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ADDRESS FOR ALL CORRESPONDENCE
Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity
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To an Ecumenical Delegation of Finland

19 January 2017

“We need the simplicity of children. They will teach us the way to Jesus Christ”. Pope Francis shared this observation in an address to the Ecumenical Delegation from Finland on Thursday morning, 19 January. The Holy Father received the Delegation on the occasion of the Feast of Saint Henrik, noting that the group had made this pilgrimage annually for over 30 years during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. This year’s pilgrimage took an even greater significance as 2017 marks the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, as well as 50 years of official ecumenical dialogue between Lutherans and Catholics. The following is the English text of the Pontiff’s address, which he delivered in Italian, followed by the address of Bishop Kaarlo Kalliala.

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I joyfully welcome all of you, members of the Ecumenical Delegation, who have come as pilgrims from Finland to Rome on the occasion of the feast of Saint Henrik. Thank the Lutheran Bishop of Turku for his kind words… in Spanish! For more than thirty years, it has been a fine custom for your pilgrimage to take place during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which calls us to draw closer to one another anew through conversion. True ecumenism is based on a shared conversion to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Redeemer. If we draw close to him, we draw close also to one another. During these days let us pray more fervently to the Holy Spirit so that we may experience this conversion which makes reconciliation possible.

On this path, we Catholics and Lutherans, from several countries, together with various communities sharing our ecumenical journey, reached a significant step when, on 31 October last, we gathered together in Lund, Sweden, to commemorate through common prayer the beginning of the Reformation. This joint commemoration of the Reformation was important on both the human and theological-spiritual levels. After fifty years of official ecumenical dialogue between Catholics and Lutherans, we have succeeded in clearly articulating points of view which today we agree on. For this we are grateful. At the same time we keep alive in our hearts sincere contrition for our faults. In this spirit, we recalled in Lund that the intention of Martin Luther five hundred years ago was to renew the Church, not divide her. The gathering there gave us the courage and strength, in our Lord Jesus Christ, to look ahead to the ecumenical journey that we are called to walk together.

In preparing the common commemoration of the Reformation, Catholics and Lutherans noted with greater awareness that theological dialogue remains essential for reconciliation and that it is advanced through steadfast commitment. Thus, in that communion of harmony which permits the Holy Spirit to act, we will be able to find further convergence on points of doctrine and the moral teaching of the Church, and will be able to draw ever closer to full and visible unity. I pray to the Lord that he may bestow his blessing on the Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue Commission in Finland, which is working diligently towards a common sacramental understanding of the Church, the Eucharist and ecclesial ministry.

Therefore 2017, the commemorative year of the Reformation, represents for Catholics and Lutherans a privileged occasion to live the faith more authentically, in order to rediscover the Gospel together, and to seek and witness to Christ with renewed vigour. At the conclusion of the day of commemoration in Lund, and looking to the future, we drew inspiration from our common witness to faith before the world, when we committed ourselves to jointly assisting those who suffer, who are in need, and who face persecution and violence. In doing so, as Christians we are no longer divided, but rather united on the journey towards full communion.

I am pleased to recall also that this year the Christians of Finland celebrate the centenary of the Finnish Ecumenical Council, which is an important instrument in promoting communion of faith and life among you.

Finally, in 2017 your homeland, Finland, will celebrate one hundred years as an independent State. May this anniversary encourage all the Christians of your country to profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ – as did Saint Henrik so zealously – offering a witness of faith to the world today and putting that faith into practice through concrete acts of service, fraternity and sharing.

* Sources of the texts are designated as follows: OR: L’Osservatore Romano, daily edition in Italian; ORE: L’Osservatore Romano, weekly edition in English. If texts come from sources other than L’Osservatore Romano, this will be noted. When translation is undertaken by the Information Service it is indicated by the abbreviation IS.
In the hope that your pilgrimage may contribute to further strengthening the good cooperation between Orthodox, Lutherans and Catholics in Finland and in the world, and that the common witness of faith, hope and love may bear abundant fruit through Saint Henrik’s intercession, I willingly invoke God’s grace and blessing upon you all. And, dear brother Bishop, I wish to thank you for the lovely idea of bringing your grandchildren with you; we need the simplicity of children. They will teach us the way to Jesus Christ. Thank you, thank you so much!

ORE, 20 January 2017

ADDRESS OF BISHOP KAARLO KALLIALA

Your Holiness!

I am thrice happy for being here today. Today is the Feast of our first Bishop, St Henry; this year, we are celebrating the one-hundredth centennial of Finnish independence; and we look back on five hundred years of Reformation history. Indeed, the trine character of my joy is strengthened by the fact that we three Bishops are able to undertake this journey together, in a spirit of ecumenical understanding and Christian fraternity; this year, we also celebrate the one-hundredth anniversary of the Finnish Ecumenical Council.

Justification was the great dividing question of the Reformation. When we, at long last, twenty years ago published the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, we stated towards the end (43) of the document: “Our consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification must come to influence the life and teachings of our churches. Here it must prove itself.” The way we speak, the way we live must change. This is the kind of transforming repentance that we as Churches and individual Christians have sought.

Your Holiness! Last October in Lund, you appealed to us all when you said: “Grant us the gift of unity, so that the world may believe in the power of your mercy. This is the testimony the world expects from us.” We must grow into a closer unity for the life of the world in order to be faithful to Christ who has sent us into the world.

Professor Seppo A. Teinonen, my former Professor of Dogmatics, acted as an observer for the Lutheran World Federation during the Second Vatican Council; he was deeply impressed by what he saw and heard. In 1973, he gave a speech to the Finnish Ecumenical Council where he set a practical goal: seven years of theological clarification and five years of negotiations, resulting in visible ecclesiastical union in 1985. “Should we do this, many of us will still be around to see with our own eyes the realisation of ecclesiastical unity in our country”, he added.

Ecclesiastical unity in Finland was not realised in 1985; Professor Teinonen himself died in 1995. His legacy was and is the understanding of the importance of practical goals and actual deadlines. Must the world be kept endlessly waiting for us to be able to give a better, a common witness to Christ? Are we not, perhaps, already possessed by holy impatience, as together we formulated this ecumenical imperative (From Conflict to Communion, 241): “Catholics and Lutherans should again commit themselves to seek visible unity, to elaborate together what this means in concrete steps, and to strive repeatedly toward this goal.”

My granddaughter Ilona is now six years old, my grandson Julius eight years old. Should we not be able to take it for granted that they will be the ones to see this unity made reality in their lifetime? That they will be able to experience this unity in the Lord’s table?

Joint witness and unity — these are our duty towards all the children of the world. The gift of unity is indeed needed for the world to be able to believe in the power of God’s divine mercy. The more our lives reflect forgiveness, peace, and concord, the more we will also be able to give to interreligious efforts for peace.

Your Holiness! As you pointed out at Christmas, “The power of this Child… is the power of service, which inaugurates in our world the Kingdom of God, a kingdom of justice and peace.” Our country, Finland, is not the Kingdom of God, but through God’s providence and mercy children in Finland need not fear persecution, oppression, or war.

Martin Luther continuously emphasized the fact that good things are given to us in order to be shared, and that the need of a fellow human being is equal to divine law. Celebrating the one hundred years of Finnish national independence, Julius and Ilona wish to give you one hundred doves, bearers of the message of peace. Through these doves we will, in Your Holiness’s name, support the FinnChurchAid work for peace in Syria.

Religious leaders have a substantial responsibility, acting to resolve the several conflicts of our day. The Finnish Church wishes to bear its share of this burden partly by having co-founded, in cooperation with the UN, a network of religious and traditional leaders to promote peace. Together we hope to be able to serve in finding practical solutions for peace in Syria, South Sudan, CAR, and in other areas troubled by conflicts.

We believe in a God who wants to meet us as a helpless baby, counting on us to provide for him. We believe in a Christ who promised the Kingdom of God to those who would receive it like small children. What better common witness to the world than the fact of jointly committing ourselves in all things to prioritizing children’s welfare and well-being.

The children of Finland wish for the children of the world to have what we have: peace and security.
CONCLUDING THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 2017 AT SAINT PAUL OUTSIDE-THE-WALLS

25 January 2017

Every person is called “to proclaim the Gospel of reconciliation in word and deed, to live and bear witness to a reconciled life”. Pope Francis offered this reflection in his Homily at the traditional Ecumenical celebration of Second Vespers on the Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, concluding the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. The celebration took place at the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside-the-Walls on Wednesday evening, 25 January 2017. The following is the English text of the Holy Father’s homily, which he delivered in Italian.

HOMILY OF POPE FRANCIS

Encountering Jesus on the road to Damascus radically transformed the life of Saint Paul. Henceforth, for him, the meaning of life would no longer consist in trusting in his own ability to observe the Law strictly, but rather in cleaving with his whole being to the gracious and unmerited love of God: to Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. Paul experienced the inbreaking of a new life, life in the Spirit. By the power of the risen Lord, he came to know forgiveness, confidence and consolation. Nor could Paul keep this newness to himself. He was compelled by grace to proclaim the good news of the love and reconciliation that God offers fully in Christ to all humanity.

For the Apostle of the Gentiles, reconciliation with God, whose ambassador he became (cf. 2 Cor 5:20), is a gift from Christ. This is evident in the text of the Second Letter to the Corinthians which inspired the theme of this year’s Week of Prayer for Christian Unity: “Reconciliation – The Love of Christ Compels Us” (cf. 2 Cor 5:14-20). “The love of Christ”: this is not our love for Christ, but rather Christ’s love for us. Nor is the reconciliation to which we are compelled simply our own initiative. Before all else it is the reconciliation that God offers us in Christ. Prior to any human effort on the part of believers who strive to overcome their divisions, it is God’s free gift. As a result of this gift, each person, forgiven and loved, is called in turn to proclaim the Gospel of reconciliation in word and deed, to live and bear witness to a reconciled life.

Today, in the light of this, we can ask: How do we proclaim this Gospel of reconciliation after centuries of division? Paul himself helps us to find the way. He makes clear that reconciliation in Christ requires sacrifice. Jesus gave his life by dying for all. Similarly, ambassadors of reconciliation are called, in his name, to lay down their lives, to live no more for themselves but for Christ who died and was raised for them (cf. 2 Cor 5:14-15). As Jesus teaches, it is only when we lose our lives for love of him that we truly save them (cf. Lk 9:24). This was the revolution experienced by Paul, but it is, and always has been, the Christian revolution. We live no longer for ourselves, for our own interests and “image”, but in the image of Christ, for him and following him, with his love and in his love.

For the Church, for every Christian confession, this is an invitation not to be caught up with programmes, plans and advantages, not to look to the prospects and fashions of the moment, but rather to find the way by constantly looking to the Lord’s cross. For there we discover our programme of life. It is an invitation to leave behind every form of isolation, to overcome all those temptations to self-absorption that prevent us from perceiving how the Holy Spirit is at work outside our familiar surroundings. Authentic reconciliation between Christians will only be achieved when we can acknowledge each other’s gifts and learn from one another, with humility and docility, without waiting for the others to learn first.

If we experience this dying to ourselves for Jesus’ sake, our old way of life will be a thing of the past and, like Saint Paul, we will pass over to a new form of life and fellowship. With Paul, we will be able to say: “the old has passed away” (2 Cor 5:17). To look back is helpful, and indeed necessary, to purify our memory, but to be fixated on the past, lingering over the memory of wrongs done and endured, and judging in merely human terms, can paralyze us and prevent us from living in the present. The word of God encourages us to draw strength from memory and to recall the good things the Lord has given us. But it also asks us to leave the past behind in order to follow Jesus today and to live a new life in him. Let us allow him, who makes all things new (cf. Rev 21:5), to unveil before our eyes a new future, open to the hope that does not disappoint, a future in which divisions can be overcome and believers, renewed in love, will be fully and visibly one.

This year, in our journey on the road to unity, we recall in a special way the fifth centenary of the Protestant Reformation. The fact that Catholics and Lutherans can nowadays join in commemorating an event that divided Christians, and can do so with hope,
TO MEMBERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL JOINT COMMISSION FOR THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE ORIENTAL ORTHODOX CHURCHES

27 January 2017

In regions bloodstained by violence and fundamentalism, the martyrs show us that ecumenism is the path to follow. Pope Francis emphasized this in his address to members of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, whom he received in audience Friday morning, 27 January, in the Clementine Hall.

The following is the English text of the Pope's address.

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS

Dear Brothers in Christ,

In offering you a joyful welcome, I thank you for your presence and for the kind words that Metropolitan Bishoy addressed to me on your behalf. I also thank you for that beautiful and richly meaningful icon of the Blood of Christ, which shows redemption from the womb of the Mother of God. It is indeed lovely. Through you, I send cordial greetings to the Heads of the Oriental Orthodox Churches, my venerable brothers.

I am grateful for the work of your Commission, which began in 2003 and is now holding its fourteenth meeting. Last year you began an examination of the nature of the sacraments, especially baptism. It is precisely in baptism that we rediscovered the basis of communion between Christians. As Catholics and Oriental Orthodox, we can repeat the words of the Apostle Paul: “For in the one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body” (1 Cor 12:13). In the course of this week, you have further reflected on historical, theological and ecclesiological aspects of the Holy Eucharist, “the source and summit of the whole Christian life”, which admirably expresses and brings about the unity of God’s people (Lumen Gentium, 11). I encourage you to persevere in your efforts and I trust that your work may point out helpful ways to advance on our journey. It will thus facilitate the path towards that greatly desired day when we will have the grace of celebrating the Lord’s Sacrifice at the same altar, as a sign of fully restored ecclesial communion.

Many of you belong to Churches that witness daily the spread of violence and acts of brutality placing the emphasis on Jesus and his work of atonement, is a remarkable achievement, thanks to God and prayer, and the result of fifty years of growing mutual knowledge and ecumenical dialogue.

As we implore from God the gift of reconciliation with him and with one another, I extend cordial and fraternal greetings to His Eminence Metropolitan Gennadios, the representative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, to His Grace David Moxon, the personal representative in Rome of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and to all the representatives of the various Churches and Ecclesial Communities gathered here. I am especially pleased to greet the members of the Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, and to offer my good wishes for the fruitfulness of the plenary session taking place in these days. I also greet the students of the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey – how joyful they are! I met them this morning; they are visiting Rome to deepen their knowledge of the Catholic Church. Also, the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox young people studying in Rome thanks to the scholarships provided by the Catholic Committee for Cultural Collaboration with the Orthodox Churches, based in the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. To the superiors and staff of this Dicastery I express my esteem and gratitude.

Dearest brothers and sisters, our prayer for Christian unity is a sharing in Jesus’ own prayer to the Father, on the eve of his passion, “that they may all be one” (Jn 17:21). May we never tire of asking God for this gift. With patient and trusting hope that the Father will grant all Christians the gift of full visible communion, let us press forward in our journey of reconciliation and dialogue, encouraged by the heroic witness of our many brothers and sisters, past and present, who were one in suffering for the name of Jesus. May we take advantage of every occasion that Providence offers us to pray together, to proclaim together, and together to love and serve, especially those who are the most poor and neglected in our midst.

ORE, 27 January 2017
perpetrated by fundamentalist extremism. We are aware that situations of such tragic suffering more easily take root in the context of great poverty, injustice and social exclusion, due to instability created by partisan interests, often from elsewhere, and by earlier conflicts that have led to situations of dire need, cultural and spiritual deserts where it becomes easy to manipulate and incite people to hatred. Each day your Churches, in drawing near to those who suffer, are called to sow concord and to work patiently to restore hope by offering the consoling peace that comes from the Lord, a peace we are obliged together to bring to a world wounded and in pain.

Saint Paul also writes: “If one member suffers, all suffer together” (1 Cor 12:26). Your sufferings are our sufferings. I join you in praying for an end to the conflict and for God’s closeness to those who have endured so much, especially children, the sick and the elderly. In a particular way, my heart goes out to the bishops, priests, consecrated men and women, and the lay faithful who have been cruelly abducted, taken hostage or enslaved.

May the Christian communities be sustained by the intercession and example of our many martyrs and saints who bore courageous witness to Christ and have themselves attained full unity. So what are we waiting for? The martyrs show us the heart of our faith, which does not consist in a generic message of peace and reconciliation but in Jesus himself, crucified and risen. He is our peace and our reconciliation (cf. Eph 2:14; 2 Cor 5:18). As his disciples, we are called to testify everywhere, with Christian fortitude, to his humble love that reconciles men and women in every age. Wherever violence begets more violence and sows death, there our response must be the pure leaven of the Gospel, which, eschewing strategies of power, allows fruits of life to emerge from arid ground and hope to dawn after nights of terror.

The centre of the Christian life, the mystery of Jesus who died and rose out of love, is also the point of reference for our journey towards full unity. Once more the martyrs show us the way. How many times has the sacrifice of their lives led Christians, otherwise divided in so many things, to unity! The martyrs and saints of all ecclesial traditions are already one in Christ (cf. Jn 17:22); their names are written in the one common martyrology of God’s Church. Having sacrificed themselves on earth out of love, they dwell in the one heavenly Jerusalem, gathered around the Lamb who was slain (Rev 7:13-17). Their lives, offered as a gift, call us to communion, to hasten along the path to full unity. Just as in the early Church the blood of the martyrs was the seed of new Christians, so in our own day may the blood of so many martyrs be a seed of unity between believers, a sign and instrument of a future of communion and peace.

Dear brothers, I am grateful for the efforts you make towards attaining this goal. In thanking you for your visit, I invoke upon you and your ministry the blessing of the Lord and the loving protection of the Mother of God.

And now, if you so feel, we can pray together, each in his own language, the Our Father.

[Our Father]

ORE, 3 February 2017

TO AN ECUMENICAL DELEGATION OF THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH IN GERMANY

6 February 2017

On Monday 6 February, the Holy Father received in audience an ecumenical delegation of the Evangelical Church in Germany.

We publish here below the address of the Pope.

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS

Dear brothers and sisters,

I am pleased to welcome you and I greet you warmly. I thank the regional Bishop Bedford-Strohm for his kind words – ein Mann mit Feuer im Herzen – and I am happy for Cardinal Marx’s presence: that the President of the German Episcopal Conference accompanies the delegation of the Evangelical Church in Germany is fruit of a long-standing collaboration and an expression of a matured ecumenical relation over the years. I hope you will go ahead on this blessed path of fraternal communion, proceeding with courage and determination towards an ever fuller unity. We have the same Baptism: we must walk together, tirelessly!

It is significant that, on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, Evangelical and Catholic Christians take up the occasion, of the common commemoration of historical events of the past, to put Christ again at the center of their relations.
In fact, “the question of God,” on “how there can be a merciful God” was the “profound passion, the mainspring of Luther’s life and his entire journey” (cf. Benedict XVI, Meeting with the Representatives of the Evangelical Church in Germany, September 23, 2011).

What animated and made the Reformers anxious was, at bottom, to point out the way to Christ. It is what must be at heart for us also today, after having undertaken again, thanks be to God, a common path. This year of commemoration offers us the opportunity to take a further step forward, looking at the past without rancor, but according to Christ and in communion with Him, to propose again to the men and women of our time the radical novelty of Jesus, God’s limitless mercy: precisely what the Reformers at their time wished to stimulate. The fact that their call to renewal sparked developments that led to divisions among Christians was certainly tragic. Believers no longer felt themselves brothers and sisters in the faith, but adversaries and competitors: for too long they have fueled hostility and were avid in fights, fomented by political and power interests, sometimes without having the least scruples in using violence against one another, brothers against brothers. Today, instead, we thank God because finally, “we have put down all that is a burden,” and “we run”, fraternally, “with perseverance on the course that is before us, keeping our gaze fixed on Jesus” (Hebrews 12:1-2).

I am grateful to you because, with this gaze you have the intention of approaching together, with humility and frankness, a past that grieves us, and of sharing soon an important gesture of penance and reconciliation: an ecumenical function entitled “To Heal the Memory — To Witness Jesus Christ.” Catholics and Evangelicals in Germany, can thus respond in prayer to the strong call that you perceive together in the country of origin of the Reformation: to purify the memory in God to be renewed interiorly and sent by the Spirit to take Jesus to the men of today. With this sign and with other ecumenical initiatives planned this year – such as the joint pilgrimage to the Holy Land, the joint Biblical congress to present together the new translations of the Bible and the Ecumenical Day dedicated to the social responsibility of Christians – you have in mind to give a concrete configuration to the “Feast of Christ” that, on the occasion of the commemoration of the Reformation, you intend to celebrate together. May the rediscovery of the common source of faith, the healing of the memory in prayer and in charity, and concrete collaboration in spreading the Gospel and serving brothers be impulses to proceed still more speedily on the way.

It is the reality of the one Baptism that makes us brothers and sisters and in the common listening to the Spirit, we are able to appreciate, in a now reconciled diversity, the spiritual and theological gifts that we received from the Reformation. Last October 31 at Lund, I thanked the Lord for this and asked forgiveness for the past; for the future, I wish to confirm our call to witness the Gospel together and to continue on the path to full unity. Doing so together, the desire is also born to advance of new ways. Increasingly we learn to ask ourselves: can we share this initiative with our brothers and sisters in Christ? Can we undertake together another stretch of the way?

The differences in questions of faith and morality that still exist, remain challenges on the path towards visible unity, for which our faithful long. Spouses that belong to different confessions feel the pain especially. We must commit ourselves wisely, with insistent prayer and all our strength, to overcome the still existing obstacles, intensifying the theological dialogue and reinforcing collaboration between us, especially in the service of those that suffer greatly and in the protection of the threatened creation. Jesus’ urgent call to unity (cf. John 17:21) comes to us, as well as the entire human family, in a period in which grave lacerations and new forms of exclusion and marginalization are being experienced. Because of this too, our responsibility is great. Great!

In the hope that this meeting will ultimately enhance communion between us, I ask the Holy Spirit, architect and renewer of unity, to fortify us on our common way with the consolation that comes from God (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:4) and to indicate to us His prophetic and audacious ways. I invoke from my heart upon all of you and your communities God’s blessing and I ask you, please, to remember me in prayer. Thank you so much and would like to invite you now to pray the Our Father together.

https://zenit.org/articles/popes-address-to-ecumenical-delegation-from-germany/
VISIT TO THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF ‘ALL SAINTS’ IN ROME

26 February 2017

Pope Francis made an historic visit to the Church of England chaplaincy of All Saints on Sunday, 26 February, as the first Pontiff to set foot inside an Anglican church in his own diocese as the Bishop of Rome. The event was part of All Saints’ 200th anniversary celebrations. During the afternoon encounter, the Pope joined the congregation for a short Choral Evensong service which included the blessing of a specially commissioned icon, and the twinning of the Anglican All Saints parish with the Ognissanti parish of Rome.

The Holy Father delivered a homily during the liturgy, of which we publish the text here below.

HOMILY OF POPE FRANCIS

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I wish to thank you for your gracious invitation to celebrate this parish anniversary with you. More than two hundred years have passed since the first public Anglican liturgy was held in Rome for a group of English residents in this part of the city. A great deal has changed in Rome and in the world since then. In the course of these two centuries, much has also changed between Anglicans and Catholics, who in the past viewed each other with suspicion and hostility. Today, with gratitude to God, we recognize one another as we truly are: brothers and sisters in Christ, through our common baptism. As friends and pilgrims we wish to walk the path together, to follow our Lord Jesus Christ together.

You have invited me to bless the new icon of Christ the Saviour. Christ looks at us, and his gaze upon us is one of salvation, of love and compassion. It is the same merciful gaze which pierced the hearts of the Apostles, who left the past behind and began a journey of new life, in order to follow and proclaim the Lord. In this sacred image, as Jesus looks upon us, he seems also to call out to us, to make an appeal to us: “Are you ready to leave everything from your past for me? Do you want to make my love known, my mercy?” His gaze of divine mercy is the source of the whole Christian ministry. The Apostle Paul says this to us, through his words to the Corinthians which we have just heard. He writes: “Having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart” (2 Cor 4:1). Our ministry flows forth from the mercy of God, which sustains our ministry and prevents it losing its vigour.

Saint Paul did not always have an easy relationship with the community at Corinth, as his letters show. There was also a painful visit to this community, with heated words exchanged in writing. But this passage shows Paul overcoming past differences. By living his ministry in the light of mercy received, he does not give up in the face of divisions, but devotes himself to reconciliation. When we, the community of baptized Christians, find ourselves confronted with disagreements and turn towards the merciful face of Christ to overcome it, it is reassuring to know that we are doing as Saint Paul did in one of the very first Christian communities.

How does Saint Paul grapple with this task, where does he begin? With humility, which is not only a beautiful virtue, but a question of identity. Paul sees himself as a servant, proclaiming not himself but Christ Jesus the Lord (2 Cor 4:5). And he carries out this service, this ministry according to the mercy shown him (2 Cor 4:1): not on the basis of his ability, nor by relying on his own strength, but by trusting that God is watching over him and sustaining his weakness with mercy. Becoming humble means drawing attention away from oneself, recognizing one’s dependence on God as a beggar of mercy: this is the starting point so that God may work in us. A past president of the World Council of Churches described Christian evangelization as “a beggar telling another beggar where he can find bread”. I believe Saint Paul would approve. He grasped the fact that he was “fed by mercy” and that his priority was to share his bread with others: the joy of being loved by the Lord, and of loving him.

This is our most precious good, our treasure, and it is in this context that Paul introduces one of his most famous images, one we can all apply to ourselves: “we have this treasure in earthen vessels” (v. 7). We are but earthen vessels, yet we keep within us the greatest treasure in the world. The Corinthians knew well that it was foolish to preserve something precious in earthen vessels, which were inexpensive but cracked easily. Keeping something valuable in them meant running the risk of losing it. Paul, a graced sinner, humbly recognized that he was fragile, just like an earthen vessel. But he experienced and knew that it was precisely there that human misery opens itself to God’s merciful action; the Lord performs wonders. That is how the “extraordinary power” of God works (v. 7).

Trusting in this humble power, Paul serves the Gospel. Speaking of some of his adversaries in Corinth, he calls them “super apostles” (2 Cor 12:11), perhaps, and with a certain irony, because they had criticized him for his weaknesses even as they considered themselves observant, even perfect. Paul, on the other hand, teaches that only in realizing we are weak earthen vessels, sinners always in need of mercy, can the treasure of God be poured into us and through us
upon others. Otherwise, we will merely be full of our treasures, which are corrupted and spoiled in seemingly beautiful vessels. If we recognize our weakness and ask for forgiveness, then the healing mercy of God will shine in us and will be visible to those outside; others will notice in some way, through us, the gentle beauty of Christ’s face.

At a certain point, perhaps in the most difficult moment with the community in Corinth, the Apostle Paul cancelled a visit he had planned to make there, also foregoing the offerings he would have received from them (2 Cor 1:15-24). Though tensions existed in their fellowship, these did not have the final word. The relationship was restored and Paul received the offering for the care of the Church in Jerusalem. The Christians in Corinth once again took up their work, together with the other communities which Paul visited, to sustain those in need. This is a powerful sign of renewed communion. The work that your community is carrying out together with other English-speaking communities here in Rome can be viewed in this light. True, solid communion grows and is built up when people work together for those in need. Through a united witness to charity, the merciful face of Jesus is made visible in our city.

As Catholics and Anglicans, we are humbly grateful that, after centuries of mutual mistrust, we are now able to recognize that the fruitful grace of Christ is at work also in others. We thank the Lord that among Christians the desire has grown for greater closeness, which is manifested in our praying together and in our common witness to the Gospel, above all in our various forms of service. At times, progress on our journey towards full communion may seem slow and uncertain, but today we can be encouraged by our gathering. For the first time, a Bishop of Rome is visiting your community. It is a grace and also a responsibility: the responsibility of strengthening our ties, to the praise of Christ, in service of the Gospel and of this city.

Let us encourage one another to become ever more faithful disciples of Jesus, always more liberated from our respective prejudices from the past and ever more desirous to pray for and with others. A good sign of this desire is the “twinning” taking place today between your parish of All Saints and the Ognissanti Catholic parish. May the saints of every Christian confession, fully united in the Jerusalem above, open for us here below the way to all the possible paths of a fraternal and shared Christian journey. Where we are united in the name of Jesus, he is there (cf. Mt 18:20), and turning his merciful gaze towards us, he calls us to devote ourselves fully in the cause of unity and love. May the face of God shine upon you, your families and this entire community!

ORE, 3 March 2017

EXCHANGE WITH FAITHFUL OF THE ANGLICAN COMMUNITY PRESENT AT THE CELEBRATION

Following the liturgy and prior to the exchange of gifts, the Pope answered the questions of three Anglican parishioners. The following is a translation of the exchange.

Question:

Your Predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, warned against the risk, in ecumenical dialogue, of giving priority to cooperation in social initiatives rather than following the more demanding path of theological agreement. It appears that you prefer the contrary, that is, to “walk and work” together in order to reach the goal of Christian unity. Is this true?

Answer of Pope Francis:

I do not know the context in which Pope Benedict said this. I don’t know, and so it is a little difficult for me. I cannot really answer this.... Whether he meant to say this or not?... Perhaps it was during a conversation with theologians.... But I am sure that both aspects are important. This is certain. Which of the two has priority?... And on the other hand, Patriarch Athenagoras’ famous comment — which is true because I asked Patriarch Bartholomew and he said: “This is true” — when he said to Blessed Pope Paul VI: “Let us make unity together and leave the theologians on an island to think about it”. It was a joke, but historically, it is accurate. I had doubts but Patriarch Bartholomew told me that it was true.

But what is the heart of the matter, because I believe that what Pope Benedict said is true: we must seek a theological dialogue in order to also seek the roots ... of the Sacraments ... of many issues on which we are still not in agreement. But this cannot be done in a laboratory: it must be done as we advance, along the way. We are on a journey, and as we journey, we also have these discussions. Theologians do this. But in the meantime, we help each other, we, one with the other, with our needs, in our lives; also spiritually we help each other. For example, in the ‘twinning’ [of the parishes] there was the fact of studying Scripture together, and we help each other in our charitable service, in service to the poor, in hospitals, in wars.... It is very important. This is very important. It is not possible to have ecumenical dialogue while standing still. No. Ecumenical dialogue is carried out as we walk, because ecumenical dialogue is a journey, and theological matters are discussed along the way. I believe this betrays neither the thought of Pope Benedict, nor the reality of ecumenical dialogue. This is my interpretation. If I knew the context in which that thought was expressed, I might say something different, but this is what comes to mind to say.

Question:

The Church of All Saints began with a group of British faithful, but is now an international congregation with people from various
countries. In several regions of Africa, Asia and the Pacific, ecumenical relations between the Churches are better and more creative than here in Europe. What can we learn from the example of the Churches from the southern part of the world?

Answer of Pope Francis:

Thank you. It is true. The young Churches have a different vitality, because they are young. They are searching for a different means of expression. For example, a liturgy here in Rome, or consider London or Paris, is not the same as a liturgy in your country, where the liturgical ceremony, also Catholic, is expressed with joy, with dance and many diverse forms belonging to those young Churches. Young Churches have more creativity. And in the beginning it was the same here in Europe too: they were searching.... When you read, for example in the Didache, how the Eucharist, the encounter among Christians, was celebrated, there was great creativity. Then as she grew, the Church became more consolidated, she matured into adulthood.

But young Churches have more vitality and they also have a need to cooperate, a considerable need. For example, I am studying, my collaborators are studying the possibility of a journey to South Sudan. Why? Because the Anglican, Presbyterian and Catholic Bishops, all three, came together to tell me: “Please, come to South Sudan, just for one day, but do not come alone: come with Justin Welby, that is, with the Archbishop of Canterbury. This creativity came from them, the young Church. We are considering whether it can be done, whether the situation is too dangerous down there.... But we must do it because the three of them, together, want peace, and they are working together for peace....

There is a very interesting anecdote. When Blessed Paul VI beatified the Martyrs of Uganda — a young Church — among the martyrs, who were all young catechists, several were Catholic and others Anglican, and they were all martyred by the same king, in hatred of the faith, and because they did not want to follow the king’s corrupt propositions. And Paul VI felt embarrassed, because he said: “I must beatify one and all; they are martyrs, one and all”. But at that moment in the Catholic Church, it was not quite possible to do this. The Council had just taken place.... But today that young Church celebrates one and all together; Paul VI too, in the homily, in the discourse, in the beatification Mass, wanted to designate the Anglican martyrs of the faith at the same level as the Catholic catechists. This is what a young Church does. Young Churches have courage, because they are young. Like all young people, they have more courage than we, the not-so-young!

And then, my experience. I was a close friend of the Anglicans in Buenos Aires, because the back of the parish of Merced was adjacent to the Anglican cathedral. I was a close friend of Bishop Gregory Venables, a very good friend. But there is another experience: in northern Argentina there are Anglican missions with aborigines and Catholic missions with aborigines, and the Anglican Bishop and the Catholic Bishop work there together, and teach. When the people cannot go to the Catholic celebration on Sunday, they go to the Anglican celebration, and the Anglicans go to the Catholic one, because they do not want a Sunday to go by without a celebration. They work together. And here the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith knows this. And they do charity together. The two Bishops are friends and the two communities are friends.

I think this is a richness that our young Churches can bring to Europe and to the Churches that have a great tradition. They give us the soundness of a very well-developed and well-thought-out tradition. Ecumenism is easier, it is true, in the young Churches. It is true. But I think that — I’m going back to the second question — ecumenism in a more mature Church, more mature in research, is perhaps more sound in theological research, in the study of history, of theology, of the liturgy, as is the Church in Europe. And I think it would do us well, both Churches: to send some seminarians from here, from Europe, to gain pastoral experience in the young Churches; they learn a great deal. They come from the young Churches to study in Rome, at least the Catholics, we know that. But to send them to see, to learn from the young Churches would be a great richness in the sense that you have said. Ecumenism is easier there; it is easier, something which does not mean more superficial, no; it is not superficial. They do not negotiate the faith and identity. That aborigine tells you in northern Argentina: “I am Anglican”. But [if] the bishop is not there, the parson is not there, the reverend is not there.... “I want to praise God on Sunday and I go to the Catholic cathedral”, and vice versa. This is the richness of young Churches. I don’t know, this is what comes to mind to say to you.

ORE, 3 March 2017
APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF POPE FRANCIS TO EGYPT
28-29 April 2017

COURTESY VISIT TO HIS HOLINESS POPE TAWADROS

SPEECH OF THE HOLY FATHER
28 April 2017

The Lord is risen, he is truly risen!
Al Masih kam, billakika kam!

Your Holiness, Dear Brother,

Only a short time has passed since the great Solemnity of Easter, the heart of the Christian life, which we were blessed this year to celebrate on the same day. We thus joined in proclaiming the Easter message and, in a sense, relived the experience of the first disciples who together “rejoiced when they saw the Lord” that day (Jn 20:20). This paschal joy is today made all the more precious by the gift of our joining to worship the Risen One in prayer and by our renewed exchange, in his name, of the holy kiss and embrace of peace. For this, I am deeply grateful: in coming here as a pilgrim, I was sure of receiving the blessing of a brother who awaited me. I have eagerly looked forward to this new meeting, for I vividly recall the visit Your Holiness made to Rome shortly after my election, on 10 May 2013. That date has happily become the occasion for celebrating an annual Day of Friendship between Copts and Catholics.

As we joyfully progress on our ecumenical journey, I wish particularly to recall that milestone in relations between the Sees of Peter and Mark which is the Common Declaration signed by our predecessors more than forty years ago, on 10 May 1973. After “centuries of difficult history” marked by increasing “theological differences, nourished and widened by non-theological factors”, and growing mistrust, we were able that day, with God’s help, to acknowledge together that Christ is “perfect God with respect to his humanity” (Common Declaration of Pope Paul VI and Pope Shenouda III, 10 May 1973). Yet equally important and timely are the words that immediately precede this statement, in which we acknowledge Jesus Christ as “our Lord and God and Saviour and King”. With these words, the See of Mark and the See of Peter proclaimed the lordship of Jesus: together we confessed that we belong to Jesus and that he is our all.

What is more, we realized that, because we belong to him, we can no longer think that each can go his own way, for that would betray his will that his disciples “all be one...so that the world may believe” (Jn 17:21). In the sight of God, who wishes us to be “perfectly one” (v. 23), it is no longer possible to take refuge behind the pretext of differing interpretations, much less of those centuries of history and traditions that estranged us one from the other. In the words of His Holiness John Paul II, “there is no time to lose in this regard! Our communion in the one Lord Jesus Christ, in the one Holy Spirit and in one baptism already represents a deep and fundamental reality” (Address at the Ecumenical Meeting, 25 February 2000). Consequently, not only is there an ecumenism of gestures, words and commitment, but an already effective communion that grows daily in living relation with the Lord Jesus, is rooted in the faith we profess and is truly grounded on our baptism and our being made a “new creation” (cf. 2 Cor 5:17) in him. In a word, there is “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph 4:5). Hence, we constantly set out anew, in order to hasten that eagerly awaited day when we will be in full and visible communion around the altar of the Lord.

In this exciting journey, which – like life itself – is not always easy and straightforward, but on which the Lord exhorts us to persevere, we are not alone. We are accompanied by a great host of saints and martyrs who, already fully one, impel us here below to be a living image of the “Jerusalem above” (Gal 4:26). Among them, surely Peter and Mark in particular rejoice in our encounter today. Great is the bond uniting them. We need only think of the fact that Saint Mark put at the heart of his Gospel Peter’s profession of faith: “You are the Christ”. It was the answer to Jesus ever urgent question: “But who do you say that I am?” (Mk 8:29). Today too, many people cannot answer this question; there are even few people who can raise it, and above all few who can answer it with the joy of knowing Jesus, that same joy with which we have the grace of confessing him together.

Together, then, we are called to bear witness to him, to carry our faith to the world, especially in the way it is meant to be brought: by living it, so that Jesus’ presence can be communicated with life and speak the language of gratuitous and concrete love. As Coptic Orthodox and Catholics, we can always join in speaking this common language of charity: before undertaking a charitable work, we would do well to ask if we can do it together with our brothers and sisters who share our faith in Jesus. Thus, by building communion in the concreteness of a daily lived witness, the Spirit will surely open providential and unexpected paths to unity.

It is with this constructive apostolic spirit that Your Holiness continues to show a genuine and fraternal attention for the Coptic Catholic Church. I am most grateful for this closeness, which has found praiseworthy expression in the National Council of Christian Churches, which you have established so that believers in Jesus can work together more closely for the benefit of Egyptian society as a whole. I also greatly...
The deepening progress of our ecumenical journey is also sustained, in a mysterious and quite relevant way, by a genuine *ecumenism of blood*. Saint John tells us that Jesus came “with water and blood” (1 Jn 5:6); whoever believes in him thus “overcomes the world” (1 Jn 5:5). With water and blood: by living a new life in our common baptism, a life of love always and for all, even at the cost of the sacrifice of one’s life. How many martyrs in this land, from the first centuries of Christianity, have lived their faith heroically to the end, shedding their blood rather than denying the Lord and yielding to the enticements of evil, or merely to the temptation of repaying evil with evil! The venerable Martyrology of the Coptic Church bears eloquent witness to this. Even in recent days, tragically, the innocent blood of defenceless Christians was cruelly shed: their innocent blood unites us. Most dear brother, just as the heavenly Jerusalem is one, so too is our martyrology; your sufferings are also our sufferings. Strengthened by this witness, let us strive to oppose violence by preaching and sowing goodness, fostering concord and preserving unity, praying that all these sacrifices may open the way to a future of full communion between us and of peace for all.

The impressive history of holiness of this land is distinguished not only by the sacrifice of the martyrs. No sooner had the ancient persecutions ended, than a new and selfless form of life arose as a gift of the Lord: monasticism originated in the desert. Thus, the great signs that God had once worked in Egypt and at the Red Sea (cf. Ex 106:21-22) were followed by the miracle of a new life that made the desert blossom with sanctity. With veneration for this shared patrimony, I have come as a pilgrim to this land that the Lord himself loves to visit. For here, in his glory he came down upon Mount Sinai (cf. Ex 24:16), and here, in his humility, he found refuge as a child (cf. Mt 2:14).

Your Holiness, dearest brother, may the same Lord today grant us to set out together as pilgrims of communion and messengers of peace. On this journey, may the Virgin Mary take us by the hand, she who brought Jesus here, and whom the great Egyptian theological tradition has from of old acclaimed as Theotokos, the Mother of God. In this title, humanity and divinity are joined, for in his Mother, God became forever man. May the Blessed Virgin, who constantly leads us to Jesus, the perfect symphony of divine and human, bring yet once more a bit of heaven to our earth.

ORE, 5 May 2017

COMMON DECLARATION OF HIS HOLINESS FRANCIS AND HIS HOLINESS TAWADROS II

28 April 2017

1. We, Francis, Bishop of Rome and Pope of the Catholic Church, and Tawadros II, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of Saint Mark, give thanks to God in the Holy Spirit for granting us the joyful opportunity to meet once more, to exchange a fraternal embrace and to join again in common prayer. We glorify the Almighty for the bonds of fraternity and friendship existing between the See of Saint Peter and the See of Saint Mark. The privilege of being together here in Egypt is a sign that the solidarity of our relationship is increasing year by year, and that we are growing in closeness, faith and love of Christ our Lord. We give thanks to God for this beloved Egypt, the “homeland that lives inside us,” as His Holiness Pope Shenouda III used to say, the “people blessed by God” (cf. Is 19:25) with its ancient Pharaonic civilization, the Greek and Roman heritage, the Coptic tradition and the Islamic presence. Egypt is the place where the Holy Family found refuge, a land of martyrs and saints.

2. Our deep bond of friendship and fraternity has its origin in the full communion that existed between our Churches in the first centuries and was expressed in many different ways through the early Ecumenical Councils, dating back to the Council of Nicaea in 325 and the contribution of the courageous Church Father Saint Athanasius, who earned the title “Protector of the Faith”. Our communion was expressed through prayer and similar liturgical practices, the veneration of the same martyrs and saints, and in the development and spread of monasticism, following the example of the great Saint Anthony, known as the Father of all monks. This common experience of communion before the time of separation has a special significance in our efforts to restore full communion today. Most of the relations which existed in the early centuries between the Catholic Church and the Coptic Orthodox Church have continued to the present day in spite of divisions, and have recently been revitalized. They challenge us to intensify our common efforts to persevere in the search for visible unity in diversity, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
3. We recall with gratitude the historic meeting forty-four years ago between our predecessors, Pope Paul VI and Pope Shenouda III, in an embrace of peace and fraternity, after many centuries when our mutual bonds of love were not able to find expression due to the distance that had arisen between us. The Common Declaration they signed on 10 May 1973 represented a milestone on the path of ecumenism, and served as a starting point for the Commission for Theological Dialogue between our two Churches, which has borne much fruit and opened the way to a broader dialogue between the Catholic Church and the whole family of Oriental Orthodox Churches. In that Declaration, our Churches acknowledged that, in line with the apostolic tradition, they profess “one faith in the One Triune God” and “the divinity of the Only-begotten Son of God ... perfect God with respect to his divinity, perfect man with respect to his humanity”. It was also acknowledged that “the divine life is given to us and is nourished in us through the seven sacraments” and that “we venerate the Virgin Mary, Mother of the True Light”, the “Theotokos”.

4. With deep gratitude we recall our own fraternal meeting in Rome on 10 May 2013, and the establishment of 10 May as the day when each year we deepen the friendship and brotherhood between our Churches. This renewed spirit of closeness has enabled us to discern once more that the bond uniting us was received from our one Lord on the day of our Baptism. For it is through Baptism that we become members of the one Body of Christ that is the Church (cf. 1 Cor 12:13). This common heritage is the basis of our pilgrimage together towards full communion, as we grow in love and reconciliation.

5. We are aware that we still have far to go on this pilgrimage, yet we recall how much has already been accomplished. In particular, we call to mind the meeting between Pope Shenouda III and Saint John Paul II, who came as a pilgrim to Egypt during the Great Jubilee of the year 2000. We are determined to follow in their footsteps, moved by the love of Christ the good Shepherd, in the profound conviction that by walking together, we grow in unity. May we draw our strength from God, the perfect source of communion and love.

6. This love finds its deepest expression in common prayer. When Christians pray together, they come to realize that what unites them is much greater than what divides them. Our longing for unity receives its inspiration from the prayer of Christ “that all may be one” (Jn 17:21). Let us deepen our shared roots in the one apostolic faith by praying together and by seeking common translations of the Lord’s Prayer and a common date for the celebration of Easter.

7. As we journey towards the blessed day when we will at last gather at the same Eucharistic table, we can cooperate in many areas and demonstrate in a tangible way the great richness which already unites us. We can bear witness together to fundamental values such as the sanctity and dignity of human life, the sacredness of marriage and the family, and respect for all of creation, entrusted to us by God. In the face of many contemporary challenges such as secularization and the globalization of indifference, we are called to offer a shared response based on the values of the Gospel and the treasures of our respective traditions. In this regard, we are encouraged to engage in a deeper study of the Oriental and Latin Fathers, and to promote a fruitful exchange in pastoral life, especially in catechesis, and in mutual spiritual enrichment between monastic and religious communities.

8. Our shared Christian witness is a grace-filled sign of reconciliation and hope for Egyptian society and its institutions, a seed planted to bear fruit in justice and peace. Since we believe that all human beings are created in the image of God, we strive for serenity and concord through a peaceful co-existence of Christians and Muslims, thus bearing witness to God’s desire for the unity and harmony of the entire human family and the equal dignity of each human being. We share a concern for the welfare and the future of Egypt. All members of society have the right and duty to participate fully in the life of the nation, enjoying full and equal citizenship and collaborating to build up their country. Religious freedom, including freedom of conscience, rooted in the dignity of the person, is the cornerstone of all other freedoms. It is a sacred and inalienable right.

9. Let us intensify our unceasing prayer for all Christians in Egypt and throughout the whole world, and especially in the Middle East. The tragic experiences and the blood shed by our faithful who were persecuted and killed for the sole reason of being Christian, remind us all the more that the ecumenism of martyrdom unites us and encourages us along the way to peace and reconciliation. For, as Saint Paul writes: “If one member suffers, all suffer together” (1 Cor 12:26).

10. The mystery of Jesus who died and rose out of love lies at the heart of our journey towards full unity. Once again, the martyrs are our guides. In the early Church the blood of the martyrs was the seed of new Christians. So too in our own day, may the blood of so many martyrs be the seed of unity among all Christ’s disciples, a sign and instrument of communion and peace for the world.

11. In obedience to the work of the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies the Church, keeps her throughout the ages, and leads her to full unity — that unity for which Jesus Christ prayed:

Today we, Pope Francis and Pope Tawadros II, in order to please the heart of the Lord Jesus, as well as that of our sons and daughters in the faith, mutually declare that we, with one mind and heart, will seek sincerely not to repeat the baptism that has been
administered in either of our Churches for any person who wishes to join the other. This we confess in obedience to the Holy Scriptures and the faith of the three Ecumenical Councils assembled in Nicaea, Constantinople and Ephesus.

We ask God our Father to guide us, in the times and by the means that the Holy Spirit will choose, to full unity in the mystical Body of Christ.

12. Let us, then, be guided by the teachings and the example of the Apostle Paul, who writes: “[Make] every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you too were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph 4:3-6).

Cairo, 28th April 2017

ORE, 5 May 2017

RETURN FLIGHT PRESS CONFERENCE FROM EGYPT TO ROME

29 April 2017

During the return flight from Egypt to Rome on Saturday 29 April, Pope Francis participated in the customary on-board question-and-answer session with journalists. The session was led by Greg Burke, Director of the Holy See Press Office, who thanked the Pontiff and invited him to the microphone. Before taking questions, the Pope greeted and thanked the press corps. We publish here an extract of the press conference.

[...] Vera Shcherbakova (Itar-Tass):

Holy Father, I thank you, first of all for your blessing; you blessed me, I had knelt down a few minutes ago, here in the front. I am Orthodox and I do not see any contradiction… I wanted to ask you: what are the prospects for relations with the Orthodox – obviously Russian, but also, yesterday, in the Common Declaration with the Orthodox Coptic Patriarch – there is the date of Easter in common, and it also speaks about the recognition of Baptism… At what point are we? And one more thing: how do you evaluate the relations between the Vatican and Russia, as a State, also in light of the defence of the values of Middle Eastern Christians, especially in Syria?

Pope Francis:

Christòs anèsti! [Christ is Risen] Since Buenos Aires, I have always had a great friendship with the Orthodox. For example, every 6 January I would go to Vespers, in your Cathedral, to Patriarch Plato – who now is in the area of Ukraine, he is the Archbishop of your Cathedral, to Patriarch Plato – and he is the Archbishop of the Greek Orthodox Church in Moscow, and he is a man of God, Ilia II, a mystic! We had an ecumenical meeting: and Patriarch Bartholomew was also present, the Greek-Orthodox Patriarch was present, and there were other Christians: Anglicans, and the Secretary of the World Council of Churches in Geneva… Everything that contributes to ecumenism is in motion. Ecumenism is achieved by moving forward, with acts of charity, with the commitment to help, doing things together when things can be done together… There is no such thing as a static ecumenism. It is true that the theologians must study and agree amongst themselves, but this will never have a successful outcome unless we move forward. What can we do now? We must do what is possible: pray together, work together, exercise acts of charity together… But together! This is what it means to move forward. Relations with Patriarch Kirill are good, they are good. The Metropolitan Archbishop Hilarion has also come on several occasions to speak to me, and we have a good relationship. […]

ORE, 5 May 2017
At the General Audience in Saint Peter’s Square on Wednesday morning, 3 May, Pope Francis spoke of his recent visit to Egypt. Egypt is and has always been “a sign of hope, of refuge, of help”, he said. The Holy Father gave thanks for his recent Apostolic journey to Egypt recalling the commitment to unity and spoke about the cultural and religious heritage that gives the nation a special role in the work of peacemaking. The following is an excerpt of the catechesis of the Holy Father which he originally delivered in Italian.

[...]

Christians in Egypt as in every nation on earth, are called to be the “leaven” of fraternity. This is possible if they live, within themselves, the Communion in Christ. Thank God, we were able to show a strong sign of communion with my dear Brother Pope Tawadros II, Patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox. We renewed our commitment, also by signing a Common Declaration to journey together, and not to duplicate baptisms already received in the respective Churches. Together we prayed for the martyrs of the recent attacks that tragically struck that venerable Church; and their blood rendered fruitful that ecumenical encounter, in which Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, the Ecumenical Patriarch, my dear Brother, also participated. [...]
AUDIENCE WITH EVANGELICAL LEADERS GATHERED FOR THE PENTECOST VIGIL

3 June 2017

Some 100 Evangelical leaders met Pope Francis in the Vatican on Saturday morning, 3 June. They had gathered in Rome to participate in the Pentecost vigil that began Saturday afternoon at the ancient Roman arena, Circus Maximus. The celebrations also marked the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, one of the principal organizers of the event. Participants also attended the Mass celebrated by the Pontiff on the Solemnity of Pentecost, Sunday, 4 June, in Saint Peter’s Square.

In his audience with Evangelical leaders, Francis thanked them for their ecumenical work in favour of Christian unity, their collaboration with other denominations in the field of education and in providing assistance to the poor. Reminding them to journey always on the path of fraternity, he invited them to conclude their celebrations as “brothers and sisters” by praying to the Lord “each in his or her language”.

ORE, 9 June 2017

VIGIL ON THE EVE OF THE SOLEMNITY OF PENTECOST

Circus Maximus

3 June 2017

“We even while showing that we have differences … we wish it to be a reconciled diversity”. Pope Francis emphasized this hope as he presided on Saturday evening, 3 June, at the prayer vigil organized by International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services and the Catholic Fraternity, as part of the celebrations for the 50th anniversary of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal.

We publish below excerpts of the Holy Father’s reflection originally delivered in Italian.

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS

Brothers and Sisters,

[...] Today we are here in a kind of Upper Room beneath the open sky, unafraid, under the open sky and with our hearts open to the promise of the Father. “All of us who believe” have gathered here, all of us who confess that “Jesus is Lord”. Many have come from different parts of the world, and the Holy Spirit has brought us together to build bonds of fraternal friendship that encourage us on our journey towards unity, unity for mission. Not to stand still! But for mission, to proclaim that Jesus is Lord – Jesús es el Señor. To proclaim together the love of the Father for all his children. To proclaim the Good News to all peoples. To demonstrate that peace is possible. It is not so easy to show this world today that peace is possible, but in the name of Jesus we can show by our testimony that peace is possible! It is possible if we are at peace with one another. If we emphasize our differences, we are at war among ourselves and we cannot proclaim peace. Peace is possible, based on our confession that Jesus is Lord and on our evangelization along this path. It is possible. Even by showing that we have differences – this is obvious, we have differences – but that we desire to be a reconciled diversity. We should not forget that phrase, but say it to everyone: reconciled diversity. The phrase is not mine. It comes from a Lutheran brother. Reconciled diversity. […]

We have assembled here from 120 countries throughout the world, to celebrate the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit in the Church that occurred fifty years ago and started… an institution? No. An organization? No. A flood of grace, the flood of grace of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. A work that was born… Catholic? No. It was born ecumenical! It was born ecumenical because it is the Holy Spirit who creates unity, and the same Spirit who granted the inspiration for this. It is important to read the works of Cardinal Suenens on this: it is very important! […]

Today we have chosen to assemble here, in this place – as Pastor Traettino said – because here, during the persecutions, Christians were martyred for the entertainment of onlookers. Today there are more martyrs than then! Today there are more martyrs, Christians. Those who kill Christians do not ask them first: Are you Orthodox? Are you Catholic? Are you Evangelical? Are you Lutheran? Are you Calvinist? No. They ask if they are Christians, and when they say yes, they immediately slit their throats. Today there are more martyrs than in the early times. This is the ecumenism of blood. The witness of our martyrs today brings us together. In different parts of the world, Christian blood is being shed! Today Christian unity is more urgent than ever, Christians united by the power of the Holy Spirit, in prayer and in activity on behalf of the most vulnerable. To walk together, to work together, to love one another, and together to seek to explain our differences, to come to agreement, but as
we keep walking! If we stop walking, we will never come to agreement. So it is, because the Spirit wants us to keep walking. […]

The most precious gift that all of us have received is Baptism. And now the Spirit is leading us on this journey of conversion sweeping across the entire Christian world. It is one more reason why the Catholic Charismatic Renewal is a privileged place for pursuing the path to unity! […]

To share baptism in the Holy Spirit with everyone in the Church, to praise the Lord unceasingly, to walk together with Christians of different Churches and Ecclesiastical Communities in prayer and activity on behalf of those in greatest need, to serve the poor and the sick. This is what the Church and the Pope expect from you, Catholic Charismatic Renewal, but also from everyone here: all of you who have become part of this flood of grace! Thank you!

ORE, 9 June 2017

VISIT TO ROME OF A DELEGATION FROM THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE FOR THE SOLEMNITY OF SAINTS PETER AND PAUL

26–29 June 2017

For the occasion of the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, Pope Francis received in audience on Tuesday morning, 27 June, a Delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew I. The Delegation, traditionally sent to Rome by the Patriarch in celebration of the Solemnity, was led by Archbishop Job of Telmessos, Co-President of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, accompanied by the Very Reverend Amvrosios Chozogis, Grand Synkellos of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and the Very Reverend Archimandrite Agathangelos Siskos, Librarian of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. They were joined by Cardinal Kurt Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, with Bishop Brian Farrell, Secretary, and Monsignor Andrea Palmieri, Undersecretary. The following is the English text of the Holy Father’s address to the Delegation and the letter sent through the Delegation to the Pontiff by the Ecumenical Patriarch.

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS

Your Eminence,

Dear Brothers in Christ,

I offer you a warm welcome and I thank you for being here for the celebration of Saints Peter and Paul, the principal patrons of this Church of Rome. I am most grateful to His Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and to the Holy Synod for having sent you, dear brothers, as their representatives, to share with us the joy of this feast.

Peter and Paul, as disciples and apostles of Jesus Christ, served the Lord in very different ways. Yet in their diversity, both bore witness to the merciful love of God our Father, which each in his own fashion profoundly experienced, even to the sacrifice of his own life. For this reason, from very ancient times the Church in the East and in the West combined in one celebration the commemoration of the martyrdom of Peter and Paul. It is right to celebrate together their self-sacrifice for love of the Lord, for it is at the same time a commemoration of unity and diversity. As you well know, the iconographical tradition represents the two apostles embracing one another, a prophetic sign of the one ecclesial communion in which legitimate differences ought to coexist.

The exchange of delegations between the Church of Rome and the Church of Constantinople on their respective patronal feasts increases our desire for the full restoration of communion between Catholics and Orthodox, of which we already have a foretaste in fraternal encounter, shared prayer and common service to the Gospel. In the first millennium, Christians of East and West shared in the same Eucharistic table, preserving together the same truths of faith while cultivating a variety of theological, spiritual and canonical traditions compatible with the teaching of the apostles and the ecumenical councils. That experience is a necessary point of reference and a source of inspiration for our efforts to restore full communion in our own day, a communion that must not be a bland uniformity.

Your presence affords me the welcome opportunity to recall that this year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the visit of Blessed Paul VI to the Phanar in July 1967, and of the visit of Patriarch Athenagoras, of venerable memory, to Rome in October of that same year. The example of these courageous and farsighted pastors, moved solely by love for Christ and his Church, encourages us to press forward in our journey towards full unity. Fifty years ago, those two visits were events that gave rise to immense joy and enthusiasm among the faithful of the churches of Rome and of Constantinople, and led to
the decision to send delegations for the respective patronal feasts, a practice that has continued to the present.

I am deeply grateful to the Lord for continuing to grant me occasions to meet my beloved brother Bartholomew. In particular, I recall with gratitude and thanksgiving our recent meeting in Cairo, where I saw once more the profound convergence in our approach to certain challenges affecting the life of the Church and the world in our time.

Next September, in Leros, Greece, there will be a meeting of the Coordinating Committee of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, co-chaired by Your Eminence and Cardinal Kurt Koch, at the gracious invitation of Metropolitan Paisios. It is my hope that the meeting will take place in a spiritual climate of attentiveness to the Lord’s will and in a clear recognition of the journey already being made together by many Catholic and Orthodox faithful in various parts of the world, and that it will prove most fruitful for the future of eccumenical dialogue.

Your Eminence, dear brothers, the unity of all his disciples was the heartfelt prayer that Jesus Christ offered to the Father on the eve of his passion and death (cf. Jn 17:21). The fulfilment of this prayer is entrusted to God, but it also involves our docility and obedience to his will. With trust in the intercession of Saints Peter and Paul, and of Saint Andrew, let us pray for one another and ask the Lord to make us instruments of communion and peace. And I ask you, please, to continue to pray for me.

ORE, 7 July 2017

LETTER OF PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW I

Your Holiness,

Today, we celebrate with you the honourable memory of the Holy, Glorious, and All-Praiseworthy Chiefs of the Apostles, Peter and Paul, who received their crown of martyrdom in the imperial city. We share in the joy of this feast by perpetuating the blessed tradition of exchanging official visits through delegations on the occasion of our respective Thronal Feasts. Our fraternal congratulatory wishes on this feast are conveyed to Your Holiness and expressed in person by our Patriarchal Delegation led by His Excellency Archbishop Job of Telmessos, co-president of the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between our two sister Churches, the Very Reverend Ambrosios Chorozidis, Grand Synkellus of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and the Very Reverend Archimandrite Agathangelos Siskos, Librarian of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and secretary of our venerable delegation to you this year.

The commemoration of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul reminds us of their common witness and ministry in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, which led them, ultimately, to their martyrdom. The Church was established on Christ, through the confession, witness and blood of the Holy Apostles, as our Lord foretold: “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Hence, after Saint Peter confessed Jesus Christ as the Messiah, the Son of the living God, our Lord said: “you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it” (Matt 16:18). For this same reason, Saint Paul spoke of his mission in these words: “To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26:22-23).

Tertullian recognized the blood of the Apostles and later of the Christian Martyrs as a seed for the Church. Addressing those who persecuted Christians, he said: “We spring up in greater numbers as often as we are mown down by you; the blood of the Christians is a source of new life” (Apologeticus, 50). The death of the martyrs is a testimony of Christ’s death on the Cross and a witness to His third-day, glorious Resurrection from the Tomb, both of which lead us to everlasting life in His Kingdom. For this reason, we celebrate the feast of the holy martyrs brightly with the joy of the Resurrection and in the joyful anticipation of the glory of the Kingdom to come, as witnessed by the first martyr, Archdeacon Stephen, at the moment of his martyrdom: “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God!” (Acts 7:56).

The Church, throughout her history, during different epochs and times, has been persecuted; however, the blood of her martyrs was a source of strength in faith and a witness of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. As the Bride of Christ, the Church, is still called to martyrdom today, as it faces new forms of persecution and oppression. Over the last few years, we have witnessed with great sorrow the attacks targeting Christians and their places of worship. Our sister Churches stand in solidarity with all persecuted and oppressed Christians of our times, and at this very moment, we call to remembrance “those who are in mines, in exile, in harsh labour, and those in every kind of affliction, oppression, necessity, or distress”.

Today, we call to mind the joy we experienced being with Your Holiness in Egypt two months ago, a land which is continuously watered by the blood of Christian martyrs. We prayed with you for the people of Egypt, for unity, peace and justice in the world, in the church of Saints Peter and Paul in Cairo near Saint Mark’s Coptic Orthodox Cathedral, which became a few months ago a sacred martyrion.
This was a significant moment for us, and for the world. It was in Cairo that, together with Your Holiness, we addressed an International Conference on Peace, sharing together the conviction that there cannot be any violence nor justification of terrorism in the name of religion. Together with you, we underlined that violence is the negation of fundamental religious beliefs and doctrine, that true faith does not release humans from being responsible for the world, and emphasized the importance of respecting human dignity and the need for supporting struggles aiming to attain justice and peace. We reminded our contemporary world that humanity demands from religion today honesty and openness to cultivate love, solidarity and compassion. This can be achieved also through interreligious dialogue which has the aim of overcoming religious fundamentalism and demonstrating that religions can and should serve as bridges between people, as instruments of peace and mutual understanding and respect between human beings. This interreligious dialogue is further strengthened through the deeper rapprochement of divided Christians.

Therefore, we are convinced that our common witness before the numerous challenges of our contemporary world constitutes a positive testimony for the Church of Christ and for bringing us closer to unity. This is indeed the commandment of our Lord and Saviour: “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (Jn 13:35). Over fifty years ago, our sister Churches have engaged into a dialogue of love that has led us into a dialogue of truth. With this in mind, we place great emphasis on the theological dialogue being conducted for nearly forty years between our sister Churches. We were particularly pleased to learn that the fourteenth meeting of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue, last September in Chieti, between our Churches was conducted in an atmosphere of fraternal collaboration and mutual theological exchange, successfully producing an important common document on primacy and synodality in the first millennium. Thus, this Commission has proposed new steps on our common path towards unity. Now, the Commission will be entering a new phase of the dialogue. It is our prayer that the Coordinating Committee scheduled for September on the island of Leros will be fruitful by producing a common theme and a methodology for the next stage of our discussions.

Your Holiness, dearest Brother Francis, as we celebrate today the Thronal Feast of the Church of Rome, we reiterate our deepest desire for our common advancement on the journey towards the unity. We pray that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ may grant you health, strength and peace, so that you may continue your diakonia to the precious souls entrusted to your primatial care and wisdom.

Conveying to Your Holiness, the venerable Hierarchs and the Christ-loving faithful of your Church, our warmest greetings, we embrace you fraternally with a “holy kiss” and remain with much love and honour in Christ Jesus, the Lamb once slain who lives forever.

At the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the twenty-ninth of June, 2017

Your Holiness’ beloved brother in Christ, 
+ BARTHOLOMEW
Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch

ECUMENICAL NEWS

IN MEMORIAM CARDINAL WILLIAM H. KEELER
1931 – 2017

Cardinal William Henry Keeler, Archbishop Emeritus of Baltimore, died on Thursday, March 23, 2017, at the age of 86. Very much committed to ecumenical dialogue and its importance, as well as to religious relations with the Judaism, Cardinal Keeler was for many years a member of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Born in San Antonio, USA, on March 4, 1931, he was ordained priest on July 17, 1955. In 1983 he was appointed Bishop of Harrisburg by Pope John Paul II, who also designated him Archbishop of Baltimore in 1989, a ministry which Cardinal Keeler fulfilled until his retirement in 2007. From 1992 till 1995, he served as President of the Episcopal Conference of the United States of America, guiding it with conviction in the same way as his remarkable and courageous predecessors, Cardinals Bernardin and O’Connor, with a particular attention to deepening the dialogue with representatives of the North American and International Jewish community. Below is the telegram of condolences sent by Pope Francis to William Edward Lori, who succeeded him at the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

TELEGRAM OF POPE FRANCIS

Deeply saddened to learn of the death of Cardinal William H. Keeler, I offer heartfelt condolences to you and to the clergy, religious and lay faithful of the Archdiocese. With gratitude for Cardinal Keeler’s years of devoted episcopal ministry in the local Churches of Harrisburg and Baltimore, his years of leadership within the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and his long-standing commitment to ecumenical and interreligious understanding, I join you in commending the soul of this wise and gentle pastor to the merciful love of God our heavenly Father. To all who mourn the late Cardinal in the sure hope of the Resurrection, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of consolation and peace in the Lord.

FRANCISCUS PP.
ORE, 31 March 2017

CATHOLIC, LUTHERAN, MENNONITE, TRILATERAL DIALOGUE COMMISSION ON BAPTISM

Augsburg, Germany, 9-14 February 2017

Representatives of the Catholic Church (Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity), the Lutheran World Federation, and the Mennonite World Conference met in Augsburg, Germany, 9–14 February, for the fifth meeting of the International Trilateral Dialogue Commission on the understanding and practice of Baptism in light of the current missional challenges facing all three Christian communities.

The meeting in Augsburg concluded a five year dialogue process. The commission discussed and developed its final report on “Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church” which was drafted by Professors Theo Dieter (Lutheran, France), William Henn (Catholic, US/Vatican) and John Rempel (Mennonite, Canada). The trilateral commission agreed on a further process to finalize the report which summarizes the rich discussions that have taken place over the last five years on three fundamental themes: 1) the relation of Baptism to sin and salvation, 2) the celebration of Baptism and its relation to faith and to membership in the Christian community, 3) the living of Baptism in Christian discipleship. The report will be published in early 2018.

The meeting was hosted by the Mennonite World Conference and took place in Catholic St. Ulrich’s conference centre. The meeting took place at the same time and place as the Executive Committee and the permanent working commissions of the Mennonite World Conference. During the meeting, the commission gathered together in morning devotions and bible studies. In the evenings they joined the members of the MWC in evening prayers. The members of the commission participated in a tour led by Augsburg Mennonite Wolfgang Krauss introducing the Anabaptist and Mennonite history of the city.
Participants in the meeting on behalf of the Catholic Church were Archbishop Luis Augusto Castro Quiroga, IMC (co-chair, Colombia); Rev. Prof. William Henn, OFM Cap (USA/Italy); Rev Prof. Luis Melo, SM (Canada); Sister Prof. Dr Marie-Hélène Robert, NDA (France); and Rev Avelino González-Ferrer (co-secretary, USA/Vatican). Lutheran delegation members were Prof. Dr. Friederike Nüssel (co-chair, Germany); Bishop Emeritus Dr Musawenkosi Biyela (South Africa); Prof. Dr Theodor Dieter (France); and Rev Dr Kaisamari Hintikka (co-secretary, Finland/Switzerland). Mennonites were Prof. Dr Alfred Neufeld (co-chair, Paraguay); Prof. Dr Fernando Enns (Germany); Rev Rebecca Adongo Osiro (Kenya); Prof. Dr John Rempel (Canada); Rev Dr Larry Miller (co-secretary, France). A member of the Lutheran delegation, Rev Dr KS Peter Li (Hong Kong, China) was not able to attend the meeting.

DISCIPLES OF CHRIST – ROMAN CATHOLIC INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR DIALOGUE

Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council
Bayamón, Puerto Rico, 23-28 June 2017

The fifth session of the fifth phase of the Disciples of Christ – Roman Catholic International Commission for Dialogue took place in Bayamón, Puerto Rico, June 23-28, 2017. The general theme for the current phase of dialogue is “Christians Formed and Transformed by the Eucharist”. After an introductory meeting in Nashville, TN, USA in January 2014, the Commission approached the topics related to what it means to be formed by the Eucharist discussing the following themes: “The Structure of Liturgies among Catholics and Disciples” (Rome, June 2014) and “The Significance of Eucharistic Catechesis – Knowing by Doing” (Bethany, WV, June 2015). In 2016, the Commission moved its study focus to “Christians Being Transformed by the Eucharist”, and the 2016 session was held in Calgary, AB, Canada, discussing the general theme “The Eucharist and Relationships within the Church”. This year’s session approached topics related to the theme “Living the Sacraments”. The overall goal of the dialogue, which started in 1977, is to seek full visible unity between the two communions.

The Disciples Co-Chair of the Dialogue is Rev Dr. Newell Williams, President of the Brite Divinity School at Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, TX, USA. The Catholic Co-Chair of the Dialogue is the Most Reverend David L. Ricken, Bishop of Green Bay, WI, USA.

Papers were prepared by the Most Reverend David Ricken, “Transformed by the Eucharist: Living Encounter with Jesus Christ”, and for the Disciples of Christ, Rev. Dr. Newell Williams, “Transformed by the Eucharist: Coming Face to Face with the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ”. A biblical paper entitled “Breaking the Rules: Jesus Transformed by His Experience” was presented by Dr. Mary L. Coloe, pbvm, of the Catholic Church. At this session, the Commission also worked on a very preliminary draft which will be finalized in Green Bay, WI, USA in 2018. Each day of the dialogue began and concluded with prayer together led alternately by Disciples and Catholics.

While in Puerto Rico, the Commission, at the invitation of the Most Reverend Roberto González Nieves, Archbishop of San Juan, attended the Holy Mass on the Feast of Saint John the Baptist at Catedral de San Juan Bautista on June 24. The following day, they attended the Sunday worship service at Primera Iglesia Cristiana Central (Discipulos de Cristo), the first Disciples congregation to be founded in Puerto Rico. The Commission was greeted by Pastor Gamaliel Ortiz. After the worship service, the Commission members interacted with the church members over lunch. On June 26, Rev Miguel Morales, General Pastor of the Disciples of Christ in Puerto Rico, invited the Commission to the Puerto Rican Disciples national office for dinner and conversation. The Commission was joined by the Disciples local church pastors and national staff along with Rev Carlos Algarín, Catholic episcopal vicar of Bayamón. The Commission expressed thanks and appreciation to both Catholic and Disciples communities in Puerto Rico for their hospitality and support.

In reflecting on this meeting of the dialogue team, Dr. Merryl Blair, Disciples, said, “While we have been talking about how we are formed and transformed by the Eucharist, so we are also experiencing the transforming joy of being welcomed into each other’s worship. We affirm together that we encounter Christ in the Eucharist, and leave, transformed, to live as a community of hope, love and compassion”.

At the end of the meeting, Mr. Julien Hammond, Catholic, affirmed, “Our experience in Puerto Rico has been extraordinary. Not only were we treated to the most gracious hospitality by both our Catholic and Disciples hosts, but we witnessed a high degree of real (if still incomplete) communion between
our two churches on this island. Our study on “Christians being transformed by the Eucharist” took on a special meaning and impetus in the context of the Puerto Rican experience.

The members from the Disciples of Christ are: Rev Dr D. Newell Williams, Brite Divinity School (Fort Worth, TX, USA, Co-Chair); Rev Dr Thomas F. Best, (Belmont, MA, USA); Rev Dr Merryl Blair, Stirling Theological College, University of Divinity, (Melbourne, Australia); Rev Dr David M. Thompson, University of Cambridge, UK; and Rev Paul S. Tche, Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council (Indianapolis, IN, USA). The following Disciples were unable to attend: Rev Dr Robert Welsh (Indianapolis, IN, USA, Co-Secretary); Rev Dr James O. Duke, Brite Divinity School (Fort Worth, TX, USA); and Rev Angel Luis Rivera, Latin America and Caribbean Executive, Global Ministries (IN, USA). This year, Rev Dr Hector M. Rivera from the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Puerto Rico attended the meeting as an observer.

The members of the Catholic team are: Most Revered David L. Ricken, Bishop of Green Bay (WI, USA, Co-Chair); Msgr Dr Juan Usma Gómez, Bureau Chief of Western Section, Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (Vatican City/Colombia, Co-Secretary); Msgr Dr Michael Clay, Associate Dean for Seminary and Ministerial Studies, School of Theology and Religious Studies, The Catholic University of America (Washington D.C., USA); Dr Mary Coloe, pbvm, University of Divinity (Melbourne, Australia); Mr Julien Hammond, Ecumenical Officer, Archdiocese of Edmonton (Canada); Rev Dr Joseph T. Shenosky, Vice-Rector, Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary (Philadelphia, PA, USA); and Rev Dr Michael G. Witzcak, School of Theology and Religious Studies, the Catholic University of America (Washington D.C., USA).
COMMISSION FOR RELIGIOUS RELATIONS WITH THE JEWS

AUDIENCE WITH A DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN JEWISH CONGRESS

27 January 2017

On International Holocaust Remembrance Day, Friday, 27 January, the Holy Father met with a five-member Delegation of the European Jewish Congress, accompanied by Fr Norbert Hofmann, SDB, Secretary of the Holy See’s Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews.

In an interview with Vatican Radio, Fr Hofmann said the Pope “began the dialogue by mentioning the importance of this Day for the Jews, but also for us, because remembering the victims of the Holocaust” helps to ensure “that this human tragedy never happens again”.

According to Fr Hofmann, the Pontiff and the members of the Delegation spoke of the values shared by Christians and Jews and of the need to strengthen them in a world where moral values have been sorely put to the test. The importance of education and the family were also discussed during the cordial meeting.

ORE, 3 February 2017

AUDIENCE WITH A DELEGATION OF THE ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE

9 February 2017

“Faced with too much violence spreading throughout the world, we are called to a greater nonviolence”, and to promote a culture of respect which favours religious freedom everywhere and protects “believers and religions from every form of violence and exploitation”.

Pope Francis made this appeal during an audience with a delegation of the Anti-Defamation League on Thursday morning, 9 February, in the Hall of Popes. The following is the English text of the Holy Father’s address.

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS

Dear Friends,

I offer you a warm welcome, and I thank you for your kind words. My predecessors, Saint John Paul II and Benedict XVI, also received delegations from your organization, which has maintained relations with the Holy See since the Second Vatican Council. I am grateful that these contacts have intensified: as you noted, our meeting here is a further testimony, beyond that of our shared commitment, to the valuable power of reconciliation, which heals and transforms relationships. For this we give thanks to God, who surely rejoices in the sincere friendship and fraternal sentiments which today inspire Jews and Catholics. Thus, with the Psalmist we too can say: “Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life for evermore” (Ps 133: 1, 3b).

Whereas the culture of encounter and reconciliation engenders life and gives rise to hope, the “non-culture” of hate sows death and reaps despair. Last year I visited the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp. There are no adequate words or thoughts in the face of such horrors of cruelty and sin; there is prayer, that God may have mercy and that such tragedies may never happen again. To this end let us continue to help one another, as Pope John Paul II so desired, “to enable memory to play its necessary part in the process of shaping a future in which the unspeakable iniquity of the Shoah will never again be possible” (Letter on the Occasion of the Publication of the Document “We Remember: a Reflection on the Shoah”, 12 March 1998): a future of genuine respect for the life and dignity of every people and every human being.

Sadly, anti-Semitism, which I again denounce in all its forms as completely contrary to Christian principles and every vision worthy of the human person, is still widespread today. I reaffirm that “the Catholic Church feels particularly obliged to do all that is possible with our Jewish friends to repel anti-Semitic tendencies” (Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable, 47).
Today more than ever, the fight against anti-Semitism can benefit from effective instruments, such as information and formation. In this regard, I thank you for your work and for combining efforts to counter defamation with education, promotion of respect for all, and protection of the weakest. Caring for the sacred gift of all human life and safeguarding its dignity, from conception to death, is the best way of preventing every type of violence. Faced with too much violence spreading throughout the world, we are called to a greater nonviolence, which does not mean passivity, but active promotion of the good. Indeed, if it is necessary to pull out the weeds of evil, it is even more vital to sow the seeds of goodness: to cultivate justice, to foster accord, to sustain integration, without growing weary; only in this way may we gather the fruits of peace. I encourage you in this work, in the conviction that the best remedies against the rise of hatred consist in making available the means necessary for a dignified life, in promoting culture and favoring religious freedom everywhere, as well as in protecting believers and religions from every form of violence and exploitation.

I am grateful to you also for the dialogue which, at various levels, you maintain with the Catholic Church. Upon our shared commitment and our journey of friendship and fraternal trust, I invoke the Almighty’s blessings: in his munificence may he accompany us and help us to bring forth the fruits of goodness. Shalom alechem!

ORE, 17 February 2017

TO RABBI ABRAHAM SKORKA AND A DELEGATION OF JEWISH LEADERS FOR THE PRESENTATION OF A NEW EDITION OF THE TORAH

23 February 2017

The “fruit of an ‘alliance’ between people of different nationalities, ages and religions” is how Pope Francis described the special edition of the Torah presented to him by Rabbi Abraham Skorka on Thursday morning, 23 February, during an audience in the Clementine Hall, where the Pontiff received the editorial group which worked on the publication. The following is the English text of the Holy Father’s address, which he delivered in Italian.

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS

Dear Friends,

I offer a warm welcome to all of you, who have come to present me with a new and precious edition of the Torah. I thank Rabbi Abraham Skorka, brother and friend, for his kind words, and I am very grateful to all of you for this thoughtful gesture, which brings us together today around the Torah as the Lord’s gift, his revelation, his word.

The Torah, which Saint John Paul II called “the living teaching of the living God” (Address for the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the Declaration “Nostra Aetate”, 6 December 1990, 3), manifests the paternal and visceral love of God, a love shown in words and concrete gestures, a love that becomes covenant. The very word covenant is resonant with associations that bring us together. God is the greatest and most faithful covenantal partner. He called Abraham in order to form from him a people who would become a blessing for all peoples of the earth. God desires a world in which men and women are bound to him and as a result live in harmony among themselves and with creation. In the midst of so many human words that lead to tragic division and rivalry, these divine words of covenant open before all of us paths of goodness to walk together. This publication is itself the fruit of a “covenant” between persons of different nationalities, ages and religious confessions, who joined in this common effort.

The fraternal and institutional dialogue between Jews and Christians is now well-established and effective, made so by encounters that are ongoing and collaborative. The gift that you are making to me today is fully a part of this dialogue, which finds expression not only in words but also in gestures. The extensive introduction to the text and the editor’s note emphasize this dialogical approach and communicate a cultural vision of openness, mutual respect and peace that accords with the spiritual message of the Torah. The important religious figures who have worked on this new edition have paid special attention both to the cultural vision of openness, mutual respect and peace that accords with the spiritual message of the Torah.

Every edition of sacred Scripture, however, possesses a spiritual value that infinitely surpasses its material value. I ask God to bless all those who contributed to this work and, in a particular way, to bless all of you, to whom I renew my personal gratitude. Thank you.

ORE, 3 March 2017
INTRODUCTION: SETTING THE FRAME
FOR OUR CONSULTATION

The Biblical Foundations for this Consultation

1. The love of God has been poured out by the Holy Spirit into the hearts of believers (Rom 5:5). This love summons Christians to follow Christ, embracing the way of the cross in humble self-giving (Phil 2: 1-11). In this spirit of love all are called to strive for what makes for peace and for building up the body, with all concerned for the whole community, the strong caring for the weak (Rom 14:19-15:2). Being joined to Christ through faith, each person is personally associated with Christ and becomes a member of his body. But what is the Church, and who belongs to the Church, which is his body? We take consolation in knowing that the Lord knows his own and his own know him (Jn 10:14).

Evangelicals understand that through the power of the Holy Spirit, the very moment one enters into a relationship with Christ through a personal commitment in confessing Jesus as Lord and Savior (Mt 16: 16) and is baptized, one belongs to the Church, the community which he established (Mt 16:18). As a fruit of this faith, the Christian undertakes the path of life-long discipleship. Catholics understand that a person is received into the Church at the moment of Baptism, whether as an infant or an adult, and it is expected that the person's initiation into the church will be deepened through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ that is sealed through confirmation and participation in the Eucharist, as they seek to live as his disciples.

2. The unity of the body of Christ is founded on “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all” (Eph 4:5). The church celebrates unity with Christ and with one another in the Lord’s Supper/Eucharist in which his death and resurrection are proclaimed and celebrated until he comes in glory. At his second coming it will then be revealed in the heavenly community who belongs to the unity of the body of Christ throughout the ages and from all countries and languages. Then, the whole creation will be incorporated into the eternal doxology of praise to God (Rev 5:11-14; Phil 2:10-11; Rom 8:19-23; 1 Cor 15:28). While we look forward to the final consummation of all things, we are called in the Church to be Christ’s body in the here and now.

3. Christ’s prayer for unity in John 17 takes as its premise that his present and future disciples be brought into the unity that he shares with the Father and the Holy Spirit. This unity testifies to the world that “you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (Jn 17:23). There is a unity which
the church receives, and which God has given. But unity also comes to us as a task, one that can only be accomplished by the Spirit working in and through us. The Apostle Paul makes an appeal “that there be no dissensions among you and that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment” (1 Cor 1:10).

4. We realize that in the history of the Church, continuing even to today, divisions have damaged the visible unity of the Church and shaken the credibility of the Gospel that is to be preached in the world. Unity is something deeply desired by our Lord and empowered by his Spirit. Therefore, the Church may not remain comfortable when the body of Christ is divided (cf. 1 Cor 12:25), but is called to strive for the greatest possible unity which Christ himself calls for (Jn 17:20-23; Phil 2:5). In doing so, we are agreed that the Church must make every effort to preach the Gospel in its truth and purity, though we have not always understood what that means in the same way. We recognize that in the history of the Church, striving for the truth of the Gospel has not always resulted in unity or resolved all of our differences. But we also welcome the renewed effort to address these divisions in our present consultation.

The Challenges Encountered Among Evangelicals and Catholics

5. According to the reports our consultation commissioned from 22 countries and from five continents, relations between Catholics and Evangelicals vary according to the regions, local history, public recognition and role in society as well as other new and emerging circumstances. While mutual ignorance and mistrust, fears and prejudices, as well as majority/minority dynamics have prevented relations from being improved in certain countries, in other areas where Catholics and Evangelicals are challenged by the contemporary society, or exist as minorities threatened by religious persecutions, or work in common efforts to confront poverty or various natural disasters, collaboration has been established at different levels.

6. There is a wide range in the quality of local relationships. Sometimes relations are characterized by open rivalry and opposition in the missionary field, marred by accusations and counter-accusations of proselytism, persecution, inequality, idolatry, and/or rejection of the recognition of the Christian identity of the other. At other times or places, relationships are characterized by open collaboration in the public sphere, especially in family matters and ethical and moral campaigns at every level, as well as prayer initiatives and evangelistic and common charitable campaigns inspired by the Bible.

7. Members of the Consultation are happy to note that in most parts of the world there is a consciousness of the need to improve our relationship. Catholics and Evangelicals are convinced that “Mission belongs to the very being of the church. Proclaiming the word of God and witnessing to the world is essential for every Christian. At the same time, it is necessary to do so according to gospel principles, with full respect and love for all human beings.” In accordance with the principles of the Gospel, important steps can be taken together through mutual knowledge and recognition, healing of memories, theological dialogue, as well as encouraging local collaboration between Catholics and Evangelicals wherever possible and appropriate.

The Contemporary Challenges to the Christian Witness

8. Neither Catholics nor Evangelicals can escape the challenges that an increasingly globalized context poses, where the paradigm is shifting more and more to a secular view of society and culture. This raises the question of how the gospel can be preached adequately in this context without giving in to the pressure to conform to the world. Challenges come to us in different forms:

- There is a creeping secularism that is antagonistic to the Christian faith as we live as strangers in an increasingly strange land (1 Pet 1: 1). In many places religion has been relegated largely to the private sphere of the individual with little or no public presence of religion allowed. Many people have forgotten that they have forgotten God. There is an increasing erosion of the churches themselves which affects their impact on society and culture. This erosion is not only in the West; this is a global challenge. It is an erosion whose long-term effects are not yet fully understood.

- Our age is experiencing an ethical disorientation, one that often disallows God and his revelation to serve as any type of reference point for ethical discussion. In sexual morality, there is an underlying assumption that everyone is free to do what is perceived to be right in their own eyes; there is no longer basic agreement on the definition of marriage; sexual orientation now is the accepted way of defining who we are as human beings and the redefinition of marriage to include same-sex unions is more and more

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2. As affirmed in the WEA Statement of Faith: “We believe in ... The Unity of the Spirit of all true believers, the Church, the Body of Christ” and in the Decree on Ecumenism, Unitatis Redintegratio 1: “Christ the Lord founded one Church and one Church only.”

common. The dignity and sanctity of human life at all stages is under attack. Euthanasia, assisted suicide, abortion, and some genetic and reproductive technologies threaten and undermine the basic understanding of what it means to be human. This in turn also has repercussions for the primary foundation of society - the family.

- Religious and ideological diversity is the norm in many societies and cultures around the globe. Although that is not necessarily problematic, it does serve as a challenge to the church because the truth of the Gospel can be seen as just one option among many. The exclusive claims of Christ himself (Jn 14:6) are perceived by some as a direct affront to the dominant controlling ethos of toleration. Religious pluralism has had the unintended consequence of intensified violence caused by an increasingly polarized religious environment. A perceived lack of conviction on the one hand is met with religious radicalization on the other. In such a polarized context, those on the extremes use their religious convictions to justify violence against those with whom they disagree. In this context, we note with dismay and sadness that Christians are persecuted in many countries around the world today. It is our duty to pray for the persecuted church and to stand up for religious freedom wherever it is denied.

Response to these Challenges and Our Shared Beliefs

9. To what extent can Evangelicals and Catholics continue to face such challenges alone and apart from one another? What of our present situation? The participants in this consultation, appointed by the World Evangelical Alliance and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, are convinced that the urgency of the present situation makes it imperative that we as Evangelicals and Catholics speak and act together wherever we can to confront these challenges. We are called together by Christ so that the world may come to realize his presence in a world that is fractured and fragmented - a world which he loved even to the point of death and still loves (Jn 3:16; 17:20-23). One purpose of this consultation has been to explore areas of common concern. Part of discerning what we can do together has been learning more about each other’s personal faith and commitment to Christ’s Gospel and his mission to save a dying world. We have also sought to explore more deeply those issues which continue to divide us. We do so because our divided witness weakens our response to these challenges in the eyes of the world. While we recognize our enduring divisions, we can acknowledge the work that each other is doing and even consider working together in as many areas as possible.

10. We as Catholics and Evangelicals are in agreement that Christians believe: that God is triune, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three persons in one God (Gen 1:1-3; Mt 28:19; Jn 1:1; 10:30, etc.); that he created all things, both visible and invisible, by his Word (Gen 1; Jn 1:3; Col 1:16-17); that human beings brought sin into this world, and as a result, all are born sinful and in need of forgiveness and reconciliation with God (Rom 3:20-23); that the Word, the second person of the Trinity, became flesh (Jn 1:14) as our Lord and Savior, true God and true man in one person (Col 1:19); that he came to earth as both God and man to save us from our sins (Phil 2:5-11; Col 2:9), that he was born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified for our sins, died, and was buried, he descended into hell (1 Pt 3:18-19) and rose again on the third day and ascended into heaven where he sits at the right hand of the Father and will judge the living and the dead on the last day. We believe in the Holy Spirit who leads us to repentance, calls us to faith, justifies us by grace through faith, and enlightens us with the Word of God as he inspired the Apostles and prophets; therefore we believe that all Christians of any community can have a living relationship with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit which the Spirit himself enables; it is the responsibility and privilege of all Christians to proclaim the saving Gospel to all who have not repented, believed and committed their lives to Jesus Christ (2 Cor 5:18); we also believe that the Spirit calls and gathers all believers into his one, holy, catholic⁴ apostolic Church where we strengthen and build one another up in the body of Christ as we receive his gifts of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:23-34; 1 Cor 12:12; Mt 28:19; Mk 16:16; Mt 26:26-29). We look forward to the resurrection of the body and to the time when we will see God face to face and live with him forever (1 Cor 15; 1 Cor 13:12).

11. While we rejoice in holding these elements of faith in common, we also recognize that we are called to grow in understanding of those areas where there has not been full agreement, and address them directly. Two long-standing differences of great significance have been our understandings of the authority of Scripture and Tradition, and the role of the Church in salvation. There are other important areas of disagreement which we hope to address in future discussions, but due to limits of time and resources, in this text we will address only these two historically divisive issues.

12. Finally, in this introduction it is important to note that the Evangelical movement itself constitutes a highly differentiated ecumenical network. The World Evangelical Alliance brings together Evangelical Christians from Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed, Anabaptist and Pentecostal traditions, This diversity has significant consequences particularly for ecclesiology – that is, questions pertaining to ministry, authority and ecclesial structures, sacraments, and the

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⁴ The word “catholic” in the creed means “universal.”
nature of the church. These Churches differ greatly in their relationship to the Catholic Church. In view of the doctrinal issues raised in our dialogue, such differences were clearly in evidence. The challenge is made more complex when considering that the Evangelical movement has chosen not to address ecclesiological differences among the members of the WEA, but rather, to focus on cooperation in common prayer, evangelism, and witness. 5

Method of the Consultation

13. The current round of consultations has built upon the Evangelical-Roman Catholic Dialogue on Mission (1977-84), the 1993 Venice Consultation between the World Evangelical Fellowship and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, and the Church, Evangelization and the Bonds of Koinonia document (2002). The current consultation brought together 13 participants from 10 different countries on 5 continents, ensuring that many different perspectives would be given voice in our discussions.

14. The members of this consultation were given the mandate to enter into conversation representing our diverse communities, seeking greater mutual understanding, and attempting to identify the state of our relations and how they might proceed appropriately and responsibly. Over the past six years, we met in São Paulo, Brazil; Rome, Italy; Chicago, USA; Guatemala City, Guatemala; Bad Blankenburg, Germany; and Saskatoon, Canada. In all of these places we met with local Evangelicals and Catholics and heard areas of concern and examples of cooperation in each of their regions. At our meetings, we presented papers, explained our positions, argued, asked questions, prayed together (and separately) for God’s reconciling grace, gained insights - and asked more questions. We were not in the business of compromise and negotiation, but rather of respectful and frank conversation, aware that nothing other than a deep honesty, graciously articulated, would serve our communities well. When we gathered, we sought to be faithful to Jesus Christ even when we encountered disagreements. The way forward was for us firstly to map out convergences, building on previous consultations, and on the basis of our respective teachings and practices; secondly, to name aspects of the other tradition which give us encouragement, where we rejoice in seeing God at work, and where we may learn from the other; thirdly, with the help of the dialogue partner, to formulate questions to each other in a respectful and intelligent way (hence the term ‘fraternal’), thus identifying issues we were not able to resolve in this round of consultation, which still need to be addressed by our respective communities. With mutual trust and respect, we have sought to undertake this task in a way which also records the understanding we have gained, the insights which allow us to pose the questions differently than we may have done prior to the current round of consultation. With prayer and a desire to be true to our calling and our convictions, we have posed questions that are intended to stimulate further discussion between Catholics and Evangelicals that will spill over into our own respective communities where we would like to see the conversation continue. It is our fervent hope that the Holy Spirit would enable us to go deeper in our self-understanding as we learn from each other about the God who loves us all and gave himself for us.

PART 1: THE WORD OF GOD IS LIVING AND ACTIVE: EVANGELICALS AND CATHOLICS REFLECT TOGETHER ON THE SCRIPTURES AND THE APOSTOLIC TRADITION

INTRODUCTION

15. Catholics and Evangelicals have long seen ourselves as standing in opposition to each other regarding the authority of Scripture, and its relation to Tradition. From the time of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, our respective positions seemed well summarized by two radically distinct alternatives: Scripture alone or Scripture and Tradition. Churches of the Reformation, which are an important part of an Evangelical inheritance, continue to be convinced that the Bible will always be the ultimate authority in matters of faith, doctrine and practice, that the church can and has erred, and that authority is only to be sought in the Word of God. Catholics have stressed the need for and the authority of the Church’s teaching office in the interpretation of the Bible. 6

16. Meeting in our present context, five hundred years after the beginning of the Reformation era, Evangelicals and Catholics taking part in this consultation were able to discern that we have come a long way from the disputes and battle lines of the 16th century. This is not to say that we are now in or nearing full agreement, but we have come to realize that we can rejoice in the growing centrality of the Scriptures in the lives of Catholics as well as Evangelicals. We also rejoice in the convergences apparent to us in our understanding of the significance of the Apostolic Tradition and the transmission of faith through the generations. 7


6. Regarding the use of the word “Church” in this document, see paragraphs 50 and following.

7. See section 2 on the Apostolic Tradition, beginning with paragraph 29.
17. Under the headings of “Scripture,” “Apostolic Tradition,” and “Scripture and Tradition,” we begin by identifying common ground or convergences; then proceed, in light of a deeper understanding of the other, by indicating areas where each finds encouraging developments within the ecclesial life of the other; then by posing, in a friendly but direct way, remaining questions that challenge the other community to articulate the theological foundations of its convictions in order to search for common ground.

1. The Scriptures

A. Our Common Ground

18. Through discussion, and a study of our respective documents, Evangelicals and Catholics have come to find much common ground regarding the revelation of God and the place of the Scriptures in the Church. We as Evangelicals and Catholics firmly believe that God has spoken to humanity, revealing his divine self - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - to us, and also revealing God’s will for the human race. Together, we believe that the fullness of revelation is found in Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man, the eternal Word made flesh. In Jesus, the innermost truth about God is revealed. Through his words and deeds, his miracles and teaching, and above all in his death for our sins and his resurrection he has freed us from sin and has brought redemption, has shown us the face of God, and has taught us what it is to be human.

19. After Jesus’ resurrection and ascension to the Father, the Holy Spirit descended upon the community of his disciples, who went forth proclaiming what they had received from and witnessed in Jesus. This proclamation was faithfully recorded in the books which eventually comprised the New Testament. Jesus himself had understood the Old Testament to be the written Word of God, revealed to the chosen people of Israel (Jn 5:39). By his authority, the Christian Church from its very beginning accepted the Old Testament (eventually alongside the New Testament) as the only written Word of God.9 The Bible is the written Word of God in an altogether singular way (2 Tim 3:16).

20. Catholics and Evangelicals rejoice in affirming together that the Scriptures are the highest authority in matters of faith and practice (2 Pet 1:20-21).9 The purpose of the Scriptures, consistent with the purpose of God’s revelation, is to lead people into faith in Christ, who is “the way, the truth and the life” (Jn 14:6). Christians approach the Scriptures mindful of their internal coherence as the speech of God, and that they are to be read in light of the fullness of God’s revelation in Christ. We hold that the books of both the Old and New Testaments in their entirety were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. God uses human authors with human language to communicate his Word through the sacred texts of Scripture. It follows that the Scriptures teach solidly, faithfully, without error and efficaciously leading us into all truth. We agree that we know Christ through the Scriptures with the help of the Holy Spirit, and hold the authenticity and historicity of what the Gospels record of the life, teaching and deeds, death and resurrection of Jesus. We await no further public revelation before the glorious coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (Heb 1:1-2).

21. The Bible has a central role in all Christian ministry and in the worship and life of the Church. The use of the Scriptures in worship and teaching was essential to the shaping of the canon. In the first centuries, the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, recognized and received from among many writings these 27 books as the canon of the New Testament. Although Evangelicals and Catholics have different views of the extent of the Old Testament canon that has been recognized, we can nonetheless agree that the Old Testament Scriptures testify to the promise of the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ (Lk 24:27; Jn 5:39). These Scriptures are authoritative for the Church.

22. Evangelicals and Catholics are in agreement that prayer should accompany the reading and study of the Scriptures and that the Holy Spirit can and will lead us into all truth (Jn 16:13). We also agree that the written Word of God is foundational to theology and catechesis. As the Church Father Jerome said, “ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of God.”10 Finally, Catholics and Evangelicals believe that we are called to shape our lives in all their dimensions according to the Scriptures. We firmly believe that the closer we come to Christ, the closer we come to one another; so too, the more we attend to the Scriptures and live by them, the closer we draw to God and to one another, as individuals and as communities.

B. Words of Encouragement to Each Other

23. As Catholics, we are encouraged by …

- The Evangelicals’ faithfulness to the great commission, their engagement in proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ and their zeal for evangelizing;

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8. As stated in Lausanne Movement, Cape Town Commitment, 2010. Part 1.6: “We affirm that the Bible is the final written word of God, not surpassed by any further revelation, but we also rejoice that the Holy Spirit illumines the minds of God’s people so that the Bible continues to speak God’s truth in fresh ways to people in every culture.”


• The Evangelical commitment to a morality and ethics based on the Scriptures, and to a moral life lived according to the Scriptures;
• The place of Scripture in the devotional and theological life of Evangelicals;
• The recognition that Scripture needs to be read in community;
• The move among some Evangelicals towards reading Patristic interpretations of Scriptures (such as that found in the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture or The Church’s Bible);
• Finally, the role the Bible has in shaping community among Evangelicals.

24. As Evangelicals, we are encouraged by …

• The stronger witness to the Word of God in the Catholic Church of today. We rejoice in the renewed emphasis on Scripture as the foundation for faith and practice as found, for instance, in parts of Vatican II’s Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum (1965) and in the Apostolic Exhortation from Benedict XVI, Verbum Domini (2010);
• Seeing that the Scriptures are considered as “the highest authority in matters of faith” (Ut Unum Sint 79) in the Catholic Church;
• The fact that Catholics see the written Word of God as authoritative and as the standard and foundation for all matters of faith and life;
• Finally, the Catholic Church’s efforts with regard to the translation and distribution of the Scriptures among both clergy and laity and the further pastoral encouragement to not only have the Scriptures but to read and study them.

C. Fraternal Questions of Concern

25. As Catholics, we believe along with Evangelicals that the Scriptures are the normative account of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. With you, we believe that Jesus Christ is the definitive Word spoken by God. Catholics are also encouraged by the Evangelical acknowledgement of the oral tradition (Kerygma, Viva vox evangelii, the preached Word of God) preceding the written New Testament. Nonetheless, we would like to ask:

• Whether the Evangelicals’ equation at times of the Word of God with the Sacred Scripture adequately takes into consideration the Incarnation of the Word as a person rather than as a text?
• Does the principle of sola Scriptura and its identification of the Word with Scripture, with seemingly no reference to Tradition, unduly limit our receiving of God’s revelation?
• Does the Evangelical stance on Scripture alone sufficiently account for the ongoing value and work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church in preserving her doctrine and teaching, especially in the articulation and development of the Tradition?
• We observe diverse interpretations of the Scriptures even among well-intentioned Christians. If the sense of the Sacred Scripture were plainly evident, as Evangelicals maintain, would it not be easier than it is to maintain unity among Christians?

26. Nonetheless, we are grateful that Evangelicals take the Scriptures and the challenges they present to us seriously in forming our understanding of who God is and how God works in the world, and have avoided relativizing the Scriptural message in addressing the modern world.

27. As Evangelicals, rejoicing in the growing role that Scripture has taken in the life of the Catholic Church, we would nonetheless like to ask Catholics …

• We both agree that the holy Scriptures are the inspired Word of God and, therefore, are the true, unchangeable revelation of God. However, we continue to struggle with how, according to Vatican II’s Dei Verbum 9, “both sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence” – a basic restatement of the fourth session of the Council of Trent (1546). How are these positions compatible?
• Regarding the inerrancy of the Scriptures in Dei Verbum 11, with which we joyfully concur, we would like clarification on the implications of this stance on inerrancy and what it means in relationship to the challenges that the modern historical-critical method poses and which a number of interpreters within the contemporary Catholic Church seem to favor;
• How their understanding that the Bible is the supreme authority for faith and doctrine can be reconciled with the most recent dogmatic pronouncements since the 19th century (for instance, the 1854 dogma of the Immaculate Conception, or the 1950 dogma of the bodily assumption of Mary) which seem to us as Evangelicals to have little, if any, clear explicit Biblical support;
• And finally, we would like to ask Catholics about the authority given to Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical books of the Old Testament in the formation of doctrine when it seems that many in the ancient church distinguished the Apocryphal books from the canonical books as not being authoritative in matters of doctrine or practice.

28. None of these questions should take away from the fact that we are truly grateful for the stronger witness that Catholics have shown in their defense of Scriptural truth and our united appeal to the authority of Scripture in matters of faith and life. The fact that Scripture has become a growing focus in Catholic piety and church life is extremely encouraging to us as Evangelicals.
2. Apostolic Tradition

A. Our Common Ground

29. Catholics and Evangelicals, while looking back to the history of the spreading of the Gospel, recognize and rejoice in the action of the Holy Spirit in the mission of the church, evangelizing people and transforming cultures. The Holy Spirit has a history. We have witnessed that the Holy Spirit has never ceased to act in history by giving birth to true believers and summoning us to remain faithful to the revealed truth, “No one can say that ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3). Therefore, we listen to what our predecessors in faith have received from God, how they have understood the Scriptures, and how they have lived the Christian life (Heb 11).

30. Paul says, “what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2). This passing on of the faith is a dynamic process that continues in the life of the church at different times and places, with constant reference to the Scriptures, which remain the highest authority in matters of faith and life (cf. Ut Unum Sint 79). Catholics and Evangelicals believe that the revealed Word of God to which the apostolic church once and for all bore witness in the Scriptures is received and communicated through the ongoing life of the whole Christian community. As a church, led by the Spirit, generation after generation we pass on the apostolic witness that we have received from our forebears and teachers in the faith.

31. This Consultation has been able to affirm the above as valued and appreciated by Evangelicals and Catholics alike. We have defined “tradition” differently, but we have all done so with reference to this dynamic process of passing on the apostolic faith in time. In this context, it is important to look back to the period of the Reformation. The Reformers were seeking to deal with traditions and practices that had arisen in the church that they believed not only had no Scriptural warrant but were in contradiction to Scripture. They were not seeking to jettison tradition altogether. Luther, and to a certain extent, Calvin, had a critical, but overall favorable view of the tradition. They saw much value in the creeds and the confessions of the church and often appealed to the ancient church as an authority for their interpretation of Scripture. All of these fell within the purview of their understanding of tradition.

32. In our contemporary context, there is a shared sense of the post-modern critique of individualism by both Evangelicals and Catholics that realizes and recognizes the importance of community in strengthening and supporting the individual members of the body of Christ. Both Evangelicals and Catholics understand that the individual in concert with the whole community throughout space and time – past, present and future – are important components for supporting the body of Christ and remaining in the faith that has been passed on from generation to generation through the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit.

33. Evangelicals and Catholics both can have a critical appreciation of the contributions the Church Fathers have made to the Christian faith, even as we continue to grow in our understanding of tradition’s role in the subsequent articulation of the faith of the Apostolic community. Further exploration is needed into the role of the historic liturgy in explicating and internalizing Scripture, and aspects of the sacramental life of the church which have had such an enduring history; these are also areas where there is much more we can learn from one another.

34. While giving thanks for some common ground in this dialogue, we need to note that Evangelicals and Catholics also have significant differences in their understanding of tradition and that these remain matters for further discussion.

35. The Catholic Church makes a key distinction when it treats the subject of tradition. In its primary sense, Tradition is the living transmission of what the apostles, empowered by the Holy Spirit, learned and handed down to us from Jesus’ teaching and life. This “is to be distinguished from the various theological, disciplinary, liturgical or devotional traditions, born in the local churches over time ... (and) adapted to different places and times, in which the great Tradition is expressed. In the light of Tradition, these traditions can be retained, modified or even abandoned” under the guidance of the Church’s teaching office,12 which “is not above the Word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on” (Dei Verbum 10).

36. Evangelicals remain uncomfortable with any concept of tradition that could possibly elevate tradition above Scripture. Catholics would agree. However, how this works out in our different communities continues to be a point of contention. Nonetheless, we all want to affirm an openness to tradition that does not contradict Scripture.

11. The Reformers confessed the three ecumenical Creeds, Melanchthon and Luther often quoted the Church Fathers, including many citations of them in the Lutheran Book of Concord, which later included a Catalog of Testimonies compiled by Jakob Andreae and Martin Chemnitz; for Calvin’s use of the Church Fathers, see also Anthony Lane’s John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers (New York: Continuum International Publishing, 1991).

B. Words of Encouragement to Each Other

37. As Evangelicals, we are encouraged by and have benefited from...

- The fact that the Catholic Church has fostered the **ressourcement** movement in a recovery of the full patristic tradition for the whole church;
- The Catholic Church’s commitment to upholding the historic deposit of faith (depositum Fidei) - the unchanging truth of the Christian faith (Jude 3; 1 Tim 6:20; 2 Tim 1:13-14) – in the face of the challenges that modern secularism and its philosophical values pose;
- The fact that Reformation emphases, such as the centrality of the Word and the importance of preaching in worship, are considered and recognized as part of the rich tradition of the whole church.

38. As Catholics, we are encouraged by and have benefited from...

- The increasing Evangelical recognition of the continuous action of the Holy Spirit in the 2,000 year history of the church;
- The Evangelical engagement with patristic writings and other sources of the Church of the first centuries (ad fontes) by some Evangelical scholars and their communities;
- Seeing among some Evangelicals an understanding of the differentiation between Apostolic Tradition and local traditions.

C. Fraternal Questions of Concern

39. As Evangelicals, we have learned the reasons for some aspects of Catholic popular piety that may have positive benefit. We have also been pleased to hear that in many instances Catholics have sought to address some of the excesses in their piety. We would nonetheless like to discern from Catholics...

- Whether there is a critical principle that Catholics use to address what Evangelicals view as extra-biblical teachings that form the basis for certain aspects of Catholic Tradition, for example, the doctrines of purgatory and indulgences, and the dogma of the Immaculate Conception?
- How do you ensure that the development of doctrine and the appearance of new traditions remain faithful to the teaching of the whole of Scripture if some doctrines and traditions seem to be attested more from an implicit Scriptural attestation rather than an explicit Scriptural witness?
- Mindful that Evangelical piety has its own share of questions concerning our own practices, Evangelicals nonetheless would like to ask Catholics how they deal with a piety that often seems to be shaped more by tradition(s) than by Scripture (for example, Marian piety and the cult of the saints)?

40. Again, these questions should not detract from what we can say and do together as we rejoice in the faith once received and passed on throughout all generations under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who has promised to lead us into all truth (Jn 16:13).

41. As Catholics, we have come to a new appreciation of how Evangelicals increasingly speak of the work of the Holy Spirit in the history of the Church, and how some Evangelicals are turning to the Church Fathers. But we would ask:

- How does the evaluation of whether to accept or reject what the Church Fathers have to say occur? For example, in addition to Baptism and Eucharist, why are what Catholics refer to as other sacraments a challenge for Evangelicals to accept when the church in the first centuries accepted them as such (and some of them have explicit Scriptural warrant, for instance, forgiveness of sins, Jn 20:23 and Mt 16:19, and the sacrament of the sick, James 5:14-15)?
- Is the tendency to rediscover the Church Fathers a Global North development, or is this trend shared by Evangelicals in the Global South? In what sense is the teaching of the Church Fathers affecting the life of the Church?
- We have been made aware through our consultation that the World Evangelical Alliance brings together Christian communities with a common statement of faith, but also with great diversity, including diverging understandings of tradition. There are those who see tradition as of minimal importance to the present and future life of the church and those who are increasingly attentive to tradition. What are the values at stake in this process? Given your vision of unity and the diversity among Evangelicals, how do you discern whether the unity you uphold is a sufficient response to the summons to unity in the New Testament (Jn 17:20-21; 1 Cor 1:10)?

42. Even as we ask these questions of brotherly concern, seeking further clarification, we rejoice in the faithful witness we have seen among Evangelicals to the unchanging truth of the Gospel.

3. Scripture and Tradition

A. Our Common Ground

43. There has been mutual suspicion and distrust, and perhaps a bit of caricature of one another’s views...
regarding Scripture and tradition and the relationship between the two. Behind such criticism and distrust lie not only misrepresentations and misinterpretations but also real differences in doctrine and practice that have divided us and continue to prevent us from testifying to our unity in faith (Jn 17:11). As Evangelicals and Catholics, we seek to live as disciples of Jesus and come together in the task of mutual conversation, consolation, and the search for reconciliation. Our goal is to come to a clearer understanding of the truth of God’s Word even as we acknowledge the need to be taught by our mutual, as well as our separated pasts. The words of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI, remind us, however, that “our quarrelling ancestors were in reality much closer to each other when in all their disputes they still knew that they could only be servants of one truth which must be acknowledged as being as great and as pure as it has been intended for us by God.”

44. There is a realization among both Evangelicals and Catholics that Scripture need not necessarily be pitted over against tradition or over against the Church, nor need tradition and church teaching be opposed to Scripture. Both Evangelicals and Catholics have seen progress in moving beyond the disputes of the 16th century with the Reformers and Trent, even while acknowledging the continuing validity of many of their critical insights. In the context of conversations with other worldwide communions deriving from the Reformation, the Catholic Church has gained insights and come to a greater appreciation of the Reformers. These dialogues have made significant progress in articulating a shared understanding of the relationship between Scripture and tradition. There is a noticeable return among many Evangelicals to the sources (ad fontes), which includes reading the ancient Christian writers, gaining a new appreciation for the Creeds of the church, and becoming reacquainted with their Christian past before the 16th century. In an increasing number of Evangelical circles at the beginning of the 21st century, the tradition and insights of the Fathers, as well as those who came after, are being appealed to in aiding Biblical interpretation and doctrinal exegesis, albeit with a critical eye, something Catholics also would affirm. Evangelicals would stop short of saying that the interpretation of the Fathers is authoritative, but have also begun to realize that they ignore the interpretation of the Fathers to their own peril. The Fathers knew their Bibles better than most of us. They are our teachers in the faith, teachers who have years if not, cumulatively, centuries of experience. We can also learn much from their doctrinal treatises which were, more often than not, simply focused exegesis that took into account the whole of Scripture in explicating a particular doctrine. We have together identified what might be called an interweaving and interconnection between Scripture and tradition. Tradition can serve as an important touchstone for the interpretation of Scripture and its explication of doctrine, even as Evangelicals remain committed to sola scriptura.

B. Words of Encouragement to Each Other

45. As Evangelicals, we are encouraged by ...
- The movement we perceive occurring with many - both laity and clergy - in the Catholic Church who see the increasing importance of Scriptural study in their worship and devotional lives;
- The insistence of Catholics on the importance of the community of the church in our encounter with Scripture, while still recognizing the importance of individual conscience, personal conversion and the value of our own Evangelical sense of a deepening personal relationship with Jesus Christ;
- The discerning eye of the Catholic reading of the Church Fathers, in whom there is much wisdom to be found, notably in their exegesis of Scripture. They are our common teachers, but Scripture is the authoritative text.

46. As Catholics, we are encouraged by ...
- The Evangelical reading of the Church Fathers and the recognition by them of the reverence the Fathers held for the Sacred Scripture; the growing Evangelical recognition of the importance of the patristic interpretation in engaging Sacred Scripture;
- The value of fraternal correction by prominent Evangelical leaders as a “sort of authority” in the Evangelical world;
- The keeping of a sensus fidelium among those in the Evangelical movement witnessing to a continuity of the Biblical witness;
- A growing attentiveness among Evangelicals regarding the importance of community particularly in strengthening the individual members within the context of the Christian community.

C. Fraternal Questions of Concern

47. Evangelicals realize in light of all these encouraging signs and the convergences we have found, there is much to celebrate. And yet questions still remain that must be addressed. We would still like to ask Catholics …

- How the statement that “the relationship between Sacred Scripture, as the highest authority in

17. Another term that has been used is ‘coherence.’ See Evangelicals and Catholics Together, Your Word is Truth (2002) for further explanation.
matters of faith, and Sacred Tradition, as indispensable to the interpretation of the Word of God” (Ut Unum Sint 79) can be reconciled with the statement of Dei Verbum that “both Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of devotion and reverence” (Dei Verbum 9), the latter of which to us seems to put Scripture and Tradition on the same level?

- In light of new relationships developing between Evangelicals and Catholics, how the principle of Sola Scriptura has been received and incorporated into the life of contemporary Catholics and Catholic theology?
- Recognizing our own sinfulness and need for correction, Evangelicals would further like to ask Catholics if the Church can recognize mistakes in its tradition expressed in its devotional piety, in light of human fallibility, and if so, could those mistakes be corrected in the light of Scripture?
- Since Paul exhorts us “not to go beyond what is written” (1 Cor 4:6) and even the people of Berea in Acts 17:11 examined the Scriptures to see if everything the Apostles said was true, how therefore would Catholics reconcile this with papal infallibility?
- Understanding that on the one hand Christ has promised that his Holy Spirit would lead his church “into all truth” (Jn 16:13), but on the other hand that Scripture itself declares that “all Scripture is inspired by God” (2 Tim 3:16), Evangelicals would want to ask Catholics if the guidance of the Holy Spirit works in the same way in the subsequent life of tradition as it does in Scriptural inspiration of the written text?
- Is there a sense of what Evangelicals call Ecclesia semper reformanda (the church always reforming) in the Catholic Church today?
- In light of the Catholic stance on Scripture and Tradition, how do Catholics deal with clergy and lay members, nuns and professors at Universities, for instance, who disagree with Scripture and the Church? What is the process for dissent and is it followed?

48. Catholics also realize the helpful convergence that is developing between Evangelicals and Catholics in the mutual affirmation of the authoritative nature of Scripture and an increasing appreciation of tradition. We still wish to ask Evangelicals the following questions:

- We see the strong Evangelical practice of using Scripture to interpret Scripture, working with an understanding of the internal coherence of the biblical message. We also appreciate your understanding that the Scriptures are read in the context of the Christian community while stressing the role of the Holy Spirit in the reading and interpretation of Scripture. Yet we note that among Evangelicals, just as among Catholics, differing and sometimes conflicting interpretations of the Scriptures arise. Without reference to a magisterium, how do Evangelicals maintain unity and guard against internal conflict in their interpretation of Sacred Scripture? What role does tradition play in the interpretation of Scripture? Faced with differing interpretations of Scripture, what is the methodology for discernment and discipline within the Church?
- Evangelicals have maintained a strong traditional morality, for which we are grateful. We nonetheless want to ask how you guard against moral relativism when it arises in the teaching of individual pastors or lay people?
- Given that Evangelicals believe that the Holy Spirit is active in history and that the Spirit leads us to unity, where do you see the Spirit at work in the Reformation period which brought about division in the Church? Is the Holy Spirit active solely in the Reformers and their communities or also in the Catholic Church of that period? How are the 16th century Reformers viewed by Evangelicals today, and what role do their teachings play in the life of Evangelicals? How do communities formed after the Reformation period link themselves to the Reformation?
- Liturgical renewal has been a pronounced feature of ecclesial life over the past century. We see a diversity of liturgical and spiritual practices within Evangelical worship and devotional life, at times drawing on practices that derive from the early church. Could Evangelicals look to the sacramental and liturgical forms expressed in the period of the Church Fathers as an expression of the Word of God in the life of the Church? If so, how might this affect doctrine and practice?

49. Rejoicing in the saving message of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, who died for sinners to bring them forgiveness and life, Catholics and Evangelicals together affirm that Scripture is the authoritative rule and norm for faith and life. Jesus Christ, the Word through whom God has revealed himself, speaks through and in his Word to a world in urgent need of the Gospel. God has also given his church his Holy Spirit is active in history and that the Spirit leads us to unity, where do you see the Spirit at work in the Reformation period which brought about division in the Church? Is the Holy Spirit active solely in the Reformers and their communities or also in the Catholic Church of that period? How are the 16th century Reformers viewed by Evangelicals today, and what role do their teachings play in the life of Evangelicals? How do communities formed after the Reformation period link themselves to the Reformation?
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A. Our Common Ground

50. Christ’s redeeming death and resurrection took place once and for all in history. Christ’s death on the cross, the culmination of his whole life of obedience, was the one, perfect and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the world. There can be no repetition of or addition to what was then accomplished once for all by Christ. The gift of salvation is freely given, freely received (Rom 3:24; 1 Cor 2:12). For Catholics and Evangelicals alike, the question of salvation in Jesus Christ is of supreme importance; it plays a defining role in our lives of faith and in the shaping of our theologies. Salvation is a free gift of God (Eph 2:8-9). It does not come simply by being born of a Christian family, not even by being a formal member of a Christian church; it is God’s gracious initiative. “Salvation belongs to the Lord” (Ps 3:8). Salvation denotes God’s total plan and desire for humanity and responds to the fundamental human need for redemption. Acts of the Apostles assures us that this salvation comes to us through Jesus, and that “there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

51. Wherever two or three come together in that name, Christ is there (Mt 18:20). The Scriptures tell us that from the very beginning the Church was part of God’s plan of salvation (Eph 1: 4-10, 22-23). Beginning with Adam and Eve and extending throughout the covenant history recorded in Scripture, God has formed for himself a people, Israel, who are called out (ekklesia) from the world into a community that is then sent back out to be a light to the nations (Is 60:3). The fullness of this community is found in Christ the Word Incarnate, Israel reduced to One, who came to earth to redeem his people by saving them from their sins through his suffering, death on the cross, and his resurrection to life. God made known to the world this plan of salvation in his Son (Jn 3: 16) who has brought forth a new covenant people (Jer 31:31-34; Rom 9) in the community of His Church. He tells us that he himself will build this Church and that the gates of hell will not prevail against it (Mt 16:18). Christ tells us later how he provides for his Church in Matthew 18:15-20 and John 20:23 by ensuring that the forgiveness of sins that he won for us and for our salvation is and always will be central to the purpose and message of the church. He has given the gift of ministers to his Church (1 Cor 12: 28; Eph 4: 11-13) who are then called to be stewards of the mysteries and servants of God’s people (1 Cor 4:1). The primary task to which Christ has called the Church, its ministers, and people is to go and make disciples, baptizing and teaching all that Christ has commanded us (Mt 28:19-20). He gave the promised Holy Spirit to his Church at Pentecost to empower the Church in its mission. As such, the Church is evangelized by God, but it also evangelizes for God. The disciples who are created by this work of God the Holy Spirit are then cultivated and grow in their faith as a community of believers (Acts 2:42-47) whose faith and trust is in the One who has saved them. The Spirit flourishes in this community, which Christ has called his Church, enlivening it with his gifts (Acts 2:1-4; 1 Cor 12; Rom 8:10-11) to witness to the world the love of God while also strengthening and building another up in the body of Christ (1 Thes 5:11).

52. The Apostle Paul provides two primary metaphors (there are others) which describe this community. 1 Corinthians 12 describes the Church as the body of Christ with Christ himself as the head. Apart from the head, there is no body, just as there are no branches without a vine (Jn 15). Salvation comes by being grafted on to the body of Christ through the work of the Spirit since no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12: 3) and a branch cut off from the vine will wither and die (Jn 15:1-6). As Jesus said, apart from him we can do nothing (Jn 15:5). The body cannot exist apart from the Spirit, nor can it exist apart from the head which is Christ. But with the head and the Spirit there is indeed a body, a communion of forgiven saints who, animated by the Spirit, produce works which God prepared in advance for us to do, not to merit salvation but to give glory to him (Eph 2:10) and to draw still others to his body, the Church (Mt 5:16; 28:19-20).

53. A second metaphor for the Church related to that of the body is what Paul presents in Ephesians 5. There he presents the imagery of the Church as the bride of Christ, with Christ, again “as the head of the Church, his body, of which he is the Savior ... who loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (Eph 5:23, 25-27). In this metaphor, we see the sacrificial giving of the Bridegroom’s very life in order to present the bride as his own by virtue of giving his own flesh on the cross. Through his sacrifice of himself, Christ has cleansed his bride, presenting her pure and undefiled, so that he also may take her to be his own to live with him in holiness and righteousness. The Church is not the one who sacrificed, nor is it the one who cleanses. Rather it is the Bridegroom who sacrifices himself for his bride and cleanses her, he is the one who feeds and cares for

18. Neither Catholics nor Evangelicals hold to the idea that Christ is re-sacrificed in the Eucharist by the presiding priest.
her, i.e., for the members of his body (Eph 5:29-30). The bride, the Church, is in this sense joined to and submits to her Beloved; as such, she does what he himself has given her to do, promising that he will be with her until the very end of the age (Mt 28:19-20).

54. The Church, then, is God’s gift to the world. While not all Evangelicals agree that the Creeds are authoritative, Catholics and Evangelicals can affirm that in the Creeds we found an expression of core Biblical teaching in many areas of doctrine, including the Church. After professing the Christian faith in God the Father and his work, in our Lord Jesus Christ and his life, and in the Holy Spirit and his sanctification of believers, we say that we believe “in one, holy, catholic and apostolic church”. Christians profess faith in the Church which exhibits the marks of unity, holiness, catholicity and adherence to the apostolic faith and teaching. But we do not believe in the Church in the same way that we believe in the divine persons of the Trinity confessed earlier in the Creed.20 When we say “we believe in God the Father. .. in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God ... and in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life,” we profess our faith in the work of salvation of the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit. We put our confidence and faith in our triune God. We trust him and commit ourselves totally to him, our rock and our salvation. Our faith is in God alone, our salvation comes from him (Ps 62:2). The Church and its ministers are in service to this salvation wherever the marks of the true Church are found. The pure preaching of the Gospel and the right use of the sacraments/ordinances which Christ commanded his Church to observe (Mt 28:19; Mk 16:15-16; Lk 22:19-20; 1 Cor 11:23-25) are life-giving gifts for the nurturing and feeding of his flock.21

55. The Church is in service to the Gospel, as Paul says, because when Christ has reconciled us to himself he has also given to us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:19). The world will not hear this message of reconciliation apart from the Church, her ministers, and her people, who are to proclaim this message so that people may hear it (Rom 10:14-17; Mt 28:19-20).

But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?” (Rom 10:14 NRSV). Therefore, the Church has the obligation and privilege to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ. The Church, as the body of Christ, is the usual place where the offer of salvation is heard and extended. By the power of the Holy Spirit, she proclaims Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, with a view to persuading people to repent and come to him personally and so be reconciled to God and become part of his community of faith (Mt 4:17). Salvation presupposes a conversion, a turning to God, and regeneration as we receive God’s grace, resulting in a reorientation of life according to the new life revealed in Jesus Christ. For many if not most Evangelicals, baptism is the primary means by which God incorporates people into his Church (Mt 28:19). Once in the Church, it is expected that members of Christ’s body will live out their Christian life in faithful service to him and one another.

B. Words of Encouragement to Each Other

56. As Evangelicals we are encouraged by:

- The seriousness shown by Catholics in upholding the Apostles’ Creed especially as it speaks of the glorious reality of the Triune God and his gracious work that brings about “the remission of sins”;
- The renewed emphasis in Catholic teaching on the biblical metaphors of the church as they also relate to salvation (e.g. the people of God, the body of Christ, the temple of the Spirit), the diminished role of past understandings of the church that seemed to exclude other Christians from the possibility of salvation (e.g. societas perfecta, ark of salvation); and the view that “separated churches and ecclesial communities” are used by Christ as a means of salvation;
- The more recent focus of the church and her ministers on the ministry and preaching of the Word as an increasingly important aspect of Christian faith and life both corporately and individually;
- The communal dimension of salvation we see evidenced over against individualistic tendencies which have characterized some trends in Protestantism;
- The insistence on the centrality of conversion, the many Catholic initiatives to take the Gospel of salvation to the whole world, as well as the more recent emphasis on a personal encounter with Jesus Christ for salvation.

57. As Catholics, we are encouraged by …

- The Evangelical trust and confidence in what God has done for us in Jesus Christ and the continuous loyalty of Evangelicals to the biblical teaching regarding God’s promise of salvation as a matter of primary importance;
• The recognition that the strong Evangelical focus on the saving character of Christ’s death is coupled with an equally strong focus on his resurrection from the dead and the hope which comes from it;
• The Evangelical conviction that there is no such a thing as a completely private Christianity; in other words, their understanding of salvation as relational, linking conversion and regeneration by water and the Word, leading to new life in Christ; and the conviction that conversion to Jesus Christ necessarily entails incorporation into the Church;
• The Evangelical conviction that salvation is not reducible to such things as formal church membership, but summons forth an active life of discipleship;
• The Evangelical understanding that Christian faith leads to a strong commitment to evangelization and mission for the sake of the salvation of all.

C. Fraternal Comments and Questions of Concern

58. As foregrounding for our questions, we as Evangelicals would like to, first of all, make the following observation. We have noted and appreciated the Catholic emphasis in our discussions on the love and mercy of God when dealing with the question of the assurance of salvation. We can see that Catholics are convinced of both the love of God and the mercy of God, as well as the fact that God takes sin seriously. Therefore, when Catholics are asked about whether they can be sure of salvation, they will respond in hope and trust but also with what appears to Evangelicals as uncertainty. The uncertainty stems from the fact, they tell us, of being confronted by almighty God who is transcendent and holy but also all merciful, and yet still before whom we are unworthy because of our sin; this is the cause for the Catholic reticence about language of assurance of salvation, whereas Evangelicals speak of their confidence in being saved. But Evangelicals have come to realize that when Catholics speak of hope, they do so in the context of Romans 5:1-5 and 8:24-25 where it speaks of a hope that does not disappoint which is grounded in Christ. We also understand that Catholics are also concerned that the doctrine of the assurance of salvation of which Evangelicals speak can be misused to imply that those who do not express such assurance do not have faith, which is indeed what some Evangelicals often mean to say.

59. As Evangelicals, we appreciate the insight into the mercy of God and the humility that Catholics express in the face of the holiness of God. We understand that they do not feel it is their place to speak for God in saying that they can be sure of their own personal salvation: they would consider this as presuming on God. When Catholics are asked whether they are saved, they often will say “I hope,” or “I trust.” As Evangelicals, we have come to realize through our discussion that when Catholics say they hope they are saved, they are not necessarily saying “I hope I can do something to please God” or “I hope I’m good enough,” but they may well be saying that they trust that God is love and that God is faithful, and they are putting their hope in that love and faithfulness which is beyond anything they or we deserve. This love is revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And they hope for salvation, then, because they have experienced the mercy of God through the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives, and trust in his promise. To say, however, that they are saved as an accomplished fact, we understand, would be perceived as presumption on their part and is not in line with Catholic teaching.

60. Evangelicals would still like to ask Catholics, however:

• What practical hope and comfort can you give to those with troubled consciences or those who have fear concerning their eternal destiny, if they can only offer hope (Abraham’s “hope against hope”, Rom 4:18)? Can Catholics live with the hope of the promise without the assurance of the fulfillment? What makes Catholics hesitate or doubt when we have the clear promises in Scripture that forgiveness is ours in Christ Jesus and that Christ himself wills our salvation (see Gen 3:15; Ex 15:2-3; Ps 62:2-3, 6–9; Is 53:3-12; Jn 3:16, 10:27-30; Rom 8:1-5, 26-39; 2 Cor 5:17-21; Eph 1:14,2:8-10; 1 Thess 5:9-11; 1 Tim 2:4; as well as many others)?
• In the Second Vatican Council, you speak of the possibility of God offering salvation even to those who have not received the Gospel (Lumen Gentium 16) and that this belief is grounded in God’s mercy. We Evangelicals have come to appreciate through our discussions the fact that you want to emphasize the mercy and love of God and that this view is grounded in the confidence you have that God loves all and wants all to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4). The fact that Scripture does say that God is love (1 Jn 4:8), that God will be all in all (Eph 1:23), and every knee will bow in heaven and earth and under the earth (Phil 2:10-11) do emphasize the mercy of God, which we would also want to emphasize. And yet we still wonder if saying something on which Scripture has not spoken, i.e., the view that even those who have not received the Gospel can be saved, could still be misconstrued by some Catholics to lead to the conclusion that there is no need to evangelize (Mt 28:19-20)?
• From the Evangelical point of view, Christ’s forgiveness, in view of the Last Judgement and beyond, not only does away with sin as enmity against God but also all the consequences of sin. There is no further need for cleansing after death because that cleansing has occurred by Christ on the cross which we appropriate by faith. In our discussions, when Evangelicals heard Catholics speak of purgatory, we
heard you speak about the transforming work of God’s mercy that you believe goes on even after death, where the purging of the effects of sin still needs to occur before one approaches the throne of God. While we understand that you do not see this purging as meritorious, we still would like to ask on the one hand where this can be found in Scripture, but also why purgatory is still needed if Christ has redeemed us completely in both soul and body? In this connection, we would also like to ask: If you truly believe in an all merciful and loving God who redeems us in Christ and that it is not by your merits that you are saved and salvation is given why do you continue to use the language of the treasury of merit, satisfaction, and indulgences?

· As far as churches which baptize infants, we require preparation for baptism. We Evangelicals understand that Catholics too require preparation for baptism and spiritual formation for the parents of the children, which is very important. But we also understand that the family many times does not appear in church after the Baptism which seems to make Baptism simply into a work that is performed. We would like to ask what follow-up occurs when an infant is baptized? Is the impression given that Baptism is just simply a work that needs to be performed? We were glad to hear that there is an emphasis on catechesis which needs to occur with the baptismal family, but what is the role of discipleship in relation to Baptism? Is the Church doing enough after the child is baptized to ensure disciples are being made? What is the role of the clergy in this as well as the larger Church community?

· We have come to understand in our discussions that the sacraments play a central role in salvation, especially Baptism and the celebration of the Eucharist. We also have discerned that the efficacy of the sacraments in the Catholic Church is largely bound and tied together with the sacraments of ordination and more specifically episcopal ordination. On the one hand, we are grateful to hear you saying that our sacramental acts do accomplish something, although you are unclear what that something is. We also want to reaffirm that we know you do recognize our baptisms as valid and do not require a rebaptism. Nonetheless, because you tie the efficacy and benefit of the sacraments to the episcopal orders we still need to ask: Does not the way that your church restricts the full benefit of church acts to the ordained clergy of the Catholic Church still end up devaluing and ultimately calling into question what, if any, benefit occurs for the salvation of members in Evangelical churches? In other words, if the sacraments are central to the life of the church, but the sacraments of Evangelical churches (at least those which have them) do not accomplish as much in our churches as they do in Catholic churches, does not that end up saying that our ministry is less effective than the ministry which occurs in the Catholic Church? This also becomes a key issue with regard to assurance. Can Evangelicals who confess their sins and receives forgiveness from their pastor - or from a fellow Christian in those without ordained clergy - know for sure that their sins are forgiven?

61. As foregrounding to our questions, we as Catholics would note that our conversations have brought us much clarity into the Evangelical understanding of the assurance of salvation. As Catholics, we had thought that when you spoke of having been saved, you were saying that there was nothing further to be done; that you had a “once saved always saved” mentality; and that you believed that you could then do whatever you wished and it wouldn’t affect your salvation. We have now come to understand that this moment of assurance of salvation is a decisive point to be followed by turning back to Christ day by day, trusting in him only and referring daily to what God has done for you by his grace. We have been grateful to learn that you stress the need to be diligent in daily living your faithfulness to Christ through repentance and faith.

62. We have also learned that Evangelicals distinguish between certainty and security. In terms of a morally rational self-awareness of Christians, there may never be a certainty of salvation in the formal sense, but a certainty which gives peace with God to the conscience burdened with temptations. This happens when with faith you boldly appeal to God’s promise in his Word in the face of your own weakness and temptation. We had heard in your claim of assurance or certainty a presumption, perhaps even an arrogance, in the self-referential claim that “you have decided” to follow Jesus and were thus saved. Now we hear your focus on the promise of God, and your trust in that promise, which places things squarely on Christ’s shoulders. Your assurance doesn’t come from yourself, but from the work that God has done in Jesus Christ and in his paschal mystery. The Gospel is the Good News of the promise of salvation, and you trust God and his promises, and thus have assurance and certainty. There is not as big a gap between Catholic language of trust and hope and Evangelical language of assurance as we had thought. We too believe that God wants to forgive and redeem us, that God the Son died to forgive us and to reveal a boundless mercy to us. We have heard this promise in the Scriptures, have felt it stirring in our inmost being, and hear in the Gospel an invitation to live in joy because God is doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves, in all of this, we have found more common ground than we had anticipated.

63. Catholics nonetheless would like to ask Evangelicals the following questions:

· We often find the language that we hear from you - in the personal claim that “I am saved” and in the hymn refrain’s “Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine,” and “I have decided to follow Jesus” - seems to place
the focus on the person's decision and personal conviction, and not God's decision. The subsequent question to others "are you saved?" often lacks the nuance of the way in which God calls and converts us. In practice, how does this language move past a self-referential focus to place the emphasis on the great mercy and faithfulness of God?

- We have come to understand that there is some divergence among Evangelicals about whether or not you can lose your salvation and that there is no one definition of "assurance of salvation". Addressing in particular Evangelicals who hold that the gift once received cannot be lost, how do you deal with those who turn away from the faith or don't seem to take seriously the daily challenge to be faithful to the Gospel? How do you deal with sin committed after giving your life to the Lord? And how do you interpret Heb 6:4-6, which speaks of turning away from the Gospel after having "tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come"?

- How does the confidence that comes with the assurance of salvation allow you, in your evangelizing efforts, to recognize with humility the many ways that God has been at work in the other (mindful that God's engagement with others is always larger than our efforts); in particular, what is an appropriate pastoral approach to those who do not claim the same assurance of salvation, although they confess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and profess the Gospel of salvation?

- When Catholics listen to Evangelicals, we understand the desire for an explicit biblical warrant for doctrines such as purgatory. We also understand that Evangelicals wish to affirm the efficacy of the saving action of Jesus' death on the cross. For Catholics, purgatory is the state of those who die in God's friendship, assured of their eternal salvation, but who still have need of purification to enter into the happiness of heaven. We believe that because of the communion of saints, the faithful who are still pilgrims on earth are able to help the souls in purgatory by offering prayers in suffrage for them, especially the Eucharist. While the explicit scriptural warrant for purgatory is in the book of Maccabees in the Septuagint (2 Macc 12:46), which is not accepted as Scriptural by Evangelicals, there is reference in the Old Testament to punishment for sin even after one has received forgiveness (2 Sam 12:13-18). In the New Testament, as well as in the Old Testament (Pr 15:1-2), there is reference to the need for purification because nothing unclean will enter the presence of God in heaven (Rev 21:27 and Mt 5:48). Heb 12:22-23 speaks about a way, a process, through which the spirits of the "just" are "made perfect." 1 Cor 3:13-15 and Mt 12:32 affirm there is a place or state of being other than Heaven or Hell. While affirming the one for all saving power of the cross, which Catholics also affirm, might there be an openness from Evangelicals to the possibility of recognizing such an intermediate state of purification as compatible with Scripture? Could you understand the communion of saints as having a role to play in this period of purification?

- Regarding the possibility of salvation for the non-Christians, we have heard from you that Evangelicals do not want to presume on the mercy of God and extend hope beyond what Scripture explicitly states in this regard. We also appreciate and agree that the Gospel is to be proclaimed to all creatures, and share a sense of obligation and privilege to preach Jesus Christ to those who have never heard the Gospel message. Yet faced with those who died without having heard the Gospel preached, or heard it proclaimed in a way that lacked integrity, we would suggest that the great mercy revealed in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus' dying and rising gives us grounds for a profound hope that such persons should not be automatically excluded from God's salvific plan and they too can obtain eternal salvation through Jesus Christ. The Second Vatican Council noted that a sharing in the paschal mystery is made possible "not only to Christians but to all people of good will in whose hearts grace is secretly at work. Since Christ died for everyone, and since the ultimate calling of each of us comes from God and is, therefore, a universal one, we are obliged to hold that the holy Spirit offers everyone the possibility of sharing in this paschal mystery in a manner known to God" (Gaudium et Spes 22; cf. Lumen Gentium 16, Ad Gentes 7). While it is neither our mission nor our biblical calling to give a definite answer to what God will do, we trust that God's mercy is much greater than ours and dare to hope that God's offer of salvation will extend well beyond the parameters of the Church. This affirmation, however, does not exempt Christians from proclaiming the Gospel unto the ends of the earth; this mission remains of utmost importance. We would ask Evangelicals if the same paschal mystery which allows you to speak of an assurance of salvation for believers would not allow you to have a more hope-filled view of the possibility of God offering salvation to non-believers in a way that is known only to God?

- In our conversations, we have appreciated the emphasis Evangelicals place on eternal salvation, which of course is central to the Scriptures. And yet in our conversations, we often heard an emphasis on salvation in the next life without much consideration for the human condition in this life. Perhaps this was due to the limited number of topics discussed. Still, we would want to ask: does the fact that you are saved make any difference for this life (Is 58:6-7; Heb 13:1-3; Mt 25:31-46)? Could there be some benefit to balancing your concern for the next life with Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom of God for this life with its concerns for social justice and the welfare of humanity? Might we look for transformation in the present world as well as the world to come?

- There is much to appreciate among Evangelicals with their vibrant worship life and the commitment many of the churches seek from their membership. We understand that there are differences among
Evangelicals regarding the role of the sacraments in the life of the Church. There does seem to be at least some agreement that Baptism and the Lord’s Supper play an important part in our Lord’s teaching about the Church and the benefits they bring to the believer (Mt 28:19; Mk 16:16; Jn 3:3; Tit 3:4-7; Mt 26:26-29; Mk 14:22-25; Lk 22:14-23; Jn 6; 1 Cor 11:17-34). Mindful of the differences between various Evangelicals about the place of the sacraments in the life of the Church, Catholics would want to ask differing questions to different Evangelical churches, including the following: Why have the sacraments lost their primary role, and what might you be missing by not celebrating the sacraments? How can they be recovered as gifts of God to his people as expressed in the New Testament? Do all forms of worship and sacred actions have the same value in your tradition? Is it contrary to the New Testament to define sacred actions as signs and instruments of salvation? Is the Sunday celebration of the Lord’s Supper not a privileged place where the Gospel is heard and the faith is lived, proclaimed and professed? Could Evangelicals gain insight about the sacraments/ordinances by retrieving the teachings of the different Reformers? Could Evangelicals begin to study how these gifts of God might be put to a deeper and more prominent use in the life of the Church?

64. Catholics and Evangelicals rejoice in the gifts of salvation and the Church which God has given to the world he loves so much. They are gifts freely given, and freely received. The Scriptures tell us that from the beginning the Church has been a part of God’s plan for salvation (Eph 1:4-10, 22-23). Christ has told us how he provides for his Church ensuring that the forgiveness of sins he won for us and for our salvation will always remain central to the purpose and message of the Church. Both Evangelicals and Catholics rejoice in the gift of the ministry of reconciliation which is given to the Church by Jesus Christ. “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12 RSV). Having received this gift from the crucified and risen Lord, the Church is then entrusted and empowered by the Holy Spirit to deliver that message of hope and forgiveness to our world in desperate need of reconciliation with its creator. In the words of the Samuel J. Stone hymn sung by many Evangelicals:

Catholics and Evangelicals:
- The Church’s one foundation
- Is Jesus Christ her Lord,
- She is His new creation
- By water and the Word.
- From heaven He came and sought her
- To be His holy bride;
- With His own blood He bought her
- And for her life He died.

CONCLUSION

65. We are committed Christians - Catholics and Evangelicals - from Guatemala, Colombia, Brazil, the Philippines, Ghana/Kenya, Spain, Italy, Germany, Canada and the USA. We come from places where there are very good relations and places where the relations are marred by tension and mistrust. But we were entrusted to represent our own ecclesial traditions faithfully and to reflect the realities of Catholic and Evangelical relations around the globe. It became clear early on that Evangelicals represent a wide diversity of Christian communities. Each community had its own perspective to offer which, while challenging at times, also offered the opportunity to discover the rich and legitimate diversity of the people of God, as well as the bonds of communion.

66. One purpose of this consultation was to learn from one another and also to challenge one another in what we believe, teach and confess. A second purpose was to clarify the current state of relations between us and to provide a way forward that would help us to improve those relations where there are difficulties and to support and encourage those places where the situation is more positive. During the consultation, we also had the opportunity to see the deep and committed faith of our partner even as we also were able to share our own faith experiences in an open and candid way. We also sought to address issues of doctrine and practice, always attentive to the perspective of the local communities.

67. Over the past six years, we have built up trust with our dialogue partners, allowing us to address difficult issues in a frank but gracious way. We invite our churches to take time to engage in a process of study and reflection on the issues, challenges, and questions they will encounter in this document. Our consultation has learned that it is when we respect and treat one another in a Christian manner that our communities are able to make progress in our relationships with one another in Christ. In humility, we have learned that we must put aside our own self-assurances and focus on Jesus Christ, “the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6). We have also learned that we need to understand the words of the other as they are intended. We each came with preconceptions of the other, but we have opened up to listen to and discover how the other views the doctrines chosen for

22. Catholics understand that there are seven sacraments, all instituted by Jesus Christ our Lord, though the Church identifies Baptism and Eucharist as major sacraments. The sacraments are “the masterworks of God” (St Augustine, De civi Dei 22:17) “powers that come forth from the Body of Christ, which is ever-living and life-giving” (CCC 1116; cf. Lk 5: 17,6:19; 8:46). The sacraments are for the Church and they make the Church, since “they manifest and communicate...the mystery of communion with the God who is love, One in three persons” (CCC 1118). Catholics are convinced that in a sacrament, the Church does more than profess and express its faith; it makes present the mystery it is celebrating.

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discussion in this consultation: Scripture and Tradition, and the Church and salvation. We entered into new experiences and insights that we might not have had otherwise. Through these experiences, we have come to know one another and ourselves better.

68. Our consultation has confirmed that real differences remain between Evangelicals and Catholics about certain aspects of the life of faith, but also that we share convictions about Jesus that ground our call to mission. As well, our communities share similar convictions about the Christian life: Christ is forming us by the Holy Spirit into a faithful people called together and sent into the world to obey and serve Him by participating in his life and mission. The Lord calls us not only to enter into conversation but to live out the implications of that conversation. The unity he desires for his disciples is not a theoretical unity but a lived one, “so that the world may believe” (Jn 17:21).

69. In this concluding section, it is our intent to address local communities of Evangelicals and Catholics worldwide, mindful of very diverse contexts and states of relations. We would invite them to consider both the convergences noted in the text above and the areas of divergence and mutual questioning. Where there have points of agreement or convergence, we would invite local communities to ask: what does this then make possible for us? What can we appropriately and responsibly undertake together, without compromising our convictions, without overstating our current level of agreement? How is the Lord asking us to grow together at this moment in time?

70. There are limits to what can be said in response to each of these questions. Furthermore, there will be differences from place to place. What is possible in Canada may not be possible in Guatemala; what is possible in Germany may not be possible in Spain. 23 We also recognize that it took our international consultation years of getting to know each other and engaging in discussion before some of these convergences could be confirmed. If at first glance in your local situation, significant steps forward do not seem possible, or the convergences named seem problematic, we would encourage you to ask each other the questions you have and to discuss them; and we would nevertheless encourage you to ask what small steps are possible here and now. In all of this, we are mindful that reconciliation is always the work of God, not us; but the Lord has invited us to play our part in our reconciliation towards one another.

71. In those areas where our conversation has noted convergences, we would invite you to ask the following questions:

- In light of those convergences, how is it possible to cooperate in building up the common good and strengthening the community? Are there things that are critical for our communities to do together now?
- In light of social and moral upheaval in the world around us, and of the world’s need to hear the Gospel of Christ, how can we responsibly witness together to our shared values, addressing some of the social and political questions in our world that we are facing today? Should we take the opportunity of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation to reflect together afresh on what the Gospel means for us and how it brings good news to our needy world?
- While for some Evangelicals and Catholics, praying together is not seen to be acceptable, many would want to ask: Are there any times and places where it would be appropriate for us to pray together? If yes, what ought to shape our common prayer?

72. We would also invite you to ponder the divergences and questions which our document has noted. As we have stated, divergences and remaining questions need not signify the end of our relations, but can fruitfully set the agenda for future discussions. While convergences may appropriately lead us to common action and growth in our relations, further clarity about convergences and divergences alike can lead us to study, especially at a local level, so that what we hold in common and what separates us might be better understood. A key feature of this document was the mutual questioning in a spirit of striving to understand. Some of these questions we asked could be fruitfully discussed on a congregational level; others might be better discussed in ministerial associations or in seminars and theology faculties. The questions that we have asked each other are not exhaustive. We have asked them in part to stimulate discussion, self-understanding, and learning, about the other, and about ourselves.

73. Perhaps we haven’t been asking your questions at all. Perhaps your local experience suggests more convergences than we have named; perhaps less. We encourage you to ask further questions in your own context, using the methodology which we used. We invite you to consider gathering together a group of interested Evangelicals and Catholics in your area to hold a series of discussions on matters of importance in your own contexts. It needn’t be complicated. Choose a subject that you would like to address, of mutual interest, and invite participants to offer presentations or share on what is being discussed.

23. In some parts of the world, Catholics and Evangelicals speak of engaging in “common mission.” By this they are not speaking about planting churches together, but rather, jointly pursuing humanitarian objectives, working together for justice, peace, human rights, and the common good. In other parts of the world, Evangelicals and Catholics would be very uncomfortable with language of common mission.
Enter into the process with your convictions, but also with humility and an open heart. Ask each other questions, and listen deeply to the responses of your conversation partner. Look for areas where you can encourage each other, where you can learn from the other. Try to answer each other’s questions, and ask new questions. Pray that the Holy Spirit guide your conversations. The World Evangelical Alliance and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity would be grateful to hear the results of your conversations.

Finally, we invite you to view dialogue and consultation as a way of engaging your faith, and as a standing together before Christ. Christ is the truth and the fullness of truth can only be found in him. We invite you to consider joining us in pledging ourselves to mutual conversation, consolation, and continuation in admonishing and encouraging one another to remain faithful to the Word who gave us his word that he would be with us to the end of the age (Mt 28:20).

Appendix 1: Participants

Catholic Participants

Monsignor Juan Usma Gómez, Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Vatican/Colombia, Coordinator (2009-2016) /P.S.D/
Most Reverend Donald Bolen, Archbishop of Regina, Canada, (2009-2016) /S.D/
Ms Beatriz Sarkis Simões, Focolare Movement, Brasil (2009-2016)
Most Reverend Rodolfo Valenzuela Núñez, Bishop of La Vera Paz, Guatemala (2009-2016)
Dr Nicholas Jesson, (Local Participant), Ecumenical Officer, Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon, Canada (2015-2016)

Evangelical Participants

Rev Prof Dr Rolf Hille, Director of Ecumenical Affairs of WEA, Germany, Coordinator (2009-2016) /P.S.D/
Rev Dr Leonardo De Chirico, Alleanza Evangelica Italiana, Italia (2009-2016)
Rev José De Segovia Barrón, Alianza Evangélica Española, España (2009-2013)
Rev Prof Dr Joel C. Elowsky, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO (LC-MS), USA (LC-MS), USA, (2009-2016) /S.D/
Rev Prof Dr Timoteo D. Gener, Asian Theological Seminary, The Philippines (2009-2016)

Rev Prof Dr James Nkansah-Obrempong, Vice-Chair, WEA Theological Commission, Kenya (2009-2016)
Rev Prof Dr Claus Schwambach, General Director FLT - Faculdade Luterana de Teologia in São Bento do Sul, SC, Brasil, (2009-2016)
Rev Dr Salomo Strauss, Evangelical Church of Württemberg, Germany (2009-2016)
Rev James Kautt (Observer), International Christian Church Tübingen, Germany/USA (2009-2014)

Appendix 2: Places and Papers

2008 Rome: Planning Committee Meeting

“Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen” (Eph 3:20-21).

2009 São Paulo (Brazil)
“Scripture and Tradition”, and “The Authoritative Interpretation on the Word of God”

2011 Rome (Italy)
“Scripture and Tradition”, and “The Question of Scripture and Tradition in Traditional Catholic Countries in Europe, like Spain”

2009 São Paulo (Brazil)
“The Common Ground on Dogmatic Questions and on Ethical Issues”

“Scriptures in the Life and Mission of the Church” (communications)

Rev Prof Dr James Nkansah-Obrempong “Reflections from Africa”

Rev Prof Dr James Nkansah-Obrempong, Vice-Chair, WEA Theological Commission, Kenya (2009-2016)
Rev Prof Dr Claus Schwambach, General Director FLT - Faculdade Luterana de Teologia in São Bento do Sul, SC, Brasil, (2009-2016)
Rev Dr Salomo Strauss, Evangelical Church of Württemberg, Germany (2009-2016)
Rev James Kautt (Observer), International Christian Church Tübingen, Germany/USA (2009-2014)

P: Planning Committee
S: Steering Committee
D: Drafting Committee

Appendix 2: Places and Papers

2008 Rome: Planning Committee Meeting

2009 São Paulo (Brazil)
“The Common Ground on Dogmatic Questions and on Ethical Issues”

Gregory Fairbanks, “Foundations of Catholic Social Teaching”

James Nkansah-Obrempong, “Evangelical Views of Ethical Principles: Insights and Perspectives from Africa”

Beatriz Sarkis Simões, “Economy of Communion: A Catholic experience” (communication)

Local contacts with the Evangelical Ministry in São Paulo

2011 Rome (Italy)
“Scripture and Tradition”, and “The Question of Scripture and Tradition in Traditional Catholic Countries in Europe, like Spain”

“Scriptures in the Life and Mission of the Church” (communications)


José de Segovia, “The Question of Scripture and Tradition in Traditional Catholic Countries in Europe, like Spain”

“Scriptures in the Life and Mission of the Church” (communications)

Rodolfo Valenzuela “A Catholic Perspective from Latin America”

Prof. James Nkansah-Obrempong “Reflections from Africa”

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Local contacts with the President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Cardinal Walter Kasper

2012 Chicago (USA)
“The Role of the Church in Salvation and Preparation of the Questionnaires”


Jean-Marie Tillard, “Church and Salvation”, (On the sacramentality of the Church), ARCIC II.

Local contacts. Visit to the Billy Graham Center and Meeting with representatives of the Wheaton College

2013 Ciudad de Guatemala (Guatemala)
First Evangelical Responses to the Questionnaires.

Rolf Hille, “Some Fundamental Ecumenical Considerations Concerning Dialogue Between Roman Catholic And Evangelical Theologians”

Local contacts with Evangelical leaders from Guatemala and with the Apostolic Nuncio in Guatemala, the Most Reverend Nicolas Henry Marie Denis Thevenin

Working on the Draft
Drafting Committee: Rome March 2014.

2014 Bad Blankenburg (Germany). At the sources of the Reformation New First Completed Draft.

Meeting with Evangelical leaders at the Allianz Haus in Bad Blankenburg.

Study tour to some important historical sites of the Lutheran Reformation (Erfurt, Wittemberg, and Eisleben).

Drafting Committee: Boston (USA), March 2015.

2015 Saskatoon (Canada) Working of the Final Draft

Local contacts with members of the “Saskatoon Evangelical-Catholic Dialogue”.

Drafting Committee mandated with finalizing the text after consultation with all participants.

Appendix 3: Questionnaires

Catholic Questionnaire on Evangelical-Catholic Relations

Kindly answer this questionnaire openly and honestly

Bishops Conference of

1. What is the breakdown (percentage) of Evangelical and Catholic populations in your area? Any further statistical information about Evangelicals in your area would be helpful. What contacts do you have with them?

2. Identify three common concerns jointly facing Evangelicals and Catholics in your region that could provide opportunities for common public witness. Have you engaged in common witness on those questions?

3. Are there occasions where Evangelicals and Catholics gather together in common prayer in your region, whether as the two communities, at broader ecumenical celebrations, or alongside other faith communities?

4. Do you have occasions to engage together in initiatives aimed at advocating the common good, or promoting justice and peace?

5. Are there any instances where Evangelicals and Catholics are engaging in common study (e.g. of the Bible) or dialogue in your area? Are you aware of the international consultations between Evangelicals and Catholics or national discussions which have taken place in some countries in recent decades?

6. Are there instances of cooperation between Evangelicals and Catholics in educational institutions or theological colleges/seminaries in your region? Do you do anything within your churches to deepen our understanding of the other, in order to move past misunderstandings and misconceptions?

7. Are there opportunities for Evangelical and Catholic leadership to regularly meet in your region? If so, do you take part? Are Evangelicals and Catholics
fellow participants in ecumenical organizations in your area?

8. Have you had any other interaction with Evangelicals? How has your relationship been in the past (both positive and negative), and have those relations changed in recent years?

9. Has there been any noticeable change within Evangelical churches in recent decades? What are the implications of those changes for relations in your region?

10. What are the main challenges that you see in your context for Evangelical-Catholic relations and dialogue? What hinders our working together?

11. To what extent are Evangelical efforts at proclaiming the Gospel - evangelizing, looking to deepen the personal faith of the hearer - perceived on the Catholic side as proselytism? Do you feel proselytism complicates Evangelical-Catholic relations in your region, and is there anything you are doing to address this?

12. How do you regard Evangelical communities - as ecclesial communities as sects? How do you regard individual Evangelicals? Do you see them as fellow Christians, as brothers and sisters in Christ?

Evangelical Questionnaire on Catholic - Evangelical Relations

National Evangelical Alliance of

1. To the best of your knowledge, what would you say is the approximate number of Evangelicals in your country?

2. What has been the tension between Evangelicals and Catholics in the past? What are the tensions today, if any? Have you seen any improvement in relations between the two?

3. Has your community (church) had contact with Catholics in the past? Is there contact with Catholics in the present? If so, what have they been (or what are they)?

4. Would your community (church) see Catholics as brothers and sisters in (insert term for geographical area) in Christ? Why or why not?

5. If you can, list three common concerns jointly facing Evangelicals and Roman Catholics in your region, which provide opportunities for common public witness (e.g., life issues, justice issues, political controversies)? Have you or your national alliance engaged in common witness on those questions?

6. In your experience, have you noticed any change in the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) in recent decades, for instance, since Vatican II? What are the implications of those changes for relations with Catholics in your region, if any?

7. Are there any instances where Evangelicals and Catholics are engaging in common study (i.e., of the Bible) or dialogue in your area?

8. Are you aware of the international consultations between Evangelicals and Catholics or national discussions which have taken place in some countries in recent decades?

9. Are Evangelicals and Catholics fellow participants in ecumenical or inter-Christian organizations in your area?

10. Are there opportunities for Evangelical and Catholic leadership to regularly meet in your region? If so, do you take part?

11. Would you urge a born-again Catholic to remain in his / her church or not?

12. What are the main challenges that you see in your context for Evangelicals-Catholic relations and dialogue? What hinders our working together?

13. What do national alliances expect regarding the role of the World Alliance (WEA) in contact and dialogue with the RCC in helping national alliances? How can we (of the WEA) help national and regional alliances in facilitating dialogue with the Catholics on a national or regional level?
On behalf of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, I am pleased to send you the enclosed resources for the Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity 2018. These materials have been prepared by an international committee comprising representatives from the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, working from material provided by an ecumenical group representing Christians from diverse traditions in the Caribbean.

The biblical theme which provides the focus for the material is, “Your right hand, o Lord, glorious in power”, from the triumphant song of Moses and Miriam (Exodus 15:1-21). This scriptural passage has a special resonance for a people whose history has been scarred by colonisation and oppression, but who recognise their freedom as a triumph and a gift of the God of steadfast love. A song, The Right Hand of God, written by the Caribbean Conference of Churches and an anthem of the ecumenical movement in the region, is used throughout the materials.

The Worship Service gives particular prominence to the Word of God in Holy Scripture. The Caribbean Christians recognise the great irony that this Word which they received from the hands of the same people who cruelly oppressed them, became a Word of hope, liberation and salvation. Christians across the region recognise the shared experience of God entering their history to free their hands from bondage, putting an end to their enslavement. Like the Israelites of the Exodus, they have a song of victory and freedom to sing and it is a song which unites them. The chains of enslavement have been replaced by the bond of communion established by the shared experience of God’s gift of salvation.

In their reflections for the eight days of the Octave of Prayer the Caribbean Christians chose to focus on contemporary issues, such as debt, addiction, human trafficking and violence, which threaten to again enslave a people that has been set free. Their faith in the salvation God has already won for them, gives them hope and strength in the face of these challenges.

The materials include an introduction to the theme, an ecumenical worship service, a selection of readings, reflections and prayers for the eight days of the Octave of Prayer, and an account of the ecumenical context in the Caribbean. The resources can be drawn upon in many ways, and are intended for use not only during the Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity, but throughout the year 2018. The materials are also available online, and in translation, at: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/christuni/sub-index/index_weeks-prayer.htm.

The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity requests that you bring these resources to the attention of those responsible for coordinating Prayer for Christian Unity events. We strongly encourage the regional or local adaptation of the material, so that it may effectively address the local social and cultural context. It is also hoped that the material will be adapted and made available to young people, youth groups and associations. This process will provide a further valuable opportunity for collaboration between Christians at the local level.

With every good wish, and in appreciation of your efforts for the cause of Christian Unity, I remain

+ Brian Farrell
Secretary
IMPORTANT

This is the international version of the text of the Week of Prayer 2018

Kindly contact your local Bishops’ Conference or Synod of your Church to obtain an adaptation of this text for your local context

Resources for
THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY
and throughout the year

Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power

(Ex 15:6)

Jointly prepared and published by
The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity
The Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches

Scripture quotations: The scripture quotations contained herein are from The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1989, 1995, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, and are used with permission. All rights reserved.
TO THOSE ORGANIZING
THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR
CHRISTIAN UNITY

THE SEARCH FOR UNITY: THROUGHOUT
THE YEAR

The traditional period in the northern hemisphere for
the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is 18-25
January. Those dates were proposed in 1908 by Paul
Wattson to cover the days between the feasts of St
Peter and St Paul, and therefore have a symbolic
significance. In the southern hemisphere where January
is a vacation time churches often find other days to
celebrate the week of prayer, for example around
Pentecost (suggested by the Faith and Order
movement in 1926), which is also a symbolic date for
the unity of the Church.

Mindful of the need for flexibility, we invite you to
use this material throughout the whole year to express
the degree of communion which the churches have
already reached, and to pray together for that full unity
which is Christ’s will.

ADAPTING THE TEXT

This material is offered with the understanding that,
whenever possible, it will be adapted for use in local
situations. Account should be taken of local liturgical
and devotional practice, and of the whole social and
cultural context. Such adaptation should ideally take
place ecumenically. In some places ecumenical
structures are already set up for adapting the material;
in other places, we hope that the need to adapt it will
be a stimulus to creating such structures.

USING THE WEEK OF PRAYER MATERIAL

- For churches and Christian communities which
  observe the week of prayer together through a
  single common service, an order for an ecumenical
  worship service is provided.
- Churches and Christian communities may also
  incorporate material from the week of prayer into
  their own services. Prayers from the ecumenical
  worship service, the “eight days”, and the selection
  of additional prayers can be used as appropriate in
  their own setting.
- Communities which observe the week of prayer in
  their worship for each day during the week may draw
  material for these services from the “eight days”.
- Those wishing to undertake bible studies on the week
  of prayer theme can use as a basis the biblical texts and
  reflections given in the eight days. Each day the
  discussions can lead to a closing period of intercessory
  prayer.
- Those who wish to pray privately may find the
  material helpful for focusing their prayer intentions.
  They can be mindful that they are in communion
  with others praying all around the world for the
  greater visible unity of Christ’s Church.

BIBLICAL TEXT FOR 2018

Exodus 15:1-21

Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the
Lord:

“I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the
sea. The Lord is my strength and my might, and he has
become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise
him, my father’s God, and I will exalt him. The Lord is
a warrior; the Lord is his name.

Pharaoh’s chariots and his army he cast into
the sea; his picked officers were sunk in the Red Sea.
The floods covered them; they went down into the
depths like a stone. Your right hand, O Lord, glorious
in power — your right hand, O Lord, shattered the
enemy. In the greatness of your majesty you overthrew
your adversaries; you sent out your fury, it consumed
them like stubble. At the blast of your nostrils the
waters piled up, the floods stood up in a heap; the
deeps congealed in the heart of the sea. The enemy
said, ‘I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the
spoil, my desire shall have its fill of them. I will draw
my sword, my hand shall destroy them.’ You blew with
your wind, the sea covered them; they sank like lead in
the mighty waters.

Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in
splendour, doing wonders? You stretched out your
arm and planted them on the mountain of your own
abode, the sanctuary, O Lord, that your han

The floods covered them; they went down into the
sea; his picked officers were sunk in the Red Sea.
The horses of Pharaoh with his chariots drivers went into the sea, the Lord
brought back the waters of the sea upon them; but the
Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground.

Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron’s sister, took
a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out
after her with tambourines and with dancing. And
Miriam sang to them: “Sing to the Lord, for he has
triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown
into the sea”.

I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the
spoils, my desire shall have its fill of them. I will draw
my sword, my hand shall destroy them.’ You blew with
your wind, the sea covered them; they sank like lead in
the mighty waters.

Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in
splendour, doing wonders? You stretched out your
arm and planted them on the mountain of your own
abode, the sanctuary, O Lord, that your hands have
established. The Lord will reign for ever and ever”.

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Miriam sang to them: “Sing to the Lord, for he has
triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown
into the sea”. 
INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME FOR THE YEAR 2018

Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power
(Ex 15:6)

THE CARIBBEAN REGION

Bearing the name of one of the groups of its indigenous peoples – the Kalinago people, formerly called the Caribs – the contemporary Caribbean region is a complex reality. The region’s vast geographical spread includes both island and mainland territories containing a rich and diverse tapestry of ethnic, linguistic and religious traditions. It is also a complex political reality with a variety of governmental and constitutional arrangements, ranging from colonial dependencies (British, Dutch, French, and American) to republican nation states.

The contemporary Caribbean is deeply marked by the dehumanizing project of colonial exploitation. In the aggressive pursuit of mercantile gains, the colonisers codified brutal systems which traded human beings, and their forced labour. Initially, these practices enslaved and decimated and in some cases exterminated the region’s indigenous peoples. This was followed by the enslavement of Africans and the “indentureship” of people from India and China.

At each stage, the systems of the colonisers attempted to strip subjugated peoples of their inalienable rights: their identity, their human dignity, their freedom and their self-determination. The enslavement of Africans was not simply a case of transporting labourers from one location to another. In an affront to God-given human dignity, it commodified the human person, making one human being the property of another. With the understanding of the enslaved as property went other practices that further sought to dehumanize the African. Included among these was the denial of the right to cultural and religious practices and to marriage and family life.

Very regrettably, during five hundred years of colonialism and enslavement, Christian missionary activity in the region, with the exception of a few outstanding examples, was closely tied to this dehumanizing system and in many ways rationalized it and reinforced it. Whereas those who brought the Bible to this region used the scriptures to justify their subjugation of a people in bondage, in the hands of the enslaved, it became an inspiration, an assurance that God was on their side, and that God would lead them into freedom.

THE THEME FOR THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 2018

Today Caribbean Christians of many different traditions see the hand of God active in the ending of enslavement. It is a unifying experience of the saving action of God which brings freedom. For this reason the choice of the song of Moses and Miriam (Ex 15:1-21), as the motif of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2018 was considered a most appropriate one. It is a song of triumph over oppression. This theme has been taken up in a hymn, The Right Hand of God, written in a workshop of the Caribbean Conference of Churches in August 1981, which has become an “anthem” of the ecumenical movement in the region, translated into a number of different languages.

Like the Israelites, the people of the Caribbean have a song of victory and freedom to sing and it is a song which unites them. However, contemporary challenges again threaten to enslave and again threaten the dignity of the human person created in the image and likeness of God. While human dignity is inalienable it is often obscured by both personal sin and social structures of sin. In our fallen world societal relationships too often lack the justice and compassion that honour human dignity. Poverty, violence, injustice, addiction to drugs and pornography, and the pain, grief and anguish which follow, are experiences that distort human dignity.

Many of the contemporary challenges are themselves the legacy of a colonial past and slave trade. The wounded collective psyche is manifested today in social problems related to low self-esteem, gang and domestic violence, and damaged familial relationships. Although a legacy of the past, these issues are also exacerbated by the contemporary reality that many would characterize as neo-colonialism. Under existing circumstances it seems almost impossible for many of the nations of this region to pull themselves out of poverty and debt. Moreover, in many places there is a residual legislative framework that continues to be discriminatory.

The right hand of God that brought the people out of slavery, gave continued hope and courage to the Israelites, as it continues to bring hope to the Christians of the Caribbean. They are not victims of circumstance. In witnessing to this common hope the churches are working together to minister to all peoples of the region, but particularly the most vulnerable and neglected. In the words of the hymn, “the right hand of God is planting in our land, planting seeds of freedom, hope and love”.

BIBLICAL - PASTORAL REFLECTION ON THE TEXT (EX 15:1-21)

The Book of Exodus takes us through three periods: the Israelites’ life in Egypt (1:1-15:21); Israel’s journey through the wilderness (15:22-18:27); and the Sinai experience (19-40). The passage chosen, the ‘Song at the Sea’ led by Moses and Miriam, details the events leading up to the redemption of the people of God from enslavement. It closes the first period.
“THIS IS MY GOD, AND I WILL PRAISE HIM” (15:2)
Verses 1-3 of chapter 15 emphasize the praise of God: “The Lord is my strength and my might, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father’s God, and I will exalt him” (15:2). In the song, led by Moses and Miriam, the Israelites sing the praises of the God who has freed them. They realize that the plan and purpose of God to set the people free cannot be thwarted or frustrated. No forces not even Pharaoh’s chariots, army and trained military power could frustrate the will of God for his people to be free (15:4-5). In this joyful cry of praise, Christians from many different traditions recognize that God is the Saviour of us all, we delight that he has kept his promises, and continues to bring his salvation to us through the Holy Spirit. In the salvation that he brings we recognize that he is our God and we are all his people.

“YOUR RIGHT HAND, O LORD, GLORIOUS IN POWER” (15:6)
The liberation and salvation of God’s people comes through the power of God. The right hand of God can be understood both as God’s sure victory over his adversaries, and as his unfailing protection of his own people. In spite of the determination of Pharaoh, God heard the cry of his people and will not let the people perish because God is the God of life. By his control of wind and sea God shows his will to preserve life and to destroy violence (Ex 15:10). The purpose of this redemption was to constitute the Israelites as a people of praise recognizing God’s steadfast love.

The liberation brought hope and a promise for the people. Hope because a new day had dawned when the people could freely worship their God and realize their potential. It was also a promise: their God would accompany them throughout their journey and no force could destroy God’s purpose for them.

DOES GOD USE VIOLENCE TO COUNTERACT VIOLENCE?
Some Church Fathers interpreted the narrative as a metaphor for the spiritual life. Augustine, for example, identified the enemy which is cast into the sea not as the Egyptians, but as sin.

“All our past sins, you see, which have been pressing on us, as it were from behind, he has drowned and obliterated in baptism. These dark things of ours were being ridden by unclean spirits as their mounts, and like horsemen they were riding them wherever they liked. That’s why the apostle calls them ‘rulers of this darkness’. We have been rid of all this through baptism, as through the Red Sea, so called because sanctified by the blood of the crucified Lord…” (Sermon 223E).

Augustine saw the story as encouraging the Christian to hope and to persevere, rather than despair, at the pursuit of the enemy. For Augustine baptism was the key constitutive event in establishing the true identity of each person as a member of the Body of Christ. He draws a parallel between Israel’s liberating passage through the Red Sea and that of the Christian people in baptism. Both liberating journeys bring a worshipping assembly into being. As such Israel could freely praise the saving hand of God in the victory song of Miriam and Moses. Their redemption constituted the enslaved Israelites as members of the one people of God, united with one song of praise to sing.

UNITY
Exodus 15 allows us to see how the road to unity must often pass through a communal experience of suffering. The Israelites’ liberation from enslavement is the foundational event in the constitution of this people. For Christians this process climaxes with the incarnation and Paschal mystery. Although liberation/salvation is an initiative taken by God, God engages human agencies in the realization of his purpose and plan for the redemption of his people. Christians, through baptism, share in God’s ministry of reconciliation, but our own divisions hamper our witness and mission to a world in need of God’s healing.

THE PREPARATION OF THE MATERIAL FOR THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 2018

The Churches of the Caribbean were chosen to draft the material for the 2018 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Under the leadership of His Grace Kenneth Richards, Catholic Archbishop of Kingston and Bishop with ecumenical responsibilities for the Antilles Episcopal Conference, together with Mr Gerard Granado, General Secretary of the Caribbean Conference of Churches (CCC), an ecumenical team of men and women were invited to draft the material.

Gratitude is extended in particular to the leaders of CCC, to the Antilles Episcopal Conference, and to those who contributed to these resources:

- Most Reverend Kenneth D. Richards - Coordinator of the Drafting Team on behalf of the Antilles Episcopal Conference (AEC), Chairman of the AEC Ecumenism Commission, Archbishop of Kingston (Roman Catholic) [Jamaica]
- Mr Gerard A.J. Granado, M.Th. (Edinburgh) - General Secretary, Caribbean Conference of Churches (CCC), Convener of Drafting Team (Roman Catholic) [Trinidad and Tobago]
made our stay so comfortable. We also wish to express our gratitude for the support of local ecumenical Church leaders, Reverend Dr Ranford Patterson, President of the Bahamas Christian Council, and the Right Reverend Laish Boyd, Diocesan Bishop, Anglican Diocese of The Bahamas and the Turks and Caicos Island, who joined the group to share their knowledge and experience of the local church.

**ECUMENICAL WORSHIP SERVICE**

**INTRODUCTION**

The Bible and three sets of chains are integral to the celebration of this Worship Service. The Caribbean writing group suggests that these symbols are prominently placed in the worship space.

The Bible is especially important in the experience of the Caribbean Churches. Historically, indigenous and enslaved peoples experienced atrocities perpetrated by colonizers who, at the same time, brought Christianity. Yet, in the hands of the oppressed peoples of the region, the Bible became a primary source of consolation and liberation. This dynamic of reversal makes the Bible a particularly potent symbol in itself. Therefore, in this service, it is important that a visually significant Bible be placed in the midst of the gathered assembly and that the readings be proclaimed from this same Bible rather than from other books or booklets.

Chains are a very potent symbol of enslavement, dehumanization and racism. They are also a symbol of the power of sin which separates us from God and from each other. The Caribbean writing group encourages the use of real iron chains during the Prayers of Reconciliation in this Worship Service. If iron chains are not feasible, alternative visually strong chains should be used. During the Worship Service, the iron chains of enslavement are replaced by a human chain expressing bonds of communion and united action against modern slavery and all kinds of individual and institutionalised dehumanisation. Inviting the entire assembly to participate in this gesture is an integral part of the worship.

For the song after the proclamation of the Word, the Caribbean writing group suggests the hymn *The Right Hand of God*. Reflecting the song of Miriam and Moses in praise of the liberating action of God in the Book of Exodus, it is associated with the ecumenical movement in the Caribbean, as the Churches work together to overcome the social challenges facing the people of the region.
ORDER OF THE SERVICE

*Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power*  
(*Ex 15:6*)

**L** Leader  
**C** Congregation  
**R** Reader

GATHERING

**Song**

*During the singing of the song, those leading the celebration enter. They should be led by an assistant carrying the Bible. The Bible is placed in a place of honour in the centre of the worship space. The Scripture readings during the service should be proclaimed from this Bible.*

WORDS OF WELCOME

**L** The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**C** And also with you.

**L** Dear friends in Christ, as we gather for this service of prayer for unity, we thank God for our Christian heritage, and for his liberating and saving action in human history.

The resources for this year’s Week of Prayer for Christian Unity have been prepared by the churches of the Caribbean. The history of Christianity in that region contains a paradox. On one hand, the Bible was used by colonizers as justification for the subjugation of the original inhabitants of these lands, along with others who were transported from Africa, India and China. Many people suffered extermination, were put in chains and enslaved, and were subjected to unjust labour conditions. On the other hand, the Bible became a source of consolation and liberation for many who suffered at the hands of the colonizers.

Today, the Bible continues to be a source of consolation and liberation, inspiring the Christians of the Caribbean to address the conditions that currently undermine human dignity and quality of life. As the iron chains of enslavement fall from our hands, a new human bond of love and communion emerges in the human family, expressing the unity prayed for by our Christian communities.

INVOCATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

*The response to the invocation may be sung.*

**L** With the Christians of the Caribbean, let us call upon the Holy Spirit to set our hearts on fire as we pray for the unity of the Church.  
Unite your servants in the bond of unity.

**C** Come, Holy Spirit!  
**L** Teach us to pray.

PRAYERS OF RECONCILIATION

**L** We have not received a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. Let us call upon the mercy of God, confident in the saving power of God’s Right Hand.

*Three members of the assembly come forward, each carrying a chain. After each petition and response, one of the chains is allowed fall to the ground. The Kyrie response may be sung.*

**L** From structures that undermine human dignity and enforce new forms of enslavement, deliver us, O God. **Kyrie eleison.**

**C** Kyrie eleison.

**L** From decisions and deeds that impose poverty, marginalisation or discrimination on our brothers and sisters, deliver us, O God. **Kyrie eleison.**

**C** Kyrie eleison.

**L** From the fear and suspicion that separate us from each other and place limits on hope and healing, deliver us, O God. **Kyrie eleison.**

**C** Kyrie eleison.

**L** The Lord is our strength and our might, and has become our salvation. May God, who has redeemed us, lead into the abode of holiness.

**C** Amen.

PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD OF GOD

**L** Redeem us, O God, from human oppression,  
that we may keep your precepts.

**C** that we may keep your statutes.  
(cf *Ps 119:134-135*)

*Exodus 15:1-21*

**L** Listen and you will be set free.

**C** Thanks be to God.  
*It would be preferable for the psalm to be sung.*

*Psalm 118:5-7, 13-24*
R/ O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; 
his steadfast love endures for ever!

Out of my distress I called on the Lord; 
the Lord answered me and set me in a broad place. 
With the Lord on my side I do not fear. 
What can mortals do to me? 
The Lord is on my side to help me; 
I shall look in triumph on those who hate me. R/

I was pushed hard, so that I was falling, 
but the Lord helped me. 
The Lord is my strength and my might; 
he has become my salvation. 
There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous. R/

The right hand of the Lord does valiantly; 
the right hand of the Lord is exalted; 
the right hand of the Lord does valiantly. 
I shall not die, but I shall live, 
and recount the deeds of the Lord. R/

Open to me the gates of righteousness, 
that I may enter through them 
and give thanks to the Lord. 
This is the gate of the Lord; 
the righteous shall enter through it. R/

I thank you that you have answered me 
and have become my salvation. 
This is the Lord’s doing; 
it is marvellous in our eyes. 
This is the day that the Lord has made; 
let us rejoice and be glad in it. R/

Romans 8:12-27

L Listen and you will be set free.

C Thanks be to God.

A suitable Alleluia acclamation may be sung before and after the proclamation of the Gospel.

Mark 5:21-43

L Listen and you will be set free.

C Thanks be to God.

Homily / Sermon

Song
The Apostles Creed

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

L With thanks for our liberation from slavery to sin, let us place our needs before the Lord, asking him to shatter the chains that enslave us and to join us instead with bonds of love and communion. Each intercession is read by a different reader. As they finish, the readers each join hands or link arms with members of the assembly, thus creating a human chain.

R1 God of the Exodus, you led your people through the waters of the Red Sea and redeemed them. Be with us now and free us from all forms of slavery and from everything that obscures human dignity.

C Lay your hands on us, O Lord, that we may live.

R2 God of abundance, in your goodness you provide for all our needs. Be with us now, help us to rise above selfishness and greed and give us the courage to be agents of justice in the world.

C Lay your hands on us, O Lord, that we may live.

R3 God of love, you created us in your image and have redeemed us in Christ. Be with us now, empower us to love our neighbour and to welcome the stranger.

C Lay your hands on us, O Lord, that we may live.

R4 God of peace, you remain faithful to your covenant with us even when we wander from you, and in Christ you have reconciled us to yourself. Be with us now and put a new spirit and a new heart within us that we may reject violence and instead be servants of your peace.

C Lay your hands on us, O Lord, that we may live.

R5 God of glory, you are all-powerful, yet in Jesus you chose to make your home in a human family, and in the waters of Baptism have adopted us as your children. Be with us now and help us to remain faithful to our family commitments and our communal responsibilities, and to strengthen the bonds of communion with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

C Lay your hands on us, O Lord, that we may live.

R6 God, One in Three Persons, in Christ you have made us one with you and with one another. Be with us now and by the power and consolation of the Holy Spirit, free us from the self-centredness, arrogance and fear that prevent us from striving towards the full visible unity of your Church.

C Lay your hands on us, O Lord, that we may live.

THE LORD’S PRAYER

L Let us join our hands, bound not by chains but by the love of Christ that has been poured into our hearts, and pray to the Father in the words that Jesus taught us.

The Lord’s Prayer may be sung.

Our Father.....

After the Lord’s Prayer, still holding hands, the assembly may sing a familiar song that celebrates their unity.

After the song, the Sign of Peace may be exchanged.

COMMISSIONING

L Redeemed by the Right Hand of God, and united in the One Body of Christ, let us go forth in the power of the Holy Spirit.

C The Spirit of the Lord is upon us, because the Lord has anointed us to bring good news to the poor, 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. Amen! Alleluia!

Song

BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS AND PRAYERS FOR THE EIGHT DAYS

DAY 1

You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt

Leviticus 19:33-34 You shall love the alien as yourself

Psalm 146 The Lord watches over the strangers

Hebrews 13:1-3 Some have entertained angels without knowing it

Matthew 25:31-46 I was a stranger and you welcomed me

After becoming the first independent black republic, Haiti extended hospitality to other enslaved peoples in search of freedom. Recent times have brought severe economic hardship to Haitians, many of whom have left home, making perilous journeys in hope of a better life. In many instances they have been met with inhumanity and legal barriers. The Caribbean Council of Churches has been involved in advocacy to challenge those nations that are restricting or stripping Haitians of citizenship rights.
REFLECTION

The Israelites’ memory of being strangers in the land of Egypt lay behind the Law’s instruction that God’s people were to welcome the stranger in their midst. The memory of their own exile was expected to prompt empathy and solidarity with contemporary exiles and strangers. Like Israel, our common Christian experience of God’s saving action goes together with remembering both alienation and estrangement-in the sense of estrangement from God and from his kingdom. This kind of Christian remembering has ethical implications. God has restored our dignity in Christ, and made us citizens of his kingdom, not because of anything we did to deserve it but by his own free gift in love. We are called to do likewise, freely and motivated by love. Christian love is to love like the Father, that is to recognize dignity and to give dignity, and thereby to help bring healing to the broken human family.

PRAYER

Eternal God,
You belong to no culture and land but are Lord of all, you call us to welcome the stranger in our midst.
Help us by your Spirit,
to live as brothers and sisters, welcoming all in your name, and living in the justice of your kingdom. This we pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.

The right hand of God
is planting in our land,
planting seeds of freedom, hope and love;
in these many-peopled lands,
let his children all join hands,
and be one with the right hand of God.

DAY 2

No longer as a slave but a beloved brother

Genesis 1:26-28 God created humankind in God’s own image
Psalm 10:1-10 Why, O Lord, do you stand far off?
Philemon No longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother

Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery in which victims are forced or tricked into sex work, child labour and the harvesting of organs for the profit of the exploiters. It is a global, multimillion-dollar industry. It is also a growing problem across the Caribbean. Reformed Churches in the Caribbean have joined with the Council for World Mission and the Caribbean and North American Council for Mission to educate Christian communities to end the scourge of human trafficking.

REFLECTION

One of the first things we learn about God in the Hebrew and Christian Bible is that God created humankind in his own image. However, this profound and beautiful truth has often been obscured or denied throughout human history. For instance, in the Roman Empire, the dignity of those enslaved was denied. The Gospel message is entirely different to this. Jesus challenged the social norms that devalued the human dignity of Samaritans, describing the Samaritan as the ‘neighbour’ of the man who had been attacked on the road to Jericho–a neighbour to be loved, according to the Law. And Paul, made bold in Christ, describes the once-enslaved Onesimus as ‘a beloved brother’, transgressing the norms of his society and affirming Onesimus’s humanity.

Christian love must always be a courageous love that dares to cross borders, recognising in others a dignity equal to our own. Like St Paul, Christians must be ‘bold enough in Christ’ to raise a united voice in clearly recognising trafficked persons as their neighbours and their beloved brothers and sisters, and so work together to end modern-day slavery.

PRAYER

Gracious God,
draw near to those who are victims of human trafficking,
assuring them that you see their plight and hear their cry.
May your Church be united in compassion and courage to work for that day when no one will be exploited and all will be free to live lives of dignity and peace. This we pray in the name of the Triune God who can do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine.
Amen.

The right hand of God
is lifting in our land,
lifting the fallen one by one;
each one is known by name,
and rescued now from shame,
by the lifting of the right hand of God.

DAY 3

Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit

Exodus 3:4-10 God frees those who are in human bondage
Psalm 24:1-6 Lord, we are the people who seek your face
1 Corinthians 6:9-20 Therefore glorify God in your body
Matthew 18:1-7 Woe to the one by whom the stumbling block comes!

Many Christian churches in the Caribbean share a concern about the issue of pornography, especially via the internet. Pornography has destructive consequences for human dignity, particularly for children and young people. Like slavery, it commodifies human
REFLECTION

The book of Exodus demonstrates God’s concern for people in human bondage. God’s revelation to Moses at the burning bush was a powerful declaration of his will to free his people. God observed their misery, heard their cry and so came to deliver them. God still hears the cry of those who are subject to enslavement today, and wills to deliver them. While sexuality is a gift of God for human relationships and the expression of intimacy, the misuse of this gift through pornography enslaves and devalues both those caught up in producing it and those who consume it. God is not impervious to their plight and Christians are called to be similarly concerned.

St Paul writes that we are called to give glory to God in our own bodies, which means that every part of our lives, including our relationships, can and should be an offering pleasing to God. Christians must work together for the kind of society that upholds human dignity and does not put a stumbling block before any of God’s little ones, but, rather, enables them to live in the freedom which is God’s will for them.

PRAYER

By your heavenly grace, O God, restore us in mind and body, create in us a clean heart and a pure mind that we may give glory to your Name. May the churches attain unity of purpose for the sanctification of your people, through Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. Amen.

The right hand of God is healing in our land, healing broken bodies, minds and souls; so wondrous is its touch, with love that means so much, when we’re healed by the right hand of God.

DAY 4

Hope and Healing

Isaiah 9:2-7a His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace

Psalm 34:1-14 Seek peace, and pursue it

Revelation 7:13-17 God will wipe away every tear from their eyes

John 14:25-27 Peace I leave with you

Within the Caribbean, violence is a problem to which the churches are called to respond. There is an alarmingly high rate of murder, much of which stems from domestic abuse, gang warfare and other forms of criminality. There is also a rising rate of self-harm and suicide in some parts of the region.

REFLECTION

The kingdom which God promised, the kingdom which Jesus proclaimed and made manifest in his ministry, is a kingdom of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. What does this Good News mean for those trapped in the darkness of violence? In the prophet’s vision, light shines on those who lived in a land of deep darkness. But how can Christians bring the light of Jesus to those living in the darkness of domestic and gang violence? What sense of hope can Christians offer? It is a sad reality that division among Christians is a counter-sign, which hampers the communication of hope.

However, the quest for peace and reconciliation between the different churches and confessions is the opposite of that. When Christians strive for unity in a world of conflict, they offer the world a sign of reconciliation. Christians who refuse to enter a logic of privilege and status, who refuse to demean others and their communities, give witness to the peace of God’s kingdom, where the Lamb guides the saints to springs of the water of life. This is a peace the world needs, and one which brings healing and comfort to those afflicted by violence.

PRAYER

God of all comfort and hope, your resurrection defeated the violence of the cross. As your people, may we be a visible sign that the violence of the world will be overcome. This we pray in the name of our risen Lord. Amen.

The right hand of God
is pointing in our land,
pointing the way we must go;
so clouded is the way,
so easily we stray,
but we’re guided by the right hand of God.

DAY 5

Hark, the cry of my poor people from far and wide in the land!

Deuteronomy 1:19-35 The Lord God goes before you and carried you

Psalm 145:9-20 The Lord upholds all who are falling

James 1:9-11 The rich will disappear like a flower in the field

Luke 18:35-43 Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!
The Caribbean economies have traditionally been based on the production of raw materials for the European market and so have never been self-sustaining. As a consequence, borrowing on the international market became important for development. The requirements of such borrowing impose a reduction of spending on transport, education, health and other public services, which impacts most severely on the poor. The Caribbean Conference of Churches has launched an initiative to address the current debt crisis in the region and through their international networks to come to the aid of the poor.

REFLECTION
We can imagine the noise of the crowd as Jesus enters Jericho. Many voices shout down the cry of the blind beggar. He is a distraction and an embarrassment. But through all this tumult Jesus hears the blind man’s voice, just as God always hears the cries of the poor in the Hebrew Scriptures. The Lord who upholds the voice, just as God always hears the cries of the needy in distress, a shelter from the storm.

The disunity of Christians can become part of the world’s tumult and chaos. Like the arguing voices outside Jericho, our divisions can drown out the cry of the poor. However, when we are united we become more fully Christ’s presence in the world, better able to hear, listen and respond. Rather than increasing the volume of discord, we are able to truly listen and so discern the voices that most need to be heard.

PRAYER
Loving God, you lift up the poor and distressed and restore their dignity. Hear now our cries for the poor of our world, restore their hope and lift them up, that all your people may be one. This we pray in Jesus name. Amen.

The right hand of God is lifting in our land, lifting the fallen one by one; each one is known by name, and rescued now from shame, by the lifting of the right hand of God.

DAY 6  Let us look to the interests of others
Isaiah 25:1-9  Let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation
Psalm 82  Maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute
Philippians 2:1-4  Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others
Luke 12:13-21  Be on your guard against all kinds of greed

DAY 7  Building family in household and church
Exodus 2:1-10  The birth of Moses
Psalm 127  Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain
Hebrews 11:23-24  Moses was hidden by his parents … because they saw that the child was beautiful

Changing international banking regulations continue to have a negative impact on the trade and commerce of the Caribbean and threaten the economic survival of many families. It has become increasingly difficult for Caribbean people working abroad to send money back to their families. The Churches in the Caribbean introduced the Credit Union movement in order for the poor to have access to finance for economic activity.

REFLECTION
The witness of the Scriptures is consistent that God always makes a preferential option for the poor: the right hand of God acts for the powerless against the powerful. Similarly, Jesus consistently warns against the dangers of greed. Despite these warnings, however, the sin of greed often infects our Christian communities and introduces a logic of competition: one community competing against the next. We need to remember that insofar as we fail to differentiate ourselves from the world, but conform to its divisive competing spirit, we fail to offer ‘a refuge for the needy in distress, a shelter from the storm’.

For our different churches and confessions, to be rich in the sight of God is not a case of having many members belonging – or donating – to one’s own community. Rather, it is to recognise that as Christians we have countless brothers and sisters right across the world, united across the economic divisions of ‘North’ and ‘South’. Conscious of this fraternity in Christ, Christians can join hands in promoting economic justice for all.

PRAYER
Almighty God, give courage and strength to your church to continually proclaim justice and righteousness in situations of domination and oppression. As we celebrate our unity in Christ, may your Holy Spirit help us to look to the needs of others. Amen.

The right hand of God is striking out at envy, hate and greed; our selfishness and lust, our pride and deeds unjust, are destroyed by the right hand of God.
Matthew 2:13-15  Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt.

In the Caribbean the family continues to be adversely affected by the legacy of enslavement and by new factors such as the migration of parents, financial problems and domestic violence. Facing this reality, the churches of the Caribbean are working to give support to both nuclear and extended families.

REFLECTION
Families are of central importance for the protection and nurture of children. The Bible accounts of the infancies of both Moses and Jesus, who were in mortal danger from the moment they were born because of the murderous orders of angry rulers, illustrate how vulnerable children can be to external forces. These stories also show how action can be taken to protect such little ones. Matthew presents us with a model of fatherhood that is in loving fidelity to the Lord’s command, especially in turbulent times.

The Scriptures view children as a blessing and as hope for the future. For the Psalmist, they are ‘like arrows in the hand of a warrior’. As Christians, we share a common calling to live as supportive family networks, relying on the strength of the Lord for the task of building strong communities in which children are protected and can flourish.

PRAYER
Gracious God, 
you sent your son to be born in an ordinary family 
with ancestors who were both faithful and sinful. 
We ask your blessing upon all families within households and communities. 
We pray especially for the unity of the Christian family so that the world may believe. 
In Jesus’ name we pray, 
Amen.

The right hand of God is writing in our land, 
writing with power and with love; 
our conflicts and our fears, 
our triumphs and our tears, 
are recorded by the right hand of God.

DAY 8  He will gather the dispersed…
four corners of the earth

Isaiah 11:12-13  Ephraim shall not be jealous of Judah, and Judah shall not be hostile towards Ephraim

Psalm 106:1-14,43-48  Gather us to give thanks to your holy name

Ephesians 2:13-19  He has broken down the dividing wall

John 17:1-12  I have been glorified in them

The Caribbean churches work together to heal the wounds in the Body of Christ in the region, which are a legacy left by colonization. Reconciliation often demands repentance, reparation and the healing of memories. One example is the acts of apology and reparation between Baptists in Britain and the Caribbean. Like Israel, the Church in its unity is called to be both a sign and an active agent of reconciliation.

REFLECTION
Throughout the biblical narrative of salvation history, an unmistakable motif is the unrelenting determination of the Lord to form a people whom he could call his own. The formation of such a people – united in a sacred covenant with God – is integral to the Lord’s plan of salvation and to the glorification and hallowing of God’s Name.

The prophets repeatedly remind Israel that the covenant demanded that relationships among its various social groups should be characterized by justice, compassion and mercy. As Jesus prepared to seal the new covenant in his own blood, his earnest prayer to the Father was that those given to him by the Father would be one, just as he and the Father were one. When Christians discover their unity in Jesus they participate in Christ’s glorification in the presence of the Father, with the same glory that he had in the Father’s presence before the world existed. And so, God’s covenanted people must always strive to be a reconciled community - one which itself is an effective sign to all the peoples of the earth of how to live in justice and in peace.

PRAYER
Lord, 
we humbly ask that, by your grace, the churches throughout the world may become instruments of your peace. Through their joint action as ambassadors and agents of your healing, reconciling love among divided peoples, may your Name be hallowed and glorified. 
Amen.

The right hand of God is planting in our land, planting seeds of freedom, hope and love; in these many-peopled lands, let his children all join hands, and be one with the right hand of God.
THE ECUMENICAL SITUATION IN THE CARIBBEAN *

The Caribbean region stretches from the Bahamas in the north to Suriname, Guyana and French Guiana (Cayenne) on the South American mainland, and from Barbados in the east to Belize in Central America in the west. The common identity of the Region is based on geographical considerations as well as on a shared history of colonialism, exploitation and resistance against foreign domination, and on a common cultural awareness.

The presence of some of the churches in the Region – e.g. the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches – coincides with the beginning and early period of the colonial enterprise. Other churches came later as part of the 18th, 19th and early 20th century missionary movement. Even more recently, the evangelical and pentecostal movements have spread throughout the Caribbean. Consequently, evangelical alliances or fellowships can be found in many countries and territories of the Region.

The Caribbean Conference of Churches (CCC) grew out of a dynamic precursor of ecumenical activity in the 1960s and was formally established during the socio-cultural and political ferment of the early 1970s. This was the immediate post-colonial period of the Region during which many countries gained their political independence. It was a time when the Region as a whole was enveloped in a movement towards self-determination, development and new forms of self-expression. The joint response and contribution of several churches to this new regional awareness was the formation of an organisation called Christian Action for Development in the Caribbean (CADEC). This organisation is the precursor of the CCC, and would later become one of two major departments of the CCC. The other department was known as the Agency for Renewal of the Churches (ARC).

The founding assembly of the CCC took place in 1973, in Kingston, Jamaica. The preamble of its constitution reads:

We, as Christian people of the Caribbean, because of our common calling in Christ, covenant to join together in a regional fellowship of churches for theological reflection, inspiration, consultation, and cooperative action, to overcome the challenges created by history, language, culture, class and distance. We are therefore deeply committed to promoting peace, the holistic development of our people and affirming social justice and the dignity of all persons. We pledge to journey together in Christ and to share our experiences for the strengthening of the kingdom of God in the world.

The thirty three member churches of the CCC represent a vast diversity of people and cultures, spread over many islands and mainland territories of South and Central America and belonging to four major linguistic groupings – Dutch, English, French and Spanish. Included in this grouping are: Cayenne (French Guiana), Cuba, Guadeloupe, Haiti, Martinique and Puerto Rico. The CCC’s member churches share the common conviction that, despite the divisiveness of the long colonial heritage, there is an authentic, unifying Caribbean identity through which Caribbean people must articulate God’s will for them and make their response to it.

As one of six Regional Ecumenical Organisations (REOs), the CCC is historically unique, being the first instance in the world in which the Roman Catholic Church – formally through its bishops’ conference – was a founding member of an REO. The involvement of the Antilles Episcopal Conference (AEC) as a founding member of the CCC was held up as an example in the preparatory document – “Lineamenta” – for the Roman Catholic Church’s 1997 Synod of the Americas. In the section of the document entitled “Areas and Ways of Communion,” the document states: “One example of greater possibility for dialogue with other confessions is demonstrated by the work of some bishops of the Caribbean, who contributed to the founding of the only ecumenical organisation present in the region” (Section IV, Art. 42).

Over the forty three years of its existence, the CCC’s member churches have together taken many initiatives in the areas of theology, Christian education, integral development, youth and women’s concerns, family life, human rights, and communications. Some of the significant achievements of the CCC have been the media channels Contact and Caribbeat, the Caribbean Contact monthly newspaper and the Christian education series – Fashion Me a People.

In 1983, the CCC’s mandate was re-formulated to read: “Promoting ecumenism and social change in obedience to Jesus Christ and in solidarity with the poor”. Since then, the Conference has developed a strategic approach and implemented an integrated programmatic response to the many socio-economic issues and social ills impacting the Caribbean. Among these are endemic poverty, a high incidence of HIV/AIDS infection, drug-trafficking and addiction, and uprootedness as persons are displaced for various reasons – including natural disasters, violence and the search of work and a better life.

* This text is reproduced under the sole authority and responsibility of the ecumenical group in the Caribbean which came together to write the source texts for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2018.
The policy of the CCC is a deeper ecclesial engagement with, and mutual accompaniment of the member churches, through their existing agencies and institutions, and right down to the local congregations. The major programme initiatives are:

- Priority Regional Initiatives (HIV/AIDS, drugs, violence, family, food, uprooted people)
- Sustainable Socio-economic Development (poverty reduction, project funding, disaster preparedness)
- Advocacy and Communications (public awareness, information, dialogue and exchange)
- International Relations (regional integration, solidarity visits), and cultural affairs.

In addressing some of these issues, the CCC works very closely with major regional intergovernmental organisations, chief among these being the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). It has also engaged over the years with various departments of the United Nations (UN) and European and North American governments.

In addition to the above initiatives, the CCC established a Regional Forum of National Councils of Churches (NCCs), as a space for greater networking and mutual accompaniment of these councils in the region. This was in recognition of the critical role played by NCCs in several parts of the Region, some NCCs – e.g. the Cuban and Jamaican NCCs – pre-dating the CCC by decades. The Forum was first convened in 2001 under the theme: “Sing a New Song.” It met annually thereafter until 2008. Like some other initiatives, the Regional Forum had to be curtailed because of significantly reduced funding to the organisation.

In recent times, a greater emphasis on the theological basis of Ecumenism is being pursued by the CCC’s Secretariat in conversation with member churches. This is in an effort to strengthen the fundamental issue of “koinonia” which, it is felt, has been somewhat obscured by an over-emphasis on “diakonia.” In this regard, a measure has been taken to ensure, not only that discussions on these and other “faith and order” issues take place, but also to ensure that there is a “space of hospitality” where members of various denominations – theologians, clergy and others – can encounter one another in an atmosphere of mutual understanding and edification. With these objectives in mind, the Caribbean Regional Centre for Ecumenical Encounter & Dialogue was launched in December 2014. The creation of this Centre is a collaborative venture between the CCC and the monks of the century-old Benedictine Monastery of Our Lady of Exile – popularly known as Mount St. Benedict’ – in Trinidad. (Given its historical pastoral ministry to people of many different religious persuasions, the Monastery was seen as a natural setting and choice for such an initiative).

There has also been a new engagement by the CCC with other ecumenical expressions and configurations – e.g. the Taize movement and the Caribbean ‘chapter’ of the Global Christian Forum (GCF). The latter is an important means of outreach and dialogue with Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians. The CCC has actually acted as convener / facilitator of the Caribbean GCF.

Apart from the CCC, there are other institutional expressions of ecumenism in the Caribbean. One such outstanding manifestation is The United Theological College of the West Indies (UTCWI), located in Jamaica. As an institution, the UTCWI is a collaborative venture of various Protestant denominations. Interestingly, the UTCWI is located next to the Roman Catholic Theological College (and former seminary) of St. Michael’s. The lecturers and students of both institutions have enjoyed a very amicable and mutually edifying relationship over the several years of the institutions’ existence.

On a wider Regional level, there is also the Caribbean Association Theological Schools (CATS). This organisation brings together in a collaborative manner the three major theological colleges of the Anglicophone Caribbean – UTCWI; Codrington (Anglican) College, (Barbados); and the two Roman Catholic Colleges: St. John Vianney and the Uganda Martyrs, (Trinidad) , and St. Michael's (Jamaica).

In terms of Protestant ecumenical theological colleges in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, there is the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico and the Evangelical Seminary of Matanzas, Cuba. Both institutions are collaborative ventures of various Protestant denominations. The latter is currently headed by the Rev. Dr. Carlos Emilio Ham, a former President of the CCC and a former staff member of the World Council of Churches (WCC).

No consideration of the ecumenical situation in the Caribbean would be complete without noting that the Caribbean made a tremendous gift to the wider ecumenical movement in the person of the Rev. Dr. Philip Alford Potter – the celebrated third General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC). Dr Potter, now of sacred memory, was a Methodist minister and a native of the Commonwealth of Dominica. During his tenure as the General Secretary of the WCC (1972 – 1984), Rev. Potter fought the immoral apartheid regime of South Africa. It was also during his tenure of office that Pope John-Paul II – in response to an invitation of the WCC – made his historic visit to the headquarters of the WCC in Geneva, Switzerland. This was a major milestone in ecumenical relations between the Vatican and the WCC. It is estimated that there are currently thirteen member churches of the WCC in the Caribbean, representing 1.4 million Christians. Following in Rev. Potter’s footsteps, other Caribbean ecumenists continue to make significant contributions in the wider
Among these is the Rev. Neville Callam of Jamaica. Rev. Callam, the incumbent General Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), was for many years a highly respected member of the WCC’s “Faith and Order Commission.”

WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY
THEMES 1968–2018

Materials jointly prepared by the WCC Faith and Order Commission and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity were first used in 1968

1968  To the praise of his glory (Ephesians 1:14)

1969  Called to freedom (Galatians 5:13)
(Preparatory meeting held in Rome, Italy)

1970  We are fellow workers for God
(1 Corinthians 3:9)
(Preparatory meeting held at the Monastery of Niederaltaich, Federal Republic of Germany)

1971  ... and the communion of the Holy Spirit
(2 Corinthians 13:13)
(Preparatory meeting held in Bari, Italy)

1972  I give you a new commandment (John 13:34)
(Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)

1973  Lord, teach us to pray (Luke 11:1)
(Preparatory meeting held at the Abbey of Montserrat, Spain)

1974  That every tongue confess: Jesus Christ is Lord
(Philippians 2:1-13)
(Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)

1975  God’s purpose: all things in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-10)
(Material from an Australian group – Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)

1976  We shall be like him (1 John 3:2) or, Called to become what we are
(Material from Caribbean Conference of Churches - Preparatory meeting held in Rome, Italy)

1977  Enduring together in hope (Romans 5:1-5)
(Material from Lebanon, in the midst of a civil war – Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)

1978  No longer strangers (Ephesians 2:13-22)
(Material from an ecumenical team in Manchester, England)

1979  Serve one another to the glory of God
(1 Peter 4:7-11)
(Material from Argentina – Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)

1980  Your kingdom come (Matthew 6:10)
(Material from an ecumenical group in Berlin, German Democratic Republic – Preparatory meeting held in Milan, Italy)

1981  One Spirit - many gifts - one body
(1 Corinthians 12:3b-13)
(Material from Graymoor Fathers, USA – Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)

1982  May all find their home in you, O Lord
(Psalm 84)
(Material from Kenya – Preparatory meeting held in Milan, Italy)

1983  Jesus Christ - the life of the world
(1 John 1:1-4)
(Material from an ecumenical group in Ireland – Preparatory meeting held in Céligny, Bossey, Switzerland)

1984  Called to be one through the cross of our Lord
(1 Corinthians 2:2 and Colossians 1:20)
(Preparatory meeting held in Venice, Italy)

1985  From death to life with Christ
(Ephesians 2:4-7)
(Material from Jamaica – Preparatory meeting held in Grandchamp, Switzerland)

1986  You shall be my witnesses (Acts 1:6-8)
(Material from Yugoslavia, Slovenia – Preparatory meeting held in Yugoslavia)

1987  United in Christ - a new creation
(2 Corinthians 5:17-6:4a)
(Material from England – Preparatory meeting held in Taizé, France)

1988  The love of God casts out fear (1 John 4:18)
(Material from Italy – Preparatory meeting held in Pinerolo, Italy)

1989  Building community: one body in Christ
(Romans 12:5-6a)
(Material from Canada – Preparatory meeting held in Whaley Bridge, England)
1990  That they all may be one...That the world may believe (John 17)  
(Material from Spain – Preparatory meeting held in Madrid, Spain)

1991  Praise the Lord, all you nations! (Psalm 117 and Romans 15:5-13)  
(Material from Germany – Preparatory meeting held in Rotenburg an der Fulda, Federal Republic of Germany)

1992  I am with you always... Go, therefore (Matthew 28:16-20)  
(Material from Belgium – Preparatory meeting held in Bruges, Belgium)

1993  Bearing the fruit of the Spirit for Christian unity (Galatians 5:22-23)  
(Material from Zaire – Preparatory meeting held near Zurich, Switzerland)

1994  The household of God: called to be one in heart and mind (Acts 4:23-37)  
(Material from Ireland – Preparatory meeting held in Dublin, Republic of Ireland)

1995  Koinonia: communion in God and with one another (John 15:1-17)  
(Material from Faith and Order – Preparatory meeting held in Bristol, England)

1996  Behold, I stand at the door and knock (Revelation 3:14-22)  
(Material from Portugal – Preparatory meeting held in Lisbon, Portugal)

1997  We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:20)  
(Material from Nordic Ecumenical Council – Preparatory meeting held in Stockholm, Sweden)

1998  The Spirit helps us in our weakness (Romans 8:14-27)  
(Material from France – Preparatory meeting held in Paris, France)

1999  He will dwell with them as their God, they will be his peoples (Revelation 21:1-7)  
(Material from Malaysia – Preparatory meeting held in the Monastery of Bose, Italy)

2000  Blessed be God who has blessed us in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-14)  
(Material from the Middle East Council of Churches – Preparatory meeting held at La Verna, Italy)

2001  I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life (John 14:1-6)  
(Material from Romania – Preparatory meeting held at Vulcan, Romania)

2002  For with you is the fountain of life (Psalm 36:5-9)  
(Material from CEEC and CEC – Preparatory meeting held near Augsburg, Germany)

2003  We have this treasure in clay jars (2 Corinthians 4:4-18)  
(Material from churches in Argentina – Preparatory meeting held at Los Rubios, Spain)

2004  My peace I give to you (John 14:23-31; John 14:27)  
(Material from Aleppo, Syria – Preparatory meeting held in Palermo, Sicily)

2005  Christ, the one foundation of the church (1 Corinthians 3:1-23)  
(Material from Slovakia – Preparatory meeting held in Piestaňy, Slovakia)

2006  Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them (Matthew 18:18-20)  
(Material from Ireland – Preparatory meeting held in Prosperous, Co. Kildare, Ireland)

2007  He even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak (Mark 7:31-37)  
(Material from South Africa – Preparatory meeting held in Faverges, France)

2008  Pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:12a, 13b-18)  
(Material from USA – Preparatory meeting held in Graymoor, Garrison, USA)

2009  That they may become one in your hand (Ezekiel 37:15-28)  
(Material from Korea – Preparatory meeting held in Marseilles, France)

2010  You are witnesses of these things (Luke 24:48)  
(Material from Scotland – Preparatory meeting held in Glasgow, Scotland)

2011  One in the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer (cf. Acts 2:42)  
(Material from Jerusalem – Preparatory meeting held in Saydnaya, Syria)

2012  We will all be changed by the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:51-58)  
(Material from Poland – Preparatory meeting held in Warsaw, Poland)
2013  What does God require of us? (cf. Micah 6:6-8)  
    (Material from India – Preparatory meeting held in Bangalore, India)

2014  Has Christ been divided?  
    (1 Corinthians 1:1-17)  
    (Material from Canada – Preparatory meeting held in Montréal, Canada)

2015  Jesus said to her: Give me to drink (John 4: 7)  
    (Material from Brazil – Preparatory meeting held in São Paulo, Brazil)

2016  Called to proclaim the mighty acts of the Lord  
    (cf. 1 Peter 2:9)  
    (Material from Latvia – Preparatory meeting held in Rīga, Latvia)

2017  Reconciliation - The love of Christ compels us  
    (2 Cor 5:14-20)  
    (Material from Germany – Preparatory meeting held in Wittenberg, Germany)

2018  Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power  
    (Ex 15:6)  
    (Material from the Caribbean – Preparatory meeting held in Nassau, Bahamas)

KEY DATES IN THE HISTORY OF THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

c. 1740 In Scotland a Pentecostal movement arose, with North American links, whose revivalist message included prayers for and with all churches.

1820  The Rev. James Haldane Stewart publishes “Hints for the General Union of Christians for the Outpouring of the Spirit”.

1840  The Rev. Ignatius Spencer, a convert to Roman Catholicism, suggests a “Union of Prayer for Unity”.

1867  The First Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops emphasizes prayer for unity in the Preamble to its Resolutions.

1894  Pope Leo XIII encourages the practice of a Prayer Octave for Unity in the context of Pentecost.

1908  First observance of the “Church Unity Octave” initiated by the Rev. Paul Wattson.

1926  The Faith and Order movement begins publishing “Suggestions for an Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity”.

1935  Abbé Paul Couturier of France advocates the “Universal Week of Prayer for Christian Unity” on the inclusive basis of prayer for “the unity Christ wills by the means he wills”.

1958  Unité Chrétienne (Lyons, France) and the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches begin co-operative preparation of materials for the Week of Prayer.

1964  In Jerusalem, Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I prayed together Jesus’ prayer “that they all may be one” (John 17).

1966  The Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches and the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity [now known as the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity] begin official joint preparation of the Week of Prayer material.

1968  First official use of Week of Prayer material prepared jointly by Faith and Order and the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity.

1975  First use of Week of Prayer material based on a draft text prepared by a local ecumenical group. An Australian group was the first to take up this plan in preparing the 1975 initial draft.

1988  Week of Prayer materials were used in the inaugural worship for The Christian Federation of Malaysia, which links the major Christian groupings in that country.

1994  International group preparing text for 1996 included representatives from YMCA andYWCA.

2004  Agreement reached that resources for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity be jointly published and produced in the same format by Faith and Order (WCC) and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (Catholic Church).

2008  Commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. (Its predecessor, the Church Unity Octave, was first observed in 1908).