

The Ministry of the Spirit in the Ministries of the Church: Disciples and Catholics Complete Sixth Phase of International Dialogue

ROME, Italy (June 2026) — Members of the International Commission for Dialogue between the Disciples of Christ and the Catholic Church gathered in Rome from June 12–15, 2026, to conclude the Sixth Phase of their dialogue and approve the final report, *The Ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Ministries of the Church*. The report represents six years of theological, biblical and liturgical reflection, common prayer, worship, and friendship as the commission explored together the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to the unity of the Church, particularly in connection with lay and ordained ministries.

Inspired by St. Paul’s description of “the ministry of the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:8), the Commission reflected on the Spirit as both giver and gift, the ministry of the Spirit among all the baptized, the distinctive ministry of the ordained, and the gift of the Spirit in ordination. The dialogue affirmed that the same Holy Spirit empowers the Church’s ministry, guides discernment, sustains worship, and calls Christians toward the visible unity for which Christ prayed.

Looking back on six years of study, prayer, and friendship, the Dialogue’s co-chairs reflected on what this journey has meant for both communions and the continuing call to visible unity.

Bishop David Ricken, Catholic co-chair of the Dialogue, said:

Serving as Catholic co-chair of the Disciples of Christ–Catholic International Dialogue has been a unique opportunity to learn from and to walk together with brothers and sisters from different countries. At the end of this phase, I can affirm that it has been a blessing to see how much we have in common on the role of the Holy Spirit in our own churches. The Disciples of Christ have great love for the Lord’s Supper, which they celebrate every Sunday. Studying together biblical passages and liturgies, praying and discerning together, allowed us to enjoy the beauty of the Ministry of the Spirit in each other. I hope the fraternal experience we have shared can be replicated locally: Catholics and Disciples discerning and recognizing together the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

Rev. Dr. Robert Welsh, Disciples co-chair of the Dialogue, added:

It has been my privilege to have been a member on all six phases of the International Dialogue between the Disciples of Christ and the Catholic Church, and especially to have served as co-chair for this sixth phase of dialogue. The overall topic for our meetings has been “The Ministry of the Holy Spirit” which provided an important focus for our work, study, fellowship and worship together as Disciples and Catholics. I believe all members of both dialogue teams have genuinely experienced the gift of

the Holy Spirit leading and calling us to our unity as brothers and sisters in Christ. Together, we were thus able to affirm that it is the same Spirit who is at work in both of our churches as we gathered for worship (especially in our celebrations of the Lord's Supper and Eucharist, and in our services of Ordination for Ministry). We also affirmed that it is the same Spirit who calls and empowers our churches to continue Christ's mission and ministry to the world, and to continue to work for the full visible unity in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.

The Commission's work in Rome was enriched by an ecumenically prepared Bible study led by Rev. Dr. Merryl Blair and Dr. Ian Boxall, *Spirit-Endowed Ministry: A Bible Study on Isaiah 61:1–6 and Luke 4:16–30*. Participants expressed particular appreciation that the study itself was prepared together, embodying the ecumenical spirit that has characterized this phase of the dialogue.

Beyond formal sessions, members experienced the gifts of prayer, hospitality, and fellowship that have sustained this dialogue for nearly fifty years. The Commission attended Sunday Mass at St. Peter's Basilica, where Cardinal Mauro Gambetti, O.F.M. Conv., Archpriest of St. Peter's Basilica, welcomed the group. Later that day, during the Angelus, Pope Leo XIV greeted the members of the Commission gathered in Rome. The Commission also enjoyed an evening of conversation and fellowship graciously hosted by Archbishop Flavio Pace, Secretary of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity.

Reflecting on the experience of the Sixth Phase, members gave thanks not only for theological insights gained, but also for the friendships formed and trust deepened through years of walking together. Disciples and Catholics have come to know one another better by discovering and rediscovering what the Spirit has sown in the other as a gift for them.

As the Sixth Phase draws to a close, Disciples and Catholics give thanks for six years of study, prayer, worship, and fellowship. Confident that the same Holy Spirit continues to guide the Church into all truth, they look toward the future with renewed hope, seeking the day when the unity for which Jesus prayed, "that they may all be one" (John 17:21), may be made fully visible around the one table of the Lord.

The International Commission for Dialogue between the Disciples of Christ and the Catholic Church was inaugurated in 1977. Members of the Commission are appointed by the Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council on behalf of the Disciples of Christ World Communion and by the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity on behalf of the Holy See. The final report of the Sixth Phase will be submitted to the co-sponsoring bodies asking permission for publication.

The Commission members from the Disciples of Christ are: Rev. Dr. Robert K. Welsh, Co-chair, Indianapolis, USA; Rev. Paul S. Tch , Co-secretary, DECC, Indianapolis, USA; Rev. Dr. Thomas F. Best, Belmont, USA; Rev. Dr. Merryl L. Blair, Melbourne, Australia; Rev. Dr. Geritza Olivella-Santana, Bayam n, Puerto Rico; Rev. Dr. D. Newell Williams, Fort Worth, USA; and Rev. No l Suministrado, Hamiota, Canada/The Philippines.

The Commission members from the Catholic Church are: Most Reverend David L. Ricken, Co-chair and Bishop of Green Bay, USA; Rev. Msgr. Juan Usma G mez, Co-secretary, DPCU, Vatican City/Colombia; Dr. Ian Boxall, St Louis, USA; Msgr. Dr. Michael Clay, Raleigh, USA; Dr. Elizabeth Groppe, Dayton, USA; Rev. Dr. Taras Khomych, Ukraine/Liverpool, UK; and Rev. Dr. Michael G. Witczak, Milwaukee, USA.