

FORTY YEARS OF WALKING TOGETHER: ANGLICAN-ROMAN CATHOLIC DIALOGUE IN CANADA

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The Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue of Canada turned forty years old in November. Many individuals who reach that milestone find it a felicitous occasion to look back and celebrate past accomplishments, as well as to look ahead and consider future directions. So, too, did the current members of ARC Canada.

Celebrations centred on an ecumenical service of Vespers held at Saint Joseph's Oratory in Montreal on November 13. Presiding at the liturgy together were the Right Reverend Barry Clarke, the Anglican Bishop of Montreal, and the Most Reverend Thomas Dowd, Auxiliary Bishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Montreal.

All of the elements of the bilingual liturgy were intended to highlight and celebrate the fruits of the four decades of dialogue between the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches in Canada, as well as internationally. Before each liturgical act, lectors read a brief preface drawn from *Growing Together in Unity and Mission*, the 2006 document issued by the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission.¹

The liturgy began with a remembrance of baptism with aspersion, prior to which the assembly was reminded that Anglicans and Catholics 'regard our common baptism as the basic bond of unity between us, even as we recognize that the fullness of eucharistic communion to which baptism should lead us is impeded by disagreement concerning some of the elements of faith and practice which we acknowledge are necessary for full, visible communion.'²

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¹ The full text of the liturgy can be found in the summer 2011 issue (no. 182) of the journal *Ecumenism*. It may also be found online at <http://www.anglican.ca/faith/worship/resources/>. The liturgy can be adapted by local communities wishing to commemorate Anglican-Roman Catholic relations in their own context.

² *Growing Together in Unity and Mission: Building on 40 Years of Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue* (London: SPCK, 2007), 38.

The proclamation of the word focused on the story of two disciples meeting Jesus on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). This biblical account gave the celebration its theme, 'Forty Years of Walking Together,' and a focus for its preacher, the Most Reverend François Lapierre, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Saint Hyacinthe and ARC Canada's co-chair.

In his homily, Bishop Lapierre acknowledged that the past forty years of Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue have not always been easy. 'Each church has made decisions that the other found difficult to understand,' he admitted. 'Begun in the enthusiasm after Vatican II, the dialogue is now experiencing more difficult moments.' Like the two disciples who met the risen Christ on the Emmaus road but did not recognize him, he said neither do our two churches always see Christ clearly. Nevertheless, said Bishop Lapierre, we continue to walk, talk, and pray together.

A common profession of faith was made using the Apostles' Creed, the creedal statement professed at baptism, a further acknowledgement that 'our full recognition of one another's baptism is itself the basis of the growing communion between us.'³

Prior to the singing of the Song of Mary and the censing of the altar, lectors recalled that, 'Catholics and Anglicans recognize the grace and unique vocation of Mary, Mother of God Incarnate, observe her festivals and accord her honour in the communion of saints. We agree in recognizing Mary as a model of holiness, obedience, and faith for all Christians and for the Church.'⁴

There followed a litany of thanksgiving prefaced by a common expression of repentance and regret: 'We have not always been open to the leadings of the Spirit. We gather today knowing that still more could have been possible. We seek pardon from God, and from each other, for not reaching out more generously in love, not listening more attentively, not imagining more creatively, not trusting the Spirit's work in each other with greater confidence.'

Having acknowledged with regret what might have been, past and present ARC Canada members then shared in expressing thanksgiving for what Anglican-Roman Catholic relations have accomplished over the past forty years. The litany included thanks for the witness of

³ *GTUM* 11.

⁴ *GTUM* 89.

pioneering dialogue members such as Jean-Marie Tillard and Eugene Fairweather, for inter-church families whose pastoral needs the dialogue has attempted to respond to, for the joint addressing of several social and moral issues, for shared theological faculties, and for the common lectionary and liturgical traditions the two churches share. The litany concluded with the Lord's Prayer being prayed in each one's own language.

The forty years of dialogue were compared in the liturgy to a 'decades-long exchange of gifts between our two traditions.' As an outward expression of this, a young person from each church exchanged symbolic gifts on behalf of their respective communions. The Anglicans' gift was a four-hundredth anniversary edition of the King James Bible, while the Catholic gift was a copy of the gospels from the illuminated Saint John's Bible. The choice of gifts called to mind the churches' common affirmation that 'within Tradition the Scriptures occupy a unique and normative place and belong to what has been given once for all.'⁵

The liturgy's dismissal was prefaced by *Growing Together in Unity and Mission's* exhortation to give living expression to the theological agreement the two churches have achieved: 'Genuine faith is more than assent: it is expressed in action. As Anglicans and Roman Catholics seek to overcome the remaining obstacles to full, visible unity, we recognize that the extent of our common faith compels us to live and witness together more fully here and now. Agreement in faith must go beyond mere affirmation.'⁶

The co-presiding bishops then led the assembly in a concluding reaffirmation of commitment in which those gathered promised, with God's help, to 'carry forward our commitment to the full, visible unity for which Christ prayed,' and 'to seek to deepen our relationship with one another in life and mission, and to further build on the communion we share.'

After recommitting to these things in prayer on Sunday, the members of ARC Canada met together the following day to discuss how they might be achieved. For this discussion on future directions for Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue, they were joined by members of the Canadian Anglican-Roman Catholic bishops' dialogue, and

⁵ GTUM 29.

⁶ GTUM 96.

members of the Commission for Christian Unity of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. Such a joint meeting was without precedent.

The gathering received an update on the work of the newly inaugurated third phase of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC III). Bishop Linda Nicholls, a member of ARCIC and the ARC Canada bishops' dialogue, and Canon Alyson Barnett-Cowan, who staffs ARCIC as the Anglican Communion's Director of Unity, Faith, and Order, each offered reflections on ARCIC III's first meeting last May in Bose, Italy. Both women are former members of ARC Canada.

The pair reminded the gathering of ARCIC III's mandate to engage with the concept of the church as communion, local and universal, and the related question of how in communion the local and universal church comes to discern right ethical teaching.

They indicated that 'receptive ecumenism' had been adopted as ARCIC III's methodology. The approach invites parties in a dialogue to move beyond the question of, 'What do others first need to learn from us?' to instead ask, 'What do we need to learn and what can we learn, or receive with integrity, from others?'

The national ARC dialogues have in the past responded to—and contributed to—the work of the international commission, and it was suggested that this should continue to be the case with ARCIC III. It was noted that ARC Canada might be in a particularly unique position to support this current round of ARCIC, since the Canadian churches are already wrestling with some of the moral and ethical questions the international commission has been mandated to address.

More specifically, five potential areas were identified where the national ARC dialogue might support the international commission:

1. Undertaking a theological project on primacy;
2. Formulating a case study on ethical or moral discernment based on the Canadian context;
3. Encouraging the reception of the documents of ARCIC II;
4. Encouraging the reception of the recommendations found in *Growing Together in Unity and Mission*;
5. Undertaking a project aimed at demonstrating how the receptive ecumenism model might be adapted and lived out locally.

In this way ARC Canada could endeavour to both increase an awareness of ARCIC's past agreed statements, as well as create an interest in the international commission's current work.

As important as contributing to ARCIC III could be, members of the national ARC dialogue are also acutely aware of the limited degree to which their churches have received the practical recommendations to be found in *Growing Together in Unity and Mission*. Many around the table expressed a desire to work more intentionally to help our churches 'live and witness together more fully here and now.'⁷

A recent Canadian example of such an initiative is the covenant entered into in 2011 by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Regina and the Anglican Diocese of Qu'Appelle. Signed by both diocesan bishops, the covenant commits them and their dioceses to nineteen different engagements. The commitments include ensuring regular occasions of common prayer, issuing joint episcopal statements on matters of public pastoral concern, arranging joint baptismal preparation, seeking together reconciliation with aboriginal peoples, and working together in mission.⁸

As one bishop around the table observed, 'Until the fruit of *Growing Together in Unity and Mission* actually takes root in our communities, we remain in the realm of thought rather than practical expression. The dialogues' discussions need to be "brought down" to the local, community level.'

To this end it was agreed that the ARC Canada theological dialogue and the national bishops' dialogue should meet together again, perhaps regularly. In doing so it is hoped that theological reflection and pastoral practice might better inform one another, so that the two dialogues' work is not carried out in isolation.

Evangelism was identified as a possible area to begin such collaborative work between the two dialogues. How can Canadian Anglicans and Roman Catholics together engage fruitfully with the predominantly secular reality in which both churches now exist? How do we reflect on this theologically in a way that can inform our common pastoral response?

⁷ *GTUM* 96.

⁸ The full text of the covenant can be found at:

http://archregina.sk.ca/sites/default/files/ecumanism/documents/Covenant_Letter_20110123.pdf.

Anglicans and Roman Catholics in Canada recognize that there are still fruits to be harvested from the past forty years of dialogue, and that there still remain gifts to be exchanged between our two traditions. What November's anniversary celebrations and discussions have revealed is an ongoing interest, steadfast willingness, and firm recommitment by both churches to continue to engage in those efforts. The road to full, visible unity may have proven longer than first thought. Nevertheless, Canadian Anglicans and Roman Catholics remain committed to journeying down that road together.