

Press Release

CATHOLICS AND DISCIPLES OF CHRIST COMMISSION FOR DIALOGUE

Bethany, WV, 19-24 June 2015

The Third Session of the Fifth Phase of the Disciples of Christ-Roman Catholic International Commission for Dialogue took place in Bethany, West Virginia, from the 19th to 24th of June 2015. The general theme for the present phase of Dialogue is "Christians Formed and Transformed by the Eucharist". After an introductory meeting (Nashville, January 2014); the Commission approached the topics related to what it means to be "Formed by the Eucharist" discussing the following: "The Structure of Liturgies among Catholics and Disciples" (Rome, June 2014) and "The Significance of Eucharistic Catechesis - 'Knowing by Doing' " (Bethany, WV, June 2015). The overall goal of the dialogue, which started in 1979, is the full visible unity between the two communions.

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

Papers were prepared by Rev. Dr. James Duke for the Disciples, "Formed by the Eucharist: Knowing by Doing" and Msgr. Michael Clay, D. Min. for the Catholics, "The Significance of Eucharistic Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church". Two biblical papers were given, "Bread of Heaven, Food for Formation: Exodus 16 in its Literary Setting" presented by Rev. Dr. Merryl Blair (Disciples) and "The Bread of Life Discourse: John 6" presented by Dr. Mary Coloe, pbvm, (Catholic). According to the agreed proposal, the Commission will devote its next sessions to the topic "Transformed by the Eucharist" starting with "The Eucharist and Relationships within the Church" (Calgary, 2016). The days began and concluded with prayer together led alternatively by Disciples and Catholics.

Meeting at historic Bethany College established by Alexander Campbell, one of the founders of the Disciples of Christ, has been very meaningful for the dialogue itself. The participants became acquainted with one of the places at the origins of the Disciples of Christ and joined the local Disciples of Christ congregation at the Sunday Lord's Supper Service held in the Old Meeting House built by Alexander Campbell. Later in the week, the Commission attended Solemn Vespers presided over by the Most Reverend Michael Bransfield, Catholic Bishop of Wheeling-Charleston, at the Cathedral of Saint Joseph, with the participation of Rev. Thaddaeus Allen, Regional Minister of the Disciples of Christ, together with Disciples of Christ leaders and pastors as well as local Catholic ecumenical leaders. The Commission appreciates the warm hospitality of Rev. Thaddaeus Allen, and all the Disciples' community who facilitated our time together.

At the end of the meeting, Rev. Williams affirmed, "These days at Bethany, supported by the gracious hospitality of West Virginia Disciples and Roman Catholics, have helped this International Commission for Dialogue to grow in our understanding of the similarities and differences in our practice of the Eucharist, or what Disciples commonly call the Lord's Supper, and to identify issues related to our ultimate goal of a common Disciples-Roman Catholic celebration of the Eucharist."

According to Bishop Ricken, "This meeting, the third in a series of six annual meetings, has been a real experience of growth in mutual understanding and respect. The dialogues help us to understand the meaning behind our liturgical practices and the educational/formatational preparation for worship. It is always an enriching and a challenging experience."

The members from the Disciples of Christ are: Rev. Dr. Newell Williams, Brite Divinity School, TCU, Fort Worth, USA, Co-Chair; Rev. Dr. Robert Welsh, Council on Christian Unity, Indianapolis, USA, Co-Secretary; Rev. Dr. Thomas Best, Belmont, USA; Rev. Dr. Merryl Blair, Stirling Theological College, University of Divinity, Melbourne, Australia; Rev. Dr. James O. Duke, Brite Divinity School, TCU, Fort Worth, USA; Rev. Angel Luis Rivera, Latin America and Caribbean Executive, Global Ministries, Indiana/Puerto Rico, and Rev. Dr. David M. Thompson, Cambridge, UK.

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