Canadian Anglican and Roman Catholic Bishops' Dialogue
Highlights of Meeting of November 2006

A meeting of representatives of the Canadian Anglican House of Bishops and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops took place in Villa St. Martin in the Montreal suburb of Pierrefonds, QC, November 22-24, 2006. By coincidence, bishops from the two churches met at the same time that the Archbishop of Canterbury, Most Rev'd Rowan Williams, was visiting Pope Benedict XVI for the first official visit of their respective terms in office.

In Canada, Anglican and Roman Catholic and Eastern Rite Catholic bishops have met, usually annually, since 1975. The meeting is an occasion for prayer, worship, Bible study, and discussion of issues of mutual concern. The bishops' meetings are often informed by, and contribute to, an Anglican Roman Catholic Dialogue composed of theologians, pastors, laity and bishops which meets more frequently.

On this occasion, bishops discussed

- The experience of the recent ad limina visits of Canadian bishops to Rome
- Issues coming to the Anglican General Synod in June, 2007
- The reception of the agreed statement of ARCIC II "Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ"
- The experience of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity
- Restructuring diocesan boundaries
- Stewardship of the environment and making church buildings energy efficient

The bishops' daily Bible study focused on the role of Mary in the Church. Captain Michelle Staples, Anglican Chaplain to the Canadian Forces, and member of the ARC theological dialogue, prepared the studies. The dialogue shared in morning and evening prayer, and in daily Eucharist, to the degree possible, with a Roman Catholic presiding one day while an Anglican preached, and vice versa the next day.

Most particularly, the bishops discussed perceptions and misperceptions about their churches' teachings about Christian marriage. Both churches are struggling with how to offer appropriate Christian pastoral response to the needs of gays and lesbians. Both churches are trying to understand what it means to serve in a society that recognizes the civil marriage of same-sex couples. Both churches are very concerned about the trivialization and commodification of sexuality and the exploitation of the vulnerable, especially children, that can result from dehumanized relationships.

There is energetic debate within the Anglican Church of Canada about whether same-sex unions could be blessed by the church as a recognition that committed same-sex monogamous relationships could be a faithful expression of Christian commitment for gay and lesbian persons. Even the way in which this question should be addressed within Anglicanism is a question of intense debate nationally and internationally. It became clear to members of the bishops' dialogue that the pastoral question of gay and lesbian

relationships is vital for both churches and, while related, is also separate from teaching about Christian marriage.

Through the frank exchange of the dialogue bishops came to realize that both churches maintain the same teaching about Christian marriage, as expressed in their marriage liturgies and canon law.

The dialogue welcomed the Common Declaration signed by the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury on November 23, 2006. They found realism in the assertion that there are serious matters yet to be resolved, confidence in the expression of what we have come to find in common, and hope in the call to act together on many issues than concern our world. Based on the conversation that the Canadian bishops held, they especially welcomed the call to work together in the specific areas of mission and service named in the Declaration. As a concrete sign of this commitment the bishops are asking the theological ARC dialogue to do some work in the area of stewardship of creation.

The bishops recommended that two documents be taken forward within the life of their churches: a brochure called 'Marriage: A Gift of God', a pastoral aid to married couples where one is Roman Catholic and the other Anglican; and 'When Anglicans and Roman Catholics are at the Eucharist Together', guidelines to help members of each church to understand the different ways in which the two churches regard the sacrament of the eucharist and to encourage pastoral sensitivity when they are worshipping in each other's communities.

The bishops also call on both churches to take every opportunity to pray for one another's leaders. They encourage Anglicans and Roman Catholics to incorporate in their intercessions prayers for local bishops and leaders of each other's and other churches; to pray for the Pope, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the leaders of the Lutheran World Federation, and the Patriarchs and Popes and Catholicoi of the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches, and other leaders of Christian communions with which they seek communion and the restoration of full visible unity.

Members of the dialogue this year are:

Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops		Anglican House of Bishops
Mgr Claude Champagne	Co-Chairs	Most Rev'd Andrew Hutchison
Mgr Pierre-André Fournier		Rt. Rev'd George Bruce
Most Rev. Gary Gordon		Rt. Rev'd Barry Clarke
Mgr Émilius Goulet		Rt. Rev'd Victoria Matthews
Most Rev. John Pazak		Most Rev'd Bruce Stavert
Mr. Jonas Abromaitis	Staff	Canon Alyson Barnett-Cowan

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