

CHURCH AND AUTHORITY

1. The New Testament shows the local churches being called into existence by the Spirit through the apostolic teaching. Being "faithful to the apostolic teaching, to the koinonia, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers" (Acts 2:42), the local churches constitute recognisable assemblies with a recognisable order, governed and served by their ministers. Through life and prayer together, especially at the eucharist, they all experience the same redemption. Despite occasional differences, they realise a sense of identity and unity. They acknowledge the authority of God's revelation as imparted to them by those to whom Christ entrusted the message of the gospel.

2. The structure of the local church, as it soon developed everywhere, showed forth the catholicity of the koinonia. There is one bishop and one altar. The bishop expresses and unites in his person the multitude of the faithful, especially at the eucharist and in the preaching of the one gospel. Assisted by his presbyters and the other ministers, the bishop teaches the common faith "once delivered to the saints"; he presides at worship; he ordains and regulates the diverse ministries of the community into a harmonious unity. Thus the local church has an inner unity and wholeness which is embodied in its structure. As manifesting the fulness of Christ, it is the whole ecclesial mystery. Being at one with the church in heaven, it has in itself a unity which transcends all divisions and invites all mankind to reconciliation and peace.

3. The local church is also apostolic. Its mission is from the apostles, and its faith and teaching are those of the apostles. It is not an ad hoc gathering of believers. Rather, it is rooted in the function of the apostles. It acts and lives by what it has authoritatively received. Its authority is not solely from itself. But it comes from the actual oneness of the Church with the Risen Lord; it derives from the apostolic origins of the community; and it is shared with the other local churches. The whole apostolic presence and mission is experienced in each local church as united to all the others in the oneness of the universal koinonia. Of this apostolic authority the ministry of the bishop is a sign and a guarantee.
4. Local churches are not independent entities which could be indifferent to their relationships with one another. As 'no man liveth unto himself', so no local church lives for itself or by itself. From the earliest times the maintaining of relationships with other local churches was an issue of first importance. The unity of local churches may be seen in their teaching of the common apostolic faith, in their reading and exposition of the same Scriptures, in their common basic structure, in the celebration of the one eucharist, however diverse the forms and liturgies, in their common witness and mission in the world. Their unity is given sacramental expression in the reception of members of other local churches to communion and in the exchange of ministries. It is sacramentally expressed in the participation of the bishops of several churches in the ordination of a new bishop. Thus, the bishop expresses in his person the collegiality of the

local church, being the officially appointed teacher and co-ordinator of the local church's faith and practice. In turn, since the rite of ordination incorporates into the episcopal college, the bishop signifies and effects the unity in faith of all local churches. Synods, conferences, and gatherings of bishops also symbolise and contribute to the unity of local churches. In the Roman Catholic communion the universal council of bishops, with the bishop of Rome at the head, is seen as the supreme organ of authority and unity.