

God in Christ Reconciling: On the Way to Full Communion in Faith, Sacraments, and Mission

**Report of the
Joint International Commission for Dialogue
Between the World Methodist Council
and the Catholic Church**

**2022
Eleventh Series**

PREFACE

This present round of dialogue of the Methodist–Roman Catholic International Commission between the World Methodist Council (WMC) and the Catholic Church began with members being received in audience by Pope Francis in October 2017. The formal addresses by His Holiness and Bishop Ivan Abrahams, WMC General Secretary, marked the fiftieth anniversary of the commencement of theological dialogue between Catholics and Methodists in 1967. Since then, the joint commission has produced ten substantial reports coinciding with quinquennial meetings of the WMC. Cumulatively, these reports register significant theological agreement and convergence between Catholics and Methodists. Both Pope Francis and Bishop Abrahams recognised that after fifty years, we are no longer strangers, but brothers and sisters committed to the journey of walking together towards unity. The co-chairs were honoured to present Pope Francis with a Spanish translation of the commission’s most recent report *The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory* (Houston, 2016).

The theme of this latest round of dialogue, the eleventh series, is reconciliation. The apostle Paul proclaims that ‘God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself’ (2 Cor 5.19). Reconciliation is a central theme of the New Testament, though it has never previously been the subject of theological dialogue at a world level. This latest report entitled *God in Christ Reconciling: On the Way to Full Communion in Faith, Sacraments, and Mission* (Gothenburg, 2022), investigates how Catholics and Methodists respectively exercise the Church’s ministry of reconciliation and the implications for our bilateral relationship. The report’s subtitle reflects the missionary imperative that our imperfect communion be reconciled so that our witness may become a more effective sign, instrument, and foretaste of the reconciliation that God wills for all peoples and the whole of creation.

Reconciliation is a timely subject for dialogue between Catholics and Methodists as the present divisions between and among the peoples of the world have been exacerbated by strident political, economic, and social forces. Increasing concern for the future wellbeing of our planet compels humankind to find ways of living responsibly in relationship with the whole of God’s creation. When the present round of dialogue began in 2017, no one could have foreseen the difficult circumstances that would arise through the COVID-19 pandemic. The devastating impact on everyday life has heightened the sense of mutual estrangement that is characteristic of the fallen human condition. The need for reconciliation between peoples and between humankind and the planet has never been more urgent than at the present time.

The meetings of the joint commission included shared prayer, a common life, theological dialogue, and meetings to support local Church communities. In Rome, members of the commission prayed together at the tomb of St Peter the words of the Lord’s Prayer ‘forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us’. To understand better the perspective of a global Church, membership of the commission was widened for this round of dialogue, and we also met in Hong Kong and Nairobi. The final plenary meeting in Jerusalem was cancelled because of the pandemic and became instead a virtual meeting from our homes.

Finally, we dedicate this report to the memory of two distinguished ecumenists and theologians, who served on the joint commission with great distinction. The Revd Professor Geoffrey Wainwright (1939-2020) was Methodist co-chair from 1986 to 2011, and was a driving force in bringing to fruition the dialogue’s very significant reports in this period and also the Methodist Statement of Association with the Joint Declaration of Justification which is among the theological foundations of this and the previous report of the commission. As a Catholic theologian and ecumenist of long experience, Mgr Denis Edwards (1943-2019) brought his considerable expertise and great human warmth to the commission when he joined in 2017. His untimely death in 2019 was a great loss to us as it was to his many friends. *May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace and rise in glory.*

Bishop John Sherrington
Catholic Co-Chair

Revd Dr David M. Chapman
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Pentecost 2021

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The Status of this Document

The Report published here is the work of the Methodist–Roman Catholic International Commission whose members were appointed by the World Methodist Council or by the Holy See's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. The authorities who appointed the Commission have now allowed the Report to be published so that it may be widely discussed. It is a joint report of the Commission, not an authoritative declaration by the Roman Catholic Church or by the World Methodist Council, which will study the document in due course.

Abbreviations with Selected Annotations

BEM	<i>Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry</i> . Faith and Order Paper 111. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982.
CCC	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i> . Second English language edition. 1997.
CD	Second Vatican Council. <i>Christus Dominus</i> (Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops). 1965.
CIC	Codex Iuris Canonici (Code of Canon Law).
CUMT	Catholic and United Methodist Committee (USA). <i>Catholics and United Methodists Together: We Believe, We Pray, We Act</i> . 2020.
EG	Pope Francis. <i>Evangelii gaudium</i> . 2013.
FT	Pope Francis. <i>Fratelli tutti</i> . 2020.
GS	Second Vatican Council. <i>Gaudium et spes</i> (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World). 1965.
HEFG	Catholic and United Methodist Committee (USA). <i>Heaven and Earth are Full of Your Glory: A United Methodist and Roman Catholic Statement on the Eucharist and Ecology</i> . 2012.
JDDJ	Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church. <i>Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification</i> . 1999. http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-occidentale/luterani/dialogo/documenti-di-dialogo/1999-dichiarazione-congiunta-sulla-dottrina-della-justificazion/en.html
LG	Second Vatican Council. <i>Lumen gentium</i> (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church). 1964.
LS	Pope Francis. <i>Laudato Si</i> . 2015.
MAJDDJ	The World Methodist Council. <i>Statement of Association with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification</i> . 2006. http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-occidentale/consiglio-metodista-mondiale/relazioni/en.html
PR	International Theological Commission. <i>Penance and Reconciliation</i> . 1982.
RM	<i>Roman Missal</i> . Third edition. 2002.
RP	Pope John Paul II. <i>Reconciliatio et paenitentia</i> . 1984.
SCar	Pope Benedict XVI. <i>Sacramentum caritatis</i> . 2007.
SC	Second Vatican Council. <i>Sacrosanctum Concilium</i> (Constitution on the Liturgy). 1963.
UR	Second Vatican Council. <i>Unitatis redintegratio</i> (Decree on Ecumenism). 1964.
UUS	Pope John Paul II. <i>Ut unum sint</i> . 1995.
WJW	<i>The Works of John Wesley</i> . Various volumes and editors. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975–1983; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984–.
WW	<i>The Works of John Wesley</i> . 3rd edition. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1984; reprint of London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872 (Jackson edition).
Brighton	<i>Speaking the Truth in Love: Teaching Authority among Catholics and Methodists</i> . 2001.
Denver	<i>The Denver Report</i> . 1971.
Dublin	<i>The Dublin Report</i> . 1976.
Durban	<i>Encountering Christ the Saviour: Church and Sacraments</i> . 2011.
Honolulu	<i>The Honolulu Report</i> . 1981.
Houston	<i>The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory</i> . 2016.
Nairobi	<i>Towards a Statement on the Church</i> . 1986.
Rio	<i>The Word of Life: A Statement on Revelation and Faith</i> . 1996.
Seoul	<i>The Grace Given You in Christ: Catholics and Methodists Reflect Further on the Church</i> . 2006.
Singapore	<i>The Apostolic Tradition</i> . 1991.
Synthesis	<i>Synthesis: Together to Holiness: 40 Years of Methodist and Roman Catholic Dialogue</i> . 2010. https://worldmethodistcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Roman-Catholic-Dialogue-Synthesis-Report.pdf .

English translations of Roman Catholic documents may be found at www.vatican.va.

All scriptural quotations are from the New Revised Standard (Anglicised) Version.

SCRIPTURAL MEDITATION

Luke 15.11-32 (New Revised Standard Version)

¹¹ Then Jesus said, 'There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." So he divided his property between them. ¹³ A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. ¹⁴ When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶ He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸ I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" ²⁰ So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹ Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." ²² But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴ for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate.

²⁵ 'Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. ²⁷ He replied, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound." ²⁸ Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, "Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!" ³¹ Then the father said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'"'

This story in Luke's Gospel has traditionally been entitled the parable of the prodigal son. In many ways, however, it is more appropriate to refer to this story as the parable of the two sons. The focus of the story is the father's overflowing love, expressed in mercy and generosity towards his sons, rather than the spendthrift behaviour of the younger son. By demanding immediately his portion of the estate, which he would inherit when his father died, the younger son was saying, in effect, 'Father, I wish you were already dead', a sentiment that brought great shame on his family. A Jewish audience would have considered the father's response indulgent to the point of foolishness.

Extravagance and dissolute living reduce the younger son to poverty. He can find only the worst employment possible—looking after pigs, which for Jews are the most unclean of animals. He sinks even lower than the pigs since they at least had enough to eat.

More powerful than this vivid picture of the younger son's rebellion and fall, however, is the dramatic and otherworldly description of his repentance and restoration. Desperate, he finally 'came to himself', suggesting an awareness of his true state. No longer worthy of being his father's son, nevertheless he returns home to beg for employment as a household servant.

Though the son freely decides to return, the father takes the initiative in the restoration of the family relationship. He has been keeping a long vigil, and he recognises his son whilst he is 'still far off'.

The family patriarch runs to his son with a warm embrace and kiss, refusing to hear his apology. The father's act of running to meet his estranged son was perceived as shocking, undignified, and humiliating in the cultural environment of the first hearers of the Gospel. Yet the father does not wait for his son to approach him in humility to provide an explanation and confess his rebellion. The son has returned and is at once the object of his father's overwhelming compassion. There is no qualified or cautious reception by the father but rather a wholehearted acceptance and an uninhibited expression of delight in his son's return. The father displays the divine characteristics of love, graciousness, mercy, and forgiveness.

After a passionate embrace, the son makes his confession, perhaps more meaningfully because of his experience of acceptance by his father. Whereas convention dictated that the son must earn his restoration after shaming the family, the father offers him unconditional forgiveness and restores him to sonship. To continue to ask for employment as a servant would insult his father's generous love. Instead, the son is robed, and given shoes and a ring. A banquet is prepared in celebration. The provision of a 'fatted calf' is a remarkable extravagance making this a truly festive occasion.

The story is incomplete without mention of the elder son. He is reintroduced at this point as one whose bitterness and envy make him just as lost as the younger son and similarly cut off from sharing joyfully in the life of the family. In contrast to his father's love and forgiveness, the elder son is absorbed by expectations of merit and reward. Trapped by self-righteousness and resentment, he cannot bring himself to say 'my brother' but instead speaks contemptuously of 'this son of yours': while the filial relationship has been restored, the fraternal relationship has not. The elder son refuses to join in the celebration and grumbles at the lavish welcome, accusing his father of failing to treat him in the same free and joyous manner.

Patiently the father goes out to the elder son just as he went out to the younger, reminding him that all the resources of the family have always been available to him. The father accepts that the elder son has been faithful but invites him to consider what has happened: a son and brother has returned from the dead. The challenge for the elder son is to recognise that the family relationships have been restored and to join in the celebration. Everything else fades into insignificance in this moment: 'we had to celebrate and rejoice'. The unifying character in this story is the father, whose gracious love is extended both to his younger, unrighteous son and to his elder, self-righteous son.

The message of this parable in its context in Luke's Gospel is that God loves his wayward children and longs for them to return home. The father in the parable represents God, whilst the younger son represents the 'outsiders' to whom Jesus has been ministering—the poor, sick, demonised, outcasts, sinners, tax-collectors, and gentiles. The elder son represents the self-righteous who reject Jesus' call to repentance and look down upon others.

The parable helps us understand that reconciliation is principally a gift of the heavenly Father, who is 'rich in mercy' and always ready to forgive. The elder brother, as much as the younger, needs to be converted from his selfishness and receive mercy. In every person, we can find a mixture of both brothers who stand in need of reconciliation. The Church's mission of reconciliation is the initiative of the God who is rich in love and mercy to all.

CHAPTER ONE

God's Reconciling Work in Christ

The Longing for Reconciliation: The Parable of the Two Sons

1. 'Reconciliation' is one of the ways in which scripture speaks of God's redemptive mission to the world. In faith we welcome the divine initiative and are brought into right relationship with God: 'By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts whilst equipping and calling us to good works' (JDDJ §15). In reconciling us, God overcomes the obstacles to communion and friendship with him and others caused by our weakness and sinfulness. The scriptural witness is clear, 'In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself' (2 Cor 5.19). God's mercy is evident in that 'while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son' (Rom 5.10). In contrast with human frailty, Paul reminds us that the gifts of God are irrevocable (Rom 11.29) and give rise to a responsibility, a mission in the world (2 Cor 5.20). 'By God's grace believers are commissioned and empowered to tell people that God has reconciled the world to himself and to entreat them on behalf of Jesus Christ to be reconciled to God' (MAJDDJ §4.1).

2. Reading the parable of the two sons in the context of the Methodist–Catholic bilateral dialogue on reconciliation enables us to recognise once again the primacy of God's gracious initiative of forgiveness and the need for repentance and forgiveness between our Christian communities. The parable issues a challenge close to the heart of our dialogue. The Father's embrace of us as his children demands that we embrace each other as brothers and sisters, and challenges us to overcome the divisions between us caused by sin. Reconciliation understood this way enables us to see why Christian unity is integral to our Christian calling, a Gospel imperative. However, this is not easy. In the parable, the process of fraternal reconciliation challenges both sons. The younger son must recognise his situation and repent, return to the family home, confess, and humbly accept that only the loving attitude of the father restores his dignity and reconciles him. The older son is called to accept the younger son as his brother and share in the joy of the father at the restoration of the prodigal. The end of the story remains open, because Jesus invites the readers' response. Real fraternal reconciliation is always a challenge for Christians and Christian communities. Methodists and Catholics are on the way to full communion to the extent that we receive the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5.18; cf. Seoul §§11, 103, 137, 144, 165-171). Is it possible to respond together to the ecclesiological and ecumenical implications of the parable? Yes, and this affirmation can serve as the starting point for the reconciliation of our respective communions.

3. The parable of the two sons serves as a mirror for the Church. Each Christian community is challenged to recognise within itself the traits of both sons and those of the father. Read in this way, the parable poses important questions for all Methodists and Catholics. Have we really discovered and received God's gift of reconciliation? Is it a central feature of our preaching of the Gospel and our Christian witness? Are we truly committed to continuing the historical and theological process of self-examination, taking into account the need for concrete acts of repentance and restoration? Do we recognise each other as brothers and sisters in Christ or are we perhaps too stuck in an attitude of indifference toward other Christians? Do we allow ourselves to feel the pain of the present situation of divided Christianity? Do we share the Father's longing for the reunion of his divided family? Are we aware of the ways we have squandered the Father's gifts? Do we long to experience the overabundant joy of God's reconciling action? Do we rejoice when a brother or sister is embraced by the Father's love? Do we share the Father's readiness to forgive? In addressing these questions, Methodists and Catholics are aware that God's gift of reconciliation in Christ is given not only that we might live in harmony with each other but also that the credibility of the Church's mission, damaged by division, might be restored. It belongs to our common vision of faith that the Church is sent into the world with a ministry of reconciliation, as bearer of God's message of forgiveness. As a

prophetic sign, the Church is called to manifest and anticipate in her very life the joy of the Kingdom in which all will be renewed and united in justice and peace.

4. Human history is tangled and complex. In its long unfolding, there are signs of suffering and frustration and, at the same time, many signs of hope. The Second Vatican Council recognised these seemingly contradictory signs: ‘The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men and women of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ’ (GS §1). The griefs and the anxieties of humankind can be recognised in the fracture lines of wounded humanity: the fractures experienced by human beings who have lost a sense of meaning in their lives; the fractures leading to peoples’ suffering exclusion, exploitation, or discrimination; the fractures between believers of different religions, often tempted to appropriate the place of God as supreme judge of all. The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic brought many of these deep fissures in our societies to the surface and showed the brokenness of modern life. The mission of the Church commits it to being present in all these divisions in order to exercise a ministry of healing and reconciliation. We see this in the story of Pentecost. The Spirit that descends in tongues of fire heals the division and misunderstanding of Babel as peoples of different languages hear and understand the very first message preached by the Church. The Church, as Temple of the Holy Spirit, must disperse, must go out precisely to those places of fracture that divide the world. Yet the Church is also called and sent to name the ‘signs of hope’ present in our time. These signs include ‘scientific, technological and especially medical progress in the service of human life, a greater awareness of our responsibility for the environment, efforts to restore peace and justice wherever they have been violated, a desire for reconciliation and solidarity among different peoples, particularly in the complex relationship between the North and the South of the world’.¹ The World Methodist Council (WMC) affirms that every ‘expression of love, justice, and reconciliation’ is a sign pointing toward communion with God.² Methodists and Catholics join the human family in yearning for the healing of human relations, a healthy, whole, and clean environment – in short, for all things to be reconciled in Christ (Col 1.20). When the Church reads the signs of hope in the present age, Christians discover more fully their vocation to serve the world as agents of God’s reconciliation.

5. The need for reconciliation reaches beyond the walls of divided ecclesial communions. In the words of Paul, ‘creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God’ (Rom 8.19). Paul presents God’s creation as a living entity with a desire for liberation. This understanding clashes with the modern view that sees creation in mechanistic terms or as a resource to be exploited for human purposes. By contrast, Paul compares the cosmos to a woman in labour, about to give birth, groaning for a new reality. Being attentive to creation’s longing demands spiritual discernment. Developing the ears to hear its distinctive cry is for Christians a gift of the Holy Spirit. ‘We come to realize that a healthy relationship with creation is one dimension of overall personal conversion, which entails the recognition of our errors, sins, faults and failures, and leads to heartfelt repentance and desire to change’ (LS §218). This heartfelt desire is a sign that the Spirit is at work among us.

6. The presence of the Spirit keeps the longing for reconciliation from settling for superficial solutions and premature resolutions. It is an undeniable fact that in contexts of historic inequities and violence, the language of ‘reconciliation’ has frequently been co-opted by people in power in order to slow down the process of social transformation. In such settings, the term ‘reconciliation’ has become synonymous with appeasement, and the cry of unity with a call to forgetfulness. In the context of apartheid, South African theologians stated in the Kairos document, ‘It would be quite wrong to try to preserve “peace” and “unity” at all costs, even at the cost of truth and justice and, worse still, at the cost of thousands of young lives. The disciples of Jesus should rather promote truth and justice

¹ John Paul II, *Tertio millennio adveniente* §46.

² World Methodist Council Social Affirmation; at <http://worldmethodistcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/WMC-Social-Affirmation.pdf>.

and life at all costs, even at the cost of creating conflict, disunity, and dissension along the way.’³ Christians must reject all abuse of the language of reconciliation which perpetuates injustice. Pope Francis has described truth as the ‘inseparable companion’ to justice and mercy in all efforts to break cycles of violence. ‘Truth,’ he writes, ‘means telling families torn apart by pain what happened to their missing relatives. Truth means confessing what happened to minors recruited by cruel and violent people. Truth means recognising the pain of women who are victims of violence and abuse’ (FT §227). True reconciliation requires repentance, and repentance requires full recognition of the reality of sin, including ecclesial division and the damage it has caused. Seeing the signs of hope and yearning for unity are acts of ecclesial discernment formed by a robust account of God’s reconciliation of the world in Christ by the Spirit. Such an account begins with a theological description of the interconnectedness of the world as God’s creation.

The Gift of Creation: God’s Original Plan and Humanity’s Original Failure

7. ‘All things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together’ (Col 1.16-17). Paul sees Christ as the centre of creation in whom the diversity of the universe finds its unifying principle. All things are interconnected because all things are made through and for Christ. Creation is a gift of the triune God. The loving communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit embraces and sustains the communion of creatures. This trinitarian vision of the interrelation and interconnection of all things comes from reading accounts of the creation at the beginning of the scriptures in light of its consummation in Christ. The first pages of the scriptures offer us the original vision of God for humanity and creation, the work of God’s hands (Gen 1-2), and the contradiction introduced in them by the failure of human freedom. The work of reconciliation heals and heightens the communion that creation shares in the Trinity.

8. God created a universe where everything is good and the totality of it is very good (Gen 1.31). Creation is an interconnected whole. In the words of Pope Francis, ‘Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth’ (LS §92). The bold employment of familial language in relation to sun, moon, river, and earth echoes the analogical usage introduced by St Francis of Assisi; it emphasizes the commonality shared by all creatures made by the same creator. Methodists and Catholics believe that ‘The human being was made to be in harmony with God, creation, and neighbour’ (Houston §20). The root of the rich harmony of relations that constitute the human being is our relationship with God.

9. Sin has wounded the fundamental relation of human beings with God, the relations between human beings and creation (Gen 3.1-19) and, finally, fraternal relations (Gen 4.1-16). The narrative and poetic language of these first chapters of scripture discloses profound realities of creaturely and human existence. Sin unravels the vital relations from which human life is woven (cf. LS §66). Distrust, fear, shame, and resentment displaced the trust, confidence, self-esteem, and love which human beings were called to experience in the presence of God. The first sin of humanity severs the relationship with God and simultaneously breaks the bond of friendship that had united the human family. The man and the woman point accusing fingers at each other for the predicament in which they find themselves, experiencing their nakedness as shameful. The relationship between the first brothers degenerates into fratricide. Wounded fraternal relations initiate a sequence of hostility and desires of revenge (Gen 4.23f).

10. Methodists and Catholics affirm that ‘[w]hen human beings refuse to acknowledge God as their Creator, they disrupt their proper relationship to their own ultimate goal as well as their relationship to themselves, other humans, and all created things’ (Houston §29). The tragic malignancies of sin

³ See <https://kairossouthernafrica.wordpress.com/2011/05/08/the-south-africa-kairos-document-1985/>.

produce a ‘deformed self’ (Honolulu §15). Sin damages all the capacities with which God has gifted the human. Paul teaches that in rejecting God, humans ‘became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened’ (Rom 1.21). Sin wounds human beings to such an extent that they struggle to remember, understand, and love anything rightly, even themselves. This alienation from self is presented in the Genesis story as the shame experienced by the man and woman at their own nakedness (Gen 2.25; 3.7, 10).

11. In societies where ethnic prejudice and racial discrimination are built into the social structures, the estrangement of the self can manifest itself in xenophobia and internalised racism. The deforming power of sin extends beyond persons to institutions. Christians are particularly concerned to denounce the power of sin to turn both individuals and structures away from their good ends. Human history confronts us with a seemingly unending conflict between peoples, ethnic hatreds, and local, regional or global wars that produce the suffering of the innocent and the weak.

12. Scripture teaches that all creation is sacred and belongs to God (Ps 24.1), yet humans treat the earth as a possession, a commodity to be exploited for personal gain. Human sin, as alienation from God and God’s purpose, is destroying the earth and threatens all life. The consequences of human sin expose the interconnectedness of God’s world. The United Methodist bishops stated in 2010, ‘When we open our eyes to God’s vision, we no longer see a list of isolated problems affecting disconnected people, plants, and animals. . . We see that the threats to peace, people, and planet earth are related to one another, and that God’s vision encompasses complete global health.’⁴ Humanity’s turn away from God impacts the earth and all creatures in it. John Wesley comments on the depravity of humanity against other creatures. ‘The lion, the tiger, or the shark, give [other creatures] pain from mere necessity, in order to prolong their own life; and put them out of their pain at once. But the human shark, without any such necessity, torments them of his free choice; and perhaps continues their lingering pain till after months or years death signs their release.’⁵ Humans play an outsized role in their ecosystem. This is the reason that Pope Francis states, ‘Today, however, we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor’ (LS §49).

13. Nevertheless, God does not abandon human beings in a prison of hopelessness, frustration, and broken relations. Methodists and Catholics believe that ‘God’s saving purposes for humanity are evident from the beginning’ (Honolulu §31). Human history bears within itself a longing for the fulfilment of God’s promised deliverance. The Christian story is, in the words of John Paul II, ‘the wonderful history of a reconciliation: the reconciliation whereby God, as Father, in the blood and the cross of his Son made man, reconciles the world to himself and thus brings into being a new family of those who have been reconciled’ (RP §4).

The Gift of Reconciliation: Christ is our Peace

14. The good news is that the triune God offers humanity the gift of reconciliation. Through Christ ‘God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross’ (Col 1.20). In a world where it appears that the human heart and the nations of the world are bound by fear of the stranger, the Gospel speaks a different word. Christ ‘is our peace; in his flesh he has . . . broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us’ and through him we ‘have access in one Spirit to the Father’ (Eph 2.14, 18). By the power of the Holy Spirit, God’s mystery is revealed in Christ, ‘as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him’ (Eph 1.10). Reading the Greek version of this text, Irenaeus of Lyons refers to this ‘gathering

⁴ United Methodist Council of Bishops, ‘God’s Renewed Creation: Call to Hope and Action’, 2009; <http://hopeandaction.org/main/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/Foundation-Doc-Eng-Handout-2-col.pdf>.

⁵ John Wesley, Sermon ‘The General Deliverance’ WJW, vol. 2, ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), II.6, 445.

up' as a recapitulation. Christ 'in an invisible manner contains all things created, and is inherent in the entire creation...and therefore he came to his own in a visible manner, and was made flesh, and hung upon the tree, that he might sum up all things in Himself.'⁶ The interrelation of creatures with God and one another that was damaged by sin is healed by the life of Christ who harmonizes the diversity of creation to himself.

15. Reconciliation was not originally a religious term; it was a social and political one. The word 'reconciliation' (*katallagē*) was used in Greek society to name the coming together of an estranged couple and for the signing of peace treaties. According to this classical use of the word 'reconciliation', one does not reconcile friends or strangers; it is enemies that need reconciliation. The novelty of the biblical usage is striking. In the New Testament, reconciliation serves as one of the central categories to describe the mission of Jesus Christ. In Christian usage, reconciliation denotes the renewal or transformation of humanity's relation to God. Reconciliation is God's medicine for a landscape scarred by dividing walls of hostility. The offended takes the initiative in reaching out to the offender. God has not done anything wrong. God does not need to be reconciled to humanity. It is human beings who need to be reconciled to God, and God takes the initiative in sending Christ to a broken, beloved world. Paul describes this work in startling terms. 'For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God' (2 Cor 5.21). In Christ, a marvellous exchange takes place. What is ours is his, and what is his is ours. Christ, 'though he was rich, yet for your sakes became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich' (2 Cor 8.9). Later, Greek fathers associated the theme of the wondrous exchange with that of divinisation. God became human in order that the human might become divine.⁷ Methodists and Catholics believe that 'Salvation is ultimately a matter of our reconciliation and communion with God – a sharing in God's life which is effected through real union with Christ' (Nairobi §16).

16. Methodists and Catholics confess the work of reconciliation as already accomplished in Christ; it is a divine gift of God. 'In the mystery of salvation, the grace of Jesus Christ transforms the human nature and its condition, for "if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation" (2 Cor 5.17-18). Being re-created as human beings "in Christ" constitutes a new way of living in the world, reconciled to God and to one another' (Houston §47). Christ is our redeemer, the reconciler and the liberator of humanity from sin in all its forms (Rom 5.10). Christ's redeeming act, in the paschal mystery, is the cause of humanity's reconciliation in its twofold aspect of liberation from sin and communion of grace with God (cf. RP §7). The reconciling work of Christ is made possible by the Spirit. It is in the Spirit that humanity has access through Christ to the Father (Eph 2.18). It is in the Spirit that human beings are baptised into the body of Christ, the Church (1 Cor 12.3). Methodists and Catholics affirm that, in addition to being Lord and giver of life, 'the Holy Spirit is also the Paraclete or Advocate, who pleads for them, and brings about repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation' (Seoul §30). Thus, reconciliation is the work of the triune God who draws near to humanity in order to restore and fulfil the original communion of creation.

17. God's ministry of reconciliation through Christ is deeply personal. Alienation and marginalization, forgiveness and embrace are real experiences that touch the heart and soul of every human being and every human community. All people experience the need for reconciliation with God because of the contradictions, sufferings, and weaknesses that sin has introduced in the human self. Real reconciliation demands that we live the experience of forgiveness daily. It is a petition addressed by the disciples of Jesus, according to his own teaching: "'forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors'" (Matt 6.12). Forgiveness is the only possibility for a healing of fraternal relations at every level. In fact, 'Society can become "ever more human" only when we introduce into all the mutual relationships which form its moral aspect the moment of forgiveness, which is so much of the essence of the Gospel. Forgiveness demonstrates the presence in the world of a love which is more

⁶ Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, V.18.3.

⁷ Cf. Athanasius, *De Incarnatione verbi*, 54, 3.

powerful than sin. Forgiveness is also the fundamental condition for reconciliation, not only in the relationship of God with human persons, but also in relationships between people. A world without forgiveness would be nothing but a world of cold and unfeeling justice, in the name of which each person would claim his or her own rights vis-a-vis others.⁸ While reconciliation through Christ is a deeply personal matter, the interconnectedness of God's world means that reconciliation cannot be limited to the restoration of individual human beings to God and to one another.

18. God's reconciliation through Christ in the Spirit has social dimensions. Jesus teaches his followers that disputes in the community are to be settled before 'offering your gift at the altar': specifically, 'first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift' (Matt 5.21-24). It is not possible to be reconciled with the God who is communion in a purely individualistic manner. Paul is particularly clear on this point: 'So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation' (2 Cor 5.17). All human relations are reconstituted and transformed by participation in the life of the triune God. Christ creates a new humanity out of the fractured pieces of fallen human history (Eph 2.15). This new way of being human is not based on gender, ethnicity, or economic status. The cohesiveness of this new identity comes from being recreated in Christ. 'For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything, but a new creation is everything!' (Gal 6.15). Methodists and Catholics believe that 'humanity in Christ is still humanity, and yet a new creation has occurred in each believer, and in the newly reconciled community [...] Reconciliation replaces a relationship of hostility and hatred with one of peace' (Seoul §169). In Christ, the wounds inflicted through the history of colonialism and racism are being healed. In the words of a hymn by the Methodist theologian, Justo González,

In all four of earth's faraway corners
sin is building embittering barriers;
but our faith has no fear of such borders,
we know justice and peace will prevail.
To all four of earth's faraway corners
we're a people who point to tomorrow,
when the world, living sov'reign and peaceful
is united in bonds of God's love.⁹

19. God's reconciliation in Christ has cosmic dimensions because through Christ's incarnation, God has assumed the whole of the created order. Paul's assertion that the 'wages of sin is death' (Rom 6.23) applies not only on a personal level but also on a global level. Something similar can be said of the Gospel of reconciliation. Methodists and Catholics are inspired by the witness of St Francis to the Gospel of reconciliation. 'He was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself. He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace' (LS §10, cited in Houston §41). The eccentric way of life of the poor man from Assisi is a testament to the power and purpose of God to reconcile all things. The Holy Spirit changes the alienated sinner into the relational being he or she is called to be. By grace disinherited prodigals become children of God crying 'Abba! Father!' (Gal 4.6), co-heirs with Christ of the divine promises, and friends of all creatures.

20. Reconciliation with God has an eschatological dimension. According to one Methodist teaching document, 'The final goal of the mission of God is the enjoyment of all creation in the fellowship and

⁸ John Paul II, *Dives in misericordia* §14.

⁹ *Mil voces para celebrar* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), Hymn #378. English translation of 'De los cuatro rincones del mundo' by George F. Lockwood.

participation in God's very being which is love.'¹⁰ Pope Francis states, 'Eternal life will be a shared experience of awe, in which each creature, resplendently transfigured, will take its rightful place and have something to give those poor men and women who will have been liberated once and for all' (LS §243). The 'once and for all' (Heb 9.26; 10.10) act of reconciliation that God has accomplished through Christ cannot be separated from the 'not-yet' reception or appropriation of that reconciling work with which God in Christ has entrusted his Church in the power of the Spirit (2 Cor 5.18). There is thus an eschatological dimension to this reconciling work that will only come as a divine gift at the end with a new heaven and a new earth (Rev 21.1). Despite this 'not-yet' aspect of our hope for reconciliation, we should experience reconciliation at work in the here and now of our lives, and also through our witness in the world. Even as it has received the gift of reconciliation in Christ, the Church is on the way. The Church is a pilgrim people whose journey is guided by signposts of hope. 'Transcendent hope must be maintained by signs of historical hope, even when the signs are apparently as simple as... "They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit" (Is 65.21).'¹¹

21. God's reconciling act is the basis for all reconciliation with self, neighbour and creation. The cross grounds the 'horizontal' dimensions of reconciliation, that is to say, the need for the healing of the nations, peoples, and creatures of the world in the 'vertical' dimension of reconciliation, the restoration of relationship between humanity and God. John Wesley counselled his followers, 'Nay, but *first believe*. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the propitiation for thy sins. Let this good foundation *first* be laid, and then thou shalt do all things well.'¹² Methodists and Catholics can affirm Wesley's counsel provided that the 'first' is interpreted theologically rather than chronologically. It is because God acts that humans can act. Scripture teaches, 'we love, because he first loved us' (1 John 4.19). As Jesus tells Simon in explaining the actions of the woman who washed Jesus' feet, "'I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little'" (Luke 7.47). God takes the initiative and is present in all the dimensions of reconciliation previously mentioned. To underplay or neglect the priority of being reconciled to God in Christ leads ultimately to misplaced confidence in human effort (Pelagianism) or even atheism. Full reconciliation between people is and can only be the fruit of the redemptive act of Christ, who died and rose again to re-establish the covenant with God and thus break down the dividing wall which sin had built up between people.

The Church: Minister of Reconciliation

22. Essential to the Church's vocation is its participation in God's reconciling work. The commission received by the disciples on the evening of the resurrection is clear. Jesus sends them as the Father sent him and charges them, "'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained'" (John 20.21-23). In the words of Paul, 'we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God' (2 Cor 5.20). Methodists and Catholics agree that 'through God's act of grace in Christ, we stand in a relationship with God which is described by the word "righteous". Our reconciliation as churches seeks to proclaim that message' (Seoul §171). There is a growing ecumenical emphasis on the unique service of the Church in the reconciling purpose of God. The Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches' convergence statement, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, asserts, 'The Church, as the body of Christ, acts by the power of the Holy Spirit to continue his life-giving mission in prophetic and compassionate ministry and so participates in God's work of healing a broken world. Communion, whose source is the very life of the Holy

¹⁰ *Sent in Love* §27. This United Methodist document has been released by the United Methodist Council of Bishops, and is to be approved by the General Conference in 2022.

¹¹ Óscar Romero, *La voz de los sin voz: La palabra viva de Monseñor Romero* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 2005), 190.

¹² John Wesley, Sermon 'The Righteousness of Faith,' WJW, vol. 1, ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), III.1, 214.

Trinity, is both the gift by which the Church lives and, at the same time, the gift that God calls the Church to offer to a wounded and divided humanity in hope of reconciliation and healing.¹³

23. The Church has received the gift of reconciliation with God in order to be God's ambassador to the world, God's minister of reconciliation. As a people who have been reconciled to God in Christ, the Church is a reconciling community that witnesses to and represents in the world the work of Christ. This ministry is expressed through the Church's witness, liturgy, and service, and it should be lived by every Christian according to the particular charism that the Spirit has bestowed for a given context. The Church is also reconciling inasmuch as it shows humanity the paths and offers the means of being fully reconciled to God, one another, and creation. The paths are those of conversion of heart and victory over sin, whether selfishness or injustice, arrogance or exploitation of others, an inordinate attachment to material goods or the unrestrained quest for pleasure. The means are those of faithful and loving attention to God's word, to personal and community prayer, and in particular, to the sacraments, true signs and instruments of reconciliation. Methodists and Catholics believe that by Baptism and the Eucharist we live in Christ, and 'it is by living in Christ and in his paschal mystery that the Church finds its unity and peace' (Durban §7). Both Catholics and Methodists have practices of reconciliation to restore and heal what is fundamentally accomplished, celebrated, and strengthened through Baptism and the Eucharist.

24. The breadth and depth of God's work of reconciliation challenge the Church not to settle for superficial forms of inclusivity and peace which do not address questions of justice. In this way, the message of reconciliation entrusted to the Church calls for the most radical of conversions. Paul declares, 'From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view' (2 Cor 5.16). Where sinful structures and corrupt worldviews have deformed the imagination, the road to reconciliation requires repentance and the rejection of these deforming influences in order to see all things in light of God's new creation.

The Church: Pilgrim of Reconciliation

25. The Church, the community of sinners reconciled to God through the power of the Spirit, has received the gift of reconciliation. Yet, as Paul writes, 'we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us' (2 Cor 4.7). The Church offers its ministry of reconciliation in spite of its own fragility and weakness. Beneath this simple expression lies a conviction: God's power is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor 12.9). The triune God is the reconciler of all things in heaven and earth, and the historic failures of the Church, however terrible they might be, cannot ultimately frustrate God's saving purpose. At the same time, this conviction is no reason for indolence. As the Church is sent to the world as a reconciling community, it must never forget that it is called to be a reconciled Church.

26. The reception of God's gift of reconciliation calls for the purification of the Church (cf. LG §§8, 51). To proclaim God's reconciling love more effectively to the world, the Church must become ever more genuinely a community of disciples united in the commitment to be converted continually to the Lord, to live as new people in the spirit and practice of reconciliation. To the people of our time, who long for credible and authentic witnesses, the Church is called to be a prophetic sign and instrument of the reconciliation that God wills for the whole of creation, to embody and exemplify reconciliation among its members. This requires that Methodists and Catholics consider their respective pilgrimages through history on their way to the Father's house (Luke 15.18) and how division has wounded the body of Christ to which we both belong. Purification calls for recognising and repenting of the manner in which we have sinned against God and one another.

¹³ World Council of Churches, Commission on Faith and Order, *The Church. Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper 214 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), §1.

27. The conversion and reconciliation of the Church is both God's gift and an ecclesial responsibility. The turn to God in humility and repentance for the sins against unity committed by Christians is fundamental. At the same time, in order to live a real reconciliation after historical situations of division and violence, it seems necessary to experience a real healing of memories. Methodists can join Catholics in affirming, 'This purification aims at liberating personal and communal conscience from all forms of resentment and violence that are the legacy of past faults, through a renewed historical and theological evaluation of such events. This should lead – if done correctly – to a corresponding recognition of guilt and contribute to the path of reconciliation. Such a process can have a significant effect on the present, precisely because the consequences of past faults still make themselves felt and can persist as tensions in the present.'¹⁴ There is a certain analogy between the process of recognising personal sins and the collective process of healing of memories. For the process to achieve its main purpose, it cannot remain only at the social or political level but must reach the most profound spiritual level. It must lead to confession of sins. 'If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins' (1 John 1.8-9; cf. UR §7). The confession of sins is always a confession of faith in a just and merciful God who has the power to make all things new.

28. Ecclesial reconciliation requires the healing of historical memories. How the past is remembered shapes how the present and future are faced. Acknowledging and assuming responsibility for collective failures makes it possible to let go of the pain and bitterness of historical wounds. The healing of memories makes possible reconciliation in truth, justice, and charity among human beings and, in particular, between the Church and the different religious, cultural, and civil communities with which it is related. 'Reconciliation between Methodists and Catholics involves a mutual reassessment of each other, which includes a new understanding of the past' (Seoul §11). The commemoration of the fifth centenary of the Reformation in 2017 challenged Catholics and Protestants to move forward in this process of purification: 'What happened in the past cannot be changed, but what is remembered of the past and how it is remembered can, with the passage of time, indeed change. Remembrance makes the past present. Whilst the past itself is unalterable, the presence of the past in the present is alterable. In view of 2017, the point is not to tell a different history, but to tell that history differently.'¹⁵

God's Appeal to Methodists and Catholics: Be Reconciled

29. The present round of dialogue challenges Catholics and Methodists to listen in a new way to the call to accept the gift of reconciliation. Paul's exhortation to the Christians at Corinth is just as valid today: be reconciled to God (2 Cor 5.20). Reconciliation cannot be reduced to a peripheral issue. Our ecclesial vocation is to be ambassadors of Christ, to strive to overcome the divisions that have wounded the body of Christ in its journey through history, and to be in solidarity with the yearnings of the world for reconciliation. We see ourselves reflected in the parable of the two sons, for we also yearn for home and yet, at the same time, we do not always long for our sisters and brothers. The road to greater unity between Methodists and Catholics calls for a pilgrimage of conversion and renewal of our respective communities. This conversion involves turning away from self-centred and divisive practices to a new way of thinking about each other.

30. This journey of reconciliation back to the Father's house requires that Christians overcome our estrangements through a series of recognitions. It demands that we confess our sinful histories and make acts of repentance. It demands that we grow in appreciation of each other, see in each other the common faith we confess, acknowledge the presence and blessing of the Spirit in the other, admit our

¹⁴ International Theological Commission, *Memory and Reconciliation. The Church and the Faults of the Past* (1999), Introduction.

¹⁵ Lutheran–Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, *From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran–Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt; and Paderborn: Bonifatius, 2013), §16.

need for each other, and celebrate the degree of communion we already share. The more we learn to receive humbly the gifts and graces that God has bestowed upon the other, the more we will grow in mutual recognition and the more we will be enabled to act together, giving joint witness in mission to the world. Each of these moments is an important stage on the path towards reconciliation. Ultimately, reconciliation will involve reception and full recognition of the efficacious nature of our ministries and of the ecclesiality of our communions as we move into full communion in faith, sacramental life, and mission.

CHAPTER 2

The Church: Reconciled with One Another through Faith in Christ

31. In the words of the Nicene Creed, Christians confess belief in ‘one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church’. The unity and catholicity of the Church exist in a certain tension. The Church is called to preach the Gospel across cultural divides and thus to find expression in a variety of forms and contexts whilst maintaining unity. All Christian communities, according to their vocation, try to express and therefore make visible their unity and continuity in the apostolic faith and mission. At the same time, within the unity of each Christian community there exists a legitimate diversity. This chapter investigates the respective means by which Catholics and Methodists each maintain their visible unity in legitimate diversity. The realisation of these structures is often flawed, failing to preserve either unity or sufficient diversity and, to that extent, they are always in need of reform and renewal. A church in which Methodists and Catholics were united would require renewed structures to reconcile our two communions whilst maintaining the rich diversity of our distinctive spiritual endowments and ecclesial heritage.

From Estrangement to Friendship

32. The Church in human history has been marked by moments in which disagreement in doctrine and practice has ruptured the bonds of unity. Early divisions arose from christological disputes in the fifth century. Strained relations between the Christian East and West became an enduring separation in the Great Schism of 1054. The sixteenth-century Reformation divided the Western Church, and the resulting separated Christian communities have since suffered further divisions. As a result, diverse churches have at times been unable even to recognise one another as being in continuity with the apostolic tradition. The modern ecumenical movement is an acknowledgement that the failure of Christians to be a community in which their diversities are reconciled within a visibly united Church has diminished the Church’s capacity to accomplish its reconciling mission as the effective agent and instrument of God’s work of reconciliation in the world.

33. The historical, theological and liturgical origins of Methodism lie in a movement of renewal within the eighteenth-century Church of England, which was itself the outcome of a reforming process that differed in some respects from the continental Reformation. That there was never an intentional separation of Methodism from the Roman Catholic Church enabled the very first report of this commission to declare that Methodist-Catholic relations bear ‘none of the historical, emotional problems consequent on a history of schism’ (Denver §6). However, it would be wrong to ignore the acrimonious history of relations between Catholics and Methodists, or to exaggerate unduly the significance of irenic texts such as John Wesley’s ‘Letter to a Roman Catholic’ (1749).

34. Methodists inherited the prevalent anti-Catholic attitudes of the Church of England and similar sentiments from other European Reformed Churches. The perception of certain Roman Catholic theological positions led to condemnations in the Church of England’s Thirty-nine Articles which were maintained in John Wesley’s adaptation, the Twenty-four Articles of Religion. Well into the twentieth century, Methodists remained vehemently anti-Catholic, sometimes refusing to regard Catholics as Christian. For their part, Catholics were quick to condemn the nascent Methodist movement. Bishop Richard Challoner wrote his ‘Caveat Against the Methodists’ in 1756 arguing that Methodists are not ‘Gospel Christians’ nor any part of the Church of Christ.¹⁶ Until the mid-twentieth century, Catholics continued to regard other Christians as heretics and schismatics, and in those parts of the world where Catholicism held political influence other Christians were sometimes denied basic freedoms and rights. Therefore, if historic injuries and injustices on both sides are to be laid to rest as structures of prejudice are dismantled, the reconciliation of Catholics and Methodists will require a

¹⁶ A slightly fuller treatment of this text is given in Seoul §23.

‘healing of memories’, which in some parts of the world are still raw. The hostilities that have marred their mutual relations constitute ways in which both Catholics and Methodists can be said to have ‘departed from the Father’s house’. As each community has repented and reformed, members of the other community have often been reluctant to share in the Father’s joy in welcoming the returning prodigal.

35. The twentieth century witnessed the growth of the ecumenical movement which went hand in hand with the renewal of liturgical, biblical, and patristic studies. The World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910 is usually identified as the catalyst for the formation of the World Council of Churches in 1948. Whilst Methodists were deeply involved in these early ecumenical ventures the Catholic Church was slow to embrace them.¹⁷ However, in the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) the Catholic Church gave its full support to the ecumenical movement. The Council fathers recognised other Christians as brothers and sisters in Christ through Baptism and affirmed that ‘many elements and endowments which together build up and give life to the Church itself’ (LG §15) are found in other Christian communities. These elements of the Church serve as effective means of grace and salvation (cf. UR §3; LG §8). Indeed, the Council did not hesitate to affirm that in some cases, certain aspects of revelation have been appreciated more fully or expressed to better effect in the life and practice of other Christian traditions (cf. UR §17). The Council thus marked a watershed in relations between Catholics and other Christians. In 1966, the World Methodist Council (WMC) accepted the invitation of the then Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity to form a joint International Commission for theological dialogue. Subsequently, national dialogues were established in Great Britain, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand.

36. In company with other Christians, Catholics and Methodists have come to recognise that their separation is contrary to God’s will as expressed in Jesus’ prayer for his followers: “that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17.21). The experience of over fifty years of sustained dialogue has served as a ‘mutual reassessment’, leading us to correct misperceptions of one another, transforming our attitudes (Seoul, Chap. 1), and enabling us to recognise many elements of the one Church in each other (Seoul §46). The transformation in Christian relations that has resulted from the modern ecumenical movement enables us now to say that Catholics and Methodists are no longer strangers to one another but friends and fellow pilgrims in the Gospel. This experience prompted Pope Francis to comment in his address to the members of the WMC and the members of this commission who gathered in Rome to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Methodist–Catholic dialogue: ‘As a result of these fifty years of patient, fraternal dialogue, we can truly say to one another in the words of the Apostle Paul: “you are no longer strangers” (cf. Eph 2.19). Yes, we are no longer strangers, either in our hearts or in our belonging to the Lord, thanks to the one Baptism that has made us true brothers and sisters. We are, and we feel ourselves to be, “members of the household of God”.’¹⁸ Dialogue and common study have also helped us to recognise the considerable degree of communion in faith that we already share, despite a diversity of theological approach, church structure, and practice.

¹⁷ The American Methodist layman, John R. Mott, played a leading role in the founding of the International Missionary Council, and later the World Council of Churches. The only Catholic contribution to the World Missionary Conference was a letter from the seventy-nine-year-old Bishop Geremia Bonomelli of Cremona. See Joan Delaney, ‘From Cremona to Edinburgh: Bishop Bonomelli and the World Missionary Conference of 1910’, *Ecumenical Review* 52.3 (2000): 418-431.

¹⁸ Francis, ‘Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to a Delegation of the World Methodist Council’, 19 October 2017, at: http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/october/documents/papa-francesco_20171019_delegazione-metodisti.html

The Unity We Seek

37. The ultimate goal of theological dialogue between Catholics and Methodists was established as long ago as 1986. In its fourth report, *Towards a Statement on the Church*, this joint commission identified the goal of dialogue as being ‘full communion in faith, mission and sacramental life’ (Nairobi §20). The commission has subsequently restated this goal on several occasions, though precisely how ‘full communion in faith, mission and sacramental life’ is attained and made visible in the structures of the Church has not been investigated until this present report.

38. Two important principles can be stated at the outset of such an investigation. The first is that ‘full communion in faith, mission and sacramental life’ need not and should not imply a form of union whereby distinctive ecclesial identities are absorbed and lost within a homogenising structure. Unity is not uniformity. From the earliest Christian communities of the New Testament, we see that the one Church has always been composed of diverse local communities bound together in fellowship through the proclamation of ‘one Lord, one faith, one baptism’ (Eph 4.5), expressed visibly through the sharing of one bread, through mutual assistance, and through prayer, mission, and service. Nor is visible unity properly envisaged by a merely putative ‘reconciled diversity’ where churches remain entirely unchanged and independent of each other whilst declaring themselves to be in full communion. Diversity has limits and ecclesial communion is not infinitely elastic such that it can embrace any and every diversity. Growth toward full, visible communion will require the reform and renewal of those structures which serve and express the unity of each communion. Indeed, ‘Christian unity is a matter not just of organisational adjustments or shared mission but of being of one heart and mind in Christ Jesus.’¹⁹ Visible unity between Catholics and Methodists will involve each communion retaining its distinctive ecclesial identity and structures in a relationship that nevertheless binds them together in mutual accountability, shared discernment and decision-making, the common confession of faith, in the shared witness of common mission, and a practice of mutual sharing in sacramental life.

39. The unity of the Church is to be a sign and instrument of God’s own reconciling love in the world. As the community of those who have been reconciled to God and one another in Christ, the Church is to be a witness to God’s design for the reconciliation and unity of the entire human community. The biblical concept of ‘communion’ (Greek *koinonia* [‘sharing’ or ‘participation’]; Acts 2.42; 1 Cor 1.9; 10.16) has become ever more central to the Christian understanding of the Church in the light of ecumenical dialogue between the churches. Methodist–Catholic dialogue has itself contributed to this development. In its eighth report, *The Grace Given You in Christ: Catholics and Methodists Reflect Further on the Church* (Seoul, 2006), the joint commission gave this exhortative definition of communion:

Communion involves holding in common the many gifts of God to the Church. The more of these gifts we hold together, the more in communion we are with each other. We are in full communion when we share together all those essential gifts of grace we believe to be entrusted by God to the Church (Seoul §63).

Drawing on this understanding, the commission was able to establish greater convergence regarding the nature of the Church as a sharing in the life of the Trinity and a participation in the paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ. The same concept of communion now offers a potentially fruitful way of considering the unity of the Church, the people of God (1 Pet 2.9) established by the outpouring of God’s reconciling love.

¹⁹ Response of the British Methodist Conference to *Ut unum sint* (1998), §4, in *Statements and Reports of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order 1984-2000* (Peterborough: Methodist Church of Great Britain, 2000), 433.

40. Just as there can be different degrees of unity, communion is not an ‘all or nothing’ concept but exists in differing degrees. In Baptism, Christians are reconciled to God, becoming sons and daughters of the Father and coheirs with Christ. In Christ, we are brothers and sisters to one another. This communion is deepened, broadened, and increasingly made visible through the many ways in which Catholics and Methodists encounter one another and share together in the Christian life. Since the different dimensions of communion are interrelated, these properly belong together and so cannot be separated in the Christian life. Whilst recognising their interrelatedness, for convenience, the following paragraphs consider in turn communion in faith, sacramental life, and mission as the essential elements of visible unity.

41. Communion in faith is based on a common baptismal confession of the apostolic faith ‘that was once for all entrusted to the saints’ (Jude 1.3). In company with other Christians, Catholics and Methodists confess together the faith of the apostles, first witnesses to the resurrection. Catholics and Methodists agree the core of this faith is ‘the love of God who saves in Christ’ (Singapore §36). Both traditions express this faith liturgically in the historic creeds, especially the Nicene and Apostles’ creeds (Singapore §38), proclaiming faith in: the triune God; the Father, source of all life; the incarnate and resurrected Son; and in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Church. Very sadly, alongside this shared inheritance of faith Catholics and Methodists also inherit some theological differences fiercely contested from the time of the Reformation. The work of this commission in over fifty years of painstaking theological dialogue has clearly established the high degree of theological understanding that Catholics and Methodists already share even in relation to historically divisive issues (see *Synthesis*). The 2006 Methodist Statement of Association with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification demonstrated the high degree of consensus shared regarding this doctrine which was central to the disputes of the Reformation. The Statement of Association cites the far-reaching agreement of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (§2) and goes on to say that remaining differences of theological emphasis are not ‘sufficient cause for division’ (MAJDDJ §3). Catholics and Methodists agree that there exists an ‘order or “hierarchy of truths” since they vary in their relation to the foundation of the Christian faith’ (UR §11; CCC §90; cf. Rio §116). Whilst we share the central truths of faith in common, the present dividing doctrinal differences are less foundational and the ‘hierarchy of truths’ therefore calls for reflection on how these remaining differences could be held together and reconciled.

42. Communion in sacramental life is in many ways the most challenging aspect of the goal of theological dialogue between Catholics and Methodists since it deeply affects the ways in which they live the Christian life and express ecclesial communion. This joint commission has done a great deal to reveal the many ways in which the sacramental life of Catholics and Methodists respectively has much in common. The ecumenical journey might appropriately be described as being from the font to the altar. Methodists and Catholics agree that ‘Baptism initiates the individual into the koinonia of the church’ (Dublin §54); through Baptism ‘we are bound together ... both with the Lord and with others who share in the sacramental meal’ of the Eucharist (Nairobi §12). Because they recognise each other’s Baptism and thus recognise each other fully as brothers and sisters in Christ, Catholics and Methodists share a sacramental bond of communion. That is to say, they share in many of the holy things that Christ bestows on his Church: they share together in prayer; they listen together to the Word of God and exercise ministry (catechesis, preaching, *lectio divina*); and they can also share in the sacramental grace of marriage. Our common Baptism orients Catholics and Methodists to the day of full ecclesial communion when we will share together in the celebration of the Eucharist at one table—the fullest visible manifestation of ecclesial unity. Catholics and Methodists agree that in the Eucharist the bread and wine sacramentally become the body and blood of Christ (Durban §82); that it is Christ’s once and for all sacrificial offering to the Father ‘celebrated and made present in the eucharistic memorial’ (Durban §95); and that those who partake of the sacrament in a eucharistic celebration are ‘knit more closely together as Christ’s body’ (Durban §85). Although much progress has been made, the painful reality is that the joint celebration of this visible sign of reconciliation is

not yet possible; differences remain concerning the relationship between the ministry of those who preside at the Eucharist and the visible structuring of communion in the one apostolic Church.

43. We have grown towards a shared understanding of the sacramental nature of the ordained ministry as a ‘graced participation in the continuing pastoral leadership of Christ himself’ (Seoul §90). Together we regard the apostolic ministry as a constitutive element of the Church (Durban §140) and agree ‘that the orderly transmission of apostolic ministry belongs to the essence of the church’ (Durban §143). Nonetheless, we differ in our understanding of the form of that ministry and its role in assuring fidelity to the inheritance of the apostles. While Methodists consider that ‘succession of ordination from the earliest times’ can serve as ‘a valuable *symbol* of continuity’ in faith, Catholics regard ‘an episcopal succession from the apostles’ as an effective guarantee of communion in the faith and witness of the apostles (Durban §143-144). We commit ourselves to deepening our common understanding of the apostolic ministry and to recognising more fully the many ways in which ministries in both communions serve the faithful and effective handing on of God’s gifts. Already we can discern differing degrees of apostolicity in one another’s practices (cf. Durban §177). We look forward to the day when growth in understanding will bear fruit in a formal act of mutual recognition which this commission has described as ‘a fresh creative act of reconciliation which acknowledges the manifold yet unified activity of the Holy Spirit throughout the ages. It will involve a joint act of obedience to the sovereign Word of God’ (Singapore §94).

44. Communion in mission is the natural consequence of communion in faith and sacramental life. When we recognise the real yet imperfect communion we already share in the apostolic faith and the sacramental life we are impelled as Catholics and Methodists to act together. Already, in many places, Catholics and Methodists share in witnessing to the Gospel through evangelisation. Sharing together as far as possible in a common mission, whilst not yet enjoying a relationship of full communion in faith and sacramental life, is a stimulus to further convergence in these areas. Crucially, in the absence of full communion in faith and sacramental life, full communion in mission of itself is insufficient as a goal of theological dialogue between Catholics and Methodists. Witnessing together to a Gospel of reconciliation requires that Catholics and Methodists become a living sign of that saving unity which is God’s will for the entire human race (cf. LG §§1, 9). For Methodists and Catholics to be so reconciled will require ecclesial structures and sacramental practices that make unity visible and tangible, and that enable us to remain together in unity as we face new challenges in mission, pastoral practice and doctrine.

Ecclesial Structures of Communion in the Service of Reconciliation

45. Structures of communion are at the service of the Church’s reconciling mission. In Baptism, all the faithful are anointed by the Spirit who ‘guides them into all truth’ (John 16.13). Nourished by the Word of God and assisted by the Spirit, they are gifted with an innate ‘sense of the faith’ when they take counsel together to discern the will of Christ. This sense of faith is the innate capacity of the people of God, who share in the prophetic office of Christ, for discernment and right judgment concerning the truth of the Gospel; it is a work of the Spirit reflected in the consensus of the whole Church (cf. LG §12).²⁰ At every level of ecclesial life, Christians are called to walk together in Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14.6). The term synodality (from the Greek *syn-hodos*, meaning ‘on the way together’) expresses the fact that the pilgrim people of God walk together with the Risen Christ. The practice of synodality is essential for the active engagement of the sense of the faith by the whole community of believers. For Methodists, the connexional principle expresses this sense of ‘walking together’, and synodality is expressed in conferencing. Throughout the Church’s history, Christians have relied upon the ministry of oversight and upon visible structures to support

²⁰ *Lumen gentium* grounds its teaching on this matter in the writings of Saint Augustine: ‘It shows this characteristic through the entire people’s supernatural sense of the faith when “from the bishops to the last of the faithful” it manifests universal consensus in matters of faith and morals’ (LG §12; cf. Augustine, *De praedestinatione sanctorum*, 14, 27).

and express their life of communion and connexion, gathering for common praise, discernment, and deliberation concerning the expression of doctrine and witness most suited to the effective proclamation of the Gospel. The ministry of oversight is exercised in the service of unity and, whenever that unity is wounded, of reconciliation.

46. Catholics and Methodists each possess ecclesial structures that serve the unity, mission, and integrity of their respective communities at local, regional, and global levels. These typically include councils, synods, and conferences of various kinds, all of which are expressions of synodality. It is commonly recognised that existing structures of communion are under great stress today. In the last half century, both Catholics and Methodists have been confronted by many challenges as they experience new ways of being worldwide Christian families with all the diversity this implies. After receiving the deliberations of the bishops gathered from around the world at the International Synod on the New Evangelization, Pope Francis openly acknowledged that the functioning of Catholic structures for governance presently suffers from ‘excessive centralization’ and ‘monolithic uniformity’, making local church communities less responsive to immediate needs for mission (EG §32). Within the WMC, new tensions are felt as decisions on matters of human sexuality by some conferences are not shared by others.

47. The Christian Scriptures and Tradition attest to a general pattern in the structuring of ecclesial life and suggest that all ministry ‘should be exercised in a personal, collegial, and communal way’ (BEM §26). In some churches, one or other of these dimensions has been emphasised at the expense of the others. In general, a Catholic emphasis on the personal dimension of ordained ministry and decision-making has led to insufficient attention to the collegial and communal dimensions, in particular to the importance of local initiative and to the meaningful participation of the baptised faithful. Recent popes have observed the need to better implement structures for the participation of the laity at the parish and diocesan levels provided by existing canon law in a more effective practice of pastoral discernment.²¹ In Methodist practice, a strong emphasis on the communal dimension of ecclesial life – especially the value of the common priesthood of the baptised reflected in the full participation of lay persons at all levels of authoritative decision-making – gives rise to a diminished concern for the collegial bond with other conferences, or for expressions of oversight or representation in the personal ministry of bishops and superintendents. Both communions are challenged to find a greater balance of these dimensions in the structuring and practice of discernment and decision-making for the sake of unity in faith and mission.

48. Methodists and Catholics have begun to reassess the judgments of the past and recognise increasingly in one another’s communions the living reality of the one apostolic faith (cf. Seoul §§11-44). We acknowledge the presence and activity of the one Church of Christ in and through each other’s corporate ecclesial life. We are thus more deeply aware of the growing responsibility that we have to one another as ecclesial families growing together towards fuller, visible unity. As we face the need for the strengthening and renewal of structures of reconciliation and communion within our respective communions, we humbly acknowledge our need to learn and receive from one another (Seoul §§144, 11). Recognising the need for ‘pastoral conversion’ at every level of ecclesial life today, Pope Francis invites us to consider, ‘How many important things unite us! If we really believe in the abundantly free working of the Holy Spirit, we can learn so much from one another! It is not just about being better informed about others, but rather about reaping what the Spirit has sown in them, which is also meant to be a gift for us’ (EG §246). In this spirit, we consider the structuring of our respective ecclesial communions and ask, how might we be more fully reconciled and enriched by one another in this exchange of gifts?²²

²¹ John Paul II, ‘Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Inuente*’, 6 January 2001, no. 44; Francis, EG §31; CIC §§511-514, 536-537.

²² These reflections aim to build upon the perspectives developed previously in *The Grace Given You in Christ* (Seoul, 2006), §§107-135. Cf. UUS §28, footnote 53.

Local Structures of Communion

49. For most Methodists and Catholics, the primary experience of ecclesial life is centred in the congregation or parish community. Catholic dioceses are composed of parish communities in a given territory. Pastoral councils at parish and diocesan levels, which include lay participation, advise the parish pastors and the diocesan bishop concerning pastoral priorities. Similarly, the diocesan synod advises the bishop. The establishment of these bodies remains the prerogative of the pastor or bishop (facultative) and they serve a consultative, rather than deliberative, role. Bishops also take counsel on matters of importance with the council of priests in each diocese.²³ A weak implementation of structures for consultation in many contexts has given rise to a distancing between bishops and their people. In the absence of a vital synodal life, a bishop will be poorly equipped to listen to the ‘sense of faith’ among the people, to attend to genuine pastoral needs, or discern the gifts and charisms that God has given for the good of all. New structures are needed to enable a dialogue that recognises and incorporates the gifts of the many lay women and men who serve in stable forms of lay ecclesial ministry. Greater consideration might be given to their inclusion, together with permanent deacons, into the ministerial structures of the local church. Such a development would be in harmony with the tradition of the early church, which envisioned a variety of ministers collaborating with the bishop in service of the gathered people of God (cf. SC §41).²⁴

50. Local Methodist churches, under the pastoral oversight of presbyters, are grouped together under the pastoral oversight of superintendents. In turn, these are under the pastoral oversight of bishops or their equivalent, who exercise a personal ministry of oversight on behalf of the conference. A presiding bishop or president (a presbyter) represents the authority of the conference but at every level authoritative decision-making involves ordained ministers and lay people together. The various national or regional conferences exercise plenary authority within their autonomous jurisdiction. The roots of the Methodist movement are found in a time when a ‘Constantinian’ model of church – that is to say, one in which bishops exercised a mix of religious and civic functions – continued to shape the predominant form of oversight in the Church of England. For this reason, Wesley and his later followers did not easily perceive this office as a true service of the Gospel, and Methodists remain suspicious of monarchical forms of episcopal oversight.

51. For both Catholics and Methodists, local structures of communion do not always maintain a proper relationship between lay and ordained. The crisis of sexual abuse by clergy and other pastoral workers, including failures by bishops to listen to victims, report these allegations to civil authorities for investigation, and then follow canonical processes of discipline, reveal a deeply ingrained culture of clericalism in the Catholic Church as well as a failure to learn from other institutions. This clerical culture, which contributes to a passive and overly deferential laity, reflects a fundamental failure to understand ministry as service, including the responsibility of ministers to protect the vulnerable entrusted to their care. At its worst, clericalism reflects a contempt for the laity and a disregard for their gifts and competencies. Similar problems exist in Methodist churches. All forms of abuse, whether spiritual, sexual, or financial involve an abuse of power within the network of ecclesial relations. A failure to tackle these abuses or to provide proper processes for redress represents a failure of oversight. Tighter structures of accountability and codes of conduct are being developed across our communions. The voices of victims and survivors of abuse are being structured into listening processes and changing the mindset and culture of leadership. Both Catholic and Methodist communions recognise the need to restore a proper balance between the personal exercise of episcopate and the shared responsibility of all the baptised in discerning the ways of the Gospel.

²³ CIC §§511-516, 536-537.

²⁴ The Second Vatican Council makes its own the vision of the second century bishop, Ignatius of Antioch: ‘the principal manifestation of the church consists in the full, active participation of all God’s holy people in the same liturgical celebrations, especially in the same Eucharist, in one prayer, at one altar, at which the bishop presides, surrounded by his college of presbyters and by his ministers’ (SC §41; cf. *Ign. Magn. 7; Ign. Phld., 4; Ign. Smyrn., 8*).

Regional Structures of Communion

52. For Methodists and Catholics, the personal ministry of oversight by bishops (and superintendents) has both communal and collegial dimensions, entailing a ‘solicitude for all the churches’ (Singapore §74): ensuring at once unity within the local church and the bonds of communion with other local churches. Those entrusted with the ministry of oversight in both Methodist and Catholic communions represent their local churches and the sense of faith as it is discerned within them. Synodal structures exist at regional and intermediate levels in both communions that serve and express the communion in faith and mission between the local churches.

53. The experience of the Second Vatican Council gave great impetus to national conferences of bishops which were formally recognised and mandated for the first time. This led to the establishment of new national conferences where they did not previously exist, and to the establishment of regional and continent-wide conferences. Their purpose is to foster the mission of the local churches to the common good of the wider society and the suitable adaptation of the Church’s prayer and evangelizing activity to the conditions of various cultures (cf. CD §§37-38). The role of the episcopal conferences has been the subject of some debate in the last half century, including their role in the authoritative proclamation of the faith. In this regard, Pope Francis has observed, ‘The Second Vatican Council stated that “like the ancient patriarchal Churches” episcopal conferences are in a position “to contribute in many and fruitful ways to the concrete realisation of the collegial spirit” (LG §23). Yet this desire has not been fully realised, since a juridical status of episcopal conferences which would see them as subjects of specific attributions, including genuine doctrinal authority, has not yet been sufficiently elaborated’ (EG §32).

54. The Second Vatican Council also recognised the important role of ecclesiastical provinces composed of several dioceses in a given geographic region and presided over by the metropolitan bishop. They had been structured in this way from the earliest times to share resources and to foster common pastoral action and the mutual support of the local churches. Although Vatican II expressed its wish that these provinces ‘should flourish with renewed strength’ through regular gatherings of the bishops and their people – including clergy, religious, and the laity – in provincial and plenary councils (CD §36), this desire has not been realized and such meetings remain exceedingly rare. It might be said that their influence has been somewhat eclipsed by the evolution of episcopal conferences.

55. For Methodists, the regional structure of communion is the general or autonomous national Conference, which comprises ordained ministers and lay representatives, all of whom have an equal voice. These Methodist bodies are the locus for authoritative decision-making on matters of doctrine, discipline, and policy for mission. Bishops or superintendents are called to exercise a ministry of pastoral oversight (episkope) within the context of each conference. They proclaim the consensus attained by the conference and carry out its decisions in matters of discipline. Whilst the conference is understood to exercise a ‘corporate episkope for the service of the church’ (Brighton §74), Methodists continue to be led by a desire to reassess the historic episcopate against the horizon of growth in unity with other Christian communions. They are led to consider the nature of this personal ministry of authoritative discernment and proclamation of the Word. They ask in what ways might the prophetic role of bishops call the body of believers to remain in the faith of the apostles?

Global Structures of Communion

56. Catholics and Methodists each have ecclesial structures that embody the dynamic of connexion and communion between their diverse local or particular churches gathered from around the world. For Catholics, the bond of communion between the particular churches finds expression in the college of bishops. Just as the first apostles formed a group or ‘college’, those who succeed them and continue

their ministry of building up the church entrusted to them by Christ form a college (cf. LG §§19-20). The international synod of bishops, established by Pope Paul VI during the Second Vatican Council (cf. CD §5), constitutes a global structure of communion and collaboration of the whole college of bishops who together with the Bishop of Rome are ‘solicitous for the entire church’ (LG §23; cf. CD §6). Ordinary general assemblies meet at regular intervals, whilst ‘extraordinary’ assemblies have been called to address matters of urgent concern. At present, the synod of bishops remains a consultative body offering advice to the Bishop of Rome, who is both a member and the head of the college – the body of those who are successors to the apostles. At the discretion of the pope, it might be invited to exercise a more deliberative role. The post-synodal documents promulgated during the pontificate of Pope Francis have reflected the consensus of the bishops on matters of pastoral concern. Representatives of other world communions are always invited to attend and address a synod of bishops, and Methodists have recently been among those so invited.

57. For Methodists, the WMC constitutes a structure of global communion among the particular Methodist Churches (and a number of United and Uniting Churches²⁵). It exists to foster Methodist unity, witness, mission, and unity with other Christian communions. Similarly, regional councils exist in various continents that reflect the communion between the churches. Other world communions, including the Catholic Church, send representatives to participate in meetings of the WMC. These meetings are generally held twice in a five-year period to confer on matters of mutual concern relating to the mission and ministry of the churches. Admission to membership of the WMC requires the agreement of member churches and an affirmation of adherence to a statement of the Wesleyan Essentials of the Faith, including doctrine, worship, witness, and service. Receiving a new member church entails the mutual recognition of faith, sacraments, and ministry. By regulating membership in this way, the Council indirectly exercises oversight of the communion in faith among the particular Methodist churches according to the Wesleyan principle of ‘watching over one another in love’. A church making doctrinal decisions that do not abide by the Wesleyan Essentials of the Faith would presumably be excluded and judged to have broken the fellowship of the global Methodist communion. The Council has no executive authority; nevertheless, it is influential in preserving and maintaining communion in faith among Methodists. Having formally consulted all member churches, the officers of the WMC were authorized to sign the Methodist Statement of Association with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification when the Council met in Seoul in 2006. This suggests that the WMC not only helps to express the communion or connexion between the member churches; it has come to serve as a vehicle for discerning the consensus of faith among them.

58. Methodists and Catholics accept the role of the early ecumenical councils as instruments of communion that enabled Christians to discern a faithful interpretation of the scriptures. Their teaching is summarized in the creeds that we profess together (cf. Brighton §21; Rio §8). From the first centuries, the term ‘ecumenical council’ designated those councils that gave expression to the consensus of faith of the whole Church. Later, it was applied to those councils truly representative of all the local churches of the worldwide Christian community. The Spirit, whom Christ assured would lead us to the truth of faith (cf. John 14), assisted the early ecumenical councils in their discernment and interpretation of the scriptures. ‘With different emphases, Methodists and Catholics “affirm both the human frailty and the God-given indefectibility of Christ’s Church”’ (Seoul §84; Brighton §39).

59. In an era of ecclesial division, it has not been possible to convoke a council at which the ecclesial bodies of all baptised Christians are represented, causing some to question whether present day

²⁵ These churches were constituted by the union of Methodist Churches with other churches: examples include the Uniting Church in Australia (with Presbyterian and Congregationalist Churches); the United Church of Pakistan (with Anglicans, Lutherans, and Presbyterians); the Church of North India and the Church of South India (with Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists); and the Uniting Church of Sweden (with Baptists and Mission Covenant). These are examples of an approach that prized the ‘organic’ model of ecclesial unity that was prevalent in the twentieth century. Some of these churches belong to other world confessional families as well.

councils can properly be called 'ecumenical'. Catholics count the Second Vatican Council, which gathered together all those bishops in communion with the See of Rome, as the twenty-first ecumenical council, but readily acknowledge that its teaching is not binding upon other Christian communities. Nevertheless, the Council fathers sought to teach in a language that would commend itself to all Christians. An important feature of Vatican II and a sign of the Council's ecumenical intention (cf. UR §1), was the presence of observers from other world communions, including the WMC. They neither took part directly in the conciliar debate nor voted on its decrees, yet they contributed valuable insights in exchanges with the bishops and theologians at Vatican II. In recognition of Christ's will for the unity of the Church, Catholics and Methodists look forward to a future ecumenical council where the ecclesial communities of all baptised Christians in the household of faith are fully represented.

Papal Primacy: Reconciling Ministry or Obstacle to Reconciliation?

60. A previous report of this commission, *Towards a Statement on the Church* (Nairobi, 1986), examined the biblical witness concerning Simon Peter, among the first of the apostles called to follow Jesus (Matt 10.2; Mark 3.16; Luke 6.14). He is first to confess his faith in Jesus as the promised Messiah (Matt 16.13-20; Mark 8.27-30; Luke 9.18-27). Nonetheless, the Gospels let us know that Peter did not always understand Jesus' mission. On the road to Caesarea Philippi he fundamentally misunderstood the nature of Jesus' messiahship (Mark 8.31-32). The passion narratives record that, fearing persecution, Peter denied Jesus three times (Matt 26.69-75; Mark 14.66-72; Luke 22.54-62; John 18.15-27) and fled in the face of the crucifixion.

61. Peter experienced first-hand the love and forgiveness of Jesus, who invited him repeatedly to follow in the ways of humility and self-giving to the point of merciful love and the forgiveness of his persecutors. The New Testament records that Peter was among the first witnesses to the resurrection (John 20.3-10; Luke 24.12), first to proclaim it to the nations and to call others to faith in the Risen One (Acts 2.14-42; 4.1-22; 8.14-25; 10). He called upon 'all who are far off' to repent and receive the forgiveness of their sins, to be reconciled to God and to one another by the gift of the Spirit. Having experienced how the love and forgiveness of God led to new life, he played a preeminent role in proclaiming and witnessing to the resurrection (Mark 16.7; 1 Cor 15.5). Despite Peter's failings and incomprehension, Jesus, praying that he might return and remain steadfast in faith, called him to 'strengthen your brothers' in faith (Luke 22.32). John's Gospel records the Risen Jesus' commissioning of Peter to shepherd his flock (John 21.15-23), thus linking the pastoral role of oversight or episkope, of watching over the Church in love, to the ministry of unity and reconciliation. As Jesus called Peter to repent and turn back to him, Peter would continue the ministry of calling others to return to God.

62. By the second century, the local church in the city of Rome came to be known for its exemplary witness of faith, being the church of the martyrs, especially of the martyrdom of the apostles Peter and Paul. Early in the second century, Ignatius of Antioch wrote of Rome as 'the church that presides in love'.²⁶ Later that century, Irenaeus of Lyons would refer to it as the community 'founded and constituted' by the martyrdom of Peter and Paul.²⁷ Tertullian wrote of the local community at Rome in the early third century, 'O Happy church on which the apostles poured forth all their teaching, together with their blood'.²⁸ Other local churches turned to the community at Rome and its bishop for assistance in times of crisis (e.g., First Clement). The Christian witness in Rome was an encouragement and support to other Christian communities as they struggled against division and

²⁶ Ignatius of Antioch, *Ign. Rom.*, Prologue. This dialogue has explored the early sources of the petrine ministry previously in Nairobi (1986), and more recently in Brighton (2001).

²⁷ Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, III, 3.

²⁸ Tertullian, *De prescriptione haereticorum* 36.3.

dissension. In this reconciling ministry, the bishop of Rome called them to return to communion with other communities.

63. Early Christian writers convey a sense of a continuing presence of Peter in and through the ministry of his ‘vicar’ or representative, the bishop of the church founded upon his proclamation and witness to the message of God’s reconciling love. Thus, the bishops attending the Council of Chalcedon (451) affirmed that ‘Peter had spoken through Leo’.²⁹ This association of the bishops presiding over the life of the local church at Rome with Peter attests to the fact that their witness was faithful to the teaching of Christ and the apostles. Methodists and Catholics agree that Peter exercised a role of leader, a certain ‘primacy’ among the other apostles, as they founded the early churches by their preaching, celebration of the sacraments, and witness. For Catholics, this primacy is a ministry of reconciliation at the service of the unity in faith that binds the diverse particular churches.

64. Beginning from the fourth century, when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, the office of bishop increasingly took on the form of other temporal authorities. Even in their attempts to free the papal office from the interference of temporal rulers, the bishops of Rome adopted monarchical modes of leadership. The unintended effect of this evolution was to obscure, in many ways, the fundamental character of this ministry as service and of leading others to God in Christ. Thus, it is not surprising that John Wesley did not perceive, in the popes of the eighteenth century, a compelling witness to the good news of God’s reconciling love in Jesus Christ. He considered the titles attributed to the papal office as excessive, as if the human office holder were ‘claiming the prerogatives that belong to God alone’.³⁰ The Wesleyan movement was born in the context of the Church of England, which had broken communion with Rome in the sixteenth century. Thus, many Methodists came to see the rejection of the papal office as a defining feature of their confessional identity. Methodists and Catholics agree that the ways in which the office of the Bishop of Rome has been exercised at various times has not always contributed to unity and understanding.

Towards a Conversion of the Papacy in Our Time

65. In more recent times Catholics have come to a deeper awareness of how the form and exercise of the papal office have hindered the witness of its essential mission, which is the service of reconciliation and unity. They recognise that the claims of papal authority have often been misunderstood by both Catholics and other Christians. Pope Paul VI acknowledged that his ministry remained a stumbling block for many, without a doubt the most serious obstacle on the path to the reconciliation of the churches.³¹ Heeding the call from the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, Pope John Paul II invited church leaders and theologians to enter into a ‘patient and fraternal dialogue’ with him to ‘find a way of exercising the primacy’ that is ‘open to a new situation’ (UUS §95). He recognised the need for genuine reform, distinguishing between the ‘way of exercising the primacy’ and ‘what is essential to its mission’ of serving the communion of the local churches (UUS §§95-96). Pope Francis has noted ‘the urgent need to think about “a conversion of the papacy”,’³² observing, ‘we have made little progress’ in regard to John Paul II’s invitation. Through dialogue, he insists, Catholics must rediscover the ways that this ministry might be ‘more faithful to the meaning which Jesus Christ wished to give it and to the present needs of evangelization’ (EG §32). Francis models a style of leadership and oversight that serves the unity of the churches, rather than exercising power over them. Without denying the need for a right ordering of church structures and ministries, he

²⁹ *Acts of the Council of Chalcedon*, vol. 2, trans. Richard Price and Michael Gaddis (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), 23 (Second Session; 10 October 451).

³⁰ John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, 2 Thessalonians 2:3.

³¹ Paul VI, ‘Discours du Pape Paul VI aux membres du Secrétariat pour l’union des chrétiens’, 28 April 1967, at http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/fr/speeches/1967/april/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19670428_unione-cristiani.html.

³² Francis, ‘Address of his Holiness Pope Francis on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the Synod of Bishops’, 17 October 2015, at: http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html.

nonetheless invites us to consider the Church as ‘an inverted pyramid’ in which those with oversight (in Catholic terms ‘the hierarchy’) stand beneath, in humble service to the people of God. They are called to follow the example of Jesus who, at the Last Supper, bent down to wash the feet of the disciples. Accordingly, one of the ancient titles of the pope is ‘servant of the servants of God’.

66. Methodists welcome the ways in which the exercise of episkope in service of the universal Church by recent bishops of Rome has been more centred on the teaching of Christ and more attentive to the practice of collegiality and synodality in ways that honour the diverse needs of the local churches. They recognise the many ways in which the pope can speak with conviction and authority on behalf of all Christians. The Catholic Church comprises a global communion of diverse particular churches which preserve their autonomy. Nevertheless, Catholics do not always live out this unity in diversity in harmonious ways. This gives rise to a situation where Methodists perceive the Catholic Church to be tightly controlled from Rome, which leads to the suppression of legitimate diversity (cf. EG §32). In a fully reconciled Church, where the ministry of the pope is at the service of unity, Methodists would not be required to lose their characteristic traditions and polity.

67. Questions regarding the nature and exercise of papal jurisdiction and the infallible exercise of the papal teaching office have not been fully resolved. Remaining differences must be faced at some future point in our dialogue. Nonetheless, through dialogue Methodists and Catholics together are coming to a deeper understanding of the ministry of universal primacy in the service of reconciliation and communion. In the light of much recent ecumenical study and calls for a conversion and renewal of the papacy, Methodists and Catholics alike would benefit from a new formulation of the doctrine concerning the exercise of authoritative discernment by the Bishop of Rome within the communion of the local churches. They would welcome a much clearer articulation of the relationship between the Bishop of Rome and the bishops of the particular churches, and of the responsibility of the Bishop of Rome to consult the local churches in an open and transparent manner in the process of discernment leading to an authoritative judgment. At the same time, they would urge that every act of teaching show more clearly how its judgments are grounded in the scriptures, which teach all that is necessary and sufficient for salvation. Such transparency would inspire greater confidence in the working of the Spirit and the proclamation of God’s reconciling Word through the petrine ministry of the Bishop of Rome.

CHAPTER 3

Rites and Practices of Reconciliation

68. The previous chapters established the nature of the Church as a household of reconciled sinners, faced with the eschatological realities of our being in Christ and the struggles of life in the Spirit in this world. We now reflect together on how our respective communions have developed liturgical rites and spiritual practices of reconciliation to serve growth in Christ in this ecclesial reality.

69. Catholics and Methodists understand their practices of reconciliation to derive from, correspond to, and participate in Jesus's own actions and practices: the solidarity with sinners which he expressed in his submission to baptism; his teaching and preaching; his calling of sinners to new life; his forgiveness of sins and restoration of persons to their community; his healing of the sick; his dignifying of outcasts and the marginalized; and his ongoing work as a physician of souls.³³ In this sense, practices of reconciliation continue and make present Jesus's own ministry of reconciliation in each successive generation. Because of their basis in Jesus's ministry, Methodists and Catholics share some common practices, though differences in theological interpretation have often been regarded as divisive and are thus in need of clearer understanding.

Our Common Baptism

70. Divergences in sincerely held matters of doctrine and discipline mean that ecclesial structures are not yet able to hold Catholics and Methodists within a fully united communion. Nevertheless, a 'sacramental bond of unity' already exists between us by virtue of 'our common baptism in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit' (Durban §28b-29; cf. Seoul §78) and our shared profession of faith (cf. above §41). Reconciliation in Christ takes effect in the sacrament of Baptism by which, through God's grace, persons enter and grow more deeply into the paschal mystery of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection. In Baptism, God incorporates persons into the divine life and fills them with the Holy Spirit. Before God and the community of faith, at Baptism they (or, in the case of infants, others who profess the Church's faith) renounce and repent of the bondage of sin, profess their adherence to Christ as Lord and Saviour, and commit to being God's holy people in the Church and the world.

71. Baptism, as the sacrament of unconditional grace, heals all that separates humans from God. Although we were created in the image of God and, from the beginning, God intended friendship with human beings, we have been unfaithful to that relationship by aggrandising our own wills and inclining towards evil, sin, and disobedience. When we turn from God, God nevertheless remains turned toward us, continually inviting us back into relationship, a relationship made possible by Christ's overcoming of sin and death to set us free to be God's people (Rom 6.3-14). Thus, in Baptism, 'as Christ is received in faith, original sin is erased, sins are forgiven, the baptised are justified in the eyes of God and become a new creation' (Durban §46). Through the mystery that is the sacrament, Baptism makes us 'right' (that is, justified) with God, and with all believers enables us to 'share the communion of the Spirit' and to 'seek perfection in hope and in love through faithful response to God's continuing gifts of grace' (Durban §46).

72. Through Baptism, we are reconciled with God and incorporated into Christ's living body, the Church. 'For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptised into one body' (1 Cor 12.12-13a). Through Baptism, therefore, we are reconciled to each other (cf. Gal 3.27-28) and with the Church of every time and place. Oneness in Christ is recognised by a common discipleship:

³³ Cf. Is 53.4-5; Luke 5.31-32; Luke 9.2-6. Writers in the patristic period regarded Christ as a physician and his redemptive work as a medicine of salvation (e.g., Augustine *Sermon* 352, 3, 8-9).

to love our neighbour (cf. Mark 12.30-31) and to care for the world that God so loves (cf. John 3.16). This Baptism that Methodists and Catholics share with other Christians is ‘the visible foundation of the deep communion which already exists between us and which impels us to ever deeper unity with each other and participation in the life and mission of Christ himself’ (Durban §29; cf. Seoul §78).

Eucharist and Reconciliation

73. Baptism is a ‘living, continuous reality’, a ‘lifelong sacramental gracing of the Christian’s journey’ which ‘enables our hearts to burn with the Spirit as we hear God’s word’ and which ‘brings us to communion with Christ in the breaking of bread, consecrating us for the holy work of God’s mission’ (Houston §106). At the Eucharist, the gifts given at Baptism – our conformity to Christ, new identity as children of God, and incorporation into the Church – are perfected, thereby encouraging and enabling our witness to God’s work of reconciliation with us and with the world (cf. SCar §17; Houston §107). The Eucharist renews and fulfils our Baptism and is a ‘foretaste of its completion when we will be completely one with Jesus Christ and one another’ (CUMT §18). Beyond these affirmations, theological differences between Catholics and Methodists regarding the nature and good ordering of the Church, ordained ministry, and the Eucharist prevent us from receiving holy communion at a common table. Our communion with each other remains imperfect, which motivates us toward further reconciliation.

Reconciliation and Liturgies of Word and Sacrament

74. At the heart of Catholic and Methodist worship stands reconciliation with God, reconciliation with the self, reconciliation of the Christian community, and reconciliation with the world. Different liturgical components attest to particular aspects of God’s ministry of reconciliation through Christ. The entirety of the eucharistic celebration, from the gathering of God’s people at the beginning to their sending forth at the end, reinforces the eucharistic action of the liturgy proper which especially recalls Baptism and orients the faithful to Christ’s paschal mystery.

75. Worship begins with God’s calling out to the scattered faithful as well as seekers to come and assemble (*ekklesia*) around God’s word and sacrament, and so renew themselves as the living body of Christ. The principal initiative for this gathering rests with God, who has already reconciled the world, and calls the ‘royal priesthood’ of God’s own people to ‘proclaim the mighty acts of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvellous light’ (1 Pet 2.9). God’s call to worship is an invitation to enter again into God’s story of salvation and to reorient our lives toward God’s vision for humankind and all of creation. Having recognised God’s prior actions and presence in their midst, the people of God gather, with introductory words of greeting and reconciliation exchanged between the presiding minister and the congregation: grace and peace.³⁴

76. When Christians speak words of peace, we acknowledge that our relationships with God, neighbour, and the world may flourish and deepen. Yet those relationships at times may wither and become distant or even hostile. Worship summons us to reconciliation; it gives us an opportunity to confess sin and brokenness, to receive God’s forgiveness, and commit to a change of heart and an amendment of life. Both of our communions use prayers for the corporate or general confession of sin, which acknowledge that all present have sinned against God and neighbour as a body and as individuals. In response to petitions for God’s mercy, the minister offers words of pardon, absolution, or assurance that voice God’s gift of (and desire for) reconciliation.³⁵ If our prayers of confession are to be honest, we must admit the ongoing sin of division in which Catholics and Methodists are complicit, repent, ask forgiveness, and pray for divine assistance in changing hearts and transforming structures in order to move toward the unity for which the Son prayed.

³⁴ Cf. 2 Cor 1.2; Eph 1.2; Phil 1.2; Titus 1.4; 1 Pet 1.2; 2 Pet 1.

³⁵ For Catholics, ‘[t]he rite concludes with the Priest’s absolution, which, however, lacks the efficacy of the Sacrament of Penance’ (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal* §51).

77. Reconciliation is at the heart of the Gospel and is set before God's people in the reading and proclamation of scripture. Catholics and Methodists desire that the biblical witness 'be opened up more lavishly, so that richer fare may be provided for the faithful at the table of God's word' (SC §51). For Catholics and many Methodists this means the use of a lectionary organized according to the days and seasons of the Christian year to guide the selection of scripture for worship. There are strong affinities between the Lectionary for Mass and the ecumenically developed Revised Common Lectionary used by some Methodists, even though the ecumenical lectionary omits the deuterocanonical books used by Catholics. These similarities give Methodists and Catholics opportunities to share in *lectio divina* and to reflect together on common readings in preparation for preaching. We agree that the people of God grow through a 'continued hearing and assimilation of the Word of God' (Singapore §18), which 'brings us together as a community of those who look to God's creative and redemptive Word for all their needs' (Rio §117).

78. 'Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ' (Rom 10.17). Through hearing the exposition of scripture by means of preaching, the people of God encounter the living Word of God. The preacher, assisted by the Holy Spirit and sharing in Christ's ministry of witness to God's good news, has the responsibility of locating God's Word among a particular people at a particular place and time. Preaching declares God's saving love and forgiveness (Luke 24.47), illuminates the mysteries of faith, calls people to a transformed life in Christ, and charges the faithful to demonstrate love for God, for self, for one another, and for all of God's creation (John 13.35). For both Methodists and Catholics, liturgical preaching is principally an element of ordained ministry since word and sacrament belong together, though Methodists also have a long-standing practice of authorizing lay preachers for public worship.

79. The scriptural witness also finds expression through song by means of psalmody, scriptural canticles, and metered and un-metered song crafted by Christian believers across the generations. In all these things, it is Christ who provides these words to his people, for 'it is he himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church' and 'when the Church prays and sings, for he promised: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them"' (Matt 18.30)' (SC §7).

80. The Church, from its beginning, has articulated in creedal form the faith by which we believe and the faith that is believed (cf. Rio §§33-35). The recitation of these creeds in the gathered congregation is a confession of the common faith. Catholics and Methodists affirm this faith in their respective liturgies by means of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed and the Apostles' Creed, both trinitarian statements that place at their centre biblical teachings about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the eschatological hope. The Apostles' Creed, the profession of faith used historically at Baptism, reminds us of the gift of reconciliation already received through Baptism and the 'continuous call into a life of pilgrimage toward the kingdom' (Durban §67-68) that includes God's grace to participate in the work of reconciliation – a work inseparable from 'true faith in the incarnate Son of God' (EG §88).³⁶

81. Since Christ, our high priest, is our eternal intercessor before the Father (Heb 7.25), and because the Holy Spirit intervenes to make prayers worthy (Rom 8.26-27), Christians are emboldened to make 'supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings' (1 Tim 2.1) for others as well as ourselves (Phil 2.4). Methodist and Catholic liturgies include extended prayers in which intercession is made for the Church, the world and the whole of creation, the nation and the nations, civil authorities, local communities, the oppressed and victims, and the sick, suffering, and dying. These prayers may also include petitions or expressions of lament, which address directly situations of conflict or

³⁶ For a joint Catholic/United Methodist statement on the articles of the Apostles' Creed, see CUMT §§27-67.

circumstances of suffering and the need for active intervention. Whereas Catholic prayers of intercession may also include petitions for the dead, Methodists typically do not offer intercessions for the dead, preferring instead language of remembrance or thanksgiving for the departed. Methodists may ‘increasingly be open to the practice of prayer for the departed’ (Houston §§155, 191); nevertheless, this remains a subject for further conversation. Prayers for others are offered in the confidence that the faithful in exercising the royal priesthood are entrusted with a ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5.18-19) and that God will hear our petitions (Luke 18.7-8) and strengthen our commitment to this ministry.

82. In thanksgiving for God’s gifts of reconciliation, the people of God offer gifts of God’s creation –money, bread, and wine – whilst also offering themselves as ‘living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God’ (Rom 12.1). In turn, these gifts become means for God’s ongoing reconciliation: money to relieve the needs of the world and to support the Church’s missional efforts; bread and wine for the remembrance (*anamnesis*) of Christ’s ‘sacrifice of our reconciliation’ that it might ‘advance the peace and salvation of all the world’ (RM, Eucharistic Prayer 3).

83. Methodists and Catholics both continue the ancient practice of the liturgical sharing of peace though the action may be located at different points in the liturgy. Many Methodist authorized liturgical texts situate the peace prior to the eucharistic prayer in accordance with the instruction in Matthew 5.23-24 that grievances must be settled prior to offering a gift at the altar, thereby explicitly connecting the peace with reconciliation. Some Catholic eucharistic liturgies share this tradition, notably the historic liturgies of Milan, Italy (Ambrosian or Milanese Rite), and Toledo, Spain (Mozarabic Rite), and because of their antiquity, the Catholic Church permits their use today in their respective communities. In the Latin Rite Catholic Mass, the exchange of peace follows the eucharistic prayer as a sign of the peace established by the presence of the risen Christ and as a preparation for receiving communion together. Unfortunately, the nature of the action as reconciliatory is lost when instead the peace serves as a gesture of greeting or fellowship. Both our communions might benefit from deep reflection on the implications of sharing the peace especially when, for whatever reasons, reconciliation is not possible and persons are unable honestly to express ‘peace, communion, and charity’ to each other.

84. The eucharistic prayers used today by Catholics and many Methodist churches show similarities in shape and content, for they draw upon a shared liturgical tradition rooted in texts and practices of the early church. Though spoken by the presiding minister, this prayer is understood to be the prayer of the entire gathered community. The eucharistic prayer gives thanks to God for God’s saving design from the beginning and for reconciling the world in Jesus Christ even while we were sinners (Rom 5.8-11). Indeed, ‘it is the risen and ascended Christ himself, by the power of the Holy Spirit, who unites his once-for-all eternal self-giving and ours as one single offering, pleaded and presented to the Father and accepted by him’ (Durban §134). Catholics and Methodists agree, ‘as we celebrate the Eucharist, called together by the Father, the Risen Lord makes us more fully what he wills his Church to be, by the power of the Holy Spirit’ (Seoul §94). Thus, it is fitting that our respective eucharistic prayers include petitions for the unity of the Church, that we may become what we receive.³⁷

85. Liturgies of both of our communions include the saying of the Lord’s Prayer – a text that stands at the heart of all Christian prayer following Jesus’s instruction to ‘pray then in this way’ (Matt 6.9). In the early church, persons preparing for Baptism learned this prayer and said it alongside the faithful for the first time following their baptism; thus, the ‘Our Father’ has a strong historic association with baptismal identity and the need for ongoing repentance. The Lord’s Prayer is also a ‘school of prayer: to pray it is to rehearse our identity as children of God by adoption, in fellowship with the church throughout time and space’ (CUMT §70). Accordingly, ‘to pray for God’s kingdom to come, on earth

³⁷ Cf. Augustine, *Sermon 227*.

as it is in heaven, is at one and the same time to commit ourselves to the work of this kingdom, to seek conformity of our wills to the will of God, and to locate our lives within God's reign and seek to make this a reality for others as well' (CUMT §84). In this prayer, as in the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18.21-35), Jesus links the reconciliation of the sinner to the sinner's reconciliation with others.

86. As corporate worship concludes, participants go forth 'together in Christ to share more deeply in God's work in our world' (Seoul §94). The liturgy does not end with the dismissal; in being sent, the faithful continue the work of worship that belongs to the entire people of God, which is to participate in God's mission.

Other Practices of Reconciliation

87. Despite living as communities reconciled in Christ, Christians continue to struggle with 'the mystery of sin' even after the fundamental forgiveness and reconciliation of Baptism (cf. RP §§14-18; Houston §27). The struggle with sin continues even for a pilgrim community living in the Spirit. Christ's followers retain 'that liberty, which entails the possibility of becoming guilty' (PR A1.3), and so recognise together that the Church on the way 'is still possessed of the sins and failings of its members' (Houston §96).

88. Personal sin is never exclusively an individual matter between the sinner and God. 'Sin inflicts the results of the distortion or refusal to live in right relationships on other people and on the world order. It instills an unnatural distance between human beings and their creator, and creates the conditions that allow for violence, suffering, and death' (CUMT §93). Methodists can join with Catholics in recognising that 'penance should not be understood as a mere private and innermost attitude. Because (not "although") it is a personal act, it also has a social dimension. This point of view is also of importance for the justification of the ecclesial and sacramental aspects of penance' (PR AII.2). For Catholics, reconciliation is one of the sacraments of the Church. Methodists, in company with other traditions shaped by the Reformation, refer only to Baptism and the Eucharist as sacraments ordained by Christ, but accept that practices of reconciliation are a means of grace and therefore have a sacramental quality.

89. This shared understanding is expressed in the ways that both Methodists and Catholics practise various communal and individual means of repentance and reconciliation. We have already noted how our respective liturgies of word and sacrament contain common elements and practices of repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. In addition, there are patterns of prayer and worship outside of eucharistic and normative Sunday worship practised by Methodists and Catholics, some of which are found in both traditions.

90. Any liturgical or ritual expression of reconciliation in Christian life must find its context within a holistic daily living of repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Catholic teaching affirms that the Sacrament of Reconciliation must not be seen as the only ecclesial expression of reconciliation; its practice 'does not mean that through the action of the Holy Spirit reconciliation may not also take place outside of the boundaries of the Church' (PR BIII.1). Indeed, 'isolating the sacrament of penance from the context of the entire Christian life, which is inspired by the spirit of reconciliation, leads to an atrophy of the sacrament itself' (PR CII.1). John Wesley's recommended practice of an evening examination of conscience (continued by some Methodists today) corresponds closely to Catholic practices of an end of day *examen*. Both our traditions recognise the penitential power of prayer and fasting, especially during the season of Lent.

Distinctive Methodist Practices of Reconciliation

91. Two worship practices instituted by John Wesley and maintained today by many Methodist churches highlight the importance of reconciliation within the church community. The covenant service, held annually, often on New Year's Eve or on New Year's Day, emphasizes 'God's readiness to enfold us in generous love, not dependent on our deserving. Our response, also in love, springs with penitent joy from thankful recognition of God's grace.'³⁸ The heart of the service is a 'covenant prayer' by which persons commit themselves anew to God. Wesley published a text for the service in 1780 and, since then, Methodist communities have prepared covenant services appropriate for their context that are more or less dependent on Wesley's original, with some in the late twentieth century connecting covenant renewal more closely with baptismal renewal.

92. The Methodist-style love feast, with roots in the agape meal of the early church and Moravian practices from the early eighteenth century, traditionally involves a collection for the poor, extended time for testimony and prayer, and a simple meal of bread, cake or crackers along with water or tea (shared from a single 'loving cup'). Congregations of the African Methodist Episcopal Church have a long-held custom of celebrating the love feast within a week before a Sunday observance of the Lord's Supper as an opportunity for peacemaking and settling any disputes within the community.³⁹

93. Another historic Methodist practice that facilitated reconciliation was attendance at the largely lay-led accountability groups of increasing intimacy (the 'societies', 'class meetings', and 'bands') at which persons would confess their sins and shortcomings (James 5.16), pray together, and give and receive spiritual guidance in order that they might 'watch over one another in love' (Eph 4.15-16).⁴⁰ Particularly in the intimate bands, persons would freely state their mind and condition to each other for sharing both weeping and rejoicing (Rom 12.15). The rules that governed these groups advised a social dimension to a life of reconciliation: Methodists were 'carefully to abstain from doing evil', 'zealously to maintain good works', and 'constantly to attend on all the ordinances of God'.⁴¹ Versions of these groups persist today among Methodists, some with the classic names, others described as covenant, prayer, or support groups, all designed to encourage growth in the love of God and participation in God's mission. There are Catholic parallels with the monastic mutual confession of sins within monastic communities and the practices of some new communities who name their sin publicly and pray for conversion.

94. The authorized service books of a number of Methodist churches now include specific liturgies for personal ('individual') repentance and reconciliation intended to occur outside of the normal Lord's Day liturgy. Prefatory materials make clear that all forgiveness and reconciliation is God's gift, to which the church may respond, empowered by the Spirit, with acts of confession and the declaration of forgiveness, which then may serve as 'an important step towards reconciliation, spiritual growth and wholeness'.⁴² These services of personal reconciliation tend to follow a pattern of repentance, confession, assurance of forgiveness and the commitment to change and a new start, centred on the scriptures. All are clear that the liturgical expression of personal reconciliation 'ritualises a moment in a process of conversion: it is worship rather than therapy',⁴³ though the liturgy might occur in the context of pastoral counselling. Restoration of a person to the community of faith

³⁸ 'The Covenant Service', *The Methodist Worship Book* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1999), 281.

³⁹ Henry M. Turner, *The Genius and Theory of Methodist Polity, Or, The Machinery of Methodism* (Philadelphia: Publication Department, A. M. E. Church, 1885), 210-212.

⁴⁰ 'The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies', in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 9. Edited by Rupert E. Davies (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), §2, 69. Some Methodist and Wesleyan denominations today include the General Rules among their governing documents.

⁴¹ 'Directions given to the Band Societies, Dec. 25, 1744', in *The Works of John Wesley*, III, 9:79.

⁴² 'Service of Repentance and Reconciliation', *The Methodist Worship Book* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House), 422.

⁴³ 'A Service of Reconciliation', *Uniting in Worship 2* (Sydney: Uniting Church Press.), 541.

typically takes place through public prayer and confession or by the renewal of baptism (with accompanying renunciation of sin and profession of faith). A number of Methodist churches also provide liturgical texts for congregational reconciliation, particularly appropriate for the season of Lent and for occasions ‘when the church assembles to acknowledge its brokenness and to be assured of God’s grace.’⁴⁴

95. Methodists, as circumstances and contexts require, offer liturgies and practices focused upon the reconciliation of relationships and the healing of memories. These events may address the Church’s complicity, past or present, in the ‘violation of human dignity based on race, class, age, sex, nation, or faith; the exploitation of people because of greed and indifference; the misuse of power in personal, communal, national, and international life; the search for security by those military and economic forces that threaten human existence; and the abuse of technology which endangers the earth and all life upon it.’⁴⁵ Whenever possible, the Methodist community develops these events in close cooperation with those wronged. Acts of heartfelt confession and repentance, coupled with pleas for forgiveness by God and the offended neighbours, aim to bring about reconciliation or at least repair broken relationships. There are Catholic parallels to these liturgies and practices; for example, the liturgy of repentance for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 which included repentance for sins against the unity of the Church.

Distinctive Catholic Practices of Reconciliation: The Sacraments of Healing

96. Catholics usually identify two rites as ‘Sacraments of Healing’: the Sacrament of Reconciliation⁴⁶ and the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. Both rites serve to forgive sins, reconciling the penitent to God; bestow peace, reconciling the penitent with himself/herself; restore or strengthen the bonds of communion, reconciling the penitent with the Christian community; and reconcile the penitent to God’s creation. Whilst both rites have relevance to this report, the focus here is on the Sacrament of Reconciliation which has three ritual forms: for an individual; for several penitents with individual confession and absolution; and for several penitents with general confession and absolution.

97. Catholics explain the development of the sacramental rite by their understanding that Jesus, after his resurrection, sent the Holy Spirit upon the apostles to empower and commission them to continue his ministry of forgiving sins (cf. *Rite of Penance* §1). Catholics would agree with many other Christians that this sharing in Christ’s ministry occurs primarily in Baptism as the principal sacrament of forgiveness. This is expressed liturgically in the process of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults and the celebration of the Baptism of adults at the Easter Vigil. The actions of turning away from sin and towards God in prayers of exorcism reflect the practices of the early church. Some Methodists have recovered the celebration of Baptism at the Easter Vigil, and include stronger language about the renunciation of sin prior to the profession of faith both then and at Baptism on other days.

98. The need for a rite of forgiveness separate from Baptism arose when the early church faced the pastoral challenge posed by those who had apostatised from the faith or committed serious sin (adultery and murder). In the earliest rites (late third/fourth centuries), which were restricted to once in a person’s lifetime, a formal excommunication admitted the sinner to the order of penitents. After completing what was normally a lengthy period of penance, the person was reconciled in a rite where the bishop imposed hands. The reconciled sinner was thereby readmitted to a place among the faithful and would participate once again in the Eucharist. The reconciliation rite was closely related to Baptism and ordered towards the Eucharist: it renewed the forgiveness of sins received at Baptism

⁴⁴ ‘To Reconcile and Make New’, in *Celebrate God’s Presence: A Book of Service for The United Church of Canada* (Etobicoke, Ont.: The United Church Publishing House, 2000), 669.

⁴⁵ From the ‘World Methodist Council Social Affirmation’ (<https://worldmethodistcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/WMC-Social-Affirmation-1.pdf>).

⁴⁶ The term ‘Sacrament of Reconciliation’ appears throughout this document for the rite which is also known as the Sacrament of Penance or the Sacrament of Confession.

and re-established the penitent within the Christian community, restoring the broken bonds of Christian communion that finds its sacramental expression in the Eucharist. Already in these early practices, called canonical penance, the four elements that constitute the modern rite can be discerned in some form: contrition, confession, penance, and absolution. Many contemporary Methodist rites take up a similar fourfold shape culminating in words of forgiveness or pardon.

99. The connectedness of these early rites of reconciliation with the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist demonstrates their ecclesial nature. The Second Vatican Council and the subsequent reform of the liturgy recaptured and emphasised this ecclesial dimension of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church taught that those who receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation 'obtain pardon from the mercy of God for the offence committed against Him and are at the same time reconciled with the Church, which they have wounded by their sins, and which by charity, example, and prayer seeks their conversion' (LG §11; cf. CCC §1445). The 1973 *Rite of Penance* provided two communal forms for the celebration of the sacrament, and in the introduction noted that 'the communal celebration shows more clearly the ecclesial nature of penance' (§22).

100. Sixth-century monastic practices of reconciliation and particularly those developed within Celtic monasticism also greatly influenced the form of the rite as it emerged. Although the elements of contrition, confession, and penance are in evidence, Celtic practices differed in a number of ways from the earlier canonical penance. In contrast to the latter's public liturgy, the penitent approached the monk-confessor privately, as in spiritual direction. Furthermore, the monastic reconciliation was repeatable and, consequently, was not limited to the grave, communion-breaking sins of apostasy, murder, or adultery, but rather dealt with less serious sins, enabling the penitent to grow in the spiritual life. As the wider Church gradually adopted these practices, reconciliation changed from a once-in-a-lifetime event to a discipline encouraged as a regular part of the Christian's spiritual life.

101. Following this Celtic tradition, Catholics understand the Sacrament of Reconciliation as an integral part of the call to holiness which extends to all the baptised. The sacrament is celebrated in the context of a Christian life patterned by ongoing and deepening conversion. Through prayer, the reading of scripture, and examination of conscience, the Christian recognises all that alienates them from God, from oneself, from the other, and from creation. When we confess these sins, the sacrament helps to 'form our conscience, fight against evil tendencies, let ourselves be healed by Christ and progress in the life of the Spirit' (CCC §1458). The experience of the sacrament is a 'regaining of lost joy, the joy of being saved' (RP 31.III).

102. The contemporary Sacrament of Reconciliation unites the ecclesial dimension of the early canonical rites with the dimension of personal holiness inherited from monastic practices. The Introduction to the *Rite of Penance* describes both these elements using a number of scriptural images. 'In the sacrament of penance the Father receives the repentant son who comes back to him, Christ places the lost sheep on his shoulders and brings it back to the sheepfold, and the Holy Spirit sanctifies this temple of God again or lives more fully within it. This is finally expressed in a renewed and more fervent sharing of the Lord's table, and there is great joy at the banquet of God's Church over the son who has returned from afar' (*Rite of Penance* §6d).

Clarifying Historical Disagreement and Identifying Common Ground

103. Reformation disputes about the sacramentality of reconciliation centred on the question of Christ's institution of the practice. This subject is reflected in both the decrees of the Council of Trent and the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England from which John Wesley's Articles of Religion derive. A renewed understanding of what Catholics mean by Sacred Tradition has proved a major ecumenical advance, which is relevant both to what Catholics mean by dominical institution and to Wesley's conventional understanding of 'those five commonly called sacraments'. Previous statements of this commission have established that although Methodists only use the word

‘sacrament’ for Baptism and Eucharist, they ‘do not thereby deny a “sacramental quality” to other rites’ (Seoul §179). Indeed, Methodists agree with Catholics that ‘the category of “effective sign” enables the sacramental economy to be described in a way that goes beyond Baptism and the Eucharist’ and that ‘the Church has authority to institute other rites and ordinances which are valued as sacred actions and signs of God’s redeeming love in Christ’ (Durban §178), although they would not go so far as to say that the Church is divinely commissioned to perform these rites. For their part, Catholics acknowledge that all sacraments are not of equal importance and, following the medieval tradition, are able to acknowledge Baptism and Eucharist as the principal sacraments.⁴⁷ However, deeper questions remain concerning what the sacramentality of the rite of reconciliation implies for Catholics and Methodists respectively. These questions relate to the role of the Church, its ministers, and its rites in the bestowal of and reception of grace.

104. Catholic teaching typically cites two principal commissioning texts of scripture in support of the practice of sacramental reconciliation: the power to loose and bind given to Peter (Matt 16.19; 18.18), and the power to forgive sins given to the disciples (John 20.23). From these texts Catholics understand that Jesus, after the resurrection, sent the Holy Spirit on the apostles to empower them, and commissioned them to continue his ministry of forgiving sins (cf. *Rite of Penance* §1). Catholics understand this ministry to continue in the Church, exercised principally in Baptism, but subsequently through the Sacrament of Reconciliation in which ‘pardon and peace’ is given to the penitent because the sacrament ‘imparts to the sinner the love of God who reconciles’ (CCC §1424).

105. Methodists can agree with Catholics that the mission of the Church is to continue Jesus’ ministry of forgiving sins and that it is empowered for this ministry, but would not understand the ordained to possess a unique role in the bestowal of Christ’s forgiveness. Methodist commentators over the generations have taken the position that none of the scripture passages addressing confession of sins delineated explicitly a ‘priestly’ model for resolution. They interpreted Jesus’ giving the power to remit sin to the apostles (John 20.23; Matt 16.19, 18.18) as a gift and responsibility exclusive to those Jesus chose personally. Only in a much more limited sense was Jesus’ commission applicable to ministers of later years: they were, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to declare in Christ’s name his pardon, forgiveness, and grace. The principal pastoral paradigm was James 5.16 and its call for Christians to ‘confess ... sins to one another and pray for one another’ so that God would bestow healing. In this sense, all Christians, as members of the priesthood of all believers, were to encourage others to ‘believe in the Lord Jesus Christ’ in order to receive salvation (Acts 16.31). Ministers did not have judicial power, but rather were to be sympathetic listeners and fellow labourers, who would assist the penitent in returning to Jesus Christ, the source of forgiveness and reconciliation. This remains the perspective of most Methodists today.

106. Methodist concerns about the intermediary role of the Church are brought into focus by Catholic insistence on the necessity of the sacrament.⁴⁸ Many Methodists would echo the concerns of certain sixteenth-century Reformers who saw this teaching as restricting the repentant Christian’s access to God’s forgiveness and restricting God’s grace of forgiveness to sacramental rites.

107. Catholics agree with Methodists that God’s forgiveness is not bound to the sacrament and is able to work beyond it.⁴⁹ Acknowledging the weight of these concerns, Catholics point to two important distinctions which help the sacrament to be understood not as a restriction on God’s grace

⁴⁷ Cf. *General Directory for Catechesis*, rev. ed (1997), no. 115.

⁴⁸ In 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council made the sacrament an annual duty in preparation for the reception of communion at Easter, and the Council of Trent reaffirmed the necessity of the sacrament for those who had committed mortal sin (Trent, 14th Session, 1551, On the Sacrament of Penance, Chapter I, DS 1669. Cf. *Rite of Penance* §7).

⁴⁹ Pope John Paul II taught, ‘Certainly the Saviour and his salvific action are not so bound to a sacramental sign as to be unable in any period or area of the history of salvation to work outside and above the sacraments’ (RP 31, I; see also CCC §1257).

but as an instrument of God's grace for the sinner. First, in describing the seriousness of sin, a distinction arises between mortal and venial sin. Mortal sin is that sin which pertains to grave matter and is committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent. It results in a radical break in love of God and of neighbour – a loss of God's gift of love (*caritas*). God's mercy alone can restore this love. Sin that does not meet any one of the conditions for mortal sin is described as 'venial'. These everyday faults do not break our friendship with God and are forgiven by turning to God in either personal or liturgical prayer. However, after baptism, the Sacrament of Reconciliation is necessary for the forgiveness of mortal sins. For persons not guilty of mortal sin, participation in the sacrament is a way to growth in communion with God. In the sacramental encounter, the priest helps the penitent to discern the gravity of their sin, to open the heart to the grace of God that leads to contrition, and to hear and receive a word of pardon that is an encounter with the mercy of God.

108. Turning to the attitude of the penitent, the second important distinction is between contrition and attrition. Perfect contrition, which is a gift of God through the prompting of the Holy Spirit, arises from a pure love of God, and is sufficient for the forgiveness of all sins, including mortal sin. The Council of Trent acknowledged that such contrition 'reconciles humanity to God before the sacrament is actually received',⁵⁰ though the Council also taught that contrition implies the desire to receive the sacrament. However, the movement of the human heart to sorrow is often slow and imperfect. The Church calls this imperfect sorrow 'attrition'. It is sufficient to bring the penitent to the sacrament, but the sacramental liturgy deepens it and perfects it (cf. CCC §1453). In circumstances in which the sacrament is not available, such as during the closure of the churches during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, the desire to receive the sacrament, accompanied by perfect contrition, a request for forgiveness and a firm resolution to receive the sacrament as soon as possible, is sufficient to obtain forgiveness of all sins.⁵¹

109. Methodist practices of reconciliation acknowledge, at least tacitly, that there are different degrees of sin. However, following John Wesley, Methodists do not ordinarily use the language of mortal and venial sins. Wesley rejected what he understood to be the Catholic teaching on this distinction.⁵² Instead, Wesley distinguished between 'sin, properly speaking' and 'sins of infirmity'. In the strict sense, sin is 'a voluntary transgression of a known law of God'.⁵³ Sins of infirmity are involuntary 'deviations from the holy and acceptable and perfect will of God' and do not separate a person from the love of God.⁵⁴ Wesley's distinction approaches the Catholic distinction between mortal and venial sin, and offers theological support for Methodist practices of reconciliation.

110. Methodist practices of reconciliation reflect a different perspective on the offering of God's forgiveness and the role of the minister. In Methodist liturgies that include prayers of confession, including Sunday worship, Methodists understand that words of pardon or forgiveness (drawn from scripture or newly composed) are to follow confession, but are not a priestly absolution. This belief is rooted in the position of John Wesley, who noted in 1755 his objection to the absolution in the Church of England's 'Order for the Visitation of the Sick',⁵⁵ and in 1779 claimed that priestly absolution was 'only declarative and conditional', for 'judicially to pardon sin and absolve the sinner,

⁵⁰ Trent, 14th Session, On the Sacrament of Penance, Chapter IV. See also PR C.II.4: 'In these cases the Tradition of the Church, confirmed by the Council of Trent, acknowledges the possibility of a Christian obtaining the forgiveness of grave sin by perfect contrition. According to the same Tradition perfect contrition also always implies the desire (*votum*) of receiving the sacrament of penance as soon as possible . . . such a perfect contrition is probably a sufficient disposition for receiving the Eucharist.'

⁵¹ Trent, 6th Session, (1547), Decree on Justification, Chapter 14, DS 1542; and 'Note from the Apostolic Penitentiary on the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the current pandemic, 23.03.20' at (<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2020/03/20/200320d.html>).

⁵² Cf. John Wesley, 'Some Remarks on Mr. Hill's "Farrago Double-Distilled"', WW, 10:444.

⁵³ See John Wesley's letters to John Hosmer (WW, 12:239) and to a 'Young Disciple' (WW, 12:448).

⁵⁴ John Wesley, Sermon 'The First-fruits of the Spirit', WJW, 1:241, II.8.

⁵⁵ 'Ought We to Separate from the Church of England?' WJW, 9:572.

is a power God has reserved to himself'.⁵⁶ Because of his concerns about the absolution, Wesley omitted the entire visitation service in his revision of the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* entitled *The Sunday Service of the Methodists* (1784). He also replaced the lengthy absolution after the General Confession in Morning and Evening Prayer with the collect for the twenty-fourth Sunday after Trinity and, by changing pronouns, made the absolution in the Holy Communion liturgy into a supplicatory prayer. In addition, *The Sunday Service* throughout omits the term 'priest' in favour of 'minister', 'elder', or 'deacon' out of a desire to retain the language of the New Testament for the ministers of the Church. The received liturgical tradition for many Methodist churches thus does not include a formulation for absolution. Even in Methodist churches that for a time used for worship an Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*, a declaration or prayer of forgiveness typically was preferred to follow a prayer of confession in order to express clearly that only God has the power to remit sin.

111. Catholics agree that God alone can forgive sins (cf. CCC §§430-31, 1441) and are sensitive to a potential misunderstanding of the role of the priest in pronouncing the words of absolution. The introduction to the *Rite of Penance* describes the confessor as giving 'the dispensation of another's kindness' (§8) and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* stresses, 'The confessor is not the master of God's forgiveness, but its servant', adding that the priest must 'unite himself to the intention and charity of Christ' (§1466). Because of sensitivities concerning the role of the confessor, many other Christians who practise rites of reconciliation, of both East and West, avoid formulas such as 'I absolve you', used in the Latin Rite. Although the absolution in the current Roman Rite retains this formula, these words come at the very end of the prayer of absolution which reads, 'God the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son, has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you of your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit' (*Rite of Penance* §48). Taken as a whole, the prayer 'indicates that the reconciliation of the penitent comes from the mercy of the Father; it shows the connection between the reconciliation of the sinner and the paschal mystery of Christ; it stresses the role of the Holy Spirit in the forgiveness of sins; finally, it underlines the ecclesial aspect of the sacrament because reconciliation with God is asked for and given through the ministry of the Church' (*Rite of Penance* §19). In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, as in all sacraments, Catholic understanding is that 'it really is Christ who acts in the sacraments through the Holy Spirit for the Church' (CCC §1120; cf. SC §7; LG §10).

112. Ultimately, how far Methodists and Catholics can come to agreement concerning the sacramentality of the rite of reconciliation depends upon how we understand and articulate the action of God's grace at work in the rite. John Wesley's words and subsequent Methodist understanding that the absolution is 'only declarative' would seem to suggest significant disagreement. However, previous reports of this commission have achieved remarkable convergence regarding sacraments. This convergence has been based on an understanding that no longer polarizes word and sacrament but sees the Word itself as sacramental and the sacraments of the Church as moments in which the Word of God is effectively proclaimed (cf. Durban §20). For Catholics the Sacrament of Reconciliation makes effectively present the forgiveness and reconciliation that was tangibly present in the person of Jesus. This is not to say that Catholics believe that the sacrament works automatically, or that the Church claims control over God's grace. Catholics and Methodists agree together that 'justifying grace never becomes a human possession to which one could appeal over against God' (JDDJ §27), but that God forgives whenever human hearts turn to God in true penitence.

113. The Methodist doctrine of assurance — that is a theology of grace which 'includes not only the assurance of the forgiveness of our sins but also the promise that we are liberated from the power of sin' (MAJDDJ §4.4) — provides some parallel to Catholic confidence in the sacramental action of

⁵⁶ 'Popery Calmly Considered', WW, 10:153.

reconciliation. Methodist assurance and Catholic faith in the efficacy of the sacraments are both grounded in the commonly held belief that the ‘faithful can rely on the mercy and promises of God’ (JDDJ §34).

114. The mission of the Church is to continue the reconciling ministry of Jesus as a sign and instrument of that reconciliation in the world. The liturgical rites and spiritual practices within our respective communions make present and effective the reconciliation that sinners and the outcast experienced when they encountered Jesus.

115. For Methodists and Catholics, Baptism is the primary means of reconciliation, and participation in the Eucharist is the visible sign of that reconciliation. Methodists place greater emphasis on the Eucharist as a means of reconciliation, whereas Catholics emphasise the Eucharist as the fullest expression of our reconciliation. For this reason, Catholics do not consider it appropriate normally to share the Eucharist with other Christians whilst the churches remain divided. Although we agree that God alone can forgive and is not limited to acting through liturgical forms, Catholics and Methodists differ in their understanding of the role of the Church, its ministers and its rites in conferring God’s forgiveness. Nonetheless, in cases of pastoral need, ‘in certain circumstances, by way of exception, and under certain conditions,’⁵⁷ the Catholic Church is open to welcoming other baptised Christians to receive the Sacraments of Penance, Anointing, and Eucharist which signifies and expresses a genuine communion of faith (cf. UR §8; CIC §844).

⁵⁷ *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* (1993), §129.

CHAPTER 4

The Church's Ministry of Reconciliation in the World

116. The earlier chapters of this report have reflected on God's reconciling work in Christ and focused particularly on reconciliation within the Church as well as between Catholics and Methodists. This chapter focuses on the reconciling mission of the Church in a world struggling with the exploitation of peoples, mass migration, social unrest, human trafficking, economic instability and injustice, pandemics, climate change, and the extinction of species. Methodists and Catholics affirm that churches 'should always begin from the perspective of unity and not from the point of view of division in order to strengthen what is held in common even though the differences are more easily seen and experienced'.⁵⁸ This is an imperative when we recognise our common Baptism; it impels us to work together for reconciliation by building justice, peace-making, and good stewardship of God's gift of creation, our common home. In this chapter, we explore certain aspects of what Catholics and Methodists can say together about this ministry of reconciliation.

117. The Church exists to proclaim Jesus Christ and to continue the great commission to preach the Gospel to the ends of the world (Matt 28.16-20). Communion and mission are profoundly related. The greater the communion, the more effective the mission, especially in many parts of the world where people are sceptical about religion and claims to authority. 'The call to holiness is also a call to unity in the Church, the body of Christ. Jesus prayed for his disciples to be sanctified in the truth that they might all be one (John 17.17, 21). Holiness and Christian unity belong together as twin aspects of the same relationship with the Trinity such that the pursuit of either involves the pursuit of the other' (Houston §5). The ways in which Methodists and Catholics share in this mission of the Church together and grow in holiness and unity will witness more credibly to the Gospel. We need to be open to the Holy Spirit who will show us how we can grow together, perhaps in unexpected and surprising ways.

118. Catholics and Methodists recognise together the relationship between Christian faith, evangelisation, and social action. For Catholics, the call to express our faith in action is well-stated by the synod of Catholic bishops meeting in 1971: 'Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation'.⁵⁹ In this synodal document, the understanding of liberation from sin and oppression is well developed. Methodists hold a similar commitment to social holiness. A social affirmation adopted by the World Methodist Council (WMC) in 1986 states: 'We rejoice in every sign of God's kingdom: in the upholding of human dignity and community; in every expression of love, justice, and reconciliation; in each act of self-giving on behalf of others; in the abundance of God's gifts entrusted to us that all may have enough; in all responsible use of the earth's resources.'⁶⁰

119. Jesus quotes from the prophet Isaiah in his first sermon, according to Luke's Gospel: "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release

⁵⁸ The 'first imperative' in *From Conflict to Communion* (Lutheran–Roman Catholic Commission on Unity), §239, cited in the Notre Dame Consultation Statement (March 2019) on the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification by representatives of five world communions: Anglican, Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, and Reformed; at https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/2019/documents/190303-jddj_nd_statement_final-en.pdf.

⁵⁹ Second General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (30 November 1971), 'Justice in the World', no. 6, in *The Gospel of Peace and Justice: Catholic Social Teaching Since Pope John*. ed. Joseph Gremillion, 514 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1976).

⁶⁰ World Methodist Council Social Affirmation; at <http://worldmethodistcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/WMC-Social-Affirmation.pdf>.

to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour'" (4.16-30). The year of the Lord's favour is the Jubilee Year, when justice in economic and social terms would be restored to the oppressed through the remission of debts, the liberation of slaves, and the restoration of land which had been lost. Then, Jesus startlingly announces the reconciled fulfilment of this promise with these words, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing' (Luke 4.21). In these words, Jesus proclaims God's plan for the reconciliation of humanity with God, with each other, and with the earth itself. The Acts of the Apostles describes the Jerusalem community of disciples as united in heart and mind, sharing everything in common (Acts 4.32). Catholics and Methodists lament with one voice that we have failed to embrace fully God's invitation and not heeded Jesus' command to live the Jubilee Year, such that humanity and the earth suffer because of acts of injustice, violence, and the misuse of the gift of creation.

Reconciliation by Building Just Relationships

120. Reconciliation between persons is the culmination and fruit of a process. It is the bestowal of the gift of God. This process involves repentance, forgiveness, and restoration of relationships; it requires restitution for wrongs committed and the commitment to rebuild relationships with new understandings and insights. The voices of those who have suffered injustice cry out to be heard and understood. It is a complicated process, often fraught with false starts, which requires God's grace and human commitment as well as patience. 'Catholics and Methodists are committed to serve the poor and oppressed of our time, and they understand the Church as an instrument in bringing God's peace and justice to all God's people ... As Christ reached out to touch and restore the lives of the outcasts of his society, so the Church is called to reach out in his name to touch and transform the lives of the untouchables and marginalized of our world' (Seoul §69). Catholics and Methodists commit to this work of reconciliation and to the visible and structural establishment of justice as aspects of the Church's reconciling mission in the world.

121. The Gospel has always inspired individuals to works of mercy. The lives of the saints, and the efforts of guilds, religious orders, and lay movements demonstrate many benevolent works carried out by members of the Catholic Church. Likewise, early Methodists were committed to the poor and marginalised. Methodist societies flourished in poverty-stricken, urban areas, where the poor and disenfranchised lived. Following Wesley's lead, Methodists opened free medical clinics and schools, introduced loan programmes to help individuals launch businesses, and provided funds for basic charitable relief. Methodists and Catholics continue such charitable works today and challenge structural systems that reward the rich and exacerbate economic inequality, poverty, and hunger.

122. Catholic theological understanding of the relationship between the state and society evolved over time. More sustained reflection develops with Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and the subsequent body of social teaching. Successive documents respond to particular historical and social situations. Although the context of the different documents varies, we can identify principles which emphasise the dignity of the person, the importance of the family, the responsibility of the state to serve the common good with respect for subsidiarity and solidarity, and just access to the resources of the earth that God has created for the good of all people and not only for the powerful. A strong sense of social responsibility always accompanies Methodist concern for radical social action. Having become more aware of the ecological challenge in recent years, Catholics and Methodists have reflected more deeply on the relationship between people and the need for responsible stewardship of creation (cf. HEFG and LS). Because of the interconnectedness of all reality, the just ordering of society and the stewardship of creation are intimately linked. This new perspective deepens our understanding of the Church's reconciling mission in the world.

123. Both Catholics and Methodists have come to a deeper understanding of the relationship between personal and social sin. Pope John Paul II developed the understanding of the 'structures of sin' and 'social sin' as a means of analysing realities that oppress and deny human dignity. As he wrote in

1987, at the height of the Cold War between East and West, ‘It is important to note therefore that a world which is divided into blocs, sustained by rigid ideologies, and in which instead of interdependence and solidarity different forms of imperialism hold sway, can only be a world subject to structures of sin.’⁶¹ These structures begin with personal sin and then link to the concrete acts of individuals who perpetuate them to their own advantage and make them difficult to remove. This group prejudice or bias empowers the strong at the expense of the weak. In a landmark gathering of Methodists in South Africa in 1981, the importance of naming the structural sin of racism was affirmed as a necessary step in the process of repentance and personal as well as social transformation. ‘What we have heard convicts us that every Methodist must witness against this disease, which infects all our people and leaves none unscathed in our Church and country. We call upon every Methodist to reject apartheid. We have experienced how hard it is to abandon long-held prejudice and long-felt bitterness. But we have seen God work this miracle in us’.⁶²

124. Catholics and Methodists are called to learn from situations of oppression and injustice, and address them. The reality of eighty million displaced persons and migrants in our world, often as the result of injustice and conflict as well as deep racial tensions, is a constant reminder of our failure to recognise the equal dignity of every person created in the image of God. The process of reconciliation often begins with members of local church communities hearing the suffering of peoples caused by the effects of injustice and oppression, naming the impact of economic and technological decisions on the ecosystem and indigenous peoples, and revealing injustices. By hearing the voice of the poor and oppressed, Methodists and Catholics grow in understanding of their suffering and the dislocation of their lives. By naming injustice, work can begin to protect the dignity of all persons and their families. Collectively, Catholics and Methodists are called to repent of their actions that cause the suffering of peoples and their misuse of the gifts with which they have been entrusted as stewards. We can ask forgiveness of those who have suffered. The experience of injustice leads to a growing awareness that there is need for an examination of the dominant structures of power and for the proper participation in decision-making by local peoples. The process of reconciliation involves repentance and forgiveness, leading to restitution and a commitment to amend patterns of behaviour. Catholics and Methodists can be a leaven in society and a sign of God’s reconciling grace.

125. Christians are called to see the other person with the merciful gaze of Jesus. Personal conversion begins with the ability to see in a new way and to open the mind and heart to new realities. The conversion of unjust social structures begins with recognising, in a new way, our neighbour who suffers as an equal. The power of God’s grace enables us to see the dignity and equality of our neighbour as other and to walk with them on the journey towards freedom which is the work of justice.

126. To help us awaken to and repent of our complicity, we look to those in both our traditions who show the way to imitate Christ. John Wesley demonstrated care for enslaved human beings with his unwavering abolitionist stance and for animals by denouncing their mistreatment and torture. Caroline Chisholm, a convert to Catholicism, organized shelter and employment for female immigrants to Australia, later expanding her work to include immigrant families and endeavours for immigration reform. Nelson Mandela’s resistance to apartheid was inspired by his formation in Methodist schools and churches. Nurtured by Catholic social teaching, St Oscar Romero in El Salvador denounced social injustice whilst defending the poor and marginalized. Such witness is the fruit of Christ’s reconciling ministry carried forward through the ministry of the Church. These witnesses are prophets who help us, like the prodigal son, ‘come to our senses’ and awaken us to overcoming sinful actions and situations.

⁶¹ John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis* §36.

⁶² Statement of the Obedience ’81 Conference; at <https://methodist.org.za/who-we-are/obedience-81/>.

127. Holy living in the world requires that Christians take action to support reconciliation in the world. Catholics and Methodists are called to ‘speak into political debates concerning the environment and how human beings are called to inhabit God’s creation; ... to challenge unjust social structures and promote the development of the poor by working for improved access to education, healthcare and employment with a just wage; and to eradicate the structural causes of poverty’ (Houston §121). The dramatic situation of our world today, which has been deeply manifested during the COVID-19 pandemic – the failure of our economic and political cultures to foster a shared commitment for the common good, the failure to protect and care for the vulnerable and the poor, the tragic exploitation of migrants by human traffickers and the poverty, famine and conflict in many countries – makes the need for the reconciliation of Christians and for our shared witness more urgent than ever. Popular movements for racial equality have highlighted the insidious nature of institutional racism and the need for conversion of persons and structures. Catholics and Methodists are called to work together to combat the effects of this sinfulness.

Reconciliation by Peace-making

128. The reconciliation of enemies takes the form of peace-making. Part of the work of reconciliation between peoples and countries is the building of international cooperation to resolve conflicts by peaceful means and so prevent the horrors of warfare. Methodists and Catholics are called to be peacemakers and witnesses to this important work of reconciliation. How might we witness to this invitation as communities of Christians sharing one Baptism together?

129. From the very beginnings of the Church, Christians with a new identity in Christ struggled with the question of how to live in a violent world. ‘Christianity was born in a milieu of political and social tension. Early Christianity sought to transcend this violent environment, and to create a new identity based in Christ. Paul speaks of God’s new creation and God’s act of reconciliation ... Paul summoned Christians to new social roles grounded in reconciliation and a new identity’ (Seoul §§165-166).

130. The Methodist tradition embraces both pacifists and those who consider war justifiable as a last resort under carefully defined conditions. For example, United Methodists declare that war is ‘incompatible with the teachings and example of Christ’ and is therefore to be ‘rejected as an instrument of national foreign policy’, yet there is respect for those who ‘support the use of force’ under strictly limited conditions.⁶³ The Catholic tradition has long reflected upon when it is morally permissible to wage war to defend human rights and the nation state. Pope Francis recently taught that ‘it is very difficult nowadays to invoke the rational criteria elaborated in earlier centuries to speak of the possibility of a “just war”’ (FT §258). Many Christians serve in the armed forces, whilst some refuse conscription. Catholics as well as Methodists acknowledge the right to conscientious objection, with Catholics formally recognising this choice at the Second Vatican Council (GS §79) when theological reflection on the matter had sufficiently developed after the Second World War. Methodists and Catholics grieve violence in all its forms, even in the legitimate defence of a country; war can never be glorified. Listening to those who have suffered in war raises our consciousness to a new level: ‘Let us ask the victims themselves. Let us think of the refugees and displaced, those who suffered the effects of atomic radiation or chemical attacks, the mothers who lost their children, and the boys and girls maimed or deprived of their childhood. Let us hear the true stories of these victims of violence, look at reality through their eyes, and listen with an open heart to the stories they tell. In this way, we will be able to grasp the abyss of evil at the heart of war. Nor will it trouble us to be deemed naive for choosing peace’ (FT §261). Christians are called to repent of the ways in which they are complicit in perpetuating violence.

⁶³ *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 165C, 164I.

131. Methodists and Catholics have a growing awareness of the need to work more devotedly as peace builders thanks to those who proclaim the power of non-violent love. Pope Francis, in his Letter for the World Day of Peace (2017), cited the examples of Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Abdul Ghaffar Khan, and St Teresa of Calcutta. He noted that when St Teresa received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979, she said, “We in our family don’t need bombs and guns, to destroy to bring peace – just get together, love one another... And we will be able to overcome all the evil that is in the world”.⁶⁴ Pope Francis also praised in this letter the work of peace activists such as Leymah Gbowee (Noble Peace Laureate 2011) and other Liberian women, whose organized ‘pray-ins’ and non-violent protests gave rise to peace talks that ultimately ended Liberia’s civil war.⁶⁵ Non-violence is the new ‘style of politics for peace’ commended by Pope Francis to Catholics – and to Methodists – for prayer and work. Much Methodist peace building in recent times has been focussed on the Korean peninsula. The 19th World Methodist Conference was held in Seoul in 2006. A resolution of the Conference called on Methodists globally “to be mediators for peace and reconciliation, as well as advocates for the peaceful reunification of Korea”. The 21st World Methodist Conference (Houston, 2016) returned to this theme, hosting a roundtable between members of the World Methodist Council, the Korean Methodist Church and the United Methodist Church to unify and consolidate Methodist efforts to promote peace and the denuclearisation of the peninsula.

132. Catholics and Methodists are committed to supporting peace-making in many ways. Catholics are invited to engage in prayer and reflection during the World Day of Peace each year on 1 January. Each year, the WMC gives its Peace Award to an individual, church, or community that demonstrates courage in the face of physical danger or disruption, creativity for new initiatives in the cause of peace, and consistency over time despite setbacks and frustrations. The United Methodist Church celebrates Peace with Justice Sunday on the first Sunday after Pentecost. Methodists and Catholics give a powerful witness whenever they respond together to local instances of conflict and violence by joining in common prayer, creating a climate for healing, forgiveness, and peace making.

133. Peace-building cannot be separated from questions about the arms race and the possession and stockpiling of ever more armaments. Expenditure on armaments diverts scarce resources from the promotion of peace, the building of justice, and respect for human rights as well as from educational, ecological, and healthcare projects. By filling our communities with weapons of war, ‘We have turned our backs on God and one another. By obstructing God’s will, we have contributed to pandemic poverty and disease, environmental degradation, and the proliferation of weapons and violence.’⁶⁶ God’s earth is aching for peace, as is humanity, particularly the most vulnerable, who suffer the most from violence and war. Both Catholics and Methodists are called to work for the reduction of the manufacture and sale of armaments as part of their work of peace-building.

134. Whilst Catholic teaching has accepted nuclear deterrence as a step to disarmament, Pope Francis has challenged this understanding and strengthened his condemnation of the possession of nuclear weapons: ‘International peace and stability cannot be based on a false sense of security, on the threat of mutual destruction or total annihilation, or on simply maintaining a balance of power... In this context, the ultimate goal of the total elimination of nuclear weapons becomes both a challenge and a moral and humanitarian imperative’ (FT §262). Many Methodist churches have their own statements regarding nuclear disarmament. The WMC includes this concern under the broad

⁶⁴ Francis, ‘Message for the Celebration of the Fiftieth World Day of Peace. Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace,’ 1 January 2017, §4; at http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20161208_messaggio-l-giornata-mondiale-pace-2017.html.

⁶⁵ Francis, ‘Message for the Celebration of the Fiftieth World Day of Peace. Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace,’ 1 January 2017, §4.

⁶⁶ *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church 2016* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), ¶16129: ‘The United Methodist Church and Peace’, 634-635.

confession of sin for ‘the search for security by those military and economic forces that threaten human existence’ and for ‘the abuse of technology which endangers the earth and all life upon it’.⁶⁷

Reconciliation by Caring for our Common Home

135. Reconciliation embraces all dimensions of reality because everything is interconnected. In the scriptures, sin is understood not only as alienation from God and from our human neighbours, but also as alienation from the wider natural world (Gen 1-11). This cosmic dimension of reconciliation is reflected in the biblical vision of all creatures united with God at the end of time and the fullness of God’s kingdom of a ‘new heaven and new earth’ (Rev 21.1), when all things will be gathered up in Christ and ‘God will be all in all’ (1 Cor 15.28).

136. Many voices concerned with the care of creation have helped Methodists and Catholics to recognise more deeply the way humankind has exploited God’s creation and the need to repent of ‘ecological sins’. Human beings contaminate the earth’s waters, pollute its land, toxify the air, and threaten all life. These sins lead to the exploitation of peoples since many acts of environmental destruction threaten the livelihood of poor people in various parts of the world. Pope Francis writes, ‘to commit a crime against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God’ (LS §8). Indeed, ‘[m]any dimensions of the environmental crisis can be traced to forgetfulness of this basic fact, articulated by the psalmist so many centuries ago: “Know that the LORD is God! It is he that made us and we are his” (Ps 100:3). When creation is taken for granted, its original relation to God the Creator forgotten, such forgetfulness easily leads to a distorted understanding of the vocation to subdue the earth in the creation account in Genesis’ (HEFG §11; cf. LS §67).

137. The naming of sin against the gifts of creation calls for ecological conversion which results in personal and communal action: ‘For this reason, the ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion. Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience’ (LS §217). This has implications for personal and communal decisions, including government legislation to protect creation and vulnerable people who are often weak in the face of the strength of many multinational corporations. The earth is crying out for human beings to change their way of life.

138. Both Catholic and Methodist responses to the environmental crisis call for repentance. *Laudato Si* speaks of a ‘crime against the natural world’ (§8), and Methodists echo that sense of moral transgression. Industrialised societies need to repent for their complicity in structural sin which has led to climate change. The Church also stands under judgement and the need for a corporate act of confession.⁶⁸ Integral to any act of confession is an acknowledgement that an action in one part of the world has a global impact. All people and all things are caught up in this need for cosmic reconciliation.

139. Following repentance, forgiveness is the next step on the path towards justice, peace, and the ultimate reconciliation of all created things in Christ. God alone can grant forgiveness which is a gift. Each person is inevitably both part of the problem and potentially part of the solution. By our daily living, we use resources, create waste, and leave a footprint upon creation. We need to live so that this footprint is as small as possible. People must be aware that they are involved in economic, social, and political systems that cannot be transformed overnight. We need to seek God’s forgiveness for our continuing part in any misuse of creation’s bounty, whilst maintaining our commitment to change.

⁶⁷ World Methodist Council Social Affirmation; at <http://worldmethodistcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/WMC-Social-Affirmation.pdf>.

⁶⁸ *Hope in God’s Future: Christian Discipleship in the Context of Climate Change*, A Report of a Joint Working Group on Climate Change and Theology convened by the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church, 2nd ed. (2011), §3.1, §3.2.

140. Whilst there is much to lament, it must be recognised that much is already being done by Christians together around the world, in spite of current divisions. Many churches seek to be environmentally responsible through greater awareness of issues relating to carbon reduction, farming methods, the use of fossil fuels, climate change, the need for sustainable living, and greater care for creation. United Methodist bishops⁶⁹ and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops⁷⁰ reacted strongly against the United States' withdrawal from the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement. One symbolic act Methodists and Catholics could take together is to make a joint commitment to the care of the earth, which might include the naming of sin and a collective act of repentance. If this involved other Church leaders, it would show the commitment of Christians to the good of all. The annual Season of Creation celebrated by many Christians beginning on 1 September is a fitting time to make such a joint commitment. Methodists and Catholics might also consider producing a joint liturgy for an act of confession to repent for our share in environmental degradation.

Celebrating God's Gifts

141. It is important to acknowledge and celebrate the many small steps that lead to reconciliation. The father welcomed home his younger son with a feast; they celebrated and rejoiced because the restoration of the younger brother to his father's house was akin to resurrection. He 'was dead and has come to life' (Luke 15.32). A wall falls; a criminal repents; an estranged couple embraces. Such moments of reconciliation may be fleeting and fragile, and yet they are signs of the new creation touched by God's grace and therefore to be celebrated. Common and symbolic celebrations are important milestones of the pathway of God's reconciling mission of the Church in the world. Such acts deepen the unity in friendship and communion between Catholics and Methodists.

142. The journey of reconciliation of all creation in Christ is long and daunting. Catholics and Methodists live with eschatological hope and trust in the power of God's grace. There are many false starts, minds and hearts to be converted, setbacks and steps forward. Together Catholics and Methodists can recognise that their efforts are a response to God's grace which touches every person and reality. 'Time is God's messenger.'⁷¹ God builds on each of the daily gestures which break with the pattern of violence, exploitation, and selfishness so that Catholics and Methodists can look together towards the new creation of a 'new heaven and new earth' (Rev 21.1-5a).

⁶⁹ Council of Bishops Statement on Climate Accord, 6 June 2017; at <https://nccumc.org/bishop/council-bishops-statement-climate-accord/>.

⁷⁰ Statement by Bishop Oscar Cantú, Chair, USCCB Committee on International Justice and Peace; at <http://www.usccb.org/news/2017/17-092.cfm>.

⁷¹ Attributed to St Peter Faber; see EG §171

CHAPTER 5

Reconciliation and Mutual Recognition: Discerning Communion of Faith in Diverse Structures and Practice

143. The chosen theme of this present report ‘God in Christ Reconciling’ (2 Cor 5.19) has yielded an unexpectedly high degree of theological convergence in several areas, though significant differences require further investigation within the framework here established. This final section summarizes the key points to emerge from each chapter. Fittingly, the report concludes with a short liturgy of repentance and mutual commitment prepared by the joint commission and offered to Catholics and Methodists as the basis for an act of worship held together in appropriate settings. The joint worship facilitated by this liturgy marks an intentional step forward on the way to our eventual ecclesial reconciliation and full communion in faith, mission, and sacramental life within the full visible unity of the Church.

144. The Methodist Statement of Association with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification provides a theological foundation and framework for affirming and developing convergence between Catholics and Methodists concerning the nature of reconciliation and the Church’s ministry of reconciliation. As a result, Catholics and Methodists are able to recognise more clearly than ever before the elements of sanctification and truth operative in each other’s ecclesial life and ministries of word, sacrament, and pastoral responsibility and thus to affirm that the one Church of Christ is effectively present in them (see UUS §11). Such a positive affirmation summons Catholics and Methodists to take concrete steps towards their mutual reconciliation and ecclesial recognition.

145. More specifically, Catholics and Methodists are called to develop the full consequences of the mutual recognition of Baptism – the sacramental bond and sign of our shared confession of faith and of God’s justifying grace. Our substantive agreement in Chapter 3 of this report concerning the effective role of the sacramental and pastoral rites of the Church in bringing to fruition the reconciling power of Christ in the lives of the Christian faithful (in Baptism, the Eucharist, rites of reconciliation, and anointing of the sick) calls us to a fuller mutual recognition in sacramental and pastoral practice. This might include a more generous spirit in practices of sacramental sharing in cases of acute pastoral need. Similarly, it has become customary in some places for Catholic and Methodist representatives to attend significant events in each other’s ecclesial life, such as ordinations, plenary assemblies, and conferences. Our shared presence and participation in these events signify a measure of ecclesial recognition, founded on a real communion in faith. As this report has demonstrated, Catholics and Methodists share a common faith in Christ the reconciler (Chapter 1); our respective churches have structures that maintain ecclesial communion (Chapter 2); our sacramental and pastoral practices restore individuals to the household of faith (Chapter 3); we are committed to living faithfully and responsibly in God’s world (Chapter 4).

Our Common Faith in Christ the Reconciler (Chapter 1)

146. Catholics and Methodists must repent of the ways in which we have often failed in the past to recognise each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. This has sometimes led to discrimination and even oppression. The healing of painful memories involves us together acknowledging past wrongs and retelling our respective histories in ways that honour the victims while seeking fresh interpretations in the light of changed perspectives. Today, despite the general improvement in ecumenical relationships arising from the ecumenical movement, lingering suspicions remain among some. Overcoming mutual suspicion requires a willingness to respect and trust each other’s intention to serve and participate in Christ’s ministry of reconciliation in the world.

147. As a result of the global ecumenical movement and the patient theological dialogue sustained by this joint commission since 1967, Catholics and Methodists enjoy a degree of mutual ecclesial

recognition through our common Baptism that enables us now to recognise each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, even if we are unable to share fully together in our respective ecclesial lives. Ecclesial recognition is not an all or nothing reality. The lived experience of growing communion has enabled us to see our differences in a new light, and at times to discover beyond our differing emphases, our differences in theological language, liturgical and pastoral practices a common understanding of the basic truths of faith. The deepening degree of mutual ecclesial recognition that exists between Catholics and Methodists represents a step on the way to the full visible unity of the Church as the body of Christ.

148. The vocation of the Church is to signify the unity that God wills for humankind by prophetically embodying and exemplifying what it means to live as a reconciled and reconciling community. Together, we can affirm that God works in and through our respective churches and ministries in many and different ways as means of reconciliation. At the same time, Catholics and Methodists must acknowledge and confess that our failure fully to embody and exemplify what it means to live as a community of reconciliation within our respective communions, coupled with widespread complacency in the face of our continuing disunity, seriously impedes and undermines our ability to fulfil our vocation to serve and participate in God's reconciling ministry in the world.

149. The visible unity of the Church matters not only for its own sake but because it serves a greater purpose within the work of God for the world. The sad divisions evident in the world today have led to the erection of walls of one kind or another between people that need to be broken down through the reconciling ministry of Christ. The ministry of reconciliation is the core mission of the Church. By accepting disunity as an inevitable fact, Christians fall short of what it means to be the Church. Their prophetic witness to the Gospel of reconciliation is impoverished and the world is poorly served.

150. A key affirmation that arises from this report is the recognition that Catholics and Methodists are brothers and sisters in Christ and therefore in a real sense are already united to one another within his body, the Church. The unity of the Church matters because the Church is a sign, instrument, and foretaste of the reconciliation that God wills for all peoples and the whole of creation. Moved by the grace of baptism and their baptismal vocation, Catholics and Methodists must look for every opportunity to manifest the unity that Christ wills for his Church.

Structures of Ecclesial Communion (Chapter 2)

151. The Church's visible unity is not to be thought of in terms of uniformity but rather as a 'communion' (*koinonia*) that enables legitimate diversity to flourish in diverse settings. Such unity exists in varying degrees so that ecclesial reconciliation is a continuing process of deepening relations in which concrete acts of mutual recognition constitute particular steps on the way to the full visible unity of the Church.

152. The goal of ecumenism and theological dialogue cannot be to settle for superficial models of unity that obscure underlying divisions thus impairing the reconciliation of Christians within the body of Christ. The commitment to unity requires a serious commitment to renewal and reform within our respective communions, as well as openness and receptivity to learning from ecumenical partners.

153. The ministry of oversight (*episkope*) is God's gift to the Church for guarding and transmitting the apostolic faith and mission. Catholics and Methodists recognise that the ecclesial structures of our respective communions locally, regionally, and globally are intended to serve unity and catholicity so that the unity in diversity of the Church is maintained.

154. Catholics and Methodists have much to learn and receive from each other's structures of oversight through the recognition and exchange of our respective gifts and ecclesial endowments. Methodists affirm the participation of all the baptised in the processes of discernment leading to

authoritative decisions. Catholics can learn from the way in which Methodists involve the laity in authoritative discernment in the conviction that God's Spirit is at work among all the faithful. Methodists can learn from the way in which Catholics distinguish between the 'sense of faith' that is shared by all the baptised and the formal responsibility for guardianship of the faith which is proper to the ministry of oversight exercised by bishops. These perspectives can be mutually enriching and corrective. In Methodist practice, personal forms of oversight and presidency exercised by bishops, presidents of Conference, and superintendents are subordinate to the communal oversight exercised by the relevant Conference. In Catholic practice, there is a growing understanding of the role of episcopal conferences and regional synods. Catholics are also openly asking today how better to include competent laywomen and laymen in ecclesial structures and practices of discernment and decision-making. In both our communions, there is a need for greater equilibrium between personal and communal forms of oversight, recognizing both the special vocation of those individuals called and ordained to exercise a ministry of oversight and the co-responsibility of all the baptised.

155. For Catholics, the bishop of Rome as pope and successor of Peter exercises a ministry of unity for the whole Church. However, the petrine office of the bishop of Rome and its exercise have often been a stumbling block in ecumenical conversations. In this present round of dialogue, we have been able to clarify and distinguish among the various aspects of the ministry of the pope in relation to the Church.

156. As a result of ecumenical studies in liturgy, theology, and church history, Methodists have come to a greater appreciation of the way in which the Holy Spirit has consistently and providentially guided the Church since the time of the New Testament and not just at certain key moments such as the Reformation and the Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century. Methodists can recognise how the Christian witness of the local church in Rome was an encouragement and support to other Christian communities as they struggled against division and dissension in the early church. In this reconciling ministry, the bishop of Rome spoke with unparalleled authority in response to appeals for judgement and in maintaining communion among the local churches.

157. The universal primacy of the bishop of Rome as pope requires further joint study by Methodists and Catholics. Specifically, dialogue between Catholics and Methodists must address the nature and exercise of papal jurisdiction and the infallible exercise of the papal teaching office. These have been theologically contentious and historically divisive. However, two affirmations provide a benchmark against which the universal primacy of the bishop of Rome might be reassessed in ecumenical perspective as a gift to the Church. First, is the often-overlooked affirmation of the First Vatican Council that the papal office is for the building up of the Church. Second, is a recovered emphasis on the pope as servant of the servants of God.

158. It is evident from Chapter 2 that the structures of oversight in our respective communions, though they differ in key respects, are intended to serve the same purpose: to maintain the unity and integrity of the community in relation to the faith of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church. The same Church of Christ is present and effective in our respective communions, though expressed in diverse ways. Catholics and Methodists can appreciate and learn from this diversity. Catholics can learn from the way in which synodality is expressed in Methodist processes of conferencing. Methodists can learn from the way in which Catholics associate authoritative teaching with the ministry of oversight in which primacy is exercised regionally and universally. Already, there is a degree of mutual recognition and reception in these areas. Methodists appreciate to varying degrees the way in which the Pope may speak prophetically on occasion on behalf of the whole Church. Increasingly, papal teaching documents are studied as a valuable resource in ministerial formation in Methodist seminaries. Catholics appreciate the need for the laity to participate more actively and fully in synodal processes. In some places, Catholic bishops' conferences accept invitations to be represented at Methodist conferences. More informally, Catholic bishops and Methodist bishops,

presidents and superintendents usefully meet to pray together and reflect on common pastoral concerns.

Sacramental and Pastoral Practice (Chapter 3)

159. In Chapter 3, we examined Methodist and Catholic rites and practices of reconciliation. Our work together makes a new and significant contribution to a deeper understanding between us about God's reconciling action and the sacramental practice of reconciliation. This is important because the common understanding amongst many Catholics tends to minimise this aspect of Methodist practice and teaching. At the same time, some Methodists overly focus on Catholic sacramental confession to the exclusion of other means of reconciliation in both the liturgy and practice, while some also perceive an exaggerated emphasis on the role of the priest as the dispenser of absolution, minimizing the work of God in the sacrament. Our dialogue has deepened our appreciation of the ecclesial dimensions of this sacrament in the broader understanding of rites and practices within our communions. Our deeper understanding is a helpful step towards our reconciliation and enables us to affirm a more common understanding of God's reconciling action, the forgiveness of sin, and the call to conversion. This is essential in cultures where the language of sin and conversion has been lost along with a sense of the transcendence of God, the fragility of the human person, and the need to forgive one another.

160. We affirm that Baptism is the primary sacrament of reconciliation. Our common Baptism and the profession of faith in the Apostles' Creed is the first step on the path to full communion. There is a challenge to help members of our communions understand, respect, and build upon this common foundation. We recognise that reconciliation in Christ takes effect in the sacrament of Baptism and that the baptised are incorporated into Christ's living body, the Church (1 Cor 12.12-13a). The Baptism in which Catholics and Methodists share is a visible foundation of the deep communion which already exists between us and impels us to ever deeper unity with each other and participation in the life and mission of Christ himself (cf. Durban §29; Seoul §78).

161. Our common Baptism implies communion in the divine life, expressed through communion in faith and shared participation in Christ's ecclesial body, the Church. Our growth in understanding the Eucharist means that Catholics and Methodists recognise that the reconciliation of the baptised continues through their eucharistic practice. The whole of the eucharistic liturgy in its various elements is a reconciling action that preserves, nourishes, and renews the grace of Baptism and sacramentally configures the faithful to Christ's paschal mystery. Common to our eucharistic liturgies, Methodists and Catholics use prayers for the general or communal confession of sin, words of pardon expressed by the minister, and assurance of God's promise of reconciliation. Other common features of our liturgies are: the call to conversion found in the scriptural readings; preaching the Word of God; reconciliation expressed in psalmody and hymnody; prayers for reconciliation in the world; the sharing of the peace; and the forgiveness of God desired and expressed in the Lord's Prayer. Greater appreciation of the meaning and depth of our respective liturgical rites and practices of reconciliation helps overcome prejudice and suspicion towards those of the other communion.

162. Methodists more often participate in communal practices of reconciliation than rites intended for individuals. The Methodist Covenant Service is one opportunity when Catholics could be invited to experience the communal reality of Methodists naming sin and calling for conversion. The Week of Prayer for Church Unity provides another opportunity. It is desirable that opportunities to experience the rites and practices of the other communion are made available to help dispel misunderstanding.

163. An important theological convergence in Chapter 3 arises out of the affirmation by Catholics that God's forgiveness is not bound exclusively to the sacrament of reconciliation. In Catholic understanding, the act of perfect contrition and desire for the sacrament, when it is not possible to be

received, is an effective sign of God's reconciling action through the gift of grace. For Methodists it is also helpful to note that the sacrament of reconciliation is only obligatory for Catholics when a person is in a state of mortal sin. Catholics can appreciate the breadth of those Methodist rites and practices which manifest God's reconciling action in Christ. Methodist concerns regarding the role of the minister, and the mediatory role of the Church, are salutary for Catholics to hear, warning of harmful misunderstandings to which Catholics themselves can fall prey. As a corrective to such misunderstandings, Catholics and Methodists agree together that 'justifying grace never becomes a human possession to which one could appeal against God' (JDDJ §27).

164. Catholics and Methodists agree that their liturgical rites of reconciliation are effective proclamations of the Word of God and that by grace the penitent is moved to confess their sins and hear the declaration of God's reconciling love. In and through these rites we encounter Christ and affirm that 'the Word itself is sacramental and the sacraments of the Church are moments in which the Word of God is effectively proclaimed' (Durban §20).

165. Since the usual practice of Catholics is to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation as a private one to one encounter with the priest, misunderstandings can arise about the meaning of this action. It can appear individualistic and lacking scriptural and ecclesial dimensions. Chapter 3 contributes to growth in mutual understanding about the ecclesial nature of the sacrament, the various liturgical options offered by the Rite, and the use of scripture in the ministry of reconciliation. The close attention paid to the prayer of absolution in the Catholic rite of sacramental reconciliation has revealed how the words and action of the priest in the sacrament are placed within the whole mystery of God's forgiveness, the paschal mystery, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the ecclesial dimension of the sacrament.

166. Discussion in Chapter 3 also focuses on the nature of sin and the distinctions made in the Catholic tradition between mortal and venial sin, and contrition and attrition. It was helpful to discover that John Wesley made a distinction between 'sin, properly speaking' and 'sins of infirmity'. These distinctions show that both Methodists and Catholics have tried to comprehend the mystery of sin and the extent to which sin breaks or damages the relationship of the person with God. Whilst Catholics state that the sacrament of reconciliation is only necessary for the forgiveness of mortal sin, it is an effective means for the forgiveness and healing of venial sins, and the continuing conversion and growth in grace of the sinner.

167. Catholics and Methodists recognise that the concepts of sin and conversion are difficult to communicate today, both within our respective communions and more widely in the work of evangelisation. Misunderstanding about the language and practices of reconciliation may become a block for effective communication about God's merciful love and the need for conversion. Chapter 3 illustrates the extent to which the complexities and subtleties of theological and liturgical language can be an obstacle to understanding on the part of the people of God. Catholics and Methodists must work together to find a more adequate formulation of our respective doctrines, rites and practices of reconciliation in language that conveys the gifts of God's grace more accessibly to our contemporaries.

168. Methodists and Catholics acknowledge the reality of sin in human life, the need for reconciliation with God and neighbour, and the sovereignty of God's reconciling action through the gift of grace. Chapter 3 recognises the centrality of these truths for both Catholics and Methodists and the way in which they are expressed in our respective rites and practices of reconciliation. However, there remain significant theological differences between our communions which require further study. These differences relate to the role of the Church in sacramental reconciliation and the action of the minister in the bestowal of God's forgiveness.

Mission and Witness (Chapter 4)

169. Chapter 4 reveals many areas of convergence where Methodists and Catholics share in the mission of the Church as agents of God's reconciling action in the world. Catholics and Methodists seek to build just relationships in our common home and to alleviate need. They offer to all peoples a sign of hope that God does not abandon them and is ready to forgive and welcome them.

170. During the pandemic, many Christians, prompted by their common Baptism as witnesses to Jesus Christ, worked together to alleviate need. Through this common action, Methodists and Catholics have deepened their communion as individuals as well as between their communions. Such apostolic activity makes tangible the call to grow in personal and social holiness (§121 above). By repentance and conversion, hearts and minds are converted so that the hands of the body of Christ can serve others. The contemporary social, economic, and environmental crises we are facing offer extensive possibilities for Methodists and Catholics to work together and witness to their common Baptism. The ecumenical Christian prayer with which Pope Francis concludes *Fratelli tutti* (On Fraternity and Social Friendship) gives a direction for this service:

Grant that we Christians may live the Gospel,
discovering Christ in each human being,
recognizing him crucified
in the sufferings of the abandoned
and forgotten of our world,
and risen in each brother or sister
who makes a new start.

171. Catholics and Methodists must seek inspiration from the goal of full visible unity in order to strengthen what they hold in common. We must repent of those times when we have failed to recognise the reality of our common Baptism and walked alone in our mission. We must pray that our hearts are converted so as to embrace our brothers and sisters who share our faith in Jesus Christ, whose grace enables the building of just human relationships in society and inspires ethical responsibility and care for the rest of creation. Those in positions of church leadership are invited to adopt this approach and be exemplars of witness and service in the 'Dialogue of Life'.⁷² This approach will foster more deeply a witness which can reach out to people of other faiths and good will to stimulate a 'dialogue among all people of good will' towards a 'new vision of fraternity and social friendship that will not remain at the level of words' (FT §6).

172. Deep fractures and fissures in society have been further revealed by the COVID-19 pandemic, making the Church's ministry of reconciliation all the more urgent. Yet, the divisions between Christians detract from the ministry of reconciliation. During this present round of dialogue, our forced separation and inability to meet as a communion in person because of travel restrictions has made us long for a time when we might share the joy of each other's company and celebrate our shared faith in God who has reconciled us to one another in Christ. This experience reflects both the pain of our separation through continuing divisions and the deep longing for full unity in faith, mission and sacramental life. Despite our separation, Methodists and Catholics testify to the transcendent truth of the salvation of the Good News of Jesus Christ, who alone reconciles us to the Father and to one another. This truth subverts false notions of power and autonomy since Christ, through the Incarnation, has united himself with every woman and man. Catholics and Methodists witness to the dignity of the human person and engage in God's work of reconciling all things in Christ. This begins with the naming of injustice, the search for truth, and repentance for sin, both personal and structural. Methodists and Catholics are called to the pilgrim journey of walking together

⁷² *The Bishop and Christian Unity: An Ecumenical Vademecum* 39; accessed at <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/news/2020/2020-12-04-vademecum-online.html>.

as friends not strangers in the work of building just relationships between people who are equal in the sight of God, seeking peace and caring for God's good creation, a common home for all humanity.

173. In concluding this summary of Chapter 4, it is important to acknowledge and celebrate just how far Catholics and Methodists have already walked together as members of the household of God, and the love and service jointly offered for the good of others. To make our witness to God's reconciling love in the world through Christ more credible, we must urgently and earnestly repent of our separation, be converted by God's grace, and grow together in holiness, unity and mission.

An Ecumenical Liturgy of Repentance and Reconciliation

Lent is an appropriate season for the celebration of this liturgy, but it may also take place at any time of the year.

Leaders should come equally from Catholic and Methodist communities, and represent diversities from within those communities.

Suggestions for hymns/songs are listed at the end of the liturgy; alternatively, a song or hymn can be included that is appropriate to the occasion and familiar locally to the Methodists and Catholics in attendance. Where copyright permissions for songs/hymns are required by law, those responsible for planning the service should secure necessary permissions for any reproduced text or tune in advance of the worship event.

During the Baptismal Remembrance, a Catholic representative and a Methodist representative may, by means of a sprinkler (aspergil) or a small evergreen branch dipped in water in the baptismal font, walk throughout the assembly and sprinkle water toward those gathered. During this action, a choir (perhaps comprising Methodist and Catholic singers) or a soloist may offer appropriate music.

The liturgy may conclude with a meal shared by all the participants.

Opening Psalm (Psalm 133, NIV)

This or some other responsive reading may be used.

L. How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!

P. It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down on the collar of his robe.

L. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion.

P. For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.

Hymn/Song

Words of Welcome (delivered by a Catholic and a Methodist)

A Call to Reconciliation

One or more of these readings may be used. The reading from the selection by Pope Francis should have one reader, as should the selection from Ivan Abrahams.

Voice 1: 'God commands us to be peacemakers, and in accord and of one mind in his house; and as such God makes us by a second birth . . .

Voice 2: that we who are children of God may remain in God's peace; and having one spirit, we may have also one heart and mind.

Voice 1: Thus God does not receive the sacrifice of a person who is in disagreement, but bids a person to go back to the altar and first be reconciled, so that God also may be appeased by the prayers of a peacemaker.

Voice 2: Our peace and concord is the greater sacrifice before God, a people joined through the unity of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit'.

(Cyprian, *On the Lord's Prayer*, §23)

'Commitment to ecumenism responds to the prayer of the Lord Jesus that "they may all be one" (Jn 17:31). The credibility of the Christian message would be much greater if Christians could overcome their divisions and the Church could realize "the fullness of catholicity proper to her in those of her children who, though joined to her by baptism, are yet separated from full communion with her". We must never forget that we are pilgrims journeying alongside one another. This means that we must have sincere trust in our fellow pilgrims, putting aside all suspicion or mistrust, and turn our gaze to what we are all seeking: the radiant peace of God's face. Trusting others is an art and peace is an art. Jesus told us: "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Mt 5:9). In taking up this task, also among

ourselves, we fulfil the ancient prophecy: “They shall beat their swords into ploughshares” (Is 2:4). . . If we really believe in the abundantly free working of the Holy Spirit, we can learn so much from one another! It is not just about being better informed about others, but rather reaping what the Spirit has sown in them, which is also meant to be a gift for us’. (Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium* [2013], §§244, 246)

‘John Wesley in 1749 in his “Letter to a Roman Catholic” claimed, “If we cannot as yet think alike in all things, at least we may love alike.” Wesley also stressed that Catholics and Methodists are called “to help each other in whatever . . . leads to the Kingdom.” Catholics and Methodists have much to learn from each other. We walk side by side, each in service to the world in our response to climate change, human trafficking, abuse of human rights and global terror. In our responses to these challenges, we are called to be a church with fast feet and extended hands, to be in solidarity and embrace the poor and marginalized’. (Ivan Abrahams, General Secretary, World Methodist Council, Address to Pope Francis [2017])

Moments of Reflection (*in silence*)

Invocation of the Holy Spirit

L. Come, Holy Spirit, and assist us as we seek God’s forgiveness and our reconciliation.

Prayer of Repentance and Reconciliation

L. Almighty, triune God, forgive us for remaining in darkness rather than walking in your light.

P. Your mercy is great, O God.

L. Forgive our limited faith and our failure to live lives of holiness and generous charity.

P. Your mercy is great.

L. Forgive our indifference to the groaning of creation, to the poverty of our neighbour, and to the vulnerability of the stranger and refugee in our midst.

P. Your mercy is great.

L. Forgive our silence in responding to the abuse of the innocent, our complicity in the demeaning of persons unlike ourselves, and our responsibility for the pain, hardship, and alienation of others.

P. Your mercy is great.

L. Forgive our failure to listen to voices different from our own and our neglect in saying words that offer healing and hope.

P. Your mercy is great.

L. Forgive Methodists and Catholics for times in the past when we persecuted one another and for times in the present when we harbour prejudices. Forgive us for wearing our mistrust and pain rather than our baptismal garments, and for failing to see grace and good in the other. Purify and heal our memories, and open us to recognise your Spirit present in one another.

P. Your mercy is great.

L. Forgive us when we plead for unity but are unwilling to strive for reconciliation.

P. Your mercy is great.

L. Forgive our unwillingness to trust in the new paths that you set before Catholics and Methodists.

P. Your mercy is great, O God.

Other petitions may be added as appropriate to national and local contexts.

Silence

L. Holy God, mighty and loving, heal our communities and each of us with the mercy you promise to your people, with the forgiveness that flows from Christ's wounds, and with the Spirit of grace outpoured on all who believe. **Amen.**

Sharing of Christ's Peace

L. Confident that God heals our divisions and every weakness, we pray that God will help us continue both to receive and to offer forgiveness. As a sign of our willingness to walk together as the body of Christ and to seek reconciliation with God, creation, neighbour, and self, let us now offer the peace of Christ, the peace that the world cannot give, to one another. The peace of Christ be with you.

P. And with your spirit.

Song "Ubi caritas"

Tune: Hubbard, alt.

Begin singing while Christ's peace is still being shared. Sing multiple times until all have returned to their original places.

Ubi caritas et amor, ubi caritas Deus ibi est

Where there is charity and love, where there is charity, God is there.

U - bi car - i - tas et a - mor

U - bi car - i - tas De - us i - bi est

Listening to the Living Word of God

The scripture texts offered here are suggestions only.

Old Testament

Gen 50.15-21

Epistle

Rom 6.3-11; 2 Cor 5.18-21; Eph 2.14-17; 4.1-6; or Col 1.19-22

Here a Gospel acclamation may be said or sung.

Gospel

Matt 11.25-30; or Luke 15.11-32

Homily/Sermon

Hymn/Song

The Apostles' Creed (in unison)

Baptismal Remembrance

L. The Apostles' Creed is a baptismal creed and, by saying it together in unison, we not only remember our own baptism, but we also recognise the baptism of our neighbours, Catholic and Methodist. As we receive God's gift of water, let each of us consider these words of Paul to the Ephesians (4.1b-6): 'Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all'.

Musical Offering

Prayers of Intercession

L. In thanksgiving for our unity in baptism, in whose waters we become part of the family of those reborn in Christ, we pray to the Lord.

P. *We give you thanks, O God.*

L. That our churches may come to greater accord on matters relating to faith, mission, and sacramental life.

P. *Hear our prayer, O God.*

L. That our churches—and all churches—may declare with one voice God's design for justice and mercy, and be faithful instruments of God's reconciliation in the world.

P. *Hear our prayer, O God.*

The prayer continues with petitions appropriate to the national and local contexts, and attentive to the concerns of the world, care for creation, the sick, the poor and needy, and concludes with the Lord's Prayer.

The Lord's Prayer, Ecumenical version (in unison)

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.

Hymn/Song

Prayer

This or some other prayer may be used.

L. God of justice and mercy, who calls your people to reconciliation with you, with each other, and with the world you created and love:
empower and strengthen Catholics and Methodists to answer your summons to be agents of reconciliation,
that, by the power of your Holy Spirit, and the work of our hands and hearts,
patterns of violence, exploitation, and selfishness in the world may cease,
and our communions may grow in friendship and greater solidarity
as we journey together toward your creation of a new heaven and new earth;
through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

P. Amen.

The Grace (2 Cor 13.14; *in unison*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

Suggested Hymns/Songs (English language)

The canticle of St Francis ('All Creatures of our God and King')

Forth in the peace of Christ we go (Text: James Quinn [permission required]; Tune: 88.88)

Holy God, we praise thy name (Text: Ignaz Franz; Tune: 78.78.77)

Lead, kindly light (Text: John Henry Newman; Tune: 10.10.10.10 with refrain)

The love of Christ joins us together (Text: Bob Hurd [permission required]); Spanish translation

Unidos como un solo cuerpo (Text: Pedro Rubalcava [permission required])

Father, we have wandered (Text: Kevin Nichols [permission required]; Tune: 76.76D)

Ubi caritas (Tune: Jacques Bertier, Ubi caritas [permission required])

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"Christ, from whom all blessings flow"

Christ, from whom all blessings flow, / perfecting the saints below,
hear us, who thy nature share, / who thy mystic body are.

Join us, in one spirit join, / let us still receive of thine;
still for more on thee we call, / thou who fillest all in all.

Move and actuate and guide, / diverse gifts to each divide;
placed according to thy will, / let us all our work fulfill;

Never from thy service move, / needful to each other prove;
use the grace on each bestowed, / tempered by the art of God.

Many are we now, and one, / we who Jesus have put on;

There is neither bond nor free, / male nor female, Lord, in thee.

Love, like death, hath all destroyed, / rendered all distinctions void;
names and sects and parties fall; / thou, O Christ, art all in all!

Text: Charles Wesley; Tune: 77.77

"Jesus, we look to thee"

Jesus, we look to thee, / thy promised presence claim,
thou in the midst of us shall be, / assembled in thy name.

Thy name salvation is, / which here we come to prove;
thy name is life, and health, and peace, / and everlasting love.

Not in the name of pride / or selfishness we meet;
from nature's paths we turn aside, / and worldly thoughts forget.

We meet the grace to take / which thou hast freely given;
we meet on earth for thy dear sake / that we may meet in heaven.

Present we know thou art; / but oh! thyself reveal!

Now, Lord, let every bounding heart / the mighty comfort feel!

O may thy quick'ning voice, / the death of sin remove,
and bid our inmost souls rejoice / in hope of perfect love!

Text: Charles Wesley Tune: 66.86 (Short Meter)

"Love divine, all loves excelling"

Love divine, all loves excelling, / joy of heaven, to earth come down;
fix in us thy humble dwelling; / all thy faithful mercies crown!
Jesus, thou art all compassion, / pure, unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation; / enter every trembling heart.

Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit / into every troubled breast!

Let us all in thee inherit; / let us find that second rest.

Take away our bent to sinning; / Alpha and Omega be;
end of faith, as its beginning, / set our hearts at liberty.

Come, Almighty to deliver, / let us all thy life receive;
suddenly return and never, / never more thy temples leave.

Thee we would be always blessing, / serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray and praise thee without ceasing, / glory in thy perfect love.

Finish, then, thy new creation; / pure and spotless let us be.

Let us see thy great salvation / perfectly restored in thee;
changed from glory into glory, / till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee, / lost in wonder, love, and praise.

Text: Charles Wesley; Tune: 87.87D

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Our Father, we have wandered / and hidden from your face,
in foolishness have squandered / your legacy of grace.

But now, in exile dwelling, / we rise with fear and shame,
as distant but compelling, / we hear you call our name.

And now at length discerning / the evil that we do,
behold us Lord, returning / with hope and trust to you.

In haste you come to meet us / and home rejoicing bring.

In gladness there to greet us / with calf and robe and ring.

O Lord of all the living, / both banished and restored,
compassionate, forgiving / and ever caring Lord,
grant now that our transgressing, / our faithlessness may cease.
Stretch out your hand in blessing / in pardon and in peace.

Text: Kevin Nichols (1981); Tune: 76.76.D

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