

Interim Report of the Anglican Church of Canada-United Church of Canada Dialogue Vancouver, January 2014

“Great things are they that you have done, O Lord my God!
How great your wonders and your plans for us!”
Psalms 40:5a

The current phase of the theological dialogue between the Anglican Church of Canada and the United Church of Canada resumed in January 2012 with a shared mandate to discern “whether God is calling us into a new stage in our common life.”¹ The 2010 General Synod of the Anglican Church specifically asked the dialogue to focus its work on “an examination of the doctrinal identities of the two churches and the implications of this for the lives of the churches, including understandings of sacraments and orders of ministry.”²

Meeting once annually, the members of the dialogue have rediscovered the degree to which our two churches share a common faith, context, history, geography, and commitment to carrying out God’s mission in the world. We have spent considerable time examining the theological positions and practices related to orders of ministry, sacraments, and creeds.

In doing so we have noted our differences, particularly in the way our churches order their ministries. However, we are also cognisant that such differences have been successfully navigated in numerous Ecumenical Shared Ministries, which have been for decades served interchangeably by both United Church and Anglican clergy. We have also learned from similar ecumenical dialogues in other parts of the world how it is possible to move beyond differences to achieve mutual exchanges of ministries for the purposes of mission.

When the Anglican Church of Canada and the United Church of Canada were negotiating a formal merger in the 1970s, it was for the sake of mission: “We desire that union should make possible more effective participation in God’s mission both in Canada and throughout the world.”³

The context in which our two churches now live and work has changed in the past 40 years, and our churches themselves have changed also. We are learning to proclaim the gospel anew in an increasingly secular and pluralistic society, and to do so with fewer financial and human resources than we once had. But the missional conviction that drove the framers of the Plan of Union remains our conviction, too. Our two churches are called still to be effective partners in God’s mission in this land and beyond.

That mission is compromised by the scandal of Christian division. The Lund Principle, which both our churches have affirmed, exhorts us to “act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately.”⁴ Yet more often than not we do act separately, and our witness to the world is rendered less effective.

¹ The first iteration of this dialogue met between 2003 and 2009, the fruits of which were catalogued in *Drawing from the Same Well: The St. Brigid Report*, available at www.united-church.ca and www.anglican.ca.

² Resolution A139-R2, 2010 General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada.

³ Plan of Union, ¶ 8.

⁴ “Lund Principle,” *A Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, 2nd ed., Eds. Nicholas Lossky, et. al. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2002) 714-5.

Proposals

1. We propose to explore what steps can be taken to make a mutual exchange of ministries between our two churches normative. We would begin this process by studying the possible interchangeability between the order of priest in the Anglican Church of Canada and ordained ministers in the United Church of Canada.
2. Recognizing that this will represent a deepening of our conversation, we request the addition to our number of one representative from the United Church's Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee and one representative from the Anglican Church's House of Bishops.
3. We further request that this current iteration of the dialogue be allowed to continue its work on mutual recognition of ministries until we have sufficiently explored the question to determine whether there is real potential to move forward.

We are confident, based on our dialogue's work to date, that there is real potential to achieve some form of interchangeability between our churches' ministers of word and sacrament. The Anglican Church of Canada and the United Church of Canada are both in different places than when we last visited this question three decades ago. Anglicans have been enriched by a dozen years of full communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC). The United Church is exploring new models of unity with other churches.

We look forward to having the time and space to discern where the Spirit might be leading our churches, responding to Jesus' desire that we may be one, for the sake of God's mission in the world.

Representing the Anglican Church of Canada

The Rev. Dr. William Harrison (co-chair)
The Rev. Dr. Gordon Jensen (ELCIC)
The Ven. Dr. Lynne McNaughton
The Rev. Dr. Paula Sampson
The Rev. Stephen Silverthorne
The Ven. Bruce Myers (staff)

Representing the United Church of Canada

The Rev. Dr. Andrew O'Neill (co-chair)
The Rev. Dr. Sandra Beardsall
The Rev. Alf Dumont
The Rev. Elisabeth Jones
The Rev. Donald Koots
Dr. Gail Allan (staff)