



Queensland
Churches Together

CHRISTIANS IN DIALOGUE

HOPE FOR A NEW PENTECOST

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Christians in Dialogue - Queensland Churches Together, PO Box 2096 Toowong Q 4066

Telephone: (07) 3369 6792 Email: admin@qct.org.au www.qct.org.au



LEADER'S GUIDE

1. Gathering

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

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

2. Beginning

- A. When all have arrived get the session started by giving them a clear statement of what the group is about -
Welcome the group
- ◆ who we are;
 - ◆ why we're here;
 - ◆ when we will finish.

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

- B. Then invite the members to introduce themselves saying:
- ◆ who I am;
 - ◆ why I'm here;
 - ◆ what I hope to get out of the program.

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

- C. Then distribute copies of the program.

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

3. Opening Devotion

- A. You may wish to play some music quietly in the background and give the group a few moments to reflect on the opening devotion. Then call for volunteers to lead it.
- B. You might like to choose an appropriate song for the group to share

4. Reflection on the Topic

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

5. Discussion

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

6. Closure

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

Closing Devotion

Cuppa

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EVALUATION FORM

The group leader invites the participants to complete the Evaluation Form at the end of the fourth study.

1. What did you appreciate about these studies?
2. What aspects of these studies did you find difficult?
3. What was the greatest challenge for you and your Church?
4. What topics would you like *Christians in Dialogue* to cover in future?

The Planning Committee invites the leader to respond to the two questions below.

1. Name of your group, each Church represented, and the number of people present from each denomination.
2. Generally speaking, how fully did participants enter into the discussion?

Thank you for your response.

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Hope for a New Pentecost

Study One – The Call to be One

The Call to be One

If you are reading this you most likely belong to a Christian denomination, e.g. Anglican, Lutheran, Roman Catholic or Uniting Church. You have probably encountered the word ‘ecumenism’. We speak of the ecumenical movement. Sometimes it is spelt ‘Oecumenical’. The word comes from a Greek word *oikoumene* which means ‘the whole inhabited earth’.

The aim of this program is to promote discussion on what the concept/word ecumenism means for us, both individually and as members of our denomination. The impetus to unity comes from several sources.

1. Scripture

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Acts 2:1-2, 6 (NRSV)

In our time, when some people think of the movement towards Christian Unity they liken it to a new Pentecost.

Jesus offers a clear call for us to be one.

It is found in John 17:20-21 (NRSV):

I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

Most people seeking church unity can and do quote this passage from the New Testament. There are other scriptural sources that enlighten us and encourage us towards ecumenism.

A good example is this extract from *A Lutheran Stance towards Ecumenism, a report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, (Missouri Synod, 1974)*.

Paul’s injunction to Timothy, to pastors of all generations, and to the whole church is recorded in 2 Tim. 1:13-14: *“Follow the pattern of the sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus; guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.”*

Here is a biblical model for ecumenical endeavors: Holding firmly to the unity of the Spirit, foster and promote the bond of peace (Eph. 4); recognizing our unity with all who in every place call on the name of the Lord, strive earnestly by mutual admonition and instruction to overcome every obstacle to peace and concord throughout Christendom, reproving errors as injurious to faith and spiritual life and manifesting at the same time also a genuine concern for the physical well-being of all members of Christ’s body everywhere. (1Cor.1-16)

Most major churches have similarly recognized that scripture calls us into the journey to unity.

2. Official Documents

There are many official documents which promote unity, both at international and national level.

Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. World Council of Churches Faith and Order Paper No 111, 1982 (known as the “Lima Text”)

The Holy Spirit is at work in the lives of people before, in and after their baptism. It is the same Spirit who revealed Jesus as the Son (Mark 1:10-11) and who empowered and united the disciples at Pentecost (Acts 2).

(# 5)

Baptism initiates the reality of the new life given in the midst of the present world. It gives participation in the community of the Holy Spirit. It is a sign of the Kingdom of God and of the life of the world to come. Through the gifts of faith, hope and love, baptism has a dynamic which embraces the whole of life, extends to all nations, and anticipates the day when every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

(# 7)

A significant Australian official document is the ***Basis of Union*** – the document which heralded the emergence of the **Uniting Church in Australia** in 1977. Two extracts read.

The Uniting Church in Australia lives and works within the faith and unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. The Uniting Church recognizes that it is related to other Churches in ways which give expression, however partially, to that unity in faith and mission. Recalling the Ecumenical Councils of the early centuries, the Uniting Church looks forward to a time when the faith will be further elucidated, and the Church’s unity expressed, in similar Councils. It thankfully acknowledges that the Uniting Churches were members of the World Council of Churches and other ecumenical bodies, and will seek to maintain such membership...(# 2)

...The Uniting Church affirms that it belongs to the people of God on the way to the promised end. The Uniting Church prays that, through the gift of the Spirit, God will constantly correct that which is erroneous in its life, will bring it into deeper unity with other Churches, and will use its worship, witness and service to God’s eternal glory through Jesus Christ the Lord. (# 18)

3. Church Leaders

There are similarly calls from a variety of Church leaders.

In the **Anglican Church** one of the ways official views are expressed is through the **Lambeth Conferences of Bishops** which meet every ten years. The last conference in 1998 resolved that:

This Conference:

- a. reaffirms the Anglican commitment to the full, visible unity of the Church as the goal of the Ecumenical Movement;
- b. encourages the further explication of the characteristics which belong to the full, visible unity of the Church (described variously as the goal, the marks, or the portrait of visible unity); and

- c. recognises that the process of moving towards full, visible unity may entail temporary anomalies, and believes that some anomalies may be bearable when there is an agreed goal of visible unity, but that there should always be an impetus towards their resolution and, thus, towards the removal of the principal anomaly of disunity.

This overall commitment to seeking unity is a major theme of Anglican life at the international level and supported by the major Anglican leaders.

An example of this can be seen in the **Archbishop of Canterbury**, Rowan Williams, **greeting to Pope Benedict XVI** on 23 November 2006:

It is in that same fraternal spirit that I make this visit now, since the journey of friendship that they began is one that I believe that we should continue together. I have been heartened by the way in which from the very beginning of your ministry as Bishop of Rome, you have stressed the importance of ecumenism in your own ministry. If the Good News of Jesus Christ is to be fully proclaimed to a needy world, then the reconciliation of all Christians in the truth and love of God is a vital element for our witness.

Orthodox and Roman Catholic examples can be seen in the following:

Common Declaration by Pope Benedict XVI and the Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I (Istanbul, Turkey, 30 November 2006)

This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it! (Ps 117:24)

This fraternal encounter which brings us together, Pope Benedict XVI of Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, is God's work, and in a certain sense his gift.

We give thanks to the Author of all that is good, who allows us once again, in prayer and in dialogue, to express the joy we feel as brothers and to renew our commitment to move towards full communion. This commitment comes from the Lord's will and from our responsibility as Pastors in the Church of Christ. May our meeting be a sign and an encouragement to us to share the same sentiments and the same attitudes of fraternity, cooperation and communion in charity and truth. The Holy Spirit will help us to prepare the great day of the re-establishment of full unity, whenever and however God wills it. Then we shall truly be able to rejoice and be glad.

Pope John Paul II - Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* (That They May All Be One) 1995

The faithful are one because, in the Spirit, they are in communion with the Son and, in him, share in his communion with the Father: 'Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ' (1 Jn 1:3). For the Catholic Church, then, the communion of Christians is none other than the manifestation in them of the grace by which God makes them sharers in his own communion, which is his eternal life (# 9).

...Indeed, the elements of sanctification and truth present in the other Christian Communities, in a degree which varies from one to the other, constitute the objective basis of the communion, albeit imperfect, which exists between them and the Catholic Church.

To the extent that these elements are found in other Christian Communities, the one Church of Christ is effectively present in them...(#11)

In 1985 **Pope John Paul II** spoke to the Roman Curia,

The search for unity and ecumenical concern are a necessary dimension of the whole of the Church's life. Everything can and must contribute to it. I have already asked on more than one occasion that the reestablishment of unity among all Christians must be considered a pastoral priority. We are committed together with our brothers and sisters of the other churches and ecclesial communities in the ecumenical movement.

Discussion Questions

1. How widespread is the desire for Christian unity? Is this an Australian phenomenon as a reaction to an apparent need, or is it worldwide?

2. Why are you interested in ecumenism?
What do you hope for from ecumenism?

Hope for a New Pentecost

Study Two – The History of Ecumenism

1. A Brief History of Division

Division occurred early in the history of the Church. For example the Assyrian Church of the East split from the western Churches at the time of the Council of Ephesus (431 AD). In India this church is called the Chaldean Syrian Church. This was at a time when there was deep discussion on Jesus as one divine person with two natures, human and divine. This debate continued on through the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD). The discussion was complicated because a common theological language had not evolved and also because of cultural and political sensitivities that coloured the debate. Those churches which split at the time of the Council of Chalcedon have the generic name Oriental Orthodox Churches. Churches belonging to this group include the Armenian, Egyptian (Coptic), Syrian, Ethiopian and Indian Malabar Churches.

These divisions in recent times have begun to heal. In the common declaration of Pope John Paul II and His Holiness Mar Ignatius Zakka Iwas I, on June 1984 we read:

In the 20th century, the Chalcedonian schism was not seen with the same relevance any more, and from ...meetings between the ...Pope and Patriarchs declarations emerged.

The confusions and schisms ...they realize today, *in no way affect or touch the substance of their faith*, since these *arose only because of differences in terminology and culture* and in the various formulae adopted by different theological schools to express the same matter. Accordingly, we find today no real basis for the sad divisions and schisms that subsequently arose between us concerning the doctrine of Incarnation.

There is a centuries-long history of religious, cultural and political difference that accompanied the eventual division that occurred between the Western Church and the Eastern Orthodox Churches. The Western Church, around the Pope in Rome, was influenced by the cultural development in Western Europe and the Christians of the East held to the culture of the East. In 1054 the Great Schism saw Pope Leo IX excommunicate the Patriarch of Constantinople, and the Patriarch in turn condemned the Pope. The resultant lack of communion between Constantinople continued till the time of the Second Vatican Council. A turning point came with the Common Declaration of Patriarch Athenagoras I and Pope Paul VI on 7 December 1965 when each lifted the condemnations of the 11th Century. Formal dialogue to work towards full communion has followed.

The Orthodox Churches in the East are presided over by the Patriarchs of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Moscow, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sophia. Various self-governing Orthodox churches are in communion with these patriarchates. In this context it is also to be noted that the Catholic Pope is the Patriarch of Rome, and as such heads the Latin or Roman Rite within the Catholic Church. There are many other Rites within the Catholic Church that have their own legal system and liturgical practice. Each of these is headed by a patriarch. These rites are in communion with Rome in that the election of the Patriarch, which takes place within the rite, is ratified by the Pope. The Melkite Rite, the Maronite Rite and the Ukrainian Rite are examples of other rites found in Australia.

The division between the Churches with which we are most familiar is referred to as the Reformation or the Protestant Reformation. This was a movement in the 16th century which at first set out to reform practices that were seen as deficiencies in the Church in Western Europe. Soon, the reformers split from the Church altogether, founding four major church traditions.

In 1517, Martin Luther published his 95 Theses criticizing the Church, including what he called “selling” indulgences. He was building on work done by John Wycliffe and Jan Hus. Other reformers joined the cause. Church beliefs and practices under question by Protestant reformers included purgatory, devotion to Mary, saints, the number of the sacraments and the authority of the Pope.

The four most notable traditions to emerge directly from the Reformation were the Lutheran tradition, the Reformed/Calvinist/Presbyterian tradition, the Anabaptist tradition and the Anglican tradition. Subsequent Protestant traditions generally trace their roots back to these initial four schools of the Reformation. In many parts of the world new churches are continually emerging. The Reformation also led to a Catholic Reformation.

The single most identifiable expression of the Catholic Reformation occurs in the decrees of the Council of Trent (1545 – 1563).

Discussion Question

In what ways has this section enhanced, developed, surprised or challenged your understanding of the concept of Ecumenism?

2. A History of Ecumenism.

The nineteenth century saw the coming to birth of what we know as the modern Ecumenical Movement. This began with the missionary movement from the West into Africa, Asia and the Pacific. Of course, this also fed the scandal of disunity with missionaries often competing to win souls, and often preaching against one another, leaving local ‘heathens’ puzzled by Christian disunity.

One response to this situation was the foundation of Missionary Societies, which brought about the coming together of representatives of a number of different denominations in the mission fields to meet, pray and discuss their common work. These gatherings however were not of Churches, but rather individual missionaries, but they did promote contact and understanding between Protestant churches. Their aim was not ecumenism, however the result was ecumenical.

Another result was the Evangelical Alliance which saw Christian leaders of some 52 Protestant Churches come together for ‘spiritual union’ with the aim of evangelisation. This resulted in united prayer for the renewal of the Church.

The third factor of early Church unity was the youth movement which saw the foundation of YMCA in 1844 and in 1854 the YWCA. These were founded in England but spread quickly to North America. The basis of membership was personal faith in Jesus Christ and their aim was to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. They showed the rest of the ecumenical movement how to meet together inter-denominationally, sharing their heritage and the riches of their particular tradition with others. They did not blur over the differences as would happen in a non-denominational meeting. This was indeed a great gift to the Ecumenical Movement.

The Roman Catholic Church was not party to any of these movements. The first Papal Decree devoted to ecumenism was in 1894 by Pope Leo XIII, calling for Roman Catholic unity. In it, he envisaged reconciliation of other Churches with the Church of Rome (not quite what the Protestants had in mind!).

The World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910 represents both a culmination of the 19th century missions and the formal beginning of modern Ecumenism. The conference led to the founding of several ecumenical projects and agencies including the World Council of Churches in 1948. The 1910 Chairman, John Mott, is recorded as saying, “The end of the planning is the beginning of the doing.”

The first World Conference of the Faith and Order movement, which looked at matters of doctrine, was in 1927 at Lausanne in Switzerland. No Roman Catholics were present at this Conference despite a personal invitation being delivered to Pope Pius XI who subsequently issued a statement saying there was no way the Roman Catholic Church could participate. A Decree had been issued in 1919 forbidding Roman Catholics to participate in congresses with those ‘separated brethren’ looking towards Christian unity. The Roman Catholic understanding of Christian unity has developed dramatically since then.

Another development was that of ‘Life and Work’ movement whose concern was with Christians ‘doing’ things together. It was the result of a growing Christian sense of social responsibility which developed after the First World War. This group first met in Stockholm, Sweden in 1925.

The Orthodox Churches had been almost totally separated from western Christians since the eleventh century. Then in 1920 the Patriarch of Constantinople addressed an Encyclical letter “unto all the Churches of Christ wheresoever they be”. To this point the Orthodox Churches had not been involved in any ecumenical discussions, but perhaps were influenced by the new idea for a League of Nations. The encyclical called for a permanent organized fellowship between the Churches – a kind of League of Churches – outlining twelve methods by which Churches could move towards better understanding and closer union.

All these ‘movements’ as mentioned were led by people of great vision, but they were not rooted in the Churches. The Churches had no control over the results of the conferences and the conferences were not accountable to the Churches. It was not until 1937 that the movement leaders met with Church leaders and agreed on a proposal for one comprehensive ecumenical body to be called a World Council of Churches. After World War II many Christians were deeply affected by war, but were able to unite in Christian fellowship on terms of repentance and forgiveness, particularly with the Church in Germany, and in Amsterdam in 1948 emerged the World Council of Churches (WCC).

In 1952, Professor (later Cardinal) Johannes Willebrands established the Catholic Conference for Ecumenical Questions, which worked actively with the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC. In addition, in the ‘50s and early ‘60s, official Roman Catholic observers were present at a number of WCC related conferences including the Faith and Order Conferences at Lund (1952) and Montreal (1963) before becoming full participatory members of Faith and Order in 1968.

The official entry of the Roman Catholic Church to the field of Church Unity came with the calling of the Second Vatican Council on 25 January 1959 and the subsequent proclamation of its **Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*** (The Restoration of Unity) on 21 November 1964.

The restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council. Christ the Lord founded one church and one church only. However, many Christian communions present themselves to people as the true inheritors of Jesus Christ; all indeed profess to be followers of the Lord but they differ in outlook and go their different ways, as if Christ himself were divided. (#1)

The faithful should remember that they promote union among Christians better, that indeed they live it better, when they try to live holier lives according to the Gospel. For the closer their union with the Father, the Word, and the Spirit, the more deeply and easily will they be able to grow in mutual brotherly love. (#7)

Discussion Questions

1. The initial movements towards Ecumenism were made by individuals of great vision. How does this knowledge affect your sense of personal involvement in the ecumenical movement?
2. Do you believe that members of your faith community have basic understandings of the history of division and the history of Ecumenism? If not, how can this be addressed?

Hope for a New Pentecost

Study Three – Signs on the Pathway to Unity

1. Dialogues

Dialogues, and the agreements that have followed on from them, are the chief signs on the path towards unity. Dialogue happens at all levels: local, national and international.

There have been some key statements that have influenced ecumenical dialogue at all levels. One of these is the **Lund Principle** which comes from the **Third World Conference on Faith and Order** held at Lund in Sweden in 1952. It encourages the churches to “*act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately*”.

A full study of dialogue is beyond the scope of this work however there have been important examples which bear some mention.

In Australia there have been significant dialogues between the following:

The Anglican Church and the Lutheran Church;
the Anglican Church and the Roman Catholic Church;
the Lutheran Church and the Roman Catholic Church;
the Uniting Church and

- (a) the Anglican Church,
- (b) the Churches of Christ,
- (c) the Greek Orthodox Church,
- (d) the Lutheran Church
- (e) the Roman Catholic Church.

The area of most commonality in the above dialogues concerns Baptism and there is agreement between these Churches that each recognize the other’s baptism. It is recognized that in Baptism we become part of the body of Christ to share in ministry and the mission of all believers. Across the wider theological stances there are still unresolved issues regarding infant baptism, the relationship of baptism and confirmation, admission to communion and around the question of believer’s Baptism. For this last question there is a general consensus that recommends Churches recognize different practice and avoid re-baptism.

The Eucharist which, of course is another central issue, has been the subject of dialogue between the Lutheran Church with each of the Anglican, Roman Catholic and Uniting Churches and between the Anglican and Uniting Churches. The dialogue between the Lutheran and Roman Catholic Church in Australia produced a key document: ***Sacrament and Sacrifice***. This affirms a common faith in the real presence of Christ in the sacramental celebration of the Eucharist where the reception of Christ’s true body and blood by the faithful is an essential aspect of the Eucharist. There is room for further debate concerning the reservation of the species outside of the Eucharist. The document avoided discussion of transubstantiation as a theological theory. While there are local agreements regarding Eucharistic hospitality, as for example between the Anglican and Lutheran Churches, the question of Eucharistic hospitality in general is still open to discussion. This is because the underlying issues of ecclesiology and ordination/ ministry within the church have not yet been resolved.

While there is significant agreement on the subject of Church, including the subjects of Apostolic Succession, *Episcope* (Bishops) and Ordination and Ministry within the Church, it

must also be said that until there is agreement across the board on these subjects only partial unity can be achieved.

The subjects of marriage and Justification by faith have also been discussed in local dialogues.

In Australian dialogues to date, a summary of convergence reads as follows:

1. Our recognition of each others' baptism as members of the body of Christ and the reality of the sacramental source of our common life in Christ.
2. We hold the scriptures of the old and new testaments bear decisive witness to the faith we hold in common.
3. We each receive the Christian Creeds
4. A community of scholarship bridging denominational differences has emerged.
5. The problem of tradition in Christian life and thought is less divisive – the Protestants recognize the scriptures are read within the historical Christian community and the Catholic side sees the need of the churches to be challenged by the scriptures.
6. Liturgical worship - we use the same scriptures and liturgical year and readings cycles.
7. Eucharistic service is drawn from ancient Christian traditions.
8. The experience of praying together leads to respect.
9. Common witness together in social justice and justice in the world

Stages on the Way: Documents from the Bilateral Conversations between Churches in Australia (Edited by Raymond K. Williamson, Joint Board of Christian Mission, Melbourne, 1994)

Much of the Australian dialogue reflects international agreed statements. At an international level a most comprehensive and thorough treatment of doctrinal matters was found in the publication in 1982 of *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (often shortened to **BEM** and sometimes called the “Lima text”) from the **World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission**. It was preceded by much preparation and rested on active biblical scholarship, liturgical studies across the denominations and increasing good will.

Other significant milestones have been the **Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC)** documents.

ARCIC I produced *Agreed Statements on Eucharistic Doctrine and Ministry and Ordination with Elucidations*, and two joint statements on *Authority in the Church with Elucidations*. These were collected and published as *The Final Report* to coincide with the Pope's visit to Britain in 1982.

ARCIC II produced *Agreed Statements on Salvation and the Church* and *The Church as Communion*.

Our Agenda has explicitly included “the study of all that hinders our mutual recognition of ministries”, and in 1995 Cardinal Cassidy stated in a letter to the Co-chairman of ARCIC II that a declaration of real agreement in faith by both Churches “in matters which admit of no divergence” concerning Eucharist and Ministry, would

alter the context of Leo XIII's 1896 assessment of Anglican orders, and "could lead to a new evaluation of the sufficiency of these rites".

A topic of both doctrinal and practical disagreement was obviously the ordination of women to the priesthood...

ARCIC II then turned its attention to the stance of the two Churches on moral and ethical issues, and produced an impressive *Common Statement* on their differing approaches and points of agreement in *Life in Christ* in 1994.

In response to widespread concern in both Churches, ARCIC II also took up again the subject of authority, producing in 1998 a very remarkable document, *The Gift of Authority*. This not only took up questions left unresolved by the *Final Report* of ARCIC I, but carried the whole study very much further, in the light of developments about authority, especially primatial authority, in both churches.

Boulding, M.C. *Anglican-Roman Catholic Relations Since Vatican II* downloaded from <http://vatican2voice.org/symp/boulding.asp>

ARCIC has continued to address other points of disagreement and has now provided a statement concerning the Blessed Virgin Mary called *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*. The later ARCIC writings are proposed agreements awaiting a response by the two Churches.

Methodist/ Roman Catholic relations have reached a new level of maturity. The dialogue began in 1967 and the two communions are now looking at ways of taking stock of the achievements of that dialogue and the new stage reached in the relationship. The World Methodist Council at its Conference in Seoul, Korea in July 2006 affirmed the signing of the *Joint Declaration on Justification* by the Roman Catholic and Lutheran Churches in 1999. It was said that Methodists accept the significance of that statement as an expression of the "shared biblical faith of the universal Church". It added that this means that the Methodists, along with the Roman Catholics and the Lutherans no longer see the understanding of Justification as a "church-dividing issue".

The **Centro Pro Unione** web site has full texts from many dialogues - http://mail1.pro.urbe.it/home_en.html

Other texts can be found on the websites of the participating Churches.

Discussion Questions

1. How important is it to **you** to discuss Ecumenical issues?
2. How can you promote awareness in your community of the official dialogues?
3. What ecumenical issue or dialogue would you like to learn more about?

2. Covenants

An indicator of the progress towards Church unity in Australia at an official level may be seen the Covenant signed in Adelaide in July 2004 by the member churches of the **National Council of Churches in Australia**.

The wide variety of those Churches in itself is significant; they are as follows: Anglican Church of Australia, Antiochian Orthodox Church, Armenian Apostolic Church, Assyrian Church of the East, Churches of Christ in Australia, Congregational Federation of Australia, Coptic Orthodox Church, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia, Lutheran Church of Australia, Religious Society of Friends, Roman Catholic Church in Australia, Romanian Orthodox Church, The Salvation Army, Syrian Orthodox Church, Uniting Church in Australia

The First part of the Covenant was a *Declaration of Intent*.

The Second part of the covenant entitled *The Proposed Commitment* deals with five areas concerning ecumenical ministry: The General Notion of Ecumenism, The Shared Use of Physical Resources, Common Mission and Ministry, Common Sacraments and Sharing Ordained Ministries. This section, seen as a whole, reflects the stages at which different denominations find themselves on the journey towards unity.

The Third part of the Covenant presents a *Pledge for the Future* and *An Affirmation of Commitment*. This covenant is the subject of another *Christians in Dialogue* study.

(See *Christians in Dialogue 2006 Churches in Covenant with One Another*)

Discussion Question

In your faith community, are some of the things that could be done together still being done separately? If so, can you suggest some steps that could be taken to improve the situation?

Hope for a New Pentecost

Study Four – Themes for Ecumenical Discussion

1. Communion

The word ‘Communion’ has a range of usages. It can refer to the Eucharist as ‘Holy Communion’. Communion is also frequently used to translate a New Testament Greek word *Koinonia*. *Koinonia* carries the basic idea of sharing with someone in something. It is the fellowship established in the life of the Christian community.

Within ecumenical reflection ‘Communion’ has become a summary of all that we have in common as Christians. Similarly, we sometimes read of the ‘The Lutheran Communion’ or ‘The Anglican Communion’. Thus, ‘Communion’ can be a way of saying that a particular group of Christians belong to each other.

An example of this way of using the word ‘Communion’ is **The Windsor Report** of the **Anglican Church** (2004). This document describes the Anglican Communion as:

a communion of churches, nourished by the presence and work of the Holy Spirit, building up the body in love. This Communion has been held together historically by “a common pattern of liturgical life rooted in the tradition of the Book of Common Prayer; shaped by the continual reading, both corporate and private, of the Holy Scriptures; rooted in its history through the See of Canterbury; and connected through a web of relationships – of bishops, consultative bodies, companion dioceses, projects of common mission, engagement with ecumenical partners – that are the means and the signs of common life.” (#7)

An example of the use of ‘Communion’ to describe the relationship between churches is the **1987 Common Declaration of Pope John Paul II and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie**.

We also urge our clergy and faithful not to neglect or undervalue that certain yet imperfect communion we already share. This communion already shared is grounded in faith in God our Father, in our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit, our common baptism into Christ, our sharing of the Holy Scriptures, of the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds; the Chalcedonian definition and the teaching of the Fathers; our common Christian inheritance for many centuries. This communion should be cherished and guarded as we seek to grow into the fuller communion Christ wills. Even in the years of our separation we have been able to recognize gifts of the Spirit in each other. The ecumenical journey is not only about the removal of obstacles but also about the sharing of gifts.

At one level the concept of ‘Communion’ is central to who we are as *persons* – in relationships with others and in our relationship with our God. At another level we recognize our communion with God and one another in our *connectedness* to all of creation, as creatures of God. At yet another level we are invited to participate in the Trinitarian fellowship of God, whose persons live in a *unique relationship of giving and receiving love*. We have seen how the Anglican Church explains all the relationships within its provinces as ‘Communion’.

The ultimate aim of the movement for church unity or ecumenism is for all churches together to nourish and support an ecumenical communion and be a ‘sacrament’ or sign of our intimate union with God and one another.

At this dialogue level while much has already been done, there are still unresolved issues. These issues include:

- The relationship between Communion and Ministerial Orders, which has priority?
- Papal primacy.
- The relative roles of Tradition and Scripture in shaping Communion.

On a local level we may experience Communion when we recognize one another as fellow Christians, worshipping the same God through Christ, enlightened by the Spirit. Communion may also be expressed in common life, when Christians from different groups are able to pray together and act together to promote the Gospel or share in pastoral care. As we have recognized a shared creedal faith we, in Communion, are able to see ongoing disagreements as dialogue between sisters and brothers.

Discussion Question

Read again the 1987 statement by the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury. What do you know about “our common Christian inheritance”?

Do you have a sense of the “certain yet imperfect communion we already share”?

2. Scripture

To understand the way the topic of Scripture is handled in Ecumenical discussion we need to look at a few aspects.

Firstly, this is a crucial area for discussion. It has been observed at the World Council of Churches that much will depend on the possibility of achieving ecumenical agreement on the question of the authority of the Bible. This will also mean discussion of the Church as the guardian of Holy Scripture, and the authority of the Church as a teacher of the faith in the question of the interpretation of Holy Scripture. These are difficult questions which cannot be by-passed, for the way to Christian unity lies through them.

The ecumenical reports frequently express the view that the Scriptures are basis texts, texts with a unique authority in the life of the Church and the Christian. The following statement by the **Anglican and Roman Catholic International Commission (Venice, 1976)** is representative of such expressions.

Assisted by the Holy Spirit (the apostolic community) transmitted what they had heard and seen of the life and words of Jesus and their interpretation of his redemptive work. Consequently *the inspired documents in which this is related came to be accepted by the Church as a normative record of the authentic foundations of the faith.* To these the Church has recourse for the inspiration of its life and mission; to these the Church refers its teaching and practice. Through these written words the authority of the Word of God is conveyed. Entrusted with these documents, the Christian community is enabled by the Holy Spirit to live out the gospel and so to be led into all truth. {emphasis added}. (*Authority in the Church* #2)

The Orthodox have stated their position as follows:

...we Orthodox cannot conceive of a united Church in which some of its members would hold that there is only one source of divine revelation, namely Holy Scripture alone; but others would affirm that apostolic tradition is the necessary completion of Holy Scripture (**Lausanne, 1972**)

A key problem that has been discussed often is the relation between Scripture and Tradition. A 1980 example of a statement dealing with this from the **Lutheran Roman Catholic Dialogue** is

It is the conviction of both churches that God's word is also transmitted through *church traditions* even though they differ in their theological evaluations. The canon of Holy Scripture is certainly itself a weighty and fundamental part of church tradition. Further, the creeds and official dogmatic decisions of the undivided church have special importance. Greater consideration of the early church and medieval pre-Reformation tradition shared by both churches could function as a decisive step towards unity. Strenuous efforts to understand the diverging traditions since the 16th century are also important as steps on the way to unity. (***Ways to Community #64***)

It can be seen that in this sense all Churches have a sense of tradition and development to arrive at their theology and practice today.

There are other issues that may need further work in formal ecumenical discussion.

One is the response of the Churches to developments in modern biblical scholarship. Contemporary scholarship can be seen behind discussions of some other themes but when Scripture is discussed the documents sometimes affirm mutual acceptance of biblical authority, without mentioning that the academies of both dialoging Churches are researching the meaning and application of the Bible.

At a local level Christians will often observe similar use of the Bible in their Churches. Some Churches use the same or similar three-year lectionaries in their Sunday worship. Others will take a more thematic approach in their selection of biblical passages for public reading and preaching. Many will regard their own faith as rooted in the Bible and can learn to respect the biblical roots of the others' faith. Many will have similar patterns of personal devotional use of the Bible. This observation of mutual loyalty and faith can underpin fellowship and sometimes seems to be ahead of the official statements of Church leaders.

Sacred Scripture brings us into communion with the family of God. So we cannot read Sacred Scripture on our own. Of course, it is always important to read the Bible in a very personal way, in a personal conversation with God, but at the same time it is important to read it in the company of persons who are on the journey with us. (**Pope Benedict XVI, speech 6 April 2006**)

Discussion Questions

1. How do the Churches represented in the discussion group use the Bible in public worship?
2. How aware are group members of the role of **tradition** in shaping their own denomination's beliefs and practices?

3. Justification

The introduction to *A Common Statement of the Australian Lutheran – Roman Catholic Dialogue* (1998) says:

When the Western church divided at the time of the Protestant Reformation the understanding of the doctrine of justification was at the heart of the separation. Many of the most significant condemnations in the Lutheran confessional writings and the anathemas from the Roman Catholic Council of Trent concerned this doctrine. In 1541 one of the first dialogues between Roman Catholics and Lutherans occurred

when Luther's colleague Philip Melancthon and the Roman Catholic theologians Johannes Eck and Gasparo Contarini, among others, engaged in a series of theological discussions in Regensburg. They surprised those assembled by reaching an agreement on the doctrine of justification.

In the period following the Second Vatican Council a new era of conversation was entered into with important national dialogues between Lutherans and Roman Catholics being organized in North America, Europe and in many other regions, including Australia. A number of these dialogues took up the question of Justification. While not finding agreement as easy or straight forward as the Regensburg dialogue, each team found a surprising level of agreement on this important doctrine. As a result of these dialogues the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church through the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity asked an international Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue team to determine to what extent the two traditions agreed on the doctrine of Justification.

On 31 October 1999 the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Roman Catholic Church signed the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. The Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) and the Australian Roman Catholic Church also signed this declaration. Hence the mutual condemnations no longer apply. The Methodists became a third party to this in Seoul in 2006.

The doctrine of Justification is the 'chief article' of the Lutheran Church. It is inextricably linked to Luther's faith, and Luther's faith was deeply embedded in the personal experience of a God who justifies the ungodly. The doctrine of Justification was not a new teaching prior to the Reformation, but the expression 'Justification' was and is rarely used in the Roman Catholic Church. The Lutheran Reformation brought it into the limelight. Luther's approach was completely permeated by his existential turmoil (*Anfechtung*) over the "righteousness of God", based on the phrase in Paul's letter to the Romans. (Rom 1:17).

The word 'Justification' refers to God's free and gracious action by which sinful human beings are declared to be righteous before God and by which their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. Justification comes solely by grace and through faith and not through our own merits. Justification cannot be separated from regeneration, sanctification and the renewal of our hearts by the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of Justification is based upon the reality of the sinful condition of humanity, which separates us from God and draws God's condemnation; it is called the *original sin*. Human beings are wounded by original sin, the sin of Adam and Eve in Paradise, which is the source of every sin, and they need forgiveness. God's forgiveness means that instead of the condemnation that our sins deserve, we are forgiven on Christ's account. Forgiveness therefore is God's free action in which sins are truly taken away.

Justification is entirely God's work, and very closely connected to sanctification, which is the fruit of justification in human beings. Sanctification involves human cooperation, however, justification and sanctification go hand in hand, and these cannot be separated only distinguished. Justification and sanctification are two sides of the same coin. The sacrament of Baptism is the visible sign and realization of God's promise of forgiveness in a person's life and of our regeneration and incorporation into Christ.

Jesus Christ occupies absolute centrality in the work of Justification, which is our redemption and salvation. Therefore no one should doubt the saving work of Christ and the efficacy of the sacraments. Salvation from the perspective of what God does for us in Christ is guaranteed. We can trust absolutely in God's saving promises.

That such a divisive issue as Justification by faith has been resolved to the extent of an elementary agreement is a cause for both celebration and determination to work more diligently for ultimate church unity.

Discussion Question

How important is a doctrine of Justification in your Church's teaching?

Listen to the views of the different members of the group.

Questions that may sharpen your perspective on Justification are:

Is it good enough to be a good, decent person? Why?

Can a sinner just say 'sorry' and be forgiven? Why?

Does this mean one can 'repent' and then live as you like? Why?

Hope for a New Pentecost

Study Five

Contentious Issues / Spiritual Ecumenism / What We Need To Do!

A. Contentious Issues

There are many contentious issues which arise in ecumenical relations such as those surrounding episcopacy and non-episcopacy, infant Baptism and believer's Baptism, the relation between scripture and tradition, debates on the goal of the Ecumenical Movement and on the nature of the Church. Some examples will be discussed in this study.

1. Ordination and Ministry

As Christian churches endeavour to come to full recognition of each other's ordination and ministry various matters require clarification and agreement. This is very clearly illustrated in the dialogues between the Roman Catholic Church and other churches.

The ***Decree on Ecumenism from the Second Vatican Council*** outlined the Roman Catholic approach:

Although the ecclesial communities separated from us lack the fullness of unity with us which flows from baptism, and although we believe they have not preserved the proper reality of the eucharistic mystery in its fullness, especially because of the absence of the sacrament of Orders, nevertheless when they commemorate the Lord's death and resurrection in the holy supper, they profess that it signifies life in communion with Christ and await his coming in glory.

(# 22)

Some years later the **Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission** document *The Malta Report* (1968) attempted to clarify the issue:

We are agreed that among the conditions required for intercommunion are true sharing in faith and the mutual recognition of ministry. The latter presents a particular difficulty in regard to Anglican Orders according to the traditional judgment of the Roman Catholic Church. We believe that the present *growing together of our two Communions* and the needs of the future require of us a very serious consideration of this question *in the light of modern theology*. The theology of the ministry forms *part of the theology of the Church* and must be considered as such. It is only when sufficient agreement has been reached as to the *nature of the priesthood* and the *meaning attached in this context to the word validity* that we could proceed, working always jointly, to the application of this doctrine to the Anglican ministry of today. We would wish to *reexamine historical events* and past documents only to the extent that they can throw light upon the facts of the present situation. (*The Malta Report*, # 19)

The history of the Anglican – Roman Catholic debate regarding orders is summed up in a statement from an **Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue in the United States**, 1990:

The question of the validity of orders conferred according to the *Anglican Ordinal* has come up occasionally in Roman Catholic theology since the period of the Reformation. In 1550 the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, issued a new ritual of ordination that was destined to replace the medieval rituals hitherto in use in England, of which the rite of Sarum (Salisbury) was the most widespread. When Cardinal Reginald Pole, under Queen Mary, tried to restore the old religion in England, he received

instructions from Popes Julius III and Paul IV regarding the mode of reconciliation of schismatic priests and bishops. Nonetheless, the exact meaning and scope of these instructions, as well as the actual decision of Reginald Pole, have been a matter of scholarly debate.

In the late nineteenth century, Pope Leo XIII, acceding to urgent pleading from some unofficial groups of Anglicans and from a few Roman Catholics, commissioned a team of scholars to examine the problem. This resulted in the pope's apostolic letter, *Apostolicae Curæ* in which Leo XIII concluded that the orders conferred with the use of the *Anglican Ordinal* were not valid according to the standards of the Roman Catholic Church.

Other denominations have been engaged in discussion on Ministry and Orders. Briefly the issues arising from such discussion include

The approach to Eucharist and Ministry is underpinned by the question of authority and place of Scripture and Tradition.

Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (# 53) recommended that Churches with episcopal succession (Bishops) recognize the apostolic faith in other Churches and that Churches without Bishops consider accepting them.

Lutherans and Roman Catholics have a different understanding of episcopate as the instrument which guarantees the authority of the Word and Sacrament in the Church. It may mean that this dialogue may need stages of partial recognition.

For a variety of reasons that affect the ecumenical discussion but especially because of the papal statement regarding Anglican Orders in *Apostolicae Curæ*, (Leo XIII 1894) attention must be paid to the issue of papal infallibility. This discussion has its influence on many attempts at dialogue. One example of the discussion comes from an **Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue in Canada** in 1992

1. God alone is essentially and inalienably infallible, incapable of deceiving or being deceived.
2. The Church as a whole can be said to be infallible in the analogical sense that, by God's grace, it will never deceive or err so gravely concerning the truths of the Gospel that the message of salvation is lost to humankind. To speak of 'infallibility' in this sense is not to claim that either the institutions of the Church or even the majority of its members are immune from error. It is simply to assert that the Church can be confident in the sufficiency of the Holy Spirit...
3. The truths of the Gospel thus 'infallibly' preserved enlighten the whole people of God. By virtue of their participation in the prophetic ministry of Jesus Christ, all persons and institutions of the Church are called to express and preserve these truths in appropriate ways. However, we must recognize also a special sign of God's grace in preserving the Church from error at times of crisis or when fundamental matters of faith are in question: this sign occurs when the institutions which serve the universal fellowship (i.e. council and/or primate) are enabled to articulate these truths faithfully to Scripture and in a way that commends itself to the whole Church, thus equipping the Church to meet the challenge. Such pronouncements, by virtue of their foundation in Scripture and their appropriateness to the need of the time, give the first embodiment to a renewed agreement in the truth to which they summon the whole of the Church. The 'formal authority' of such pronouncements helps the Church to meet the threat of error and gives it confidence in proclaiming the Gospel: but it must

always defer to the ‘material authority’ of Scripture, in fidelity to which the pronouncements were formulated.

Discussion Question

Imagine a new Pentecost experience happening today. What might it look like? How might it affect or be the hope for, the dialogue regarding Ordination and Ministry?

2. Eucharist

Issues still arise in ecumenical dialogue about the nature of Eucharist and especially the presence of Christ.

The *Decree on Ecumenism* from the Second Vatican Council presents a connection between Baptism and Eucharist.

Baptism, therefore, constitutes the sacramental bond of unity existing among all who through it are reborn. But baptism, of itself, is only a beginning; a point of departure, for it is wholly directed toward the acquiring of fullness of life in Christ. Baptism is thus ordained toward a complete profession of faith, a complete incorporation into the system of salvation such as Christ himself willed it to be, and finally, toward a complete integration into Eucharistic communion. (# 22)

The Lutheran Reformation in its confessions continued to affirm the teaching of the church about Christ’s real presence in the Lord’s Supper. Transubstantiation was rejected as an inappropriate attempt to explain something that is ultimately a mystery. Luther at many points opposed the late medieval system.

In his *Small Catechism* Luther teaches that “The Sacrament of the Altar” has been instituted by Christ himself, and it is the true body and blood of Christ “under the bread and wine”. The essential and effective words in this sacrament are the words of Christ, “for you” and “for the forgiveness of sins”. These are life-giving words for all who believe them, and who are, through their faith, truly worthy and well prepared.

Together with the proclamation of the gospel and the sacrament of baptism, the Lord’s Supper is the principal means through which the triune God communicates to all people salvation, understood as justification and reconciliation, and all the blessings of a new life in Christ Jesus. Thus the Eucharist belongs to the existential centre of Christian life and community.

The deep difference on this issue from the time of Reformation between Lutherans and Roman Catholics has been largely but not entirely resolved. Lutherans and Roman Catholics agree that Christ’s sacrifice is unique, and unrepeatable, and complete. They also agree that in the Eucharist the faithful participate in Christ’s sacrificial death. This is not merely a historical memory, but a reality, which is made present and effective in the Eucharistic celebration, and the participants are drawn into fellowship or *koinonia* with Christ and his sacrificial body and blood. (*Sacrament & Sacrifice: A Report from the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue in Australia, 1985*)

Discussion Question

How does your faith community express the manner in which it believes in Christ’s presence in the Eucharist?

B. Spiritual Ecumenism

One of the pioneers of spiritual ecumenism was Swiss-born protestant Brother Roger Schutz who in the 1940s founded the ecumenical community of Taize in France. It is a truly ecumenical community in that over one hundred brothers from Protestant and Roman Catholic backgrounds live there. Thousands of young people make pilgrimage there during the summer months. Taize has been visited by Pope John Paul II, three Archbishops of Canterbury, Metropolitans of the Orthodox Churches, the fourteen Lutheran bishops of Sweden and religious from all over the world. Everyone who visits is urged to grow in awareness of their inner life as well as the bonds that they have with others. Brother Roger was tragically murdered while at evening prayer on 16 August 2005. In a long tribute to Brother Roger, Pope Benedict XVI said "...He is now visiting us and speaking to us from on high. I think that we must listen to him, from within we must listen to his spiritually-lived ecumenism and allow ourselves to be led by his witness towards an interiorized and spiritualized ecumenism."

The understanding that spiritual ecumenism, involving personal conversion, prayer and a life of Christian witness, is at the heart of all efforts to bring about Christian unity, is emphasized in a variety of Christian traditions.

Second Vatican Council - *Decree on Ecumenism*

There can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without interior conversion. For it is from newness of attitudes of mind, from self-denial and unstinted love, that desires of unity take their rise and develop in a mature way. We should therefore pray to the Holy Spirit for the grace to be genuinely self-denying, humble, gentle in the service of others and to have an attitude of brotherly generosity toward them. The Apostle of the Gentiles says: "I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:1-3). This exhortation is directed especially to those raised to sacred orders in order that the mission of Christ may be continued. He came among us "not to be served but to serve": (Mt.20:28).

St John has testified: "If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (1Jn. 1:10). This holds good for sins against unity. Thus, in humble prayer we beg pardon of God and of our separated brethren, just as we forgive them that offend us." (#7)

In 2003 **Bishop Mark Hanson** led a delegation of bishops, pastors and leaders from the **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America** to Geneva, Rome and Canterbury. Archbishop Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury said,

The most important way of growing in fellowship with each other is growing together in prayer. If we can put together occasions in which Anglicans and Lutherans can share in retreats and reflection in silence together, that is bound to deepen things. If we can go on working on our sense of how the Lord's Supper...is at the heart of all we do, then we shall understand what we're about as churches.

The **World Council of Churches Faith and Order** document on Worship: "The Ditchingham Report" Ditchingham, England, August 1994 states:

‘Spiritual ecumenism’ refers to the source of our common commitment to the goal of visible unity. This must be a life of worship, bible study, prayer and spiritual discipline which keeps us going in the face of all obstacles and apparent lack of progress. Only within such a broader spiritual context can we forgive one another time and again as we cause pain through misunderstanding or insensitivity. (# 58)

In his *Letter 2007: Letter from Kolkata*, Brother Alois of Taizé points out:

As we continue the “pilgrimage of trust on earth” that brings together young people from many countries, we understand more and more deeply this reality: all humanity forms a single family and God lives within every human being without exception.

In India, as in other parts of Asia, we have discovered how much the quite natural attention paid to the presence of God in the whole of creation implies respect for the other person and what is sacred for him or her. Today, in modern societies, it is so important to reawaken that attentiveness to God and that respect for human beings.

Every human being is sacred for God. Christ opened his arms on the cross to gather together all humanity in God. If he sends us to the ends of the earth to communicate God’s love, this takes place above all through a dialogue of life.

John Paul II - *Ut Unum Sint (That They May Be One)* 1995

This change of heart and holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians, should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement, and can rightly be called ‘spiritual ecumenism’.

We proceed along the road leading to the conversion of hearts guided by love which is directed to God and, at the same time, to all our brothers and sisters, including those not in full communion with us. Love gives rise to the desire for unity, even in those who have never been aware of the need for it. Love builds communion between individuals and between Communities. If we love one another, we strive to deepen our communion and make it perfect... Love is the undercurrent which gives life and adds vigour to the movement towards unity.

This love finds its most complete expression in common prayer... Even when prayer is not specifically offered for Christian unity, but for other intentions such as peace, it actually becomes an expression and confirmation of unity. The common prayer of Christians is an invitation to Christ himself to visit the community of those who call upon him: “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them” (Mt 18:20) (#21)

Dedicated ecumenists are called to the witness of an interiorized and spiritualized life.

C. What we need to do!

In his first homily as Pope, Benedict XVI said:

Both the image of the shepherd and that of the fisherman issue an explicit call to unity...the account of the 153 large fish ends with the joyful statement: “*although there were so many the net was not torn*” (Jn 21:11). Alas, beloved Lord, with sorrow we must now acknowledge that it has been torn! But no – we must not be sad! Let us rejoice because of your promise, which does not disappoint, and let us do all we can to pursue the path towards the unity you have promised. Let us remember it in our prayer to the Lord, as we plead with him: Yes Lord, remember your promise. Grant that we may be one flock and one shepherd! Do not allow your net to be torn, help us to be servants of unity.

This potent plea for unity can cause us all to reflect on the directions we see as crucial and necessary for the unity of the churches to be achieved.

Discussion Question

In what ways do you understand Spiritual Ecumenism to be a personal call of challenge to you and to the wider community?