

Anglican/Roman Catholic Commission In The U.S.A. Agreed Statement On The Purpose Of The Church

I. INTRODUCTION

1. As Roman Catholics and Episcopalians living in the United States today, we have been charged by our churches to explore the possibility that there is a fundamental unity between us on the deepest levels of Christian faith and life. Roman Catholics and Episcopalians believe that there is but one Church of Christ,¹ yet we find ourselves living in separate churches.

2. Those who went before us in the faith lived in one communion for many centuries. This fellowship was broken in the sixteenth century, yet our two churches continue to share "many elements of sanctification and truth" which "possess an inner dynamism toward Catholic unity."² We follow one Lord; we profess the ancient Creeds and confess one Baptism; we hear God's Word in the Scriptures; we revere the Fathers and the ancient Councils; we cherish similar structures of worship and episcopal succession. Thus, our estrangement of four centuries has been far from complete. In fact, recent authoritative statements and liturgical texts of both our churches which we have examined³ show a remarkable convergence in their answers to fundamental questions such as these:

Where does the Church come from and why does it exist?

Where is the Church going and what should it be doing here and now? In short, what is the *purpose* of the Church?

3. Since the prayer of the Church is the most intense expression of our faith in God and commitment to his purpose for the world, and since the Eucharist is seen in both our churches as bringing us into a new relationship of union with Christ and with one another in his sacramental Body and Blood,⁴ we have decided together to write our common belief about the Church's purpose or mission, in answer to the above questions, in a context inter-

woven with prayers from our contemporary Eucharistic liturgies. We invite the reader to reflect upon this relationship between prayer and belief in the statement that follows. In the parallel passages that we quote, liturgical texts used in the Episcopal and Roman Catholic Churches are placed, respectively, in the left and right hand columns.⁵

II. WHERE DOES THE CHURCH COME FROM AND WHY DOES IT EXIST?

4. Both our churches witness to the fact that the Church comes from God who sent Jesus Christ his Son in the power of the Spirit to accomplish the mystery of salvation and redemption. Christ announced the Kingdom and proclaimed the Good News. The Church is that community of persons called by the Holy Spirit to continue Christ's saving work of reconciliation.⁶ As Christ proclaimed the Kingdom, so the Church serves the Kingdom, so that "the entire world may become the people of God, the Body of the Lord, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit, that in, by, and through Christ there may be rendered to God the Creator and Father of the universe all honor and glory."⁷

God of all power, Ruler of the
Universe,
you are worthy of glory and praise.
Glory to you for ever and ever.

At your command all things came to
be,
the vast expanse of interstellar space,
galaxies, suns, the planets in their
courses,
and this fragile earth, our island
home:

By your will they were created and
have their being.

From the primal elements you have
brought forth the race of man,
and blessed us with memory, reason,
and skill;
you made us the rulers of creation.

Therefore, we praise you,
joining with the heavenly chorus,
with prophets, apostles, and martyrs,
and with men of every generation who
have looked to you in hope:
to proclaim with them your glory,
in their unending hymn:

Father in heaven, it is right that we
should give you thanks and glory:
you alone are God, living and true.
Through all eternity you live in
unapproachable light.

Source of life and goodness, you
have created all things, to fill your
creatures with every blessing
and lead all men to the joyful
vision of your light.

Countless hosts of angels stand before
you to do your will;
they look upon your splendor
and praise you night and day.
United with them, and in the name of
every creature under heaven,
we too praise your glory as we sing:

Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might.
Heaven and earth are full of your
glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name
of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.

III. WHERE IS THE CHURCH GOING AND WHAT SHOULD IT BE DOING HERE AND NOW?

5. Many in our churches ask the questions, "Where is the Church going?" and "What should it be doing here and now?" Some feel the Church is engaged in a fruitless, self-serving enterprise which fails to come to grips with the challenges posed by the world today. Others ask in bewilderment whether the Church has abandoned its spiritual calling. We find this restlessness and bewilderment among clergy and laity in both our churches. On the one hand, this situation is partially rooted in the churches' awareness of "the cry of those who suffer violence and are oppressed by unjust systems and structures (in a world whose) perversity contradicts the plan of its Creator."⁸ On the other hand, it is partially produced by movements of renewal and new responses to the Spirit within our churches, such as the charismatic movement, the liturgical movement, new forms of piety, and developments in biblical study and catechesis.

6. In the midst of the long history of human selfishness and sin, we hear the story of God's redeeming action for us and all mankind calling us to re-examine our faithfulness to our mission.

Holy and gracious Father,
in your infinite love you made us for
yourself;
and when we fell into sin
and became subject to evil and death,
you, in your mercy, sent Jesus Christ,
your only and eternal Son,
to share our human nature,
to live and die as one of us
to reconcile us to you,
the God and Father of all.

Father, we acknowledge your
greatness:
all your actions show your wisdom
and love.
You formed man in your own likeness
and set him over the whole world
to serve you, his creator,
and to rule over all creatures.
Even when he disobeyed you and
lost your friendship
you did not abandon him to the
power of death,
but helped all men to seek and find
you.
Again and again you offered a
covenant to man,
and through the prophets taught him
to hope for salvation.

7. In our re-examination, we need to be constantly reminded that "the Church is not a man-made society of like-minded people who are trying to live Christian lives and to exert some kind of Christian influence upon the world."⁹ Rather, it is a community created and called by God. Its task is evangelization and salvation: to be an instrument of God's work in the world focused in the saving and liberating mission of Jesus Christ. It must, therefore, look to him for the example and style of its mission and to the Holy Spirit for the power to accomplish it.¹⁰

8. Our churches have understood that this mission of witness to Jesus Christ is to be carried out by the proclamation of the Good News, the praise of God's Name, and service to all people. This mission is carried out in the context of the fellowship of believers, and it is the responsibility of all—not just some—of the Church's members.¹¹ The corporate character of this witness springs from the nature of the Church as the Body of Christ.

9. The witness which the Church is called upon to give must first find expression in the lives of its individual members and in the Church's regulation of its own structures and agencies. Only then can it become a light to the world¹² and find expression in the structures of society.

Almighty and everliving God, you
have fed us with the spiritual food
of the most precious Body and
Blood of your Son, our Saviour
Jesus Christ;

You have assured us, in these Holy
Mysteries, that we are living
members of the Body of your Son,
and heirs of your eternal kingdom.

And now, Father, send us out to do
the work you have given us to do,
to love and serve you as faithful
witnesses of Christ our Lord.

To him, to you, and to the Holy Spirit,
be honor and glory now and for
ever. Amen.

Lord Jesus Christ,
we worship you living among us in
the sacrament of your Body and
Blood.

May we offer to our Father in heaven a
solemn pledge of undivided love.

May we offer to our brothers and
sisters a life poured out in loving
service of that kingdom
where you live with the Father and
the Holy Spirit,
one God for ever and ever.

A. Proclamation of the Gospel

10. The first thing the Church should be doing here and now is proclaiming the Gospel. The original Gospel was not only a message preached but also a life lived, and for this reason our

proclamation today must involve not only preaching in words but also witness in deeds.¹³ The Church proclaims Jesus as Lord and Savior, both in its preaching and in its witness, and the response it asks is a following in both word and deed. The task of proclamation and likewise the necessity of response, moreover, are an obligation not only for individuals but also for the Church as a whole.

Therefore, O Lord and Holy Father,
we your people
celebrate here before your Divine
Majesty,
with these holy Gifts which we offer
to you,
the memorial of the blessed Passion
and precious Death of your dear Son,
his mighty Resurrection and glorious
Ascension,
looking for his Coming again in
power and great glory.
And with these Gifts, O Lord, we
offer to you ourselves,
for this is our duty and service.
And we pray you, in your goodness
and mercy, to accept,
through the eternal mediation of our
Savior Jesus Christ, this our sacrifice
of praise and thanksgiving.
Gracious Father, in your almighty
power,
bless and sanctify us and these holy
Mysteries
with your Life-giving Word and Holy
Spirit;
fill with your grace all who partake
of the Body and Blood of our Lord
Jesus Christ;
make us one Body that he may dwell
in us and we in him.
And grant that with boldness
we may confess your Name in
constancy of faith,
and at the last Day enter with all your
Saints
into the joy of your eternal kingdom.

Father, calling to mind the death your
Son endured for our Salvation, his
glorious resurrection and ascension
into heaven, and ready to greet
him when he comes again,
we offer you in thanksgiving this holy
and living sacrifice.

Look with favor on your Church's
offering, and see the Victim whose
death has reconciled us to yourself.
Grant that we, who are nourished by
his body and blood, may be filled
with his Holy Spirit, and become
one body,
one spirit in Christ.

May he make us an everlasting gift to
you and enable us to share in the
inheritance of your saints,
with Mary, the virgin mother of God;
with the apostles, the martyrs, and
all your saints, on whose constant
intercession we rely for help.

Lord, may this sacrifice, which has
made our peace with you, advance
the peace and salvation of all the
world.

11. Both in proclaiming the Gospel and in responding to it, the Church remembers with its Lord the words of the prophet as recorded in the Good News according to St. Luke (4:18-19): "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to

set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." These words of Scripture, we believe, as well as the words of our Eucharistic liturgies, lead us to affirm that "action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world" are fully a "constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel."¹⁴ This is to say, the Gospel as a word of reconciliation must be embodied in efforts to bring about social justice,¹⁵ and in particular the Church must address itself to the questions posed by technological change. Such change, which is inevitable in the modern world, adds urgency and brings new opportunities for Christian mission. To the negative effects of technology, the Church must proclaim a word of challenge and even, at times, confrontation, whereas the positive effects of technology should receive the Church's active promotion; in both cases, however, the Church must seek to evaluate these effects and then make its voice heard. The imperative of evangelism, therefore, has many dimensions.¹⁶

B. Worship

12. The Church which proclaims God's Word expresses its own life most fully when it gathers as a community for worship, especially the celebration of the Eucharist, which is the summit and source of its mission.¹⁷ Worship, indeed, is part of the mission of the Church, for it testifies to the dependence of all people upon God and it affirms God's action for humanity in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, in the promise of the gift of the Spirit, and in our ultimate destiny of union with the Father.

He stretched out his arms upon the
Cross,
and offered himself, in obedience to
your will,
a perfect sacrifice for all mankind.

On the night he was handed over to
suffering and death,
our Lord Jesus Christ took bread;
and when he had given thanks to you,
he broke it, and gave it to his
disciples,
and said, "Take this and eat it:
This is my Body, which is given for
you.
Do this for the remembrance of me."

After supper he took the cup of wine;
and when he had given thanks, he

Father, you are holy indeed,
and all creation rightly gives you
praise.

All life, all holiness comes from you
through your Son, Jesus Christ our
Lord,

by the working of the Holy Spirit.
From age to age you gather a people
to yourself,
so that from east to west
a perfect offering may be made
to the glory of your name.

And so, Father, we bring you these
gifts.

We ask you to make them holy by
the power of your Spirit,
that they may become the body and
blood

gave it to them,
and said, "Drink this, all of you:
This is my Blood of the new Covenant,
which is shed for you and for many
for the forgiveness of sins.

Whenever you drink it, do this for the
remembrance of me."

Therefore, Father, we recall the
mystery of faith:

of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,
at whose command we celebrate this
eucharist.

On the night he was betrayed,
he took bread and gave you thanks
and praise.

He broke the bread, gave it to his
disciples, and said:

Take this, all of you, and eat it;
This is my body which will be given
up for you.

When supper was ended, he took the
cup.

Again he gave you thanks and praise,
gave the cup to his disciples, and said:
Take this, all of you, and drink from it;
This is the cup of my blood,
The blood of the new and everlasting
covenant.

It will be shed for you and for all men
So that sins may be forgiven.

Do this in memory of me.
Let us proclaim the mystery of faith:

Christ has died,
Christ is risen,
Christ will come again.

13. To many contemporary Christians; moreover, the witness of worship is only fully complete when it results in a commitment to service.

C. Service

14. The imperative of viewing the Church's purpose in the context of "Service" (*diakonia*) has deep roots both in Holy Scripture and in the documents of our respective traditions.¹⁸ While this call to serve others and to place our resources at the service of others is recognized and widely discussed in each of our churches, we must confess that it does not appear that either of us has yet found the means to carry out this aspect of mission as successfully as we might. This presents a particular problem as well as a special opportunity to those Church members who find themselves among the affluent, for they possess, under God, particular means whereby the Church may become more fully a servant people, a sign of hope on mankind's way.¹⁹ One of the major challenges facing our churches is the cultivation of an awareness of "unjust systems and structures" that oppress human freedom, maintain situations of gross inequality, and facilitate

individual selfishness.²⁰ Forms of Christian service which do not take these structures into account are not adequate for the complexities of our day.

Lord God of our Fathers,
God of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob,
God and Father of our Lord Jesus
Christ:
open our eyes to see your hand at
work in the world about us.
Deliver us from the presumption of
coming to this Table
for solace only, and not for strength;
for pardon only, and not for renewal.
Let the grace of this Holy Communion
make us one body, one spirit in Christ,
that we may worthily serve the world
in his name.
Risen Lord, be known to us in the
breaking of the Bread.

Father, you so loved the world
that in the fullness of time you sent
your only Son to be our Savior.
He was conceived through the power
of the Holy Spirit, and born of the
Virgin Mary,
a man like us in all things but sin.
To the poor he proclaimed the good
news of salvation,
to prisoners, freedom,
and to those in sorrow, joy.
In fulfillment of your will
he gave himself up to death;
but by rising from the dead,
he destroyed death and restored life.

15. Our contemporary re-examination of mission has emphasized the call of the Church to serve as an agent and forerunner, in this world, of God's Kingdom of justice and peace. "Mindful of the Lord's saying, 'By this will all men know you are my disciples, if you have love for one another' (John 13:35) Christians cannot yearn for anything more ardently than to serve the men of the modern world ever more generously and effectively. Therefore, holding faithfully to the Gospel and benefitting from its resources, and united with every man who loves and practices justice, Christians have shouldered a gigantic task demanding fulfillment in this world. Concerning this task they must give a reckoning to Him who will judge every man on the last day. Not everyone who cries, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but those who do the Father's will and take a strong grip on the work at hand. Now, the Father wills that in all men we recognize Christ our brother and love Him effectively in word and in deed."²¹

16. Human liberation, we agree, is that aspect of the Church's mission of service which is most challenging for our time. We agree, also, with the context in which Pope Paul VI has recently placed it: [Human liberation] "forms part of that love which Christians owe to their brethren. But the totality of salvation is not to be confused with one or other aspect of liberation, and the Good News must preserve all of its own originality: that of a God who saves us from sin and death and brings us to divine life."²²

IV. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH?

Conclusion

17. The Church, the Body of Christ in the world, is led by the Spirit into all nations to fulfill the purpose of the Father. Insofar as it faithfully preaches the Gospel of salvation, celebrates the sacraments, and manifests the love of God in service, the Church becomes more perfectly one with the risen Christ. Impelled by its Lord, it strives to carry out the mission it has received from him: to prepare already the structures of the Kingdom, to share with all persons the hope for union with God.

18. In humility and repentance, the Church shares the guilt of mankind in its disunity. Presenting men and women with hope in the fulfillment of their destiny beyond this life, it also assumes, under the cross of its Lord, the burdens and the struggles of the oppressed, the poor, and the suffering. Striving for justice and peace, the Church seeks to better the conditions of this world. To the divided, it offers oneness; to the oppressed, liberation; to the sick, healing; to the dying, life; to all persons, eternal salvation.

But chiefly are we bound to praise you for the glorious Resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, for he is the Paschal Lamb who by his death has overcome death, and by his rising to life again has opened to us the way of everlasting life.

Accept these prayers and praises, Father, through Jesus Christ, our great High Priest, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit, your Church gives honor, glory, and worship, from generation to generation.
Amen.

Father, in your mercy grant to us, your children,
to enter into our heavenly inheritance in the company of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God,
and your apostles and saints.

Then, in your kingdom, freed from the corruption of sin and death, we shall sing your glory with every creature through Christ our Lord, through whom you give us everything that is good.

Through him,
with him,
in him,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all glory and honor is yours,
almighty Father,
for ever and ever.
Amen.

19. We, as Roman Catholics and Episcopalians charged by our churches to explore the possibility that there is a fundamental unity between us, find that we are in substantial agreement about the purpose or mission of the Church as we have set it forth above. We have uncovered no essential points on which we differ. And we know, also, that insofar as the Church appears

visibly divided, its purpose is obscured, its mission impeded, and its witness weakened. We yearn, therefore, for a restoration of the unity that will serve our common purpose.²³ Listening to the signs of the times, we seek guidance from the Spirit, so that through our common witness all may acknowledge that Jesus is the Lord, to the glory of God the Father, and that, in this faith, all may have life and have it abundantly. We conclude with a prayer common to both our traditions:²⁴

O God of unchangeable power and eternal light: Look favorably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery. By the tranquil operation of your providence, carry out the work of man's salvation. Let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being renewed to the perfection of him through whom all things were made, your Son our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

NOTES

¹ Constitution of the Episcopal Church, preamble; Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 5 and 8, ed. Walter M. Abbott, S.J., pp. 17-18, 22-23.

² Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 8; Decree on Ecumenism: *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 3 and 13; ed. Abbott, pp. 23, 345-46, 356.

³ At these meetings: ARC XIII, Cincinnati, Ohio, March 19-22, 1973; ARC XIV, Vicksburg, Miss., January 6-10, 1974; and ARC XV, Cincinnati, November 10-13, 1974. The following papers, among others, were considered: Charles H. Helmsing, "Some Reflections on the Mission of the Church"; George H. Tavad, "The Church as Eucharistic Communion"; and J. Robert Wright, "The Purpose or Mission of the Church as seen by the Episcopal Church." The documentation for this present statement has been largely drawn from these papers, which were themselves documented from authoritative statements and liturgical texts of both our churches.

⁴ Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission, Windsor Statement on Eucharistic Doctrine, paras. 2-4.

⁵ Episcopal texts are taken from *Services for Trial Use* (1971) and *Authorized Services* (1973). Roman Catholic texts are taken from *The Roman Missal: The Sacramentary* (Liturgical Press 1974). The aim of ARC in this statement has been to describe the Church's purpose or mission as it is seen in the present faith of our two churches, and in our selection of texts we have not intended to urge the superiority of any one particular form of liturgical expression over another. It is acknowledged that liturgical revision is still in process in both our churches.

⁶ ARCIC, Canterbury Statement on Ministry and Ordination, paras. 3-5, 12, 17.

⁷ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 17; cf. Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests: *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 1; ed. Abbott, pp. 36-37, 532-33.

⁸ Roman Catholic Church, Second General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *Justice in the World* (1971), introduction; cf. Lambeth Conference 1948, pp. 26-28.

⁹ Lambeth Conference 1948, p. 26.

¹⁰ Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: *Gaudium et Spes*, 3 and 21; ed. Abbott, pp. 201, 219. *The Book of Common*

Prayer (Episcopal Church), p. 38 (Prayer for Missions). Cf. General Convention of the Episcopal Church, 1973, definition of evangelism: "The presentation of Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, in such ways that persons may be led to believe in him as Savior and follow him as Lord, within the fellowship of his Church."

¹¹ Episcopal Church, canon I.3, article 1: membership of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society comprises "all persons who are members of the Church." Cf. Vatican II, Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity: *Ad gentes*, 1, 11, 15, 20, 21, 35, ed. Abbott, pp. 585, 597, 602, 609-11, 623.

¹² Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 1; ed. Abbott, pp. 14-15.

¹³ *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 83; Lambeth Conference 1968, p. 24; Anglican Congress 1954, p. 199; Episcopal Church, House of Bishops, Pastoral Letters, November 12, 1953, and November 12-17, 1960; cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 25; ed. Abbott, p. 47.

¹⁴ *Justice in the World*, introduction; cf. Episcopal Church, Position Statement of the Executive Council on Empowerment, February 22, 1972.

¹⁵ Cf. *Justice in the World*, part III.

¹⁶ *Book of Common Prayer*, pp. 47-48 (Bidding Prayer), 74-75 (Prayer for Whole State); Lambeth Conference 1968, p. 77; Anglican Congress 1954, p. 44. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 8; ed. Abbott, pp. 22-24.

¹⁷ Vatican II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy: *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 2 and 10; ed. Abbott, pp. 137, 142; Anglican Congress 1954, pp. 197-98. Cf. *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 291 (Second Office of Instruction, Bounden Duty).

¹⁸ *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (1962), vol. 3, pp. 386 ff. ("Ministry," *diakonia*, by M. H. Shepherd, Jr.); Robert C. Dentan, *The Holy Scriptures* ("The Church's Teaching Series," Protestant Episcopal Church, 1949), pp. 167-69; Augustin Cardinal Bea, *We Who Serve* (1969), esp. pp. 171-184; Lambeth Conference 1968, p. 24; Anglican Congress 1963, p. 264; Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 18; *Gaudium et Spes*, 3 and 45; ed. Abbott, pp. 37, 201, 247.

¹⁹ Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 8, 9, and 10; ed. Abbott, pp. 205-9; Lambeth Conference 1968, p. 74. *Book of Common Prayer*, pp. 18, 32 (Prayer for All Conditions), p. 44 (Prayer for Social Justice).

²⁰ Cf. *Justice in the World*, introduction; *Book of Common Prayer*, pp. 298-9, 579-80 (Duty Towards Neighbor).

²¹ Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 93; ed. Abbott, p. 307; cf. Episcopal Church, Actions of General Convention 1967, pp. 303-7; Summary of General Convention Actions 1970, pp. 3-6; Position Statement of the Executive Council on Empowerment, February 22, 1972.

²² *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, November 7, 1974, p. 9.

²³ Cf. John 17.

²⁴ In the Episcopal Church: *Services for Trial Use*, in Eucharistic Intercessions form VI, and in the Solemn Collects for Good Friday. In the Roman Catholic Church: prayer following Reading VII in the Easter Vigil.