



CONSEIL PONTIFICAL
POUR LA PROMOTION
DE L'UNITÉ DES CHRÉTIENS

INTERNATIONAL MEETING OF ANGLICAN AND CATHOLIC BISHOPS
Canada, May 14-20, 2000

STATEMENT: COMMUNION IN MISSION

1. This meeting of Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops from 13 countries, convened by His Eminence Edward Cardinal Cassidy and His Grace Archbishop George Carey, gathered at Mississauga, near Toronto, Canada, from 14-20 May 2000. Our meeting was grounded in prayer and marked by a profound atmosphere of friendship and spiritual communion. We began on Good Shepherd Sunday, conscious of our common vocation as shepherds of the Good Shepherd, with a responsibility to lead God's people forward in active hope towards that unity in truth and holiness which our Lord wills for his Church.

2. We came together to address the imperative for Christian reconciliation and healing, in a broken and divided world. We were also conscious of the fact that Christian people around the world are celebrating two thousand years since the birth of Jesus Christ. In this year of Great Jubilee, in which the churches are acting co-operatively for the remission of unpayable Third World debt, we are aware of the need to leave behind all past deficits with which our churches have themselves been burdened, so as to enter the new millennium renewed in deepening unity and peace.

3. At this meeting we have naturally focussed on the special relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion as expressed in the Decree on Ecumenism of the Second Vatican Council. We also recognised the progress which has been made in our relations with other Christians and we recommit ourselves to the ecumenical endeavour with all Christian churches.

4. As day by day we prayed together and meditated on scripture in the chapel of Queen of Apostles Renewal Centre, we realised afresh both the degree of spiritual communion we already share in the richness of our common liturgical inheritance, but also the pain of our inability to share together fully in the Eucharist. As we listened to experiences from the different regions we were struck by the extent of inter-church collaboration, particularly common action for social justice and joint pastoral care in which Anglican and Roman Catholic clergy and lay people are involved. We noted with concern some of the problems our disunity causes to the mission of the Church, and recognised the opportunities for shared endeavour presented to us in the service of our fragmented world. As we reviewed the results of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC), we came to appreciate the very impressive degree of agreement in faith that already exists. This alerted us to the serious obligation to intensify the process of reception of those agreements at the local level.

5. There is one specific point that has been driven home to us during the meeting. Over the last thirty years we have become familiar with the concept of 'degrees of communion'. Despite our acknowledged differences, we have regularly affirmed that we share in the fundamental communion of a common faith and a common baptism. This degree of communion holds within it the promise of the full visible communion to which God is calling us. Our experience at Toronto encourages us to believe that we have reached a very significant new place on our journey. We feel compelled to affirm that our communion together is no longer to be viewed in minimal terms. We have been able to discern that it is not just formally established by our common baptism into Christ, but is even now a rich and life-giving, multifaceted communion.

6. We have come to a clear sense that we have moved much closer to the goal of full visible communion than we had at first dared to believe. A sense of mutual interdependence in the Body of Christ has been reached, in which the churches of the Anglican Communion and the Roman Catholic Church are able to bring shared gifts to their joint mission in the world.

7. We appreciate that there are as yet unresolved differences and challenges which affect both Communions. These have to do with such matters as: the understanding of authority in the Church, including the way it is exercised, and the precise nature of the future role of the universal primate; Anglican Orders; the ordination of women; moral and ethical questions. Though interchurch families can be signs of unity and hope, one pressing concern has to do with addressing the need to provide joint pastoral care for them. Sometimes those in interchurch families experience great pain particularly in the area of eucharistic life.

8. However, we believe these challenges are not to be compared with all that we hold in common. The communion constituted by what we already share has within it an inner dynamic which, animated by the Holy Spirit, impels us forward toward the overcoming of these differences. Indeed, we have become conscious that we have embraced what may be described, not only as a new era of friendship and co-operation, but as a new stage of 'evangelical koinonia'. By this we mean a communion of joint commitment to our common mission in the world (John 17:23).

9. The marks of this new stage of communion in mission are: our trinitarian faith grounded in the scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds; the centrality of Christ, his death and resurrection, and commitment to his mission in the Church; faith in the final destiny of human life; common traditions in liturgy and spirituality; the monastic life; preferential commitment to the poor and marginalised; convergence on the eucharist, ministry, authority, salvation, moral principles, and the Church as communion, as expressed in agreed statements of ARCIC; episcopacy, particularly the role of the bishop as symbol and promoter of unity; and the respective roles of clergy and laity.

10. We believe that now is the appropriate time for the authorities of our two Communion to recognise and endorse this new stage through the signing of a Joint Declaration of Agreement. This Agreement would set out: our shared goal of visible unity; an acknowledgement of the consensus in faith that we have reached, and a fresh commitment to share together in common life and witness. Our two Communion would be invited to celebrate this Agreement around the world.

11. As our meeting proceeded we became increasingly aware that as bishops we ourselves have a responsibility to guide, promote, and energise the ongoing work of unity in our churches. We commit ourselves wholeheartedly to this task. Our action plan is appended to this statement.

12. The first recommendation of our action plan is that a Joint Unity Commission be established. This Commission will oversee the preparation of the Joint Declaration of Agreement, and promote and monitor the reception of ARCIC agreements, as well as facilitate the development of strategies for translating the degree of spiritual communion that has been achieved into visible and practical outcomes.

13. It is important to be clear that this new stage on our journey is but a step on the way to full and visible unity. Our vision of full and visible unity is of a eucharistic communion of churches: confessing the one faith and demonstrating by their harmonious diversity the richness of faith; unanimous in the application of the principles governing moral life; served by ministries that the grace of ordination unites together in an episcopal body, grafted on to the company of the Apostles, and which is at the service of the authority that Christ exercises over his Body. The ministry of oversight has both collegial and primatial dimensions and is open always to the community's participation in the discernment of God's will. This eucharistic communion on earth is a participation in the larger communion which includes the saints and martyrs, and all those who have fallen asleep in Christ through the ages.

14. However, the shape of full visible unity is beyond our capacity to put into words. "God will always surprise us", as we were reminded in a meditation shared with us: "God cannot be understood through our human system or correspond to our positive or negative predictions for the future. ... In our ecumenical efforts we should keep in mind that one day we will rub our eyes and be surprised by the new things that God has achieved in his Church".