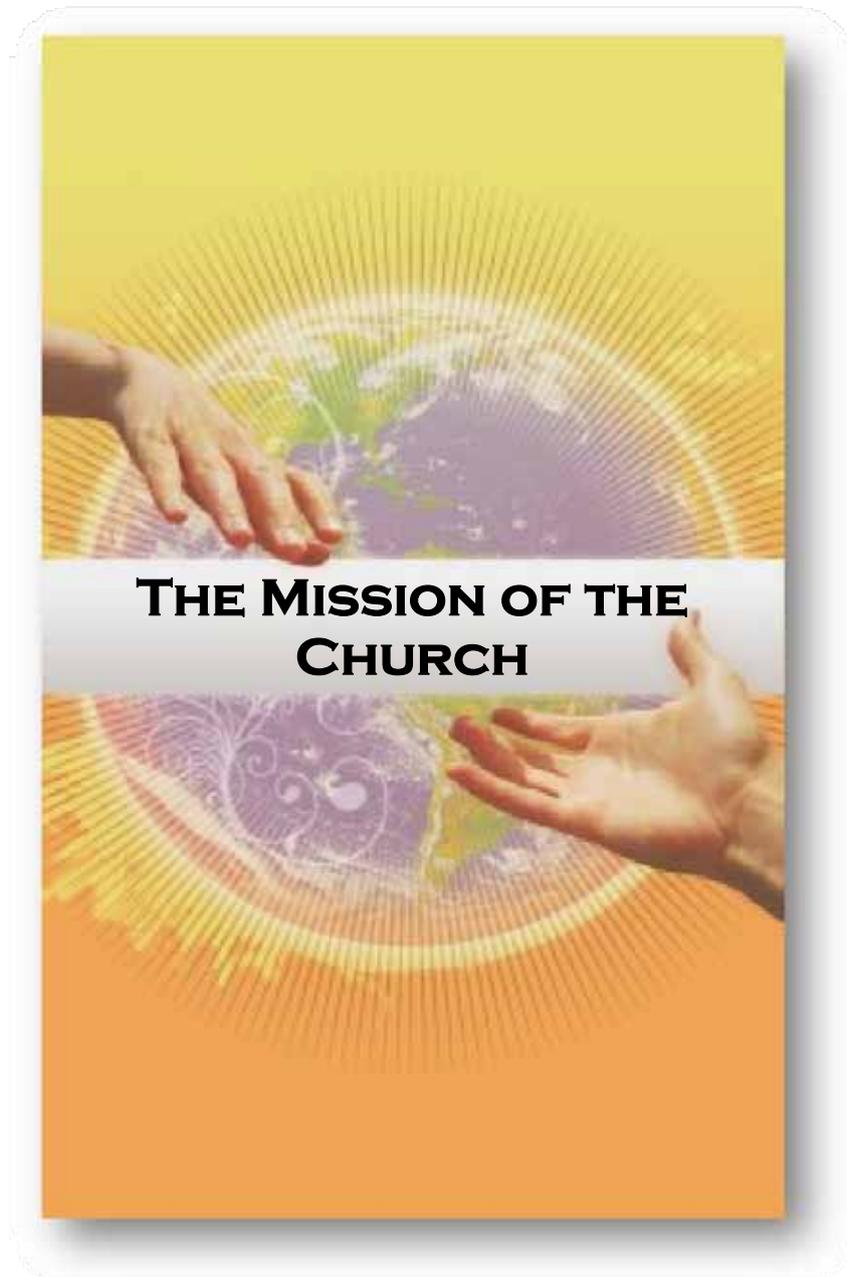


REFLECTIONS ON



A SMALL GROUP STUDY RESOURCE ON THE
REPORT OF THE NATIONAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC
CHURCH
AND THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA (2002-2008)

Contents

Editor's Notes	3
Leader's Guide	4
Study One: Part 1	5
Study materials: Finding Common Ground	5
Uniting Church Perspectives on Mission	7
Roman Catholic Church Perspectives on Mission	8
Study materials: 1. The Mission of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit	10
Study Two: Part 1	13
Study materials: 2. Worship (Doxologia / Leitourgia) as Mission	13
Study Two: Part 2	17
Study materials: 3. Communion (Koinonia) as Mission	17
Study Three: Part 1	20
Study materials: 4. Service (Diakonia) as Mission	20
Study Three: Part 2	23
Study materials: 5. Proclamation (Kerygma) as Mission	23
Study Four: Part 1	26
Study materials: 6. Witness (Martyria) as Mission	26
Study Four: Part 2	29
Study materials: 7. Teaching (Didache) as Mission	29

Editor's Notes

The national Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Uniting Church of Australia met in Brisbane from 2002 to 2008 and explored the topic of *The Mission of the Church*. At the end of 2008, the report from the Dialogue was submitted to the appropriate authorities in each of the Churches.

Participants in that Dialogue were:

Roman Catholic

Archbishop John A. Bathersby (co-chair)
Revd Dr Tom Elich
Mrs Elizabeth Harrington
Revd Bill O'Shea
Revd Dr David Pascoe (co-secretary)
Bishop Michael Putney
Revd Dr Orm Rush

Uniting Church

Revd Dr David Rankin (co-chair)
Mr Alan Demack
Revd Peter Lockhart
Revd Wendi Sargeant
Revd Dr Geoff Thompson
Revd Don Whebell
Revd Dr Geraldine Wheeler (co-secretary)

Members of the Dialogue team have been keen to share their findings with the wider Church communities, and so, in 2010, Revd Wendi Sargeant and Revd Peter Lockhart produced a series of seven short reflections on the Uniting Church perspective of each of the areas considered by the Dialogue. In discussion with their Roman Catholic colleagues, it was decided to produce two resources for use by people in congregations.

1. The first is two sets of complementary reflections for use as formation/prayer before meetings etc. These consist of a scripture passage, a précis of the Roman Catholic or Uniting Church perspective of one of the areas, followed by discussion questions and prayer. It is anticipated that each reflection would take approximately 20 minutes.
2. The second resource is intended for use by local ecumenical groups who would meet weekly, for a 90-minute session, over a minimum of four weeks. It explores the Dialogue material in considerably more detail and also provides prayer resources and questions.

This document is the second of these resources. Both resources will be available for free download from the websites of the Uniting Church Queensland Synod Ecumenical Relations Committee

<http://www.ecumenical.ucaweb.com.au/>

and the Brisbane Roman Catholic Commission for Ecumenism and Inter-religious Relations

<http://www.bne.catholic.net.au/ecum/resources.php>

Sincere thanks go to Luke Watts for his editorial work on the Roman Catholic perspective and to Mary-Anne Cullen for the formatting and design of the final resources. The support, encouragement and input of Dialogue members is also very much appreciated.

Notes on the use of this material:

While this resource has been written as a four-week program, each group is encouraged to be flexible and adapt it to their own needs. It is not necessary to cover all the material in one session. Each study is written in two parts so that additional sessions may be planned if this is preferred.

Although the material comes from a Roman Catholic Uniting Church Dialogue, the subject matter is relevant to all Christians and so members of a wide range of Christian traditions are encouraged to use these resources.

Also worth remembering is that, while discussing the material is important, of equal value is the opportunity for Christians from a range of traditions to interact and develop understanding and friendship.

We hope you enjoy these studies.

Margaret Naylor

Executive Officer, Brisbane Roman Catholic Commission for Ecumenism and Inter-religious Relations

April 2011

Leader's Guide

1. Gathering

People coming to a group for the first time will often have some anxiety –

- ◆ Will I know anyone?
- ◆ What will be expected of me?
- ◆ Did I switch off the oven?
- ◆ It is important to help them through this first awkward stage. Have all your preparations done well beforehand so that you are able to greet each person warmly on arrival, introducing them to one another, and perhaps having tea and coffee available.

2. Beginning

A. When all have arrived get the session started by giving them a clear statement of what the group is about - Welcome the group

- ◆ who we are;
- ◆ why we're here;
- ◆ when we will finish.

It might go like this: "Welcome to my place, and I'm delighted that each of you has been able to make it. We are a group of people from Churches gathered together to reflect and share our ideas on the Mission of the Church. Tonight we will be looking at Study One..."

B. Then invite the members to introduce themselves saying:

- ◆ who I am;
- ◆ why I'm here;
- ◆ what I hope to get out of the program.

Lead yourself by giving a short response to each of the three areas. Then invite each of the others to do likewise. Don't worry if some respond to only one or two of the areas.

C. Then distribute copies of the program, if this has not already been done.

Encourage participants to listen to one another's ideas with respect.

3. Opening Devotion

A. You may wish to play some music quietly in the background and give the group a few moments to reflect on the opening devotion. Then call for volunteers to lead it or read the scripture.

4. Reflection on the Topic

Invite a couple of people to read the teaching. Encourage the readers to pause between each section.

5. Discussion

Allow a few minutes of quiet time to reflect on the questions. Encourage participants to share responses to each question but there is to be no pressure put on anyone to speak. Be sure to make some response to each speaker if only to say e.g. "Thank you John". This makes sure the participant feels that he / she has been heard.

6. Closure

Thank the participants for their participation. Check to ensure venue is right for next session.

Closing Devotion

Note that each session should take approximately 90 minutes

Cuppa

Study One: Part 1

Opening Devotion

(A candle may be lit and an appropriate hymn chosen to begin the devotion.)

Call to prayer

Leader: O God,
you gave us minds to know you,
hearts to love you,
voices to sing your praise.
Send the Holy Spirit among us,
that, confronted by your truth,
we may worship and serve you as we should;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All: Amen *(Uniting in Worship, Peoples' Book)*

Scripture Reading

John 17: 20 – 25 (NRSV)

I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I am in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that they world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. I made you name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.

Pause for silent prayer and reflection

Prayers of Intercession

The Leader invites participants to pray aloud for the needs of family, community and the world

Leader: Let us pray

All: **Loving God help me to receive wisdom from the presence of your Holy Spirit and so listen for Jesus, your eternal Word, leading and guiding my life as his disciple. Amen.**

Study materials: Finding Common Ground

The Decree on Ecumenism adopted by the Second Vatican Council on November 21, 1964 encouraged the formation of bilateral dialogues between the Roman Catholic and other Christian churches. In Australia the Roman Catholic Church entered into national dialogues with both the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches. With the inauguration of the Uniting Church in Australia on 22 June 1977, the two dialogues were merged.

From 1978 to 1993 the national Roman Catholic/Uniting Church Dialogue was based in Melbourne. During those years three important reports were produced: "A Common Understanding of Baptism" (1979), "Make Straight His Way: Stages on the Road to Unity" (1985), and "Towards Agreement on Marriage" (1989)¹.

¹ The texts can be found in Raymond K Williamson, ed, *Stages on the Way: Documents from the Bilateral Conversations between Churches in Australia*. (Melbourne, Joint Board of Christian Education, 1994) 244-245, 246-251, 252-264

In 1993 the dialogue moved to Brisbane and in 1999 published a report, *Interchurch Marriages: Their Ecumenical Challenge and Significance for Our Churches*, in which some areas for further dialogue were identified². These were:

- The Indissolubility of Marriage
- Sacrament and Sacramentality
- Baptism
- Intercommunion
- Mutual Recognition of Ministers
- The Fullness of the Church of Jesus Christ
- Pastoral Care of Interchurch Families

The members of the dialogue did not meet again until March 2002. By then the membership of the dialogue had changed, and at that meeting it was suggested that the topic of 'mission' should be examined. As the dialogue progressed it became obvious that three of the issues noted in 1999 are always present:

- Intercommunion
- Mutual Recognition of Ministers
- The Fullness of the Church of Jesus Christ

However, for the purposes of this dialogue these issues highlight a difficulty that was noted in 1999:

Our incapacity to reach agreement is in part rooted in the seriousness of the issues, a seriousness which itself is part and parcel of the international nature of and lines of responsibility within the Roman Catholic Church, international to a degree not matched by the Uniting Church in Australia, which has a greater measure of national autonomy³.

Nevertheless, during the course of this dialogue, a report from the International Methodist-Catholic Dialogue Commission, *The Grace Given You in Christ*⁴, has advanced ideas that encourage members of our present dialogue to keep all issues on the table. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit there is no need for a 'too hard basket'. Although this present report does not deal directly with the issues identified in our earlier report, it enters into an area of great contemporary significance to both our churches. As the members of the dialogue began examining the topic of mission, it became obvious that the use of the word 'mission' had undergone considerable change during the twentieth century⁵. The theological ferment that grew out of the ecumenical movement of the twentieth century encouraged the churches not only to re-examine the Scriptures but to explore what the various Christian traditions meant by words such as 'mission', 'evangelism', 'evangelisation' and 'salvation'. The members of this dialogue joined in this exploration and found that, although the two churches use differing vocabularies, there was, as should be expected, a common basic understanding – the church participates in the mission of God.

Mission (sending, being sent) is central to who God is and what God does. The Father sends the Son and the Holy Spirit. Jesus sent out the company of his disciples (the church) to continue his mission. Being sent, being on mission, is both the church's response to God and the expression of the church's life in God. When the topic of 'mission' was first considered in this dialogue it was as a response to the imperative of proclaiming the Gospel in the midst of the secularised society in which we live. In his Apostolic Exhortation after the Synod of Oceania, Pope John Paul II wrote to the Catholic Church in Australia and other parts of Oceania: "The central concern of the Synod Assembly was to find appropriate ways of presenting to the peoples of Oceania today 'Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour'"⁶. In its *Basis*

² *Interchurch Marriages: Their Significance for our Churches*. Report of the National Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Uniting Church in Australia. (Strathfield, NSW; Collingwood, Vic.: St Paul's Publications, Uniting Church Press, 1999)

³ *Ibid*, p 78

⁴ Report of the International Commission for Dialogue Between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council, *The Grace Given You In Christ: Catholics and Methodists Reflect Further on the Church* (Lake Junaluska, North Carolina: The World Methodist Council, 2006). The Uniting Church in Australia is a member of the World Methodist Council.

⁵ For example, see David J. Bosch, *Believing in the Future: Toward a Missiology of Western Culture* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1995), esp. chapter 4. See also his *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991).

⁶ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Oceania: Walking His Way, Telling His Truth, Living His Life* (Strathfield,

of *Union*, the Uniting Church in Australia “prays that it may be ready when occasion demands to confess the Lord in fresh words and deeds”⁷. The members of the dialogue agree that such an occasion makes its demands upon the churches now. However, this has been an ecumenical dialogue in which the principal concern has been to explore the theological aspects of mission and its contemporary demands. What is offered is not a program for mission, but an examination of the theological nature and scope of mission.

As the dialogue progressed, six ways through which the church participates in God’s mission were identified: worship (*leitourgia/doxologia*), communion (*koinonia*), proclamation (*kerygma*), service (*diakonia*), witness (*martyria*) and teaching (*didache*). These aspects of the church’s response to God’s mission are not discrete but interdependent. Each supports and informs the others, and together they allow for human participation in the divine purpose. So that this report can fairly record the dialogue that has occurred, the chapters which follow present each church’s understanding of mission, examine points of convergence and divergence, and suggest how this will help our churches to find appropriate ways of presenting ‘Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour’.

Uniting Church Perspectives on Mission

The Uniting Church in Australia came into being in 1977 after decades of dialogue between The Congregational Union of Australia, the Methodist Church of Australasia and the Presbyterian Church of Australia. The dialogue between the three churches was conducted by a group known as the Joint Commission on Church Union.

In *The Basis of Union* (1971)⁸ the Uniting Church expresses its self-understanding as living and working “within the faith and unity of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church”⁹. In this document the Uniting Church “presupposes that there is, and can be, only one Church of God, one Body of Christ, one fellowship of the Holy Spirit. It also presupposes that this Church’s given unity is more fundamental, and will prove more decisive, than its many obvious divisions”¹⁰. The *Basis* asserts that “the faith and unity of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church are built upon the one Lord Jesus Christ”¹¹.

One of the consequences of this approach is the claim that what the uniting churches were doing was “in fellowship with the whole Church Catholic”¹². Thus integral to the Uniting Church’s self-understanding are the links between the faith of the church, the unity of the church and the mission of the church. The very act of union was a witness to this relationship and expresses a key underlying theme of unity within the mission of the Uniting Church. The *Basis* not only acted as the foundational document but has been recognised as providing ongoing theological guidance and authority since that time¹³. Thus, in developing a clearer understanding of the Uniting Church’s perspective on the mission of the church, the *Basis* guides our thinking. The *Basis* points to numerous sources for developing an understanding of the mission of the church. First and foremost it points the church to Jesus Christ, the Word of God, and God’s mission revealed in him.

N.S.W.: St Paul’s Publications, 2001), para 4. Hereafter *EO*.

⁷ *The Basis of Union as Approved by the Congregational Union of Australia (1973) the Methodist Church of Australasia (1974) and the Presbyterian Church of Australia (1974) for the Formation of the Uniting Church in Australia (1992 Edition)*, (Collingwood, Vic.: Uniting Church Press, 1992), Paragraph 11.

⁸ Hereafter in main text, *Basis*

⁹ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 2.

¹⁰ Michael Owen (ed.), *Witness of Faith: Historic Documents of the Uniting Church in Australia* (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 1984), 5.

¹¹ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 3.

¹² *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 1.

¹³ In 1997 the ongoing status of the *Basis of Union* was recognised at the National Assembly when it amended the Constitution of the Uniting Church in Australia, inserting a new clause to read: “The Church, affirming that it belongs to the people of God on the way to the promised end, lives and works within the faith and unity of the one holy catholic and apostolic church, guided by its *Basis of Union*.” (Minute 97.37.01).

The *Basis* also directs the church's attention towards the work of the Holy Spirit, who has been sent forth so that people may trust God¹⁴. Additionally, the place and authority of the Scriptures as testimony to God's Word is emphasised. As well as this, the *Basis* acknowledges the Creeds, certain Reformation witnesses, and scholarly interpreters, as all witnessing to Jesus Christ and God's work in and through him. In seeking to elucidate the Uniting Church's perspective on mission we listen for the voice of the living Word of God speaking through these sources.

The engagement of the church within God's mission is spoken about in the *Basis* in terms of worship, witness and service¹⁵. It is important to stress that the church's mission consists in the integration of these three realms of the human response to God's action in Jesus Christ. It cannot be reduced to any one of them on its own. Nor can the church's call be reduced to getting out and engaging with things in the world to promote social, economic or political change. The mission of the church can only be articulated in terms of the relationship between the ministry of Jesus, the sending of the Spirit and the status of the church as an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself. Whilst worship, witness and service have been given different priority in different settings and at different times, for the most part they are understood by Uniting Church members, clergy and lay, as expressing the mission of the church. However, it is appropriate, within the context of this dialogue, to elucidate these three aspects of the mission of the church as well as explore new avenues of expressing the mission that arises out of the *Basis*.

To this end, the writers of this chapter began by recognising that the mission of the church is defined by the mission of God in Jesus Christ and through the Spirit. The first section of this chapter will thus examine the understanding of the mission of God in the world from a Uniting Church perspective. The writers also recognised that this mission of God is intrinsically linked to worship (*doxology* and *leitourgia*), communion (*koinonia*), service (*diakonia*), proclamation (*kerygma*), witness (*martyria*) and teaching (*didache*). These aspects of the church's life, rather than having an order of priority, could be thought of as overlaying, or possibly indwelling, one another. Thus, in seeking to define the mission of the church, each of the elements will then also be briefly discussed in their relationship to mission.

Roman Catholic Church Perspectives on Mission

We proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us – that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ (1 Jn 1: 2-3)

The Second Vatican Council cites these words of scripture at the beginning of its *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*¹⁶. As words that point us toward the intention of God's mission to draw all into communion through Christ in the Holy Spirit, they provide an outline of the major dimensions of a Roman Catholic perspective on the church's mission.

Fellowship, or better, communion in God's life both provides the initiative for, and the consequence of the church's proclamation of the good news that Jesus Christ is the salvation of God¹⁷. Eternal communion with God is revealed through the Father's sending the Son and the Spirit. Faithfully responding through the power of the Spirit, the church's purpose is to be that human community throughout history by means of which God brings about unity among people and unity between humanity and the holy Trinity through its witness to and proclamation of the Gospel.

¹⁴ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 3.

¹⁵ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 1

¹⁶ *Dei Verbum*, 1. Hereafter, *DV*.

¹⁷ PHEME PERKINS. "The Johannine Epistles," in Raymond Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Roland E. Murphy. Eds. *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall. 1990), 989.

Pope Paul VI, in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*¹⁸, offers a “meditation” on the imperative for the church to preach the Gospel. The imperative to evangelise, to preach the Gospel to all people, constitutes, he says, “the essential mission of the church.”¹⁹ The church exists “in order to evangelize, that is to say, in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God, and to perpetuate Christ's sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of His death and glorious resurrection.”²⁰ Paul VI acknowledges that the preaching of the Gospel is a complex process made up of various interrelated elements. Among those elements, he notes “the renewal of humanity, witness, explicit proclamation, inner adherence, entry into community, acceptance of signs, apostolic initiative.”²¹

Our dialogue with the Uniting Church has brought to the fore the complexity of trying to understand together the various elements that constitute the nature of the church’s mission. However, a commonality emerged regarding the categories through which we understand our own distinctive approaches to mission, and through which we have come to understand each other's position. Together we have come to approach the nature of the church’s mission under the following headings: Liturgy, Communion, Service, Proclamation, Witness, and Teaching.

Reflect and share

“Being sent, being on mission, is both the church’s response to God and the expression of the church’s life in God.” Can you think of examples where this is lived out in the lives of individual Christians and in Christian communities?

¹⁸ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. Hereafter, *EN*

¹⁹ *EN*, 14.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *EN*, 24.

Study One: Part 2

Study materials: 1. The Mission of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit

Uniting Church Perspective

The mission of the church is clearly understood as originating in the mission of God in Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit. The *Basis of Union* expresses the mission of God in Jesus Christ in terms of reconciliation. "In Jesus Christ 'God was reconciling the world to himself' (2 Corinthians 5:19 RSV). In love for the world, God gave the Son to take away the world's sin."²²

This statement points at two things which are occurring. 1. In Jesus Christ God was dealing with the problem of sin. 2. God was creating a new creation which was 'reconciled' with God. Thus, it could be said that the mission of God is about the reconciliation of the creation with its creator, which is the action of God alone.²³

God's mission is exhibited through the church in and through the power of the Holy Spirit in the following ways: worship, witness, service, communion (sharing in the life of God and each other's lives), proclamation, and teaching.

Roman Catholic Perspective

The Second Vatican Council's *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* understands the "sending" of the Son and the Spirit as the origin and purpose of the church and its commission to be a sign and instrument of unity.²⁴ However, the document precedes its reference to these "sendings" with reference to the one who sends: the eternal Father.²⁵ Accordingly, "the universal Church is seen to be a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit"²⁶ and has its own identity of "being sent" in the missions of the Son and the Spirit.

The foundation of the church's mission in the life of the Trinity is the basis for the church's understanding of its missionary activity; indeed, the church is missionary "by nature", and all the baptised have a part to play in the church's mission.

Reflect and share

How do you personally define the word mission?

Who has inspired you to believe "through their word"?

Reading and Understanding Each Other

A Uniting Church reading of the Catholic perspective

The Uniting Church finds much common ground with the Roman Catholic Church in the basic understanding of mission. Both churches affirm that it is God's mission (*missio Dei*), God-given and God-initiated. Both understand that the church participates in the continuing mission of the triune God, although we find that this is often conceptualised somewhat differently. The Uniting Church can affirm the Roman Catholics statement that "the foundation of the church's mission in the life of the Trinity is the basis for the church's understanding of its missionary activity."²⁷

While it is more characteristic for the Uniting Church to emphasise the proclamation of God's reconciling work in Jesus Christ, calling for the response of faith to what God has already done in Christ and continues to do through the

²² Basis of Union, Paragraph 3

²³ Basis of Union, Paragraph 3

²⁴ Lumen Gentium 3 &4. Hereafter LG

²⁵ LG, 2,3,4

²⁶ LG, 4

²⁷ See Chapter 2, "The Mission of the Church": Report of the National Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Uniting church in Australia (2002-2008).

Spirit, it can also speak of God's mission to draw all people into communion with Christ. The quest for the restored unity of the one, holy catholic and apostolic church which is strongly stated in the *Basis of Union* clearly implies a longing for God's people to be at one with God and with one another, as Jesus and the Father are one and as Jesus prays that they may be one (Jn 17). The goal and the process of mission, God's work of reconciling people to God and to one another, may also be understood as God's drawing people into the communion of the Trinity.

The Uniting Church also recognises the imperative to preach the Gospel to all people, to evangelise (Matt 28: 19-20). Making disciples of Jesus Christ, in every dimension of that continuing process, is essential in the life of the church. The church is missionary "by nature" and witness to the Gospel is a call on the lives of all God's people.

It is noted that there are differences in terminology, in the imaginative conceptualisation of the church, its worship, witness and service, and how God is understood as acting or being with humanity and in the church. This will be explored further in the following sections. These are differences which no doubt can be traced back to the theological debates of the sixteenth century (e.g., the struggle to find the most appropriate ways to speak of Christ's presence in the eucharist) and to recognise the ways of God's continuing revelation and presence in the world.

This is a complex but vital question for dialogue, because of the changing understanding of mission and because of the several inter-related aspects which characterise the nature of the church as essentially missional.

A Catholic reading of the Uniting Church perspective

A Catholic reading of the Uniting Church's position on God's mission finds common ground where the mission of the church is founded in the *missio Dei*. The mission of the church has its origins in the Trinitarian life of God, and the missions of both the Son and the Spirit.

It is recognised by Catholics that the Uniting Church's emphasis on the term "reconciliation" is important for understanding the church's mission. God's action in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit is primarily one of reconciliation that addresses human sinfulness, which humanity itself has no power to overcome. Linked with and integral to God's act of redemption through reconciliation is God's establishment of the community of persons who are the church, "a fellowship of reconciliation." "It is the mission of God in Christ through the Spirit that determines the mission of the church." The Catholic Church can recognise this understanding to be in accordance with its faith. It teaches that the church is missionary by nature and has its origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit²⁸. Also, that

God decided to enter into human history in a new and definitive manner, by sending his own Son in human flesh, so that through him he might snatch people from the power of darkness and of Satan (cf. Col 1:13; Acts 10:38) and in him reconcile the world to himself²⁹

Common agreement regarding the nature of the relationship between mission and reconciliation is expressed strongly in the report *Towards a Common Understanding of the Church* (1990). The report is the fruit of international dialogue between the Catholic Church, and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. Together they confess that Christ, established as Mediator, achieves our reconciliation in all its dimensions: God reconciling humanity, human beings reconciled with each other, and humanity reconciled with God³⁰

And,

The Church is called into being as a community of men and women to share in the salvific activity of Christ Jesus. He has reconciled them to God, freed them from sin and redeemed them from evil. "They are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom 3:24)³¹.

A note of difference between our churches, when speaking of the fundamental notion of the mission of the church, is the different emphases on reconciliation and of unity. The Uniting Church more readily uses the term

²⁸ *Ad Gentes*, 2. Hereafter, *AG*

²⁹ *AG*, 3

³⁰ International Reformed Catholic Dialogue. Final Report (1990): "Finalization of Final Report: Towards a Common Understanding of the Church," 71. See http://www.prounione.uebe.it/dia-int/r-rc/doc/e_r-rc_2-printable.html [accessed 14/11/2005]

³¹ International Reformed Roman Catholic Dialogue. Final Report (1990), 85

'reconciliation' while the Catholic Church highlights the goal of 'unity'. The respective meanings of these terms are not in opposition to each other. Rather, they are complementary.

Commonalities and Differences

The most striking commonality to be observed at the outset is our fundamental agreement on the grounding of the mission of the church in the life of the triune God and the mission of God in human history as revealed in God's sending of his Son Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. The significance of our agreement at this level should not, we believe, be underestimated. Ultimately this is the foundation of our common conviction about the missional nature of the church.

Within our broad agreement surrounding the relationship between the missionary nature of the church and the triune life of God, we realised that our churches use slightly different language to describe the goal of God's saving work. Where the UCA tends to speak of God drawing people into God's reconciling work, the Catholic Church more often speaks of people being drawn into the communion of the Trinity. We concluded that no substantial issue was at stake in this difference.

Reflect and share

*What do you think it means as a Christian to be "completely one" in the world today?
How do you see us (Christians) working together so that "they may all be one"?*

Closing Prayer

Scripture Reading

2 Corinthians 5:16-21 (NRSV)

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Pause for silent prayer and reflection

Leader: Let us pray together

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

Study Two: Part 1

Opening Devotion

(A candle may be lit and an appropriate hymn chosen to begin the devotion.)

Call to prayer

Leader: Father in heaven
form in us the likeness of your Son
and deepen his life within us.
Send us as witnesses of gospel joy
into a world of fragile peace and broken promises.
Touch the hearts of all with your love
that they may in turn love one another.
We ask this through Christ our Lord

All: Amen

(Opening Prayer, Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time A, The Sunday Missal, Harper Collins Religious, 1998)

Scripture Reading

Colossians 3: 14 – 17 (NRSV)

Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Pause for silent prayer and reflection

Prayers of Intercession

The Leader invites participants to pray aloud for the needs of family, community and the world

Leader: Let us pray

All: **Loving God, help us to clothe ourselves in love, to do all things in your name, and to come together as one body and share with others the mystery of Christ. Amen**

Study materials: 2. Worship (Doxologia / Leitourgia) as Mission

Roman Catholic Perspective

The Roman Catholic Church understands the church to be in the nature of a sacrament, a sign and instrument of communion with God and unity among all people. ³²As such, it reflects the light of Christ and carries out its “sole” purpose, to see “that the kingdom of God may come and the salvation of the human race is accomplished.”³³ It is a people brought into “unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” ³⁴that receives a mission of “proclaiming and establishing among all peoples the Reign of Christ and of God”,³⁵ so that it understands itself as “the seed and the beginning of that kingdom.”³⁶

³² LG, 1

³³ Gaudium et Spes 45. Hereafter, GS

³⁴ LG, 5

³⁵ LG, 5

³⁶ LG, 5

Pre-eminent among the ways in which the Roman Catholic Church makes itself fully present to the world is in its liturgical life. Through its liturgical life, the church is drawn into the God-given gift of the fullness of divine worship that is Jesus Christ, the one mediator between God and humanity, the means of our salvation.³⁷

The whole liturgical life of the Roman Catholic Church revolves around the church's seven sacraments, the heart of which is the Eucharist. Every liturgical celebration is the action of Christ and his Body, the church.

The Roman Catholic Church also realises that for this full effectiveness to take place those who are the church need to be enabled to participate in the liturgical life of the church, aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the church's rituals so as to be enriched by them: for "it is through the liturgy, especially, that the faithful are enabled to express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church."³⁸

Uniting Church Perspective

Jesus' worship of God, which was exhibited in his obedience to God and which included his participation in and fulfilment of Israel's own traditions of worship, is the offering of human worship which is acceptable to God.³⁹ This self-offering of Jesus Christ, culminating in the cross, continues through Jesus' ascended life where Jesus goes on mediating between God and the creation, offering praise to God on behalf of the whole creation.⁴⁰

The *Basis of Union* declares that Christ is present in the preaching of the Word⁴¹ and that "The Word of God on whom salvation depends is to be heard and known from Scripture appropriated in the worshipping and witnessing life of the Church."⁴² The Basis also "commits its ministers to... administer the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper as effective signs of the gospel set forth in the Scriptures."⁴³

When we worship God together on a Sunday we are not simply imitating Jesus, we are drawn into Jesus' own worship of the Father by the power of the Holy Spirit. The creative power of God which raised Jesus from the tomb draws us into new life as God's new creation and we offer with Jesus our worship for the sake of the whole world.

Reflect and share:

In what way does liturgy/worship connect to the mission of God in Jesus?

When gathered together for liturgy/worship, do you feel part of "one body"?

Reading and Understanding Each Other

A Catholic reading of the Uniting Church perspective

The Catholic partners in the dialogue find common ground with the Uniting Church's statement on the centrality of Christ and his work of reconciliation as fundamental to any notion of Christian worship. They recognise the power of the proclamation of the word to draw us into the worship of Christ and the role of baptism in initiating us into Christ's life and mission. They appreciate the Uniting Church emphasis on the Eucharist as an effective sign and foretaste of God's kingdom. Finally, the Catholic side sees in the Uniting Church notion of "words of mission" an affirmation of its own understanding of the eucharist as "Missa" (Mass) in which liturgy and life interpenetrate.

The dialogue has highlighted the strong Roman Catholic emphasis on ecclesiology and its approach to sacramentality, which is different from the more restricted Uniting Church usage of the word "sacrament" in reference to Baptism and Eucharist. A Catholic perspective would always begin with the liturgy as an ecclesial act of the whole Body of Christ while the Uniting perspective springs from Jesus' obedient worship of God as seen in the Scriptures. In the Catholic approach, ecclesiology is expressed through broad notions of sacramentality in which the

³⁷ Sacrosanctum Concilium, 10. Hereafter SC

³⁸ SC, 2

³⁹ Cf. Lk 4:16ff; Lk 22:15-20

⁴⁰ Cf. Hebrews 8-10

⁴¹ Basis of Union, Paragraph 4

⁴² Basis of Union, Paragraph 5

⁴³ Basis of Union, Paragraph 5

church itself and its manifold sacramental actions become a witness to the world and signs of God's universal salvific embrace.

For this reason, perhaps, Catholics are generally more comfortable with the term "liturgy/*leitourgia*" whereas the Uniting Church gravitates more naturally to "doxology/*doxologia*". The first (etymologically 'the work of the people or public service') places the emphasis on the communal response to God's grace in word, symbol and action; the second begins with the honour and praise due to God. This is a reminder to Roman Catholics that their shorthand expressions such as "Baptism initiates us into God's family" cannot reduce worship to merely human actions: God takes the initiative and acts in the liturgy and human actions occur as a faith response under the influence of the Holy Spirit. To the question, "Who celebrates the liturgy?" the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* answers, "Liturgy is an 'action' of the whole Christ (*Christus totus*)"⁴⁴. "It is the whole 'community', the Body of Christ united with its Head, that celebrates"⁴⁵.

This raises an issue which, from a Catholic perspective, will need further attention, namely, the notion of 'participation' in the liturgy and hence in the saving, reconciling work of Christ: how would one understand such a 'joint action' between Christ and the church? We pour water and Christ acts to reconcile. This is an ecclesial question which addresses the nature of the church as the Body of Christ. Whether through such things as a common Creed or the office of bishop, a missionary church will need a strong sense of communion beyond the gathered assembly in order to establish a solidarity with the church of all times and places: this provides an impetus to participate in the mission of Christ and will be a sign of the congregation of all languages and cultures in the eschaton — "I shall draw all people to myself" (Jn 12:32). Are we then in a position to address the extension of the notion of sacramentality and to ask whether this provides us with a suitable category for understanding the way in which the church mediates salvation in Christ to the world?

Catholic participants in the dialogue affirm a common joy in the recognition of God's word which calls us to conversion and summons us to mission. Together we embrace the eschatological dimension of the liturgy which provides the end and goal for mission — "Thy kingdom come". We affirm by our common baptism, by the shared gift of the Holy Spirit, and by the dialogue process itself a desire to overcome the scandal of division at the table of the Lord which impedes and distorts the mission of Christ.

A Uniting Church reading of the Catholic perspective

The Uniting Church recognises that the worship of the gathered congregation, the liturgical life of the church, is central for both churches. The Uniting Church partners in the dialogue note the Roman Catholic understanding that the gathered congregation at worship is both the central expression of that communion to which the mission of the church is directed (Christ present with his people, centrally in the eucharist) and the empowerment of the church for mission. The Uniting Church speaks of Christ as present, speaking and acting through the preaching/proclamation of the word and the celebration of the sacraments, baptism and the Lord's supper, and the worship of the church as the nourishment of God's people to strengthen them in their participation with Christ in his mission in the world. The order of service for the Lord's Day recommends a scriptural "word of mission" before the final blessing.

Within this acknowledgment of the centrality of the worship of the gathered people of God for both churches, certain differences in terminology and ethos are noted. One example is the use of the word "sacrament", which for the Uniting Church has the precise meaning of baptism and holy communion/eucharist/the Lord's supper. This word in Roman Catholic terminology is more widely used for several rituals, for the whole church and for the relationship of God with many aspects of the created world, which may be understood as sacramental. We also note a subtly different way of speaking of Christ's relationship with his human members in his body, the church — what has been described as a different equilibrium. While the Uniting Church expresses its understanding of God/Christ/Spirit as acting through what the church does in worship (proclamation and sacrament), witness and service, it maintains an acute awareness of the distinction between God and humanity. The church and its members can disobey and fail its Lord. We recognise that the Roman Catholic Church expresses its understanding of Christ's presence and action in the church with a sense of closer identification with what the church, particularly the priest, does. This is to be seen

⁴⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1136

⁴⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1140

in the approach to absolution or forgiveness of sins, where the priest in the name of Christ absolves, while the Uniting Church preference is to announce Christ's words of grace, "Your sins are forgiven".

Commonalities and Differences

The worship of the gathered community was likewise recognised by our dialogue as central to our common ecclesial visions of a missionary church. Both our traditions believe that it is in word and sacrament that Christ is truly present and it is there that the identity of the community of disciples, the Body of Christ, is most clearly expressed. In worship we Christians are empowered by the nourishing grace of God to participate in God's mission.

In the midst of our common understanding of the relationship between mission and worship, we acknowledge that our traditions differ around a cluster of ecclesiological issues. These are focused in our different understandings of 'sacrament', which point in turn to different theologies of ecclesial mediation. This, in turn, raises further questions about the manner in which we recognise and acknowledge God's presence outside the church (an issue which will be raised again below).

Reflect and share

How would you explain the different understandings of 'sacrament' in the two traditions?

Why do you gather on Sunday? Why do WE gather on Sunday?

Study Two: Part 2

Study materials: 3. Communion (Koinonia) as Mission

Roman Catholic Perspective

The 1985 meeting of the Synod of Bishops deliberated on the nature of the church and came to the conclusion that “communion” is the driving principle for the church.⁴⁶

What is the relationship between the missionary nature of the church and the nature of the church as a communion? Pope John Paul II offers a way of understanding this relationship in his Pastoral Exhortation, *On the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World (Christifideles Laici)*.

Communion begets communion: essentially it is likened to a mission on behalf of communion ... Communion and mission are profoundly connected with each other; they interpenetrate and mutually imply each other, to the point that the communion represents both the source and the fruit of mission: communion gives rise to the mission and mission is accomplished in communion.⁴⁷

This is the key to understanding the Catholic approach to the relationship between *koinonia* and mission. The church is a communion whose mission is to build communion, communion among people, communion of all people with God, communion of all people with the larger creation. Because of this, work to restore unity among Christian churches, efforts to build relations with other world religions, work for justice and peace, and work to protect the environment are integral to the mission of the church, as expressions of the fundamental mission of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all the nations. All of these in their own ways build communion among people, of people with God and of people with the rest of creation. This communion is centred on and initiated by the Triune God. It is a communion in Christ. All are bound together in him by the Holy Spirit and in Christ all are given a share in his relationship with the Father. The mission of the church is to share in the Spirit’s work of extending that communion to the ends of the earth. Everything which brings people closer together, even if they do not know Christ, can be part of this mission.

Uniting Church Perspective

Integral to the mission of God in Jesus Christ is God’s will to draw all things into communion (relationship) with the triune life of God. The will of God for a communion in being is expressed poignantly in Jesus’ prayer of John 17 when he prays, not only that the unity of believers will be the same unity as shared by the Father and the Son, but that they will share in the very unity of God.⁴⁸

This gift of union with God and one another, given through the power of the Holy Spirit, is cited as a fundamental imperative in the mission of the Uniting Church. Moreover, the gifts of the church’s members are used for the building up of the whole and are understood as a means through which Christ works and bears witness to himself. Thus, the promised union of all things in God is anticipated by the unity of the church. Whilst division remains, seeking further unity continues to be an important aspect of the church’s mission.

The way we exist towards one another within our congregation, as a Presbytery, as members of the UCA and as a church in relationship with other denominations can all express the bond we have in Christ.

Reflect and Share:

How do you show your unity with others in your every day actions?

What does your parish/congregation do to develop relationships with (the communion of) the whole church?

⁴⁶ Final Report, Section C1

⁴⁷ Christifideles Laici, 32. Hereafter CL

⁴⁸ Cf John 17:20-24

Reading and Understanding Each Other

A Catholic reading of the Uniting Church perspective

The Catholic Church finds common ground with the Uniting Church's position of holding communion as integral to the church's nature and in accord with the faith of the church. Communion defines the church's mission, as mission defines the theological notion of communion that the church is.

The impetus for the church's communion is a gift of the Holy Spirit whose intention is to draw all people into communion with God. This movement to communion in God is foundational for the ecumenical activity of the church. For both churches baptism gives entry into the church, which is the foundation for life in Christ. The desire of the Catholic Church is to deepen its unity with other churches, in which it recognises elements of what it is to be the church. The Catholic Church understands that there are various degrees of communion between the churches. Further, both churches look to the missionary role of the church as a communion with God and between people as motivation for working toward unity of all things in God. Together our churches place an emphasis on the sign of unity that the church is, in anticipation of the fullness of God's reign.

We note here the Uniting Church's practice of eucharistic hospitality, which is a particular point of emphasis with regard to the meaning of communion, and also a point of difference from the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church understands itself as not able to invite Christians from those churches and ecclesial communions with which it is in partial communion to share in the eucharist. For the Catholic Church full participation in eucharistic communion is a sign of the fullness of communion in the church.

A Uniting Church reading of the Catholic perspective

The Uniting Church recognises the very important emphasis in recent Roman Catholic understanding of *koinonia* as a fundamental idea in its ecclesiology. It is also recognised in the Uniting Church that "communion" is of the nature of the church, not simply a dimension of mission. The mission of the church and the communion of the church are both fundamental to the nature of the church. The church participates in the communion of the Trinity, and the goal of its mission is that all be drawn into that communion with God and with one another for which humanity has been created and redeemed.

The idea of communion is also seen to respond to that longing of humanity to find its place, its home, in communion with God, for itself and the wider creation. This emphasis is not inappropriate within Uniting Church understanding as it is closely linked to the idea of unity, the oneness for which Christ prayed and to which the Uniting Church seeks to be committed because it is at the heart of the Gospel. The Uniting Church has the vision, based in the life, death and resurrection of Christ, that this unity of all Christ's people may become visible in the life of the church on earth. Communion/*koinonia* can be understood as the vital depth dimension of all relationships within the new creation, achieved in Christ's reconciling work on the cross and in the continuing work of the Holy Spirit.

When the Uniting Church speaks about reconciliation and Christ's work of reconciliation, communion with God and God's people is understood as an essential aspect of this gift of grace. The emphasis on the *missio Dei* as the reconciling work of God in Christ can therefore be enriched with the explicit understanding that this work of God is for the purpose of bringing all into living communion with God and all God's people, the eschatological hope towards which we move. Our conviction, that it is God's will that there be unity in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, receives new depth through the concept of communion (*koinonia*) as the living relationship with God in Christ in which the church exists and will live forever.

Commonalities and Differences

There was also basic agreement around the idea that the communion to which the church is called is pivotal to our respective ecclesiologies, and for that reason is itself central to our understanding of mission. The unity of the Body of Christ is a sign of the unity of all things to which the missionary God is bringing all creation.

Our common view that the communion of the Body of Christ is essential to the missionary nature of the church puts into sharp relief our different accounts of eucharistic hospitality. This particular difference does, of course, take us back to the issues of the Reformation and to a difference which causes pain to both our churches. Further discussion

will need to address whether the shared agreement on the missionary nature of the church will help to reframe a dispute which has traditionally been treated through received categories of the eucharist and the nature of the church, and of sacraments and ministerial order.

Reflect and Share:

How do you show that you share in a relationship with the “Father of all”?

When the church struggles to exhibit the unity we have in Christ how does the world respond?

Closing Prayer

Scripture Reading

Ephesians 4: 1 – 6 (NRSV)

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

Pause for silent prayer and reflection

Leader: Let us pray together

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

Study Three: Part 1

Opening Devotion

(A candle may be lit and an appropriate hymn chosen to begin the devotion.)

Call to prayer

Leader: Come to us, God of unity.
Come with your forgiveness and your healing grace.
Come, that we may witness to reconciliation for a divided world;
that we may gather around Christ's table as one people;
that we may affirm one church, one faith, one Lord:

All: Come to us, God of unity. (Uniting in Worship, Peoples' Book)

Scripture Reading

Matthew 25:31-40 (NRSV)

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

Pause for silent prayer and reflection

Prayers of Intercession

The Leader invites participants to pray aloud for the needs of family, community and the world

Leader: Let us pray

All: Compassionate Friend, help us know not only what it means to wash each other's feet but to serve this whole world that you love so much. Amen.

Study materials: 4. Service (Diakonia) as Mission

Uniting Church Perspective

God's mission in Christ is also expressed in Christ's compassion for the world. This compassion revolves around bringing reconciliation and wholeness to people's lives. The incarnation of Christ reflects God's concern for the creation and the promise of God is for a renewal of the creation.

Christ's compassion occurs at personal and communal levels as Christ forgives, heals, exorcises, and recognises people at the margins of society. God's compassion for the world is most fully expressed in Christ's death which takes away the sin of the world. The Basis expresses the belief that "the Church of God is committed to serve the world for which Christ died."⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Basis of Union, Paragraph 1

The Uniting Church has a strong commitment to serving the world as it participates in the mission of God. The Basis “acknowledges with thanksgiving that the one Spirit has endowed the members of Christ's Church with a diversity of gifts, and that there is no gift without its corresponding service: all ministries have a part in the ministry of Christ.”⁵⁰ All members of Christ's Body are expected to take upon themselves the form of a servant in order that God's loving care is known among people.

Roman Catholic Perspective

The church is a communion of people in Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit, that seeks the fullness of the Reign of God, as it bears the message of salvation in, with and for the world. The church's mission is of a religious nature,⁵¹ which in itself includes all aspects of human life.

At the heart of the Roman Church's mission of service of all people is its belief that human persons, in deep relationship with one another as social beings, are created in the image of God to know and love their creator.⁵² This is revealed most fully through the mystery of the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, the image of the invisible God.⁵³

The Second Vatican Council teaches that as all people are created in the image of God, they have the same origin and nature. Through Christ's redemption they enjoy the same divine calling and destiny; there is here a basic equality between all, which needs to be given greater recognition.⁵⁴ In this respect, all “forms of social or cultural discrimination in basic personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, colour, social conditions, language or religion”⁵⁵ need to be eradicated as incompatible with God's design.

The responsibility of the whole church is to practise love.⁵⁶

Reflect and Share:

How have you experienced God's compassion for you?

In what way have you shown compassion in the last month?

Reading and Understanding Each Other

A Uniting Church reading of the Catholic perspective

The Uniting Church notes the large area of common ground about service. An aspect of the mission of the church, for both churches, is to offer service to the world, based either in the notion of common humanity created in the image of God, or Christ's service of this humanity on the cross without distinction of race, social status or gender. Our two churches in Australia aim to serve the wider community in similar ways through a range of services. Whether one uses Johannine language, where the word “love” is central or Pauline language, employing other concepts drawn from Christ's ministry and the work of the Spirit, “love” is quite basic. Paul speaks of love as the best way of all (1 Cor. 13).

It is noted, however, that different theological grounding of the rationale for service is given in the two chapters.

The Catholic perspective speaks of an underlying basis for service as found in creation: that all people are made in the image of God to know and love their creator. The humanity and dignity of all people are thus recognised and all are to be served by Christ's people. This is shown most fully in Jesus Christ, that all people have the same divine

⁵⁰ Basis of Union, Paragraph 13

⁵¹ GS, 42

⁵² GS, 12

⁵³ Cf Col1:15

⁵⁴ GS, 29

⁵⁵ GS, 29

⁵⁶ Deus Caritas Est, 19 (Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical *On Christian Love*)

calling and destiny. Resulting from this, all forms of cultural and racial discrimination need to be eradicated and the activity of the church is to be an expression of love that seeks the integral good of humanity.

The Uniting Church section on service in chapter three begins with Christ, serving the world by his death, as the starting point for the church's ministry of service. The church is to model itself on Christ and participate in his service to the world. Christ's service to those who met with discrimination in his day, not only the respectable, leads the church to the same engagement in service to work for justice and peace. There is reference also in Chapter 3 to the gifts of the Holy Spirit given to all, and the corresponding gifts for each person's ministry of service.

These points may be understood as complementary rather than contradictory. They may be seen also as opening up a range of questions which face the churches in their mission of service. How do we seek to serve in Christ's name those who belong to other world religions? How do we offer Christian service through the employment (e.g., under equal opportunity legislation) of those who do not offer their service in the name of Christ?

A Catholic reading of the Uniting Church perspective

The Catholic Church finds common ground with the Uniting Church on the centrality of the Incarnation for understanding the church's mission. A Catholic emphasis on the Incarnation understands Jesus Christ's unity with all creation as a restoration of God's likeness in which all people are created. A particular emphasis of the Uniting Church is the reconciliation that is brought about by God through the Incarnation. In the light of our dialogue, for both churches the coming of Christ signifies a deep participation in God's mission by the church enabled through Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

A consequence for both our churches is the significance of the connection between Incarnation and faithful response by the church in service to the world. Christ's redemptive act is a universal act of God's love and provides the foundation for the church's Spirit-guided acts of love of neighbour. This service of love for the world, as the Uniting Church phrases it, has for both churches its ecclesial origins in the church's liturgical life. An important consequence of the churches' faithful response is their mission formed by solidarity with all people. Particularly important for both churches is the implication of how the church is at service to the world, and ecumenically, how the churches might offer this service in faithful partnership for the deepest needs of the world.

Commonalities and Differences

Our two churches are agreed that the posture of the church towards the world is one of service. For all our shared emphasis on the particularity and visibility of the church and its role in the *missio Dei*, the church is not an end in itself. Precisely because of its grounding in God's own life, the church is oriented towards the world in service.

We discovered that our commonly held view on the importance of service (*diakonia*) for the church's participation in the *missio Dei* nevertheless was informed by two different perspectives: a common humanity created in the image of God (RC) and the example of Jesus serving the world (UCA). It was concluded that this difference was of no fundamental significance.

Reflect and Share

How is Christ's love/compassion expressed through the Churches?

Do you think Christ's compassion can be expressed by those who do not have a commitment to Christ?

Study Three: Part 2

Study materials: 5. Proclamation (Kerygma) as Mission

Uniting Church Perspective

In Christ God proclaims the beginning of a new order of righteousness and love, pointing the creation towards its promised end: union with God. This good news of salvation is given for the church to share. Just as “Jesus of Nazareth announced the sovereign grace of God whereby the poor in spirit could receive God's love”⁵⁷ so too the church is called to preach “Christ the risen crucified One and confesses him as Lord to the glory of God the Father.”⁵⁸

The gospel imperative to share the message of salvation reflects Christ’s command of Matthew 28:19, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.” Hence, the evangelical tradition of the church, which is particularly focussed on sharing the Gospel message, is also essential in the participation of the church in the mission of God.

The proclamation of Christ as Lord takes place first and foremost in the context of the congregation and is given a sacramental quality in the Basis. “Christ who is present when he is preached among people is the Word of God who acquits the guilty, who gives life to the dead and who brings into being what otherwise could not exist.”⁵⁹ However, the firm belief found in the Basis is that all people are called to respond to God’s love in Christ and the proclamation must be made beyond the gathered congregation also.

Whilst recognising that there are particular gifts in evangelism,⁶⁰ that is to say bringing others to faith, “The Uniting Church affirms that every member of the Church is engaged to confess the faith of Christ crucified and to be his faithful servant.”⁶¹

Roman Catholic Perspective

The proclamation of “the full and living Gospel”⁶² is, for Roman Catholics, at the heart of the mission of the church. This proclamation includes telling the story of salvation achieved through Christ in the power of the Spirit, demonstrating its power through lives of faith, as well as offering to others the possibility of salvation through present encounter with Christ in the Spirit. This proclamation is central to the worship of Catholics; it is central to the church’s outreach of evangelisation to the whole world.

The close relationship between the church as communion and the mission of the church, highlights the special place of the proclamation of the Gospel in the life of the church. This proclamation incites its hearers to personal faith in Jesus Christ and adherence to the Christian community.⁶³

While the mission of the church takes many forms, all are related to communion, where the proclamation of the Gospel has a central place. Communion exists in Jesus Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit and opens up for all people the possibility of their entering into a life-transforming relationship with God in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, a relationship that will save and liberate, will bring reconciliation, redemption and sanctification. This is only possible if all Christians share in the mission of witnessing to Jesus Christ by their lives and in their words.

Reflect and Share

*When did you last share your faith in Jesus with another person?
Can you tell about a homily/sermon which impacted on your life?*

⁵⁷ Basis of Union, Paragraph 3

⁵⁸ Basis of Union, Paragraph 3

⁵⁹ Basis of Union, Paragraph 4

⁶⁰ Basis of Union, paragraph 11

⁶¹ Basis of Union, Paragraph 13

⁶² DV, 7

⁶³ EN, 14

Reading and Understanding Each Other

A Uniting Church reading of the Catholic perspective

The Uniting Church finds much common ground with the Roman Catholic Church in its discussion of the evangelical nature of the church and its mission. The Uniting Church speaks of the proclamation of the Gospel, or evangelisation, as calling hearers to personal faith in Jesus Christ and adherence to the Christian community. In this way people are drawn into the communion of the life-transforming relationship with God in Jesus Christ.

The Uniting Church also identifies with seeing the need to find new forms or new ways of proclaiming the Gospel in the cultural settings of Oceania, including Australia, and the understanding that it is the task of all God's baptised people to engage in this mission of witnessing to Christ by their lives and words. It too struggles to find ways both to encourage the people of the church and to equip them by developing their gifts for the work of evangelism, while also acknowledging that some people have particularly highly developed gifts for this work.

A strong emphasis in the way that the Uniting Church uses the word "proclamation", which is not found as much in Chapter 2, is the understanding that the Gospel is proclaimed also in every service of worship where the scriptures are read and preached. The preaching is understood not simply as teaching, but as an event through which God addresses the people gathered and inspires them in their faith and daily living, for their mission and service in the world. The Gospel is proclaimed both within the church and beyond the church to those who have not yet responded in faith.

A Catholic reading of the Uniting Church perspective

The Catholic Church finds common ground with the Uniting Church in acknowledging the intimate connection between the proclamation of the gospel and the christological and ecclesiological dimensions of the church's mission. The mission of proclamation is an imperative to share the gift of the good news of salvation that the church has received in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ is both the saving Word proclaimed by the church and the content of this Word. The imperative to proclamation draws the church to share the good news with the whole world. The good news of salvation is not simply for the church, but by virtue of the nature of the gift the church becomes missionary, offering the Word of life to others to draw all into communion with God. Our churches affirm that all members of the church are called to be missionary and proclaim the gospel each in their own way.

Both churches also present an emphasis on proclamation that is directed to those who are baptised members in the church. The gift of the Spirit provides the impetus for a faithful response by those who hear and receive the Word to form the church, and who likewise provide voice for the Word to be proclaimed as the church's mission to the ends of the earth.

Commonalities and Differences

Over and above the obvious agreement that the proclamation of the gospel is central to the church's mission, our dialogue revealed a deeper agreement around this issue. The proclamation of the gospel by the church is not simply the means by which men and women are summoned to faith, but the ongoing proclamation of the gospel within the church continually addresses the people of God with the claims of the gospel and thereby draws them more deeply into being the church and therefore more deeply into the *missio Dei*.

On the relationship between mission and kerygma, we found that there were no major differences.

Reflect and Share

Do you think people are reluctant to share their faith? Why?

What ways do you see the Churches proclaiming the message of salvation to the world?

Closing Prayer

Scripture Reading

Luke 4:16-21 (NRSV)

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.’

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’

Pause for silent prayer and reflection

Leader: Let us pray together

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

Study Four: Part 1

Opening Devotion

(A candle may be lit and an appropriate hymn chosen to begin the devotion.)

Call to prayer

Leader: God of wisdom and love,
source of all good,
send your Spirit to teach us your truth
and guide our actions in your way of peace.
We ask this through Christ our Lord

All: Amen

(Opening Prayer, Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time A, The Sunday Missal, Harper Collins Religious, 1998)

Scripture Reading

Philemon 1: 4 – 7 (NRSV)

When I remember you in my prayers, I always thank my God because I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith towards the Lord Jesus. I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective when you perceive all the good that we may do for Christ. I have indeed received much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.

Pause for silent prayer and reflection

Prayers of Intercession

The Leader invites participants to pray aloud for the needs of family, community and the world

Leader: Let us pray

All: Loving God in your Son we come to know you. Help us to act with joy and love, so that our lives are may be an encouragement to others. Amen.

Study materials: 6. Witness (Martyria) as Mission

Roman Catholic Perspective

Christians are called to witness to Christ at all times and places, for example, when they are engaged in dialogue with other world religions and other people in the pursuit of justice and peace. They never cease to be ambassadors to Christ by their words and actions. Paul VI reflects on what he names a “wordless witness” in his meditation on the preaching of the Gospel, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. He mirrors the approach of St Francis and his companions, who saw their mission as preaching the Gospel, but only “using words if necessary.” St Francis’ focus is on a Gospel life lived in action that reflects the love of God in Christ.

Witness to the Gospel, as the ordinary way of life for Christians, reflects the teaching of the Catholic Church in its understanding of the universal call to a holy way of life. The Second Vatican Council grounds this call to holiness in the one holiness of God, Father, Son and Spirit.⁶⁴ The church is holy only in the gift of God’s holiness, but all in the church are called to a holy way of life in Christ, who is the “author and maker” of holiness.⁶⁵ Holiness is the gift of the

⁶⁴ LG, 39

⁶⁵ LG, 40

Spirit who moves Jesus' disciples "interiorly to love God with their whole heart, with their whole soul, with their whole understanding, with their whole strength, and to love one another as Christ loved them."⁶⁶

For the Catholic Church, this gift of holiness is expressed in the church's teaching on the communion of saints, and the singling out of some witnesses as sure signs of holiness to inspire others in their imitation of Christ. These are called saints, but all are called to be saints.

Uniting Church Perspective

The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ bear witness to God's work of salvation. In bearing witness Jesus reveals the truth of his identity and the work of God that he has been sent to do. So it is that in John 5:36 Jesus declares, "The works that the Father has given me to complete, the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me."

This witness is given so that the world may believe and partake in knowledge of God.⁶⁷ Jesus' mission includes his witness to the work of salvation being carried out by God in Israel's history and conclusively through himself.

The Uniting Church reflects Christ's mission of witness through its own life. It does this by the very act of union in which it was "seeking to bear witness to that unity which is both Christ's gift and will for the Church."⁶⁸ It seeks to continue this by responding to the call to be "an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself."⁶⁹

The witness of the church is understood as a participation in Christ's self-witness and his witness to the work of God's Holy Spirit for the whole creation.

Reflect and Share

Where and when do you witness to Jesus Christ in your life?

How do the Churches witness to the work of God's Holy Spirit in the whole of creation?

Reading and Understanding Each Other

A Catholic reading of the Uniting Church perspective

The Catholic Church's understanding of witness finds common ground in the Uniting Church's emphasis on how each individual Christian is to be a witness to Jesus Christ to fulfil the mission of the church. Agreement is acknowledged in that the church is a corporate witness in Christ through the Holy Spirit. By virtue of their Christ-like lives, Christians fulfil the church's mission and seek to draw others into communion with God.

However, there is a different emphasis in the approaches taken by the respective churches here in the way of witness. The Uniting Church places significant emphasis on the saving work of God in Jesus Christ as the content of those who are witnesses to Jesus Christ. The Catholic Church places an emphasis on how the church is witness through each person faithfully responding to what is named as the universal call to holiness, and as the communion of saints. Both approaches are found in each church with different emphasis.

A Uniting Church reading of the Catholic perspective

Again the Uniting Church finds much common ground with the Roman Catholic Church in the writing about mission and witness. Both agree that Christ's people are to engage in witness to Christ in words and actions. Although perhaps it is not often articulated, the Uniting Church would recognise that sometimes the silent witness of a holy life may be an effective witness. Witness to Christ is to be offered by the whole life of the Christian.

⁶⁶ LG, 40

⁶⁷ Cf Jn17:30

⁶⁸ Basis of Union, Paragraph 1

⁶⁹ Basis of Union, Paragraph 3

As the Uniting Church uses the expression “worship, witness and service” to express the essential life of the church, the understanding of “witness” places a certain emphasis upon giving an account of what God has done in Christ and on what God is doing through the Spirit in the present world in the lives of people. The witness points to Christ in words but also in actions. Certainly service may also be Christian witness. (As the dialogue progressed, the degree of inter-relationship and overlapping of the several ideas selected to explain the understanding of mission became more evident.)

The Uniting Church notes the quotation from Pope Benedict’s *Deus Caritas Est* where he speaks of the church’s three-fold responsibility of proclaiming the word of God (*kerygma-martyria*), celebrating the sacraments (*leitourgia*) and exercising the ministry of charity (*diakonia*).⁷⁰

The Uniting Church sees also the importance for the Roman Catholic Church of the memory of the past witness offered by Christians, particularly those who have been canonised as saints. While the UCA does not give the same prominence to canonised saints and their witness by holy lives, even to death, as does the Catholic Church, there is recognition of many faithful Christians from all generations in the commemorations found in *Uniting in Worship II*.⁷¹ They are listed for commemoration on particular dates and classified as one of the following: apostle, witness to Jesus, martyr, Christian thinker, Christian pioneer, reformer of the church, person of prayer or faithful servant. To see and know their story of witness is to be encouraged in our witness today. Many names are common to the lists of both churches.

The Catholic emphasis on the importance of the holy personal life as witness to Christ resonates with the holiness emphasis, the work of the Holy Spirit to sanctify the lives of believers, inherited by the Uniting Church from Methodism. This common value is noted also in *The Grace Given You in Christ*, the report of the International Commission for Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council, 2006.⁷² A question which relates “witness” to “*koinonia*” concerns how effectively the witness of the church is offered to the world beyond the church, when the world sees the church as not having that unity and communion in itself which it proclaims is the goal which God has for all the people of the world.

Commonalities and Differences

Our churches commonly affirm that the category of witness implies more than the verbal proclamation of the gospel, but extends to the exemplary actions of Christ’s disciples. Both our traditions affirm that lives conformed to Christ in the obedience of personal holiness can be the means of unspoken witness to Christ, and that all Christians are called to conform their lives to Christ in this way.

Our discussion of the relationship between mission and witness pointed to only minimal differences, the key one being the UCA’s tendency to regard witness as something verbal, whereas the Catholic Church more naturally speaks of the comprehensiveness of witness through word and life. Whilst this difference was instructive about our respective theological traditions, it was finally perceived to be a case of complementary rather than contrasting differences, and of no significance for our shared understandings of mission.

Reflect and Share:

How is witness expressed in action that reflects the love of God?

How can you live as a saint today?

⁷⁰ DCE, 25. See Chapter 2.

⁷¹ See 566ff.

⁷² Section 110.

Study Four: Part 2

Study materials: 7. Teaching (Didache) as Mission

Roman Catholic Perspective

Jesus Christ is both the model and the content for the teaching dimension of the Roman Catholic Church's understanding of mission.⁷³

The Holy Spirit, as the divine animator, is the living memory of the church.⁷⁴ This same Spirit establishes the church's continuity with its apostolic beginnings founded by Jesus, so that the Gospel is proclaimed everywhere for all time.⁷⁵ The whole church retains this mark of apostolicity, as the "Christian vocation is, of its nature, a vocation to the apostolate," which is constitutive of every action of the church.⁷⁶ However, within the church there is a diversity of ministry while there is unity in mission.⁷⁷

The whole body of the faithful participate in the prophetic office of Christ,⁷⁸ it might also be said that the church is a community of teachers. Together, each and all in the church are called to be teachers on mission.

Also, all the laity are called through their baptism and hence by their participation in the prophetic office of Christ to the proclamation of the Gospel.⁷⁹

Uniting Church Perspective

God's ministry in and through Jesus Christ is also typified as a teaching ministry. The predominant message of Jesus, standing in the Deuteronomic tradition, is the coming of the Reign of God.

Jesus teaches as a Jewish Rabbi of the period. He is recognised as such by his contemporaries who call him 'teacher' (e.g. John 3:2). Jesus' teaching takes place in the synagogue and in more informal settings. His teaching often, but not exclusively, takes the form of an exposition of the law. As part of his mission Jesus' teaching focuses on incorporating others into the vision of the coming Reign and its proclamation. This mission of teaching is handed on to the disciples, and thus to the church in following generations.

Reflect and Share:

*When did you last attend a Bible Study or read a spiritual book? (Can you share something that you learnt?)
What knowledge of the faith do you pass on, and to whom?*

Reading and Understanding Each Other

A Catholic reading of the Uniting Church perspective

The Catholic Church finds common ground with the Uniting Church in the christological and pneumatological bases and content of the church's teaching function as this relates to the church's mission. Jesus Christ is the model for, and content of the church's teaching. The Holy Spirit enables and guides the authenticity of the church's teaching for

⁷³ GS, 45

⁷⁴ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1099

⁷⁵ LG, 19

⁷⁶ Apostolicam Actuositatem, 2. Hereafter AA

⁷⁷ AA, 2

⁷⁸ LG, 12

⁷⁹ LG, 35;AA, 10

the fulfilment of its mission. Also, both the Catholic and Uniting churches relate a function of teaching to all the members of the church, and make this connection to the apostolic nature of the church. Authentic teaching by the church has its foundation in Jesus' teaching that seeks to draw all into God's kingdom. Through the power of the Spirit this teaching is handed on through the apostles to the church in history.

However, there is a difference in the way the two churches understand the institutional structure for the ministry of teaching is to be expressed in their respective churches. Both churches understand there is one mission, but a variety of ministries for teaching in the church. Yet, the Catholic Church understands that the magisterium provides the necessary structure for authentic teaching in the church. The Uniting Church has a variety of ministries that provide for authentic teaching in the church.

A Uniting Church reading of the Catholic perspective

The Uniting Church is able to affirm, with the Roman Catholic Church chapter that "Jesus Christ is both the model and the content of the teaching dimension of the church, and that the Holy Spirit, the divine animator, is the living memory of the church, establishing apostolic continuity with the apostolic faith, the faith witnessed to in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments". As Christ requires (Matt 28: 20), teaching all that he commanded must follow the baptism of all people, whether it is the formation of children or adults in the faith. Teaching is subsequent to the proclamation of the gospel as people respond in faith, but may also be part of the work of evangelisation which precedes baptism. The Holy Spirit is the teacher *par excellence* in all the effective teaching of the church.

Responsibility for the teaching function of the church is, however, understood differently in each church. The Uniting Church recognises that in the Roman Catholic Church this responsibility is held by the college of bishops with the Pope as their head. They, in turn, are responsible for teaching in their local areas, which takes place through the work of priests, teachers and parents in the home. In the Uniting Church, the National Assembly has final authority for these matters.

That there is much common ground recognised between the churches is shown by the fact that the theological colleges of both churches work together with other churches in groupings of colleges, often as part of universities, in several parts of Australia. People from our respective churches also regularly attend educational events organised by the other church.

Commonalities and Differences

Our discussion around teaching revealed not only our agreement that a ministry of teaching is essential for the church to be equipped for mission, but also our common conviction that Jesus Christ is both the model and the content of the teaching.

The differences identified in our discussion of teaching focused on the different institutional structures related to the church's teaching ministry. The hierarchical and centralised Catholic magisterium stands in contrast to the UCA's more diffuse teaching authority, even if in the latter the Assembly is invested with 'determining responsibility'. This is not irrelevant to further reflection on the place of teaching in the mission of the church as it impacts upon what is taught. This, in turn, raises questions of apostolicity.

Therefore, our dialogue encountered no substantial differences in our respective ecclesial visions regarding either the missional nature of the church or what constitutes its mission. The differences that did emerge oftentimes related to the widely acknowledged confessional differences that have accompanied our separated histories.

Reflect and Share

Is teaching and catechesis given a high value in the life of your parish/congregation?

How do the Churches engage in the teaching ministry of Jesus?

Closing Prayer

Scripture Reading

Luke 1: 1-4 (NRSV)

Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.

Pause for silent prayer and reflection

Leader: Let us pray together

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

