

COMMON WITNESS TO THE GOSPEL

DOCUMENTS ON
ANGLICAN-ROMAN CATHOLIC RELATIONS
1983-1995

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Anglican-Roman Catholic Bishops Dialogue, Canada, 1991

A BRIEF HISTORY

In November 1985, the Anglican-Roman Catholic Bishops' Dialogue began to discuss the ecumenical implications of clergy moving from one Church to the other. Participants agreed that when a change is requested, it is important to make contact with the authorities in the Church from which the person comes; to assess the impact on the person and on the whole Christian community; to proceed with ecumenical courtesy.

In November of 1986, the topic was resumed with a focus on the criteria and procedures for preparing candidates for ordination.

At the November 1987 meeting, there was a further discussion of criteria and procedures as well as some consideration of discernment of vocation. It was agreed that the number of cases may increase and that guidelines would be helpful. Archbishops Antoine Hacault and Walter Jones agreed to prepare a first draft for discussion the following year.

In 1988, an outline of the proposed guidelines was discussed. The two bishops agreed to work with staff to prepare a more detailed set of guidelines.

In 1989, Archbishops Hacault and Jones presented their draft text. There was a page by page examination of the document and a number of modifications were proposed. It was agreed that these would be incorporated and that the text would be forwarded to the CCCB's (Canadian Conference of [Roman Catholic] Bishops) Ecumenism Commission and the Anglican Interchurch Interfaith Committee for comment.

At the 1990 meeting, Archbishop Hacault presented the revised text. Participants studied the document in detail in both French and English versions and made a number of revisions. Sister Donna Geernaert was asked to edit the text and circulate it prior to the 1991 meeting.

With a few changes, including the title of the English version, the revised text was approved at the meeting of November 21-23, 1991. It was agreed that the document should be forwarded to the CCCB Permanent Council and the Anglican House of Bishops. This is to be a document for the bishops' information and use rather than a formal publication such as the Pastoral Guidelines for Interchurch Marriages.

I. ORDAINED MINISTRY IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

1. In Canada over the past few years there have been instances of Anglican or Roman Catholic clergy joining the other Church and wishing to exercise an ordained ministry. Sometimes there have been unfortunate consequences, resulting in uncertainty and confusion among members of both Churches. The individuals concerned are motivated by deep personal reasons but people do not always understand what has happened or why. We hope that such transitions might not be occasions of triumphalism but will take place in ways appropriate to a relationship between two Churches which today receive each other as sister Churches in real but imperfect communion. For this reason, it will be helpful for both Churches in such cases to deal with each other openly and in a spirit of mutual respect to the world.

2. For a quarter of a century, Anglicans and Roman Catholics have been engaged 'in a serious dialogue which, founded on the Gospels and on the ancient traditions, may lead to that unity in truth, for which Christ prayed' (Common Declaration of Pope Paul VI and Archbishop Michael Ramsey, 1966). One of the fruits of that dialogue has been growing appreciation of the ministry exercised in the other Church. In the Agreed Statement on Ministry and Ordination (Windsor, 1973) the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission claims to have reached consensus on essential matters related to the nature of ordained ministry and its role in the life of the Church. It is in this context, far removed from the more polemical approach which often marred earlier relationships, that the question of the movement of persons in the ordained ministry from one Church to the other should be approached.

3. Another important element in our dealing with the persons seeking admission to the ordained ministry within the other Church must be a profound respect for the conscience of those whose pilgrimage of faith has made such a move seem desirable and necessary to them. The intention of these guidelines is a pastoral one, to ensure that the procedures followed are a help and not a hindrance to individuals in clarifying the motivation and implications of their movement into the communion of the other Church. It is also important to keep in mind the needs and concerns of the church communities which are involved and in which they will eventually serve.

4. We wish to ensure that such occasions are not disruptive of our growing ecumenical relationship. We are convinced that sensitivity to the rights of both individuals and particular Churches will not conflict with the growing appreciation of the real but imperfect communion which already exists between our Churches.

5. There are several important reasons why pastoral guidelines are appropriate for dealing with cases of clergy moving from one Communion to the other:

- (a) In both Communions the ordained ministry is a public office, representing a focus of leadership and unity within the Church. When an individual decides to move

into communion with another Church it cannot avoid coming to the attention of the wider community and giving rise to questions and concerns regarding the relationship between the two Churches involved.

- (b) Ordained ministry is carried out within the context of a worshipping and serving community which needs a pastor who understands it. Guidelines for the movement of ordained persons from communion with one Church into communion with the other should ensure that the person concerned is given the opportunity to become familiar with the rites and ethos of the receiving community.
- (c) It is important for both the applicant and the Church to discern if those in pastoral leadership have the vocation and qualities appropriate to the exercise of ordained ministry. This is why both Churches have procedures to be followed before admitting candidates into the exercise of ordained ministry, and there are particular policies regarding the admission of persons ordained in another Church. These guidelines presuppose that such regulations are understood and followed.
- (d) Persons leaving one Church for the other need to be aware of the ecumenical dialogue between us, which aims at nothing less than the restoration of full communion between sister Churches. Any move from one to the other ought to be motivated primarily by a love for the new Church, not by frustration or anger, and the bishop receiving such a person should encourage a healthy respect for the former Church and for our continuing search for reconciliation and understanding.

II. ASSISTING APPLICANTS IN DISCERNMENT OF VOCATION

A. Initial Approach

6. From a theological perspective baptism precedes ordination. That is, church membership is prior to the seeking of ordained ministry in the Church of which one is a member. Further, commitment to the doctrine and practice of the receiving Church must be broader than a single issue which may appear to have motivated the change. Although it is difficult to discern among the complexity of human motivations it is important to attend to the difference between opportunism and spiritual growth. Applicants will also need to become used to the similarities and differences which characterize the two Churches. It may, therefore, be appropriate for them to spend two or three years as a practicing member of the receiving Church and have the opportunity of learning its ethos before either ordination or reception into ordained ministry.

7. Before leaving one Church for another it would be helpful to bring closure to the earlier relationship. Among other things, the person should be encouraged to contact the former bishop and be informed that the receiving bishop will want to talk with the former bishop.

8. In both Churches there are procedures for helping individuals discern their vocation, and to identify right intention and the possession of the spiritual, moral, personal,

and social qualities integral to the exercise of ordained ministry. Applicants who have been ordained in the other Church should be asked to give careful consideration to: (a) their commitment to the receiving Church, (b) signs of vocation specific to that Church, and (c) for those entering the Roman Catholic Church, the significance of the link between celibacy and the priesthood.

The Call to Celibacy or Marriage

9. Both Churches acknowledge that marriage, celibacy, and priesthood are all gifts of God. There is, however, a difference of approach between the two Churches in the link recognized between celibacy and priesthood.

- (a) A married priest moving from the Anglican tradition into the Roman Catholic Church needs to be aware that the majority of his colleagues in the presbyterium will be celibate and that the Roman Catholic Church is committed to the principle of linking celibacy and priesthood. Under certain circumstances permission can be granted for married men to be ordained, but the basic model is renunciation of marriage for the sake of the Kingdom.
- (b) In the case of someone coming to the Anglican Church from the Roman Catholic tradition the Anglican bishop will want to discern that the applicant is not making the change solely out of a desire for marriage. He will also want to be sure that any marriage that exists is firmly established before ordination or reception into ordained ministry. It should also be noted that while the Anglican tradition recognizes that some may discern a call to celibacy, this is not a qualification for ordained ministry.

Signs of Vocation

(a) Subjective Perception

10. An exploration of the applicant's own sense of vocation should include such matters as:

- (a) a brief autobiographical statement including a description of the persons, events, and institutions which have shaped the applicant's development in either a positive or negative manner; (b) a history of the candidate's vocational and spiritual development; (c) an appraisal of the candidate's personal and professional strengths; (d) an assessment of the applicant's relationship to the Church at this stage of spiritual and emotional development; (e) a description of the applicant's personal and vocational goals; (f) the applicant's perception of authority and the way the applicant sees himself exercising it; (g) motivation or desire for change at the

present stage of personal and vocational development; (h) hopes and dreams for the future.

(b) *Authority's Assessment*

11. In both our traditions it is the bishop who carries ultimate responsibility, upon informed recommendation, for making an assessment of the applicant's suitability for ordination. Both Churches also have structures to help the bishop make such an informed decision: the presbyterium or Council of Priests, the seminary team, the Advisory Committee on Postulants for Ordination, etc. Appropriate assessment procedures should be followed. It may be important to explore attitudes toward both authority and colleagues in ministry. It is important that underlying differences with the position of the former Church on such matters as celibacy or the ordination of women do not reflect negative attitudes toward authority which could make it difficult for the person to adjust to life in the new Church.

(c) *Community Discernment*

12. Although both traditions see the ordained ministry as having a distinctive role which is not simply 'an extension of the common Christian priesthood but belongs to another realm of the gifts of the Spirit' (*Ministry and Ordination*, para. 13), they would also agree that the priesthood is exercised in and for the sake of the Christian community. As part of his ministry of oversight the bishop has a particular obligation to ensure that the community is served by clergy who understand its ethos and are sensitive to its needs. For this reason it is important for lay members of the Church to be involved in the assessment of the candidate's capacity to function as an ordained minister in the new context according to the disciplines of the respective Churches.

B. Communication Between Bishops

13. The movement of clergy between our Churches implies a responsibility on the part of the Church as well as the individual. Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops in Canada have been in dialogue for considerable time and sufficient mutual confidence has been built up so that they should be in contact as early as possible when one or the other is approached by clergy wanting to move from one Church to the other. Questions to be discussed will include: (1) the personality of the candidate; (2) the authenticity of the candidate's earlier calling to ordained ministry and in the case of one leaving the Roman Catholic Church, his vocation to the celibate life; (3) the candidate's capacity as a pastor in the community that is being left; and (4) any other information that will be of assistance to both the individual and the receiving Church.

14. The financial situation of the candidate should be part of the conversation between the bishops. What, for example, does a person do during the waiting period? The need could be especially acute if the individual concerned is married and has a family.

15. It may also be necessary for the two bishops to discuss the question of publicity and media interest in the movement of a particular priest. A competitive approach does not accurately reflect the relationship which our two Churches now enjoy. Instead, cooperation between the respective bishops can be a living demonstration of the search for unity and reconciliation in which both Churches are currently engaged. Consideration should be given to a joint announcement or to a coordinated response. Applicants themselves should be discouraged from making statements.

III. FOLLOWING APPROPRIATE PROCEDURES

16. Bishops should be aware of the procedure applicable in the sister Church for the reception of those ordained in another tradition. Guidelines should be shared where available and differences in procedure should be respected. Through dialogue, in an atmosphere of mutual regard and respect the reasons behind particular requirements can be clarified and their intention understood. As a result of this process, it is to be hoped that if there are any aspects of our respective procedures which could give rise to offence, they will be modified insofar as the competence of the leadership of our respective Churches is able to do so.

17. One area of difference is a disparity in practice regarding ordination or reordination. A bishop of the Roman Catholic Church will be required by its discipline to ordain a person ordained according to the rites of the Anglican Church. On the other hand, a priest lawfully ordained in the Roman Catholic Church would normally be received, rather than ordained, on admission into ordained ministry in the Anglican Church. This will continue to be a source of pain and misunderstanding as long as our two Churches do not mutually recognize each other's ordinations. The recognition of each other's ministries and the restoration of full communion continues to be the objective of the dialogue being carried out by the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission and by a variety of regional and national dialogues.

IV. PASTORAL SUPPORT FOR THOSE IN TRANSITION

18. Just as a newly ordained person needs time and support to become comfortable with life in the ordained ministry, this need should not be overlooked for the person in transition. Special consideration should be given to pastoral support during the first year or two after an individual has been ordained or received into ordained ministry in the other Church. The bishop should appoint a capable team including a priest and some lay people who will meet regularly with the person concerned in order to serve as a source of support and provide continued formation in ordained ministry in the new Church.

19. Individual circumstances will call for flexibility. The nature and duration of the person's experience in the former Church, as well as his understanding of the receiving Church should be taken into account in the planning of early placements. For the common good, the person concerned should usually not be placed in the same area that was served in prior to the change. Such early service will often take place in a non-parish setting or as an assistant to the pastor of a parish to give the person an opportunity to adapt and better equip himself to serve the people of the Church with which he has now identified.

20. We are aware this document focuses primarily on those moving from priesthood in one Church to priesthood in the other. Other circumstances of transition can be envisioned, including the deacon or lay person who may feel called to seek priesthood in the other Church. We believe that if the same principles of ecumenical and pastoral sensitivity are applied these also can be occasions of growth and understanding.

21. The Church is called to proclaim the reconciling love of God in Christ, to be a people among whom this love is manifested and the instrument through which salvation is offered to all. It is this priesthood of the whole Church which the ordained ministry seeks to serve. May God guide and nurture all men and women in their various ministries within the community of the faithful.

*The gifts he gave were that some would be
apostles, some prophets, some evangelists,
some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints
for the work of ministry, for building up the
body of Christ, until all of us come to the
unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the
Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the
full stature of Christ.*

(Eph 4.11-13 [N.R.S.V.]

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