

Call to Unity

RESOURCING THE CHURCH FOR ECUMENICAL MINISTRY

Issue 7 • December 2006



**CHURCHES
UNITING IN
CHRIST**

Consultation on *Episcopé*



FROM THE EDITOR

The ministry of episcopé

This special issue of *Call to Unity* brings together the presentations, bible studies and summary report of a “Consultation on Episcopé” that was held in St. Louis on October 2-4, 2006, as a contribution to the ongoing process of mutual recognition and mutual reconciliation of ministries within Churches Uniting in Christ (CUIC) and its member communions.

The issues of *episcopé*, especially historic succession, represent one of the primary roadblocks to the advance of the ecumenical movement, both here in the United States and throughout the world. Early on, the Consultation on Church Union (COCU)—the predecessor body to CUIC—identified the issues of a divided ministry as a central challenge to be overcome in achieving its goal of a church “truly catholic, truly reformed, and truly evangelical.”

It was, therefore, appropriate for CUIC to host a consultation that would address head-on the issues related to the ministry of *episcopé* as it seeks to move forward in its commitment to the full recognition and reconciliation of ordained ministries among the diverse communions represented in its membership:

- the African Methodist Episcopal Church
- the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church
- the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
- the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church
- the Episcopal Church
- the International Council of Community Churches
- the Moravian Church, Northern Province
- the Presbyterian Church (USA)
- the United Methodist Church
- the United Church of Christ

A primary focus of the Consultation revolved around the dual challenge that had been outlined in Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, the historic theological consensus text of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches:

In order to achieve mutual recognition, different steps are required of different churches. For example, (a) Churches which have preserved the Episcopal succession are asked to recognize both the apostolic content of the ordained ministry which exists in churches which have not maintained such succession and also the existence in these churches of a ministry of *episcopé*, in various forms; (b) Churches without the Episcopal succession . . . are asked to realize that the continuity with the Church of the apostles finds profound expression in the successive laying on of hands by bishops and that, though they may not lack the continuity of the apostolic tradition, this sign will strengthen and deepen that continuity. [M53]

This issue of *Call to Unity* has been produced in partnership with all CUIC member communions as a way to further the dialogue on this central theme before the churches in their quest for full communion in Christ.

I affirm the words of Patrice Rosner, Director of CUIC, in her words of introduction to this issue: “God is in the conversation and prods us to continue . . . We dare not grow weary; we dare not grow faint. We will renew our strength through the Spirit who makes us one.”

Robert K. Welsh

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Resourcing the Church for Ecumenical Ministry

Issue No. 7 • December 2006

Consultation on Episcopé Churches Uniting in Christ

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A Deepening Dialogue

Patrice L. Rosner



THE REV. PATRICE L. ROSNER is *Director of Churches Uniting in Christ*.

In January 2002 at the inauguration of Churches Uniting in Christ (CUIC), the participating churches agreed to express their relationship with one another through eight visible marks. One of those of those marks was an ongoing process of theological dialogue:

To clarify theological issues identified by the members of CUIC in order to strengthen their shared witness to the apostolic faith;

To deepen the participating churches' understanding of racism in order to make an even more compelling case against it;

To provide a foundation for the mutual recognition and reconciliation of ordained ministry by the members of CUIC by the year 2007.

This ongoing theological dialogue stands in line with many years of conversation among the churches. We did not start a new inquiry in 2002, but picked up on earlier work and theological consensus in *The COCU (Consultation on Church Union) Consensus* (1985), *Churches in Covenant Communion* (1988), in conscious continuity with a wider international ecumenical agreement, *Baptism Eucharist and Ministry* (1982).

One of the most difficult issues that has plagued full communion initiatives for more than fifty years is the question, "How can the ordained ministries of each communion be recognized and reconciled so that they become 'one ministry of Jesus Christ in relation to all' and that 'the ministry of one may function, whenever invited, as a ministry to all'" (*Churches in Covenant Communion*, ch.4, par. a Ministry

Task Force to advance the vision of these earlier documents and to bring a report to the churches on the mutual recognition and mutual reconciliation of ministry.

After more than three years of dialogue, discernment, and devotion—and multiple drafts—the task force in June 2005 presented to the Coordinating Council what it hoped would be the next-to-last draft of the Ministry document, called "Mutual Recognition and Mutual Reconciliation of Ministry" (MRMRM). That draft text was distributed to all the member communions for review and comment. In addition, nine inter-communion study-and-response sessions were conducted in cities across the country from November 2005 through April 2006.

*God is in the conversation
and prods us to continue.*

As one more step in receiving input and clarifying understandings about *episcopé*, the Coordinating Council convened a "Consultation on *Episcopé*" in St. Louis, October 2-4, 2006. The Consultation was intended to produce constructive reflections on the MRMRM as an aid to the concluding work of the Ministry Task Force. The stated purpose of the Consultation was:

The consultation will contribute to the ongoing process of mutual recognition and reconciliation of ministries within Churches Uniting in Christ (CUIC) and its member communions. To do so, it will address four topics related to understandings of *episcopé* in the context of the U.S. ecumenical journey

Our commitment to our relationship as members of Churches Uniting in Christ bids us stay at the table with one another in deepening relationships and honest dialogue.

and the implications of these understandings for global ecumenical relationships.

What you will find in this digest are the three daily Bible studies that brought our biblical heritage to bear on our conversations, the five presentations on *épiscopé*, and a summary of responses and what participants were saying to one another.

We are greatly indebted to members of the Ministry Task Force, chaired by the Rev. A. Guy Waldrop, and members of the Consultation planning team, chaired by Dr. Mark Wilhelm, for their faithful work and diligent efforts in facilitating CUIC's pursuit of theological dialogue on the critical issues of ministry.

We are also grateful to Dr. Robert Welsh, president of the Disciples' Council on Church Unity, for his willingness, along with the support of the other

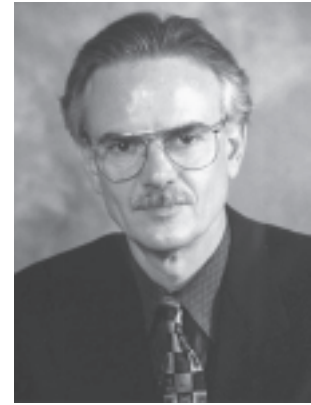
CUIC member communions, to publish this digest.

The conversation is not complete. The CUIC member communions still struggle to come to agreement about the reconciliation of ordained ministry. But God is in the conversation and prods us to continue. Our commitment to our relationship as members of Churches Uniting in Christ bids us stay at the table with one another in deepening relationships and honest dialogue. We dare not grow weary; we dare not grow faint. We will renew our strength through the Spirit who makes us one.

"Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen." (Ephesians 3:20-21)

Summary of Group Reports and Plenary Presentations

Michael Kinnamon



DR. MICHAEL KINNAMON is Professor of Mission and Peace at Eden Theological Seminary, St. Louis. He chairs the Justice and Advocacy Commission of the National Council of Churches, is past General Secretary of the Consultation on Church Union and serves on several ecumenical dialogues and commissions.

I hope we can agree that this is an impossible assignment since there has been so little time to digest the work of the small groups. I certainly cannot provide a full summary of what we have said and learned; but I can identify several points that, in my judgment, may help move us toward a relationship of full communion with a reconciled ministry. The planning committee made clear that I was not to editorialize (much) in these remarks; but, obviously, I have heard our discussions through my own filter, which affects my choice of what to highlight. I at least promise to acknowledge when I am offering what is solely my own opinion.

I start with an observation about the tone of this meeting: It has been wonderfully irenic.

The participants here clearly assume that this is a discussion worth having (not to be taken for granted) and that the Spirit has been (is) at work in the others *as churches*. There has been little defending of positions. Episcopal Church representatives have acknowledged that your church exercises *episcopé* corporately, while United Church of Christ representatives have acknowledged that you have exercised it, at times, through a personal office. All of this helps to break down stereotypes and move us forward.

The preface to the World Council of Churches text, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, asks the churches not simply to evaluate BEM by their confessional standards but to measure their own traditions by the

theology and practice of the universal church. This consultation did not attain that lofty goal, but it did seem to head in that direction.

The group reports also acknowledged both that change is difficult and that this process is not worthwhile if it does not challenge us to real transformation. It seems to me, and this is an editorial comment, that there is still an underlying fear that others won't take change as seriously, or be held as accountable for changing, as "we" will.

I move now to areas of shared affirmations. There are five, found in the plenary addresses and group reports, that I think are especially significant.

1.) Corporate and personal exercises of *episcopé* are present in all churches and, in fact, aren't separable since ministries of oversight and unity are simultaneously personal, collegial, and communal. This is particularly evident when we move beyond abstract statements about polity to examine actual practice. It is the over-emphasis on either the corporate or personal that is the problem. (The group reports also say that the ministry document would be strengthened by fleshing out the meaning of corporate *episcopé*.)

2.) Ecumenism is not simply a unity movement but a movement for unity through renewal; and all of our ministries of oversight and unity stand in need of renewal.

To be more specific, the exercise of *episcopé* in each of our churches is often more regulatory and administrative than sacramental, educational, and missional.

(There may be a divide at this consultation between those who are content with our churches' current diversity as a basis for life together and those who are

willing to contemplate change in the direction of common practice for the sake of renewal; but the latter is clearly the position held by most of the participants.)

The group reports also acknowledged that this process is not worthwhile if it does not challenge us to real transformation.

Several groups underscored the need to hear even more clearly what gifts each church thinks it can receive from the others and what difference the reconciliation of ministry will make for its own communion. I recommended, during my own group's discussion, that all ministries of oversight (all ministers?) be re-commissioned as a sign that reconciliation involves renewal for every participating church. This recommendation is consistent with the famous "Appeal" issued by the Lambeth Conference in 1920: "We believe that for all the truly equitable approach to union is by the way of mutual deference to one another's consciences. To this end, we who send forth this appeal [bishops of the Anglican communion] would say that, if the authorities of other communions should so desire, we are persuaded that, terms of union having been otherwise satisfactorily adjusted, bishops and clergy of our communion would willingly accept from these authorities a form of commission or recognition which would commend our ministry to their congregations, as having its place in the one family life." Such graciousness would go a long way toward allaying fears in various churches.

3.) Episcopal succession is properly understood within the broader framework of the apostolicity of the church. According to the Creed, the church is apostolic. This was a major insight of BEM that Churches Uniting in Christ has appropriated: "Apostolic tradition in the church means continuity in the permanent characteristics of the church of the Apostles: witness to the apostolic faith, proclamation and interpretation of the gospel, celebration of baptism and eucharist, communion in prayer, love, joy and suffering, service to the sick and needy, unity among local churches and the sharing of gifts, and the transmission of ministerial responsibilities" (BEM, M 34). This prompts a recognition that churches without bishops in apostolic succession may be apostolic in so far as they live faithfully to the gospel; and that, in turn, frees these

churches to affirm that episcopal succession can be an important sign, though not a guarantee, of apostolicity. Churches such as the Disciples will never say that episcopal succession is essential to the church's life, but we may now be willing to affirm that it can be beneficial. (Several groups also lifted up the role of the laity in preserving the apostolic tradition of the church and a desire to see that more clearly affirmed in the ministry document.)

4.) Our churches need to integrate more fully the work for ministerial reconciliation with the struggle for racial justice. Combating racism, the ostensible "mission core" of CUIC, still feels tacked-on to the ministry discussion; and it must become far more central or the whole effort will be stunted.

For example, *apostolicity* should mean continuity in the mission of the apostles to proclaim that in Jesus Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female. The question for this consultation is this: How might the reconciliation of ministry contribute to a recovery of apostolicity understood as a continuing struggle for racial justice and inclusivity? In the same way, *reconciliation* has to do with God's work of restoring relationship where it has been estranged. The reconciliation of ministry is important in so far as it contributes to the calling of the church to be an ambassador of God's reconciling love.

5.) Mission is the proper framework for speaking about *episcopé*. The question is how we structure our life together in order to be a more effective sign of unity *and* a more faithful witness in mission. No single ordering guarantees or necessarily inhibits this, although some expressions of *episcopé* seem more suited to maintenance than mission. Several of our churches have had an establishment mindset in a missionary context, and this unity effort gives us the opportunity to rethink this pattern.

An editorial comment: Our church leaders may say that CUIC needs to focus more on mission; but, in fact, we have had a chance to do so over the past five years and have made little of it. In Memphis in January of 2002, these churches solemnly declared their intent to live together in a new way; but it is clear that the reconciliation of ministry "ups the ante," has the potential to hold us accountable to one another in a way that covenanting for mission does not.

I end with three additional insights from our time

*Episcopal succession is properly understood within
the broader framework of the apostolicity of the church.*

together that are not really group consensus, but are important to me.

First, it is important to begin with basic theological questions rather than to “negotiate” based on existing polity. For example, one real issue with regard to *episcopé* is the tension between freedom and orderliness. I think we should acknowledge that none of our churches has the perfect balance and, then, explore this tension more fully together.

Second, the work of ministerial reconciliation is made difficult by the fact that our churches operate out of different ecclesial “gestalts,” but also by the culture (radical individualism, anxiety about authority) and by inherited fears from an era of church division and hostility. As one participant in my small group put it, we have maintained “an apostolic succession of grudges.” Both of these factors—culture context and historic fears—could be more fully named in the ministry document.

Third, if I am honest with myself, I will acknowledge that I have encouraged Disciples to accept the office of bishop a) because it would invite “universal recognition” of our ministry and b) because it would make interchangeability more possible—not because Disciples *need* such an office. Through this

consultation, I have come to see more clearly that the episcopal office, if properly understood, can truly serve as a sign of unity that Disciples need. A recent funding crisis in our church has made it abundantly clear that Disciples regional ministers think in terms of their responsibility for a particular place.

Bishops, by contrast, think in terms of their responsibility for the whole church in that particular place—and this makes an immense difference. Such a shift in self-understanding could help move Disciples beyond autonomy toward an interdependence that we desperately need.

I hope that these less-than-systematic comments have been useful. I want to finish by underscoring John Ford’s admonition to urgency. At the 1952 world conference on Faith and Order in Lund, Sweden, delegates admitted that “a faith in the one church of Christ which is not implemented by acts of obedience is dead.” Their question haunts me: If we proclaim unity without acting on it, shouldn’t we expect the judgment of God? The churches that make up CUIC have been proclaiming unity for nearly five decades. It is time to show others that we mean it.



Apostolic Replacement

John T. Ford

October 2, 2006

FR. JOHN T. FORD is Professor of Systematic Theology and Coordinator of the Hispanic/Latino Programs at Catholic University of America. He is a Member of the Faith and Order Commission of the National Council of Churches and the Ministry Task Force of Churches Uniting in Christ.

Acts 1:15-26: Contemporary English Version (CEV)

¹⁵One day when there were about one hundred twenty of the Lord's followers meeting together, Peter stood up to speak to them: ¹⁶⁻¹⁷"My friends, long ago by the power of the Holy Spirit, what David said about Judas has now happened. Judas was one of us and had worked with us, but he brought the mob to arrest Jesus. ¹⁸Then Judas bought some land with the money he was given for doing that evil deed. He fell headfirst into the field. His body burst open, and all his insides came out. ¹⁹When the people of Jerusalem found out about this, they called the place Akeldama, which in the local language means "Field of Blood." ²⁰In the book of Psalms it says, "Leave his house empty, and don't let anyone live there." It also says: "Let someone else have his job." ²¹⁻²²So we need someone else to help us tell others that Jesus has been raised from death. That person must also be one of the men who was with us from the very beginning—from the time the Lord Jesus was baptized by John until the day he was taken to heaven. ²³Two men were suggested: one of them was Joseph Barsabbas, known as Justus, and the other was Matthias. ²⁴Then they all prayed, "Lord, you know what everyone is like! Show us the one you have chosen ²⁵to be an apostle and to serve in place of Judas, who got what

he deserved." ²⁶They drew names, and Matthias was chosen to join the group of the eleven apostles.

Reflections

The Acts of the Apostles is one of my favorite books of the Bible; Acts raises questions about the nature of the early Church that are fascinating and thought-provoking. Nonetheless, the title of Acts seems to promise more than it actually delivers; instead of being an historical account of the activities of all the Apostles, as its title suggests, Acts is more a series of biographical vignettes of various leaders of the first Christian communities; and like vignettes, the central features of these events are clearly delineated, but there is a fading away at the margins that leaves intriguing questions unanswered.

Modern readers are then sometimes disconcerted that Acts is not a history of all the Apostles, rather a record of select episodes in the lives of only two Apostles: Peter, one of the original Twelve, and Paul, self-described as "one born out of due time" (I Cor. 15:8). In his own day, some apparently challenged Paul's claim to being an authentic "Apostle"; in response, Paul, like a person whose credentials are being questioned, at times took considerable pains to authenticate his claim to being an Apostle. Yet, if Paul was sometimes on the defensive about his apostolic authenticity, in the long run, his recognition as an Apostle rivaled that of Peter.

In contrast, Matthias, after being chosen as the "replacement" for Judas, literally had his one day of fame and then simply disappears not only from the rest of Acts, but from the rest of the New Testament. Given the subsequent obscurity of Matthias, one might wonder why Peter's speech so

strongly emphasized the importance of filling the place vacated by Judas. Not only did the incorporation of Matthias into the leadership-circle of the Twelve quickly yield to an interloper thirteenth—Paul—but even the title “Apostle” seems to lose its *éclat* in Acts—as well as in the subsequent history of the Church.

What then is the significance of Matthias as an apostolic replacement? One possible explanation is that the selection of Matthias is a case of the disciples choosing Mathias and the Holy Spirit choosing Paul; accordingly, one could see in this election a conflict between the ecclesiastical and the charismatic, or at least a contrast between the institutional and the spiritual. A basic difficulty with such an interpretation, however, is the fact that the Apostles prayed to the Lord to show them whom He had chosen and then left the decision to God by drawing names. Presumably the Lord supported the institutional decision.

Another reason for Peter’s insistence on a quorum of Twelve is that they represented the eschatological fulfillment of God’s promise to restore Israel; after all, Jesus had earlier promised his disciples:

So I will give you the right to rule as kings, just as my Father has given me the right to rule as a king. You will eat and drink with me in my kingdom, and you will each sit on a throne to judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Luke 22:29–30).

Thus, the selection of Matthias may have been considered a way to demonstrate in the twelve-fold apostolate the precise continuity between Jesus and the Church’s claim upon “the whole house of Israel.” Accordingly, the replacement of Judas would be eschatologically essential to the foundational continuity of the early Church.

Another perspective on the selection of Matthias is not so much *charismatic* or *eschatological*—given the fact that both Matthias personally and the title of “Apostle” in particular soon fade out of the ecclesiastical picture—as *theological*. The role of Matthias as “replacement apostle”—even though this role is rather enigmatic—seems to have definite, even definitive, ecclesiological significance. For example, *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* characterizes this replacement as “The Filling of the College of the Twelve” and suggests that this episode serves as sort of a bridge—whether factual or literary is another question—between the Ascension and Pentecost—two events that are crucial in both the lives of the

Apostles and the beginnings of the Christian Church.

However, if this narrative in *Acts* is viewed as an ecclesiological event, what does it tell us about the early Church’s ecclesiological self-understanding? First, one may concede that Peter’s speech on this occasion resembles some of those in the *Congressional Record* that are thoroughly redacted after their delivery—in this case, Peter’s speech is not necessarily a verbatim of what he actually said, but the presentation of a pivotal ecclesiological point. In effect, the author of *Acts* may have put words into Peter’s mouth as a way of emphasizing the apostolic foundation of the Church. As *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* has remarked: “The later Church, seeking a norm of belief and life looks back to the privileged initial period of her history and sees in the Twelve the unique transmitters of the Word and the Spirit during that period.”

In addition, perhaps there is a hint about this ecclesial function in the citation of Psalm 109:8, which the *Contemporary English Version* rather brusquely translates: “Let someone else have his job.” In contrast, *The Catholic Youth Bible* is somewhat more conventional in translating this verse: “May another take his office.” Behind these different English translations, the Greek text of this psalm has *episcopé*. One might, of course, argue that this is simply a case of a Greek text citing a Greek translation of the psalms; and so it may have been coincidental. Nonetheless, one wonders whether the choice of a psalm text containing the word *episcopé* was deliberate?

The author of *Acts* did not provide an explicit commentary on this verse, but later interpreters have not been reticent. *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, for example, points out that while Apostleship is considered *diakonia*, it is not yet an “ecclesiastical office”; rather, the basic “service” of the Twelve is the “ingathering” of Israel. Other commentators, however, have given this passage an explicitly ecclesiastical meaning; Justo González, for example, has commented:

...the bishops—those who occupied the *episcopate*—were the successors of the apostles. This text gives some basis for this, since in it the responsibility of an apostle receives the name of *episcopate*.

This alleged episcopal emphasis—in both the event itself, the selection of Matthias—and in the choice of a psalm with the word *episcopé* may have been

occasioned by the time that Acts was written—approximately a half-century after the death of Jesus and two decades after the deaths of Peter and Paul—when the need for personal *episcopé* within the Church was becoming evident; for example, the need for oversight within the Church at Corinth seemingly continued well after Paul’s death.

In any case, the need for personal *episcopé*—apostolic oversight—was certainly a critical issue in the Church a century later. Irenaeus, confronted by the individualistic scriptural interpretations of the Gnostics, appealed not simply to the scriptural text but also to the apostolic legacy as an essential criterion for the truth of the Gospel. The reason for this dual appeal was that both Irenaeus and his Gnostic opponents used the same scriptural texts to validate their respective claims that their otherwise divergent doctrines represented the authentic teaching of Christ. In short, at the center of their argument was the need for an authentic interpretation of Scripture; for Irenaeus, this question could only be resolved by an authoritative teacher.

Where does one find authoritative teachers in the Church? Irenaeus replied that the transmission of apostolic teaching was guarded and guaranteed by a publicly acknowledged line of ecclesiastical office-holders. For Irenaeus, the best way to resolve any dispute about *what* is genuine apostolic teaching comes from answering the question: *who* was your teacher? In effect, doctrinal arguments can be easily and definitively resolved simply by consulting the successors of the apostles; as an example, Irenaeus cited his own “apostolic pedigree”: he was a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of John, who was a disciple of Jesus. Accordingly, apostolic doctrine is linked with apostolic succession. On this premise, even though bishops can no longer trace their episcopal lineage back to a specific apostle—at most one can trace the historical succession of a few select sees—the concern for *episcopé* within the Church continues to the present.

Modern ecumenical concern about *episcopé* has found broad consensus in the document on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, that was prepared by

the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches at its meeting in Lima, Perú in 1982. The section on “The Forms of the Ordained Ministry” stated:

The New Testament does not describe a single pattern of ministry which might serve as a blueprint or continuing norm for all future ministry in the Church. In the New Testament there appears rather a variety of forms which existed at different places and times. As the Holy Spirit continued to lead the Church in life, worship and mission, certain elements from this early variety were further developed and became settled into a more universal pattern of ministry. During the second and third centuries, a threefold pattern of bishop, presbyter and deacon became established as the pattern of ordained ministry throughout the Church. [M19]

While acknowledging “the changes the threefold ministry has undergone in the history of the Church” (M19), the Lima text described the “job” or “office” of bishop as follows:

The bishop was the leader of the community. He was ordained and installed to proclaim the Word and preside over the celebration of the eucharist. He was surrounded by a college of presbyters and by deacons who assisted in his tasks. In this context the bishop’s ministry was a focus of unity within the whole community. [M20]

These episcopal functions were soon modified:

Bishops began increasingly to exercise *episcopé*, over several local communities at the same time.” In the first generation, apostles had exercised *episcopé*, in the wider Church. Later Timothy and Titus are recorded to have fulfilled a function of *episcopé*, in a given area. Later again this apostolic task is carried out in a new way by the bishops. They provide a focus for unity in life and witness within areas comprising several eucharistic communities. [M21]

For Irenaeus, the best way to resolve any dispute about what is genuine apostolic teaching comes from answering the question, who was your teacher? Irenaeus cited his own “apostolic pedigree”: he was a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of John, who was a disciple of Jesus.

If the evident insistence of Peter in *Acts* about providing a replacement for Judas is understood in terms of the need for providing an apostolic witness, the Lima text points to the need for a comparable witness in the contemporary Church:

The Church as the body of Christ and the eschatological people of God is constituted by the Holy Spirit through a diversity of gifts or ministries. Among these gifts a ministry of *episcopé*, is necessary to express and safeguard the unity of the body. Every church needs this ministry of unity in some form in order to be the Church of God, the one body of Christ, a sign of the unity of all in the Kingdom. [M23]

Concluding Reflection:

If the purpose of a Bible study is to relate a specific biblical text to the present-day life of the Church, then a leader of a Bible study is faced with the option of comforting the challenged or challenging the comfortable. This Bible study leans toward the second option.

In the *Acts of the Apostles*, there is an on-going tension between the institutional and the spiritual, between “structure and mission.” Accordingly, while some would maintain that “the Spirit does not adjust to our structures nor to our designs,” the inspirations of the Spirit do need to take form in concrete human structures. Thus, it is not a question of either Spirit or structure, but of Spirit-guided structures. In this perspective, the selection of a replacement for Judas can be seen as a necessary, albeit time-conditioned, decision not only for the mission of the Apostolic Church, but also for the apostolic mission of the Church throughout the ages.

Yet, the selection of Matthias was both *personal*—he was an eye-witness to the life of Jesus—and *collegial*—his membership in the Twelve was seen as somehow necessary for the integrity of the apostolic mission of the early Church. There is, however, inevitably a tension not only between the institutional and the inspirational, but also between the personal and the collegial; there is then an inevitable and on-going challenge to the Church to balance these two foci, since over-emphasis on either results in disharmony and even disunity:

Overemphasis on the *personal* aspect of *episcopé* easily results in authoritarianism: a bishop may become a tyrant.

Overemphasis on the *collegial* aspect of *episcopé* easily results in unprincipled populism: a congregation may opt for what is popular rather than what is evangelical.

Balancing the personal and collegial dimensions of *episcopé* has never been easy and it will never be easy. This is a not only a challenge confronting the Churches Uniting in Christ, it is a challenge confronting all churches, especially those that maintain episcopal succession.

The question directed by this Bible Study to the participants in Churches Uniting in Christ is: If the early Church found it essential for the integrity of its apostolic mission to choose a personal successor for the College of Twelve, would not Churches Uniting in Christ best serve the unity and mission of the Church today by officially selecting persons to give personal witness to the Gospel as members of a collegiate body responsible for maintaining the unity of the Church and fostering its mission?

New Structures in the Church

John T. Ford

October 3, 2006

Acts 6:1-7: *Contemporary English Version (CEV)*

¹A lot of people were now becoming followers of the Lord. But some of the ones who spoke Greek started complaining about the ones who spoke Aramaic. They complained that the Greek-speaking widows were not given their share when the food supplies were handed out each day. ²The twelve apostles called the whole group of followers together and said, "We should not give up preaching God's message in order to serve at tables. ³My friends, choose seven men who are respected and wise and filled with God's Spirit. We will put them in charge of these things. ⁴We can spend our time praying and serving God by preaching." ⁵This suggestion pleased everyone, and they began by choosing Stephen. He had great faith and was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then they chose Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and also Nicolaus, who worshiped with the Jewish people in Antioch. ⁶These men were brought to the apostles. Then the apostles prayed and placed their hands on the men to show that they had been chosen to do this work. ⁷God's message spread, and many more people in Jerusalem became followers. Even a large number of priests put their faith in the Lord.

Reflections

Although the early followers of the risen Christ had already experienced some extramural conflict with their fellow Jews, the incident described in this passage of Acts is "the first indication of dissension in the Jerusalem church"—which to

this point had seemed an ideal community. Although Acts does not provide information about the emergence of the Greek-speaking contingent within this community, the "inner crisis" that "disturbs the idyllic unity of the church"—seems to have been a cultural conflict between two groups: Aramaic speakers—sometimes described as "Hebrews"—who apparently were Palestinian Jews—and Greek speakers—frequently called "Hellenists"—who seemingly were Jews who had grown up in the Diaspora, spoke Aramaic as a second language and probably had been members of one of the several Greek-language synagogues which existed in Jerusalem at that time. One can easily imagine 'why widowed immigrants faced special economic hardships and why they might be "overlooked" in a food distribution run by the native contingent.'

Exegetes have noticed that this passage is the one instance where Acts refers to the "Twelve Apostles." One might also note that this is the first recorded instance of a cultural conflict *within* the Church—which suggests that the enthusiastic universalism of the Pentecost—experience (Acts 2:1-41) was difficult to put into practice: believing that all people are called to be brothers and sisters in Christ is far easier than actually living together as brothers and sisters in Christ, especially when there are cultural and linguistic differences. But what is most important for the present bible study is that this cultural conflict evidenced "a need for a structuring of the community itself."

At least on the surface, the source of this conflict seems simple enough: the Greek-speaking widows felt that they were receiving short shrift from the "Hebrew" element in charge of distributing communal supplies. Nonetheless, the precise nature of this cultural favoritism is ambiguous; for example,

The incident described in this passage of Acts is the first indication of dissension in the Jerusalem church, which to this point had seemed an ideal community.

the reference “to serve at tables” may refer either to those who were in charge of handing out food—possibly at communal meals—or to those who were in charge of the money: the Greek word *trápeza* may mean either “table” or “bank.” Suffice it to say that not a few modern congregations have experienced comparable conflicts not only in the food pantry, but especially in the finance committee.

If the precise nature of the favoritism is unclear, so too is its motivation: the negligence may have been deliberate—the Hebrews in charge may have decided to give preference to their families and friends; or the disparity in distribution may simply have been an “over-sight” that was more a matter of inattentiveness than discrimination; in any case, this favoritism, whether a matter of preferential treatment or merely benign neglect, highlighted the need for apostolic “over-sight”—*episcopé*.

The apostolic remedy, however, was rather unexpected, indeed, innovative. “With the appointment of such assistants three classes appear in the Jerusalem mother church: apostles, elders, and assistants.” While one might see in this decision a rough parallel with the prior apostolic decision to replace Judas with Matthias (Acts 1:12-16), there are several differences. Instead of a simple replacement, there is the creation of a new “office” or “job.” Moreover, there is not simply one appointee, but seven—possibly a reflection of the composition of a “Jewish town council.”

Also—in contrast to the election of Matthias, when eligibility for membership in the group of Twelve was apparently restricted to those who had known Jesus personally—the qualifications for these seven new assistantships specified that the candidates should be “respected and wise and filled with God’s Spirit.” Perhaps this criterion was simply the inevitable result of the fact that none of those who followed Jesus during his lifetime came from the Greek-speaking Diaspora. In any case, the resolution of this crisis seemingly called not only for the appointment of people who spoke Greek, but specifically Greek-speakers from the Diaspora:

ministers from a background similar to that of the people they were called to serve. In effect, the Apostles went outside the inner circle of Palestinian Jewish Christians, thereby extending leadership positions to a new class of people. Not surprisingly then, the seven appointees all had Greek names. Four are known only by name; the fifth, Nicolaus, was described as a proselyte from Antioch. But the other two, Stephen and Philip, figure prominently later in Acts.

If five of these new assistants were presumably involved in the somewhat unheralded ministry of serving at table, should one see in such service—the term *diakonia* is used in the text—another way of actualizing the Word of God? Such a synthetic connection—though some would see a sharp contrast—between *diakonia* and “the ministry of the word” soon became evident in the evangelizing of Stephen and Philip. On the one hand, the rationale for their appointment was to allow the Apostles time for prayer and preaching God’s message—apostolic responsibilities seemingly more important and more prestigious than waiting on table/distributing the dole. On the other hand, Stephen and Philip were no sooner deputized for an intramural type of *diakonia*—than they expand their ministry to include evangelizing. Thus, whatever the merits of a neat and tidy distinction between preaching as proclaiming the Word of God in speech and *diakonia* as actualizing the Word of God in deed, neither Stephen nor Philip restricted their activities to table-waiting/alm-distributing: Stephen was soon preaching to a Jewish audience (Acts 7:1-53) and Philip was instructing an Ethiopian official (Acts 8:26-40). Should one then infer that the “placing” of hands—incidentally the text is not clear whether it was the “Twelve” or the whole community who imposed hands—might have been a more extensive empowerment than was originally envisioned by the Apostles? In any case, while the laying on of hands was a custom practiced in the Old Testament and also used in New Testament healings, this is the first time that it appears as part of the conferral of an ecclesiastical office or responsibility—“some spiritual gift, blessing or function.”

Contemporary Reflections

In reflecting on this passage in Bible studies with Hispanic groups, I have occasionally modernized this text even more than the *Contemporary English Version*:

A lot of people were now becoming followers of the Lord. But some of the ones who spoke Spanish started complaining about the ones who spoke English.

They complained that the Spanish-speaking widows were not given their share when the food supplies were handed out each day.

This textual modernization inevitably opens a Pandora's Box. Not only do cultural differences exist in the contemporary American church, racial tensions and ethnic discrimination seem alive and well.

What can we learn from this cultural crisis in the early Christian community? First of all, it is usually helpful to recognize candidly that cultural differences are practically as old as the Church itself; however, there are those who are smugly content with this historical information and see no need to press their biblical reflections any further: not only will the poor always be with us, so too will cultural differences. One well known result is that Sunday mornings are often the most segregated time of the week, as Christians attend churches that tend to be homogeneous in terms of race, ethnicity, class, political affiliation, etc.

In this regard, Churches Uniting in Christ should be commended for creating a Task Force on Racism; churches which do not have such commissions should follow CUIC's lead and create them. However, neither recognizing the problem nor creating a task force to address ethnic and cultural diversity is sufficient. One very important lesson from this passage in Acts is the need for new structures that will effectively remove the barriers of discrimination and the obstacles to genuine Christian fellowship.

How might such a re-structuring come about? One method of biblical reflection used in the Hispanic community follows the principle—"see, judge, act." First, it is necessary to "see" or acknowledge the presence of cultural difference, but this first step is only a preliminary to recognizing that such differences usually surface in situations where some are dominant while others are relegated to the status of second-class citizens; in effect, cultural differences often result in

marginalization and discrimination—sometimes overt, but often subtle.

While honestly and humbly recognizing the existence of discrimination is an essential first step—one that some Christians sometimes do not want to take—the next step is even more crucial and sometimes excruciatingly painful. The Church needs to follow the apostolic example and create structures that will deal directly and honestly with the discrimination that often accompanies culture diversity. Frequently church officials address this problem by appointing select representatives from different cultural groups to various church agencies and committees. In so doing, these officials can conveniently point to apostolic precedent in this text from Acts: the apostles recognized the problem created by cultural diversity and responded by creating a structure—in their case, a group of assistants to address this inequity. What could be better than having a group of Greek-speaking assistants to take care of the needs of Greek-speakers? Or why not appoint Hispanics to positions of authority to care for the needs of the Hispanic community? Et cetera.

There are, however, several problematic aspects to such a proposal, however well intentioned. First, from a sociological standpoint, the decision is often made by those in power on behalf of those who are marginalized and so implicitly continues the marginalization that the decision was meant to address. For example, Acts does not tell us whether the Greek-speaking assistants were given all the resources they needed to assist the needy Greek widows. Second, from a pneumatological viewpoint, the problem of pluralism in the Church is not created simply by the unanticipated arrival of new cultural groups; if anyone is to blame for cultural diversity within the Church, it is the Holy Spirit, who, beginning at Pentecost, invited people of all places and races to accept Christ. Third, from an ecclesial point of view, it should be noted that while the Apostles empowered their seven new assistants with the specific responsibility of table-service, Stephen and Philip soon exceeded the stipulations of their original commission. They began preaching and evangelizing—under the guidance of the Spirit. Their success—apparently accepted by the early Christian community—suggests that it may be difficult to describe and delimit the range of specific church offices at the outset.

Accordingly, although it is well and good for churches to grant a place at the table to members of

so-called minority groups, shouldn't these churches also give these minority representatives the authority and the responsibility of not only caring out the ministry entrusted, but even to expand that ministry? Or should one imagine that when Stephen saw the opportunity to preach or when Philip encountered the Ethiopian official, that either of them would have replied: "while I would like to tell you more about Jesus Christ, his ministry and message, I really don't have the authorization to do so since I am only authorized for table-service/alms-giving."

In any case, the role of deacons in the post-apostolic church has seen considerable fluctuation both in definition and in responsibility. While the diaconate has remained an ordained ministry in some churches, this has not been universally the case. And even in those churches in which deacons are ordained ministers, the exercise of the office has considerable variation. For example, sometimes the diaconate has been a temporary or transitional office on the way to the priesthood—indeed, so transitional that occasionally some people have been ordained deacon one day and priest the next. In other instances, deacons have been ordained ministers with restricted responsibility—both in the liturgical actions that they are permitted to perform and/or in the geographical areas where they are allowed to minister. In contrast, there are other instances where deacons have been clerics with considerable authority and responsibility; for example, in the Roman Catholic Church in the 19th century, cardinal deacons (who were not priests) often held important and influential positions in the Roman Curia.

In other churches, however, a deacon—sometimes known by other titles—has been a lay officer in the local church. Their responsibilities might range from assisting in the financial affairs of the church to providing assistance to the needy. In some churches deacons have a liturgical function, while in other churches they do not. Indeed, some churches do not have an ordained minister equivalent to a deacon. And even in those churches that ordain deacons, there are numerous questions about the role of deacons.

The Lima text on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* that was prepared by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches in 1982, provides a succinct summary of the issues surrounding the diaconate:

In many churches there is today considerable uncertainty about the need, the rationale, the status and the functions of deacons. In what sense can the diaconate be considered part of the ordained ministry? What is it that distinguishes it from other ministries in the Church (catechists, musicians, etc.)? Why should deacons be ordained while these other ministries do not receive ordination? If they are ordained, do they receive ordination in the full sense of the word, or is their ordination only the first step towards ordination as presbyters?

Given this catena of questions, it seems important that churches work together to formulate an ecumenical consensus on the role of deacons in the church today. In route to such a consensus, the Lima text has provided a succinct but helpful description of the diaconate:

Deacons represent to the Church its calling as servant in the world. By struggling in Christ's name with the myriad needs of societies and persons, deacons exemplify the interdependence of worship and service in the Church's life. They exercise responsibility in the worship of the congregation: for example by reading the scriptures, preaching and leading the people in prayer. They help in the teaching of the congregation. They exercise a ministry of love within the community. They fulfil certain administrative tasks and may be elected to responsibilities for governance. [M3I]

In a collateral commentary on this definition, the Lima text remarked:

Today, there is a strong tendency in many churches to restore the diaconate as an ordained ministry with its own dignity and meant to be exercised for life. As the churches move closer together, there may be united in this office ministries now existing in a variety of forms and under a variety of names. [M3I]

In effect, the Lima text has provided Churches Uniting in Christ with both an interlocking three-fold challenge: first, to recognize the presence of various forms of diaconal ministry in its member churches; second, to restore the diaconate as one of the three acknowledged ordained offices in the church; third, to find a way to reconcile those who

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have been deacons with their future “restored” counterparts, whose previous titles and functions may previously have been specific to one denomination. In implementing this process of restoration-recognition-reconciliation, the Lima text cautioned: “Differences in ordering the diaconal ministry should not be regarded as a hindrance for the mutual recognition of the ordained ministries [M3I].”

In conclusion, one might ask: What are the impli-

cations of the “creation” of a new structure of ministry in the early Church as recorded in *Acts of the Apostles*? One very important lesson is the need for new structures that will effectively address the needs of the Church and its *diakonia* in the modern world in such a way as to remove the barriers of discrimination and other obstacles to fellowship. I sincerely hope that Churches Uniting in Christ will find ways to reconcile and recognize each others’ ministries in ways that will witness Christ to a world where all are called to be brothers and sisters.

Corporate *Episcopé*

John T. Ford

October 4, 2006

Acts 15:22-29: *Contemporary English Version (CEV)*

²²The apostles, the leaders, and all the church members decided to send some men to Antioch along with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Silas and Judas Barsabbas, who were two leaders of the Lord's followers.

²³They wrote a letter that said: "We apostles and leaders send friendly greetings to all of you Gentiles who are followers of the Lord in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. ²⁴We have heard that some people from here have terribly upset you by what they said. But we did not send them! ²⁵So we met together and decided to choose some men and to send them to you along with our good friends Barnabas and Paul. ²⁶These men have risked their lives for our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷We are also sending Judas and Silas, who will tell you in person the same things that we are writing. ²⁸The Holy Spirit has shown us that we should not place any extra burden on you. ²⁹But you should not eat anything offered to idols. You should not eat any meat that still has the blood in it or any meat of any animal that has been strangled. You must also not commit any terrible sexual sins. If you follow these instructions, you will do well. We send our best wishes."

Reflections

The reading for today's Bible study describes the "Apostolic Council of Jerusalem" which took place in the middle of the first century; thus, about two decades after the death of Jesus. The Apostles met to discuss a potentially divisive controversy in the early Church—a conflict which they felt needed prompt resolution lest it split the Christian com-

munity, yet simultaneously a conflict whose resolution needed the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps of most interest to this consultation, the decision-making process was collegial and communal—what today might be called "corporate *episcopé*."

From a literary standpoint, this event is not only placed in the middle of Acts, this event also represents a sort of mid-course tacking, where the biographical-ecclesiological focus of Acts shifts from Peter as leader of the Jerusalem community to Paul as the leader of the Gentile community. The Jerome Biblical Commentary, for example, describes this shift: "the Christian Church officially breaks out of its Jewish matrix."

Unfortunately, Acts does not tell us about the duration of this consultation—though there are hints that it lasted at least several days. However, Acts does indicate that the participants at this event included: "the apostles, the leaders, and all the church members"—suggesting that the discussion and the later decision were communal—involving the entire Christian community. Nonetheless, Acts did not specify which apostles were present; nor who the "leaders" (or "ancients") were; nor what their function was; nor how many people constituted "all the church." In any case, among those in attendance were Silas (a companion of Paul) and Judas Barsabbas (about whom nothing more is known). Judas and Silas were later chosen as the "delivery agents" for the council's message—a task that seemingly was assigned because the recipients of the council's message had earlier been confused by unauthorized people apparently pretending to represent the Jerusalem community (Acts 15:24), or perhaps they were simply a matter of expediency as messengers in an age when

ordinary people did not have access to the imperial postal service.

Yet perhaps the task of Judas and Silas really went beyond that of simply being trustworthy delivery agents, witnesses *bona fide*. What is all too often neglected in sending out ecclesiastical and ecumenical documents is the need to send out “interpreters” of those documents as well. Most church documents are simply “published” or “released” with the result that they are not really “received”—other than in the most perfunctory sense of that term: another addition to the recipient’s stack of accumulated mail. Was the task of Judas and Silas not only to deliver the written text of the Jerusalem Church’s decision, but also to interpret that decision to those who were expected to accept it and abide by it? Thus, the council seems to have recognized that a document is not self-interpreting and needs the ongoing assistance of its authors if it is to be interpreted correctly.

One then might speak of a “parallel process” in the reception of church decisions and ecumenical consensus statements: if those who draft a document really want people to receive it, then the drafters need to walk through the document with those who are to receive it. What recipients receive is a set of statements, but they have not experienced the process that produced that statement; they have only the text, but little if any sense of its context. In a comparable way, the preparation of a document on the recognition and reconciliation of ministries—though a huge task in itself—is only the first stage in the reception process; considerable work lies ahead in “processing” that document with the people in the pews.

As for the letter itself, it is similar in form to others of its time, but without the stylized introduction and conclusion of some of the epistles in the New Testament. Some exegetes have speculated that the letter provided in Acts is really a paraphrase of an original letter on file at Antioch, while others have suggested that the ‘apostolic letter is a “document” of our author’s confection, quite in keeping with Hellenistic historians’ convention.’ Insofar as the apostolic letter is a summary of the council’s

decisions, it suggests the need for preparing some sort of “executive summary” or cover letter for the report of the Ministry Task Force.

In terms of destination, the letter was evidently sent to various churches in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia—yet, like the epistles of St. Paul which were addressed to specific recipients, this conciliar letter seems to have been included in Acts precisely because it had implications for the whole Church. In analogous fashion, one might suggest that while the work of the task forces of Churches Uniting in Christ is primarily intended for its member-churches, both the experience of working together in these task forces and the documents that emerge from those discussions have considerable importance not only for the member-churches of Churches Uniting in Christ but also for the ecumenical future of the whole Church. If the member-churches of Churches Uniting in Christ can not find a way to fuller union through the mutual recognition and reconciliation of their ministries, is there any realistic hope of achieving visible unity among Christians?

The decisions enunciated in the conciliar letter of Acts have traditionally drawn a lot of exegetical attention; three of these decisions were dietary—abstinence from eating food that has been sacrificed to idols, consuming blood, and eating animals that had been strangled. However, what has aroused exegetical curiosity is the fourth prohibition against what the *Contemporary English Version* translates as “terrible sexual sins.” (*porneia*). By way of *caveat*, it is worth noting that the number of prohibitions varies from translation to translation, so that preachers are prudently advised to check in advance whether a specific lectionary includes the particular prohibition that is going to be the pivotal point of their sermon.

Regardless of the number of decisions, one noteworthy and admirable feature is that the decisions are simple and straightforward—also a characteristic of the statements in the Lima text on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* that was prepared by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches in 1982. The Lima text has become the

Acts indicates that the participants at this event included: “the apostles, the leaders, and all the church members”—suggesting that the discussion and the later decision were communal—involving the entire Christian community.

most widely published and translated ecumenical text to date—possibly because of its clarity and conciseness. In a comparable way, the decisions of Churches Uniting in Christ about the recognition and reconciliation of ministries need to be clearly and cogently stated.

A second aspect of the decisions of the Jerusalem Council is that they represented the *minimum* requisites for unity in the early Christian community; in a similar way, the wide acceptance of the Lima text seems to have hinged on its decision to use biblical and patristic language and to avoid denominationally divisive terminology—is there a comparable way in which the Churches Uniting in Christ can enunciate a set of principles for the mutual recognition and reconciliation of ministry? In a similar vein, one must ask whether the protracted discussion of details about ordained ministry really involves crucial points of difference or whether such discussion has effectively become a theological distraction, if not a detour from the ecumenical quest for unity.

However, there is an issue even more basic than questions of documentary length or detail in the composition of the report on ordained ministry. As Justo Conzález has commented *à propos* of the Council of Jerusalem:

There are Christians—sincere Christians like those Judaizers of Jerusalem—who don't want things to change, that the same hymns be sung, that the same sermons be preached, that the same activities be held, and nothing more.

Should this list be expanded to include those who basically do not wish to re-align the human structures of their denominations for the sake of Christian unity?

To introduce a personal note, when I first became interested in the discussions of the Consultation on Church Union, Paul Crow, Jr., then its General Secretary remarked: "The Ecumenical Movement moves at the pace of its slowest participant." Over the nearly four decades in which I have been following the ecumenical pilgrimage of the Consultation and now of Churches Uniting in Christ, I have seen that statement verified. On the one hand, I sincerely respect the theological labor and carefulness that has gone into the handcrafting of ecumenical consensus statements; on the other hand, I am wondering whether the Ecumenical Movement is in need of

Solomonic wisdom—or if you prefer Jacobean wisdom (Acts 15: 13-21)—to arrive at a consensus that will "not place any extra burden on you."

Theological Reflections

The concern of the Apostles in replacing Judas, the insistence of Irenaeus on apostolic succession in his efforts to combat Gnosticism, the efforts at the Council of Jerusalem to guide the early Christian community, indeed, the concern of Christians throughout the centuries to believe the teaching of Christ, found a new expression in the Lima text on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. Like the letter of the Church of Jerusalem, the Lima text addressed specific issues that were of concern to the member churches of the World Council of Churches. Yet in a sense, the issues surrounding Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry concern all the churches, and it is significant that churches that were not members of the World Council officially responded to the World Council's invitation for comments.

Accordingly, should Churches Uniting in Christ receive the Lima text as a kind of apostolic letter guiding its member churches in their pursuit of a mutual recognition and reconciliation of ordained ministries?

First of all, the Lima text acknowledged that such a pilgrimage is not an easy task:

In order to advance towards the mutual recognition of ministries, deliberate efforts are required. All churches need to examine the forms of ordained ministry and the degree to which the churches are faithful to its original intentions. Churches must be prepared to renew their understanding and their practice of the ordained ministry.
[M51]

And just as the replacement of Matthias (Acts 1:15-26) underlines the need for an *episcopé* that is simultaneously *personal*—Matthias as a witness to the life and teachings of Jesus—and *collegial*—incorporation into the group of Twelve—so too the Lima text proposed a generic principle for achieving a mutual recognition of ministries—"continuity with apostolic times":

Among the issues that need to be worked on as churches move towards mutual recognition of ministries, that of apostolic succession is of particular importance. Churches in ecumenical conversations can

recognize their respective ordained ministries if they are mutually assured of their intention to transmit the ministry of Word and sacrament in continuity with apostolic times. The act of transmission should be performed in accordance with the apostolic tradition, which includes the invocation of the Spirit and the laying on of hands. [M52]

The Lima text candidly acknowledged that the process of reconciliation would make demands on the churches and their traditions:

In order to achieve mutual recognition, different steps are required of different churches. For example:

a) Churches which have preserved the episcopal succession are asked to recognize both the apostolic content of the ordained ministry which exists in churches which have not maintained such succession and also the existence in these churches of a ministry of episkop[é], in various forms.

b) Churches without the episcopal succession, and living in faithful continuity with the apostolic faith and mission, have a ministry of Word and sacrament, as is evident from the belief, practice, and life of those churches. These churches are asked to realize that the continuity with the Church of the apostles finds profound expression in the successive laying on of hands by bishops and that, though they may not lack the continuity of the apostolic tradition, this sign will strengthen and deepen that continuity. They may need to recover the sign of the episcopal succession. [M53]

In spite of the obvious obstacles to recognizing and reconciling divergent structures of ordained ministry, a number of churches have already found ways to meld episcopal succession with other types of ordained ministry—thereby joining apostolic continuity with apostolic faith and mission. One of the earliest and best known examples is the Church of South India. An important example in the United States is the recent Lutheran/Episcopal agreement that has initiated a process of melding episcopal succession and what had previously been a single ordained ministry.

At least to an outsider, this seems to be the crossroads at which the Churches Uniting in Christ have arrived. Although the Lima text was content with saying that such a confluence of ministries is a “sign” that “will strengthen and deepen [apostolic] continuity,” isn’t such a confluence of episcopal and non-episcopal ministries a *sine qua non*—an essential catalyst for the recognition and reconciliation of existing churches and so a necessary condition for the unity of the Church as a whole? In other words, just as the churches of Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia were called upon to receive the decisions of the Council of Jerusalem, are not the Churches Uniting in Christ being called upon to receive the Lima text as a way to visible union?

Last but not least, for many Christians, understanding the ecumenical world is complicated by the use of a host of acronyms: WCC and BEM, COCU and CUIC, etc. To add to the confusion, these acronyms are sometimes pronounced in different ways; for example, should CUIC be pronounced “cue-ick” or “quick”? I would opt for the later pronunciation for two reasons: first, in terms of urgency: the origins of CUIC date back to 1960 when a sermon by Eugene Carson Blake set in motion the series of events that led to the formation of COCU—the Consultation on Church Union. The 50th anniversary of that ecumenically energizing event is already on the horizon. What better way of celebrating it could be envisioned than the recognition and reconciliation of the ministries of Churches Uniting in Christ?

However, there is a second reason for opting for pronouncing CUIC as “quick,” and that is the sense of *kairos*; at the time of Blake’s proposal in 1960, mainline churches seemed ready, indeed eager, to respond to the search for church unity; in fact, a *Plan of Union* was prepared within a decade. However, for a variety of reasons the momentum was lost. In effect, *chronos* prevailed over *kairos*. Now nearly half a decade has passed since the festive celebration of the inauguration of CUIC in Memphis; those in attendance certainly recognized it as a moment of *kairos*—a time of celebrating the progress that the COCU pilgrimage had made, along with the joyful hope of completing that pilgrimage. Was that celebration premature? Or overly optimistic? Isn’t there a danger that *chronos* will once again triumph over *kairos*?



Expression of *Episcopé* in the Episcopal Church

Ellen K. Wondra

DR. ELLEN K. WONDRA is Professor of Theology and Ethics at Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, Evanston, Illinois. She is Editor of *The Anglican Theological Review* and a member of the Anglican-Roman Catholic Consultation in the U.S.A.

In June I had the chance to spend two weeks in Rome, about half of it on a course that looked at how the Constantine saga brought together some of the primary symbols of Christianity and the primary symbols of empire through retelling the story of the conversion of Constantine and the recovery by his mother Helena of the true cross and of the manger and other relics. In the middle of this was the Feast of St. Peter and St. Paul—the day, in the Roman Catholic church, on which the Pope bestows upon new archbishops the pallium, a symbolic yoke that binds the bishop to the servanthood of Christ, expressed through obedience and loyalty to the “heir of Peter,” the Bishop of Rome. We attended this beautiful and powerful service, which—moving as it was—also made at least some of the Anglicans in our group quite uneasy. I confess I was one of them. I couldn’t figure out what my un-ease was about until afterwards, when one of the other Anglican priests said, “They worship him. They really do.” What he said brought into focus why I was uneasy: the liturgy particular to the Feast of St. Peter and St. Paul, and particularly the bestowal of the pallium, is very much about the primacy of Peter, and about affirming and solidifying that primacy by promises of loyalty and obedience to the occupant of the throne of Peter. Worship the Bishop of Rome? In reality, of course not. But to the part of our sense of ourselves as Christians that is grounded firmly in the Reformations of the 16th century—that is what we *fear*, deeply and entirely unreasonably. As

Cranmer’s 1544 Litany had it, “From the tyranny of the Bishop of Rome and all his detestable enormities, good Lord deliver us.”

Now, I start with this deliberately risky and provocative story for a reason. We who are heirs of the various Reformations of the 16th century identify ourselves, our traditions, our ecclesial order in oppositional terms: we are not like them. From that point we find it possible to go on and say what we are. I’m overstating this, certainly. But I do so to make a number of points.

First, our fears are the flip side of our hopes and desires. We fear certain uses and abuses of power because we long so deeply, so strongly for the freedom for which Christ has set us free. We stake a great deal on our trust in that, and we are deeply offended, angered, horrified, when we are able to recognize the way in which that freedom is corrupted, perverted, distorted, and curtailed. And that’s as it should be. But how do we locate that falling short? That we are so much more ready to see the speck in another church’s eye than the plank in our own brings me to the second point.

That is, as Martin Luther so tersely said, as Christians we are *simul justus et peccator*, living out our lives as church at that place where since and grace are both reality. To put it another way: with Luther and Paul, we recognize that the law—not just rules but orderliness itself—is given to us in significant part to restrain sin—sin as self-seeking, as idolatry, as an entirely misdirected effort to live into the image of God. (See, most importantly, the pear tree incident in Augustine’s *Confessions*.) At the same time, with Calvin and Hooker and many, many others, we recognize that law—orderliness—is given to us to open up all the possibilities of our freedom in Christ.

As much as we all recognize that absolute control is antithetical to Christian freedom, we also recognize that absolute self-interest (which means also absolute license) is also antithetical. Our challenge is to find some way to live in this tension.

To put it simply, orderliness is irreducibly ambiguous. And ambiguity tends to make us very uncomfortable. We recognize that order is, in a way, what we make of it: it both hurts us and helps us. We need it—and we abuse it. To the extent that our theology deals with ideals and glittering generalities, this fact is hidden, masked. But to the extent that our theology deals with enacted, embodied realities, with past and present, with the disjuncture between *eschaton* and history, we cannot help but recognize that this is true.

So, third, my experience in Rome points to another element of what we fear, and it can be expressed in two words: “clericalism” and “hierarchy”—both of which signify abuse of power by some at the expense of the legitimate freedom of others. This is of course the flip side, again, of saying that we simply cannot be persons—fully human, in relationship with each other, in relationship with God—without the freedom for which Christ sets us free. And we know that that freedom is not “merely” theological or theoretical. It must be enacted and embodied; it must be practiced to be real.

Of course, my and others’ very affective reflection on this papal mass has an affective polar opposite: anarchy, or lack of order. In our late capitalist, late Enlightenment, racist and sexist North American context, this lack of order is manifested in the ecclesial expression of the worst of American individualism: the claim to a call from God that is not available to any kind of assessment by anyone other than the individual claiming it. The claim to “personal revelation” too often really means “private and unexaminable revelation,” or, bluntly “because I say so, that’s why” dressed in ecclesial garb. As much as we all recognize that absolute control is antithetical to Christian freedom, we also recognize that absolute self-interest (which means also absolute license) is also antithetical. Our challenge is to find some way to live in this tension. Not to make it go away, but to live in it.

All churches—all churches—live in the tension between the freedom of Christ and the bondage of sin, between oppression and liberation. All churches

have to struggle with the ways in which church order both constrains sin and sets us free. All churches have to struggle with the fact that any and every order not only can be but has been abused. All churches are deeply engaged in figuring out how the freedom of the Gospel can be corporately, communally enacted in a world that is *simul justus et peccator*. All churches have to confess that none of us has found an infallible way to deal with this; and all churches have to confess that we are more likely to identify where someone else has fallen short before we are willing to identify where we ourselves have fallen short.

It is from this theological and spiritual framework that I want to talk about personal and corporate *episcopé*, and to do so in reflection on MRMRM.

MRMRM affirms that the church of Christ needs and has (as a gift and not just a necessity) the reality of *episcopé* or oversight.

MRMRM affirms that oversight is inherent in *ministry as such*, that is, in the ministry of the baptized, or the *laos* or whole people of God.

MRMRM affirms that oversight is and should be enacted in complicated ways, ways that are “personal, collegial, and communal,” ways that are differentiated so that some persons and offices exercise *episcopé* in certain ways and others exercise it in other ways. The point here is that we need *episcopé*—but the exercise of it is at the same time dispersed, embodied, and differentiated.

MRMRM also, at points, seems to pose “corporate *episcopé*” and “personal *episcopé*” as opposites of each other, and I want to challenge that understanding. But first I want to discuss, as examples, two areas where one might look for differences among the denominations in the exercise of *episcopé*—in theory at least. My hope here is to illumine the actual *practices* of the Episcopal Church, as indicated by our policies that enact our canon law—that body of material that governs how the Episcopal Church lives its life. Law, here, is less of the nature of rules than of order. (The entire body of Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church nationwide is less than 200 pp. long.) Church order serves as a

kind of “middle axiom,” if you will, between our theology of *episcopé*, and of ministry in general, and our ongoing life “on the ground” with each other. Church order answers the rather general question, “How ought we to structure our common life in witness to the Gospel?” The general answer to that question is then concretely practiced as groups and individuals enact their life in the church, guided by policies and practices, some of which are written down, but most of which are, I suspect, in the realm of “common law”—also known as “the way we do things here.”

So: what do our policies and practices say about how the Episcopal Church exercises *episcopé*? Or, more precisely, what do our policies and practices say about how *episcopé* is exercised, individually and corporately, by lay people, deacons, priests, and bishops? I have time to look at only two exemplary areas. The first of these, the selection of clerical leadership for a congregation, indicates how *episcopé* in an important matter is dispersed among bishop, diocesan leadership, congregational leadership, and “the people in the pews.” The second, handling cases of clergy misconduct, indicates how the focus of *episcopé* in the person and office of the bishop is in fact enacted by the bishop as one among a number of indispensable persons and groups.

There’s an irony here that is quite evident to Episcopalians in our conversations with the churches of CUI and others. The policies and practices I’m about to describe are quite anomalous among Anglicans worldwide, many of whom view them with incredulity as overly, well, presbyterian and congregational. This is the case to the extent that even those who are in a position to know better frequently attribute to our bishops more power than they have, and to our laity, deacons, and priests less power than *they* have. This is no small part of the current controversies in the Anglican Communion.

But to my examples:

First, how are clergy selected to lead local congregations? This is the decision that is most likely to have the greatest impact on the life of the congregation and its future, as well as on and its individual members. The decision also has an impact—significant, perhaps—on the life of other congregations and of the diocese and, perhaps, of the Episcopal Church overall. In short, it matters. So we might reasonably expect to see something significant about the exercise of *episcopé* here.

In the ordinary course of things, the rector (priest in charge) of St. Matthew’s Episcopal Church in Evanston, IL, resigns. Let’s say she’s accepted a position in another diocese. The canons of the Diocese of Chicago say:

The Rector of a Parish shall be elected in the following manner: First—One or more Priests shall be nominated for the office of Rector by the Vestry, and such nominations shall then be submitted to the Ecclesiastical Authority (ordinarily, the Diocesan Bishop). Second—The Ecclesiastical Authority shall advise the Vestry in writing as to whether such nominee or nominees are believed to be qualified Priests of the Church. Third—A Priest so approved by the Ecclesiastical Authority may be elected Rector by the votes of a majority of the Vestry at a meeting duly called for the purpose.

(The national canons are, as far as I can tell, silent on all this. The diocesan canons are, then, a particular, contextualized outworking of the national canons, which are themselves a particular, contextualized outworking of the general theology of the church and of *episcopé*.)

How does this actually work? The voting members of St. Matthew’s—that is, persons who are baptized, who regularly attend Sunday worship, and who give for the support of the parish—meet annually to conduct official business, one element of which is to elect members of the Vestry, the governing body of the parish, made up of a number of lay people (two of whom are designated as wardens) and the rector of the parish. When the rector of St. Matthew’s resigns, the Vestry meets and appoints a search committee, made up of representative lay members of the congregation, some of whom but not all of whom may be members of the Vestry. The Vestry may name a chair, or the search committee may select a chair from among its members.

That committee advertises the position, receives applications, considers them, and comes up with a slate of candidates to interview. The committee may or may not work with a diocesan consultant, who may be a member of the bishop’s staff, or a clerical or lay leader with particular skills in search processes. That person is a *consultant*—that is, he or she has an advisory capacity but is not part of the decision-making process. Initial interviews are often done out of sight of the congregation—by phone,

and by largely anonymous visits to the candidates' current parishes. The search committee narrows the list to those 2-3 candidates the committee wants to bring to visit St. Matthew's. By this point, the list has been submitted to the Bishop, who may or may not pass the list on to a diocesan staff member, and each person on the list is "vetted" to be sure, first and foremost, that each person is indeed a priest in good standing of the Episcopal Church, and second, in a general sense suitable for service in that diocese. That is, is each priest someone who is morally and doctrinally acceptable within that diocese? These are very broad categories: is the priest facing disciplinary charges in another diocese? Is the priest likely to advocate schism or heresy? Is the priest likely to be an effective colleague in ministry for the people, clergy, and leadership of the diocese?

Here the bishop or designated staff person exercises a fair degree of discretion. The priest's current bishop and perhaps others will be contacted discreetly; the résumé will be examined; probably, these days, the priest will be "googled." Some information may come from a professional background check, which is done either at this point or before the new Rector begins her or his ministry is offered. If the bishop has appropriate reason to object to anyone on the list, this is generally the time the bishop says so, to the parish's search committee, with greater or lesser detail depending on the case at hand.

The search committee then proceeds with the interviews, generally bringing the candidates to the church, one by one, to preside and preach at a main service, to meet with the Vestry and members of the congregation, the search committee, and the bishop. After everyone has been interviewed, and various forms of evaluation received (including from the bishop), the search committee meets to make a recommendation to the vestry. They may recommend a single candidate, or they may present a slate in order of preference, or something else—but they do make a recommendation. Once either the search committee or the Vestry selects the person to be called, the name is sent to the bishop. Once the bishop indicates that the nominee or nominees are in fact qualified and acceptable, the Vestry issues the call, negotiates the terms of employment, and informs the parish and the diocese of the election of the new rector.

Who exercises *episcopé* in this practice? The parish

oversees itself by electing a Vestry, which carries on the work of the parish, in conjunction with the rector and others. This is formal or official oversight through governance.

The Vestry oversees the search by appointing a search committee to which the search is delegated. This, too, is official oversight through governance.

The search committee conducts the search and nominates a candidate to the Vestry. The search committee exercises oversight instrumentally or operationally—that is, formally it *does* the work—and in an advisory manner: it *nominates* or *recommends*.

In the course of its work, the search committee will solicit and receive feedback from those involved in the interview process—ordinary members of the congregation. These members thus exercise informal or unofficial oversight through consultation.

The search committee may or may not work with a consultant who is not a member of the parish and who has no formal role in developing the recommendation. This is informal or unofficial oversight through advice or consultation.

The Vestry elects the new rector. This is formal oversight through governance.

The bishop—the *episkopos*—or the bishop's deputy checks the qualifications of the nominee or nominees, and notifies the search committee that candidates are qualified—or not. The *episkopos* exercises *episcopé* here in a mixed way: the bishop may formally *disqualify* a candidate for cause—an exercise of oversight through decision-making, a form of governance. At the same time, the bishop formally states which nominees are qualified, but does not thereby necessarily express a preference for a particular nominee. The bishop *may* express a preference, but this is not binding on the search committee; it is *informal* oversight. So the bishop exercises *formal* oversight by advice and even tacit consent, and *may* exercise informal or unofficial oversight through advice.

So in this general pattern of the selection of a new rector, we see oversight being exercised by a wide range of people, primarily at the congregational level. Some of these people have direct governing responsibility; some only advisory. The bishop—by theology and policy and practice the focus of authority, leadership, and unity in life and doctrine of the diocese, as well as the embodiment of communion with the rest of the church—the bishop has a relatively small role to play, and that role is largely

advisory. The bishop governs directly only in a very restricted way: the bishop can tell the search committee what *not* to do, but the bishop cannot tell them what they *must* or *ought* to do.

To put it another way: the selection of a rector is an exercise of collegial or communal or, I think, corporate *episcopé*, within which the bishop exercises *episcopé* primarily in an advisory way. The congregation is free to choose its own leader; but it does so in conjunction with the bishop whose role here is to make sure that the leader chosen is a leader *for the church*, not just for that congregation. The bishop indeed exercises *episcopé*, but in a collegial way, not in any sense solely or autonomously. Notice, too, that *episcopé* is exercised at every level both *formally* or *officially* and *informally* or *unofficially*. The whole exercise takes place according to canon law and stipulated policy, but with considerable latitude for “local adaptation” to the realities of the parish and the diocese at that time in that place.

Let us turn now to our second example, clergy misconduct. These cases are very difficult and taxing to handle well, in any church; we all know this. Many things are at stake: the congregation’s well-being and trust, the well-being of the member of the clergy, and of at least one other person, and of their families—and the mission of the individual congregation and the church as a whole in the community. Such cases are matters of discipline and they are also matters of pastoral concern and care. In the Episcopal Church’s understanding of *episcopé*, it is the bishop who is chief pastor of the diocese, and it is the bishop who has oversight of church discipline (in this instance, maintenance of discipline). In these cases, these two “offices” come together and may, at some points, conflict.

So let us say that the Rev. Arthur Dimsdale, Rector of St. Agnes in Agony Episcopal Church, is observed by Dr. Laura Chillingsworth, a member of the Vestry of St. Agnes, in a compromising position with Ms. Hester Prynne, vestry member and warden of St. Agnes. Both Dimsdale and Prynne are married to other people, and they each have children, some of whom still live at home. In short, this is not a situation where a civil law has been broken; but it

is a case where the church’s moral teachings, its canons, and its policies have been violated. Now what?

For the sake of moving this discussion along, let us further say that Dr. Chillingsworth knows enough about the workings of the Episcopal Church that the first thing she does is to telephone Bp. Julia Morgan to report what she has seen. This sets in motion quite a complicated process that entails Bp. Morgan’s talking with Dr. Chillingsworth to determine whether her information is credible; with the Rev. Dimsdale to see what he has to say; with Ms. Prynne; with the Vestry; with the parish; and, at a pastorally appropriate moment, with the various families. Some of this is pastoral: Bp. Morgan precisely as bishop has some measure of pastoral care for each of these persons and groups. Bp. Morgan may invite others to be part of the conversations and response—particularly in working with the congregation—and these others may be members of the bishop’s staff, or other church leaders, or outside consultants. The bishop may, at a certain point, delegate primary pastoral care to another in order that the bishop may exercise her other fundamental role, which is to oversee church discipline.

When Bp. Morgan meets with the Rev. Dimsdale in her office, she is to present him with what she has been told, and to ask him if it is true. Here’s our first fork in the road: Dimsdale may confirm the report, or he may deny it.

If he confirms the report, and admits that this is, indeed, a case of misconduct, Dimsdale may voluntarily submit to discipline, thereby agreeing that the Bishop will decide how Dimsdale’s behavior is to be treated. The bishop makes this decision only after consulting with appropriate counsel, with the complainant(s)—in this case, Dr. Chillingsworth—and with the victim(s)—in this case, Ms. Prynne. As chief pastor of the diocese, Bp. Morgan will likely make provisions for a professional evaluation of Dimsdale. Depending on this assessment and other things, Bp. Morgan and the Rev. Dimsdale have further conversation before the bishop decides what pastoral and disciplinary steps to take. The provisions of the submission to discipline will agreement will be put in writing, and they are binding. They

If we make these distinctions too sharply—and that is always a possibility—we will be tricked into thinking that “personal” and “corporate” are theologically separate and at best complementary modes of being.

may include the Rev. Dimsdale's resigning his ministerial orders, or seeking alternative employment, or taking an extended leave of absence, or engaging in a course of counseling, and so on—that is, primarily pastoral actions. Bp. Morgan may also take formal disciplinary actions, by which Dimsdale may be admonished, suspended (thereby terminating his relationship with the Church of St. Agnes), or deposed (thereby terminating Dimsdale's ministry as a member of the clergy of the Episcopal Church).

Ah, but what about Ms. Prynne?—who while having lesser power than Dimsdale is nevertheless a responsible adult. In the Episcopal Church at this time, Bp. Morgan may *ask* or *urge* Ms. Prynne to resign as Warden and to step down from the Vestry, but Bp. Morgan cannot *require* her to do so. The only formal sort of discipline the bishop or anyone else in the Episcopal Church can exercise over Ms. Prynne is to excommunicate her. There is some sense in the Episcopal Church that other kinds of discipline are desirable, but this is not yet something on which we have a broad agreement. But let us leave talk of double standards to another time.

As soon as the Rev. Dimsdale confirms the report and agrees to submit to discipline, the bishop's office puts in motion a response that informs the congregation of the situation, provides them with ministerial leadership, and helps them deal with this critical moment—all according to diocesan policy that has been formulated in accord with canon law and national policy.

But let us say that the Rev. Dimsdale takes the other fork in the road. If Dimsdale denies the report, or confirms it but says he did nothing wrong (or that it's not the church's business), another chain of policies, procedures, and practices is put into motion. Bp. Morgan will likely inhibit Dimsdale from exercising his ministerial office for a period of 90 days, and the things I mentioned already relative to the congregation and families will all be put into motion.

Further, Bp. Morgan will inform Dr. Chillingsworth how to proceed with a formal charge. And, depending on the case, Bp. Morgan may appoint an advocate for the alleged victim. The bishop must also make a prompt, full report of the matter to the Diocesan Review Committee, a very high-level group of clergy and laity. Within 30 days of being notified by the bishop, the Diocesan Review Com-

mittee meets and refers the matter to a specially appointed church attorney, who investigates the matter and reports back to the Diocesan Review Committee within 60 days. The Committee shares this confidential report with the bishop. At that point, the Diocesan Review Committee—not the bishop, note—has thirty days to decide whether to issue a presentment, or formal ecclesiastical charge.

If the Diocesan Review Committee does issue a presentment, the matter goes to an ecclesiastical court made up of lay people, priests, and deacons. This court has its procedures laid out in detail by canon law, and they provide for the trial's conduct, for due process, and for appropriate counsel for the major parties involved. No sooner than thirty days after the presentment is issued, the court convenes formally to hear evidence in the case from the church attorney and from others, including from Dimsdale, should he desire to testify. The court reaches a judgment by a two-thirds vote. The judgment may be appealed, using canonical procedures. The court's judgment does not move to a sentence any sooner than thirty days, and longer if there is an appeal. This is to give an opportunity to the church attorney, the complainant, and the victim to indicate why they think the recommended sentence should not be pronounced, and to communicate with the bishop about anything they think is pertinent to the matter. After this period, the court gives its judgment to the bishop—admonition, suspension, deposition—and it is the bishop who pronounces the sentence. The bishop must give notice of the place and time at which she will pronounce the sentence and, if the sentence is deposition, the bishop must pronounce it in the presence of at least two priests. The bishop may pronounce a sentence that is less stringent than that recommended by the court. The bishop's office then communicates the outcome of the trial to the congregation of St. Agnes, all clergy and vestries in the diocese, and every other bishop and Standing Committee in the Episcopal Church, as well as to the appropriate national offices. In this notification, the bishop is acting as the guardian—the overseer, if you will—of the unity of the church within the diocese and beyond the diocese.

So who exercises *episcopé* in cases of clergy misconduct?

The bishop exercises *episcopé* in initiating the disciplinary process and in responding to the judgment of the court, as well as in making the

necessary notifications as the case warrants. This is disciplinary *episcopé*, but within a very limited and carefully specified range.

The bishop exercises *episcopé* in pronouncing sentence, but it is worth noting that the bishop is acting at the behest of the ecclesiastical court, and not autonomously. The bishop may pronounce a lesser sentence the court recommends, but cannot pronounce a greater one.

The Diocesan Review Committee exercises *episcopé* in overseeing the disciplinary process itself, in deciding whether or not formal charges are to be made, and in deciding what needs to be done following the bishop's initial actions. This is disciplinary *episcopé*.

The Ecclesiastical Court exercises disciplinary *episcopé* in hearing the charges and the evidence and in reaching a judgment as to what action should be taken.

Who offers pastoral care and concern in this case?

The bishop provides pastoral care and concern directly to the member of the clergy involved, and to others directly involved.

The bishop generally also deputizes others to provide pastoral care on the bishop's behalf. These others may be individual clergy, individual laity, and/or groups of responders who, generally, have clergy and lay members.

The Diocesan Review Committee and the Ecclesiastical Court provide pastoral care for all persons involved through the stipulated procedures. They provide further pastoral care of a more general sort in seeing that church discipline and teachings are upheld.

So in cases of clergy misconduct, we see oversight being exercised by a wide range of people, primarily at the diocesan level. What we don't see is one person or one office being the locus of oversight.

To put it another way: dealing with clergy misconduct is an exercise of collegial or communal or, I would say, corporate *episcopé*, within which "personal" *episcopé* is formally and informally exercised primarily in a pastoral way, but also formally in a disciplinary way but within explicit parameters. The bishop's office as the focus of unity, of oversight, of teaching, and of pastoral care is enacted in the specific actions that only the bishop may take—inhibition, deposition. But in this instance, the bishop is enacting these offices in a representative way. That

the Diocesan Review Committee has such a strong role in clergy discipline is indicative of at least two things, I think. One of them is the pastoral recognition that any person enacting a number of roles simultaneously is likely to be most effective insofar as the inevitable conflicts of roles are alleviated to some extent by others, both those who share certain roles and those who act as advisors to whom one is accountable. The second thing is that the strong role of the Diocesan Review Committee reflects both the Episcopal Church's fundamental theology about the nature of the church as a body, and our realistic recognition of the temptations facing human beings to misuse or abuse power—a very reformed and reforming understanding.

I want to conclude with some comments on the terms "personal," "corporate," "collegial," and "communal." To generalize from my discussion of these two examples of the exercise of oversight, consistently in the Episcopal Church (and I suspect elsewhere) *episcopé* is *simultaneously* personal and communal and collegial—even corporate insofar as that term means a cooperative working together of authorized and recognized church leaders toward a largely common end. Consistently *episcopé* is also *simultaneously* local, regional, and national, and even global.

This reality points to an important fundamental theological point that has to do with the nature of the "personal." While in the largely secularist context of the post-Enlightenment North Atlantic, "personal" is often synonymous with "individual"—and in the sense of both "autonomous" and "private"—in theology "personal" means something quite different. From the Scripture forward, "to be a person means to be self-conscious that one's being does not originate in and of oneself" and it means "to be open toward and receptive of distinct others." Or, to paraphrase William Temple, to be a person is to know that I need others and that I am needed by others.

To flesh this out a bit, being a person, by definition, entails both connection and differentiation—and those are not antithetical. It is only as differentiated that I can connect with others *as others* (rather than subsuming them or being subsumed by them); but *how* I am differentiated is at exactly the same time constituted in and through those connections. Second, personhood involves the whole of being human—heart, mind, body, soul and strength. Affective as well as rational as well as irrational as well

as embodied as well as self-transcending. What all this means, then, is that the “personal,” theologically speaking, is *always already* corporate, collegial, and communal. Persons can never *not be* those things.

Further, “personal” also means that when we are talking about the “personal” character of ministry we are talking not about function or office, but of manner of being. To what extent do I, in my person—not just my preaching, not just my writing, not just my presiding at the Eucharist—but as a person embody and enact my relationship with God through Christ in the power of the Spirit, in relationship to others? How do I do that consistently but not necessarily uniformly? How is my being patterned in response to a God who is both steadfast and quite willing to do new things at the most surprising moments? Note, again, that this meaning of “personal” is also a matter of both differentiation and connection. It is a matter of character and virtue as informing thought and practice.

One ecclesiological implication of this theological understanding of the “personal” is that our ability

to live together as Christians—within our different traditions, between our different traditions—depends to significant extent on our remembering that persons are, by definition, both connected and different. It is absolutely necessary to point to the particular instances in which one is more the case than the other. It is absolutely necessary, particularly in our socio-historical context, to point to and reform those areas where the “personal” has been taken to refer almost entirely to the “autonomous individual.” It is absolutely necessary to point to and reform those areas where power has been misused and abused—be those areas individual or corporate.

But at the same time, if we make these distinctions too sharply—and that is always a possibility—we will be tricked into thinking that “personal” and “corporate” are theologically separate and at best complementary modes of being. My argument here has been that they are not and cannot be separable. Our discussions, finally, and theologically, are about distinction within connectedness, and connectedness is not only indispensable, but also always present.

Expressions of *Episcopé*

Anna Case-Winter



DR. ANNA CASE-WINTER is Professor of Theology at McCormick Theological Seminary. Previously on the General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical Relations of the PCUSA, she is Co-Chair of the International Commission for Lutheran and Reformed Relations.

It is a pleasure to be here and to be part of these important conversations. A spirit of unity prevails in this gathering and a clear commitment to make our unity more visible. It restores my hope just to be in this good company!

In my terms as the Chair of the Subcommittee for Christian Unity for the Presbyterian Church, USA, I had the privilege of seeing earlier drafts of the document before us and of making theological comment. As I reread drafts three, four, and five, I was struck by how much *progress* has been made. The Ministry Task Force is to be commended on the evolution of understanding reflected here. While I know that we have a long way to go, we are blessed to enter into their labors, so well along the way.

Distinguishing Form and Substance

More and more in ecumenical conversations we are drawing a helpful distinction between *form* and *substance*. There is a sense that this substantial something which is *episcopé* can (and maybe should?) take many forms. There is broad agreement that a ministry of oversight is essential to the church for the sake of ordering our life together. As we have lived out that conviction within our different histories and contexts, *episcopé* has had rich and varied expressions: some are *congregational*, some *presbyterial*, some *episcopal*. Even ecumenical conversations that occur at a greater presumed distance than the one we are undertaking today, acknowledge that it is fitting that

there be multiple and different expressions of *episcopé*. In the first ever Presbyterian-Roman Catholic conversations in Rome, the Pontifical Council on the Promotion of Christian Unity said to our delegation—and they even put it in writing—that while *episcopé* is essential, “its exercise and concrete shape can change and is historically conditioned.” It seems to me that this kind of recognition of the difference between form and substance leaves the door wide open for further exploration of varied expressions of *episcopé*.

Questions before Us

If we recognize the *substance* in one another, need the *forms* be church-dividing? Even *within* our respective traditions there is variety. Our Reformed churches in Hungary, for example, have bishops. Calvin had nothing against bishops in principle and recognized this as a legitimate form of the ministry of oversight—even if not the one he favored. The practice of the form, as he saw it in his day of course, did not commend itself. Within the wider Anglican family, I understand that there are very different ways in which the role of bishop is lived out. This variety we see—not only between our two traditions but also within them—may be a clue to a greater breadth in expression than we have heretofore acknowledged. In the quest for unity, should the differences be blessed, or should they be brought into greater conformity with one another? How wide a difference will be admitted among the forms?

We are not the only ones struggling with these questions, and we can learn from the collective wisdom that has already been gained in ecumenical conversations—we do not have to reinvent the wheel! Considerable work has been done on *episcopé*

in the wider world of ecumenical conversations beyond our borders. My intention, among other things, is to share some of that work, and I have provided a bibliography for further exploration.

Learning from International Ecumenical Agreements

Just to goad us along a bit in our current work, I want to call our attention to a shared international agreement among Anglican, Lutheran, and Reformed, *The Meissen Declaration*. Here is what they said together regarding *episcopé* all the way back in 1988, “We acknowledge that personal and collegial oversight (*episcopé*) is embodied and exercised in our churches in a variety of forms, episcopal and non-episcopal, as a visible sign of the Church’s unity and continuity in apostolic life, mission and ministry” (17.A.iv.). At that time (already!) they took the step to say, “authorized ministers of our churches may, subject to the regulations of the churches and within the limits of their competence, carry out the tasks of their own office in congregations of the other churches when requested” (17.A.iv.). Now the document stops short of a fully reconciled common ministry, but so much was *already* agreed! Now here we are in 2006 and not that much further along! It is a situation which invites us to redouble our efforts.

In the international conversations between Anglican and Reformed recorded in the final report *God’s Reign and Our Unity* (1981-1984), there is a very helpful discussion of *episcopé*. I will share several of the conclusions of that work, especially the presentation in section 9I.

Most notably, the report argues that when we get beneath the surface and particular titles, there is an underlying common pattern in local churches. Both communions have a pastor who works with a body of colleagues as well as assistants who forward the work of Christ in the Church and the world. This pattern first appeared in the early Church’s division of the ordained ministry into the work of bishop, presbyter, and deacon. Both traditions claim a threefold ordering even to this day, though, as the report criticizes, each tradition has tended to truncate the pattern by effectively reducing the orders to two (bishop-priest or minister-elder).

The report admits that this three-fold pattern cannot claim to be the only one authorized in Scripture. The various authors of the New Testa-

ment point rather to a variety (there’s that word again!) of patterns which existed in the earliest period of the Church. But the threefold pattern eventually prevailed and was generally adopted by the Church, and the large majority of churches have maintained it in one form or another to the present day. (9I)

Most notably, the report argues that when we get beneath the surface and particular titles, there is an underlying common pattern in local churches.

In the early church, these three ministries were the ministries of the local congregation. The bishop was the shepherd and leader of the local community who presided over the celebration of the Eucharist, and was surrounded by a college of presbyters who shared the responsibility of teaching, preaching, and leadership. They were assisted in turn by deacons who gave special attention to the diaconal witness of the community. Evidence for this pattern can be found in the letters of Ignatius. As the Church grew, congregations multiplied in each place, and that led to a shift of responsibilities. The bishop became the leader of several congregations while the presbyters became the shepherds of these congregations. In this way, the bishop’s office gradually became a regional one. Certain Reformers of the 16th century, in a restorationist endeavor, returned to the older order, and so it has been among the Reformed, more or less, to this day.

An insight I found particularly helpful in the Anglican-Reformed report is the observation that the meaning of “local church” is now simply different in these two forms. For the Anglicans, it is the “diocese” centered in the bishop. For the Reformed, it is the “congregation,” meeting weekly around word and sacrament under the pastor’s oversight. When we reframe the matter in this way, it is clear that, in both cases, the three-fold pattern remains in place for the “local church.”

This is how our shared document from international Anglican-Reformed conversations tells the history. It allows that the Reformed pattern is in conformity with a pattern which seems to have been common in the earliest times, and that, in this sense, the Reformed rightly claim that they already have bishops. (As you know, this is what we have

been saying.) In the PCUSA our *Book of Order* ascribes the title bishop, among others, to pastors.

The challenge of “supra-congregational” oversight is present for both communions. For the Reformed, this is exercised by a corporate body—presbytery or synod. So you have also been hearing us speak of a “corporate bishop” or “corporate *episcopé*” in this connection. *Corporate*, for us, is more than a *collegial* relation among ministers of word and sacrament; it includes ordained elders who are elected by the congregation. In our polity we even have a provision for what we call the “parity of the elders.” That is, these elders, along with the ministers, will be in equal numbers and have equal status in all the decision-making bodies of the church. It avoids clerical domination—what some have called the “clerical captivity of the church”—and it insures a greater sharing of power with the elected representatives of congregations. So our presbyteries, synods and general assemblies will have as many elders as ministers among the voting commissioners.

For the Anglican Communion, the “supra-congregational” *episcopé* is more straightforwardly in the bishop’s hands. However, as I understand from our conversations, there is a commitment to maintain a balance of personal and collegial oversight in this exercise of *episcopé* as well. In practice there is not much that the bishop can do individually without this collegial consultation.

In a very poignant admonition, the Anglican-Reformed report challenges *both* communions to find ways of keeping a balance of personal and corporate *episcopé* at every level of church life. As the report observes, “Personal oversight apart from the wisdom of a corporate body is apt to become arbitrary and erratic; oversight by a corporate body without a personal pastor is apt to become bureaucratic and legalistic.” (102, c) (To any Presbyterian here, words like “bureaucratic and legalistic” ring an unpleasant but all too familiar bell!) There is wisdom in documents like *God’s Reign and Our Unity* from the ecumenical conversations in the wider world church that I hope we will continue to learn from as we go forward together. I suspect we have yet more to learn from them and certainly also from one another in the way of mutual affirmations and mutual admonitions—if we keep at this conversation long enough.

A fundamental commitment that resonates throughout the international discussion is a concern that,

whatever the particular forms may be, the ministry of oversight should have *personal, collegial and communal* dimensions at all levels. Whatever the outcome of our present conversations, I am convinced that this is a goal worth pursuing for both of our churches. It is not a question of there being absolute differences between our forms—that one pattern is only *personal* the other only *collegial*. It is more a question of balancing.

One anecdote: When the delegation from PCUSA went to Rome for conversations with the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, our assumptions regarding church governance were significantly reshaped. If we assumed that the papacy functioned as something like a monarchy and church order as a rigid hierarchy, this was challenged by their description of how things actually function. They emphasized the extent to which the college of bishops is granted an important role. There is collaboration and consultation all the way down the apparent hierarchy. Their self-understanding, as they articulated it, is less in terms of *authority* and more in terms of *representation*. (Some gently-spoken reservations remained for us—not the least of which was whether an all-male hierarchy *can* really represent the church—but those are conversations for another day!) We did come to understand that what we were seeing was not such an absolute contrast to our own patterns, but rather a different *balance* in the personal-collegial authority configuration. Painting with very broad strokes, in our system personal authority lies in making input into a collegial process where decisions are made corporately. Whereas in the system they described, collegial authority lies in making input into what will eventually be personal decisions by the one holding highest office.

The Issue of the Historic Apostolic Succession

Now we come to the sticky issue of the historic apostolic succession. In short, we understand ourselves to be in that succession, having both the sign and the thing signified at least as fully as any others. For us the apostolicity of the Church refers primarily to the church’s faithfulness to the apostolic witness. We stand in the succession of those who have affirmed the Lordship of Jesus Christ and have sought to follow him. In our practice of ordination, prayer with the laying on of hands by others who have been similarly ordained is central to our

church's liturgy. We have maintained this "sign" continuously throughout our church's history, and it is of great importance to us. Yet we do not entirely identify the sign with the thing signified. Continuity with the apostolic witness is a matter of faith and life. "Apostolic succession" cannot therefore be guaranteed by any particular ritual practiced in the Church.

In the quest for unity, should the differences be blessed or should they be brought into greater conformity with one another? How wide a difference will be admitted among the forms?

The document *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* acknowledges our inclusion.

[I]t is increasingly recognized that a continuity in apostolic faith, worship, and mission has been preserved in churches which have not retained the form of the historical episcopate. This recognition finds additional support in the fact that the reality and function of Episcopal ministry have been preserved in many of these churches with or without the title "bishop." (Ministry, Para 37)

We are fully aware that, although we aspire to the fullest expression of apostolic witness, our practice may be deficient. However, this does not distinguish us from others, if I may be so bold. Given this self-understanding, if anything in the document or in our great celebration when we come together implies that we lack the substance or the sign, and are newly receiving it, there will be a fitting reformed resistance.

Are We There Yet?

Now we come to the "are we there yet?" question. It is an annoying question, as any parent who has made long trips with small children can testify. After the hundredth time the question is asked, we tend to say something like, "If you say 'are we there yet' one more time, I will turn this car around and we will go home." It is mean, but it keeps them quiet for awhile. But there was one little boy who after keeping quiet for a bit, found a way to reframe the question. He asked, "Mama, how *old* will I be when

we get there?" Many of us are also wondering, how old will we be when we get there!

As the working group leans into the next draft of this, there are several areas that I think could strengthen the document. The extent to which these are addressed satisfactorily will, in my opinion, determine the answer to the "are we there yet?" question. (I have written this up more thoroughly in my theological comments solicited for Draft 5. The writing team has these in hand). In brief:

- We need to be clear that we (Presbyterians) understand ministers to be bishops in their ministry of oversight. We need also to be clear regarding our "corporate bishop" understanding of supra-congregational oversight. If this is clear, then issues of ordination "by bishops" are resolved.
- We need to be more thorough in clarifying the varied meanings of "presbyter" among our denominations. The document treats this term as meaning priests or ministers of word and sacrament, but for us it is equally to be applied to elders. More attention to our practice of the office of elder is needed.
- We need to be clear that we (Presbyterians) understand ourselves to be in the historic apostolic succession and not newly entering it with this step. The draft implies that we have the substance but lack the sign. This does not reflect our self-understanding.

The initial celebration and all the ordinations that follow should not treat the representative communions differently. (Paragraph #8I ends up sounding as if only those bishops who share in the Episcopal line of the historic apostolic succession are really necessary to ordinations; others are welcome but not necessary.) On the basis of our conversations I would urge a complete rethinking of the liturgical celebration of our mutual recognition and reconciliation. The prospect of the "commissioning" or "re-commissioning" of all our orders of ministries better expresses the mutuality we intend.

Speaking for myself (I am not representing anyone in the comments that follow—no extra charge for this personal point of view), to move ahead to reconciliation without these very basic understandings is to have *reconciliation without recognition*. I want to see this prosper, and I think with some significant reshaping, it can. Apart from that, I fear it will not. There are red flags throughout for me—and I am an

ecumaniac. If I have scruples, you can be sure the less enthusiastic will. I have said, and am about to say, some hard things, but it is because I hope we will “get up and do what needs to be done” to insure the success of this worthy endeavor. Toward that end, I am an agitator.

I think we still have a serious imbalance in the document. I wonder if we have been hampered in our progress by too heavy a dependence upon the Lutheran-Episcopal Concordat. It is as if we have been trying to walk around in shoes that just don't fit our feet, and the chaffing is impeding our walking together. Of course, it would have been equally problematic if we had been overly dependent upon the Lutheran-Presbyterian-RCA-UCC pattern represented in our Formula of Agreement—but this resource, which takes a very different approach, is hardly even consulted. There is a lack of symmetry in this. Nor does the document appropriate the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral's language about the need to “adapt the practice of episcopacy to the historical and contextual circumstances.” But in the final analysis, I think we will need to find a “still more perfect way,” one that will fit the distinctiveness of *this* combination of partners. We need to find shoes that fit our feet.

There is a level at which I do not think the recognition is yet fully mutual. There is an assumption, for example, that Presbyterian polity and practice of ordination needs to change to accommodate Episcopal understandings of historic Episcopal succession, but there is no assumption that Episcopal polity will change to accommodate our understanding of the role of the elder. It is not that I have a zeal to impose elders, but I do have a zeal for mutuality. A unity born of capitulation of one partner to the other is not a strong bond. Personally I think a better way forward than imposing bishops and elders on one another might be a *mutual recognition* of our different but valid expressions of *episcopé* and committing ourselves to walking together and learning from one another how these offices and our practice of them may be renewed to contribute to the life and health of the church.

What is to prohibit our mutual recognition and reconciliation without either of us imposing our polity on the other? I think we may be lacking in *ecclesiological imagination*. Unity is not uniformity. Much is made of the difference between “recognition” and “reconciliation.” I for one would be

reluctant to cede the use of the term “reconciliation” of ministries to those approaches that push for uniformity. Unity may call us to the embrace of difference rather than its obliteration.

In conclusion, there is a *new day dawning* in the work of ecumenism. Many of you can remember, as I do, a time when unity was interpreted to require complete agreement and even uniformity. Our agreed statements had to be hammered out until complete agreement was achieved. Consequently, there were not as many of them as there might have been! There has been a cultural shift. Today quests for unity are met with suspicion. People ask “Whose unity?” “Unity on whose terms?” There is a suspicion that some dominant group has an assimilating agenda in which the values of others will be overrun. A time such as ours needs new approaches that find a way of expressing and respecting difference. I think the way forward will be “differentiated consensus” approaches like what we see in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, that remarkable agreement between Lutherans and Roman Catholics. We confess together what we can confess together and allow differences to be honestly voiced and claimed within the agreement rather than being glossed over or silenced.

We would have to let go of “unity as uniformity” thinking. I for one have come to accept that other denominations will never “see the light” and adopt a Presbyterian polity! Need that hinder our unity? I don't think so. Maybe we do not all have to look alike and think alike to recognize one another as brothers and sisters in Christ's service. Maybe we need to learn to do difference differently. The places where advance in ecumenical work is being made today, it seems to me, are the places where partners can participate with integrity, bringing the particularity of their convictions and commitments to the table—a table where the “dignity of difference” is respected. Can we come together at such a table? If we do, perhaps our “eyes will be opened” in the breaking of the bread. There might be a *true recognition* and a *true reconciliation*.

In Jesus Christ we belong to one another. We are no longer our own, and we are bound in a unity that is not our own doing. Our present differences in expressions of *episcopé* are not a stumbling block to unity unless we let them be. May God grant us sufficient *ecclesiological imagination* to see our way forward together.

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Gifts of *Episcopé*

John H. Thomas



THE REV. JOHN H. THOMAS is *General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ*. He was instrumental in the development of the full communion relationship between the *Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* and three Reformed churches, the *Reformed Church in America*, the *Presbyterian Church (USA)*, and the *UCC*.

For many in the United Church of Christ, the combining of the word *gifts* with the word *episcopé* will strike a discordant, disconcerting note. While *episcopé* obviously involves far more than mere “office,” linguistically and historically it has been tied in the mind of most to the office of bishop. And let’s be honest. We wouldn’t be here in the context of a nearly forty-five-year-old ecumenical journey talking about *episcopé* if the questions of how our diverse communions embody oversight in a person or a council, and how that person or council expresses the continuity of the Church through time, were not so difficult, even contentious. No one here will argue about the need for *episcopé* in the life of the church, though, to be sure, there are some in our churches for whom any authority, any “oversight,” is seen to be an infringement on freedom. Most of us here will not even quarrel over the use of the word *bishop* given its historical and biblical foundations. It’s when we begin to talk about that office lived out primarily in the vocation of an individual, and when that ministry is seen to be a distinctive sign, even if not a guarantee, of the unity and catholicity of the church across time and space through the historic episcopate, it’s at this point that we hesitate.

As one United Church of Christ historian puts it, “The traditions that make up the United Church of Christ have in varying degrees a suspicion of authority, ‘an allergy to the word *bishop*,’ especially

that resting in a single individual.”¹ This suspicion, indeed allergy, is rooted variously in the Reformed tradition’s stress on the corporate dimensions of structures of oversight, and more specifically in the experience of *episcopé* by the first generation of Separatists, Puritans, and Congregationalists in England where it was linked to an episcopate whose ties to the powers of the state enabled it to impose a religious settlement incompatible with their own understandings of ecclesiology and polity. I suspect as well that this suspicion reflects a more general American cultural discomfort with authority of any kind. Scratch a Christian of almost any “brand” today, and you will most often find a functional congregationalist!

This discomfort with oversight personally expressed has been further provoked by our emerging awareness of the way authority in the church has often been linked to patriarchy and racism. While the election of women to the office of bishop, even presiding bishop!—or to something like an office of bishop in all of our churches—begins to mitigate this discomfort, it remains for many a challenge. And while our African Methodist churches retain and honor the office of bishop, the ambiguity within Churches Uniting in Christ over the nature of their current incorporation into or relationship to the historic episcopate reflects not just theological issues in dispute, but facts of history that have much to do with racist exclusion. Unity with wholeness, a core theme of the Consultation on Church Union and Churches Uniting in Christ, runs often as a kind of counter-testimony to our witness to the importance of a reconciled ministry that will invite recognition from the wider church. As a representative voice of the United Church of Christ, and as a member of the Reformed family, I bring all

I suspect as well that this suspicion reflects a more general American cultural discomfort with authority of any kind. Scratch a Christian of almost any “brand” today, and you will most often find a functional congregationalist!

of this to these conversations. And while I may not personally have a profound allergic reaction, I can't ignore a certain itch when entering into this dialogue!

Nevertheless, from the very beginning, those spiritual and biological forebears of mine who became New England Congregationalists, like the other traditions of our Reformed and Evangelical, and to a lesser extent the Christian churches that made up our union in 1957, recognized the need for structures of oversight that went beyond the single “gathered community” in any one place. In 1648, at Cambridge, Massachusetts, the New England divines spoke of “the communion of churches one with another,” and pointed to those elements of polity that would serve as a sign of unity among the geographically dispersed congregations.² Included in these structures were mechanisms for the transfer of members between congregations and the need for some form of theological accountability through a process of what we would much later describe in our Lutheran-Reformed full communion agreement “mutual affirmation and admonition.” Thus the traditions that today comprise the United Church of Christ wrestled from the very beginning with the question of how to best provide for oversight—*episcopé*—in the life of the church, and of at least the necessity, if not the gift, of this dimension of the Church's ordered life.

Alongside this has been the claiming by the United Church of Christ of its identity as a “united and uniting church.” For fifty years our identification with this family of churches has tempered a strict obedience to the heritage of the Reformed tradition alone and has challenged us to reconsider old loyalties and assumptions. At the Uniting General Synod of our church in 1957, the famed missiologist and ecumenist, Lesslie Newbigin, Bishop of the Diocese of Madras and Ramnud of the Church of South India, spoke of this call to “reconsideration.”

I am happy that the Basis of Union itself expresses the hope that the present union will open the way to yet wider unity, and that the name of the new Church is interpreted not merely as a statement of what we are but

as a prophecy of what we hope to become. Such wider union must also be sought with a motive not merely ecclesiastical but also profoundly missionary. It must be sought with the desire that Christ Himself may be lifted up in the nation and in the world and may draw all men to Himself. *It would be foolish if we did not recognize that that may mean profound changes in the traditional structures of our Churches.*³ (emphasis added)

Here Newbigin sets forth the two essential criteria of unity and mission that must be at the center of any evaluation of structures in the Church's life. They are embedded, of course, in Jesus' prayer, serving as the motto of the United Church of Christ, “that they may all be one that the world may believe.”

This means that no ecumenical initiative, and no theological or ecclesiological arrangement within those initiatives, is worth claiming unless it simultaneously serves the unity of the Church and the mission of God. Put another way, the World Council of Churches' Faith and Order Commission has suggested that the Church is to be “a sign and instrument of God's design.”⁴ Our ecumenical vocation must be judged by its capacity to make the Church a more effective sign of God's call to unity, and a more effective instrument of God's reconciling mission in the world. The question before us, therefore, as we consider proposals for structuring *episcopé* in the Church, and in particular for its expression in personal, rather than merely corporate or collegial ways, is not whether such proposals are sufficiently “UCC,” or sufficiently “Reformed.” Such an approach, in Newbigin's language, would be “foolish.” The question must be, to borrow language from *Churches in Covenant Communion*, will our union in Churches Uniting in Christ “effectively invite recognition of its ordained ministries by all parts of the universal Church?” Will this covenant communion “be a sign and foretaste of a the unity God wills for the Church?” We must remember throughout this consultation that our “ultimate intent . . . is the salvation of each and all. [Covenant communion] is for the redemption of the world.”⁵

If the dialogue about the nature of *episcopé*, its personal expression, and the role of the historic episcopate as a sign of the unity of the Church devolves into negotiations over the politics of the possible, or our preoccupation with whether our own traditions are sufficiently visible, then we are not only unfaithful, but foolish as well.

As noted above, I take it to be a shared assumption that none of our churches would deny either the gift or the necessity of ministries and structures of oversight. The challenge, from a general point of view is how those ministries are best embodied in the life of the Church, how those structures are best ordered. More particularly we ask how *episcopé* is to be expressed in a *personal* way. Most specifically we ask how *episcopé* in the communion of our churches is to be related to the historic episcopate as a sign of the faith and the unity of the Church through the ages. The Anglican-Reformed International Dialogue, “God’s Reign and Our Unity,” in 1984 offers a “hermeneutical framework” for these questions:

The varied forms of ordained ministry have evolved in the course of history. On this, three things may be said: (i) The particular ministerial structures which are now embodied in our different communions cannot claim the direct authority of scripture. The New Testament cannot be held to prescribe a three-fold ministry of bishops, priests, and deacons, a presbyterian or congregational form of government, or the primacy of the see of Rome. All attempts to read off one divinely authorized form of ministry from the New Testament are futile. (ii) The Church is a living body which should combine continuity of tradition with adaptation to new situations under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. (iii) Not all the developments of the past nineteen centuries are to be regarded as divinely sanctioned simply because they have occurred. The ministerial forms which we inherit have been developed in the course of the Church’s missionary advance through the centuries and among the nations. They are neither to be treated as immutable because they exist, nor to be rejected because they are not explicitly authorized by scripture. Our duty is first to receive and cherish them with gratitude, and then to

learn, as those before us have done, to adapt and reform them under the guidance of the Spirit in faithfulness to the apostolic witness, and in accordance with the missionary needs of the day.⁶

Chapter seven of *The COCU Consensus*, which continues to serve as the theological understanding of ministry underlying covenanting, describes bishops as “baptized members of the People of God, ordained to preach the word, preside at sacraments, and administer discipline in such a way as to be representative pastoral ministers of oversight, unity, and continuity in the Church.”⁷ Here, in shorthand, are the “gifts of *episcopé*.” Presbyters share in some of these ministries, though not that of being representative pastoral ministers of oversight, unity, and continuity. *The COCU Consensus* goes on to say,

Bishops, in communion with all the People of God, represent the continuity of the Church’s life and ministry over the centuries, the unity of its communities and congregations with one another, and the oneness of its ministries in mission to the world. Bishops are a sign of, and are particularly responsible for, the continuity of the whole Church’s Tradition, as well as of its pastoral oversight.⁸

Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry in 1982 is the origin of much of this language, and, as does *The COCU Consensus*, it places this “gift” within the framework of an understanding that all ministry is . . .

to be exercised in a personal, collegial, and communal way. It should be *personal* because the presence of Christ among his people can most effectively be pointed to by the person ordained to proclaim the Gospel and to call the community to serve the Lord in unity of life and witness. It should also be collegial, for there is need for a college of ordained ministers sharing in the common task of representing the concerns of the community. Finally, the intimate relationship between the ordained ministry and the community should find expression in a *communal* dimension where the exercise of the ordained ministry is rooted in the life of the community and requires the community’s effective participation in the discovery of God’s will and the guidance of the Spirit.⁹

Episcopé is authentic—a gift—only when it is exercised

in such a way that all three dimensions—personal, collegial, and communal—are fully expressed.

Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry, in a commentary on this paragraph, reminds us that “these three aspects need to be kept together. In various churches,” *BEM* asserts, “one or another has been over-emphasized at the expense of others Each church needs to ask itself in what way its exercise of the ordained ministry has suffered in the course of history.”¹⁰ For the Reformed tradition it is, of course, the *personal* expression of the ministry of oversight that has suffered, in part for the reasons I noted at the beginning of my paper. But there is, at least in the history of the United Church of Christ, an intriguing exception to this that may be suggestive for the future.

In the settled older churches of the east, beginning already in the 17th century, *episcopé* was generally expressed in Associations which had oversight over the ordering of the ministry of the churches and which regularly gathered the congregations for mutual encouragement and conversation, to “advise in the formation or discontinuance of pastoral relationships,” the “establishment of new churches,” or the “solving of quarrels.”¹¹ Alongside these Associations there also emerged “mission societies” organized to promote in a cooperative manner various aspects of the mission of the church. Thus, in the “established Christianity” of colonial and federalist New England, and particularly after the Second Great Awakening, the traditional functions of *episcopé* were lodged in both ecclesial and mission structures, and in both cases the communal and collegial dimensions of this ministry were paramount.

It was not so, however, in the newly established territories of the west. There, in the decidedly “non-establishment” environment of the frontier, oversight was exercised more personally by an agent of the missionary society, most often, in the case of Congregationalism, in the Missionary Superintendent appointed over one or more geographic districts by the American Home Missionary Society.¹² The central task in this new environment was missionary: evangelism, planting churches, securing funds and pastoral leadership for those congregations, providing assistance in Christian education and the organization of women’s societies. In the west, traditional anxiety over the personal expression of oversight in the person of a powerful agent of the missionary society gave way before the context of, in this case, a *pre-establishment* Christian

circumstance. Thus, while not using the title “bishop,” Congregationalists lodged something like the traditional gifts of *episcopé* in an individual.

Such a system had its flaws. The initial lack of anything like an association meant that once pastors and congregations had grown sufficiently self-sufficient and self-supporting, there was little ecclesial expression of support—or oversight—for them. But even critical words reveal the strength of this system of personal oversight in the Missionary Superintendent: “Our Congregational churches were better organized for extension than they were for maintaining and intensifying what they already had. So long as a church was in the process of formation, or as long as it could not support itself financially, it received a great deal of attention.”¹³ As the western territories, and their churches, became more “established,” the eastern models of corporate oversight in associations began to develop, and the Missionary Superintendent’s role began to shift toward that of administering a Conference, the successor in many places to the Home Mission Society’s “districts.” Once again, the ecclesial and the missionary dimensions of oversight were split, and corporate expressions of *episcopé* were restored to dominance. Today, one must confess, few would argue that the successor to the old Congregational Churches is “better organized for extension than for maintaining.”

This poses, I think, a fascinating question for our consultation. Could it be that some expressions of episcopé are better suited to certain mission contexts than to others?

This poses, I think, a fascinating question for our consultation. Could it be that some expressions of *episcopé* are better suited to certain mission contexts than to others? It is generally agreed that Christianity in North America, with the possible exception of some new immigrant communities, finds itself in a “post-Christendom,” “post-establishment” context, a context radically different from the 18th and 19th centuries in which most of our current structures of oversight developed. Could it be, for example, that the heavy emphasis on corporate expressions of oversight, with its accompanying allergy among Reformed Christians to personal expressions, is better suited for an established rather than

a dis-established Christian context? Does the missionary success of the Superintendent in the pre-establishment west, as I've described it in the history of the United Church of Christ, point us toward the possibility that claiming more personal expressions of oversight in our post-establishment situation might more adequately serve God's mission today, leading toward greater "extension" rather than mere "maintenance?" Might this be a gift, not merely for the sake of unity, but for the sake of the mission of God?

There is, I think, some evidence to support this. Today our corporate expressions of oversight are, in many cases, consumed with what we might call "regulatory" responsibilities. Included in this are the tasks of credentialing and discipline. Protecting the Church and, in particular, its most vulnerable members from predators among the clergy is, as we have increasingly come to realize, a vitally important responsibility. But, as I have sometimes said, "our Associations now spend more time trying to make sure that bad things don't happen than to creatively encourage good things to happen." This is not a judgment on any of the individuals who serve in these important councils of oversight. But it does beg the question of who is tending to the missionary extension of the Church. Who is carrying out the responsibilities of signifying the "continuity of the whole Church's tradition," or of "representing the Church's unity," or of "representing the unity of the Church's communities and churches with one another, and the oneness of its ministries in mission in the world?"¹⁴ Who is the steward of these gifts of *episcopé*? It may be that the emergence of the office of Conference Minister in the United Church of Christ as one that increasingly expresses in *personal* ways the ministry of oversight, and of the Council of Conference Ministers as an important leadership setting in the church, is an implicit recognition of the reality that missionary contexts require different expressions of oversight than establishment contexts.

Historians could make the case, I believe, that when the Church has been faced by a missionary or *frontier* context rather than a settled or establishment context, or when the Church has been confronted with profound oppression or racism, rendering it particularly vulnerable in its culture, its message of resistance desperately needed but also deeply contested, it has best been able to serve the imperatives of mission and the demands of justice when it has

allowed gifted, charismatic leaders to exercise oversight, broadly understood, in personal rather than merely corporate ways. One can look at the Apostolic era of the pre-Constantinian establishment, or at the foreign missionary movements of the 19th and early 20th centuries where Christianity grew and continues to exist as a minority community, or at the situation of slavery and apartheid where the Church sheltered a victimized and marginalized community crying out for justice.

In each of these cases, it was not just corporate and conciliar leadership that voiced the compelling and prophetic witness of the Church, it was also, and often primarily, charismatic and authorized leaders—even bishops!—whose representative voice and witness, personally expressed, was most effective in serving the mission of God. Whether one uses the title bishop or not, the presence of powerful representative voices, speaking and acting personally and on behalf of the community, have been critical for the effective prophetic witness of the Church and its extension. Now, as our churches once again experience dis- or post-establishment, the resistance of some of us to embrace these personal expressions of oversight, and their gifts, may in fact be muting our voice and rendering our witness less effective, even impotent. In the invitation to receive the gift of *episcopé*, at once expressed collegially, communally and, yes personally in the office of bishop, today's missionary context in a post-establishment world may return us again to Newbigin's challenge: "It would be foolish if we did not recognize that that may mean profound changes in the traditional structures of our churches."¹⁵

Nevertheless, the allergic reaction, the itch for some of us in the Reformed tradition, remains. Is there some form of ecclesiastical "antihistamine" we might take for this? Here let me speak to my own confessional family, inviting others of you to listen in. In an essay on "the Reformed habit of mind,"¹⁶ Reformed historian and theologian Brian Gerrish suggests that what may be required of us is not a denial of our Reformed ethos, but a deeper and more profound claiming of it. Gerrish describes the Reformed habit of mind as "deferential," "critical," "open," "practical," and "reformed according to the Word of God." To be deferential is to nurture the habit of deference to the past, and by this Gerrish means to the apostles, the fathers and mothers of the Church. As the 19th century Mercersburg movement in my own tradition reminded us, though not with-

out strong dissenters, this meant more than rum-maging through 16th century texts or leaping back to the apostolic age without passing through the traditions of the faith of the Church through the ages. “I am not,” Gerrish says, “being genuinely Reformed even if I manage to keep up with the latest thing in the Reformed church.”¹⁷ It is not being “anti-Reformed” to consider expressions of oversight and ministry that emerged prior to Calvin or that were criticized by the Puritans or the Westminster divines for reasons theological as well as historical.

Gerrish goes on to say that the Reformed habit of mind is “unabashedly practical.” Again, Newbigin’s challenge: Will is work? Or, more precisely, will it serve the mission of God?

Gerrish also reminds us that along with being deferential, Reformed Christians are critical. Gerrish directs us to our motto: *ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*. Reformed, always reforming. “We had better make it a habit of mind, not an empty motto,” he writes. “Otherwise, we will reduce living tradition to the narrow limits of our favorite shibboleth or checklist and cancel our pledges whenever someone says something we aren’t used to hearing.”¹⁸ He goes on to suggest that “our attitude toward tradition” is always an “oscillation between attraction and aversion,” so that we “learn by conversation with the past.” In this conversation about *episcopé*, the episcopate, and the historic episcopate, I fear we have often missed much of the conversation in order to promote our own shibboleth or checklist, and at times the temptation to cancel pledges has been strong.

In reflecting on the habit of openness, Gerrish quotes from Ulrich Zwingli, who wrote that . . .

some people do not hesitate to make the truth odious by attributing it to the philosophers, not noting that the truth, wherever found and by whomever it is brought to light, is from the Holy Spirit . . . All that I have said and all that I am going to say in this book is derived from one source, namely from the nature and character of the Supreme Deity. This source Plato also tasted and Seneca drank from it.¹⁹

Those members of the Reformed family that are also

“united and uniting” churches have had to learn this habit and discipline not only for the sake of cohabitation with ecumenical partners, but also, as Newbigin of the Church of South India claims, for the service of the truth, or as he would probably have said, the mission of God in missionary contexts like his own India or, I would claim, today’s United States.

For Calvin, if an issue was not about piety, but merely inquisitive and speculative, he wasn’t interested. Piety is here understood not as private devotion, but rather as “nothing less than the transformation of society into the mirror of God’s glory.”²⁰ The historic vision articulated by our forebears of a Church truly catholic, truly evangelical, and truly reformed, is not to be achieved for the sole purpose of allowing each of us to see ourselves in the mirror, but to enable us more effectively to be the “sign and instrument of God’s design,” to enable the Church in its own life and in its witness to offer a mirror to God for the world. Churches Uniting in Christ must be a reformation of the Church for the sake of the reformation of the world, the Reformed should say. It must never be a mere repristinization of any settlement, be it apostolic, Byzantine, Roman, Genevan, Elizabethan, or Puritan.

Finally, it is our habit to seek to be churches reformed according to the Word of God. This hardly means scouring the New Testament for biblical models of oversight or *episcopé*. That may be instructive, but it is never determinative. The Word of God under which we order our lives and engage in mission is the person of Christ. We “look to this Word in the Scriptures,”²¹ as our foundational theological statement in the United Church of Christ puts it. But we also would contest with anyone who would contain or confine that Word within the covers of a book, even one with fine gold lettering on a leather binding! “The Lord hath yet more light and truth to break forth from His blessed Word of Truth,” Pastor John Robinson famously told the Pilgrims as they set forth for the new world. “God is still speaking!” Which means that, in the end, we gather as church leaders, ecumenists, theologians, and historians to talk about *episcopé* not to ensure that our words on this difficult issue are inserted into a final agreement, but to listen deeply to the Word of God for the missionary challenge of our time.

That Word, ultimately, is a sending Word. And so

the ecumenical pilgrimage we share is one that must equip us for the journey that we might be that effective sign and instrument of God's design. When it comes to the matter of *episcopé*, the question is not how to create a hybrid that we can all claim as our own, but to order our life in such a way that we can attain our vision and fulfill our vocation. I take it to remain a core element of Churches Uniting in Christ, that "the participating churches," in the words of *The COCU Consensus*, "desire to become more than a new and more inclusive denomination. They seek full reconciliation with all Christian bodies—with those whose separate identities stem from the very ancient divisions, as well as with those of more recent origin."²² If that is still true, then our conversations here have a much wider audience, and we must attend to their sensibilities and yearnings as well.

This conversation has been, we must confess, a rather leisurely one, approaching now a half century. At each point the issue of *episcopé* has thwarted us. Yet we live in urgent times, when the arrogance and destruction of the imperial designs in which we live and with which we are often deeply complicit, and the spiritual homelessness in which so many of

our neighbors find themselves, call forth a compelling witness to the Word of God. The missionary context of our post-establishment era calls us to a ministry of resistance and renewal, a ministry that I believe can be invigorated, even if not ensured, by a stronger personal embodiment of the gifts of *episcopé*. Yet for some, the allergic reaction remains. So I close with the words of the missionary bishop as he challenged the United Church of Christ at our birth almost fifty years ago:

A true union of Churches, while it means that we bring into the union all that God has given us in our separation, also means that we are ready to bring all our treasures to the test of His word and Spirit, to surrender if need be many long-cherished securities, to venture on new and untrodden paths. And I would add that it is precisely at those points where union is most costly that it will be most fruitful, provided that we do not try to evade issues of truth, or to be content with mere togetherness, provided that we are really submitting ourselves to the searching mercy and judgment of the Cross.²³

Notes

1. Randi Walker, "Historical Background for the Location of *Episcopé* in the Traditions of the United Church of Christ," *Prism* (Fall, 1997), p. 14.
2. See Williston Walker, *Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* (Philadelphia, 1960), pp. 229-233.
3. Lesslie Newbigin, "Minutes of the Uniting General Synod of the United Church of Christ," 1957, p. 101.
4. *The Nature and Purpose of the Church*, Faith and Order Paper No. 181 (Geneva, 1998), pp. 21-22.
5. *Churches in Covenant Communion: The Church of Christ Uniting* (Princeton, 1988), pp. 23 and 10.
6. "God's Reign and Our Unity," 1984, in Jeffrey Gros, Harding Meyer, and William G. Rusch, eds., *Growth in Agreement II: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level, 1982-1992* (Geneva and Grand Rapids, 2000), pp. 136-137.
7. *The COCU Consensus* (Princeton, 1985), p. 48.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
9. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper III (Geneva, 1982), pp. 26-27.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
11. Williston Walker in Donald J. Severson, "The Idea of a Conference," *Prism* (Fall, 1994), pp. 50-51.
12. See *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.
13. C. C. Merrill in *Ibid.*, p. 42.
14. *The COCU Consensus*, p. 48.
15. Newbigin, p. 101.
16. Brian Gerrish, "Traditions in the Modern World: The Reformed Habit of Mind," in David Willis and Michael Welker, eds., *Toward the Future of Reformed Theology: Tasks, Topics, Traditions* (Grand Rapids, 1999), pp. 13-20.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
19. Ulrich Zwingli, "On Providence and Other Essays," in Gerrish, p. 16.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
21. *Preamble to the Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of Christ*, par. 2.
22. *The COCU Consensus*, p. 14.
23. Newbigin, p. 98.

Relationship Between *Episcopé* and Apostolic Succession

Continuity In, Through, and Across Time

Kristen E. Kvam



DR. KRISTEN E. KVAM is Associate Professor of Theology at St. Paul Theological Seminary of Kansas City. A member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Dr. Kvam is a member of the Lutheran/Roman Catholic Commission on Unity and member of the Lutheran/Roman Catholic Dialogue, USA.

I am grateful for the invitation to be among you at this Consultation. I long have been interested in the work of, first, COCU and now CUIC. I also am honored by your request that I come to you to discuss the relationship between *episcopé* and apostolic succession—remarks I have subtitled “continuity in, through, and across time.”

I also am grateful for your many expressions of concern and sympathy for the recent death of my father, Adolph Kvam. Daddy Adolph was the son of Norwegian pietists who immigrated to the US in 1914. I have thought about the irony of my assignment often as I have worked on my presentation—thinking about bishops and historic succession when this family tradition stressed the importance of the ministry of the laity and the local worshipping congregation.

If confession is good for the soul, I also want to say that the complexity of addressing this audience has baffled me more than once. My professional ecumenism has been in bilateral work rather than in multilaterals. I have been challenged in profound ways by my task of thinking on behalf of and speaking to a body that involves nine member churches.

As a lay member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, I come as a partner in mission and dialogue. I speak as a Lutheran who has a variety of connections to many of your member churches. I am a Lutheran who teaches systematic theology at a seminary of the United Methodist Church. I also speak as a woman who for half her life was the spouse

of a pastor in the Presbyterian Church USA. And my first venture into ecumenical writing was the invitation to write a commentary on the Concordat, the full communion proposal between the ELCA and the Episcopal Church that did not gain authorization in my church.

The relationship between *episcopé* and apostolic succession

Ordering is important to systematic theologians. And this certainly has been true for me as I have worked on this presentation. I have been asked to speak about the relationship between *episcopé* and apostolic succession with an eye to clarifying the relationship between these concepts.

Ordering is important as we think about *episcopé* and apostolic succession.

Where we begin affects where we are able to go. What we consider first affects what we can consider subsequently.

My decision has been to move from apostolic succession to *episcopé*. Hence I have reversed the order of the topics assigned to me. We shall move from the broad to narrow, from the larger concept to the one whose domain is more circumscribed. And I do so for theological reasons. What we say about apostolic succession will influence and shape how we think about *episcopé*.

I proceed in this way with a certain wariness since apostolicity has not been a focus of your work. There is no sustained discussion of apostolicity in this document. And yet the notion and what it signals permeate and punctuate the text as several crucial junctures. I am convinced that your text and your proposal rest on a renewed and enriched understanding of apostolic succession.

In what follows I will lift up several passages from the Mutual Recognition and Mutual Reconciliation of Ministries because I see them as illuminating what this text says about the relationship between *episcopé* and apostolic succession—or rather apostolic succession and *episcopé*. It may be helpful for you to have your copy of the document in hand as we move to a close reading of the text embroidered by my commentary.

Also, I want to point out—especially given my remarks about the importance of order—that we shall not follow the order of this text.

But before our Presbyterian Church of the USA sisters and brothers worry about being out of order, let me rush to assure you that there is a logical and functional ordering to our study.

We will move within the document in search of ways that this text informs our understanding of its presentation of the relationship between apostolic succession and *episcopé*.

Apostolic Succession

So, let us turn to consider apostolic succession and what the document says about it.

It is interesting to note that this particular phrase is used only once in the Mutual Recognition and Mutual Reconciliation of Ministries document. This *hapax legomena* occurs in the opening sentence of Paragraph 78 within the section on Entry into the Historic Succession of Bishops:

The member churches value and maintain a ministry of *episcopé* as one of the ways, in the context of ordained ministries and of the whole people of God, in which the apostolic succession of the Church is visibly expressed and personally symbolized.

A footnote indicates that most of this paragraph (excepting the endorsement of synodical episcopacy) is adapted from the Lutheran-Episcopal Agreement of Full Communion, Called to Common Mission. This may be an interesting point for text critical studies, but our attention today should be on the so-called final form. This sentence as it now stands offers three points that merit our careful consideration.

The first point to be highlighted is that the sentence asserts that apostolic succession is an attribute of the Church as a whole. This is an important instruction.

Far too often apostolic succession is deemed in a

more narrow way. Many persons think that apostolic succession pertains primarily to the succession of bishops. Some even imagine that apostolic succession is akin to genealogical research whereby the successors of the apostles can be identified and traced across the generations from Peter or Peter and Paul or the so-called Twelve until now. Proponents and opponents of Episcopal succession at times are alike in viewing the church's apostolicity as maintained in a mechanistic way.

Over against such circumscribed views, your text displays apostolic succession as the Church's own continuity with the ministry and mission of the apostles. Scripture tells us that the apostles were sent out to the world with the mission and commission to preach the gospel. The Church knows itself to be called to and preserved in this apostolic mission through the work of the Holy Spirit.

(Although the text does not use the phrase apostolic mission, certainly its many appeals to mission are grounded in the sense that mission is apostolic in character)

Second, this sentence signals that apostolic succession is expressed and carried forth in a variety of ways. This diversity is referenced when the text states that a ministry of *episcopé* is "one of the ways" the Church's apostolic succession is expressed and symbolized.

What are these other ways? The document does not specify them at this particular point in the text. But I am convinced other parts of the document can be seen as identifying them.

The Preface offers some instruction when it recalls the eight visible marks of unity that were highlighted at the inauguration of Churches Uniting in Christ. Here the language of apostolicity is used to characterize the faith, saying that "each affirms the apostolic faith of Scripture and Tradition."

This is further developed in section II's Agreement in the Doctrine of the Faith. Noting that the nine member churches "recognize in each other the essentials of the one catholic and apostolic faith," this section goes on to speak of the "unique and normative authority of the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the Word of God." It also appeals to the authority of the ancient text known as the Apostles' Creed together with the creed commonly called The Nicene Creed, saying that in using these creeds, we bind ourselves to the apostolic faith of the one Church in all centuries and continents (Acts 2:42).

Early on in our work we discerned that the matter of apostolicity could provide an important vantage point for opening our lives to one another and regarding ourselves and each other in new ways.

An important theological point is made by the small phrase “one of the ways.” This wording points us to an enriching and expansive understanding of the means and sources for apostolic succession. Continuity with the apostles does not reside solely in structures or bishops. Rather, there are a variety of means by which the Church’s continuity in, through, and across time is established and nurtured: apostolic faith, apostolic scriptures, apostolic creeds.

It is important that this document highlights the diverse ways that the Church’s apostolic succession is expressed. It occurs within the section on the entry into the historic succession of bishops. By placing this wording here, the text helps counter views that would conflate apostolic succession with historic Episcopal succession. It thus affords the opportunity to recognize historic Episcopal succession as one way the Church knows continuity with the apostles, but it also affords recognition that this is not the sole means.

Probably one reason this point caught my eye is because of my ten years as a member of the Lutheran/Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, the international bilateral dialogue between the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church through the Vatican’s Pontifical Council on Promoting Christian Unity. Early on in our work we discerned that the matter of apostolicity could provide an important vantage point for opening our lives to one another and regarding ourselves and each other in new ways. Could a renewed understanding of apostolicity move us beyond the caricature of each other as either championing the apostolic gospel or the apostolic succession of ministry? Biblical, historical, and theological studies enabled us to say *yes*. The caricatured debate was a phantom. Each of our churches had a wider and deeper understanding of apostolic succession than slogans had allowed us to recognize.

In the end we came to recognize a richer and more differentiated understanding of the church’s apostolicity, and to commend to our churches this more enriched understanding of the many ways the Spirit has maintained—and continues to maintain—the Church’s continuity with the apostles in, through, and across time.

Turning again to the text of Mutual Recognition and Mutual Reconciliation of Ministries, the third point I want to highlight concerning Paragraph 78 is the way the text identifies *episcopé* as one of the means for maintaining the church’s apostolic succession. Here we see the depiction of *episcopé* as a genuine means for expressing apostolic succession. Even though it is not the only way the Church knows continuity with the apostles in, through, and across time, *episcopé* is recognized and assessed as being one of the ways that the Church’s apostolicity is preserved and nurtured.

This emphasis comports with a connection made between the ministry of the apostles and the ministry of bishops in Paragraph 50. Here, in a historical discussion of the tasks and functions of bishops, the text maintains that the apostles exercised “oversight” of Christian communities. Paragraph 50 states:

Bishops began increasingly to exercise oversight over several local communities at the same time in a manner analogous to the way the apostles had exercised oversight in the wider Church. Bishops thus began to provide a focus for unity in life and witness within areas comprising several Eucharistic communities.

These remarks prepare us to turn now to the matter of “*episcopé*”—the second concept that was assigned to me and which indeed provides the lens for this consultation as a whole. What is the relationship between *episcopé* and apostolic succession?

Since becoming involved in ecumenical work, as a theologian I have been struck by the ways that ecumenical openings and advances often are nurtured by developments in biblical and historical studies. New findings and gleanings in these fields often allow us the chance to revisit our own traditions as well as the traditions of other churches to find new possibilities never before considered.

Episcopé clearly has become such a resource for current ecumenical work. Biblical and historical studies have enabled our churches to observe the many ways that churches have recognized and practiced oversight between and among local worshipping

congregations. Terms for this practice may vary, as may the details of its implementation. But there seems to be an emerging consensus that some form of oversight is vital if not constitutive for the Church's life and mission. For the Church to remain faithful to its apostolic witness, a so-called supra-congregational oversight is important. There are practical reasons for endorsing such an *episcopé*; after all, accountability for proper preaching and teaching are needed. But there are deeper theological reasons at work. For the sake of the unity of the Church's witness, a means beyond—or even “over and above”—the local congregation is important.

The member churches of Churches Uniting in Christ have identified what I would term two forms of *episcopé*. One you describe as “corporate *episcopé*,” and the other you describe as “historic Episcopal succession.” While I use the term *forms* for these two teachings, your document speaks instead of *practices and concepts* as well as *convictions*. These wordings are instructive in that they allow for interactions between concrete practices and theological reflection.

In Paragraph 6 your document describes its task:

This document and the mutually reconciled ministry that it envisions will honor and embrace both corporate *episcopé* and historic Episcopal succession as gifts with strong historical antecedents and that are complementary components of a renewed form of governance and oversight.

As an aside, I want to mention that I find it intriguing that in the initial parts of the document, corporate *episcopé* usually is listed prior to historic succession, while in the latter parts of the document the reverse happens, with historic succession mentioned first and corporate second.

Your commitment to a renewed form of oversight is commendable. Your desire to embrace and honor these two practices and convictions is a testimony to the kind of complementarity you have set for yourself. As all who are representing member churches well know, your vision would be less complex—and your theological and practical work less arduous—if you had chosen one form or the other.

As a partner in mission and dialogue I wish to offer four observations.

First—akin to Ellen Wondra's remarks last night, I am uncertain that the terms you have chosen to

describe your complementarity are the most apt. I imagine they are chosen so as not to define one tradition positively and another negatively, as would be the case if the distinction was rendered between *episcopé* as the historic succession of bishops and those for whom *episcopé* does not operate by the historic succession of bishops. But as the theological discussions of corporate episcopacy take shape, it will be important to correlate the personal, collegial, and communal dimensions of this practice of *episcopé*.

Second, there are many openings in the text for a more developed discussion of corporate *episcopé*, especially as it is understood and practiced in member churches for whom this form of oversight is the primary—if not sole—means for exercising *episcopé*. For example, the text indicates that at the time of the national liturgical celebration, member churches would designate persons appropriate to their traditions for participating in this celebration. Your selections will testify to your church's teaching on corporate *episcopé*. Who will you select—and for what reasons?

This is a more difficult task than the selection process will be for those who follow the tradition of historic Episcopal succession. For the latter the teaching and practice is clear. They have the advantage of a long history of theological and liturgical reflection on the matter. But for the more congregational and presbyterial polities, I imagine the matter is less developed. Your tradition punctuates and permeates the document, but much is left unspecified. The openness of the text offers a kind of generosity for exploring and articulating your teachings about corporate *episcopé*.

Here are some questions I would pose for this development. How do you assess the involvement in the exercise of corporate *episcopé* of lay people, including those who some of your traditions ordain as elders? Is it essential and constitutive, or at least important, that they regularly be involved in the laying on of hands of those who will exercise *episcopé* on behalf of your church and the other member churches?

I don't know the answers here. I believe I speak for many when I say that we look forward to your moves to specificity, as they will testify to your teachings and convictions about your theology of corporate oversight. And, because the development of doctrine takes time, we will wait with eager expectation but also with patience.

Third, I want to draw our attention to Paragraph 77.

This paragraph describes your commitment to share an Episcopal succession that is both evangelical (gospel centered) and historic. Tucked within it is the statement that these bishops will serve as “a sign though not guarantee of the unity and apostolic continuity of the whole Church.” This is a very important theological point, especially for those of us whose churches have been shaped by the experience of bishops—perhaps precisely in their sense of unity and continuity—posing obstacles to the Church’s continuity with the apostolic gospel. Lutherans think here about the situation in 16th century Germany when Roman Catholic bishops by and large refused to allow for—let alone endorse—reformation teaching. We have come to see that a choice had to be made about the nature of continuity—between apostolic succession in episcopacy and succession in apostolic preaching.

Situations like these—even if they are what many Lutherans call an emergency situation—could prompt us all to think more of the breaks in continuity with historic Episcopal succession. How has the Holy Spirit prompted and lead the Church to maintain apostolic continuity in the concrete particularities of history. I wonder for example how Methodists in general but even more how Methodists in the historic black churches—the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, and the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church—might interpret their relations to historic Episcopal succession. I do not know enough about your traditions to answer these queries. But I look forward to learning more so that my understanding of the Spirit’s workings will be enriched and expanded.

As a Lutheran I know that our experience has led us to be convinced that historic Episcopal succession is not essential to apostolic continuity. The historic succession of bishops may be important, but it is not constitutive to the Church being the Church.

This brings me to the fourth and final observation of this Lutheran partner in mission and dialogue. It is a point about timing—especially the timing of full communion. My textual basis here is Paragraph 53. This paragraph makes a distinction between inaugurating full communion and the full realization of full communion. The inauguration occurs with the national liturgical action. The full realization occurs, and I quote: “after the Churches Uniting determine together that in the context of a

common life and mission there is a shared ministry of bishops ordained in the historic episcopate in each church as well as authentic expression of the collegial spirit evidenced in corporate oversight.”

You may know that a similar distinction in timing between inauguration and full realization is made in Call to Common Mission, the full communion agreement between the Episcopal Church and the ELCA. But in this text the distinction was used to make a differentiation between the two church bodies in their assessment of the fullness of full communion. For the Episcopal Church, full communion would be realized when there is shared ministry of bishops ordained in the historic episcopate in each church. For the ELCA, full communion was realized at the same time that it was inaugurated; there was no need for a time to intervene between the beginning and its full realization.

No such differentiation in assessment is offered by your Mutual Recognition and Mutual Reconciliation of Ministries document. Perhaps this is so because the full realization of full communion depends on the full development of two forms of *episcopé*: the full development of historic Episcopal succession so that all bishops would be ordained in the historic succession and also the full development of what the text describes as the “authentic expression of the collegial spirit evidenced in corporate oversight.”

Sometimes when I work on this matter, I think of the many times my mother corrected my grammar when I used the word “fuller.” Her point was that either something is full, or it is not; fullness does not allow for gradations.

And there could be an important theological point lodged here. Can a full communion be evaluated as full when one of the member churches does not regard it to be so?

But as a Lutheran partner in mission and dialogue I find it important to bring this matter to your deliberations. Might member churches regard the full realization of full communion in ways that are more differentiated from one another?

I hope that the questions and deliberations I have offered this morning are received by you in the spirit in which they are offered. As I said at the onset, I am honored and grateful for the opportunity to think about *Episcopé* and Apostolic Succession with you as a partner in mission and dialogue.



A Reconciled *Episcopé* and Racism

Thomas L. Hoyt, Jr.

BISHOP THOMAS L. HOYT, JR. *is Bishop of the Fourth Episcopal District of the CME church. He has served as Assistant Professor of New Testament at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, the School of Religion at Howard University in Washington, D.C., and Professor of New Testament and Director of the Black Ministries Certificate Program at Hartford Seminary in Hartford, CT.*

This Consultation is one of the very important ones in the life of Churches Uniting in Christ (CUIC). It is a test of unity in the Church and the problems involved in that unity with regard to leadership in the Church.

The last time I spoke to Churches Uniting in Christ, we were preparing for a vote on whether we could or should go on together as COCU (Consultation on Church Union). My address was entitled “Is You Is or Is You Ain’t My Baby?” In describing our regular checkups along the way, I pointed out our present problem in the following manner as we sought to give birth to the baby: Churches Uniting in Christ—“The historic episcopate was discussed early on; the baby was growing, but was turning in the womb in a way that was going to make gestation and birth more difficult”—and it has.

I joined the episcopé’s concerns with unity and racism in the following statements:

Some would contend that the DNA that would cause COCU to give birth to a distorted baby is racism. Racism is the DNA of a distorted baby. Early on the parent bodies of COCU recognized that the prenatal environment of the baby must be kept from the disease of not only racism, but sexism, congregational exclusivism, and ageism. It was recognized that the so-called Alerts to

which I previously referred testify to the threats to justice that must be addressed so as to avoid the birth of a baby that symbolizes oppression rather than liberation, justice and peace. We applaud the call to commitment to fight racism that is a part of this meeting.

From the beginning of COCU, there were those churches who saw that poverty, race, and sex issues divide the church as deeply as Eucharistic theology, baptismal practice or disputes about ministerial order ever did. The ecumenical vision was from the beginning, and is now, a vision that joins together theology and social reality, the unity of the church and the healing of a broken world. As one of the participants on the theology commission of COCU, it has always impressed me that we have never as an organization of concerned ecumenists taken with proper seriousness the social realities of poverty, race, and sex as cardinal ecumenical questions. We needed from the beginning, and need now, a social and ethical ecumenism.

In some respects, we knew from a practical standpoint that ecumenism that refused to wed theological, social and ethical realities would lead to an impotent unity. That is why the first plan of union and consensus theology document included what was called the Alerts.

We knew also from the beginning, from a practical standpoint, that we needed a wedding of theological, ethical, and social ecumenism. That is why we moved from talk

about organic union to covenant unity with some contractual safeguards.

We knew from the beginning, if unity is to be more than a fractured vision from a theological/biblical standpoint, that ethical and social realities belong together. Acts 2:9-11 contends that the Spirit creates a new human community out of the old, divided humanity. Confession of the risen Christ creates a new cosmopolitan community. So COCU was right to fight against congregational exclusivism in the Alerts. The church is not only the congregation on the corner; it is also an international community that unites in a literal, physical body a new humanity out of the babel of nations, empires, tribes, races and religions. This is indeed an ecumenical vision in progress.

The community of the Spirit of Jesus is a community of baptism and eucharist. It is also an economic community. (Acts 2:41-44—'And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their goods and distributed them to all, as any had need.') Here is no separation of spirit and body, theology and economics. How could those who broke bread together in their homes with glad and generous hearts not also share the necessities of life with those who had need? Eucharistic bread and 'bread for the world' are one bread in Christ. The oikos of faith also has a nomos of common participation and mutual sharing.

The Bishop, being the one who works in collegial relationships for the unity of the people of God, justice and peace, inclusiveness, worship inclusive of prayer, baptism and eucharist, must work in the context of a reconciled *episcopé*. This can only be done in the context of collegiality. Even after we work out the equivalent of each other's *episcopé*, we cannot work for justice unless we do so in a collegial manner and do so in the context of receptivity. Collegiality and receptivity go together.

For this presentation I will discuss receptivity and collegiality in the context of a reconciled *episcopé*.

Galatians 2:1-10

Paul operated on a collegial style of leadership sometimes and from an autocratic style at other

times. In seeking to cooperate with the leaders of the Church at Jerusalem, he tried to deal collegially. *A bishop has various styles of leadership based on various assumed roles and various publics.* Notice in Galatians 2:1-10 how Paul, Barnabas and Titus, as a team, visited Jerusalem from Antioch. Possibly this was the same famine relief visit mentioned by Luke, but we cannot be sure. Paul indicates that this was the second visit to Jerusalem following his Damascus Road experience. His first visit was "after three years" in which he met Peter (Galatians 1:18)

Paul says, after fourteen years, "I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. I went up by revelation; and I laid before them (but privately before the men of repute) the gospel which I preach among Gentiles, lest somehow I should be running or had run in vain."

Whether he conferred with the leaders of the church fourteen years after the earlier visit or fourteen years from his conversion is a matter of conjecture. Regardless of the ambiguity of the time span, Paul wishes to disclaim any conference of authority by Jerusalem leaders whom he has gone to meet. Between his new experience with God and the writing of the letter to the Galatian church, Paul claimed authority by direct commission of the risen Christ.

The two persons, Barnabas and Titus, who accompanied Paul to Jerusalem were trusted allies who had proven themselves in association with him. *A bishop knows the gifts of the people and chooses different people for different roles.*

It was Barnabas who was described as "a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith" (Acts 1:24). It was he who had given encouragement to Paul in his initial encounter with the risen Christ. Barnabas was a leader of the Antioch group before Paul's conversion. Barnabas was the only one among Paul's fellow workers who labored with his hands rather than receiving regular support from the churches (1 Corinthians 9:6). Because of his fair-mindedness he would have been respected by both those comfortable with traditions and those who respected the past but were open for the future. No wonder his name meant "Son of Encouragement." Paul's other partner who accompanied him, Titus, was evidently a person of tact and common sense. He had been used on several occasions to carry out difficult assignments for Paul (2 Corinthians 2:13; 7:6-7, 13-15; 8:16-17, 23). The fact that he was a

Gentile Christian rather than a Jewish Christian is the only fault that Judaizers had of him.

While Paul went up to Jerusalem by “revelation” to confer with the leaders there,¹ he was chiefly concerned about submitting the Gospel he preached among the Gentiles. From his work among the Gentiles, Paul could witness to the fact that the Gospel was not exhausted by the work among fellow Christian Jews. A modern analysis is that the Gospel is not exhausted among any denominational or religious grouping.

The full significance of Jesus Christ is something that must be grasped “with all the saints” (Ephesians 3:18). Paul’s experience on the Damascus road had indelibly imprinted upon his heart and mind the truth for lack of which Jew and Gentile alike were perishing. There rang through his being the clarion call that his whole life must be devoted to the proclamation of the truth of the Gospel. *A bishop must seek the unity of the Church with a call driven by passion for the Gospel.*

The reason given for submitting the Gospel preached to the Gentiles is as follows: “lest somehow I should be running or had run in vain.” This does not mean that Paul felt that he had been preaching the wrong Gospel. He was convinced that the word he received was of Divine revelation and need not be sanctioned nor could it be revoked by human authority. Rather, he was concerned that the Gospel preached to the Gentiles be preserved while at the same time maintaining the unity of the Church. He recognized that the divided mind of the Church could not assist in the propagation of the Gospel. He did not get his commission from Jerusalem, but he knew that it could not be effectively executed except in partnership with Jerusalem.

In order to establish partnership between Jews and Gentiles, Paul knew that centuries of distrust had to be overcome and Jewish and Gentile Christians must admit that they were being saved by Grace alone. Centuries of anti-Gentile feelings had been forged into the protective armor of the Jews by Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Maccabees. At the same time, anti-Jewish feelings had grown up against Jews that especially affected persons in the Diaspora. Furthermore, some were charging Paul of opening the Reign of God to those who did not go kosher. Yet Paul recognized that a break between the Gentile mission and the Jerusalem church would not por-

tend well for the cause of the Gospel; the cause of Christ would be divided. *A bishop operates with certain clear theological assumptions.*

The question can be raised, how did Paul help in establishing unity and the truth of the Gospel? *A bishop is flexible on some issues and inflexible on others in order to respect the truth of the Gospel that one preaches.* In Galatians 2:3-5 he says,

But even Titus, who was with me, was not compelled to be circumcised, though he was a Greek, but because of false brethren secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy out our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage—to them we did not yield submission even for a moment, that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

A bishop is wise as a serpent and humble as a dove. Paul exercises his leadership through strategizing and working with others for the good of the whole body of Christ. Paul mentions Titus as key to his strategy and not Barnabas because he wishes to emphasize that Titus was a Gentile, and that he was not circumcised. A dispute had arisen within the internal workings of the Christian movement: Should the followers of Jesus at Antioch undergo the normal rite of incorporation into the Jewish community? Some interesting dynamics are established by the presence of Titus among the Jewish leaders. It would have been easier to acknowledge uncircumcised Gentile fellow believers in the abstract in Antioch or Phillipi, but the issue is joined by the presence of Titus.

Even after we work out the equivalent of each other’s episcopé, we cannot work for justice unless we do so in a collegial manner and do so in the context of receptivity.

A bishop foresees the implications of one’s acts before implementation of the plan. Paul knew that the presence of Titus at Jerusalem would upset those in Jerusalem. Just think what his presence must have meant. There were at least three parties present as they gathered in Jerusalem. First, there was Paul and Barnabas who stood for the policy of receiving Gentiles as Christians without the normal ritual of incorporation into the Jewish community. *Implementation of a plan by a bishop entails knowledge of how per-*

sons behave. Generally, people respond better to concrete examples rather than to abstract ones. The presence of Titus would have been for them exhibit number one that God was present among Gentiles as well as circumcised Jews. Paul could have told the leaders in Jerusalem about how the Holy Spirit had come upon Titus and had consecrated him for a life of service among the uncircumcised.

Implementation of a plan by a bishop is sometimes dangerous because people with cherished traditions do not change easily or quickly. Paul would without a doubt have taken Titus with him when he came before the church at its public assemblies at Jerusalem, when he appeared before the select meeting of the apostles and the elders, and when he joined the apostles in the agape meal and the Eucharistic fellowship. In all these settings Paul would have been proclaiming equality of status, Christian partnership, for this Gentile Christian.

Second, there were those whom Paul characterized as “false brethren” who contended that the Gentile Christian must be circumcised. How will they treat Titus? Will they admit him, this uncircumcised Gentile, to their communion? If they permit him to eat and drink and worship with them, does that mean conceding that he is equal with them? Aren't they opening Pandora's box? *Responsible bishops must ask the question: What are the limits of compromise? What are those things for which I am ready to die in order to sustain or change?*

Third, there were those at the Jerusalem conference who for the sake of unity urged Titus and Paul to waive their scruples and consent to the circumcision of Titus. Rather than cause us to have the embarrassment of a separate agape meal and the Lord's Supper, or cause us to temporarily suspend our meals in private homes, or even to ask Titus to leave or sit apart, why not just become circumcised for the sake of unity? The question that lurks in the shadows is, “What is the price of unity?”

The account in Acts 15:4 presupposes that the dispute was presented before a complex organization in Jerusalem. This organization consisted of the whole community, led by a council of elders who assemble for important decisions with the twelve apostles, who are construed as a sort of executive committee. In the Galatians account the dispute is presented to the *pillars* of the Church in Jerusalem. Paul says to all of this, “Titus was not compelled.” Paul's oversight grew out of this theological perspec-

tive that God saves by Grace through faith in the crucified and risen Jesus Christ. Thus, when the question is asked, “Why did Paul refuse to circumcise Titus?” the refrain comes, “that the truth of the Gospel might be preserved for you.” The truth of the Gospel is enunciated in Galatians 2:16, that “a human being is not justified by works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ.” That truth is the essence of the Gospel as found in Romans 1:16-17, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, he who through faith is righteous shall live.” The refusal of Church fellowship to a believer in this Gospel on social grounds would nullify the truth that faith in Christ is the sole and sufficient ground of justification. Paul's understanding of the truth of the Gospel says something about the nature of God and the all-inclusive nature of the Christian partnership.

Galatians 2:6-10

A responsible bishop seeks to be inclusive, avoiding perpetuation of oppressive conditions that might have developed among dichotomies of slave/free, male/female, Jews/Gentiles, rich/poor, clergy/laity, or one form of leadership structure over another form of leadership structure.

Paul says in Galatians 2:6-10:

And from those who were reputed to be something (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who were of repute added nothing to me; but on the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised (for he worked through me also for the Gentiles), and when they perceived the grace that was given to me, James and Cephas, and John, who reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised; only they would have us remember the poor, which thing I was eager to do.

One thing stands out in this conglomerate of relative pronouns and participles—Paul talked like this when he was caught up emotionally in his arguments. We shall comment on this one fundamental idea.

“God shows no partiality...,” “God recognizes no

external distinction" (Weymouth), "God is not impressed with a man's office" (Phillips), "God does not recognize these personal distinctions" (New English Bible), "God accepts not the person of man." The order of the words in the Greek text puts emphasis on *prosopon*—person. This means that it is never on account of a man or woman's person that God accepts either. Since one of the Greek words for person (*prosopon* as used here) has a secondary meaning as "mask," the phrase *prosopon lamganein* is said to denote the external circumstances of a person—one's rank, wealth, office, race, sex—as opposed to one's real intrinsic character. The phrase "accepts a human being's person" is always used in a bad sense in the New Testament. On the other hand, the corresponding technical term among the Romans was *persona*, a word never used for the natural face, as *prosopon* was. So the word *prosopon* here may be used to designate the part, or certain accessories of the part, that a person plays on the stage of human life, in contradiction to one's more interior or essential character.

The phrase denotes accepting persons, for example: for their worldly rank or position, for their office, nationality, gender or even their status in the church. What Paul is saying in this passage is that his knowledge and service as a minister of Jesus Christ is just as real as the knowledge and ministry of James and the other members of the twelve whom the enemies of Paul were honoring so far above him merely for their person's sake. God made no such distinction between him and them, but worked with him just as much (see 2 Corinthians II:22ff).

As Galatians 3:27-28 reads:

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free; there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

In Paul's day as well as in ours, humanity was broken up by arbitrary distinctions of many kinds that set men and women against each other. There were racial and religious differences like those between Jew and Gentile, sexual conflicts between male and female, and class divisions of slave and free. Now that Christ has come, inwardly appropriated by faith and visibly assumed in baptism, we are made sons and daughters of God. This is the faith that restores the brokenness of humankind. One's racial heritage is not the last word for a Christian: "There is neither Jew nor Greek." One's social status is not

the last word: "There is neither bond nor free." One's gender is not the last word; the Christian's cause rests not upon gender but upon God's grace toward us: "There is neither male nor female." We are all one in Christ. "God is no respecter of persons."

Trust in the covenant begins here. The Church has only one option according to the Gospel. It is to accept all persons whom God accepts, whatever their race, gender, class, economic situation or education. A church that makes a certain race or class or sex the basis for membership has become something other than the Body of Christ, which is for all believers. Such a church may justly be placed in the category of a country club, where the major considerations are wealth, the color of a person's skin and similar criteria.

In 1956, Martin Luther King, Jr. was right when he said, "He who works against the community is working against the whole of creation. Therefore, if I respond to hate with a reciprocal hate, I do nothing by intensify the cleavage in broken community. I can only close the gap in broken community by meeting hate with love."

In 1967, in his last Christmas sermon, after many trials, he still struck the same note; the same dream was shared: "I have a dream that one day men (and women) will rise up and come to see that they are made to live together as brothers (and sisters)...that the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together...with this faith we will be able to speed up the day when there will be peace on earth and good will towards men (human beings). It will be a glorious day; the morning stars will sing together, and the sons (children) of God will shout for joy."

Notes

1. To go up to Jerusalem "by revelation" (Galatians 2:2) does not necessarily contradict the report in Acts 15:2 that the Antioch assembly "ordered" them to go. The revelation may indeed have been conveyed through a congregational prophet, the casting of lots, or some other means of inspired decision. While there are other differences in the Acts and Galatians accounts, we cannot rehearse here the long debate about them. The facts most important for our inquiry are reasonably clear.



An Invitation to Love

Vinton R. Anderson

BISHOP VINTON R. ANDERSON is the 92nd Bishop, retired, of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, Son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my flock."
(John 21:15)

I have the tendency to believe that Jesus' threefold question to Peter was intended to be restorative, and not one of consternation, particularly since Jesus was fully aware of Peter's triple denial. So now on the other side of the cross, following the miraculous catch of fish, the Resurrected Christ invites Peter's unalterable love and leadership of trust with this comparative question, "Do you love me more than these?"

Some might inject the hermeneutic, "Do you love me more than these fish?" But given the reference in Mark 14:29, when Peter said to Jesus, "Even though all become deserters, I will not," the better interpretation might well be, "Do you love me more than these do?"

However, our call to this place by the Churches Unit-ing in Christ is not about comparative ecclesiologies, or orders, or functions, or who of us loves Christ more than others do. It is, moreover, an invitation to love Christ by acknowledging that some are called to a more definite serving of Christ and God's Kingdom, in more definitive spiritual ways. Our calling is not only for the salvation of our souls, but to help God in God's saving of the world.

Our worship tonight calls us to celebrate the redemptive love of Christ; invites us to our Lord's table to feed on the Bread of Life; welcomes us to

participate in the installation of the new director, Patrice Rosner; and focuses attention on *episcopé*, the ministry of oversight. All that we are about in these days together in St. Louis must lead to the oneness of the Church.

All ministry is God's ministry, so regardless of the ecclesiastical design, or hierarchical structure, expectations for ministry in whatever communion are the same, and the invitation to love and the command to feed the flock cannot be ignored. Jesus asked Simon Peter, "Do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." "Feed my flock!"

Whether one's ministry in Christ is that of the unordained or ordained, lay or clergy, the essence is neither in the office nor the order, but in the attitude. For example, the functions of Episcopal ministry are: proclaiming the good news, symbolizing unity (the oneness of the Body of Christ), empowering the people of God, overseeing the flock, defending the faith, and of course, administering Episcopal affairs. One's function in ministry may vary, but one must affirm in fulfilling ministry what Christ says to us: "If you love me, feed my lambs; feed my sheep."

The invitation to love as the highest good can be troublesome, especially in a society driven by capitalism, where the Church to a large degree is so prosperity conscious. Remember, Jesus said to the scribe, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." (Matthew 8:20). Shepherding the flock could be far more demanding, because the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.

Tonight we hear the question to Peter as a crucial one for the Church. Jesus is not asking the question

“Do you love me more than these?” Do you love me more than your separate histories, traditions, dogmas, and polity? If the answer is “Yes,” then above all else we are commissioned to be shepherds to the flock of Christ. “Feed my lambs; feed my sheep.”

as Tevia asks his wife of twenty-five years in the play *“Fiddler on the Roof,”* “Do you love me?” Nor is it the casual question on the lips of partners in marriage or sweethearts, “Do you love me?” Even the question, “Do you love me more than these?” is not nearly as searching as “Do you love me as I love you?”

Jesus had asked key questions of his disciples leading up to the crucifixion. “Will you also go away?” “Who do you say I am?” But here it seems as if Jesus looks Simon Peter squarely in the eyes and asks, “Do you love me more than these?” It is a question we cannot avoid, for while it is addressed to Peter, it is applicable to us who confess to be Jesus’ disciples, and are called to a ministry of service.

Peter had been called into discipleship from the very surroundings in which that question was being asked. He had denied his Lord and had run away; now he is back at his old way of life, fishing for a living on the Sea of Galilee.

He and the others had fished all night and caught nothing. When Jesus showed up at daybreak and told them to cast their net on the right side of the boat, the catch was more than they could handle. That morning, Jesus prepared breakfast for them, and there was more than enough. When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, Son of John, do you love me more than these?”

So, in like manner, the long night of our toiling in the Consultation on Church Union (COCU) process ended in 2002 after forty years of work and study. Nevertheless, those of us who seriously engaged in the Consultation, with the commitment to become one in faith and justice, were still in the boat hoping and expecting.

And Jesus showed up with great concern and with a new strategy. “Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find.” The Consultation on Church Union cast its net on the right side of the boat creating its successor, Churches Uniting in Christ (CUIC).

We do not know how miraculous will be our catch, but we do know that our Resurrected Christ stands ready to provide the resources and energy for our

joining together, just as He prepared the meal for the disciples.

Now, after four years, freshly invigorated and enriched by our new find, Jesus poses the same question as he did to Peter, “Do you love me more than these?” Do you love me more than your separate histories, traditions, dogmas and polity? If the answer is “Yes,” then above all else we are commissioned to be shepherds to the flock of Christ. “Feed my lambs; feed my sheep.”

Churches Uniting in Christ (CUIC) will experience choppy waters in its quest to follow Christ’s directive to cast the net on the right side of the boat. The new waves of post-denominationalism and independent ecclesiologies, and the upsurge of congregational episcopacy may indeed rock the boat that fosters Christian unity.

However, the invitation to love still persists. It is the love that will not let us go, for loving Christ calls forth the very essence of our existence; it is caring for others in the deepest way. Jesus tells us in John 15:12, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” Then, showing the extremes to which love goes, says further, “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.” Furthermore, Jesus makes an extreme demand when He announces in Matthew 5:44, “Love your enemies.”

Then there is Paul the apostle, greatly affected by the person of Jesus, who urges us in his words to the Corinthian Church, “Love never gives up.” My personal response to Jesus’ commission is formulated rather simply: Love the people you serve. To love demands an action, and that action is about caring for others.

Coming together in this Consultation is affirmation that love never fails, and we seek a clearer understanding of how to move forward. We may not dot every *i* or cross every *t* in structuring the way ahead, but communions in Churches Uniting in Christ can position themselves to answer our Lord’s question, “Do you love me more than these?” with a resounding, “Yes, we love you, and we will feed the flock.”

Feeding the lambs must be our primary effort to raise up a new generation of children and youth to respond to Jesus' high priestly prayer, "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they all may be one" (John 17:20). There is a melody that rings in my spirit, and I hope in yours. "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd, and carry the young lambs in His bosom."

Though this Consultation is specifically intended to define *episcopé*, it must be inclusive in defining ministry. No person who is set aside for the ministry of Bishop can leave behind the baptism covenant, nor deaconate, or presbyterial orders.

The term "sheep make sheep" suggests a second task. We must recruit, equip, and nourish seasoned souls, so that they may leave a legacy of love. First Peter 5:2 puts it succinctly, "Tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you do it; not for sordid gain, but eagerly."

All who do ministry as Christian disciples must be shepherds, going before the sheep with integrity, so that they follow, knowing the shepherd's voice. Good shepherds are not restricted by denomina-

tional boundaries, remembering Jesus' words, "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold and one shepherd."

Well, Peter, who was so named by Jesus—Petros, the rock—proved his love for Christ, and at his crucifixion requested that he die head downward. Peter had affirmed his faith, recorded in Matthew 16:16: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

Even though Peter knew failure, his preaching tells of the rewards of loving Jesus; he talks about a *crown of glory that fadeth not away*.

An invitation to love is an invitation to shepherd the flock. There are sticky issues to be reconciled amongst us, but love overcomes all else. Let us be undergirded by the words of this hymn:

Savior, like a shepherd lead us,
Much we need Thy tender care.
In thy pleasant pastures feed us,
For our use Thy fold prepare.
Early let us seek Thy favor,
Early let us do Thy will.
Blessed Lord and only Savior,
With Thy love our bosoms fill.

Questions and Reflections for Discussion

Based on the Addresses and Bible Studies Presented
at the Consultation on *Episcopé*, October 2-4, 2006

Rollin Russell

THE REV. ROLLIN RUSSELL, a retired UCC Conference Minister, has served as contract staff for the Churches United in Christ in relation to the study process for the Mutual Recognition and Mutual Reconciliation of Ministries.

A Consultation on *Episcopé* was convened in St. Louis on October 2-4, 2006 by the leadership of Churches Uniting In Christ (CUIC). Its purpose was to gain insight into the nature, history and practice of the ministry of oversight in the communions which make up CUIC. This consultation was called to inform the final drafting of a document which is intended to bring the communions into “full communion,” including the interchangeability of Ministers of Word and Sacrament. The three Bible studies and the five papers which were presented address the most critical questions to be resolved in the document, “Mutual Recognition and Mutual Reconciliation of Ministries.” That document is currently undergoing revision based on these studies and on the official responses from the participating communions.

It is the view of the CUIC Coordinating Council that the study and discussion of these presentations and bible studies will deepen our understanding of the concerns addressed in the document. The following questions are offered as a means to that end.

Issue 1

- The Episcopal Church, which cherishes historic Episcopal succession as fundamental to an authentic ministry, is asked to recognize the full authenticity of the ministry of those churches who do not share this symbol. On the other hand, church bodies from the Reformed tradition, which cherish equal participation in oversight by lay and clergy leaders, are asked to recognize and accept personal *episcopé* in historic succession as an important sign of the unity and continuity of the Church and its ministry.

QUESTION: Can the office/function of episcopal oversight be described and embodied in such a way as to honor both of these cherished convictions? If so, how? If not, why?

Issue 2

- In his summary remarks to the Consultation, Michael Kinnamon noted that all in attendance, as well as all of the presentations, affirmed that both personal *episcopé*/oversight and corporate *episcopé*/oversight are present in the orders of ministry of all the partner churches of CUIC and are visible in their practices. He further reminds us that *episcopé*/oversight is a sign of the apostolicity of the Church, not of its offices. He then asks:

QUESTION: Can all our ministries of oversight be “re-commissioned” for service in the new context of Churches Uniting in Christ? Can it be done in such a way as to incorporate for all the symbols which are crucial to each?

Issue 3

- In her address, Anna Case-Winter distinguishes between the substance and the form of apostolicity, and asks—if the substance of apostolicity is recognized by each church in each of the others—how can we allow the form(s) to be Church dividing?

QUESTION: To what extent can the diversity of forms of episcopal leadership in our churches, all of which are expressions of apostolicity, be “blessed as they are,” or to what extent do they need to be brought into a degree of continuity or conformity within the life of CUIC?

Issue 4

- Thomas Hoyt reminds us that the current division of our churches and their separate lives and ministries perpetuate in many ways the racist ethos and assumptions of American culture. He asks, “What is and will be the cultural DNA of the churches of America?”

QUESTION: Is the CUIC partnership an opportunity to proclaim and embody an alternative vision of equality in God’s sight and of authentic community in God’s Reign? How can we imagine this new reality unfolding in our churches and in our culture? What role might the leaders of episcopé/oversight play in such a future

Issue 5

- John Thomas notes that none of the orders of ministry in the partner churches (or in any other church) can rightfully claim the full specific warrant of scriptures, and hence none can claim to be exclusively necessary for the Church. Hence, our calling is to adapt and reform all our ministries in faithfulness to the apostolic witness and in light of the Church’s mission in today’s world. For him the issue is not how we might create a hybrid ecclesiology that all can embrace; instead he asks:

QUESTION: How can we order ministry in such a way that it enables unity and faithfulness in mission? Have we become so myopic to have forgotten the central calling to bring all things to unity in Christ?

Issue 6

- John Ford, in his third Bible study, asks, “If Churches Uniting In Christ cannot come to agreement regarding the reconciliation of ministry, who in the world will ever be able to do so?” He continues, “This document can be a prototype that will be studied everywhere.”

QUESTION: How important is it to the ecumenical vocation of each of our churches that we have an opportunity to enact an unprecedented Full Communion among our church bodies in this nation?

