





# WE BELIEVE IN ONE GOD:

*Sixty years of  
Methodists and Catholics  
walking together*

*Joint International Commission for Dialogue between  
the World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church  
(MERCIC)*

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**Resurrection Window** (detail)

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Resurrection United Methodist Church, Leawood, Kansas, USA

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## PREFACE

*by the Co-Chairmen of the Joint International Commission for Dialogue  
between the World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church*

Following the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and a decision made at the World Methodist Council in 1966, the Methodist-Roman Catholic International Commission (MERCIC) – more formally called the Joint International Commission for Dialogue between the World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church – was established in 1967. Since then, the commission has met annually, and has produced eleven documents for consideration by the authorities and faithful of our two traditions. These reports have explored themes central to Christian faith: baptism, holiness, justification, Scripture and tradition, the Eucharist, the nature and mission of the Church, and the call to visible communion. Each document is known by the name of the city where it was presented to the World Methodist Conference following its publication.

In 2006, the Commission began preparing a document that would synthesise the fruits of the first forty years of its work. The dialogue had been progressing since 1967, and while its reports were always welcomed, they had not been received very deeply or widely in the two ecclesial communities sponsoring them. In order to present these reports afresh, a synthesis document was published in 2010, entitled *Together to Holiness*. In publishing that synthesis, the Commission wished to bear witness to the consensus and convergence that had been achieved since 1967, and also to point to the further steps needed in order to allow that convergence to be deepened. In the period since the publication of *Together to Holiness*, MERCIC has produced three more reports, which broaden and deepen the work done up to 2010.

The year 2025, when Christians mark the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, is an appropriate time for the publication of an updated synthesis of MERCIC's work, integrating material from its three most recent documents with the earlier text. We have now considered together all the elements of the the Nicene creed, allowing us to present a comprehensive synthesis of our shared Christian faith. We give thanks that during almost six decades of dialogue, reflecting together on God, Revelation, Redemption, the Church and the Christian Life, Catholics and Methodists have identified clear convergence in understanding the faith that we profess together in the Nicene Creed.

Over the course of our dialogue, our Commission has confirmed that the consensus between Methodists and Catholics about the foundation of faith and the source of our salvation far outweighs our remaining differences on matters relating to the means of saving grace in the life and practice of our respective communions – although here, too, we have made great advances toward mutual understanding and agreement. Our shared Nicene faith and our agreement on the primacy of God's free gift of justifying and sanctifying grace are expressions of the profound communion between Methodists and Catholics today, and serve as a firm foundation and basis for our continued growth toward full ecclesial unity.

Rooted in our shared confession of Christ and inspired by the spirit of Nicaea, *We believe in one God* is both a record of hope and a call to deeper communion. As with *Together to Holiness*, the order of *We believe in one God* is thematic rather than chronological. For almost every paragraph, the right-hand column provides one or more references to the relevant MERCIC report or reports, to facilitate further reading.

The Council of Nicaea and its profession of faith in the Triune God was the first and most consequential attempt in the history of Christianity to reach consensus among Christians from different backgrounds about the essentials of Christian faith. We rejoice that 1,700 years later, the leaders of many churches and communions came together in İznik, Türkiye, site of the ancient city of Nicaea, to commemorate this first Ecumenical Council. The Joint International Commission for Dialogue between the World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church now offers this updated synthesis as a gift to all the churches, as they



affirm their faith in the Triune God and reflect on the next stages of the quest for Christian Unity. We pray that it will help all of us to recognise in the various professions of our churches the one Christian faith that was proclaimed by the Council of Nicaea.

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*Methodist Co-Chairman*

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Archbishop of Brisbane, Australia  
*Catholic Co-Chairman*



**Reports of the Joint International Commission  
for Dialogue between the  
World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church**

<i>Denver</i>	1971	<b>First Report</b>
<i>Dublin</i>	1976	<b>Second Report</b>
<i>Honolulu</i>	1981	<b>Towards an Agreed Statement on the Holy Spirit</b>
<i>Nairobi</i>	1986	<b>Towards a Statement on the Church</b>
<i>Singapore</i>	1991	<b>The Apostolic Tradition</b>
<i>Rio de Janeiro</i>	1996	<b>The Word of Life: A Statement on Revelation and Faith</b>
<i>Brighton</i>	2001	<b>Speaking the Truth in Love: Teaching Authority among Catholics and Methodists</b>
<i>Seoul</i>	2006	<b>The Grace given you in Christ: Catholics and Methodists reflect further on the Church</b>
<i>Durban</i>	2011	<b>Encountering Christ the Saviour: Church and Sacraments</b>
<i>Houston</i>	2016	<b>The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory</b>
<i>Gothenburg</i>	2022	<b>God in Christ Reconciling: On the Way to Full Communion in Faith, Sacraments, and Mission</b>



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# INTRODUCTION

1. This bilateral dialogue was the result of initiatives taken after the Second Vatican Council and decisions made by the World Methodist Council in 1966. The Joint Commission between the Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council held its first meeting at Ariccia, near Rome, in 1967. Since then, the Joint Commission has reported to its respective churches at five-year intervals. Eleven reports have been presented so far, each informally named after the city where the World Methodist Council met that year: Denver (1971), Dublin (1976), Honolulu (1981), Nairobi (1986), Singapore (1991), Rio de Janeiro (1996), Brighton (2001), Seoul (2006), Durban (2011), Houston (2016), and Gothenburg (2022). *Denver §1*

2. This bilateral dialogue has a distinctive feature: there is no history of formal separation between the two churches. Nevertheless, the division is real. In many times and places, Methodists and Catholics have failed to recognize each other fully as brothers and sisters in Christ. These failures have fostered attitudes of estrangement and in some circumstances contributed to practices of exclusion. Reconciliation will require a real healing of memories, acknowledging past wrongs, retelling our histories in ways that honour victims, and fostering mutual respect and trust. *Denver §6  
Seoul §33  
Gothenburg §27-28, §146*

3. From the beginning of the dialogue, without any glossing over of difficulties, members of the Joint Commission have increasingly discovered the richness of the certain, though imperfect, communion that Methodists and Catholics already share. Our common baptism enables us to recognise each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, even if we are unable to share fully together in our respective ecclesial lives. The ultimate goal of our dialogue is full ecclesial communion – ‘full communion in faith, mission and sacramental life’. As we move in that direction, we acknowledge the vital elements in the partial communion we already enjoy, while also recognising the remaining differences on which further work needs to be done.
 

*Denver §6*  
*Nairobi §20*  
*Rio de Janeiro §111*  
*Durban §145*  
*Gothenburg §147*
4. In both traditions, the call to personal sanctification – growth in holiness through daily life in Christ – holds a central place. Catholics and Methodists have always held in common, though not always realised, John Wesley’s conviction that each human being has a duty to seek holiness and Christian perfection. Methodists and Catholics find common ground in the universal call to holiness, and share a wide, deep and rich heritage of Christian spirituality.
 

*Denver §7, §50, §52*  
*Houston §2, §69*
5. Study of the historical background of Methodist and Catholic spirituality leads to the conclusion that what has mattered most in both traditions has been that religion brings about the transformation of the human heart and mind in everyday life. This exceptional affinity between Catholics and Methodists – to that religion of the heart which is the heart of religion – gives particular hope for the future of Catholic-Methodist relations.
 

*Denver §56*



# PART 1: GOD REVEALED AND REDEEMING

## THE HOLY TRINITY

6. A distinctive characteristic of Methodist-Catholic dialogue has been a fundamentally Trinitarian approach to the range of issues discussed.

7. Methodists and Catholics both confess the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, affirming belief in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of all that is; in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, who for our salvation was made flesh, was crucified and rose again; in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life. Catholics and Methodists share a vigorous Trinitarian faith, and a great attachment to the person of the Word incarnate, who calls us in the Holy Spirit to a holiness that is 'perfect love', and therefore 'social', patterned after the Trinitarian communion of persons.

*Honolulu §9*

*Singapore §38*

*Seoul §122*

*Houston §19*

8. Catholics and Methodists affirm together that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, the Eternal Word who is God from all eternity. At the heart of our common faith is that Jesus gave his life upon the cross for our salvation, and was raised from death by the Father to a new and glorious life which he seeks to share with all human-kind. This Eternal Word has primacy in the church. The Word made flesh is the ultimate norm of all the church's life and doctrine, orienting all that is done and taught in

*Brighton §16*

*Seoul §55*

the church towards the praise and worship of God the Father, by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit. At the last day, those who live in Christ will be raised into the fullness of his Kingdom, which will 'have no end'.

9. Methodists and Catholics also affirm together their faith in the Holy Spirit, who is God, fully and perfectly divine, and God's Gift of himself to his people. The Spirit is the personal Love of Father and Son, God's transforming love calling all to holiness and working within the hearts of individual believers and their communities to bring renewal and reformation. The Holy Spirit is the Witness to Christ in the world, anointing all believers for the work of witness and the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit reminds the disciples of the message and words of the Lord, and enables them to participate in the saving events of the life, death and resurrection of Christ, leading the faithful from grace to grace.

*Honolulu §8-11*

*Singapore §31*

*Seoul §58-59*

10. As Catholics and Methodists, we are inspired and sustained by a vision of the crowning moment when 'there will be a deep, an intimate, an uninterrupted union with God; a constant communion with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, through the Spirit; a continual enjoyment of the Three-One God, and of all the creatures in him' (John Wesley, Sermon 64 'The New Creation').

*Rio de Janeiro §10*

## CREATION AND SALVATION

11. Creation and salvation, which is 'new creation', are closely linked. God's purpose for creation is that human beings, opened to the gracious presence of God, commit their entire being to their Maker and Redeemer.

*Singapore §36*

In communion with him, humans become renewed in the divine image, in the holiness and happiness which is God's intention for humankind.

12. Human beings are made in the image of God. The affirmation that human beings are made by and for God grounds our understanding of human dignity and vocation. Bearing the image of God is a gift that entails responsibility. Humans are called to live in harmonious relationship with God, with other humans and with all creation. The mystery of humanity's origins and destiny is bound to God's identity as revealed in Christ. *Houston §14-16*

13. Human beings have been created as embodied, ensouled beings. Catholics and Methodists affirm the goodness of human existence body and soul. Reductive materialisms that erase the soul and dualistic spiritualities that denigrate the body are both to be rejected. Human beings depend on the material world for life. The human being as a whole is weak, mortal, and in need of transformation. Belief in the resurrection of the body, of which Christ's own is the pattern, is integral to the Christian witness. *Houston §23-25*

14. Human beings have received the gift of freedom. In its creaturely embodiment, this gift grants human beings the power of self-determination, which is limited. Freedom grants humans the capacity to love and to respond affirmatively to God's call to communion. Freedom is given for the sake of growth in holiness. The choices humans make move them towards or away from communion with God, self, neighbour, and all creation. The reality of sin denotes humanity's failure to use its freedom to attain its goal. *Houston §20, §26*

15. The heart of the Gospel and the core of our faith is the love of God revealed in redemption. All our creedal statements seek to proclaim this mystery: the love of God who saves us in Christ. In Christ, the mystery of the human being created in the *imago Dei* (image of God), yet fallen, is revealed and re-created by the Holy Spirit in the *imago Christi* (image of Christ). *Houston §181*

16. God sent his Son to save a world marked by sin. All of humanity has been so infected by self-centredness, self-reliance and the search for false gods that the revelation of the total holiness of Jesus shows humanity to have sinned in Adam. Sin has marred but not erased the image of God in the human. The sinner remains a human being made in the image of God. The power of sin reaches beyond individuals to institutions. Its effects are manifest in social structures that lead to racism, war, and environmental degradation. In the midst of this situation of sin, Jesus comes as the only Saviour, to save humankind by his life, death and resurrection. *Dublin §18f*  
*Rio de Janeiro §28, §73*  
*Houston §30*  
*Gothenburg §11-12*

17. Salvation has individual and social dimensions that must not be separated. It involves relationship to God and to our fellow human beings, and the transformation in Christ of both the human person and human society. This transformation re-creates the harmony of human beings with God, self, neighbour, and all creation. It inaugurates a new way of being human where freedom is marked by openness to the Father in the Spirit and embrace of all peoples in mercy and love. *Dublin §11*  
*Houston §40*  
*Gothenburg §18*

18. God's saving work in Christ is not restricted in scope, but reaches towards the whole created order. Salvation touches on the personal and the social, the political and the ecological. Christ's paschal mystery promises the possibility of the healing of the peoples and the earth by restoring humankind to friendship with God. *Gothenburg §21*

19. The Holy Spirit transforms the human community into the Kingdom of God, inaugurated by God the Father in Jesus Christ. The coming of this Kingdom involves the transformation of the human community now marred by sin, with its resultant oppression and poverty into a community of justice, love and peace. The present work of the Holy Spirit is the first fruits of this transformation, and the Spirit's presence prevents our longing for such reconciliation from resting on superficial solutions. *Dublin §15*  
*Honolulu §22*  
*Gothenburg §6*
20. The Christian message of salvation affirms eternal life which encompasses and goes beyond our mortal condition. There is life after death wherein the pilgrimage begun on earth is consummated in God's eternal love. This pilgrimage finds its ground and hope in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In Christ, who is Alpha and Omega, the goal of creation and the goal of salvation are revealed. Human beings made in the image of God attain their destiny as they are conformed to the image of Christ. *Houston §34, §36*

## REVELATION AND FAITH

21. The heart of our common faith is the historical self-disclosure and indeed self-gift of the Triune God. This culminates in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, is present and handed on to successive generations of believers by the Holy Spirit, manifest in power at Pentecost. The revelation of the Triune God is the source of the church's faith, the church's mission and the church's sacramental life. *Rio de Janeiro §1, §4, §8*

22. Our knowledge of God is entirely dependent on the Creator's free and gracious choice to make himself known. God takes action to disclose himself, pointing people in the right direction and opening their eyes so that they may truly see him. Revelation is more than self-disclosure: it is God's self-communication – God's self-gift – to human beings. When God is known or seen through revelation, more is gained than information; with knowledge of God comes new relationship, new possibility, even in St Paul's words 'a new creation'.

*Rio de Janeiro*  
§11-13

23. God's self-revelation is manifest through creation and history, especially in the events which made Israel a people. This reaches its climax in Jesus Christ, who in his life, death and resurrection reveals God in a unique way. The divine Word has become flesh in Jesus. That sheer self-gift of God is a word of life to humankind: 'God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life' (John 3.16f).

*Rio de Janeiro*  
§2, §6, §14,  
§17

24. The cross and resurrection of Christ supremely reveal him to us, achieving his purpose and making him our Saviour. When the apostles preached Christ, they proclaimed Christ crucified and risen. So also, the church today proclaims Christ crucified and risen.

*Singapore* §10

25. What is revealed in Jesus Christ, our Incarnate Redeemer, is God's hidden purpose already being worked out through the whole of his creation. God's revelation aims to bring about communion with God and communion between humankind. The faithful response to God's self-gift is fundamentally one of grateful acceptance and loving self-surrender. All who have welcomed the revelation of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are bound to celebrate together the wonderful deeds of God and to declare them in mission to the world.

*Honolulu* §45

*Rio de Janeiro*  
§9

26. What God reveals through Jesus is apprehended in faith by the power of the Holy Spirit. United with Christ through baptism and the Lord's Supper, Christians are called to make their own the faith of the whole community of believers. Such faith flows into mission, as Christ through his Spirit has commissioned those united with him to make disciples of all the nations. *Rio de Janeiro* §8-9

27. God's revelation is received by the faith it prompts. Faith includes a living response to the Word which engages the whole person. Such faith grows and produces fruits, transforming human life. While it is entirely God's gift, faith is inseparably a free act on our part and an attitude of grateful reception of God's grace and revelation. Faith also includes self-commitment to the Lord who from first to last is the guide of the faithful through the action of the Holy Spirit. Faith, freely given, is freely received. *Rio de Janeiro* §27, §31, §37

28. The faith that receives God's revelation is a response shaped by the nature and being of the self-giving God. What is believed and the life transformed by faith are essential dimensions of faith. In the New Testament, there is a clear link between the faith by which we believe, the faith which is believed and the faithful action consistent with such belief. *Rio de Janeiro* §32-33

29. Historically, the church has always expressed this faith in creedal form. The creeds are not simply collections of propositional statements requiring only intellectual assent; they also convey the Gospel message in a way that Catholics and Methodists accept as authoritative and life-giving. For both our communions, what is believed is a matter of glad assurance, leading to a path of faith to be followed. What is believed and affirmed in common must be embodied in the life both of the believer and the community of faith. *Rio de Janeiro* §34-36

30. Individual believers express this faith as members of a community. Each person's 'I believe' should participate fully in the communal 'we believe' of Christ's church. Faith is always personal, but never private, for faith incorporates the believing individual into the community of faith. Such faith is both a personal conviction and a sharing of what is held by the community of believers. Faith is neither merely an intellectual assent to what the church teaches nor a purely emotional personal conviction: to believe in God and the salvation which God has wrought for us is the living response of the whole life of the believer, and changes our lives in every respect; it is personal, living faith.

*Rio de Janeiro*

§29, §113

*Brighton* §37

31. The Gospel invites all human beings to join the first disciples in receiving God's revelation in Jesus Christ. In the midst of sinfulness, Jesus comes as the only Saviour, God's revelation acquires the dimension of redemption, and faith is offered by the Spirit as saving faith, by which those who believe in the Gospel receive forgiveness, justification, sanctification and all the graces needed to persevere in God's ways.

*Rio de Janeiro*

§28

## JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION

32. Methodists and Catholics confess together God's gracious prevenience. Both traditions also hold human cooperation with God in the mystery of salvation. We cooperate with the Spirit as we take to ourselves the self-giving of God in the mystery of the Incarnation. The Christian life is a dynamic process of growth in grace, from the beginning of faith (justification) toward the fullness of faith (sanctification).

*Denver* §55



33. Catholics and Methodists acknowledge the reality of sin, and yet also and above all affirm the reality and glory of the grace of God. By grace, the love of God revealed in Christ overcomes the consequences of sin, re-creates human beings, and leads them into participation in the life of God by the power of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is present and active within us throughout the entire experience of conversion which begins with an awareness of God's goodness and an experience of shame and guilt, proceeds to sorrow and repentance, and ends in gratitude for the possession of a new life given us through God's mercy in Jesus Christ. Liberation unfolds only as God's grace transforms our wills; love manifests only as God's grace evokes in us a response to God's initiative of love in Christ.

*Dublin §18-19*

*Honolulu §13*

*Houston §183*

34. Justification is not an isolated forensic episode, but part of a process that involves regeneration and sanctification, the participation of human life in the divine. As our minds are filled with the truths of the Gospel, they are transformed, and that transformation brings about new life. Through the hearing of and response to the Gospel, a crucial change of both mind and heart takes place. For a few, the transformation comes quickly, but for most Christians the putting-to-death of the old way of life and the taking on of the new involves a long process of maturing in love, a costly journey reflecting the pattern of the dying and rising of Christ.

*Honolulu §13*

*Singapore §39,  
§41*

35. A key concept for both the Council of Trent and John Wesley was that of 'prevenience'. The divine initiative always precedes human action and response on the path to God. In justification, God, through the atoning work of Christ, restores the sinner to a right relationship with himself. In such a restoration, the primary

*Honolulu*

*§14-15*

agency and the consummation are the ministry of the Holy Spirit, bringing Christ to us and leading us to him. When sinners are led to Christ and receive him, they are re-born and given the power to turn away from a life curved back upon itself towards a 'new life', opened out to love of God and neighbour.

36. This is our reconciliation to God who was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. This is justification: to be regarded as and made righteous, for Christ's sake, and yet also to be put on the path to becoming righteous. All of this is done by the initiative of the Father's redeeming mercy, manifested in the Son's atoning grace through the Holy Spirit's activity within our hearts. *Honolulu §15*

37. Catholics and Methodists are at one in their understanding that holiness entails conversion and transformation, being 'changed from glory into glory'. Bearing in mind the controversy at the time of the Reformation regarding cooperation with grace, it is of immense significance that Catholics and Methodists stand together on this matter. Methodists and Catholics believe that we truly cooperate with God's grace and participate in God's life. *Seoul §123*  
*Houston §80-81, §184*

38. The Holy Spirit sanctifies regenerate Christians, leading them towards perfect love. Life in the Spirit is human life, lived out in faith, hope and love, to its utmost in consonance with God's gracious purposes in and for his children. As people who live in the presence of the Risen Lord, Christians know by faith the transforming power of the Holy Spirit and are enabled to live as grateful children of the Father. Thus, the church gives glory to the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. *Honolulu §18*  
*Rio de Janeiro §26*

39. There is a profound affinity between Methodists and Catholics on justification. At Seoul in 2006, the World Methodist Council became associated with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification signed in 1999 by representatives of the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church: 'The Methodist Movement has always understood itself as deeply indebted to the biblical teaching on justification as it was understood by Luther and the other reformers and then again by the Wesleys. But it has also always embraced elements of the doctrine of justification which belong to the Catholic tradition of the early church both East and West'.

*World Methodist Council  
Statement of  
Association  
with the Joint  
Declaration on  
the Doctrine of  
Justification*

## SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

40. Catholics and Methodists affirm the Bible as the Word of God. By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures bear permanent witness to divine revelation. They are normative for all subsequent tradition. In proclamation and instruction, the written word in the Scriptures has primacy over all later formulations of divine revelation. It provides a permanent standard of belief, our primary and permanent norm, to be interpreted authoritatively by the living voice of Tradition. The Scriptures should be read with reverence and prayer, and studied carefully in order to help the church discern God's will for its life.

*Denver §36*

*Nairobi §6,  
§64*

*Brighton §17,  
§39*

41. God's Word is spoken to us through the words of Sacred Scripture, and it is Christ, through the Holy Spirit, who opens our minds to understand the Scriptures within the continuing life, worship and witness of the church through the ages.

*Seoul §55*

42. The Word of God is present in Tradition as the communication of the Gospel to new generations of believers. Tradition finds its focal expression in Scripture, and is faithful to the biblical message which preserves the proclamation of the news of salvation by the prophets and apostles. In this Tradition, the Word is read, proclaimed, explained and celebrated. *Brighton §18*

43. The polemics that set Scripture and Tradition over against one another are giving way to an understanding that we increasingly share. Scripture was written within Tradition, yet Scripture is normative for Tradition. The one is only intelligible in terms of the other. That there is a harmony between Scripture, Tradition and the Christian life of faith and worship is part of the self-understanding of the church and integral to the manner in which the church, in the Holy Spirit, transmits itself from generation to generation. Methodists and Catholics agree on the fundamental relationship between Scripture and Tradition. Scripture is the highest authority for all matters pertaining to the Christian faith, and Tradition is indispensable for the proper interpretation of Scripture. *Honolulu §34*  
*Singapore §21*  
*Brighton §18*

44. The Spirit guides the church in recognising the Word of God in the Scriptures, so that they become the document and charter of its life. The Spirit enables the people of God and their ministers to hear and receive with faith the Word in the Scriptures—to understand and interpret it, to transmit and explain it. Thus, the Spirit writes the Gospel in the hearts of the faithful. *Singapore §31*

45. Since the truth is always Christ's, there is a continuum of faith with the past. In the course of its development, however, the Christian community has gained new insights into the mystery of God's self-revelation once given in Christ. Catholics and Methodists recognise the dynamic character of revelation as the past enters the present and prepares for the future. Development as the fresh interpretation of faith means allowing our minds in each generation to be formed according to the mind which was in Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit guides the community into the fullness of truth and holiness. The desire to increase faith by understanding and to protect it from variations and deviations has led to the formulation of doctrinal standards of faith and orthodoxy (as in the traditional creeds). Growth in love, growth in holiness, is necessary to achieve more insightful knowledge of the riches of the faith.

*Singapore §33*

*Rio de Janeiro  
§38-39, §45,  
§61*

## CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

46. A life in the Spirit is human life lived to the full in consonance with God's gracious purpose, in intimate union with the Risen Christ. Christian experience is faith's awareness of the Holy Spirit's initiative within the human heart, stimulating and guiding the believer to deeper faith, hope and love. Christian experience includes the assurance of God's unmerited mercy in Christ, the inner witness of the Spirit that we are indeed children of God, pardoned and reconciled to the Father. The same Spirit also guides the faithful to a knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus Christ, and to an ever more faithful obedience to God's rule within the human community at large.

*Honolulu  
§23-24*

47. Methodists and Catholics affirm together the crucial importance of 'heart religion', since we agree that Christianity is a communion of believers, a 'fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ' (1 John 1:1-3). We form a mystical body whose Head is Christ. Our calling is to live together, in the Spirit, that Christ may be formed in us. The Holy Spirit is the principal artisan of our Christian experience, completing the work of Christ by placing his presence in the innermost reality of each human being. God dwells in the faithful, and they dwell in God. This spiritual presence is pure, unmerited, gift. It calls the faithful to holiness, brings them to and keeps them in the justice of Christ, sets them on the way to perfection, and empowers them to act through the Spirit's many gifts.

*Honolulu*

§25-29

*Singapore §29*

48. There are evident similarities between John Wesley and the mainstream of Catholic spirituality. In the Catholic tradition, saints and spiritual masters have stressed the central place of Christian experience, and the Second Vatican Council spoke frequently of the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in the human person, the church and the world. Both Catholics and Methodists have found an edifying example in John Wesley's deeply personal experience of having his heart 'strangely warmed' by the assurance of God's saving presence.

*Honolulu*

§25-29

49. It is in our totality as human persons that God joins us to himself, and we are agreed that our affective states are also subject to the Spirit's absolute 'prevenience'. As we seek to be instructed by the Scriptures and by the spiritual treasures of the Christian Tradition, our 'spiritual senses' are developed with greater and greater keenness. In the Spirit, we see the Lord, hear his voice, taste his sweetness, breathe the fragrance of his

*Honolulu §29*

presence, experience his healing touch and the gift of new life in him who dwells in our hearts and speaks to us through the witness and need of others.

## HIERARCHY OF TRUTHS

50. Both Methodists and Catholics accept the Scriptures, the creeds and the doctrinal decrees of the early ecumenical councils, and hold that all doctrines must remain under the Word of God. Though, to a great extent, Catholics and Methodists share a common faith, they are not yet fully agreed on what further doctrinal accord is necessary for the full communion of faith that would unite our traditions.

*Rio de Janeiro*

§112, §114

*Brighton* §22

51. Methodists have learned from John Wesley to discern between, on the one hand, different ‘opinions’ about matters of worship, ecclesiastical polity or even the exposition of certain scriptural truths, and, on the other, the essential doctrines of the gospel. Such essential doctrines are: the Triune God; the divine creation of the world and the vocation of humankind to holiness and happiness; the incarnation and atoning work of God the Son; the work of the Spirit as source of all truth, renewal and communion; the need of fallen humankind to repent and to believe the gospel; the divine provision of grace through word and sacrament, the institution and gathering of the church; the summons to love of God and neighbour; and the promise of a final judgement and victory where all the redeemed will share in glorifying and enjoying God for ever.

*Rio de Janeiro*

§115

52. The Catholic Church is at one with Methodists about these essential doctrines. However, the Catholic Church emphasises that the whole teaching of the church constitutes an organic unity; its members are therefore called upon to believe the full teaching of the church. Catholics recognise a 'hierarchy of truths' of Catholic doctrine; these truths all demand due assent of faith, yet are not all equally central to the mystery revealed in Jesus Christ, since they vary in connection with the foundation of the Christian faith. *Rio de Janeiro §116*

53. For both Methodists and Catholics, therefore, there is an order among the doctrines of the faith based upon their relationship to the core of that faith: the love of God revealed in the redemption. There is need for further discussion on the identity and order of what are considered essential doctrines. *Brighton §23*



## PART 2: THE CHURCH

### THE NATURE AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH

54. The nature and mission of the church has been a central topic for discussion throughout the dialogue. There is much about the church that we say together as Methodists and Catholics, and many elements of the church that we recognise in each other. We affirm that the church is a fruit of God's grace, and its nature and mission belong to the mystery of God's loving plan for the salvation of all humanity. *Seoul §46, §49*

#### *The Mystery of the Church*

55. The mystery of the church is grounded in the mystery of the Holy Trinity, and of the saving life, death and resurrection of the Incarnate Word. Methodists and Catholics affirm together a fundamentally Trinitarian teaching on the nature and mission of the church, drawn by the Father, commissioned by Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit. The inner life of the church is a sharing in the life of God, and the mission of the church is a sharing in the mission of God's Son and Spirit. Because God so loved the world, he sent his Son and the Holy Spirit to draw us into communion with himself. *Koinonia* (or 'communion') lies at the very heart of the way Catholics and Methodists understand the nature of the church. *Nairobi §1*  
*Seoul §51, §74*

56. Methodists and Catholics affirm the church as the people and family of God the Father; the body and bride of Jesus Christ, God the Son incarnate; and the living temple of God the Holy Spirit. The *koinonia* or communion of Christ's disciples is a visible reflection of the eternal *koinonia* or communion of the Triune God who is the source, meaning, purpose and destiny of the church. The essence of the church is participation in this communion of love between the three Persons of the Trinity. The life of the church is a life of worship and service, by which believers share in the exchange of love that is the life of the blessed Trinity.

*Singapore §53*

*Rio de Janeiro  
§109*

*Seoul §53*

57. By the Father's gift of the new and everlasting covenant, sealed by the blood of Christ, those who are 'in Christ' become 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light' (1 Peter 2:9). By the unitive power of his Spirit of love, the Father draws us into a communion of life with his own beloved Son. In Christ, we become the adopted sons and daughters of God the Father, members of his royal and consecrated family, the church. All of this is the fruit of the outpouring of the Father's creative and gathering love.

*Seoul §54*

58. The life-bringing communion with the Risen Lord is so profound that we call the church 'the bride of Christ' and 'the body of Christ'. Christ is the true vine, and we are his branches, bearing fruit because he lives in us, and we live in him (cf. John 15:1-17). This intimate union with Christ is God's gift to the church, maintained, deepened and renewed by the proclamation of the Word and the breaking of the bread. For Methodists and Catholics, the call to holiness and the call to be the church belong together.

*Seoul §56*

*Durban §19*

59. To draw all humanity to himself, the Son died on the cross, and was raised to new life. He gave us his words and his very self. In order to fulfil this saving purpose, he called into being the church which is the place where the Word of God is spoken, heard, responded to and confessed. The living Word forms a living community in which men and women converse with God and speak their faith to one another and to the world.

*Singapore*

§15-16

*Durban* §17

60. When there is faithful witness to Christ, people hear through the words of witness the Word of God and know the God of love through deeds of love. To such witness in word and deed all the faithful are called, but not in isolation from each other. To be 'in Christ' is already to belong not only to him but to the whole company of believers that lives by his grace. From the beginning of his ministry, Jesus called others to be with him in order to embody God's loving purpose for the world.

*Rio de Janeiro*

§23

### ***Koinonia: Connection and Communion***

61. As with the first community of Christ's followers, and the community of the faithful throughout the ages, the church today is rooted in the Father's speaking of the Word and the gathering power of the Holy Spirit. The church is summoned by the personal call of the Risen Lord. He says to each of us: Come to me, follow me, and go in my name. We are transformed by the touch of his presence and become new people, ready and able to follow him and to live a new life in Christ. We are sent forth by him into the world to proclaim with joy the good news of God's love for all humanity, and 'to make disciples of all nations' (Matthew 28:20). Jesus' call to communion with his life is inseparable from his call to communion with his mission.

If we are truly united with Christ as his bride, as his body, and as branches of the vine, we will also be drawn into his mission to bring God's saving love to the world and to invite people to the feast of the kingdom.

*Seoul §57*

62. The community of the faithful is brought into existence by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit relates the faithful to one another, distributing gifts among them. The Spirit is the invisible bond of communion (cf. 2 Corinthians 13:13), uniting individual Christians to Christ and to one another. The Spirit unites local church communities with each other in the one church of Christ. Within the church, the Spirit is the bond of communion and connection across both space and time. The eternal Spirit is God's great eschatological gift (cf. Joel 2:28-29), giving us even now an anticipation of eschatological communion with the Holy Trinity.

*Singapore §62*

*Seoul §58*

63. A visible community which is in *koinonia* with God is marked with visible signs, however imperfect, of the invisible presence of God the Holy Trinity. Methodists and Catholics affirm together in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church'. Unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity are already gifts of God to the church, marks of God's continuing and faithful presence. But we are a pilgrim people, and those marks are both gifts and goals, already present but not yet fully realised. The church's visible unity is lived as a communion (*koinonia*) that enables legitimate diversity to flourish in diverse settings. For that reason, ecclesial reconciliation involves the deepening of relations by concrete and timely acts of mutual recognition.

*Seoul §65-66*

*Gothenburg  
§151*

*Durban §139*

64. The church is relational by nature; it is a 'connectional society'. Both Methodists and Catholics have an essentially 'connectional' understanding of Christ's call to discipleship, to holiness and to mission, always as God's gift and rooted in our sharing in the invisible *koinonia* that is the life of the Holy Trinity. From the first call of Jesus to his apostles, to be called is to be gathered – into local communities (churches) and into one single communion (the church). To be Christian is to be joined together in Christ, to belong to the community gathered around the Risen Lord by the power of the Holy Spirit.

*Seoul §60*

*Durban §17*

65. This connectional principle derives from the understanding of holiness common to Catholics and Methodists. Like faith, holiness is never a private affair, but a call to perfect love of God and one another. Communion is grounded in the holy love of the living God; it is a sharing together in a life of holiness and mutual love. That life of communion includes deep fellowship among participants, a fellowship which is both visible and invisible, finding expression in faith and order, in prayer and sacrament, in mission and service.

*Nairobi §23*

*Seoul §60*

66. This dynamic of connection and communion belongs not only to disciples gathered together locally, but also to the worldwide community of those local communities united together in the one church, the Body of Christ. The church of Christ is truly present and effective in some way in all local congregations of the faithful who are gathered together by the preaching of the Gospel and for the celebration of the Eucharist. But to be truly ecclesial, each community must be open to communion with other such communities. Individual Christians and their communities are essentially linked together in a web of mutual and interdependent

*Seoul §61*

relationships. What is true of individual Christians and churches is also true of regional and national churches. The one church of Christ is an interdependent whole, because ultimately there is ‘one Lord, one faith, one baptism: one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all’ (Ephesians 4:5-6).

67. Such a connectional understanding of the church means that both Catholics and Methodists recognise the need for effective pastoral ministries of unity and oversight (*episcopé*) within the one church of Christ. Catholics and Methodists firmly believe that Christ wills one visibly united, universal church, even though they may differently identify the structures needed for such full communion. We have much to learn from each other’s structures of oversight. Catholics can learn from the Methodist conviction that God’s Spirit is at work in all the faithful and hence laity are involved in authoritative discernment. Methodists can learn from the Catholic distinction between the ‘sense of the faith’ (*sensus fidelium*) of all the baptised and the responsibility of bishops to guard the unity of faith.

*Seoul §61*

*Gothenburg  
§154*

## THE HOLINESS OF THE CHURCH

68. The call to holiness lies at the heart of Methodism, whose mission has emphasized the sanctification of believers and the reform of society. Catholics affirm the ‘universal call to holiness in the Church’. Catholics and Methodists confess together, in the words of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan and Apostles’ Creeds, their belief in the church as holy. The holy church is a pilgrim people, journeying with the risen Jesus, who walks with us. Holiness is also a promise that orients the church towards its fulfilment in God.

*Seoul §49*

*Houston §68-  
69, §96*

69. While Catholics and Methodists both confess the holiness of the church, they have different emphases regarding the relationship between the church 'invisible' (its spiritual reality in Christ) and 'visible' (its historical, institutional reality). Catholics speak of the sinless church, which is the body of Christ filled with the Holy Spirit. They also recognise that some members and structures may be sinful and in need of purification. Methodists are reluctant to claim that the church is sinless, wary that such a claim may lead to a failure to repent when ecclesial structures are sinful, or to undertake the necessary reform. For this reason, Methodists are less theologically precise than Catholics about the correlation between the church as a spiritual reality and its institutional forms. Nevertheless, for Methodists and Catholics, holiness must always be understood as God's action and free gift. *Houston* §97-99

### *Abiding in the Truth*

70. The past, present and future dimensions of God's saving work must be held together. The Incarnate Word speaks through the church, carrying forward and handing on his saving work from generation to generation. For this service of Christ, the dynamic communion, connection and continuity of the pilgrim church today with the church of the past and of the future is essential. The Holy Spirit is the source of our communion with the apostles and the church through the ages, enabling the church to hand on the apostolic faith afresh to the world of today and into the future. *Seoul* §82-83

71. The whole community of faith has been sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit, who preserves within the church the truth of the Gospel proclaimed by Christ and the apostles. Because of the promised presence of the Spirit, the church is anointed with the truth, abides in the truth and is preserved in the truth, so that Christians together can be co-workers in the truth under the leading power of the Spirit of Truth. With different emphases, Methodists and Catholics affirm both the human frailty and the God-given indefectibility of Christ's church. The treasure of the mystery of Christ is held in the earthen vessel of the daily life of the pilgrim church, a community always in need of purification and reform. All true renewal and reformation in the church is the work of the Holy Spirit, who enables the community of the faithful to hear the Word of God and to move forward together in life, faith and witness. We affirm together the essentially dynamic nature of the pilgrim church, which is not only continually in need of renewal but also on a journey into holiness and truth, led by the unerring Spirit of Holiness and Truth.

*Rio de Janeiro*  
§27

*Brighton* §30-45, §118

*Seoul* §84-85

72. Catholics and Methodists believe that God alone is the absolute Truth. All members of the church on earth are fallible creatures and sinners in need of the mercy of God. The church is totally dependent on the active presence of the Holy Spirit in every aspect of its life and teaching. Methodists and Catholics agree that Jesus promised his presence and protection to the church until the end of time. He continues to endow his church with the Spirit of truth and holiness. God's faithfulness means that the powers of evil will never prevail against the church as it engages in its mission for the salvation of the world (cf. Mt 16:18).

*Brighton* §42, §48



### *Cooperation and Participation*

73. A key point of agreement between Methodists and Catholics is the need for graced, free and active participation in God's saving work. The first Christians knew they were called to participate in God's mission and to proclaim God's reign as Jesus had done. The church's calling today remains the same. Catholics and Methodists affirm a common understanding of graced 'cooperation' and 'participation' in God's work which allows us with St Paul to call Christians 'God's co-workers' (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:9; 2 Corinthians 6:1). Methodists and Catholics agree that God works through people as servants, signs and instruments of God's presence and action. Although God is not limited to such ways of working, we joyfully affirm together that God freely chooses to work through the service of human communities and individuals, empowered by grace. The whole church is called to be a channel of God's grace to the world. Within the church, individuals and institutions become agents of the Lord and thus servants of their brothers and sisters. In all of this they rely on the primacy of God's grace over all human limitations and weaknesses, and on the invisible, active and powerful presence of the Holy Spirit who blows where he wills.

74. This common understanding of graced cooperation makes it possible to move towards a common understanding of the nature and mission of the church which makes use of concepts associated with 'sacramentality'. The Mystery of the Word made flesh and the sacramental mystery of the Eucharist point towards a view of the church based upon a sacramental idea. The church takes its shape from the Incarnation from which it originated, from the sacrament of bap-

*Brighton §49,  
§52*

*Seoul §76*

*Durban §14*

tism by which its members participate in the death and resurrection of Christ, and from the eucharistic action by which its life is constantly being renewed. That the church is a 'means of grace' is a point of agreement between Methodists and Catholics. Filled with the Spirit of God, the church is empowered to serve as a sign, sacrament and harbinger of the Kingdom of God in the time between the times. The Risen Christ is present at the heart of his church, working in and through the church that he unites with himself as a communal sign and instrument of his saving presence. Only the presence of the Holy Spirit makes it possible for the church to be a sign or sacrament of the Risen Christ for our whole world.

*Nairobi §8,  
§10*

*Seoul §77,  
§102*

*Durban §11,  
§13*

75. The church is called to be an effective sign to the world of the saving and gathering purpose of God for all humanity, and a foretaste of our final gathering by God in heaven. Visible unity is essential, therefore, to the nature and mission of the church.

*Seoul §62*

### ***Called to Mission***

76. A strong missionary impulse is common to Methodists and Catholics. Faith flows into mission, and the church's calling to witness in word and life to God's saving work in Christ is fundamental to her being. The nature and mission of the church are inseparable. The call to personal holiness, the call to unity in worship and the call to mission intrinsically belong together. The church as a communion of faith is called to preach and proclaim to the world the Gospel of Jesus Christ, 'good news of a great joy which will come to all the people' (Luke 2:10). Catholics and Methodists are firmly united in the passionate conviction that the Gospel is offered to all.

*Dublin §11,  
§21*

*Rio de Janeiro  
§9, §123*

*Brighton §48*

*Seoul §73*

77. The great commissioning at the end of St Matthew's Gospel is addressed to the apostles and to all who will share their faith. The Risen Christ calls on those who follow him to share in his mission. Addressing his disciples, he says, 'As the Father sent me, so I send you' (John 20.21). They are to carry forward his once-for-all redemptive mission in space and time, to all peoples and all ages. *Rio de Janeiro §74, §76*

78. The innermost reality of the church is its invisible communion with the Risen Lord by the power of the Holy Spirit. God's Son is 'the Sent One', and being drawn into the life of Christ will always involve being drawn into his mission from the Father. Communion with the person of Christ commits us to communion with the mission of Christ. This participation in the mission of Christ is possible only because of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In the Spirit, the proclaiming community itself becomes a living Gospel for all to hear. The whole prophetic people of God, lay and ordained together, is empowered in this work of witness and mission, precisely by the Holy Spirit drawing us into a deep communion with Christ himself. *Rio de Janeiro §75*  
*Seoul §80*

79. The proclamation of the Gospel by words is an essential task for each generation of believers. Christians also bear witness when they seek to let their light shine before others so that their conduct as well as their words may bring others to glorify God. This personal evangelism contributes to the corporate mission of the church, and plays a vitally important role in making new believers. *Singapore §48*

80. The Holy Spirit empowers God's people in the work of witness and mission. The whole church remains rooted in a communion of faith and life with the apostles, their teaching and their mission. Because Christ's followers are incorporated into him through baptism, they share in his priestly, prophetic and royal office, together as a communion and individually each in their own way. Each of our churches affirms the role of lay people as essential witnesses to the Gospel. *Brighton §35-36*

81. Christ proclaimed that the kingdom of his Father was near at hand. This proclamation is the heart of his message, and therefore lies at the heart of the mission of his church. The church announces the kingdom and is itself a living sign of God's reign. In Christ's name and by the power of the Spirit, the church serves the kingdom of God by working to heal and transform the world here and now. *Seoul §68*

82. We have been 'baptised into Christ's death' so that we can share his resurrection and 'walk in newness of life' (Romans 6:4). Methodists and Catholics confess together the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The faith that 'Christ is risen!' lies at the heart of all that we hold in common. The church is called to be an Easter community, marked with the joy of the Resurrection of our Lord. Like Mary of Magdala and the apostles, Christians today are told not to look for Christ among the dead, but to proclaim him to the world as risen and alive. *Seoul §71*

83. Every authentic church community is marked with signs of Pentecost, signs of the Holy Spirit. We hear the Lord say afresh, 'You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses... to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8). In that way we truly become a community of faith and love, anticipating and journeying towards our final destiny with and in God. The Spirit of Pentecost heals the division of Babel, so that people of different languages hear and understand the *kerygma* as the church continues to go out to the margins of a fractured world.

*Seoul* §72

*Gothenburg* §4

### ***Gifts of the Spirit***

84. Central to our common understanding of the church as Methodists and Catholics is the Gift of the Holy Spirit, the transforming presence of the Spirit of Perfect Love. This ultimate giftedness bears fruit in the abundance of gifts and graces entrusted by God to the church. Throughout the ages, the Holy Spirit has poured out gifts on those who have been baptised. These gifts are for the service of communion, for the drawing of humanity into communion with the Father and the Son, and for the building up and strengthening of communion among those who believe.

*Singapore* §59

*Seoul* §86

85. Catholics and Methodists joyfully recognise and affirm many of these gifts in one another's communities. Such mutual affirmation is a vital dimension of our desire to give proper recognition to each other's ecclesial or churchly character. Many different gifts have been developed in the two traditions, even in separation. Although Methodists and Catholics already share some of their riches with one another, we look forward to a greater sharing as we come closer together in full unity.

*Nairobi* §22-23

*Seoul* §86, §97

86. Communion is much more than co-existence; it is a shared existence. Mutual sharing is at the heart of a life of holiness. Communion involves holding in common the many gifts of God to the church. The more these gifts are held together, the more in communion we are with each other. Full communion is realised when we share together all those essential gifts of grace entrusted by God to the church. *Seoul §63*

87. All of these gifts together are elements and endowments that build up the church for its life and mission. They include the written word of God; the life of grace; faith, hope and love, as well as other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit and visible elements. Among these visible elements are the means of grace so central to the life of our two traditions, especially baptism and the Eucharist as well as other rites that could be said to have a sacramental nature. An essential gift is the apostolic ministry, including a specific ministry of ‘oversight’ (*épiscopé*). *Seoul §87*

88. Methodists and Catholics are not yet fully agreed on what constitutes the essential gifts, in the areas of doctrine, sacraments and structures. For Catholics, the essential gifts of the Spirit include the historic episcopate in apostolic succession, and the Petrine ministry of the Bishop of Rome. For Methodists, the essential gifts include Christian conference. *Seoul §87, §92*

89. We already share together in the Gift of the Holy Spirit, who is the source of our communion in Christ. Methodists and Catholics are already in a real, though imperfect, communion with one another. What unites us is much greater than what divides us. We rejoice in the many essential elements of the church of Christ that we discover in each other’s communities. *Seoul §64, §107-113, §121-127*

Our communion grows as we learn to recognise God's gifts in each other, and our continuing dialogue is always an exchange of gifts.

## MEANS OF GRACE AND SACRAMENTS

90. Christ, 'the image of the invisible God' (Colossians 1.15), may be thought of as the primary sacrament, revealing God's nature and purpose and enabling us to know and serve God. 'The Word was made flesh and lived among us' (John 1.14). God's Son entered human history as one of us, taking upon himself human life and suffering, and became both the sign of our salvation and the instrument by which it is achieved. *Singapore §89*  
*Rio de Janeiro §94-95*  
*Brighton §52-54*
91. After the pattern of the Incarnation, God continues to make visible the Invisible, using signs and channels of the divine presence. Methodists and Catholics agree that God uses means of grace which are trustworthy channels. As the company of those who have been incorporated into Christ and nourished by the life-giving Holy Spirit, the church may analogously be thought of in a sacramental way. Christ works through the church. *Nairobi §8-10*  
*Rio de Janeiro §96*  
*Brighton §53, 54*
92. Instituted by Christ and made effective by the Holy Spirit, the particular sacraments of the church may be considered instances of the divine Mystery being revealed and made operative in the lives of the faithful. The sacraments flow from the sacramental nature of God's self-communication to us in Christ. They are specific ways in which, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Risen Jesus makes his saving presence and action effective in our midst. After Christ's passion, death and resurrection the Saviour continues his words and actions among us by means of sacramental signs. *Rio de Janeiro §97-98*  
*Brighton §55*

93. The sacraments are effective signs by which God gives grace through faith. God works through his Spirit in a mysterious way beyond human comprehension, and he invites a full and free human response. They are effective signs of grace because they are not merely human acts. By the power of the Holy Spirit they bring into our lives the life-giving action and even the self-giving of Christ himself. It is Christ's action that is embodied and made manifest in the church's actions which, responded to in faith, amount to a real encounter with the Risen Christ. When the church baptises, it is Christ who baptises, and it is Christ who says, 'This is my body... this is my blood' and who truly gives himself to us. The fruit of such encounters is our sanctification, and the building up of the body of Christ.

*Nairobi §15-16*

*Brighton §53*

94. The sacramental life of the church expresses our communion with God and with one another in a profound way. The sacraments are at one and the same time effective signs of God's fellowship with the people, and of the fellowship of the people of God with one another.

*Rio de Janeiro §118*

95. It is by divine institution that the church has received baptism and Eucharist, outward signs of inward grace consisting of actions and words by which God encounters his people. Methodists and Catholics affirm the full sacramental nature of the rites of baptism and Eucharist, attributing to Christ their direct institution.

*Nairobi §13*

*Rio de Janeiro §100*

## BAPTISM

96. Baptism is an action of God by which the baptised begin their life with Christ the Redeemer and participate in his death and resurrection. As Christ is

*Rio de Janeiro §101*



received, all sin, original and actual, is forgiven, the baptised are justified in the eyes of God and become a new creation; with all believers they share the communion of the Spirit, and they are called to seek perfection in hope and in love through faithful response to God's continuing gifts of grace.

97. Baptism is irrevocable and is not repeated. While it is received in the context of a local church and in a specific Christian communion, it introduces people into the universal church of Christ and the gathering of the saints. By baptism we are received into the community of faith.

*Singapore §46*

*Rio de Janeiro  
§101*

98. Baptism is given in the midst of the community to new Christians who, at their baptism, confess the faith they have received. Symbolically they are plunged into the cleansing waters where they receive the Holy Spirit and are given the garment of faith 'in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit'. United to Christ in his dying and rising, they bear witness that they are reborn in him. Methodists and Catholics agree that Christians are baptised in the faith that has been received from the apostles and obediently preached by the community and its members. Both Methodists and Catholics consider it right to baptise infants born to believers.

*Singapore §63*

99. Through the baptismal waters, people are brought into the life of God that is communicated through Christ in the Holy Spirit. This life, being the very life of the divine Persons, is itself a life of communion and involves participating in the bond of love established by the Spirit between God and creation. The baptised become sisters and brothers in Christ. They are constituted as the family of God, sharing in its privileges and responsibilities as a royal priesthood. By baptism,

*Singapore  
§64-65*

the community of believers shares in the holiness of God, a holiness that is manifest in the Christian life of the faithful.

100. Baptism, the sacrament of faith, is the sign of that new life that the Father gives us through Christ in the Spirit. Christ's death has put to death sin in our lives. The new life that replaces the old is a life of love. This life is a sharing in the inner life of God that is communicated to us by the Holy Spirit, 'God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us' (Romans 5.5). This love is pure gift, and in virtue of it we are drawn ever more deeply into the inner life of God and able to cry 'Abba, Father' (Galatians 4.6). It is boundless in its range and scope, directed to the whole world, in particular the poor, the weak and the unloved. *Singapore §40*

101. At the same time, Methodists and Catholics recognize the necessity of a personal response for the faithful living of baptism. Baptism is a call into ongoing life and mission in Christ. The tension between baptism as a cultural 'rite of passage' and baptism celebrated as a sacrament of faith in Christ and of continuing conversion towards him calls for a fresh articulation of the relationship between baptism and regeneration for our own time. *Durban §60-61, §70-71*

102. In spite of our agreement on baptism as a sacrament of faith, differences remain between Catholics and Methodists concerning the relationship between faith, the church and baptism. Further conversation may help each of us to learn from the other concerning: the personal and corporate dimensions of baptismal faith; how such faith is to be discerned and nurtured pastorally; and the relationship between believing and belonging. *Durban §43*

103. Catholics and Methodists give full recognition to each other's celebration of the sacrament of baptism. Our common baptism in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is our sacramental bond of unity, the visible foundation of the deep communion that already exists between us and impels us to ever deeper unity with each other and participation in the life and mission of Christ himself. *Seoul §78*

104. 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 Corinthians 12.12-13a). The baptism in which Catholics and Methodists share is a visible foundation of the deep communion which exists between us and impels us to ever deeper unity with each other and participation in the life and mission of Christ himself. *Seoul §78*  
*Durban §29*  
*Gothenburg §160*

## EUCCHARIST

105. It is Christ himself who invites us to feast at his table. Methodists and Catholics agree that Jesus Christ instituted the Eucharist as a holy meal, the memorial of his sacrifice. As the baptised partake of it, they share the sacrament of his body given for them and his blood shed for them; they present and plead his sacrifice before God the Father; and they receive the fruits of it in faith. Proclaiming the death of the Lord until *Rio de Janeiro §102*

he comes again, the eucharistic assembly anticipates the final advent of Christ and enjoys a foretaste of the heavenly banquet prepared for all peoples.

106. There is significant agreement on much that is central to our understanding of the Eucharist. Methodists are increasingly recognising that the Lord's Table belongs to the fullness of Christian worship, while Catholics are appreciating the fundamental importance of the preaching of the Word. These developments have resulted in a remarkable convergence, so that never before has the worshipping life of Methodists and Catholics had so much in common. *Dublin §48-51*  
*Singapore §45*

107. The eucharistic devotion of John and Charles Wesley, with their emphasis on frequent communion, as well as the eucharistic hymns of Charles Wesley, provide a significant point of contact with Catholic eucharistic spirituality and teaching, offering a possible basis for convergence on the nature of the real presence and the sacrificial character of the Eucharist. *Denver §9, §79-80*

108. The Eucharist as a sacrament of the Gospel is the fullest expression of God's love in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Through it, God meets us here and now in his forgiving and self-giving love. It is the commemoration of the sacrificial death and resurrection of Christ, which is the climax of the whole action of God in creation and salvation. It expresses our response – both personal and corporate – to God's initiative in a sacrifice not only of praise and thanksgiving, but also of the glad surrender of our lives to God and to his service. Thus we are united with Christ in his obedient self-offering to the Father and his victory over death. It is our response of faith and love whereby we receive his gift of himself and are renewed as members of his body, that we may be the focus of his presence *Dublin §52*

and the agents of his mission to the world. The Eucharist points to and anticipates his final triumph, and it is our vision of that hope and our sharing in that victory.

109. In the Eucharist, the Word of God is heard in the Scriptures and the proclamation of the Gospel. As Christians receive the sacrament of his body and blood offered for them, they become the body through which the risen Lord is present on earth in the Holy Spirit. As they share his Body and Blood that have brought to the sinful world salvation and reconciliation, they proclaim today the past events of the Lord's death and resurrection, and as they do so they present to the world their confidence and hope that Christ who 'has died and is risen' will also 'come again.'

*Singapore §67*

*Rio de Janeiro  
§102*

110. Methodists and Catholics affirm the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. This reality does not depend on the experience of the communicant, although it is only by faith that we become aware of Christ's presence. Christ in the fullness of his being, human and divine, crucified and risen, is present in the sacrament. This presence is mediated through the sacred elements of bread and wine. Within the eucharistic celebration, the bread and wine become the sign par excellence of Christ's redeeming presence to his people. To the eyes of faith, they now signify the Body and Blood of Jesus, given and shed for the world. As we take, eat and drink, and share the bread and wine, we are transformed into him. The eucharistic bread and wine are therefore efficacious signs of the Body and Blood of Christ.

*Denver §83*

*Dublin §54*

111. An important point of difference between Methodists and Catholics concerns the nature of the real presence and the transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. Catholics do not claim that the physical and chemical composition

*Dublin §49,  
§59, §61*

of the bread and wine are changed, but they do believe their inner reality (or ‘substance’) becomes that of the body and blood of Christ. Methodists affirm the bread and wine acquire additional significance as effectual signs of the body and blood of Christ, but they have been reluctant to explore the manner of any such change. These differences are evident in the question of the reservation or disposal of the consecrated elements. Catholics practise reservation for bringing Holy Communion to the sick and for adoration. Methodists do not generally reserve the elements but reverently dispose of them.

112. The Eucharist is the celebration of Christ’s full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, offered once and for all for the whole world. It is a memorial that is not a mere calling to mind of a past event or of its significance, but the church’s effectual proclamation of God’s mighty act in Christ. In this celebration we share in Christ’s offering of himself in obedience to the Father’s will.

*Denver §83*

*Dublin §63*

113. The term sacrifice is not used so readily by Methodists as by Catholics when speaking of the Eucharist. The language of sacrifice is more prominent in the hymns of John and Charles Wesley than it is in the prayers of the various Methodist communion services. When Methodists use sacrificial language, it refers to the sacrifice of Christ once-for-all, to our pleading of that sacrifice here and now, to our offering of the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, and to the sacrifice of ourselves in union with Christ who offered himself to the Father.

*Dublin §64-65*

114. Catholics can happily accept all these senses of the term, but they also speak of the sacrifice of the Mass as something the church offers in all ages of her history. They see the Eucharist not as another sacrifice adding something to Christ's once-for-all sacrifice, nor a repetition of it, but as making present and offering in a sacramental way the same sacrifice. *Dublin §66*

115. Methodists and Catholics have begun to address these issues by re-focusing on the once-for-all sacrificial action of Christ. This action is 'made flesh' in human history on the cross, but it can also be viewed within the mystery of the Trinity. God the Father eternally begets the Son, and the Son eternally responds to the Father in total self-giving. Jesus' death on Calvary can be understood as the 'sacrament'. Calvary makes tangible this eternal self-giving of the Son to the Father in the love of the Holy Spirit, as it also demonstrates the Father's ready welcome and acceptance of that self-giving. *Durban §103*

116. In the Eucharist, through the action of the Holy Spirit, Christians are united with the self-offering of the Son to the Father and share in the Father's welcome and acceptance of that self-offering. This is possible because Christ's self-offering—his sacrifice—is present in the liturgical action. Methodists and Catholics use the biblical and patristic concept of *anamnesis* or memorial to understand the liturgical action as a re-presentation of God's mighty acts here and now. *Durban §105, §121*

117. There are issues to be resolved before Catholics and Methodists can give full mutual recognition to each other's celebration of the Eucharist. These include the particular way in which Christ is present in Holy Communion, the related question of the reservation or *Denver §83f*  
*Seoul §94*

disposal of the consecrated elements, and the Catholic practice of offering the eucharistic sacrifice not only for those present but also for the dead. Intimately connected issues are those of the nature and validity of the ministry of those who preside at the Eucharist, and the link between eucharistic communion and ecclesial communion. It is essential that these issues be further explored.

118. Methodists and Catholics welcome one another to attend their celebrations of the Eucharist, and we agree that receiving Holy Communion is both a sign of existing unity and a means towards the greater unity of the church, but they are not agreed on the unity in faith required for admission to Communion. Catholics and Methodists should make the fullest use of the provisions in their respective ecumenical legislation, except that no breach of each other's discipline should be encouraged.

*Denver §84*

*Rio de Janeiro  
§119*

*Seoul §144*

119. Methodists and Catholics are already agreed that when the Eucharist is celebrated, we hear afresh the Word of God spoken to us; we enter together more deeply into the saving mystery of Christ; we encounter Christ anew in a way that ensures the living presence of Christ at the heart of the church; we are anointed by the transforming love that is God's Holy Spirit and become more truly the Body of Christ; we are sent forth together in Christ to share more deeply in God's work in our world; and we share together a foretaste of the heavenly banquet. As we celebrate the Eucharist in which our communion is made whole and complete, the peace and reconciliation of the wider world is also advanced. As we celebrate the Eucharist, called together by the Father for communion in the divine life, the Risen Lord makes us more fully the communion he wills his church to be, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Together these affirmations already provide a rich foundation from which we

*Seoul §94*

*Gothenburg  
§161*



can face the remaining issues in the hope that one day Catholics and Methodists will be able to gather together in full communion around the table of the Lord.

## OTHER MEANS OF GRACE

120. Baptism, received once, and Holy Communion, received regularly, are at the heart of the life of holiness to which the faithful are called. The church has authority to establish other rites which are sacred actions and signs of God's redeeming love in Christ. Some of these the Catholic Church has recognised as sacraments, since it sees them as ultimately derived from the will of Christ. In Catholic teaching, there are neither more nor less than seven sacraments. Methodists, while using the term 'sacrament' only of the two rites for which the Gospel explicitly record Christ's institution, do not deny sacramental character to some other rites.

*Nairobi §13*

*Rio de Janeiro  
§104*

121. Catholics believe that in confirmation the Gift of the Spirit seals what was achieved in baptism. The faithful who are aware of sinning and contrite have access to Christ the healer and forgiver in the sacrament of penance. When they are sick, they also receive in the anointing of the sick the healing of Christ. When they marry, they marry in the Lord through a sacrament of mutual communion. In the sacrament of orders, some of the believers are chosen and empowered to act for Christ as Head, Shepherd and Teacher of the church. In all sacraments the power of the Spirit is at work, inviting the believers to closer union with their Redeemer, to the glory of God the Father.

*Rio de Janeiro  
§115*

122. Methodists do not recognise these rites as instituted directly by Christ and thus do not recognize these rights as sacraments of the Gospel. However, Methodists affirm the active presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the faithful, the necessity of repentance for sins, the power of prayer for healing, the holiness of marriage, and the Spirit's empowerment of those who are called and ordained for ministry. Methodists recognise that these and other practices can be effectual channels of God's grace if they are faithful to Scripture. John Wesley taught that we can trust that God's grace is regularly found in such places. They are thus 'prudential means of grace'. In effect, Methodists treat ordination, prayer for healing, declaring the forgiveness of sins, marriage and confirmation as prudential means of grace that have a special status within this larger category. They are not sacraments like baptism and the Lord's Supper, yet they have a sacramental quality. They are distinct from other prudential means of grace in that they are grounded in the practices of the apostolic church as attested in Scripture. Thus, they are properly given liturgical expression in the life of the community of faith.

*Rio de Janeiro*  
§106

*Brighton* §59-60

123. Liturgical rites of reconciliation, for both Methodists and Catholics, are effective proclamations of the Word of God that, by grace, move penitents to confess their sins and hear the declaration of God's reconciling love. Opportunities to experience each other's liturgical rites would help dispel misunderstanding about our respective practices and their meaning.

*Gothenburg*  
§164

124. For Catholics the sacrament of penance and reconciliation is a privileged moment when sinners hear God's word of mercy and are moved to contrition, confess their sins, and hear the declaration of pardon. God's forgiveness is not bound exclusively to the sacrament. In Catholic understanding, when it is not possible to celebrate the sacrament, an act of perfect contrition is an effective sign of God's reconciling action through the gift of grace. For Catholics the sacrament is only obligatory when in a state of mortal sin, although more frequent use of the sacrament is encouraged. Despite a Catholic insistence that it is always Christ who acts in the sacraments, Methodists nonetheless have concerns that the Catholic practice places too much focus on the role of the minister and the mediatory role of the church. The Joint Declaration of the Doctrine of Justification makes it clear that 'justifying grace never becomes a human possession to which one could appeal against God' (JDDJ §27). *Gothenburg §162-163*

125. Historically, Methodists and Catholics have found much common ground on Christian marriage and family life. Married life is a holy and honourable estate instituted by God for the mutual love and sanctification of the spouses, as well as the rearing and education of children. Christian marriage involves commitment, fidelity and permanence. We agree that marriage is sacramental in nature because it is the living and life-giving union in which the covenantal love of God is made present (cf. Ephesians 5.21-34). Because marriage is a sacramental covenant, it is a living, prophetic sign to all people. The love and life of a married couple is a particular visible expression of the universal loving kindness and fidelity of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The spouses' relationship, their continual, lived, total giving and sharing, is a genuine sign of God's love for humankind, and of Christ's love for the church. Life-long marriage lived by the couple is what constitutes its ecclesial witness. Catholics and Methodists have different approaches to the problems of marital breakdown, and different views on the possibility of divorce and re-marriage when a marriage irrevocably breaks down. The advent of same-sex marriage has called into question our common understanding of Christian marriage. For Catholics, marriage is between a man and a woman, while some Methodists allow marriage between people of the same sex.

126. Methodists and Catholics find significant convergence of understanding about the means of grace. We agree that Christ has promised to be with his church until the end of the age (Matthew 28.20), and that all the means of grace, whether sacraments or 'sacramentals', instituted or prudential means of grace, are channels of Christ's faithfulness to his promise. Catholics and Methodists affirm that baptism, confirmation and ordination are unrepeatable acts whereby God's grace is conveyed to the recipient in special ways. *Brighton §61*

127. Some of the remaining differences between Methodists and Catholics centre on whether and how such 'means of grace' may be 'guaranteed' or 'trustworthy'.

128. Catholics and Methodists both recognise also other 'means of grace'. These include public and private prayer, the reading of Scripture, the singing of hymns, fasting, and what Methodists refer to as 'Christian conferencing'. *Rio de Janeiro §107*

## AUTHORITY AND ORDAINED MINISTRY

### *Ordained Ministry*

129. Catholics and Methodists affirm together the royal priesthood of the whole church, and God's call to all to service and mission. Within the apostolic service of the whole community, there has been, from the beginning, a ministry uniquely called and empowered to build up the body of Christ in love. Catholics and Methodists understand such ministry as a gift from God to the church, a graced service of the church's living communion with Christ throughout the world and through the ages.

*Rio de Janeiro*  
§84

*Brighton* §31,  
§36

130. The starting point for understanding ministry in the church is the New Testament. These scriptures offer many images elucidating the ministry of Jesus as priest, prophet and king, and the subsequent gift of this ministry through the apostles to the church. Jesus' earthly ministry culminates in the paschal mystery of his saving death and resurrection in which his three-fold office as priest, prophet and king is completely fulfilled. All ministry in the church is ultimately that of Christ and is only ever exercised by individuals as his representatives.

*Durban* §135-  
136, §189

*Gothenburg*  
§130

131. The specific charism received by those called to the ordained ministry is among the many gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit. The origins of this ministry are found in the commission that Christ gave to his apostles. Apostolic communities need people to do for their own time what was done by the apostles in theirs: to pastor, teach and minister under the authority of Christ, the Good Shepherd, Teacher and Lord.

*Singapore* §60-  
61

*Rio de Janeiro*  
§86

132. Despite obvious outward differences, Methodists and Catholics have a large measure of common understanding on ministry. The fundamental ministry is that of Christ, whose goal is to reconcile all people to God and to each other, and to bring them into a new community in which they can grow together to their full freedom as children of God. Christ's ministry did not end with his life on earth, but by the power of the Spirit continues now in and through his church. Christ still chooses and equips people for his ministry, just as he did in the beginning. *Dublin §77*

133. Methodists and Catholics agree that by ordination a person is irrevocably called and set apart by God for special service in the community of believers. It is a special calling within the general calling given to all. By ordination a person becomes a minister of word and sacrament in the church of Christ. At the heart of all pastoral service by the ordained lies a ministry of oversight for the sake of the connection and communion of the church (cf. 1 Peter 5.2,4). *Brighton §63*

134. Our communions understand ordination as a means of God's grace whereby the minister is introduced into a covenant relationship of permanent service in Christ's church. In the exercise of their ministry, the ordained represent Christ to the church and the people of God before God. This specific form of leadership is always a service both to God and to God's people. It is an essentially pastoral ministry of proclaiming the Gospel, calling people to faith, feeding the flock with word and sacrament, and making Christ known. *Singapore §86*  
*Brighton §67*  
*Durban §156*

135. Both of our traditions maintain the New Testament practice of setting believers apart for ministry by the laying on of hands with prayer for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Ordination takes place in the assembly of the church, where ordinands are incorporated into an existing body of ministers. The person called by God and ordained by the church is commissioned to a life-long ministry. *Dublin §79*  
*Singapore §80*
136. All ministry continues to depend entirely upon God's grace for its existence. The God who calls crowns his call with gifts for ministry, and the minister is to live constantly in the grace of God. As an instrument in God's hands, the ordained minister imparts the Word of God to God's people, both by speech and by the sacraments of the church. Both Methodists and Catholics maintain the principle that while preaching and the sacraments call for the holiness of the minister, it is not the minister's worthiness that makes them effective, but the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. *Singapore §84*
137. Methodists and Catholics affirm the 'collegial' and 'connectional' character of ministry. The ordained minister does not work in isolation, but in partnership and cooperation not only with other ministers but also with all members of the church, who by their Christian vocation have gifts from God for service. The nature of every Christian ministry is to serve, and its goal is to build up in love. *Denver §94*  
*Dublin §80*
138. Chosen from among the people, ordained ministers represent the people before God as they bring together the prayers of the community. Entrusted with the pastoral care of the community, they act in Christ's name and person as they lead the people in prayer, proclaim and explain the word, and administer the sacraments of faith. They transmit what they have received: *Singapore §71-72*

the good news as taught from apostolic times, the sacraments as signs and instruments of the Lord's saving presence and action, the call to holiness that the Holy Spirit addresses to all.

139. For Catholics, ordination is a sacrament. Although Methodists are accustomed to reserve the term 'sacrament' for baptism and the Lord's Supper, they look upon ordination as an effective sign by which the grace of God is given to recipients for their ministry. By examining the ordination rites of both communions, Catholics and Methodists recognise that there is substantial theological agreement concerning the nature of ordination. The clear intention of both Methodist and Catholic ordination rites is to ordain individuals into the apostolic ministry of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. Moreover, those ordination rites, involving the laying on of hands and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, are constructed so as to signify the conferral of the particular ministerial charism. The common intention and liturgical form suggest a basic theological agreement that ordination is sacramental. Ordained ministry is both a sign and instrument of Christ's ministry.

*Singapore §88*

*Durban §174,  
§177, §189*

140. Catholics and Methodists agree that ordained ministry is a means of grace through which Christ continues to lead and serve his people. By ordination, a new and permanent relationship with Christ and his church is established. The minister participates in Christ's ministry and acts in Christ's name. Ordained ministry is the ministry of Christ himself, whose representative the minister is. The authentic minister communicates Christ to people. Together we recognise that Christ the Good Shepherd shares his pastoral care with others. In the pastoral care that is extended to them

*Dublin §98*

*Denver §89,  
§92*

*Singapore §73,  
§83*

*Rio de Janeiro  
§120*

*Brighton §63-  
68*

*Seoul §90*



the faithful perceive themselves to be led by the Good Shepherd who gave his life for the sheep. Such language opens up the possibility of a common sacramental understanding of ordained ministry as a graced participation in the continuing pastoral leadership of Christ, as an extension of the incarnational and sacramental principle whereby human beings become, by the working of the Holy Spirit, agents of Christ.

141. Methodists and Catholics can agree that the only 'kind' of priesthood in the church is that which belongs exclusively to Christ. For Catholics, this affirmation is not inconsistent with maintaining the qualitative distinction between ministerial priesthood and the common priesthood of the faithful. The developments that have taken place in the mutual understanding of Methodists and Catholics means that they share a common conviction that ordained ministers participate in the priesthood of Christ in a way that is proper to their distinctive ministry, and not solely as baptised individuals.

*Durban §161-172*

142. Methodists and Catholics do not yet fully agree on who may preside at the Eucharist. In the Catholic Church, only those who are ordained to the priesthood can preside at the Eucharist. Methodists readily affirm that it is normative and fitting that ordained ministers preside at the Eucharist, but this does not imply that a Eucharist is invalid unless an ordained minister presides. The rule is therefore held to admit exceptions, when the Conference recognises a situation in which members of the church are in danger of being deprived of the Eucharist because there are no ordained ministers available, and consequently grants a dispensation to a layperson to preside. Methodists may wish to reconsider whether this practice is in fact, compatible with their understanding of the bishop or

*Dublin §99-101*

*Durban §187*

presbyter as Christ's representative to the community and of ordination as an effective sacramental rite by which these ministers are equipped with the necessary gifts and power to act in his name.

143. The Catholic Church, in keeping with its doctrine and tradition, does not ordain women to the priesthood. Methodists believe that God calls men and women to ordination and equips them with gifts and graces for serving the community of believers. For this reason, Methodists affirm and practice the ordination of women.

*Dublin §102*

*Seoul §97*

144. Ordained ministry is one of the 'ecclesial elements' that we each look for as we seek to affirm as fully as possible the churchly character of one another's community of faith. There is much that we agree upon and mutually affirm among those elements of the church we recognise in each other. We joyfully affirm together that the ministries and institutions of our two communions are means of grace by which the Risen Christ in person leads, guides, teaches and sanctifies his church on its pilgrim path. The pastors of the community are Christ's servants as he provides grace and spiritual strength to his people and leads them to the goal of their earthly pilgrimage.

*Singapore §76*

*Brighton §68*

*Seoul §91*

### ***Authority***

145. Methodists and Catholics agree that Jesus Christ alone is the supreme and final authority. To men and women sealed by the Spirit in baptism, gathered in the church, Christ's authority is mediated through the Spirit, and hence all authority that flows from this source is part of God's good gift. Only an authority given in love and received in love expresses the deepest meaning of the word for Christians.

*Denver §35,*

*§106*

*Honolulu §33*

146. Christ chose from among his disciples the twelve whom he named apostles. After his death and resurrection, he confirmed the commission of the apostles and sent them out as messengers by whom the Gospel would be preserved and proclaimed throughout the whole world. In Christ's name, they were also to oversee, guide and govern the church as it grew and spread.

*Rio de Janeiro*  
§84

147. Methodists and Catholics agree that the ministry of the apostles was essential to the proclamation and spread of the good news during the first century, and that unity in faith, mission and sacramental life can be achieved only on an apostolic basis. The church's apostolicity involves continuous faithfulness in doctrine, ministry, sacrament and life to the teaching of the New Testament.

*Dublin* §84

*Nairobi* §31

*Brighton* §71

148. From its first beginnings in the apostles themselves, a ministry of *épiscopé* (oversight) has been exercised in the church. This pastoral oversight has always included authoritative teaching and preaching, for unity in love and unity in truth belong together. When the gift of oversight is neglected, disunity follows. Communion implies oversight and vice versa. As the community is renewed from one Lord's Day to the next, it is nourished by the Tradition it has received, and responsibility for this is especially entrusted to those ministers who inherit the apostolic function of oversight in the community. This ministry of oversight entails solicitude for all the churches, seeking to ensure that the church remains one, grows in holiness, preserves its catholicity, and is faithful to apostolic teaching and to the commission of evangelisation given by Christ himself. Methodists and Catholics affirm together the place within the believing community of authoritative servants of communion and connection in love and in truth, authorised agents of discerning and proclaiming the truth of the Gospel.

*Singapore* §74

*Brighton* §51

149. In the early church, the ministry of pastoral and doctrinal oversight was primarily exercised by bishops. In the Catholic communion, the college of bishops united with the Pope exercises supreme oversight. Among Methodists, it is Conference that exercises oversight with full authority. Within or alongside such structures of leadership, there have always been charismatic individuals whose personal ministry has been vital for the life of Christ's church. John Wesley himself stands out as such a person. Catholics and Methodists affirm together that God chooses to use such individuals as well as visible structures to touch the lives of his people.

*Brighton §51*

150. Within both our communions the ministry of oversight is exercised in ways that are personal, collegial and communal. For each Methodist Church, the ministry of oversight is exercised corporately by the Conference and also personally and collegially by bishops or superintendent ministers. For Catholics, the ministry of oversight is exercised collegially by the college of bishops united with the Bishop of Rome and personally by the Bishop of Rome and by individual bishops in their own diocese.

*Brighton §76*

*Durban §181,  
§183*

151. The three-fold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon gradually developed in the church. Methodists and Catholics are not agreed on how far this development is now unchangeable. For Catholics, the three-fold ministry is derived from the living Tradition of the church and is seen as fully consistent with the written form of the Apostolic Tradition in the New Testament. Methodists hold that the New Testament does not lay down any one form of ministry as binding for all times and places; they accept, however, the appropriateness of the three-fold ministry in other churches and in united churches.

*Dublin §83-85*

*Nairobi §29*

152. Methodists and Catholics currently differ in their understanding of apostolic succession. For Catholics, succession in ministry is guaranteed only by episcopal laying-on of hands in historical succession. Methodists preserve a form of ministerial succession in practice and can regard a succession of ordination from the earliest times as a valuable sign of the church's continuity with the church of the New Testament. Even so, Methodists and Catholics agree together that the orderly transmission of ordained ministry is a sign and instrument of apostolic continuity in the church. Moreover, apostolicity has several other strands besides ministerial succession. It involves continuous faithfulness in faith, sacramental life, and witness. While Catholics look for continuity in the apostolic ministry, Methodists traditionally emphasize continuity in apostolic witness and mission.

*Dublin* §85,  
§87

*Nairobi* §31

*Durban* §145,  
§188

153. Methodists and Catholics are committed to holiness in living, to faithfulness in teaching, and to participation in God's mission to the world. Our ministries, both individual and collegial, are means of grace the Spirit of Christ uses as he wills to keep the church one, holy, catholic and apostolic in its life, faith and mission. In our human frailty, we trust together in Christ's promise to keep the church faithful to himself.

*Brighton* §84

### ***Teaching Authority***

154. Methodists and Catholics agree that the church has authority to teach. In the church, the revelation of God in Christ comes to us through the Sacred Scriptures and apostolic preaching. Maintaining God's people in the truth is the work of the Spirit. The enduring validity of the church's creedal statements and conciliar pronouncements does not restrict the power of the Spirit to speak in new ways to the church.

*Honolulu* §34

155. The Scriptures bear permanent witness to the divine revelation and are thus normative for all subsequent expressions of Tradition. At different moments in history, however, it is sometimes necessary to clarify the contents of the Christian faith, and even to define the limits of orthodoxy. It is the common belief of our churches that there are those authorised to speak for the church as a whole and who, having carefully listened to Scripture, Tradition, and to the experience of believers, may say 'It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us' (Acts 15.38). For this reason, the church convenes Councils whose purpose is to bring into sharper focus various aspects of Christian belief. Properly understood, the decisions of the ecumenical councils that met in the first centuries command assent throughout the whole church, and there is no reason to think that at the end of the patristic era God stopped enabling his church to speak in such a way.

*Nairobi*

§64-65

*Rio de Janeiro*

§67

156. The whole church is endowed with the Spirit of Truth, and it is the whole church, in different ways and through different gifts, that the Spirit leads into all truth. Catholics and Methodists both understand that the whole church must be involved in discernment and teaching under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Lay people and ordained ministers share this responsibility, but in different ways. Both communions understand that while the gift of discernment belongs to the whole church, ordained ministers in the due exercise of their office play a special role. Maintaining unity in the Truth is central to the particular ministry of *épiscopé*. Methodists and Catholics differ, however, in their understanding of how this ministry is exercised in the church.

*Singapore*

§93-94

*Brighton* §29,

§77, §118

157. Methodists recognise the guidance of the Holy Spirit in Methodist Conferences. Although they do not ascribe to them a guaranteed freedom from error, they accept their teaching as authoritative when it is clearly shown to be in agreement with Scripture, and they regard Conference as the final authority for the interpretation of doctrine. As with John Wesley and his preachers, Conference looks first to the testimony of Scripture, but also to the treasures of Christian tradition as well as to experience and reason.

*Rio de Janeiro*

§70, §130

*Brighton* §117

158. The Catholic Church recognises the presence of the Spirit especially in the 'sure charism of truth' which it believes is given to the college of bishops, and in their teaching guided by that charism. The authority of ecumenical councils derives from this charism of teaching and discernment which the Spirit gives for the building up of the body. The college of bishops exercises its teaching ministry through discerning the faith of Christians, present and past, and always with reference to the supreme norm of the Scriptures. Catholics believe that the bishops of the church enjoy the special assistance of the Holy Spirit when, by a collegial act with the Bishop of Rome in an ecumenical council, they define doctrine to be held irrevocably. Such teaching is understood as preserved from error by the Holy Spirit's gift of infallibility with which the church is endowed, and is therefore binding. This teaching office is not superior to the Word of God, but rather its servant.

*Nairobi*

§66-68

*Brighton* §117

159. Methodists currently do not accept Catholic teaching on infallibility, especially as it seems to imply a discernment of truth that exceeds the capacity of sinful human beings. They always accept what can clearly be shown to be in agreement with the Scriptures, and the final judge of this agreement must be the assent of the whole People of God.

*Nairobi*  
§72-73

160. One criterion by which new developments in Christian teaching and living may be judged consonant with the Scriptures is their long-term reception by the wider church. Although the Catholic Church does not believe reception of doctrine to be a necessary criterion for its truth, a doctrine that is not received by the people of God in the practice of their faith does not achieve its intended effect in the life of the church (cf. 1 Thessalonians 2.13). In every case, reception of what is true is a spiritual process, and calls for careful listening to the insights of others. Only the truth itself brings about conformity to Christ in the Spirit.

*Brighton* §78,  
§119  
*Seoul* §115  
*Durban* §182

161. Convergence in thinking about God's preserving the church in the truth, and even infallibility, may be furthered by considering the Methodist doctrine of assurance, whereby believers receive from the Holy Spirit an assurance of their redemption through the atoning death of Christ. Catholics and Methodists are agreed on the need for an authoritative way of being sure, beyond doubt, concerning God's action insofar as it is crucial for our salvation.

*Nairobi*  
§74-75  
*Seoul* §134



162. There remain differences between Methodists and Catholics concerning what part lay people have in the process of authoritative discernment and proclamation of the Gospel. Catholics locate the authoritative determination of teaching in the college of bishops with the Bishop of Rome at its head. Methodists locate that same authority in Conference, where lay and clergy participate in equal numbers. Both Catholics and Methodists recognise the role of the laity in the development of the faith through living, preaching and teaching, and meditating upon it.

*Brighton*  
§78, §119  
*Seoul* §115

163. One reason for this variation in practice is a different interpretation of the effect of the rite of ordination, which is linked to the Catholic understanding of the sacramentality of that rite. Christ has promised his presence and his Spirit to the church, but the implications of this for a fuller understanding of ordained ministry and of authoritative teaching need further exploration. A significant point of divergence is the idea of a guaranteed or 'covenanted' means of grace, and the grounding this gives to the Catholic understanding of the teaching authority of the college of bishops united with the Pope.

*Brighton*  
§82, §120

164. Both Catholics and Methodists affirm that in calling people to be agents in discerning what is truly the Gospel, God is using them as means of grace, trustworthy channels. They seek to preserve and strengthen the whole community of faith in truth and in love, in worship and in mission. In both communions, oversight is exercised in a way that includes pastoral care and authoritative preaching and teaching. Methodists and Catholics can rejoice that the Holy Spirit uses the ministries and structures of both communions as means of grace to lead people into the truth of the Gospel of Christ. The authority Jesus bestows is the authority for mission.

*Brighton* §81

165. Methodists and Catholics agree that teaching authority rightly exercised is a gift of God to his church, through which Christ exercises the headship of his body by the power of the Holy Spirit. At the heart of Christian ministry lies Christ's service of abounding love. This is especially true of any ministry of authoritative leadership among Christians. John Wesley's use of the phrase 'watching over one another in love' challenges all individual ministers and collegial bodies, especially those exercising the ministry of oversight. *Brighton §83*

166. Moreover, Catholics and Methodists share a common belief in the presence of the Holy Spirit, and the use by the Spirit of recognized bodies for teaching authoritatively to ensure the truth of the Gospel that is believed by both Methodists and Catholics. Both, in practice, depend upon the sure guidance of the Holy Spirit. *Brighton §121*

### ***Petrine Ministry***

167. It is Catholic teaching that to ensure the indivisible unity of the episcopate, Jesus Christ set St Peter over his fellow apostles as a fundamental principle of unity of faith and communion. This is basic to Catholic belief in the primacy of the Bishop of Rome, a primacy to be exercised in collegial relation with the other bishops of the church. For Methodists, the concept of primacy is unfamiliar, even if historically John Wesley exercised a kind of primacy in the origins of the Methodist Church, in the context of his Conference of preachers. Today's Conference continues to embody certain elements of this function. *Nairobi §36-37*

168. Methodists and Catholics can agree that Simon Peter had a special position among the Twelve, and that certain sayings in the Gospels point to a distinctive role for Peter within the church as found in the New Testament. *Nairobi §41f*

169. In Catholic understanding, the primacy of the Bishop of Rome is not established from the Scriptures in isolation from the living Tradition. When an institution cannot be established from Scripture alone, Methodists consider it on its intrinsic merits, as indeed do Catholics; but Methodists give less doctrinal weight than Catholics to long and widespread tradition. *Nairobi §55*

170. For Catholics, being in communion with the See of Rome has served as a touchstone of belonging to the church in its fullest sense, and reconciliation with the See of Rome is a necessary step towards the restoration of Christian unity. Methodists accept that whatever is properly required for the unity of the whole of Christ's church must by that very fact be God's will for his church. All local churches need a ministry of governance and leadership, and the question arises whether the whole church needs a leader to exercise a unifying role in service to the worldwide *koinonia*. A universal primacy might well serve as focus of and ministry for the unity of the whole church. *Nairobi §56-58*

171. Catholics believe that each bishop is a focus of unity in his own diocese, and that the bishop of Rome, the Pope, is a focus of unity in the communion of dioceses of the whole church. In order to serve as the visible source and foundation of the unity of the whole church, the Pope has ordinary and immediate jurisdiction throughout the church. *Nairobi §61*

172. Catholics also believe that when, as teacher and pastor of all the faithful, and in carefully defined and limited circumstances, the Pope defines a particular matter of faith or morals, his act of teaching is preserved from error by the Holy Spirit. Such teaching is considered infallible.

*Nairobi*  
§68-71

173. It is unlikely in the foreseeable future that Methodists will readily accept terms such as infallibility and universal, immediate jurisdiction with regard to the Petrine ministry. The general idea, however, of a universal service of unity within the church, a primacy of love mirroring the presence and work in the church of the Spirit who is love, may well be a basis for increased understanding and convergence. The framework for theological convergence between our two communions concerning the ministry of oversight is provided by the shared conviction that 'to maintain God's people in the truth is the loving work of the Spirit in the church'.

*Honolulu*  
§34, §36  
*Nairobi* §58-59, §62, §72  
*Seoul* §113  
*Durban* §183

174. Clearly, increasing mutual understanding and growth between Catholics and Methodists on questions of ordained ministry and authority does not exclude the fact that there are areas of serious divergence which require further exploration and discussion. Central to Methodist teaching on the church is the role of Christian conference in which lay people alongside ordained ministers authoritatively discern the will of God and the truth of the Gospel. There remain aspects of teaching and ecclesial elements that Catholics regard as essential to what we must hold in common in order to have full communion and to be fully the church of Christ. These include a precise understanding of the sacramental nature of ordination, the magisterial role of the episcopate in the apostolic succession, the 'assurance' asserted

*Seoul* §92  
*Gothenburg*  
§157

of certain authoritative acts of teaching, and the place and role of the Petrine Ministry, especially the nature and exercise of jurisdiction and the infallible exercise of the teaching office. Two affirmations may provide a benchmark for assessing universal primacy as a gift to the whole church. First, following the teaching of the First Vatican Council, the papal office is for the building up of the church. Second, the pope, in the words of Pope Gregory the Great, is ‘the servant of the servants of God’.



## PART 3:

# THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

### HOLY LIVING

175. Christians are called to holiness. This call is heard in the teaching of Christ, the Saviour, who instructed his disciples to 'be perfect therefore as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Matthew 5.48). The perfection of God is his love, for God is love (1 John 4.8, 12). Human beings are called to love God, neighbour, creation and self. The call to holiness is addressed to all human beings in their particular contexts. The proclamation of this call lies at the heart of the mission of the church. The Christian is aware that discipleship of Jesus means imitation of him whose love was so great that he did not hesitate to lay down his life. Together we acknowledge ourselves as under the imperatives of love that follow from the summons to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, in our lives and in the world. In response to this love we pursue more effective ways of expressing our faith, hope and love in and to the world for which Christ died.

*Honolulu §39,  
§42*

*Houston §42,  
§70*

176. Holy living begins in baptism and culminates in communion with the saints in glory. Christians grow in holiness as they engage in practices that mediate God's grace. Methodists and Catholics are not in full agreement as to which practices enjoy scriptural affirmation or are essential for holy living. However, both affirm that participation in the sacraments and the liturgy, the devotional reading of Scripture and the offering of prayers contribute to the sanctification of the Christian. *Houston §116*

#### ETHICAL ISSUES

177. Belief and behaviour, faith and works, should not be separated. Issues of ethics and morality, which involve the relation between conscience and authority, are not peripheral to but at the heart of the faithful hearing of the Gospel. *Honolulu §42*

178. Whether conscience is a separate faculty or the mobilising of all our faculties to discern good and shun evil, Catholics and Methodists agree that the human capacity we call conscience is the gift of God and is of vital significance for the human life. *Honolulu §43*

179. Christians have a duty to obey the voice of conscience, as one of the ways God speaks to human beings, and to respect the conscience of others. Conscience itself needs to be enlightened, instructed, corrected, and informed by the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures and the discipline of the church. Individual conscience cannot be isolated from the mind of the whole church. No-one's conscience is an island, entire of itself. People have both the responsibility to see that their conscience is open to authoritative guidance and the right freely and faithfully to follow that conscience. *Denver §104*



180. Catholics and Methodists agree that authority in the church is at the service of the Gospel and that the assent of faith is freely given. Christian conscience is formed within the life of the church, which is the life of the Spirit. Thus ecclesial authority and individual conscience witness to each other. *Honolulu §37*

181. We are agreed in asserting the importance of natural law which God himself enables us to perceive. In this perception, the supernatural gift of prevenient grace plays a major part. The natural law which is thus discerned stems from the generous provision of the Creator God. There is no reason for conflict between moral theologies based on natural law and those which appeal more directly to revelation. *Honolulu §45*

182. Despite this broad measure of agreement, there exist significant differences between our respective churches on a number of ethical issues.

183. Catholics and Methodists agree that human sexual intercourse has two equal and inter-related functions, namely fostering love, affection, unity and fidelity between spouses as well as that of reproduction. Under the stress and strain of contemporary social and economic conditions, parents have a right and duty before God to decide the number of children they may bear, support, rear and educate. How this decision is to be implemented is a moral matter, and there exist differences between the official positions of our respective churches on the application of contraceptive methods by responsible parents. *Denver §76*

184. We agree that the Holy Scripture affirms the sacredness and dignity of human life, and that we have a duty and obligation to defend, protect and preserve it. Our two churches are confronted with complex *Denver §77*

moral issues relating to abortion, and with wide differences between them in their teaching and interpretation which will require attention in our future dialogue.

185. While there are differences between Methodists and Catholics on certain moral issues, there is much that that can be affirmed together. For example, both reject voluntary euthanasia, while recognising that doctors attempting the adequate control of pain occasionally use treatment which has the side effect of shortening life. Both communions stress the need for pastoral care of the chronically sick and dying as the ultimate answer to the problem that euthanasia claims to address. *Dublin §44-46*

186. Conformity, in deep conviction, to Christian doctrinal and moral truth bears fruit in holiness. It produces that spiritual holiness which John Wesley often described as 'walking even as Christ walked'. *Rio de Janeiro §60*

## SOCIAL HOLINESS

187. People who have experienced God's faithfulness and righteousness will share what they have received by deeds of mercy and justice. They will seek to shape society according to the pattern of the kingdom of God. Theirs is the fellowship of the new creation, of which they have received a foretaste by the gift of the Holy Spirit. Never claiming to build the kingdom by their own efforts, they will give all the glory to God. *Rio de Janeiro §79*

188. Holiness is social in nature. It is by belonging together to the body of Christ that Christians grow in holiness. The integrity of the Christian life is made manifest through personal and social expressions of justice and mercy. *Houston §94*

189. Social holiness entails building just relationships. The church is entrusted with exercising Christ's ministry of reconciliation. Where relationships have been broken and people have been wronged, the church listens to the voices of the victims and preaches a gospel of repentance, forgiveness and transformation. The church is the bearer and recipient of this message. It too is called to demonstrate repentance by offering signs of restitution for wrongs committed and evidence of changed behaviour. By acknowledging itself to be in need of the merciful gaze of Jesus, the church forms Christians who see the dignity of the neighbour in all circumstances and works with creativity for the conversion of unjust social structures.

*Gothenburg*  
§110, §124-125

190. Participating in the building of the kingdom of God involves becoming peacemakers. Methodists and Catholics are called to facilitate and support international peace efforts that seek to reconcile hostile factions to avoid the terrors of war. These efforts need to interrogate the way in which countries allocate resources to armaments and how they invest in projects that promote dignified living.

*Gothenburg*  
§128, §133

191. A further expression of social holiness is care for the earth, God's gift, our common home. Creation is interconnected. Sin alienates humans from God, self, neighbour and the world. By degrading the biosphere, human beings have committed 'ecological sins.' These sins harm the non-human creation and the poor, whose social marginalization leaves them particularly vulnerable to rapid ecological changes. Holy living requires attending to the cosmic dimension of sin and holiness. In response to the cry of the earth, there is need for personal and ecclesial ecological conversion. Christians are called to support policies and practices that promote ecological responsibility and protection of vulnerable populations.

*Gothenburg*  
§133, §135-137

192. The Christian hope is that humanity will one day be gathered into Christ when the Gospel has been preached to all nations. In the widest sense of the mission of the church, there is a mandate to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, and visit both the sick and the prisoner (Matthew 25.31-46). *Singapore §47*

193. Social concern is a fruit of faith. As an essential aspect of our calling, 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 marginalised of our world. The service of charity is an essential part of the church's mission. Having experienced the loving mercy of God, the church is bound to denounce injustice and oppression, to work for peace, and to articulate the ethical consequences of God's love for humankind. To all cultures, the church is to offer the 'heaven' of the Gospel. *Dublin §20*  
*Rio de Janeiro §52*  
*Seoul §69*

194. Christ called his disciples to be servants of all (Mark 9:35). As a communal sign of the crucified Christ in our world, the church is called to a life of self-giving love. This life includes seeking always to serve rather than to be served; to a life of humble and self-emptying diakonia which involves washing the feet of those among whom we live; to sharing the sorrow of God's people and suffering with them in communion with the Suffering Servant who was led like a lamb to the slaughter. *Seoul §69-70*

195. The power and presence of the Holy Spirit lead the faithful from grace to grace. As the Holy Spirit leads them to reflect on their memory of Christ, to partake of his memorial, and to experience Christ as a present reality, they are opened to God's purpose both for themselves and for the whole of creation. The Spirit inspires them to pray and strive for the welfare of all of God's creatures, and so to protect and promote the habitat that God has given them. In ways that are known to God alone, the Spirit is also present and active among those who have not heard the Gospel or have not believed it. The Christian believers trust in God's hidden action transforming the world according to God's ultimate purpose. *Singapore §32*

#### CHRISTIAN HOPE

196. Christian hope, nurtured by the Spirit, looks further than this earth and the present life. It looks towards the eternal Kingdom, where God reigns among the saints of all ages and nations and tongues. In this final transformation, the Spirit will bring to an end the trials of the church on earth, the sufferings of the saints, and will bring the elect into the glory that the Father has reserved for those who love him. Catholics and Methodists hold in common a glorious shared vision of the life after death when Jesus Christ shall be all in all. *Denver §49*  
*Singapore §32*

197. Being sure of God's grace – 'the assurance of things hoped for' (Hebrews 11.1) – stems from the trustworthiness of God's promises and is confirmed by the interior work of the Holy Spirit. Catholics and Methodists 'confess together that the faithful can rely on the mercy and promises of God. In spite of their own weakness and the manifold threats to their faith, on the strength of Christ's death and resurrection they can build on the effective promise of God's grace in Word and Sacrament and so be sure of this grace'.

*Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* §34  
Houston §88-89

198. Historically, Catholics and Methodists have held suspicions of each other regarding the phrase 'the assurance of salvation'. Catholics considered it a presumptuous assertion based on subjective experience. Methodists considered these Catholic suspicions as a possible rejection of the work of the Holy Spirit. This difference is one of emphasis rather than a substantial difference, as was clarified in the *Methodist Statement of Association with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*: 'Such assurance is not seen as the certainty of possession but as the reliability of a relationship which is founded in God's love'.

*Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* §34  
*Methodist Statement of Association with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* §4.6  
Houston §92

## HOLY DYING AND THE FINAL CONSUMMATION OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

199. Holy living comes to its natural conclusion in death as the end of the pilgrim journey on earth. Catholics and Methodists believe that holy dying is part of holy living. The people of God witness to the Gospel in the manner of their dying. Seeking a 'good death' in the hope of the resurrection to eternal life becomes a powerful witness to the Gospel in the face of contemporary social trends where the end of life is often regarded as a negative experience to be hastened.

Houston §132

200. Methodists and Catholics acknowledge that we do not have the words, concepts, and images to adequately express the mystery of God's love and life beyond the grave. By relying on God's revelation in the Scriptures we can profess together that Jesus Christ has conquered sin and death and promised eternal life. This is a source of hope for all human beings in the face of death. The resurrection of Jesus fills us with hope and leads us to look at a time 'when death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more' (Rev 21:4). Our Christian hope is that 'we will be with the Lord forever' (1 Thess 4:17). Catholics and Methodists confess together with the words of the creed the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Our shared faith and hope commit us to keeping the promise of eternal life alive in the hearts of all people.

*Houston §137-138, §144, §165-166, §189*

201. Catholics and Methodists also hold certain practices in common. We have rituals for the dying and the deceased which offer consolation to those who mourn and proclaim our resurrection hope. We offer prayer with the bereaved, often in the presence of the deceased. We read the Scriptures, sing Christian hymns, and entrust the deceased to the mercy of God. We gather with family and friends for a wake or vigil, and later celebrate a funeral, memorial service or Mass. The dead are buried or else cremated, and the ashes are reverently disposed.

*Houston §145, §190*

202. Christ ‘will come again to judge the living and the dead’ (2 Tim 4:1). On the Day of Judgement, each person will stand before God and give a full account of his or her life and will freely accept or reject God’s gracious gift of salvation and the call to holiness. While human beings can choose to sever their relationship with God, Catholics and Methodists consider it appropriate to hope that no one will be eternally damned. Together we await the return of the Lord when all things will be restored in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. His coming will bring salvation history to a close, and the mission and ministry of the church will finally be fulfilled. *Houston §149, §151, §167*

203. Methodists and Catholics have not yet reached full agreement on the transition of the Christian from death to eternal life. One point of difference concerns the doctrine of purgatory. When a person dies still unprepared to see the face of God, the Catholic doctrine of purgatory envisages a process of purification following death. In this intermediate state, the deceased person is purged of sins and made perfect in holiness through the cleansing effect of God’s grace. Methodists have been circumspect in their teaching about this transition. Methodists and Catholics agree that God’s particular judgement at the point of death determines a person’s final destiny, and that the transition from earthly to heavenly life depends on the gracious action of God. This provides a foundation for further dialogue. *Houston §152-153*

204. A further issue that divides us is intercession for the dead. Catholics, believing that a spiritual exchange of prayer and its effects is possible between all members of the body of Christ, continue to pray for the purification of those who have died. While there are indications that Methodists may increasingly be open to the practice of prayer for the departed, it remains a subject for further conversation. *Houston §154-155*



## MARY AND THE SAINTS

205. While all the baptised make up 'the communion of Saints', Methodists and Catholics also recognise the conspicuous presence of divine grace in specific persons whose lives and example testify, even to the shedding of their blood for Jesus, to the transforming action of the Spirit of God in every generation. The 'cloud of witnesses' transcends denominational barriers. *Singapore §66*

206. 'The saints who have passed into the fullness of the mystery of God's grace are forever part of the Christian community. The witness and examples of the past continue to be cherished, and the saints in heaven are held as instances of Christ's 'closest love' and as present tokens of the ultimate fulfilment of all God's promises. *Singapore §35*

207. Catholics view the saints above as intercessors for the living, ever mindful that Jesus is the one mediator between God and humanity. Methodists acknowledge the mysterious solidarity of the saints above and the saints below but are generally resistant to the invocation of saints lest the absolute uniqueness of Christ as sole mediator be compromised. *Houston §157-158*

208. For Catholics, devotion to Mary is an integral and important part of their Christian experience and of 'Life in the Spirit'. Catholics believe that Mary, at the end of her bodily life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory. Methodists can affirm the dogma's core intention to bear witness to God's saving work in Christ and the final consummation of holy living but find no scriptural foundation for the dogma. Moreover, Catholics and Methodists continue to differ concerning the spiritual and pastoral implications of Mary's unique place within the communion of saints. In each of these areas further dialogue may lead to deeper understanding of Mary as a sign of grace and holiness. *Denver §63*  
*Houston §161-164*

## SPIRITUALITY AND PRAYER

209. The faith of the Christian community is expressed in its worship. In the liturgical assembly, the Gospel is preached, the sacraments are celebrated, the faithful are one in prayer, blessings are shared, spiritual gifts exchanged, insights communicated, pains and sufferings softened by compassion, hopes placed in common. As they go from worship into the world, the faithful are one not only in faith and belief, but also in love. *Brighton §26*

210. In the presence of the self-revealing God, people feel awe and joy, and are moved to express this in praise, prayer, confession and commitment. The Scriptures amply attest the centrality of private and public worship for God's people. *Rio de Janeiro §49-50*

211. A Methodist ideal is expressed in the phrase 'a theology that can be sung'. Catholics can appreciate that the hymns of Charles Wesley, a rich source of Methodist spirituality, find echoes and recognition in the Catholic soul, which is reflected in the frequent inclusion of these hymns in Catholic worship. *Denver §9*  
*Seoul §123*

212. There is much in common at the heart of Methodist and Catholic prayerful devotion, for example devotion to the five wounds of the crucified and risen Lord, and Catholic devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. At the core of all such devotion is a desire to grow in holiness as perfect love in intimate union with the Risen Christ. *Denver §68*  
*Seoul 111*

## CONCLUSION

213. Methodists and Catholics reaffirm together the final words of the first Report of the Joint Commission, in 1971: ‘We know only too well that the latter stages of the ecumenical dialogue are more formidable than the early ones, requiring of us redoubled efforts and devotion, not merely to the work we have to do together, the joint witness to great Christian values that we must give and widely promote in our churches, but to the tasks of educating our people and communicating to them something of the joys and inspiration that have been vouchsafed to us. As we look to the future, therefore, we renew our commitments and reaffirm our confidence in God’s providential leading, in which we have already been so richly blessed’.

*Denver §131*

214. As companions on the way to the fullness of the kingdom of the Triune God, Methodists and Catholics affirm their common conviction that the whole community of believers is called together by God our Father, placed under the lordship of the Risen Christ, united with Christ as his Body, and has the Holy Spirit as the source of its unity of life, worship and witness. In the Father’s purpose for the church, each and every believer is to participate in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit, bringing God’s outgoing, all-embracing and transforming love to all humanity.

*Brighton §48*

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