recognize ordination as a sacrament, there is precedent in the Reformed tradition for considering it sacramentally. Calvin, for instance, wrote, “There remains the laying on of hands, which, though I admit it to be a sacrament in true and legitimate ordination ...” *Institutes* IV.19.31.

1554). Furthermore, 'the fullness of the sacrament of Holy Orders is conferred by episcopal Consecration' (CCC 1557).

(3) *Offices to Which One May Be Ordained*: There is also a difference in the specific offices to which one is ordained. All of the Reformed communions ordain to the ministry of Word and Sacrament (variously called minister, pastor, or teaching elder), the counterpart to the Catholic priest. Some ordain to the office of elder or ruling elder, and/or to the office of deacon. The episcopal ministry in the Reformed communions is generally exercised not by an individual person, but by governing bodies that, in some Reformed traditions, must include elders. The Catholic Church ordains to the ministries of diaconate, presbyterate, and episcopate. All of these offices are held by specific persons. The office of (ruling) elder is not used in the Catholic Church or United Church of Christ.

(4) *Ordination of Women*: A key area of divergence is the ordination of women. Over the past century, all of the Reformed churches in this dialogue have taken actions to permit the ordination of women to all offices to which these churches ordain.<sup>15</sup> The leadership of ordained women has become central to the life of these churches. While the Pope has just called for an international commission to discuss the possibility of ordaining women to the office of permanent deacon,<sup>16</sup> women are not eligible for ordination in the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>17</sup>

In the course of our dialogue, we have come to appreciate that our arguments for and against the ordination of women are somewhat different. On the Reformed side, the discussion has been almost exclusively a matter of biblical interpretation. Historic opposition cited the fact that, among the disciples, only men were named as the twelve apostles, as well as passages calling for the silence and subordination of women in the Church (e.g., 1 Cor. 14:34). In recent

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<sup>15</sup> The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has made this a part of its most recent confessional statement: "The same Spirit who inspired the prophets and apostles rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture, engages us through the Word proclaimed, claims us in the waters of baptism, feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation, and *calls women and men to all ministries of the Church.*" Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *Book of Confessions*, 10.4; italics added.

<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that deacons are not seen as having the same relation to Christ as ordained priests, but are ordained "unto the ministry"; see CCC 1569. Some think that there is a possible opening theologically to extending the diaconate to women, in addition to there being possible biblical and historical precedent from the New Testament (Rom. 16:1).

<sup>17</sup> Indeed, this has been reaffirmed by Pope Francis. He made his latest pronouncement on this point on November 1, 2016, in response to questions from the press while on a flight from Sweden to Rome.

years, a broader reading has been advanced which points out the clear presence of women among the company of those who followed Jesus, the fact that women were the ones entrusted with the news of Jesus' resurrection, and the many women named by Paul as leaders of the early Christian movement (see Luke 8; Matt. 28; and Rom. 16). Generally speaking, it has been the experience of reading the larger witness of the New Testament that has led the Reformed churches to change their theology and practice.

The rationale for the Catholic Church's decision not to ordain women is likewise rooted in an interpretation of Scripture. As articulated in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1577, the Catholic position is that only a baptized man can validly receive ordination, since Jesus "chose men to form the college of the twelve apostles, and the apostles did the same when they chose collaborators to succeed them in their ministry" (note 67, Mk. 3:14-19; Luke 6:12-16; 1 Tim 3: 1-13; 2 Tim 1:6; Titus 1:5-9). This, then, is the basis for the Catholic Church's teaching and tradition: Jesus did not ordain women; therefore, "in fidelity to the example of the Lord,"<sup>18</sup> the Catholic Church does not. Furthermore, Catholic priests exercise their ministry *in persona Christi*, "taking the role of Christ, to the point of being his very image, when he pronounces the words of consecration." Therefore, there needs to be a "natural resemblance" between Christ and the minister,<sup>19</sup> since in the Catholic understanding of ordination, the ministerial priesthood "stems from the economy of the mystery of Christ and the Church,"<sup>20</sup> the bride of Christ.

(5) *The Effects of Ordination on the Individual*: Another major divergence is in the understanding of what kind of change is produced by ordination. For the Roman Catholic communion, ordination, as with baptism and confirmation, "confers an indelible spiritual character and cannot be repeated or conferred temporarily" (CCC 1582), particularly for bishops and priests who, as noted above, are thereafter seen as acting "in the power and place of the person of Christ himself" (CCC 1548). The indelible character conferred by ordination implies no moral or ontological superiority to the non-ordained.

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<sup>18</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Inter Insigniores* [II], 15 Oct. 1976, introduction; see also sections 1-4. This position was reaffirmed by Pope John Paul II in the Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, 22 May 1994, sec. 4. According to Catholic teaching, the tradition of the church on this point has been constant and unbroken.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, section 5.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, section 6.



The Reformed churches agree that upon ordination the ordained bears a new relationship with Christ and the Church and so is a different person in some sense. The Reformed churches diverge, however, from the claim that the minister acts “in the place of Christ,” but rather is used by Christ in Christ’s ministry to the Church and to the world. Both the Reformed and Roman Catholic communions insist that ordination is to be set aside for service and both see the personal exercise of ministry as more than function, but involving the identity of the one ordained.

(6) *The Role of the Eucharist in Constituting the Church and Ordained Ministry*: An area for continued study and dialogue involves the intrinsic relationship between the Church and the Eucharist as well as the intrinsic relationship of all the sacraments to the Eucharist, including for the Roman Catholic Church, the sacrament of Holy Orders. Catholics teach that the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life, “the other sacraments, and indeed all Ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented towards it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch” (CCC 1324). According to John Paul II, “if the Eucharist is the center and summit of the Church’s life, it is likewise the center and summit of priestly ministry.”<sup>21</sup> Advancing our appreciation of how our traditions treat these issues would bring us to significantly deeper mutual understanding.

### **Mutual Acknowledgment of Ministries**

The Church’s ministry belongs to Jesus Christ. Christ’s ministry is at work as we exercise our ordained offices. While we do not recognize one another’s ordination in an official sense, yet we acknowledge the ministry of Christ present in one another as we exercise our offices. It is our hope that this acknowledgment would be a step toward a deeper understanding of one another’s perspective which would help us move toward the unity to which Christ is calling us.

We are instructed by the significant informal and implicit forms of mutual acknowledgment that have emerged in recent decades. Past dialogues have recommended and pointed to ways in which the ordained, Catholic and Reformed, serve side by side in certain

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<sup>21</sup> John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharista*, 63.

rites, including weddings, funerals, and baptisms.<sup>22</sup> Although their functions in the rites may be different according to their tradition, their presence together implicitly communicates a mutual acknowledgment of authority and therefore of our unity in Christ.

In *These Living Waters*, the dialogue pointed to “tangible expressions of mutual recognition” by suggesting ways that Reformed and Catholic ordained persons may serve as ecumenical witnesses at baptisms, especially when there are interchurch families (TLW 77). The dialogue encouraged both the invitation for involvement in baptisms to the ordained of each other’s communions and for participation in ministerial associations to foster ecumenical cooperation at Baptism.

An example of such recognition includes the Capitol Area Council of Churches in Albany, New York. The Council, that includes ordained persons from Roman Catholic, Reformed, and other Christian traditions, designed a program that celebrates baptism into the one body of Christ. At a congregation’s request, the “Witnesses of Baptism” will send representatives from diverse Christian communions to participate in any baptism. Each congregation that invites representatives may involve them in a variety of ways — as witness, as liturgist, or as the one offering the baptismal certificate to those baptized.<sup>23</sup>

The informal acknowledgment of ministry goes further than this example suggests. In many communities, ministerial associations gather the ordained of various traditions to study together, address needs in the community, share in fellowship, and offer mutual support. Such associations and other ecumenical/interfaith collaboration between faith leaders often focus on issues of justice, peace, and service.

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<sup>22</sup> See *Interchurch Families: Resources for Ecumenical Hope* (2002), *These Living Waters: Common Agreement on Mutual Recognition of Baptism* (2007), and *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* (Vatican City: Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, 1993), 97.

<sup>23</sup> See *Prayers and Patterns of Worship: Liturgies, Music, Images, and Ideas for Engaging Worship in the United Church of Christ* (Cleveland: Local Church Ministries, United Church of Christ, 2004), 25. This practice is compelling in light of the pastoral recommendations of the Roman Catholic and Reformed “Common Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Baptism,” Roman Catholic – Reformed Dialogue of the US. Note that, in Roman Catholic practice, “a baptized person who belongs to another ecclesial Community may be admitted as witness, but only together with a Catholic godparent; a Catholic may do the same for a person being baptized in another ecclesial Community”; see *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* (Vatican City: Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, 1993), 98a.

These relationships are not always initiated by the churches or faith leaders, but often by government agencies/administrations, such as a mayor's interfaith council or a task force to respond to particular needs. In addition, those who are ordained come together to organize and participate in services of celebration as annual community Thanksgiving services and vigils or prayer services in times of community grief or difficulty. Especially in times of national or community crisis, such joint efforts express a powerful unity and recognition of and solidarity among the ordained ministry of each communion.

Relationships between the ordained from the Reformed and Catholic traditions also often take on a more personal character – through spiritual direction, clergy prayer groups, informal yet significant friendships, and relationships of mutual care. These bonds, although informal, express a deep acknowledgment of and gratitude for God's gifts and calling of both those ordained in the Catholic and Reformed communions.

## **Conclusion**

We have learned much from this conversation. Although we ordain to different offices and have different requirements for ordination, all of our traditions see ministry as service to God in the Church and rooted in our common baptismal vocation, though Catholics here would emphasize the importance of the ministry of the sacrament of Holy Orders. We further understand that ministry is exercised in both personal and collegial ways, and is undertaken in the context of the priesthood of all the baptized, who together share in the mission of proclaiming the Kingdom of God.

Official *mutual recognition of ministry* is not yet possible, given particular divergences on some aspects of ministry. *Even so*, as partners in dialogue, we mutually experience that one another's ministry bears biblical and theological integrity, and we mutually acknowledge that this observation is no small thing. As described above, there are several practical circumstances during which each communion genuinely regards the dignity and authority of the ministry of the ordained in the other's communion. We receive this as a genuine informal acknowledgement and mutual respect for the ministry of Christ in one another. In light of this, we call upon our churches to continue the dialogue in order to overcome the serious

divergences that continue to exist between us regarding both the understanding of the Church and the ministry. This would help us to move toward the unity to which Christ is calling us.

## CHAPTER 3

### **A Vital Reconsideration:**

#### ***Episkopé* in History and Practice, both Roman Catholic and Reformed**

As shown in the previous chapter, our communions hold much in common with respect to how we practice ministry and conceive of ordination to ministerial roles of leadership within the Church. We mutually affirm that those ordained bear a distinctive participation in Christ's ministry, who themselves are participants in Christ's ministry by virtue of their baptism. This is a significant affirmation. Yes, there are important differences between us, such as the Catholic emphasis on the importance of the sacrament of Holy Orders, but given the unity of this vision for the calling, vocation, and role of the ordained ministry in our communions, perhaps we may be able to move forward in resolving these differences in a way that honors the unique insights of our respective communities.

A significant dimension of the Church on earth is its ministry of oversight, both of ordained leadership and the whole community of the baptized. Christians often speak of this oversight as *episkopé*, receiving this term from the Church of the New Testament. Regrettably, after decades of ecumenical dialog, mutual affirmation of one another's conception and exercise of this seminal dimension of ministry remains at an impasse.

It is an understatement to say that our shared history of the Church is fraught with misunderstanding, caricatures, invectives, and even condemnations. But the world is turning and history is turning with it. We are in a new situation, in which confessional traditions, largely released from the political maneuvering of nation states, are reframing their self-understanding more and more according to the prayer of our Lord for his disciples on the night of his betrayal: "The glory you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, 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 17.22-23). In the context of this new situation, we have experienced an opportunity to attend to our histories

afresh and experience one another's telling of their story with ears opened as perhaps never before.

We believe that this, in turn, allows us to attend with greater openness to how ministry, and more to the point here, *episkopé*, is exercised within both of our communions. That is to say, attending our own and to one another's histories afresh, we believe we may discover that there is more that unites us than divides us with respect to this vital aspect of ecclesial ministry. Even though our principal structures that carry out *episkopé* seem disparate – the episcopal college of the Roman Catholic tradition and the synodical polity of the Reformed tradition – by attending afresh, we believe we begin to see significant convergences in how our communions inhabit church and exercise oversight structurally, and that these convergences afford for us a common theological language that may bring us into the impasse in a new way, perhaps one day even beyond it. **Our overarching, key mutual affirmation is that *episkopé* should be recognized not first as governance, as it so often is, but first as *pastoral ministry*, participating in the fulfillment of Christ's mandate to disciples to attend to the care of the flock by the grace of the Spirit, in Christ's name and for the world's sake.**

In this chapter, then, we aim to highlight this important affirmation. We do so by first situating the term and concept of *episkopé* in its New Testament context and rehearsing in brief especially the Western European church's reception and exercise of *episkopé* up to the Reformation era of the sixteenth century. Rehearsing this early history together is, of course, not without its challenges given that each our own communions have received this history in unique ways.

Again, the aim is to experience one another's story, and each our own story, in such a way that we might experience the exercise of *episkopé* anew and lead us into the primary contribution of this chapter: namely, a discussion of a number of areas in which our conception and exercise of *episkopé* converge – *despite* our diverse ecclesiologies and consequent ecclesial structures – and where they diverge. In setting these things forth, we have discovered – and celebrate – much that we learn from one another about *episkopé*, much that informs each our own communion's exercise of *episkopé* despite our diverse ecclesial theologies and structures.

## Episcopacy in the New Testament and in the Apostolic Era

The word *episkopé* is derived from the Greek *episkopos*, a term that in the New Testament is synonymous with leaders who exercise some measure of oversight in early Christian communities. *Episkopé*, which always meant simply authority or supervision in the Church, is understood differently, and so is exercised in different ways, by and in the Reformed and Catholic traditions, for example, with respect to sacraments, doctrine, and pastoral care. Such authority, however, is not necessarily reducible by all Christians to an *episkopos* or bishop.

The history of the episcopate in the Catholic Church evidences a gradual development that would only eventually link the terms in a more absolute sense. In the New Testament era, the link was not so absolute. For example, while there are instances in the New Testament in which an *episkopos* or superintendent (bishop) is identified with having real *episkopé* (e.g., Phil. 1:1, 1 Tim. 3:4, Titus 1:7), it is also true that an *episkopé* of oversight in the community was present in other community leaders as well, such as the *presbyteroi* (Acts 20:28).

It is understood in the Catholic Church that bishops are the heirs to the twelve and so derive their *episkopé* in virtue of this link. The Reformed ask whether this connection is absolute. Do bishops, whose *episkopé* has been identified as teaching, sanctifying, and governing (as in *Lumen Gentium* 21) act with the same authority exercised by the twelve in the New Testament? A good place begin a survey of *episkopé* would be to consider how such was understood and exercised in by the twelve.

The New Testament clearly shows that among the disciples of Jesus twelve were intentionally chosen by him and given a specific mission, including preaching and having authority over demons (Mark 3:14-15) as well as making disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching them (Matt. 28:16-20). Moreover, Matthew 18:18 seems to attribute the authority to “bind and loose” sins specifically to the twelve, which power is also specifically given to Peter (Matt. 16:19, John 20: 22-23) and is vividly displayed in Acts 5:1-6. Peter’s role or authority among the twelve, even among “the insiders” John, James, and Andrew, appears to be unique. In John 21:15-17, Peter is specifically commanded by Jesus to feed or pasture his sheep.

The authority granted to the twelve was exercised both personally and corporately. Certain of the twelve – Peter, James and John – emerged as prominent figures, possessing a

unique authority among the closest followers of Jesus and even exercising some function of leading the earliest Christian community. There is also clear evidence that “episcopal oversight” was exercised by the bodies of oversight, the classic example being the so-called Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-22). Even there, however, certain apostles, namely, Peter and James, exercised a certain personal authority.

While this overview offers some hint as to the authority granted to leaders in the nascent community, the New Testament does not speak clearly to the questions that have grown from the Church’s divergence on the office of *episkopé*, and so we are compelled to look to the post-apostolic era.

### **Episcopacy between the Apostolic Era and the Council of Nicea**

Despite the lack of a clear delineation of the identity and role of bishops in the New Testament, the emergence of the monarchical *episkopos*, who exercises an *episkopé* that includes governance, is an early phenomenon apparently arising from the understanding of the earliest Christians because such an understanding is clearly discernible by the end of the first century.

An early witness to this authority is Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35 – c. 107). Especially in his letters composed *en route* to his martyrdom in Rome, Ignatius provides the clearest evidence of the rule or oversight of a single bishop in a Church community (see e.g., Letter to Smyrnaeans 8). Moreover the office of *episkopos*-bishop is, by this period, more precisely distinct from the office of presbyter, and, importantly, the bishop is understood sacramentally as presiding in the place of God the Father, while presbyters do so in the place of the apostles.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, “We ought to regard the bishop as the Lord Himself” (Letter to Ephesians 6.1). The letters demonstrate how, by the late first century, there appears to be an established practice that would make inextricable the link between the bishop, the Eucharist, and the Church, such that the following formula is discernible: the bishop is always present where the Eucharist is celebrated in the Church. According to Ignatius, “Wherever the bishop is to be seen, there let

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<sup>24</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Magnesians, chapter 6. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0105.htm>



all the people be, just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church” (Letter to Smyrnaeans 8).

With Irenaeus, the model of bishop is “. . . above all an authoritative teacher and witness to the apostolic faith, an *alter apostolus*. His outward continuity in succession back to the apostles through his predecessors in the same (episcopal) See ‘serves as the sign and guarantee of inward continuity in apostolic faith.’ Thus he is a living link between his local church and the apostles. He expresses ‘the historical continuity of the church in time’ – a continuity not merely of structures but of apostolic faith (EEQVU 82; LG 20).

With Cyprian, the model of bishop is “. . . part of a worldwide episcopal college, co-responsible with his brother bishops for maintaining the unity and good estate of all the churches. An *alter Petrus*, he expresses ‘the communion and unity of the church in space.’ He is a conciliar being possessing the fullness of episcopal grace not in isolation but in union with all the other bishops, and serves as the bond of unity between his own local church and all other local churches” (EEQVU 82; LG 18-19).

In sum, the highest expression of *episkopé* of bishops in the earliest communities is their role in the liturgy, and so is *de facto* linked with a sacramental vision of interpretation, e.g., the bishop as *alter Christus* who presides at the Eucharist. This authority seems to be the source of his eventual and concentrated (in his person) responsibility of oversight within the community and with the presbyters serving as his advisors.

### **Episcopacy in the Period between the Council of Nicea and the Reformation**

It was perhaps in the fourth century with the rapid expansion of Christianity, that bishops presiding at every Eucharist became a logistical impossibility. Thus what emerges is the introduction of parishes within dioceses and the break-up of the presbyterium so that presbyters could take charge of parishes. This resulted in a situation in which the bishop was cut off from his fundamental connection with the Eucharist and became more of an administrator with the consequent danger of becoming a more worldly figure, superfluous to the needs of the Church.

That bishops during the early centuries of the Church were set apart from presbyters, in terms of their overall *episkopé*, had much to do with governance rather than their being properly ordered to the Eucharist. This understanding endured into the Middle Ages and was endorsed by scholastic theology, including that of Thomas Aquinas. The drawback in this understanding of the bishop as administrator, rather than, primarily, the one who presides at the Eucharist -- which, to the patristic understanding, plays an integral role in “making the Church” – ultimately becomes the legacy that, in the words of Yves Congar, “established an ecclesiology of powers,”<sup>25</sup> over and against an ecclesiology of communion.

### **The Reformation Era: Among Protestants, Reformed Expressions of *Episkopé***

Reformed Protestant communions originated in the sixteenth-century Reformation or in later developments related to the Reformation communions. These Protestant communities shared with Roman Catholics deep roots in a common Western Christian ecclesiology and its expressions in various structures of authority and service, including understandings of the nature and purpose of bishops. This ecclesiology is rooted in Scripture and in the tradition of theological reflections and institutional developments of fifteen hundred years. During the sixteenth century, Western society experienced a number of challenges to traditional political, intellectual, religious, and social structures and understandings of authority, some of which go back as far as the twelfth century. We have no room to give a detailed account of these changes, but to note that our divergences on the issue of ecclesiology and *episkopé* share a common context of discontent.

At about the same time as Luther’s reform movement developed in the second decade of the sixteenth century, beginning with the reforms in the Swiss cities and spreading to the Netherlands, Scotland, France, Germany and England, the Reformed Protestant movement began to reinterpret the traditional ecclesiology in light of the development of political structures in the cities. The Reformed Protestant tradition shares much in common with the German Evangelical or Lutheran reforms, but diverged from the Lutherans on a number of

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<sup>25</sup> Yves Congar, “*L’Ecclesia ou communauté chrétienne, sujet intégral de l’action liturgique*,” in J-P Jossua and Yves Congar, eds., *La liturgie après Vatican II* (Paris: Cerf, 1967), pp 241-82 at 261.

points, among them the nature and exercise of *episkopé*. The independent imperial cities in the Swiss Confederation, where the Reformed Protestant tradition originated, all had bishops, but they also had city councils who claimed a say in the affairs of the Church, just as other rulers did. Having a collective political ruler contributed to a change in the way people thought about governing authority. Where the Lutheran traditions maintained a more traditional office of bishop, the Reformed Protestants had concerns about a more monarchical office of *episkopé*, and additional concerns about the claims of the Pope to the exercise of universal episcopal office. Memory of the papal schism of the fourteenth century was still fresh, evident corruption in high offices of both Church and state undermined confidence in just and faithful rule and contributed to a widespread longing for reform. Many hoped the Pope would finally call a council of bishops to resolve these matters, just as the Council of Constance a century before had resolved at least part of the concerns splitting the Church of that time.

Almost all of the Reformers were reluctant to engage in activities that would divide the Church, however, one by one they came to a place where they feared that a compromise would deny the teachings of Christ as they found them in the Scriptures, and endanger the souls of the people. The Reformed tradition sought as closely as they might to follow a model of church order derived from their reading of the New Testament. There they read the Epistles as revealing a Church governed by the elders (presbyters), where the bishop who presided at the table and among the elders, was the leader (pastor, minister and teacher) of a local congregation. The bishop, in their reading, did not preside over a larger community until much later, a move many Reformed Protestants regarded as straying from the biblical intention.

The most prolific of these Reformed Protestants was John Calvin. Calvin handled the issue of bishops both historically and practically. He did not create a systematic theology of *episkopé*. Two aspects of his thought are important for our consideration here: his thought about bishops in general, and his aversion to a hierarchy centered in the Pope.

As a student of the Scriptures, John Calvin had respect for the office of bishop, but was sharp in his condemnation of its abuse by specific bishops. The problem was not the office as such; it was that the bishops he observed had not exercised it properly. In his *Institutes of the*

*Christian Religion*,<sup>26</sup> Calvin noted, “it was a principle of long standing in the church that the primary duties of the bishop were to feed his people with the Word of God, or to build up the church publically and privately with sound doctrine” (*Institutes* 4.4.3). He continued, “would that they [bishops and parish rectors] strove to preserve their office! For I willingly grant them that they have a godly and excellent office, if only they would fulfill it” (*Institutes* 4.5.11). Calvin listed several aspects of the office which were lacking in his experience. For example, the Church often chose as bishops lawyers who knew how to plead in court but not how to preach in Church (*Institutes* 4.5.1). In addition, many bishops were morally degenerate (*Institutes* 4.5.1), and too many were not resident in their diocese (*Institutes* 4.5.4).

Calvin’s view of the purpose of bishops was threefold: to teach the people from God’s Word; to administer the sacraments; and to admonish, exhort, and correct those who sin in order to maintain holy discipline (*Institutes* 4.7.23). He assigned substantially the same purpose to the local minister of the Word together with the elders. In sum, while Calvin and other Reformed Protestants were not in principle opposed to bishops, they would locate the basic divisions of oversight to local gatherings, or associations of ministers and elders. Various local versions of a sort of communal oversight would emerge – what later would become classes and presbyteries – that would assume episcopal responsibilities previously located in the person of the bishop.

As he considered bishops in general, Calvin also considered the office of the Pope. In general, Protestants of the sixteenth century held a negative view of the Papacy, even to the point of calling the Pope the antichrist. The common Reformed view of the matter was that the only universal bishop was Christ (*Belgic Confession* 31). Calvin’s writings contain vitriolic passages regarding the Popes, as he knew them.

The problem for Calvin was not that he completely denied the possibility of a universal expression of *episkopé*; it was that he did not consider the Pope to be a true bishop. Calvin acknowledged Rome as a prime or first see that was important for the unity of the Church (*Institutes* 4.7.1-4), following traditional authorities on the matter such as Cyprian and Jerome. Elsewhere, Calvin described the ways in which the Papacy accrued temporal power and

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<sup>26</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960).

lands, becoming a worldly monarch like the monarchy of the Caesars (*Institutes* 4.7.). In this process, Calvin argued, the Papal office lost the credentials of a bishopric by forgetting its essential calling.

Near the end of the long discussion of the Papacy, Calvin concluded that there was no longer any church or bishop in Rome at all; the Pope had become a secular tyrant. As the pastor was subject to the judgment of the congregation, so too was the Pope. In this, he echoed the larger Protestant hope for a general council to reform the Church, a hope shared by many who remained in communion with the Pope. We need to recall that this was a polemical age and it would be very strange for him to have a positive view of the Pope of his time. Still, there is a larger opening here for us to reconsider the question of some dimensions of a universal exercise of *episkopé* than might be expected at first thought.

After the sixteenth century, the Reformed Protestant movements spread as Europeans began to migrate in large numbers to the Americas, particularly from the countries of the Netherlands, England, Germany, and Scotland. Reformed Protestants from these countries each brought a Reformed theology of Church order shaped by theological reflection as well as particular political circumstances. While all Reformed communions shared the notion that the New Testament indicated a communal/collegial *episkopé* consisting of prebyters/elders and ministers, their experiences of bishops varied.

The Reformed Protestants of Geneva, the rest of Switzerland, Germany, and the Netherlands experienced relatively powerless bishops and freedom from Roman Catholic episcopal interference. The Synod of Emden (1571) expanded on the continental Reformed understanding of *episkopé*, locating it in the communal episcopate of the classis, a gathering of office-bearers – ministers and elders – from neighboring churches. The classis would exercise oversight in the ordination of ministers, establishment of congregations, and oversight of both ministers and congregations. The Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church follow this pattern, as did the German Reformed and Prussian Reformed churches that are a part of the heritage of the United Church of Christ.

In Scotland, the forced imposition of Church of England bishops in Scotland as part of a British nationalist unification project in the eighteenth century resulted in a lasting aversion to

bishops and a complete rejection of the title as well as most personal expressions of *episkopé*. Immigrants to the British colonies from Scotland, sometimes as refugees from civil wars, or as exiles, brought their aversion to bishops into the American Presbyterian Church, from which the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) descends.

The Puritan Congregationalists, Reformed Protestants from England, who founded one of the earliest British colonies in the Americas, followed a strictly congregational ecclesiology, where *episkopé* was located with the pastor and elders of the local congregation. They were of two minds about bishops. The Separatist Puritans formally withdrew from the Church of England and established their own churches. The larger body of Puritans preferred a congregational church order but never formally broke communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury. Over time, the Puritan Congregationalists (well-represented in the United Church of Christ) evolved a more presbyterian kind of ecclesiology first in Connecticut, entering the ordination of pastors and service of the unity of the Church in the Association. The Cambridge Platform, the Congregational response to the Westminster Confession limited the authority of the Association to a consultative one. Though congregations retained the authority even to ordain someone on their own authority, they rarely did so, because those ordinations had no standing in the larger Congregational world unless blessed by the Association.

A tension persists, however, between the American Reformed and American Roman Catholics, often based on misunderstandings of the nature of the Catholic hierarchy and the power of its bishops. Our communions continue to experience and even perpetuate this tension. Each communion describes the character of the other based in sixteenth-century terms without acknowledging the ways in which all our communions have changed. While Reformed Protestants might claim that Roman Catholic bishops are not accountable to the people in their congregations or dioceses, Reformed Protestants' own clergy may rule their congregations with iron fists in ways that an American Catholic bishop never could. In the context of voluntary religious affiliation and a declining cultural interest in organized religion, there is urgent need for us to give witness to a wider Christian unity and develop larger understandings of *episkopé* that more effectively serve that unity.

## **The Reformation Era: Roman Catholic Response to the Reformed and Other Protestants<sup>27</sup>**

As Catholics look at this period, several issues stand out. The first issue is the impact of abuses in the Western Church on the eve of the Reformation. Catholics acknowledge that contemporaries and subsequent historians had much to criticize. Indeed, one of the most striking characteristics of the age was the vehemence of its rhetoric against certain abuses. Efforts were of course being made to change things for the better. Reform within the Catholic Church was undertaken in an urgent and more systematic way, however, only after the Council of Trent (1545-63) began to address it. By that time the Protestant Reformation was already well established and underway (TCUC 33).

Abuses especially denounced at that time

were the venality and political and military involvements of some of the Popes and members of the Curia; the absence of bishops from their dioceses, their often ostentatious wealth and neglect of pastoral duties; the ignorance of many of the lower clergy; the often scandalous lives of clergy including bishops and certain Popes; the dis-edifying rivalry among the religious orders; pastoral malpractice through misleading teaching about the efficacy of certain rites and rituals; the irrelevance and aridity of theological speculation in the universities and the presence of these same defects in the pulpit; the lack of any organized catechesis for the laity.... Judgment on the Church just before the Reformation has, therefore, been severe - and justly so. (TCUC 34)

A second issue was the notion of reform that the reformers proposed. Despite extensive abuses needing correction, resistance to the proposals of reformers like Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin lay in their discontinuity with previous efforts at reform. Earlier efforts concentrated on discipline, education, pastoral practice and similar matters, but "Luther addressed himself first and foremost to doctrine, as later did Zwingli and Calvin." Many people, and not only theologians, were surprised and were unwilling to accept this sudden shift to reform of doctrine and especially Luther's emphasis on the doctrine of justification. "They were shocked by the implication that the Church had for centuries been in error about the true meaning of the Gospel" (TCUC 36). As will be seen, these concerns included the Church's teaching about aspects of the Church such as the episcopacy and the papacy.

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<sup>27</sup> Much of what follows is based on the Catholic presentation on the reformation period in "Towards a Common Understanding of the Church," Roman Catholic-Reformed International Dialogue, second phase (1984-1990), Chapter 1, ns. 33-47).

A third issue for Roman Catholics was the understanding of important aspects of the Church as expressed during the era of reform (TCUC 38). These aspects included the episcopal order and the papacy. There were “assumptions that were more properly theological in nature, but that had become embedded in writings and practice in a much less systematic way.” These assumptions were, however, broadly operative in the minds of many persons and they must be taken into account if we are to understand Catholic resistance to the Reformation. Some of these assumptions and the conclusions drawn from them were as follows:

- “Christ founded the Church, establishing it on the Apostles who are the basis of the episcopal order of ministry and authority in the Church. In this order the bishop of Rome had more than primacy of honor, though the precise nature, extent and function of this primacy was much debated. Therefore the proposals of the Reformers concerning church order appeared to be an attack on the apostolic foundation of the Church.”
- “Christ promised unity for the Church. Consensus in doctrine, extending through the ages, was a hallmark of the Spirit's work and a sign of Christ's unflinching presence in the Church. Therefore the turmoil accompanying the Reformation and the conflict among some of the Reformers themselves were taken as proof positive that the Spirit of God was not at work among them.”
- “Although the Church lived under Scripture, the Church was chronologically prior to the writings of the New Testament books and had recognized since earliest times that it itself as a community, especially when assembled in Council, was the authoritative interpreter of the divine Word. In contrast, the Reformers seemed to arrogate to themselves the right to interpret Scripture in a way at variance with the continuing tradition of the community, and they did not seem to provide any warrant for their interpretation that was necessarily grounded in the community.”
- “Bishops held primary responsibility for church polity. In contrast, Luther, Zwingli and the English reformers appeared to deliver the Church into the hands of secular princes and magistrates, (and city councils,) thus threatening to reduce the Church to a mere instrument of secular politics” (TCUC 39).



With regard to episcopacy, the Roman Catholic Church's Council of Trent (1545-1563) addressed both doctrinal and disciplinary issues. It emphasized the continuity of the Church in practice, doctrine and structure with the apostolic age (TCUC 43). The Council took important steps to deal with abuses of the time, and also reacted to some of the teaching of the reformers such as Zwingli, Calvin, Luther and others, without mentioning them by name.

Trent criticized the teaching of Reformers on sacraments, including in some cases, their teaching relating to the role of the bishop. For example, canons one, two and three on the sacrament of confirmation, are directed mainly at Luther, Melanchthon and Calvin, and affirm that confirmation is a true sacrament.<sup>28</sup> Canon 3 condemns anyone who "says that the ordinary minister of holy confirmation is not the bishop but any simple priest."<sup>29</sup>

Trent also criticized the reformers on the Eucharist. For example, in its Decree on the Most Holy Eucharist(1551) it professed that "in the blessed sacrament of the holy Eucharist, after the consecration of the bread and wine, our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and man, is truly, really and substantially contained under the appearances of those perceptible realities."<sup>30</sup> Against the reformers, Trent also affirmed the sacrificial value of the Mass in its Doctrine of the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass: "At the last supper. . . in order to leave. . . the Church . . . a visible sacrifice -- by which the bloody sacrifice which he was once for all to accomplish on the cross would be represented, its memory perpetuated until the end of the world. . . he offered his body and blood under the species of bread and wine to God the Father, and under the same signs gave them to partake of to the disciples. . . and ordered them and their successors in the priesthood to offer, saying: 'Do this as a memorial of Me' (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24), as the Catholic Church has always understood and taught."<sup>31</sup>

Trent was very critical of the clerical, and especially the episcopal, abuses within the Church. The Council began its treatment of this with these words:

This same holy council, with the same presidents and legates of the apostolic see, desiring to gird itself to restore ecclesiastical discipline, which to a considerable extent has collapsed, and to correct depraved customs among both clergy and Christian

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<sup>28</sup> *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, Revised edition, Edited by J. Neuner SJ and J. Dupuis SJ, London: Collins, 1982, p. 395, (1628, 1629, 1630).

<sup>29</sup> Neuner and Dupuis, p. 395.

<sup>30</sup> Neuner and Dupuis, pp. 414-15.

<sup>31</sup> Neuner and Dupuis, p. 424.

people, has decided to take as its starting point those who have control over the most important churches: for the integrity of the rulers is the salvation of the subjects.<sup>32</sup>

The Council made a series of statements on ecclesiastical reform (as distinguished from doctrinal clarification). Many of its statements focus specifically on the responsibilities of bishops and other clergy. That particular abuses are singled out is a sign that they were prevalent in the time before the Council.

Bishops are singled out for special scrutiny. They are to “attend to themselves and to *all the flock in which the holy Spirit has placed them, to feed the Church of God which he obtained with his own blood*, and, as the Apostle enjoins, to watch, to do their work in all things and to fulfill their proper ministry. They should know that they can never fulfill that duty if, like hirelings, they abandon the flocks committed to them, and completely neglect the guardianship of their flocks.” Unfortunately, some have fallen into this sin, and wander about, keeping themselves “occupied in caring for temporal affairs.”

Thus the Council declares that it will renew the ancient decrees requiring residency in one’s diocese. An absence of six months or more would lead to financial and other penalties against the bishop, extending even to being forbidden entrance to his Church and being denounced to Rome and removed from office.<sup>33</sup>

Bishops are furthermore responsible for clerics and religious under their jurisdiction. They are, for example, to discipline religious who are living outside of their monasteries, and they are to visit their churches regularly to be sure that all is in order. Finally, they are forbidden to function as a bishop in another diocese.<sup>34</sup>

The seventh session addresses the qualifications for bishops. No one is to be appointed “unless he is of legitimate birth, of mature age, and endowed with sound moral character and education.” Those who have had multiple benefices are to resign all but one.<sup>35</sup>

In the thirteenth session, the decree on reform reminds the bishops that “they are shepherds not oppressors, that they are to preside over their subjects but not lord it over them:

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<sup>32</sup> Trent, session 6, Decree on the residence of bishops and others of lower rank, Chapter 1, Tanner 681.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 683.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., chapters 3-5.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, Session 7, Second Decree: On Reform. Paragraphs 1-2, p. 687. It should be noted how these reforms address some of the abuses mentioned by Calvin above.

they are to love them as children and brothers, and take pains by exhortation and counsel to deter them from what is unlawful so that they may not be obliged, when they do wrong, to restrain them by appropriate penalties.”<sup>36</sup>

The twenty fifth session’s Decree on General Reform opens with a call to simplicity and humility for those in the episcopal ministry:

It is desirable that those who accept the episcopal ministry should recognise what their function is, and realize that they have been called not to personal advantages, nor riches nor a life of luxury, but to toil and solicitude for the glory of God. . . .In the first place they should order all their conduct in such a way that others may be able to look to them for an example of moderation, modesty, continence and of the holy humility which so much commends us to God. Wherefore, after the example of our fathers in the council of Carthage, the council bids bishops not only to be satisfied with modest furnishings and table and a frugal living standard, but to take care that in the rest of their lifestyle and their whole household there should be nothing discordant with this office and not showing simplicity, zeal for God and contempt for vanities. The council wholly forbids them to try to improve the living of their relatives and household from Church revenues . . . .<sup>37</sup>

The same standards are to be applied to all clergy, including the cardinals.

To sum up, the Council has much to say about the correction of abuses, and the call to bishops to be exemplars of proper behavior and good morals. The Council’s words usually take the form of exhortations rather than direct accusations, although, as we have seen above, the latter are also sometimes present. However, when the council met, the Reformation had already been underway for decades and it was not possible for even well-meaning people to repair the damage.

In light of such history, it is important to name and to own, together, that at times even authorities of the Church have strayed from the teachings of Christ. The practice of the oversight of the Church is to call the Church back—through Word and Sacrament—to its mission of love. In the sixteenth century, the oversight of both Roman Catholic and Reformed churches failed in some important ways. For example, as the European nations engaged in the colonization of the Americas, the forced conversion of others, the destruction of the land and the enslavement of millions from Africa and the Americas, the *episkopé* of the European

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, Session 13, Decree on Reform, p. 698.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., Session 25 Decree on General Reform, Chapter 1, p. 784.

churches largely failed to address this massive departure from the legitimate mission of the Church in the world. In the Catholic Church, a few bishops did try to recall their flocks from this unholy activity, notably Bartolomé de las Casas in Mexico. Despite exceptions like this, such failures of the exercise of *episkopé* haunt both of our communions to this day.

### **Convergences and Divergences on Issues of *Episkopé***

In the new atmosphere of ecumenical dialogue between Roman Catholics and Reformed since Vatican II, significant convergences, even agreements, have emerged on many issues previously seen as only controversial between them, including ministry and *episkopé* and its relationship to the Church. This Roman Catholic – Reformed dialogue in the United States, even in an early phase, gave significant attention to *episkopé*. Various international dialogues, including the Reformed –Catholic dialogue, affirm the need for *episkopé* on every level of the Church, including the universal level.<sup>38</sup>

As seen from the historical accounts presented above, the Reformed view of bishops, including the Bishop of Rome, is ambiguous. Indeed, many Catholics in the 16<sup>th</sup> century shared the reformers concerns over the significant abuses of episcopal office. The Council of Trent addressed these concerns, though, regrettably, by then the Reformation had gained momentum. Theological deliberations became enmeshed with divisive national interests. The combinations was too much to overcome.

Today, we see each other in a new way. Roman Catholic theologians and historians, “while not agreeing with all aspects of their thought, have become more sympathetic to Zwingli and Calvin, no longer seeing them chiefly as rebels against ecclesial authority, but as reformers who felt obliged by their understanding of the Gospel to continue their efforts to reform the Church at all costs” (TCUC 61). John Paul II, in 1984 spoke of the “zeal that animated” Zwingli and Calvin. And, while, on the one hand “the work of their reform remains a permanent challenge among us and makes our ecclesiastical division always present; but on the other hand no one can deny that elements of the theology and spirituality of each of them maintain deep ties among us” (see TCUC 61). On the Reformed side, there is an increasing sense that,

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<sup>38</sup> Kasper, *Harvesting the Fruits: Basic Aspects of Christian Faith in Ecumenical Dialogue*, *op. cit.* pp. 125-128.

regarding the division of the Western Church, “it’s at best one sided to read that history as if all the truth lay on the side of the Reformers and none at all...within the Roman Catholic camp;” And in the more remote and more recent past there have been “many positive developments in the Roman Catholic Church itself” (TCUC 31).

Ecumenical dialogues discussed above indicate significant convergences regarding the function of *episkopé*. Historical developments related to the Bishop of Rome, in particular the fact that the Papal States are no longer under his political jurisdiction, and he no longer appears as a secular ruler as well as a Christian bishop, have opened new avenues of dialogue. Reformers such as Calvin, while not being able to imagine the Bishop of Rome in their time as worthy of primary honor, did acknowledge the primary honor of the church in Rome at least, because of its historic role in the Western Church, and surely one of the primary churches of Christianity.

New developments have surpassed traditional conflicts, such as that over *sola scriptura*, or Scripture and Tradition. Today, it is no longer possible simply to set Scripture and Tradition at odds with each other.<sup>39</sup> For Roman Catholic and Reformed Christians today, the problem is no longer presented in terms of the battle lines of the post-Tridentine polemic. Historical research shows “not only how the New Testament writings are themselves already the outcome of and witness to traditions, but also how the canonization of the New Testament was part of the development of tradition” (PCCW 25).

In addition, we have made progress on doctrinal issues, not the least of which is the doctrine of justification. The 1999 Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ), produced by the Roman Catholic Church's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Lutheran World Federation, is a watershed document that shows how honest and robust ecumenical dialogue can yield rich fruit. In fact, it is worth noting that the World Methodist Council has since officially accepted the JDDJ (2006), as has the World Communion of Reformed Churches (2017), a coalition of Reformed communions that includes the Reformed denominations participant in this national dialogue.

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. Kasper, *Harvesting*, no. 102, p.197.

### Convergences with Respect to *Episkopé*

Our discussion of *episkopé* is founded on common basic theological affirmations: that Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church, that Jesus Christ is the primary authority of the Church, and that Christ, the Head of the Church, shares his authority with his disciples who minister in his name. Therefore whatever we already affirm together about ministry and *episkopé*, and also, where we continue to differ, we know that our ministry is ultimately always in service to Christ who is the Head of the Church, which is his body.

We further agree that within the New Testament, which we affirm is the earliest existing authoritative witness, there is not just a single model for the exercise of ministry and oversight, but rather several possible models depending on the interpretation of the texts. We also agree that the oversight office of bishop (*episkopé*) appears as early as there is evidence of the Church as an organized body of believers, and that the ministries of bishops, presbyters, and deacons appear in the earliest witnesses to the development of the Church. We acknowledge that a threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon "became the generally accepted pattern in the Church of the early centuries and is still retained today by many churches" (BEM 22). Roman Catholics understand this pattern to be a divinely established development revealed by the Holy Spirit.

We depend on scripture to know the life and mission of Jesus and the witness of his disciples. Reformed and Catholics agree that there is an *apostolic* function whereby the episcopate (however manifested) exists to express the integral relation of the Church to the apostolic witness to Jesus Christ. We agree that the apostolic function, as reflected in various New Testament texts, exists so that the Church maintains its witness to Jesus Christ. Reformed and Catholics speak of an apostolic succession of both doctrine and ministry. According to the Reformed-Catholic dialogue there are several senses of apostolic succession. When taken in its usual meaning to refer to the continuity of the special ministry, it clearly occurs within the apostolicity which belongs to the whole Church. Reformed and Catholics believe that there is an apostolic succession essential to the life of the Church, though they locate that succession differently (see PCCW 100).

All are open, in differing degrees, to the idea of personal *episkopé*. All agree that the New Testament shows that authority is exercised both by individual persons (e.g. Peter) and by council (e.g. Jerusalem, Acts 15, though the latter included personal leadership of Peter and James). The question, in large part, is the nature of this office and calling as well as the authority one exercises.

This exercise of authority, we agree, is for the purpose of manifesting the unity of the Church so as to make its mission effective. All can accept that the episcopal *function* that leaders manifest (either in person or council) for the *unity* of the Church, is for the sake of the Church's mission.

We both acknowledge episcopal structures within each communion. All recognize that the bishop has an essential relation to Word and Sacrament in the Church. In Reformed communions, the ministry of oversight is exercised by those in several offices: the local pastor, ruling elders, the local church council, consistory, or session, a regional body such as a presbytery, association, or classis, or a denominational body such as a general assembly or synod. Not all Reformed communions invest the same functions of episcopacy in all of the same offices, but they do put these functions in some combination of these offices. In the UCC, this includes a General Synod, conference, and association. In the PCUSA, it includes a general assembly and presbytery. In the RCA, it includes a classis, regional synod, and general synod. In the CRC, it includes a classis, regional pastor, and synod. For Catholics, the episcopal structures include a bishop and synods or councils.

We agree that the settings for ministry and *episkopé* within the Church are local, regional/national and universal. According to Reformed-Catholic dialogue, "We agree on the need for *episkopé* in the Church, on the local level (for pastoral care in each congregation), on the regional level (for the link of congregations among themselves), and on the universal level (for the guidance of the supranational communion of churches)." At the same time, we disagree about who is regarded as *episkopos* at these different levels and what is the function or role of the *episkopos*" (TCUC 142).

Regarding the service of the Bishop of Rome, the Reformed, in observing the activities and reception of Pope Francis, have noted the possibilities of servant leadership in the cause of

Christian unity as he has undertaken to represent Christianity in a number of interfaith settings. While grateful for this perception, Catholics would state that the office has a long history, and its service as a ministry of unity in the Church goes beyond any particular individual who holds that office.

### Divergences with Respect to *Episkopé*

Our interpretations diverge concerning the way the authority derived from Christ as the Head of the Church is expressed in the ministry of the Church.

We have some divergence concerning the role of the twelve apostles as traditionally presented in the Gospels, and the nature and location of apostolic authority. For Roman Catholics, the Twelve are the apostles called directly by Christ and handed authority; all authority subsequently derives from authority bestowed by these twelve men. For Reformed Churches, an apostle is one who was a witness to the resurrection, which is not confined to the traditional Twelve, but includes others signified in the New Testament as witnesses to the resurrection. This includes a number of women whose testimony, according to the Synoptic Gospels, was central to the subsequent witness of male disciples. The New Testament containing the Word of God is the location of apostolic authority.<sup>40</sup>

It appears that while Roman Catholics characteristically speak of pastoral and spiritual aspects of the office of *episkopé*, Reformed communions tend to understand it functionally in terms of polity and governance. Thus, the meaning of authority needs to be delineated more fully.

Roman Catholic and Reformed thinking diverges significantly on the office of Peter. Both Reformed and Roman Catholic communions confess only one Head of the Church: Jesus Christ. But Roman Catholics also witness to the idea that an individual bishop, in service to Christ and not as a substitute for him, can exercise a pastoral ministry of unity on the universal level. This, they say, is historically what the Bishop of Rome has done.

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<sup>40</sup> In responding to the WCC's invitation to the churches to reflect on *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, one of the Reformed Churches noted that the focus on the Twelve and the subsequent effort to trace the historical lines of their authorization of others, obscures the real source of the authority of the Church in Jesus Christ, and does not preserve the office of *episkopé* from error or misuse any more than grounding that authority in the Word.



Divergences in ecclesiology and the corollary concept of *episkopé* between Roman Catholic and Reformed communions are greatest at the point of the Reformation and in the centuries that followed, in part because of the way in which Christian divisions came to be associated with national divisions in Europe, and the rhetoric of religious difference served to strengthen nationalist rhetoric.

### **Remaining Questions about *Episkopé* for Ecumenical Discussion**

Most of our open questions centered on the Petrine ministry and its role in the service of Christian unity. It may be that if we addressed our divergences on the relationships of personal, collegial, and communal expressions of *episkopé*, the kind of authority they represent, and the relationship of tradition and the Word, this would contribute greatly to our ability to make progress on this long-standing question.

The ecumenical question, as we work toward the goal of unity in diversity, is this: can we agree together, as other dialogues have done, that a united Church of the future should include the ministry of unity at the global level, the ministry traditionally undertaken by the Bishop of Rome? If so, how would the election of the Pope, which up to now has been an internal Catholic matter, be affected? How would the rest of God's people, that is, the whole people of God, have a voice in the calling of a Pope to fulfill such a symbolic role?

In short, any discussion of the Petrine Ministry must take place in the context of discussion of the church's need for *episkopé* on the world wide level. It must address the questions: How does this need manifest itself in our various communions? How does the lack of such a ministry affect a church, or even affect the world?<sup>41</sup>

So the question remains: Can conflict between Reformed and Roman Catholic communions over episcopacy be resolved? This Roman Catholic - Reformed dialogue in the United States, in two earlier reports, suggested creative ideas for promoting reconciliation between Reformed and Roman Catholic communions on ministry and *episkopé*. Its 1971 report,

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, para. 56.

*Ministry in the Church*,<sup>42</sup> suggested that the Reformed churches and the Roman Catholic Church in their approach towards unity might propose:

Church structures which would combine the unifying elements of the episcopal tradition and the corporate responsibility of the presbyteral/congregational traditions. Indeed, each of our respective traditions has something which responds to urgent needs in the world today, namely for a unifying principle, and for more effective representation and participation. But the two emphases clearly need each other---both theologically (to be true to the full Christian tradition) and pragmatically (to respond fully to the insights and needs of the contemporary world).<sup>43</sup>

Along the same line, another report, *The Unity We Seek* (1977)<sup>44</sup> envisions “a unification of structure through the acceptance of a pluralism of ecclesial and organizational styles and mutual adaptation.”<sup>45</sup> While divergences concerning our structures have caused separation in the past, today because of changes of attitudes in both communions, these might become stepping stones to a more united Church, giving better witness to the world. “On the Reformed side there is a growing willingness on the part of many to discuss the corporate functioning of the Church in worship, doctrine and pastoral oversight through a creative fusing of the episcopal, presbyteral, and congregational traditions. On the Roman Catholic side there have been great efforts to emphasize the role of the papacy as one of unity through service, carried out in collegiality with ever more levels of the Church.”<sup>46</sup>

These examples from earlier phases of this dialogue respect the different structures of *episkopé* in the Reformed and the Catholic traditions and indicate that they need not be divisive, but rather, can both contribute important emphases useful to the Church and its mission. These earlier phases of our dialogue challenge us to be creative in seeking ways to work for the unity of Christians.

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<sup>42</sup> *Ministry in the Church: a Statement, October 30, 1971, Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 9 (1972, no. 3): 596-599.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 599.

<sup>44</sup> *The Unity We Seek*, A statement by the Roman Catholic/Presbyterian Reformed Consultation, edited by Bishop Ernest L. Unterkoefler and Dr. Andrew Harsanyi, New York: Paulist Press, 1977,

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p 28. Further references will be in the text.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28. They go further in speaking more about the Petrine ministry, pp. 32-33. Also JES, p. 599.

## CHAPTER 4

### **Hope for Advancing the Dialogue: Lived Episcopacy as Expressive of Diversity and Unity**

In previous chapters we discovered shared conceptions of ministry, ordination, and ecclesial organization. In this final chapter, we now turn to thinking constructively about how these shared conceptions might contribute to movement toward recognition of one another as Church, focusing particularly on the relationship between the collegial and personal exercise of authority.

As seen in chapter 3, both Reformed and Catholic traditions see *episkopé* as an instrument of unity that is meant to serve the community and allow its diverse gifts to flourish. Also observed in that chapter is a key difference between Reformed and Roman Catholic understandings of *episkopé*. The Reformed tradition tends to favor conciliar forms of authority that give episcopal authority to a presbytery, classis, or synod rather than an individual, whereas Roman Catholic tradition emphasizes the authority and leadership of a person who has been duly ordained and appointed to the office of bishop. As a result, ecumenical discussions around the question of authority, and specifically the function of *episkopé*, normally come to an impasse. These similarities and differences are important because questions of authority or oversight structures in the Church are often an expression of the community's understanding of what being united looks like and what forms of diversity and what amount of diversity is acceptable. Thus, comparing such expressions and exercises of *episkopé* can yield much fruit regarding how we each understand the Church and viewing one another anew.

It might be helpful to approach this issue from a functional, experiential starting point, particularly as we reflect on how each tradition deals with the issues of unity and diversity. In other words, can we observe how the personal and collegial dimensions of authority are exercised in practice (rather than just in theory) in each tradition in order to discover whether there are unexplored points of commonality? We noted above that the exercise of the

authority of episkopè is the manifestation of the unity of the Church. It is within this shared understanding of that office that we explore new possibilities in convergence in the ministry of oversight among our communions.<sup>47</sup> For both communions the ministry of oversight is constituent of the apostolic nature of the Church. That is, it is oversight through participation in the ministry of Christ, through the Holy Spirit, for the sake of the world. Our hope is that by approaching the matter by reflecting on the actual practice of the churches, we can open the discussion of ministry afresh. In so doing we can gain a deeper understanding of the nature of the Church in its mission for the sake of the world. We hope to develop a perspective that opens us to receive the gifts of the other as we move toward eventual visible unity.

In the Reformed tradition (and more broadly within other Protestant traditions that have historically rejected the role of personal bishops), responsibilities for guiding the life and activities of the gathered denomination are invested in individuals at various levels beyond the congregations. The people in these positions may be called conference ministers, regional synod executives, stated clerks, or executives of presbyteries. And at an overall synodical level, officials may be called General Minister and President, General Secretary, Stated Clerk, or Executive Director. But at a functional level, such individuals carry out a personal and pastoral role in the life of the particular body that carries a form of implicit authority. For example, they convene individuals to resolve disputes or to support ministries; they establish bonds of communication and trust with diverse factions and views in order to nurture unity; and, they consult and propose directions for shared mission and outreach.

Further, members in these communions look to such individuals as representing, in some informal yet clearly observed ways, the shared ministry and unity of the particular communion. Moreover, such members project feelings and hopes for their denomination, or regional body, onto the one placed in this position of responsibility—both positively and negatively. Even the job descriptions of such positions often include the expectation that this person will be working pastorally to preserve the unity of the body.

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<sup>47</sup> We acknowledge that *de jure* differences remain. For example, no single office-bearer among the Reformed communions has the authority to ordain ministers of the gospel. Nor do they have, in their ecclesiastical position, the authority to proclaim the Word of God. Moreover, this functional approach does not exhaust the full nature of episkopè in either the Reformed nor Roman Catholic understanding.

Thus, while Reformed understanding of office and order invest in collegial bodies the authority otherwise exercised by bishops, and stress the principle of shared leadership as a defining mark of their tradition, in practice the “personal” dimension of such leadership does not seem to be absent. Although personal leadership in a Reformed framework always functions in collegial consultation and trust, persons entrusted to lead synodical bodies often exercise an implicit authority as representatives of the unity of the Church.

Likewise, within the Roman Catholic tradition, although such authority is formally vested in individual bishops, the way bishops actually function involves essential elements of collegiality, as seen in a synod of bishops, national conferences of bishops, dicasteries at the Vatican, and the like. The lived reality is that Catholic bishops typically work in a very consultative fashion, making decisions through a process of communication and consultation. In order to support the pastoral needs of their diocese and attend to important matters regarding finances, personnel, and parish life, Catholic bishops spend much time and effort consulting with local leaders and working through existing structures on the parish and diocesan level. Although Catholic bishops may, according to official guidelines in the Roman Catholic Church, have the authority to act unilaterally in certain instances, they generally try to avoid this mode of acting, preferring to consult a variety of voices. When a Catholic bishop does act unilaterally, it is almost always out of a concern to hold unity and diversity together in fruitful ways.

We can further explore this functional similarity in the exercise of leadership (*episkopé*) by noting the vastly changed historical and sociological contexts over the past 500 years. As earlier parts of this report demonstrate, by the time of the Reformation the historical function of bishops had become intertwined in the nexus of secular political power exercised in societies. The “monarchial episcopacy” developed largely in response to these historical realities. But at times, it seems that the continued debate between the monarchial and collegial models of episcopacy takes place in a theological universe that is disconnected from five centuries of actual history.

No one today seriously asserts that bishops in the Roman Catholic tradition, or for that matter elders and other leaders in the Reformed tradition, function now in the way they did when this controversy first arose half a millennium ago. The strict “monarchial episcopacy,”

while a convenient tool for theological debate, is virtually extinct in practice. Bishops are not responsible for the secular, political order, and, with few exceptions, do not exercise their role in the style of a secular monarch. This change is empirically observable to all, and beyond reasonable dispute. It should inform our theological reflection on the role of authority and leadership in the Roman Catholic and Reformed traditions.

These same dynamics have provoked deeper reflection on the ministry of oversight as exercised within the Church, both Roman Catholic and Reformed. As a matter of historical, contextual necessity, reflection on the theological bases of leadership has drawn both communions to new understandings of both personal and collegial authority within the church.

We hope and believe that our reflections on how episcopal authority actually functions within the churches have the potential to illumine some “common criteria” and “mutually recognized structures” needed to achieve greater mutual understanding of the relation between unity and diversity in the Church. This includes questions regarding what constitutes legitimate diversity and how such determinations are reached.

As we conclude our work, this dialogue made an effort to consider how ministry and authority actually function in both Roman Catholic and Reformed traditions. We affirm the following points:

(1) The ministry of oversight has an important role in nurturing the unity of the Church. Both Roman Catholic and Reformed ministry nurtures unity in personal, collegial, and communal ways. The oversight of the Church, as it is practiced in all of these churches, includes the nurture of unity. The unity of the Church manifests the church’s oneness in Christ in order to embody more effectively its calling to minister to the souls of its people and the needs of the world.

(2) We understand that the work and authority of the ministry in all of the churches is displayed in consultative and convening practices. There is little practical difference in the ways in which ministers in our churches consult with others and convene decision-making groups. In the local congregations those ordained to ministry in these settings consult with the members of the parish or congregation as they make decisions. Similarly, they convene decision-making groups, as is the custom in their particular tradition.

(3) Each of our traditions understands that those chosen to function in an episcopal role are authorized to represent the whole Church as a constituent part of their ministry. None of our churches would say that such persons are authorized to represent their personal positions as the positions of their church. Even where a minister such as the bishop of Rome, as Pope, appears to have the authority to make such a personal position the official position of the Church, the Pope never voices a position not deeply rooted in scripture and Roman Catholic tradition. There is little difference between the representation done by Roman Catholic bishops and Reformed denominational regional and national leaders; both are responsible to their wider churches. There may be considerable difference between the Reformed and Roman Catholic leader's sense of authority to speak for the wider church and the authority with which the message is received.

Concerning *episkopé* in these areas of nurturing unity, consulting and convening, and representing, our churches have considerable similarity of practice. In the important area of *episkopé* as a locus of apostolicity, we have considerable difference. The Roman Catholic tradition locates the apostolicity of the Church, in part, in the historical successors to the apostles, who have been charged with handing on the apostolic faith.<sup>48</sup> The Reformed tradition locates the apostolicity of the Church exclusively in the Church's faithfulness to the Word of God. The oversight role of *episkopé* assists the Church in maintaining faithfulness to this apostolic witness.

Lastly, we discussed at length the matter of the universal expression of *episkopé*, and the recognition of the Reformed churches that the Roman Catholics bring to us the gift of having an international Church. The Reformed churches always face the danger of religious nationalism and mistaking the mission of the nation for the mission of God. The ministry of the

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<sup>48</sup> Another dimension of apostolic succession is the community's continuous faithfulness to the Word of God. As was noted in the 1986 document from the Orthodox-Catholic Dialogue, *Apostolicity as God's Gift in the Life of the Church*, the deposit of faith has never been understood as being "relayed in purely mechanical fashion from generation to generation by duly authorized ministers. Rather, it remains a living confession." (par. 8) The document goes on to state that all Christians share in the apostolic mission by virtue of their baptism (par. 9). Two corollaries flow from this understanding of apostolic faith: "(a) the apostolicity of ministry is generally seen as derived from the continuity of the community as a whole in apostolic life and faith; the succession of ministers in office is normally agreed to be subordinate to that ecclesial apostolicity, (b) Apostolicity seems to consist more in fidelity to the apostles' proclamation and mission than in any one form of handing on community office. These observations alert us once again to reducing apostolicity simply to forms and institutional structures." (par. 10)

bishop of Rome, as an international expression of the unity of the Church, provides a wider view of the context of the church. The Reformed Churches do have an expression of a sort of universal *episkopé* in the World Communion of Reformed Churches. An example of its operation is the action to discipline the Reformed Church in South Africa during the Apartheid period. We could all benefit from the further consideration of this aspect of *episkopé*.

There is significant and unexplored common ground in the personal and collegial dimensions of authority that exist on a functional level in the Roman Catholic and Reformed traditions. This is not to suggest that questions of theological commitments and polity issues should not continue to be examined, but that including a functional approach to matters of episcopacy or oversight might add a new and fruitful avenue for exploring these questions and achieving deeper mutual understanding. Mutual reflection on Christ's ministry as actually manifest in our churches can draw us deeper into reflection on the nature of the Church itself as the people of God, the body of Christ and the communion of the Holy Spirit. This, in turn, can free us from a polemic heritage that has hindered witness to Christ and his rule to a grateful partnership and envisioned reunion as God's one people, called and constituted for the salvation of the world.

### **Concluding Reflections**

This chapter concludes with some observations on the relationship between unity and diversity in the Church, with a goal of illuminating ways in which unity, diversity, ministry, and episcopacy are interrelated.

We are convinced that our mutual recognition of one another's baptism (achieved in round 7 of this dialogue) can serve as a basis for further developments that highlight the unity of the body of Christ. The churches in this dialogue can, despite our differences in belief and ecclesiastical structure, recognize some of the functional similarities that we share in areas of oversight and ministry. We recognize these functional similarities in the oversight of the Church, and those in these oversight ministries of all of our churches recognize that this ministry of *episkopé* cannot be done alone, but always collegially and communally. Such recognition grows out of our insights into the differences between the historical context and



tensions of the Reformation and the changes all of our churches have undergone in the last half millennium. It is also rooted in the deeper understanding that our churches face common changes in the societies around us, particularly an increasingly secular society. Such recognition might be another small step toward manifesting the unity that proclaims Christ to the world (John 17:20-23)

We are keen to highlight the role of episcopacy in promoting both unity and healthy diversity in the Church, as noted in “Towards a Common Understanding of the Church”:

On the question of how the authority of Christ must be exercised in the Church, we are in accord that the structure of the ministry is essentially collegial. We agree on the need for *episkopé* in the Church, on the local level (for pastoral care in each congregation), on the regional level (for the link of congregations among themselves), and on the universal level (for the guidance of the supranational communion of churches). *There is disagreement between us about who is regarded as episkopos at these different levels and what is the function or role of episkopos.* (#142, emphasis added).

Since one significant purpose of episcopacy in the Church is to promote unity among distinct and often diverse groups, coming to a greater mutual understanding of the function and role of *episkopos* sheds significant light on our respective (and perhaps shared) understandings of the relationship between unity and diversity in the Church. We hope that this dialogue report will lead each communion to further reflection on the function of episcopacy and on the ways in which those who exercise the function of episcopacy seek to maintain unity, yet also promote the flourishing of diverse gifts. This reflection could also lead to questions about the differences between those who exercise episcopacy and other members of the Church when it comes to promoting both the unity of the Church and the flourishing of diverse gifts.

The results of this dialogue suggest ways in which both Roman Catholic and Reformed communions can learn from one another’s practices. We think the Roman Catholic idea of *episkopé* can be seen as more collegial and more directly embedded in a process of communication and consultation. We also think this collegial, consultative model of leadership enables a bishop to enhance the legitimate diversity of the Church while strengthening its unity. Conversely, Reformed understandings of authority can be seen as focused not only in a group but also in an individual who has a representative role, particularly in symbolizing the unity and catholicity of the Church. Thus, the ways in which ministers and elders serve as representatives

in worship, in the ecclesiastical assembly, and in the mission of the Church can enhance the unity of the Church while also strengthening its diversity.

We hope that our traditions consider diversity in a fresh way within the ecclesial community. We tend to embrace certain types of diversity, but perceive other types of diversity as a threat. How can we come to see some of our diversities not only as legitimate, but also as gifts, and so as an enrichment of the Church and helpful to genuine Christian freedom? As Paul observes in 1 Cor. 12, at least some forms of diversity are enhancements that contribute to the functioning of the body of Christ.

As noted in “Towards a Common Understanding of the Church,” we recognize that the structures of our communions sometimes contribute to and sometimes detract from the legitimate unity and diversity of the Church:

we have begun to come to terms with the particularly difficult issue of the structures of ministry required for communion in the universal Church. The earlier report (PCCW) made allusion to it. Our discussion of the matter has shown how complex the issues involved are and how different the perspectives in which are seen on both sides. *As we pursue the dialogue on the Church’s structure and ministry, this theme deserves closer attention.* (#143, emphasis added).

Our dialogue has wrestled with the difficulty of promoting union between communions with significantly different structures. If such union is to transpire, then we must come to a deeper understanding of and even agreement about how our distinctive structures of ministry are faithful to the gospel. What we have explored in this chapter is this: that though our structures of oversight are distinctive, our exercise of the ministry of oversight, in fact, overlaps. As shown here, we Roman Catholic and Reformed conversation partners are discovering fresh ways to experience each our own and one another’s structures of being Church, of inhabiting ministry: structures of priests and parishes, bishops and dioceses, a college of cardinals and a preeminent bishop in the see of Rome on one side, and congregations and ministers, consistories, councils, classes or presbyteries, synods or general assemblies on the other. Committed to putting aside caricatures of one another and striving to experience how our diverse, distinctive ways of being Church actually overlap, what we are discovering of one another is a shared emphasis on the primary identity and vocation of these distinctive

structures, identity and vocation that are preeminently communal and pastoral, bearing the gifts of Word and Sacrament to God's people for the sake of the world God so loves.

The Church is in 'a season between' – a season between the first coming of Christ and his imminent return. While Christ has already ushered in the kingdom, it is not yet manifested in all its fullness. During this season, unity eludes us perhaps more than it must. Our diversity need not always be the source of division, but can be a sign of the Spirit's gifts among communities of faith and witness. Recognizing this can give us the courage to face squarely the divergences that do divide us.

## CONCLUSION

### **Already and Not Yet: A Season Between**

This eighth round of Roman Catholic - Reformed dialogue in the United States takes place between the “already” of our mutual recognition of baptism and the “not yet” of full communion at the Lord’s Table. In this “season between” we have sought together a deeper understanding of the identity and mission of the Church, the nature and purpose of ordination and ministry, the historical development and current practice of *episkopé*, and the gifts of unity and diversity in the body of Christ. We hope that all of this study and dialogue will, by the work of the Holy Spirit, contribute to our common ministry in the one body of Christ—serving the Church God calls, serving the world God loves.

As noted in the introduction, our dialogue has developed around three areas of work—with past, present, and future dimensions and implications:

- as ecumenical partners with a complex and contested history, we give thanks for an opportunity to review—and, with God’s help, to reconcile—our theologies, practices, traditions, and memories;
- at this stage in our journey, we have opened ourselves to one another in honest and searching dialogue, in order to come to a clearer understanding of what we hold in common and how we differ; and
- with fervent hope and trust in God, we pray that we may continue to move towards deeper acknowledgment of one another as Church—and eventually towards formal recognition and full visible unity.

In carrying out this work, we have sought to reaffirm and build upon the faithful labors of previous rounds of ecumenical dialogue, to discern and claim the gifts and challenges of our current situation, and to advance the unity of the Church in the mission of God.

Throughout the course of this dialogue, we have been acutely aware of another historic and “teachable” moment—the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Protestant Reformation in 1517. The commemoration of five centuries of separation adds poignancy and purpose to our work. It is only now, after all these centuries, that we can come together in

fellowship and mutual respect while acknowledging the pain we have caused to one another. We note with sadness that five hundred years ago our hostility even extended to killing one another in the name of Christ. Even in more recent times, that hostility has given way to violence, as in the situation in Northern Ireland. We lament the ways in which we grew apart, even as we celebrate the ways in which we are now growing together—as colleagues, friends, neighbors, family members, and fellow pilgrims in faith.

Despite all the pain of the sixteenth century, tearing apart the fabric of the Church, one of the parts of the fabric that held was an informal acknowledgment of our common baptism. We can give thanks and celebrate that this foundational reality has become the basis upon which much ecumenical progress has been made in recent years.

As we conclude the work of this round of dialogue, we pray for God’s ongoing renewal, reform, and reconciliation of the Church. Given the state of the world, we urgently need to work together to proclaim the gospel in word and in deed. We can easily get too caught up in internal issues and not put enough attention on our mission of promoting peace, justice, and love. In a word we recognize our call to be a force for reconciliation in the world, working side by side. In the midst of these divisions we find our own division to be a scandal, undermining the ministry and mission we are called to share.

### **Contributions of This Dialogue**

In recent decades, ecumenical efforts toward unity have embraced the challenge presented by the topics of “church” and “ministry.” Still, making *advances* toward unity on these topics has proven difficult. In this present dialogue, we believe we have discovered that some impasses may not be as recalcitrant as they once seemed. We have enjoyed new avenues toward agreement in our conversation; we have come to see one another with fresh eyes; we have discovered interim steps in the direction of unity to suggest. In all of this, we have come to a deeper appreciation of all that we share in Christ, and have new hope that we are perhaps a bit closer to being one body than previously imagined. The following are some key points and significant contributions of this round of dialogue:

Ecclesiology. Together we affirm that our relationship with Christ and one another in the Church is founded upon the communion of the triune God. We agree that the Church is a covenant community, and that Christ is the one and only true mediator of that covenant. We note the different but complementary understandings of the Church as “creation of the Word” and “sacrament of grace” in Reformed and Catholic tradition, respectively. With previous rounds of dialogue, we assert that the Church is not an end in itself, but an agent of God’s mission in the world. And together we insist that unity and diversity are both gifts of God for the flourishing of the Church in its ministry and mission. All of these represent important steps toward recognizing one another as Church. While much progress has been made, dialogue must continue if the Reformed and Catholics are to achieve a common understanding of the Church. Thus, with the World Council of Churches, we agree that further dialogue is needed on the relationship of collegiality and primacy.<sup>49</sup> With partners in Lutheran/Catholic dialogue, we affirm the need for continuing conversation around “the relationship between the Word of God and Church doctrine, as well as ecclesiology, ecclesial authority, Church unity, ministry, the sacraments, and the relation between justification and social ethics.”<sup>50</sup> Another area that remains essential for advancing our common understanding of the Church is the role that the Eucharist plays in the Church’s identity and our incorporation into the Church. Further efforts need to be directed at the question of how our sacramental theology, especially our respective interpretations of the Eucharist inform our ecclesiologies.

Ministry, Ordination, and Oversight Today. As we have considered the “state of the question” with respect to ministry, ordination, and oversight among the partners in this dialogue, we have identified several mutual affirmations, areas of convergence, and differences that remain. Mutual affirmations include a sense of ministry as service for the common good, essentially collegial in nature, and shared by the whole people of God; further, we affirm that

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<sup>49</sup> TCTCV 53–56.

<sup>50</sup> JDDJ 43. The World Communion of Reformed Churches, in their 2016 statement of association with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, suggested the need for further work on the relationship between justification and justice, calling all to pursue God’s will in seeking justice, resisting oppression, and promoting social righteousness. Reformed churches would also highlight the “third use of the law”: the idea that the law of God not only (1) convicts us of God’s holiness and human sin and (2) promotes order and restrains evil in society, but also (3) serves as instruction and guidance for faithful living.

some are called to particular service in ordained ministry, following the ancient three-fold pattern of bishop, presbyter, and deacon. We identified new areas of convergence around the relationship between the Trinity and the Church's mission, baptism as the foundation for ministry, the role of the pastor/priest as minister of Word and Sacrament, the process of vocational discernment and preparation for ministry, and the shape of the rite of ordination. Remaining differences involve our understanding of the process for appointment to service, the notion of ordination as a sacrament,<sup>51</sup> the offices to which one may be ordained, the ordination of women, and the effects of ordination on the individual. One significant realization in this aspect of our work, however, is the mutual acknowledgment that ordination involves a real and true change of identity and relationship in the one called to ministry.

*Episkopé in Historical Perspective.* In this five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, we wish to emphasize to our churches and their members that we are in a new place—particularly with respect to the office and structure of the episcopacy. The time has come to put sixteenth-century battles to rest, to avoid the perpetuation of polemic and caricature, and to work together toward the healing of our memories. We mark this anniversary, therefore, with gratitude for the work of the Spirit among us, with confession and sorrow for the wounds of our separation, and with a sense of renewed commitment to the work of reconciliation to which Christ calls us.

In the course of our dialogue, the question of the contemporary practice of the ministry of oversight or *episkopé* had evolved in significant ways. A particularly important contribution of our dialogue has been to grow towards an understanding of *episkopé* as a ministry of oversight that is primarily pastoral, rather than a merely hierarchical role or administrative function. This dialogue also affirms that the ministry of oversight is a needed function in the life

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<sup>51</sup> The Catholic tradition teaches that the ministerial priesthood differs in essence and not only in degree from the priesthood of all believers. See CCC, 1592. CCC 1547 clarifies: The ministerial or hierarchical priesthood of bishops and priests, and the common priesthood of all the faithful participate, "each in its own proper way, in the one priesthood of Christ." While being "ordered one to another," they differ essentially. In what sense? While the common priesthood of the faithful is exercised by the unfolding of baptismal grace --a life of faith, hope, and charity, a life according to the Spirit--, the ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood. It is directed at the unfolding of the baptismal grace of all Christians. The ministerial priesthood is a *means* by which Christ unceasingly builds up and leads his Church. For this reason it is transmitted by its own sacrament, the sacrament of Holy Orders.

of the Church. We recognize as well that there are instances of de facto personal expression of this ministry within the Reformed collegial practice of *episkopé*, just there are collegial expressions of this ministry within the Catholic practice of *episkopé*. It is our hope that both Reformed and Catholic communions can find ways to affirm and enhance these complementary expressions of the ministry of oversight.

Unity and Diversity. Yet another contribution of this dialogue has grown out of our discussions of unity and diversity as gifts of the Spirit for the building up of Christ's Church and for the fulfillment of God's mission in the world. As noted above, these discussions of unity and diversity have yielded fresh insights about how the ministry of *episkopé* functions in our respective churches. Indeed, through our exploration of unity and diversity we have come to appreciate the gifts we have to offer to one another within the one body of Christ. We do so celebrating a significant shift—from generations to polemics to a spirit of gratitude for the gifts we receive from one another. (See appendix for a conversation and study guide on “gifts received.”)

### **Three Acknowledgments: Interim Steps on the Path toward Unity**

We have learned much from this conversation. Our previous round of dialogue has already brought us to an agreement on baptism. While there had been, in practice, an informal acknowledgment of our common baptism, by the end of the seventh round of U.S. Catholic/Reformed dialogue each partner was able to affirm this in a full and formal way through our mutual recognition of baptism. On this basis, we now feel moved to make three new acknowledgments (see also recommendation A below):

First, we acknowledge that all of our traditions see ministry as service to God through Christ, in the Church and in the world, rooted in our common baptismal vocation. We further understand that ministry is exercised in both personal and collegial ways, and is undertaken in the context of the priesthood of all the baptized, who together share in the mission of proclaiming the Kingdom of God. Although we ordain to different offices and have different requirements for ordination, none of that negates our acknowledgment of this fundamental reality.



Second, we acknowledge that God calls and appoints people to exercise the ministry of oversight (episkopé) in the Church, and that this is primarily a service of love for the sake of the unity of the Church, undertaken in obedience to Jesus Christ, for the sake of the gospel. We acknowledge that this oversight has significant pastoral as well as administrative functions. We acknowledge that this ministry of oversight exists in all of our communions. The forms differ, but the essential functions are very similar. We have learned that, among Reformed communions, the functions that are often (in the Roman Catholic Church) lodged in the person of a bishop are distributed among other individuals and collective groups, but the functions remain. We have learned that, in the Catholic Church, bishops function in a collegial and consultative manner, both with other bishops and with the priests and laity under the bishop's oversight. We hold this to be one of the most helpful insights and significant fruits of this dialogue.

Third, we acknowledge that all of the baptized are baptized into the one body of Christ. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church states, those "who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are put in a certain, although imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church."<sup>52</sup> This leads to an implicit acknowledgment of one another as communions of believers. We acknowledge that the body of Christ is present in all of our communions. While there are still challenges to full recognition and to full, visible communion, we can and must recognize in one another the work of God, the presence of Jesus Christ, the movement of the Holy Spirit, our mutual service to a broken world, and our fidelity to the gospel that we all profess. It is our prayer that these acknowledgments become a foundation for eventual mutual recognition.

Official *mutual recognition of ministry* is not yet possible, given particular divergences on some aspects of ministry. *Even so*, as partners in dialogue, we mutually experience that one another's ministry bears biblical and theological integrity, and we mutually regard that this observation is no small thing. As described above, there are several practical circumstances during which each communion genuinely regards the dignity and authority of the ministry of the ordained in the other's communion. We receive this as a genuine informal

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<sup>52</sup> CCC 838.

acknowledgement and mutual respect for the ministry of Christ in one another. In light of this we call upon our churches to continue the dialogue in order to overcome the serious divergences that continue to exist between us regarding both the understanding of the Church and the ministry. This would help us to move toward the unity which Christ is calling us. We hope that further dialogue might explore what full, visible unity could mean, and how it could be achieved without requiring complete uniformity of Church practice.

### **A Current Ecumenical Challenge**

The participants in this dialogue wish to make special commendation of a particular area for further work (see also recommendation B below). The most practical and challenging current proposal toward reconciliation in ministry, representing input of many churches, including Reformed and Roman Catholic churches, and calling for response, comes from the historic Faith and Order text Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry (1982) and reaffirmed by The Church: Towards a Common Vision (2013). They raise the question, whether, to promote unity, all might adopt once again the threefold ministry as an expression of the unity we seek.<sup>53</sup> While taking seriously into account the concerns some have for issues involved, this dialogue proposes that the unity we seek to achieve will include the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon, as a general pattern, as was the case from the early beginnings of the Church. This may require a more comprehensive description of the actual work of our ministries of *episkopé*, but may also call us all toward structural changes consistent with our respective doctrinal beliefs. This practical proposal seems to assume a certain level of convergence we may want to test among us.

There are good reasons to explore this possibility. This Reformed-Catholic dialogue, among others, acknowledges that the threefold pattern of ministry was widely established very early in Church history. This pattern continued until the sixteenth century. Even since the sixteenth century, until now, it seems to still be the predominant pattern of ministry used in the largest parts of the Christian world. Reformers, including Calvin, primarily rejected abuses of

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<sup>53</sup> "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" (TCTCV, n.47).

episcopacy and not necessarily episcopacy itself. Dialogue has clarified many issues for which they abandoned it. The Faith and Order proposal now challenges the Christian world with a way of resolving together an issue that has long been divisive. This Roman Catholic – Reformed dialogue recommends that, even if the churches cannot now reach a consensus about it, TCTCV's question might be continually held before the churches as ecumenical conversations continue.

### **The Ministry of Reconciliation**

As this season of dialogue has demonstrated, we do live in a time between the “already” and “not yet” of full communion—already with God in Christ, not yet with one another. And yet, if we now regard one another through the waters of the font, as our mutual recognition of baptism suggests, we must acknowledge that something fundamental has changed in our understanding of one another and our relationship in Christ. As Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, “if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see everything has become new!” (2 Cor. 5:17). By the grace and power of God, something new is surely on the way, even if we cannot yet glimpse the full implications. The same God who sought and accomplished reconciliation with us through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, has given us the ministry of reconciliation, making us ambassadors for Christ’s realm of righteousness, justice, and peace. This ministry of reconciliation is the ministry we share in the one body of Christ—serving the Church God calls, serving the world God loves. We carry out this ministry under the humble authority and servant leadership of Christ, Lord of heaven and earth and head of the Church. We are called to “work together with him”—and with one another—not accepting “the grace of God in vain” (2 Cor. 6:1), but bearing witness together to the good news of Jesus Christ for all. We do so with urgency and conviction, for “now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!” (2 Cor. 6:2).

This, we believe, is “what the Spirit is saying to the churches” (Rev. 2:11) through this round of Catholic/Reformed dialogue in the United States. We will continue to listen to the Spirit, to learn from the insights of this dialogue, and above all to love one another, as we look for Christ’s coming in glory. Then, with one voice, we will join the hymn of the redeemed,

singing, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come” (Rev. 4:8). Then, as one body, we will praise the Lord Jesus Christ, who has promised, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life” (Rev. 21:6).

## **Recommendations**

For all who wish to benefit from the fruit of this dialogue, we recommend:

1. That all of our churches reflect on the gifts we have received from one another through this exploration of the mission of the Church and the Church’s ministry.
2. That all of our churches acknowledge that many of the church dividing issues from the Reformation era as those related to ministry and especially the office of the bishop no longer pertain to the practice of the Catholic Church.
3. That all of our churches acknowledge and affirm the functional ministry of oversight (*episkopé*) in the Reformed churches, a ministry that is pastoral, not merely administrative, in its oversight.
4. That all of our churches acknowledge and affirm the collegial and conciliar nature of oversight in the Catholic church.
5. That all celebrate our shared understanding that the purpose of ministry is service to both Church and world.
6. That all acknowledge that, although it is expressed differently, we share the conviction that the act of ordaining marks a distinctive change in the one ordained vis a vis the community and that this is deeper than a change of function.
7. That as we tell the story of the Church, we incorporate the insights of this study.
8. That ministers from other churches be invited to be present as witnesses at ordinations and installations, just as the previous round of dialogue has encouraged for the sacrament of baptism.
9. That Reformed ecclesiastical bodies and bishops in local communities find ways to meet together, to learn from one another, to identify convergences in their practice of serving their communions, and to collaborate in service to the world.

For further Roman Catholic – Reformed ecumenical work in particular, we recommend:

- A. That future dialogues continue to build on the current state of mutual acknowledgment of ministry, to determine how these acknowledgments might lead to mutual recognition, and to outline further steps on the path to full, visible communion.
- B. That future dialogues explore ways in which the ancient threefold pattern of ministry—especially in its personal form of bishop, presbyter, and deacon—might be recognized and used in our respective communions.
- C. That future dialogues seek to clarify appropriate liturgical roles for ministers from other traditions, particularly in relation to the proclamation of the word and celebration of the sacraments.

# APPENDICES

## Appendix One

### **Gifts Received: A Study Guide for *The One Body of Christ***

*For the gift of your Word – For the gift of your Spirit –  
For the gift of your Church –  
For the gift of baptism – For the gift of faith –  
Holy, holy, holy Lord, You are one God, and we are your people.*<sup>54</sup>

#### **Gifts among Gifts**

This document *The One Body of Christ* repeatedly draws upon the language of “gift” in exploring the work of the Triune God through the Church, its mission and ministry, and through the *episkopé* of the Roman Catholic and Reformed communions. This language represents a shift from any posture of dispute and divisiveness to a posture of prayerful openness and thanksgiving. From our work together, we bring forward not only the pain of division and hope for a future, but also deep gratitude for a multitude of gifts mutually recognized.

The document identifies:

- The Church itself as gift of God (16, in light of *The Nature and Mission of the Church*).
- The gift of baptism (17-18, 25).
- The Holy Spirit as gift-giver, the one who gives a variety of gifts to the baptized, the people of God (19, 20, 21, 64).
- The complementary gifts of Word and Sacrament (14-16, 64).
- The recognition and validation of the gifts of those called to ministry at ordination (26), and the gift of authority in ministry (24, 26).
- The gift of common liturgical practices in ordination celebrations (26-27).
- The gifts of God’s ordained ministry acknowledged in each other through informal and mutual ways (30-32).

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<sup>54</sup> Adapted from “Thanksgivings and Intercessions” in Appendix Four below.

- The gift of the three-fold ministry of bishop, presbyter, and deacon (24).
- The gift of oversight, *episkopé*, as pastoral ministry (20, 34, 57, 67, 68, 71).
- The gift of the experience of an international communion found in the Roman Catholic Church (60).
- God's gifts of both unity and diversity (19-22, 55, 61, 66, 67).

### **Gifts to One Another**

Our gratitude for gifts is also directed to one another. Near the beginning of *The One Body of Christ* is an expressed hope to identify gifts we might acknowledge in one another (9). More particularly, this is a hope that we might “develop a perspective that opens us to receive the gifts of the other as we take a step toward eventual recognition of one another as churches” (56). In the Conclusion, this is echoed in a recommendation to our communions: that “all our churches reflect on the gifts we received from one another through this exploration” (71).

*What are some of the gifts received from one another for which we give thanks to God?* The participants in the dialogue began the work of identifying gifts that each side of the dialogue has seen and experienced in the other's traditions and practice. We valued the gifts we have identified and received from each other, and provide here representative reflections:

Some gifts the Roman Catholics have identified in and received from the Reformed tradition:

1. The emphasis on collegiality in the Reformed exercise of oversight.
2. The involvement and leadership of non-ordained (“lay”) persons.
3. An emphasis on the proclamation of the Word in the liturgical assembly.
4. The sense that we are truly sisters and brothers in faith.

Some gifts the Reformed have identified in and received from the Roman Catholic tradition:

1. The personal ministry of bishops in the Catholic exercise of oversight.
2. The notion of episcopacy/oversight as a spiritual and pastoral vocation.

3. A focus on the sacramental as an essential part of our shared vocation.
4. The need to be intentional in caring for God's gift of unity.

Gifts that we, as ecumenical partners in dialogue, mutually identified and share from this dialogue:

1. This dialogue has helped all of us understand and celebrate the Church, ministry, and ordination as gifts of God, received through Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit for the sake of God's mission in the world.
2. Similarly, this dialogue has helped all of us reclaim the integration of Word and Sacrament—as central elements of the liturgy, critical aspects of ministry, and as complementary conceptions of the Church.
3. In this dialogue we have experienced the life-changing potential when we come together in prayer and honest conversation. New perspectives and approaches become possible through relationship.
4. In this dialogue we have been blessed with a willingness to go deeper, push harder, and pray more to “acknowledge” and to “recognize” one another—doing the difficult but rewarding work needed to appreciate another's point of view.
5. In this dialogue we have grown closer to one another through an openness to listen and hold the pain that comes from centuries of division and derision. Taking the work of reconciliation seriously means dealing with these uncomfortable issues.

After reflecting on *The One Body of Christ*,

1. What additional gifts would you identify in the churches other than you own?
2. What are the gifts of dialogue, of the conversation?
3. What concerns or questions linger for you after exploring *The One Body of Christ*?
4. From the recommendations found on pages 72-73, what might you or your church do?
5. What are the gifts from one another that we thank God for?

*For the promise of reconciliation –  
hasten the coming of the day  
when heaven and earth will be one*



*and righteousness and peace will kiss.  
Holy, holy, holy Lord, you are one God and we are your people.*

## **Appendix Two**

### **Prospectus for the Catholic-Reformed Dialogue (Round 8)**

Following a meeting in New York on 19 September 2011 and a follow-up phone conference on 4 October 2011, ecumenical officers of the SEIA, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Reformed Church of America, the Christian Reformed Church, and the United Church of Christ agreed to the following prospectus for the next round of the Catholic-Reformed consultation.

Even as we wrestled through theological and dialogical challenges in the last round, the five communions, in a historically significant moment, affirmed *These Living Waters: The Agreement on the Recognition of Baptism*. The time for a new round of dialogue, which we agree needs to manifest signs of continuity with the last round by means of advancing the foundations in sacramental theology that were established, seems appropriate. The topic of the consultation is largely based, therefore, on the recommendations made in *This Bread of Life*, the culminating document from the previous round of consultation.

More precisely, in its conclusion to the last round of dialogue, participants noted: *“We must also acknowledge that our deliberations were hampered by several ecclesiological issues that arose which were sometimes the cause of considerable tension. Thus we believe that it would be good for us in the future to explore together these ecclesiological issues which still stand before us, including how our sacramental theology relates to the theology of ministry and ordination, the relationship between an individual congregation and the universal Church, understanding each other’s polity, and the nature of the Church and how authority is exercised within that understanding in service to the Body of Christ.”* [*This Living Bread: Report of the United States Roman Catholic-Reformed Dialogue on the Eucharist/Lord’s Table*, p. 76-77.] The upcoming consultation will focus on the nature and meaning of the Church.

Given the challenges and preliminary goals identified, the dialogue will be designed to address issues that are ecclesiological in scope. We envision that the proposed dialogue will begin in the fall of 2012. Among the questions that the dialogue will address are the following:

On the ecclesial dimension of the Catholic-Reformed communions:

1. What is our understanding of the role of ministry and the meaning of ordination?
2. How does our sacramental theology, especially our respective interpretations of Eucharist, relate to ministry and ordination?
3. How does each of us understand the relationship between an individual congregation and the universal Church?
4. How do we interpret the relationship between the exercise of authority and the role of service?
5. How do we understand the role of *episkopé* in the Roman Catholic and Reformed traditions?
6. How might the ministry of the Bishop of Rome be helpful in the cause of Christian unity?
7. What do we understand to be the mission of the Church in light of our shared study on Baptism and Eucharist?

8. How does our understanding of the Church’s participation in God’s mission shape our view of the nature of the Church?

**Appendix Three**

**A Chart of Ecumenical Dialogue Documents**

*This chart traces significant moments in previous rounds of ecumenical dialogue (particularly those most relevant to this document), both on the international level and within the United States. The documents may be found readily online.*

ICR = International Catholic/Reformed

USCR = United States Catholic/Reformed

WCC = World Council of Churches

International Dialogue	United States Dialogue
Unitatis Redintegratio (Vatican 2) 1964 <i>and</i> Lumen Gentium (Vatican 2) 1964; <i>not based on ecumenical dialogue, but Reformed observers were present at the council</i>	various topics, including: the Holy Spirit; Revelation, Scripture and Tradition; the Development of Doctrine; Ministry and Order (USCR1) 1965–1967
The Presence of Christ in Church and World (ICR1) 1970–1977	The Ministry of the Church, Women in the Church, The Unity We Seek (USCR2) 1968–1977
Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry (WCC) 1982	Ethics and the Search for Christian Unity (USCR3) 1978–1980
Towards a Common Understanding of the Church (ICR2) 1984–1990	Partners in Peace and Education (USCR4) 1981–1988
Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (Lutheran-Catholic) 1999; <i>not based on Catholic/Reformed dialogue, but subsequently associated to the World Communion of Reformed Churches with their Statement of Association (2017).</i>	Laity in the Church and in the World (USCR5) 1989–1998
The Church as a Community of Common Witness to the Kingdom of God (ICR3) 1998–2005 The Nature and Mission of the Church (WCC) 2005	Interchurch Families (USCR6) 1999–2001
The Church: Towards a Common Vision (WCC) 2013	These Living Waters, This Bread of Life (USCR7) 2003–2010
Justification and Sacramentality: The Christian Community as an Agent for Justice (ICR4) 2012–2017	The One Body of Christ (USCR8) 2012–2017



**Appendix Four**  
**Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession**

*These prayers of thanksgiving and intercession were offered at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception on 16 October 2017, during the ecumenical prayer service that closed the eighth round of Roman Catholic – Reformed Dialogue in the United States.*

Holy, holy, holy Lord,  
**you are one God,  
and we are your people.**

We give you thanks:

For the gift of your Word—  
bringing all things into being,  
speaking life to the dying,  
calling us to turn and trust in you.

For the gift of your Spirit—  
claiming us as beloved children,  
filling us with grace and truth,  
transforming the world.

For the gift of your Church—  
gathering in your presence,  
bearing witness to the life of Christ,  
going forth in your service.

For the gift of baptism—  
immersing us in your saving love,  
setting us free from sin and death,  
uniting us in the one body of Christ.

For the gift of faith—  
saving us by your grace,  
clothing us in Christ's righteousness,  
equipping us for good works.

Holy, holy, holy Lord,  
**you are one God,  
and we are your people.**

Hear our prayer:

For the mission of your Church—  
by the power of your Spirit,  
let us be a living sign  
of your great love for all.

For the salvation of the world—  
deliver those who call on your name,  
give justice to the oppressed,  
and renew your good creation.

For the healing of our memories—  
help us to honor and love one another  
even as our Savior Christ has loved us  
so that all will know we are his disciples.

For the hope of full communion—  
bless us with the hunger and thirst  
to share together the bread of life  
and the cup of salvation at last.

For the promise of reconciliation—  
hasten the coming of the day  
when heaven and earth will be one  
and righteousness and peace will kiss.

Holy, holy, holy Lord,  
**you are one God,**  
**and we are your people.**

Send us out to share your blessing,  
keep us faithful in your service,  
and make us ready for your holy realm;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who lives and reigns with you  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

## **Participants in the Roman Catholic - Reformed Dialogue of the United States (Round 8)**

Bishop Tod Brown, Roman Catholic Church

Rev. Dr. Cynthia Campbell, Presbyterian Church USA

Rev. Dr. Peter Choi, Christian Reformed Church in North America

Dr. Anthony Cirelli, Roman Catholic Church

Dr. Kristin Colberg, Roman Catholic Church

Rev. Dr. Ronald Feenstra, Christian Reformed Church in North America

Rev. Dr. Sidney D. Fowler, United Church of Christ

Rev. Dr. David P. Gambrell, Presbyterian Church USA

Rev. Dr. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, Reformed Church in America

Rev. Dr. Allan Janssen, Reformed Church in America

Rev. Monica Schaap Pierce, Reformed Church in America

Msgr. John Radano, Roman Catholic Church

Rev. Dr. Sue A. Rozeboom, Christian Reformed Church in North America

Fr. Dennis Tamburello, Roman Catholic Church

Rev. Karen Georgia A. Thompson, United Church of Christ

Rev. Dr. Randi Walker, United Church of Christ

Rev. Robina Winbush, Presbyterian Church USA

Although the members of the dialogue do not speak officially for our churches, we have been asked to represent them in this dialogue, and it is in that capacity that we submit this statement to the leadership of our churches and to all their faithful for their prayerful consideration as a means of hastening progress along the path to full, visible unity. We hope that this statement will be received as a useful contribution on the way to that goal. It is for this unity that we continue to pray.