

REPORT OF ANGLICAN–UNITED CHURCH DIALOGUE 2003–2009 DRAWING FROM THE SAME WELL: THE ST. BRIGID REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We invite you to read this summary in the hope that it will whet your appetite to read the whole St. Brigid Report, so named because it was completed on St. Brigid's Day, February 1, 2009. The metaphor "drawing from the same well" captures the Dialogue's recognition that it is the same grace of God that we see active in and through our two churches in the power of the Holy Spirit, nourishing us with the living water that is the Christ.

The Report is set up in such a way as to make it possible to dip into it rather than read it all the way through. You can draw a cupful or a bucketful according to your circumstances. Recommendations for future discussion and action are made at the end of each section. A complete list of these recommendations is included in the Report and is provided in this summary.

Integral to this Report are the stories that reveal God's Spirit active in various ways across this nation, stories of co-operation and mutuality in mission. These inspiring stories are interspersed in boxes. You will also find quotations scattered through the Report from the reflections offered by our ecumenical partner and theological reflector, the Rev. Dr. Gordon Jensen (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada). His presence and insights were of enormous value.

Sections of the Report can easily be studied at different times by different groups or individuals who might then come together to pool their insights and findings, reflect upon the recommendations, and seek ways they might contribute to or follow up on the dialogue in their own context. Our churches also need to hear from you so that decisions can be made by the appropriate bodies of each about moving forward with this work. Your prayerful reflection and action will be essential.

The complete text will be available on the web sites of each church and for purchase at a later date.

1. Introductory Letter, quoted in full to provide the background to this Dialogue:

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

In winter 2003, twelve persons named by The Anglican Church of Canada (ACC) and The United Church of Canada (UCC) met in Vancouver to consider their new mandate to explore the relationship between our two churches. It was clear to us from the outset that we were not commissioned to prepare plans for a new Church Union, a successor to the failed project of the 1970s. What we should make our task was initially less obvious.

Over the past six years (2003–2009) we have met twice yearly, in various corners of Canada. We have explored various facets of our relationship, including looking at matters that still seem to distinguish us from each other, or for some, to divide. But above all, we have listened. Listened

to each other, and listened as people from all parts of this country told of the ways in which our two great churches intersect in their lives, in their families, in their communities, in the nation, and our world. We gathered stories of theological education, and how nearly all our clergy now train in settings where they interact daily with the other tradition. We heard stories of Ecumenical Shared Ministries – where Anglican and United Church people, as well as in many instances Lutherans, Presbyterians, and others, have learned, not without struggle, to live in a variety of patterns as one congregation of Christ’s Church. We have heard from chaplains of the Canadian Forces; from hospital and prison ministries; from Indigenous ministries; and from those engaged in social justice ministries, especially through KAIROS – and everywhere people had stories to tell. Stories of the creative energy of God’s Spirit at work in our relationship. Stories, also, that remind us that grasping too tightly to our particularities may be hurtful, may be a stumbling block to our fulfillment of God’s mission in our world.

Over these six years our respect for what God is doing amongst us has grown. We have decided that the time has come to pause in our meetings, and to share with you, Anglican and United Church people across our nation, some of these stories, and the conclusions we have drawn. We want to set before all of us the challenge of our relationship. We have now issued Drawing From the Same Well: The St. Brigid Report, A Report of the Anglican-United Church Dialogue, February 1, 2009. We invite you to read, to listen, and to ask with us whether God is calling us into a new stage in our common life. And finally, we encourage you to respond as you feel moved, to help us discern the direction we pursue in the next phase of this Dialogue.
Yours in Christ,

The Rev’d. Dr. William Harrison (ACC) and the Rev’d. Dr. Robert Mills (UCC), Co-Chairs

2. The Unity We Share

This section provides an overview of the changes in church and society that have taken place during the past 30-40 years since the breakdown of the talks in the 1970s. These changes positively affect the current relationship between the ACC and the UCC and make it very different from that of the earlier time period. There are developments in both the Canadian and the global ecumenical context, such as:

- the publication and acceptance of the World Council of Churches’ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM, 1982);
- the ACC and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) have entered into full communion;
- the growing number of Ecumenical Shared Ministries across Canada;
- the struggle of both our churches to face the damaging impact of the residential schools on Indigenous peoples and to take responsibility for apology, compensation, reconciliation, and healing;
- recognition of the complicity of the church in colonialism and the challenge of dealing with the negative consequences of our shared history;
- our subsequent intentional emphasis on hearing the voices of Indigenous peoples who contributed in a special way to this Dialogue;

We recognize the unity we share in making the mission of God key to our action and identity as church and the grace of God active in both churches. The desire of the Dialogue participants was

to put aside old resentments and negativity so as to recognize each others' gifts and work together for building up the Body of Christ.

3. Ecumenical Shared Ministries

This section describes the issues examined by the Dialogue and our achievements in relation to Ecumenical Shared Ministries. A handbook was compiled by the Dialogue that has been edited to include the perspective of other churches involved in such ministries. This resource is now available on the ACC and UCC web sites. There are wonderful examples of such exciting ministries, in congregations, theological education, and military chaplaincy, told in the story boxes of the Report.

4. Indigenous Experiences in the UCC and the ACC

Here you will find insights from the Indigenous participants in the Dialogue and from visits of the Dialogue to Indigenous ministries in Manitoba. Their voices contributed throughout the process and the Dialogue has made a special effort to hear them, and to engage their insights in relation to all aspects of the Dialogue.

5. Theological Education

Here are offered the fruits of our observations and discussions with faculty engaged in ecumenical theological education across Canada. The development of theological education for ministry in ecumenical contexts over the past 40 years has had a huge impact on the formation of ministry personnel and theologians, contributing to the growing respect for each other, co-operation, and understanding among our churches. Challenges for theological education include the integration of Indigenous culture, theology, history, and perspectives, as well as preparation for work in Ecumenical Shared Ministries.

6. Study Guide

A few years back, the Dialogue composed a Study Guide for congregations in order to engage the wider church in our Dialogue. Although we were disappointed in the immediate lack of outcome from this guide, it will still be useful to those wishing to further the dialogue in their own context by engaging with a neighbouring congregation of the other denomination. The complete Guide is included in Appendix B of the full report. We commend it to your attention, believing that it can facilitate your reflection and action.

7. Doctrine: The Blessing and the Challenge

This section provides findings on the nature of doctrine, the tradition and development of doctrine, its blessing and challenge to dialogue, and how identifiable differences may be mediated. We affirm that doctrine is the ground upon which we stand when we proclaim God's saving grace and call to participation in God's Reign. Consequently, we assert its value to all the world and to our ongoing life together. Because doctrine is important to our life together, it serves as a fruitful ground for common support. We note, however, that many of the Indigenous people

of Canada have accepted Christian doctrine as a blessing, but have found a curse attached. This presents a serious challenge to the whole church as we seek together to understand the relevance of Christian belief to the contemporary world.

The challenges to the dialogue between our two churches are set out: the range of beliefs in each church, the commonalities, and the differences especially related to ecclesiology (the nature of the church that manifests itself in polity), including understanding of ordination and episcopacy (oversight). A hopeful discovery is that agreement on all points is not essential. The notions of “unity in co-ordinated diversity” and “differentiated consensus” are examined.

8. The Wider Context of Ecumenism

This section explores in greater detail the changes mentioned earlier that have taken place in the ecumenical context since the 1970’s. These changes, while still challenging, offer hope of further unity in diversity. Discussions with Dr. Cathy Clifford of St. Paul University in Ottawa reflected that there are some stumbling blocks on the road of ecumenical discussion today. First, there is a suspicion, by some, that ecumenical statements mean to replace denominational confessions. Second, the mutual recognition of ministries is the major fault line within discussions of full visible unity, while issues of common scriptures, creeds and confessions, and sacraments are continued topics of discussion. Ecumenism in the wider context shares the same central premise as the Anglican-United Church Dialogue: members of the Body of Christ are called to the continual work of reconciliation.

9. Interfaith Relations and the Anglican–United Church Dialogue

The Dialogue turned its attention to interfaith relations particularly at its October 2006 meeting in Edmonton when it invited local persons engaged in interfaith activities to meet with them, and considered various documents on interfaith relations prepared by each of the two churches. We discussed the respective activity and approaches to interfaith dialogue of our two churches, noting the differences as well as commonalities that suggested the need for further study in the Dialogue, particularly addressing implications for Christology.

10. Discoveries through Dialogue

Throughout our discussions we were increasingly able to identify obstacles that have kept us from greater unity and in particular from mutual recognition of our ministries. Through our study of unions in other parts of the world we discovered that some of those obstacles had been addressed in helpful ways, sometimes resulting in Church Unions and/or Councils of Churches. While some others of these proposals have yet to be implemented, they provide us with creative models for finding a way through the complex issues connected with the mutual recognition of ministries.

This section details those discoveries under the headings of ordination, episcopacy, and apostolic succession, our discussion of them, and how we might benefit from the work of others that challenges us to address the obstacles to our growing together more fully than we have managed in the past. General conclusions and some key insights are named. As a result of these discoveries

a new hope has emerged within our Dialogue that our denominations can come to a greater sense of unity, and work toward concrete actions that will demonstrate that we are indeed one in Christ.

11. Sacramental Theology

Here you will find an exploration of the meaning and role of the sacraments and the eucharist, in particular, in the life of each of our churches. We examined the history of the eucharist, as well as discussing the differences and commonalities we find in each denomination. Presidency at the Table and the meaning of ordination were explored. We reflected upon how meaning and efficacy is given to the eucharist through, for example, the role and person of the presider, the actions and words of liturgy, the work of the people, and the gathering of the whole community.

12. Variety of Ministries

This section records our discussion and discoveries about the variety of formal ministries found in each denomination, their titles, roles, functions, lines of accountability, and required training. There is a focus on the relation of various roles to eucharistic presidency in each denomination, since this is a vital element of our discussion for the mutual recognition of ministries. A chart comparing the roles and accountability of the formal ministries in each denomination is included.

13. The Recommendations of the Dialogue

1. That our respective churches mandate a next phase of the Dialogue, with the following agenda:

- a) Move beyond the mostly comparative model, focused on traditional theological themes as points of similarity and difference, to explore what is at the heart of our traditions, the obstacles these self-perceptions have created and create, and the gifts they share with society.
- b) Explore each tradition's understanding of doctrinal development and how this is related to self-identity.
- c) Undertake a study of Christology in our two churches in light of our consideration of how each church addresses the theological issues involved in interfaith relations.
- d) Examine the processes leading to ordered ministry and placement systems with a view to understanding the ways in which episcopal functions in these systems in our respective churches.
- e) Review the effect of our mission history, both in Canada and in other parts of the world, upon our understanding and practice of episcopacy and how this is changing in the contemporary world.
- f) Explore and propose steps toward the mutual recognition of the ministries of our two churches in light of the notions of "differentiated consensus," "unity in co-ordinated diversity," and "bearable anomalies," as well as the considerations named in this section of the report.
- g) Continue to place our learning in the wider context of ecumenism by discussing our denominational responses to the WCC document "The Nature and Mission of the Church."

2. That our churches be proactive in considering Ecumenical Shared Ministry as a positive choice, both for congregations and for outreach and mission projects in urban, suburban, and rural areas.

3. That the churches encourage congregations to use the study guide process as a means of deepening our relationship. (The study guide is contained in this report and may be reproduced freely as needed.)

4. That our churches ensure that Indigenous people continue to be part of the Dialogue, and encourage the Aboriginal Ministries Council and the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples to have dialogue at each other's gatherings. We encourage all members of both churches to find opportunities to learn about the wisdom and traditions of Indigenous peoples.

14. Conclusion

At the end of the full Report there is a list of all who have served as members of the Dialogue over the past six years. As appendices, there is a list of the topics discussed at each meeting, the Study Guide and an interim report written for our two churches in 2005.

May you be richly blessed in your reading of and reflection on the St. Brigid Report. May you find living water for your life in the church and the world.

May 14, 2009