

Church as Communion



DISCUSSION RESOURCE FOR
ANGLICANS AND ROMAN CATHOLICS

© AustARC
Published by Faith Education Services 2004
GPO Box 1201 Brisbane 4001
07 - 3840 0599

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system without permission in writing from the Publisher.

Acknowledgements

Writing Team: Rev Helen Granowski, Sr Margaret Jenkins CSB, Archdeacon Philip Newman OAM, Rev Elizabeth Smith, Rev Denis Stanley

Prayers: Rev Elizabeth Smith

Editorial Team: Rob Cosgrove, Dr Rosemary Gill, Rev Geoff Hoyte, Prof John Mainstone, Margaret Naylon, Trish Stapleton

The publisher gratefully thanks the contributors to the 'Stories' section and all those who provided helpful feedback through the writing of this resource.

Design: Rob Cosgrove

Secretarial assistance: Marie Ford

Printed by PMP Print

Page 1. Image for 'Church as Communion' program. ©Benedictine Sisters of Turvey. Used with permission McCrimmon Publishing Co Ltd, Great Wakering, Essex UK, SS3 OEQ.

Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Contents

4 Foreword

5 Introduction

7 Leading the Group

9 Meeting 1

Topic 1 Communion unfolded in Scripture
– *The drama of human existence*

Topic 2 Communion: Sacramentality and the Church
– *God's abiding presence*

17 Meeting 2

Topic 3 Communion: Apostolicity, Catholicity and Holiness
– *Linking the present to past and future generations of Christians*

Topic 4 Unity and Ecclesial Communion
– *Making room for each other in the Body of Christ*

25 Meeting 3

Topic 5 Communion between Anglicans and Roman Catholics
– *Growth towards fuller communion*

The Path Ahead

Foreword

All the ARCIC documents are well worth taking the time to study but it is opportune that the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission (IARCCUM) has chosen to encourage people to study the 1990 document 'Church as Communion' at a moment of particular stress and strain in the relationship between our two Churches. From the beginning of the ARCIC venture in 1966 there has been a desire for visible and not merely spiritual unity. Each succeeding ARCIC document has reaffirmed this hope. But there are now some theologians in our churches who question this theological premise and others at the grassroots level who have grown weary from what they see as a failure to 'walk the talk'.

I myself was encouraged when I heard Cardinal Walter Kasper say on his recent visit to Australia that talk of an ecumenical crisis should not lead to despair. He pointed out that the term 'crisis', in its original Greek sense, refers to a situation where things 'are hanging in the balance, where they are on a knife-edge'. This can be either a positive or a negative state.

We may not think that the ARCIC texts have yet hit upon the correct blueprint for the future unity of the Church but my hope is that this study resource will allow our two Churches to remain open to the surprises of the Spirit.

+ Graeme Rutherford
Anglican Co-chair of AustARC

Jesus prayed that we should all be one. Ecumenism is a movement that seeks to bring this prayer of Jesus to fulfilment. However, its energy and urgency stems from the fact that we are already one in a very fundamental way. Through Baptism we share in the mystery of the risen Jesus, which draws us into the life of the Trinity. The life of the Trinity is what Jesus came to share with us, and it was for this that he died. Those who share in this death and resurrection share in the life of the Trinity. This most basic Christian truth is referred to in terms of communion. The communion we have as Christians, through Baptism, is a relationship that we have with each other because of our common relationship, through Jesus, with the Trinity. This word 'communion' is a word that captures this whole fundamental Christian reality. For this reason it is important that we endeavour to understand and appreciate it.

This programme, prepared for the International Anglican Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission, (IARCCUM), will help us to do that, and, thus, bring us closer together. By reflecting together on what binds us so strongly, we will begin to live more consciously that reality in our personal and communal lives. We are seeking a visible unity that expresses the invisible reality that is already achieved. If we take seriously our relationship to Jesus and the Trinity, we will be willing to do what it takes to make it visible, tangible and available for others to share.

+ David Walker
Roman Catholic Co-chair of AustARC

Introduction

'Communion' is one of the most exciting realities of our faith. The God in whom we believe is a communion of persons existing in a relationship of mutual love. 'Communion' names the reciprocal relationship of unity and love that exists not only among the persons of God but between God, humanity, and all creation. The Church of which we are members is itself a sacrament of Communion. Communion breaks down the limitations of the present moment and in and through God links us to all who have lived in the past or will live in the future. It relativises the limitations of our earthly existence and opens us up to eternity. Stretching our faith and imagination to their limit, it fills us with an excitement and happiness that is surely a foretaste of the eternal happiness we hope to experience one day in heaven. I warmly commend this Catholic/Anglican study for your prayerful consideration and discussion, so that together we may understand even more deeply the loving communion of our God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and its implications for our relationship.

+ John Bathersby
Roman Catholic Co-chair of the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission (IARCCUM)

The words community, communication and communion share common Latin words 'cum' ('with') and 'unus' ('one'). All three words have at the heart of their meaning to be 'one with' another. For communication to be effective we need to be 'one with' the other person as we attend to their verbal and physical expressions. In community, bonds of friendship are built through a shared sense of purpose and achievement. Communion, however, is the most profound level of being

'one with' another. It implies a far deeper level of commitment and unity.

The concept of 'communion' is central to who we are as persons – in relationships with others and in our relationship with our God. At one level we recognise our communion with God and one another in our connectedness to all of creation, as creatures of God. At a deeper level we are invited to participate in the Trinitarian fellowship of God, whose persons live in a unique relationship of giving and receiving love. It is manifest when we see the love of God at work in our families, workplace and community ... when we offer our sisters and brothers in faith our deep and genuine friendship, see what is positive in others and bear 'each other's burdens' (Galatians 6:2). The Church is called to nourish and support this communion and be a 'sacrament' or 'sign' of our intimate union with God and one another.

From the time of the historic visit of Archbishop Michael Ramsey to Pope Paul VI in 1966 Anglicans and Roman Catholics have been committed to a goal: to work for 'a restoration of complete communion of faith and sacramental life.' The establishment of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) in 1969 and much more recently the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission (IARCCUM) in 2001 has enabled this goal to be pursued by Roman Catholic and Anglican leaders and theologians. The first of these two commissions has worked at the theological issues which have divided us. The second is exploring practical ways for us to cooperate together in mission. This discussion resource is one practical outcome

of the work of the second group (IARCCUM). It is being published for use in Australia by the local Anglican – Roman Catholic dialogue group called AustARC.

In these discussions we see several key concepts emerging: COMMUNION, UNITY and MISSION.

The word COMMUNION (or koinonia) has become a central idea in all our discussions together. ARCIC described it as: The relation between persons resulting from their participation in the one and the same reality.

That reality is Jesus Christ himself, the Way to the Father, who has filled us with his Holy Spirit. Our communion is with the Holy Trinity, no less. We share in this through faith and baptism. It is this reality that already binds us together as brothers and sisters in Christ.

That fundamental communion remains between Anglicans and Roman Catholics in spite of our divisions, but it impels us to seek fullness of communion or UNITY. Jesus prayed that all his followers might be one 'so that the world may believe' (John 17:21). The unity we seek is for the sake of MISSION – that together we might further the mission of Jesus in the world. Only a united Church can truly serve as an instrument of unity for a broken world.

The following study, *Church as Communion*, is based on one of the ARCIC texts (1990). Such a central notion of the Church deserves to be better understood, so that we might together deepen that reality. Through our discussions in our local communities we will come to a greater appreciation of our communion with one another and where the Spirit is leading us. In this we can take a lead from St Paulinus of Nola (354–431) who urges us to '... listen to what all the faithful say, because in every one of them the Spirit of God breathes'.

Communion implies that the Church is a dynamic reality moving towards its fulfilment. Communion embraces both the visible gathering of God's people and its divine life-giving source. We are thus directed to the life of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the life God wills to share with all people. There is held before us the vision of God's reign over the whole of creation, and of the Church as the firstfruits of humankind which is drawn into that divine life through acceptance of the redemption given in Jesus Christ.

Church as Communion paragraph 3

Leader's Guide

Each person in a discussion group can make a significant contribution to the vitality and effectiveness of the weekly meetings. However the person chosen as leader or group facilitator has a specific role – to provide focus and direction for the group's prayer and learning. Some groups have a person nominated as leader for all sessions while other groups rotate this role amongst themselves.

The program consists of three meetings consisting of five topics – topics one and two for meeting one, topics three and four for meeting two and topic five for meeting three. It is suggested that meeting three also include a shared meal at the beginning and a session at the end to plan further joint action. Each meeting would be about ninety minutes. However there may be a number of reasons for adapting this process. For example if the group is meeting at lunch time perhaps the sessions could be spread over five weeks.

Below are some helpful hints for leading the group.

A welcoming space

- Is everyone clear about venue and time?
- At the first meeting there may be people who don't know each other. It is important to make the setting as inviting as possible.
- Invite people to introduce themselves. This would include their name, a sentence about themselves and the faith community to which they belong.
- Is the room an appropriate size for the group?
- If possible, arrange the seats in a circle so participants can see one another in the group.
- Set the tone for the first meeting by warmly welcoming each person. Introduce everyone. Name tags are helpful at least for the first meeting.
- To improve the flow of the meetings ensure each participant has a book before the meetings begin.
- A meeting would generally last 90 minutes. It is important to start and end at the agreed times. If people want to continue discussion this could occur informally after the meeting.

Preparing for the sessions

- Create the space and atmosphere for each meeting.
- By paying attention to the setting for your weekly gatherings, you are helping to create a prayerful, reflective atmosphere.
- Preview the material for each session.
- Display a Bible in a prominent position as a focus for the group. This also allows members to read scripture references as needed. The texts in your Bible may differ slightly from the ones in this book due to different translations of the Gospels.

All scripture texts that appear in this resource are from the New Revised Standard Version.

- This program is a resource. The BEST resource, however, is the life and faith experience of each person in the group.
- For the third meeting it is suggested that the group share a meal at the beginning and do some planning for future action at the end of the meeting. It could be helpful to have some butcher paper and pens. At the end of the second meeting organise food arrangements.
- A spirit of goodwill is always expected in the group and this allows individuals to disagree with respect and dignity. People should feel quite free to disagree, without ill feeling. Always remember that the Spirit of God is with the group – with each member of the group – because we are gathered in God's name.
- If questions arise that group members are unsure about, any, or all of the group can research them before the next meeting. The group needs to be aware that every question may not have an answer at this stage.

Prayer focus

The Leader or another member of the group is encouraged to set up a simple prayer focus to use during the program. Elements might include a candle, cross and Bible (open).

During the meeting

- Is the group keeping to the point?
- Is the group open and attentive as different ideas are expressed?
- Are the members focused and attentive to what each person is sharing with the group?
- Are all members taking part? Is someone dominating?
- Can the group bring quieter members in, or 'recover' a person who was interrupted?
- Are members being addressed by name – first name if possible?

Meeting One

Welcome and Gathering Prayer

Leader: (Read slowly and carefully this passage from St. Paul.)

Through Jesus, God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things.
Colossians 1:15-20

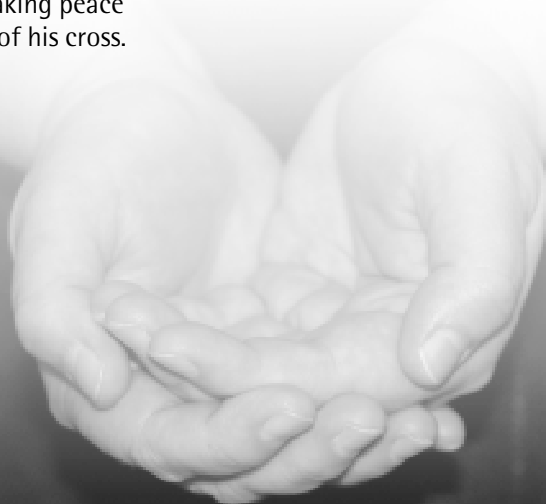
He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things have been created through him and for him.

He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

Leader: We pray together the Gathering Prayer.

All: Lord Jesus Christ, in you all things hold together: bless this group that gathers in your name. Take our scattered lives, and form us as a company of apostles, travelling together. Take our searching minds, and teach us as a fellowship of disciples, learning together.

Take our divided hearts, and unite us as a communion of Christians, praying together. As we read and listen, as we speak and pray, renew your Church for the sake of the world you love. Amen.



This topic will focus on the witness of the Scriptures that reveal God's desire for unity with us in the drama of human existence. God shares life with us and we in turn stand united in that life.

The relationship between God and his creation is the fundamental theme of Holy Scripture. The drama of human existence, as expounded in Scripture, consists in the formation, breakdown and renewal of this relationship.

Church as Communion paragraph 6

Story

We listen to the story of a broken community working together to overcome division and share life more fruitfully.

This story comes from the Northern Territory in Australia, where traditional owners of the land and people of European descent have painfully, and sometimes violently, struggled to live together.

Max and Mabs Gorringe are non-indigenous Australians who work with and for the Mangarrayi people, the traditional owners of the land.

In February 2000, Elsey Station was handed back to 400 Mangarrayi traditional owners. The Mangarrayi were thrown off Elsey in the mid 1970's and had to wait more than two decades before any hope of return seemed real. The Northern Land Council bought the lease in 1991 and then, in 1997, the Mangarrayi won inalienable freehold title by proving a strong spiritual connection to the land.

But Elsey really began to enter a new era in 1995 when Max Gorringe arrived to take on the job of manager. When Max and his

wife Mabs arrived at the station they found quite a depressing scene. 'The buildings were a shambles – lots of holes and white ants – a lot falling down!'

Six years on, Max and Mabs are still in the heat and isolation, they admit they love. While the Mangarrayi conducted their legal marathon, the Goringes worked to put Elsey on a viable footing. 'He's a good bloke, the best manager we ever got', said one of the owners, Jessica Roberts. 'Because when he came here and started running this Elsey Station and we were still waiting to get title, we saw that he build up, you know, get more stocks and more horses – that everything's really good!'

But it's not enough for Max and Mabs to run the station well. They also have a unique challenge answering to the needs of the hundreds of traditional owners, respecting numerous sacred sites, consulting at every turn. 'They've been fairly open minded and that's because they've been involved,' Mabs said. 'Years ago they never got that involvement or had a say.'

Reflection and Discussion

We reflect on our own situation.

Newspapers, radio and television are a constant source of worry for many people. They bring us stories of a broken world, pain and trouble.

- Name a recent event that has happened in your community or in the wider world that brings home to you the brokenness of the human community.

The drama of human existence

We love to celebrate our unity and harmony. However, communities do not always find it easy to live together. Continual forgiveness and reconciliation are therefore essential to bring healing and make the life of each community fruitful.

- Share together something of the importance of family or community celebrations in your life. Explain to the group what events you enjoy the most.
- From your own experience can you tell a story of a hurt, forgiveness and peace? Why is this story important to you?

Exploring 'Church as Communion'

Read these paragraphs from *Church as Communion*.

In the New Testament the idea of communion is conveyed in many ways. A variety of words, expressions, and images point to its reality: the people of God (1 Peter 2:9-10); flock (John 10:14; Acts 20:28-29; 1 Peter 5:3-4); vine (John 15:5); temple (1 Corinthians 3:16-17); bride (Revelation 21:2); body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; Romans 12:4-5; Ephesians 1:22-23).

All these express a relationship with God and also imply a relationship among the members of the community. The reality to which this variety of images refers is communion, a shared life in Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16-21; compare with John 17), which no one image exhaustively describes. This communion is participation in the life of God through Christ in the Holy Spirit, making Christians one with each other.

Church as Communion paragraph 13

Take a few moments in your group to read the Introduction (p 5) to this booklet.

Group Discussion

- Discuss the images above and identify your favourite image of the Church as Communion.
- What are the essentials of community that are basic to building up the Church as communion?
- What do you think is the difference between 'community' and 'communion'?



This second topic will explore how the Church might be a sign and instrument of God's desire to draw us together in unity. How is it possible when the Church itself is broken and divided? What sort of sign is the Church? What positive steps have been taken to heal the brokenness?

The Church is the sign of what God has done in Christ, is continuing to do in those who serve him, and wills to do for humanity. It is the sign of God's abiding presence, and of his eternal faithfulness to his promises, for in it Christ is ever present and active through the Spirit.

Church as Communion paragraph 18

Scripture

Read slowly and carefully these passages.

In his flesh he has made both groups into one. Ephesians 2:14-18, 5:1-2

For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. ...

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us.

Story

We listen to the story of the Rev. Robert Vun and the Anglican parish he serves, discovering ways of witnessing as a community to Christ's presence.

This story centres on the need to help refugees and new settlers from East Timor rebuild their lives after suffering violence and oppression in their homeland.

Helping people of a different culture settle into a new land needs a firm vision of the unity of all people and strength to make this vision real.

I met Jose (not his real name) on the streets yesterday. He spontaneously thanked me for what the Parish had done for him. I reflected ironically that even after 10 years of trying, the government still considers him an asylum seeker and has not granted him refugee status. He is worn down in this unending period of waiting – numerous times his hopes have been raised only to have them later dashed. He fled the torture of East Timor only to find himself in the Australian limbo.

Jose is a typical story among the East Timorese asylum seekers to whom we minister. They came to this strange land with only the shirts on their back and personal experiences of torture, rape, killings, pillage and abandonment. The Church saw their plight and began to minister to them.

Our primary witness takes the form of walking with them along their road of adjustments, traumas, personal losses, and struggles for forgiveness and healing.

It is a journey of heart breaking labour of visitation, counselling, and conflict resolution with little recognition. We spent long hours with government agencies and red tape with modest results. We often tread on eggshells because of numerous cultural barriers laden with misunderstandings. We endure

God's abiding presence

frustrations in interpreting for them in hospitals and tribunals. Yet being with and walking their road is the only way which we can touch them with Christ's presence and love.

This means being humble to learn from them, being gentle to soothe their wounds, being uncomfortable so that they can be secure, crossing barriers to where they are at, and be Christ to them that they may see God in all their pain. We want them to see Jesus through us, see hope in him by our actions, and see a new future possible by God's grace.

Our primary motivation is that God loves all people and accepts us all as we are. We can only love them through the love of God. Serve them unselfishly through the strength of Jesus. Weep with them, holding them closely to the heart of Christ.

We do not know how long Jose will have to endure the memories of his past sufferings and present predicament. Because Jesus loved us and taught us how to love, we cannot but love them. Our ministry still goes on as long as there are still people like Jose out there. The journey goes on.

Jose can face tomorrow because we dare to allow Jesus to use us as vessels of His grace.

Jose can face tomorrow because he has the 'grace'iousness to allow others to minister to him.

Reflection and Discussion

- All of us have many responsibilities within our family and places of work. Yet in the Church we are called to be, 'individually members one of another' (Romans 12:5). Where in your parish or community do you see people going out of their way to act as Christ to each other?

- We all experience barriers and divisions between Christians – sometimes these are very painful and confusing. In what ways do we recognize that God is indeed with 'the others' as well as with us?
- Christians believe that the Church is a sign and instrument of God's presence and action in the world. Jesus said: 'Blessed are the peacemakers' (Matthew 5:9). How do we experience and give expression to this in the everyday life of our Christian community?

Exploring 'Church as Communion'

For this session you are invited to read these excerpts from paragraph 18 and paragraph 20 from *Church as Communion*.

The Church as communion of believers with God and with each other is a sign of the new humanity God is creating and a pledge of the continuing work of the Holy Spirit. Its vocation is to embody and reveal the redemptive power of the Gospel, signifying reconciliation received through faith and participation in the new life in Christ.

Church as Communion paragraph 18

Human sinfulness and Christian division obscure this sign. However, Christ's promise of his abiding presence in the midst of his people (Matthew 18:20; 28:20) gives the assurance that the Church will not cease to be an effective sign.

Church as Communion paragraph 20

Group Discussion

- How are we challenged to be a sign of the 'new humanity of God' ... to embody it, reveal it and participate in 'the new life in Christ'.
- How do we continue the work of the Holy Spirit together?
- Read again the passages from St. Paul – Ephesians 2:14-18 and 5:1-2. How do the words of the text speak to you in your Christian community? How do they develop communion between our brothers and sisters?
- How do the words of the text inspire you to live 'communion' rather than simply 'community'.

For those who may be interested in the full text of the 'Church as Communion' ARCIC II document you will find it at the address below:

http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/arcic/doc/e_arcicII_communion.html

It may be helpful if group members were able to read this before the next meeting.

... communion involves rejoicing with those who rejoice and being in solidarity with those who suffer and those who search for meaning in life.

Church as Communion paragraph 18

Closing Prayer

Leader: Loving God, hear and help us,
as we say:
God of grace,

All: hear our prayer.

Reader 1: Enrich among us
the sacramental life, so that,
sharing holy things,
we may become a holy people.
(pause)
God of grace,

All: hear our prayer.

Reader 2: Gather up the rich diversity
of all our cultures, so that,
by the one Spirit,
all the peoples
of the earth
may come to you.
(pause)
God of grace,

All: hear our prayer.

Reader 3: Quicken among us the memory
of Christ, so that, fed by
the living Word and living Tradition,
we may be messengers
of the Gospel.
(pause)
God of grace,

All: hear our prayer.

Reader 4: Give us new ways of expressing
age-old faith, so that,
in our own age and culture,
we may show
authentic faithfulness.
(pause)

God of grace,

All: hear our prayer.

Reader 5: Re-create us in Christ, so that,
in a divided world, the Church may
be a sign of peace and harmony.
(pause)

God of grace,

All: hear our prayer.

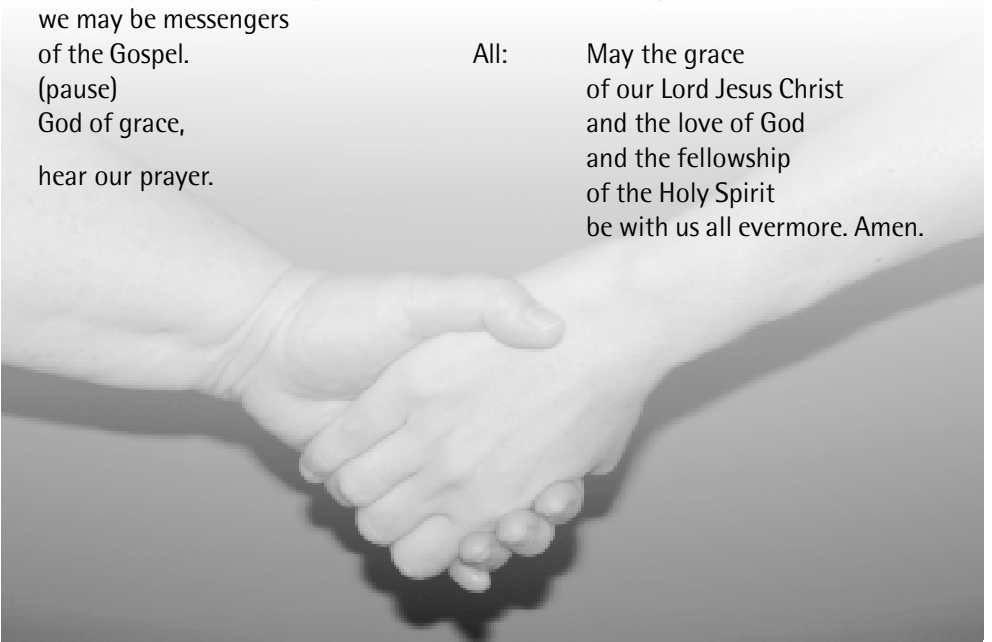
Reader 6: Inspire us for joint witness
and practical action, so that,
seeking full ecclesial communion,
we may care for one another
and bear with one another.
(pause)

God of grace,

All: hear our prayer.

Leader: Let us pray.

All: May the grace
of our Lord Jesus Christ
and the love of God
and the fellowship
of the Holy Spirit
be with us all evermore. Amen.





Meeting 2

Welcome and Gathering Prayer

Leader: (Read slowly and carefully the passages below.)

The Holy Spirit will teach you everything. John 14:25-26

'I have said these things to you while I am still with you.

But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.'

Built on the foundations of the apostles. Ephesians 2:19-22

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.

Leader: We pray together the Gathering Prayer.

All: Lord Jesus Christ,
in you all things hold together:
bless this group that
gathers in your name.
Take our scattered lives,
and form us
as a company of apostles,
travelling together.
Take our searching minds,
and teach us
as a fellowship of disciples,
learning together.

Take our divided hearts,
and unite us
as a communion of Christians,
praying together.
As we read and listen,
as we speak and pray,
renew your Church
for the sake of the world
you love. Amen.



'We believe in one holy, catholic and apostolic Church.'

This topic will explore how we value our history and live out our present relationships with each other as churches. What does our God-given identity look like? In what ways is the Church holy?

Thus the apostolic tradition is fundamental to the Church's communion which spans time and space, linking the present to past and future generations of Christians.

Church as Communion paragraph 31

The holiness of the Church reflects the mission of the Spirit of God in Christ, the Holy One of God, made known to all the world through the apostolic preaching.

Church as Communion paragraph 41

Story

We listen to the story of a country town's struggle to deal with drought and change.

We were on our way out of suburbia and into the country south-east of Brisbane for the commissioning of the new Anglican priest at Boonah, Mary Florence, a family friend of many years.

The town of Boonah, population 2700, is an attractive country town nestled in the Fassifern Valley and surrounded by the Great Dividing Range, Moogerah Peaks and Mt French. It is typical of many small rural communities across Australia. It was founded in 1882 to serve the early settlers who were involved in farming and timber milling. Later it became the centre of a thriving dairy industry.

The last ten years the drought has taken its toll – Moogerah Dam is still only at 10% of

its capacity. But the community has shown its tenacity for overcoming adversity with creative thinking and new solutions. In 2000 Boonah was named the Queensland town with the most 'Bush Spirit'. Vineyards, lavender farms and 'farm stay' accommodations have become established in the area.

When the settlers arrived from various parts of Europe they also built their churches. The Roman Catholic church, All Saints, had been built in 1887. A block down the road the local Anglican church, Christ Church, had been built in 1890. But even further back the Rev Benjamin Glennie had visited some of the farms in the area for services in 1848 on his way to the Darling Downs.

As we drove into the town for the first time we were struck by the number of churches we could see – some facing each other across streets, others on the top of hills. No doubt in the past the differences and divisions between them had not been just geographical.

When we arrived at the Anglican Church the seats were rapidly filling up – both inside and outside the church. After Bishop Raymond Smith commissioned Mary a number of the local clergy from various Christian denominations welcomed Mary to the community.

In the same way as the local community has responded to new challenges so to have the local churches. The local clergy meet monthly. Instead of calling this group the 'Ministers Fraternal' they refer to it as 'Fassifern Christian Churches Together'. Fr Ellis Clifford (Roman Catholic parish priest) and Mary 'team-teach' RE at the local state high school. This year members of the Anglican, Catholic and Uniting churches have formed groups to study the Lenten program, *Face to Face with Jesus*.

These Christian communities are very aware of their past and their history, but are also open to responding to new challenges with new and creative solutions.

Reflection and Discussion

- Reflect on your own area. What were some of the key milestones in the history of your local Church?
- What opportunities do you see available for you to connect the past with future possibilities?
- 'Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy"' (1 Peter 1:15;16). What would a holy church be like and what would it be doing?
- What steps do we need to take 'to become' Church as described above in paragraph 41 of *Church as Communion*?

Exploring 'Church as Communion'

When the Creed speaks of the Church as holy, catholic and apostolic, it does not mean that these attributes are distinct and unrelated. On the contrary, they are so interwoven that there cannot be one without the others. The holiness of the Church reflects the mission of the Spirit of God in Christ, the Holy One of God, made known to all the world through the apostolic preaching. Catholicity is the realization of the Church's proclamation of the fullness of the Gospel to every nation throughout the ages. Apostolicity unites the Church of all generations and in every place with the once-for-all sacrifice and resurrection of Christ, where God's holy love was supremely demonstrated.

Church as Communion paragraph 41

If the Church is to remain faithfully rooted and grounded in the living truth and is to confess it with relevance, then it will need to develop new expressions of the faith. Diversity of culture may often elicit a diversity in the expression of the one Gospel; within the same community distinct perceptions and practices arise. Nevertheless, these must remain faithful to the tradition received from the apostles (cf. Jude 3). Since the Holy Spirit is given to all the people of God, it is within the Church as a whole, individuals as well as communities, that the living memory of the faith is active. All authentic insights and perceptions, therefore, have their place within the life and faith of the whole Church, the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Church as Communion paragraph 29

Group Discussion

- Every Sunday the Creed is proclaimed in Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches. The Creed is an essential part of our history and our identity. How can Creeds be vehicles for deeper sharing and understanding between our two churches?
- How do we remain relevant to 'the living truth'?
- How does one develop new expressions of faith when we are taught about a God who is unchanging?

This session we explore what may be necessary to give visible expression to the spiritual unity we already share in Christ.

As separated Churches grow towards ecclesial communion it is essential to recognize the profound measure of communion they already share through participation in spiritual communion with God and through those elements of a visible communion of shared faith and sacramental life they can already recognize in one another.

Church as Communion paragraph 47

Scripture

Read slowly and carefully these passages.

We, though many, are one Body in Christ.
1 Corinthians 12:12-13

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

There is one Body and one Spirit.
Ephesians 4:4-6

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

Story

Mrs. McPaul was looking tense and worried, although she was usually a very positive octogenarian and an active contributor to our reading group. She confided her problem at a meeting. 'It's my family', she said. 'They want me to have a birthday party and it's led to a frightful row. I don't want one at all but they are adamant'.

She had previously told us about her family – her three sons, the eldest a widower, living interstate and the younger two, living locally. Yet the younger sons had very strong minded wives, who differed in attitude and religious persuasion. These ladies had equally strong ideas about the party, each wanting to hold it at her own home and celebrate it her own way, one with champagne and the works, the other with finger food and orange juice. But in either case there would not be enough room for all the grandchildren and their families, let alone neighbours and friends. The grandchildren were beginning to take sides and the eldest son was concerned.

We urged her to agree to a party but to have some input of her own. 'Well', she said, 'I'll agree to it if you promise to come too. I want my friends as well as my family'.

When our invitations arrived we noted that the party was to be in a large, well-appointed church hall, associated with neither family group. Mrs Mac must have had some say, at least!

We dutifully fronted up at the party and to begin with we found the atmosphere rather sticky. But with the large numbers of small children running around under foot and the teenagers acting as drink waiters (wine *and* soft drink) and waitresses balancing laden trays, things began to thaw.

But the real shift began when the stories were told. Family members recalled incidents from the past – sons from their youth, grandchildren of the special times they had

Making room for each other in the Body of Christ

enjoyed. Long time neighbours chipped in as well – a bit like a funeral eulogy to start with. What gave it added zest was when Mrs Mac spoke. She hadn't intended to give a speech. But she felt compelled to say something and as the words poured out one could feel the emotion all around. She spoke of her own long life with its challenges and changes. She spoke of coming to terms with her own widowhood and her new-found sense of self.

The evening didn't finish with the hugs and tears being shared by friends and family. The healing continued and when Mrs. Mac died two years later, her funeral and the party which followed were times of celebration, reverence and joy.

To explore the meaning of communion is not only to speak of the Church but also to address the world at the heart of its deepest need, for human beings long for true community in freedom, justice and peace and for the respect of human dignity.

Church as Communion paragraph 3

Reflection and Discussion

- The story above illustrates how people with a different vision of what 'should happen' can cause tension and difficulties. We Christians share a common vision of the world as belonging to God – a common vision, a common way of seeing others as God's sons and daughters. We share a common system of values. How could we, working with each other, express effectively these common values within the world at large?
- We share a spiritual connection through our baptism, but just as the Word was made flesh, we need to flesh out our invisible connectedness in tangible ways. How can you get to know the people of your neighbouring Anglican or Roman Catholic Church at a deeper human level?



Exploring 'Church as Communion' Group discussion

... it is inadequate to speak only of an invisible spiritual unity as the fulfilment of Christ's will for the Church; the profound communion fashioned by the Spirit requires visible expression.

Church as Communion paragraph 43

The *constitutive elements* essential for the visible communion of the Church are derived from and subordinate to the common confession of Jesus as Lord. ...

Ecclesial communion is:

- rooted in the confession of the apostolic faith
- revealed in the Scriptures
- set forth in the Creeds
- founded upon one baptism
- the one celebration of the Eucharist is its pre-eminent expression and focus
- finds expression in shared commitment to mission
- a life of shared concern for one another in mutual forbearance, submission, gentleness and love
- placing of interests of others above interests of self
- making room for each other in the Body of Christ
- solidarity with the poor and powerless
- sharing of spiritual and material gifts
- acceptance of the same basic moral values
- sharing of the vision of humanity created in the image of God and recreated in Christ
- a common confession of the one hope in the final consummation of the Kingdom of God.

Church as Communion paragraph 45 (summarised)

- Which elements have most significance for you? How are these elements reflected in our local congregations?
- The way we live out our communion is our responsibility. The *Church as Communion* describes it in these terms, 'it is a life of shared concern for one another in mutual forbearance, submission, gentleness and love; in the placing of the interests of others above the interests of self; in making room for each other in the body of Christ; in solidarity with the poor and powerless; and in the sharing of gifts both material and spiritual!'

To what extent are we living this life in our own congregation? What would our relationship be like if we were to live these out in relationship with each other? Identify ways where we are cultivating this relationship.

- Identify areas where there is a commitment to common mission, eg ecumenical schools.

Closing Prayer

Leader: Loving God, hear and help us,
as we say:
God of grace,

All: hear our prayer.

Reader 1: Enrich among us
the sacramental life, so that,
sharing holy things,
we may become a holy people.
(pause)
God of grace,

All: hear our prayer.

Reader 2: Gather up the rich diversity
of all our cultures, so that,
by the one Spirit,
all the peoples
of the earth
may come to you.
(pause)
God of grace,

All: hear our prayer.

Reader 3: Quicken among us the memory
of Christ, so that, fed by
the living Word and living Tradition,
we may be messengers
of the Gospel.
(pause)
God of grace,

All: hear our prayer.

Reader 4: Give us new ways of expressing
age-old faith, so that,
in our own age and culture,
we may show
authentic faithfulness.
(pause)

God of grace,

All: hear our prayer.

Reader 5: Re-create us in Christ, so that,
in a divided world, the Church may
be a sign of peace and harmony.
(pause)

God of grace,

All: hear our prayer.

Reader 6: Inspire us for joint witness
and practical action, so that,
seeking full ecclesial communion,
we may care for one another
and bear with one another.
(pause)

God of grace,

All: hear our prayer.

Leader: Let us pray.

All: May the grace
of our Lord Jesus Christ
and the love of God
and the fellowship
of the Holy Spirit
be with us all evermore. Amen.

