

The Mission of the Church

Report of the National Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church
and the Uniting Church in Australia (2002-2008)

With final revisions as of 3 November 2008

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Preface

In early 2002 members of the National Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Uniting Church in Australia reconvened for the second phase of the life of the dialogue based in Brisbane. Between 1993 – when the dialogue moved from Melbourne where it had been based for the previous 15 years - and 1999, the dialogue had considered the question of inter-church marriages and had presented a report to the two churches under the title *InterChurch Marriages: Their Ecumenical Challenge and Significance for Our Churches*.¹ The co-Chairs and co-Secretaries of the dialogue had met earlier to consider the matter of a theme or topic for this next phase and the full dialogue group then gathered and endorsed the suggested theme of *Mission*. Since that time the dialogue has met at least three times a year – with much drafting work being done between meetings by individuals and groups, the latter both intra- and inter-denominational – and this report is the fruit of these labours. We present it to our churches in the hope that it will further cement the very close relationship between them and contribute to the wider church's reflections on this vital question of the church's life and witness.

Archbishop John Bathersby and Revd Dr David Rankin (Co-Chairs)

¹ *Interchurch Marriages: Their Ecumenical Challenge and Significance for Our Churches. Report of the National Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Uniting Church in*

Chapter 1

Finding Common Ground for Dialogue

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The Decree on Ecumenism adopted by the Second Vatican Council on November 21 1964 encouraged the formation of bilateral dialogues between the Roman Catholic and other Christian churches. In Australia the Roman Catholic Church entered into national dialogues with both the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches. With the inauguration of the Uniting Church in Australia on 22 June 1977, the two dialogues were merged.

From 1978 to 1993 the national Roman Catholic/Uniting Church Dialogue was based in Melbourne. During those years three important reports were produced: "A Common Understanding of Baptism" (1979), "Make Straight His Way: Stages on the Road to Unity" (1985), and "Towards Agreement on Marriage" (1989).²

In 1993 the dialogue moved to Brisbane and in 1999 published the report, *Interchurch Marriages: Their Ecumenical Challenge and Significance for Our Churches*, in which some areas for further dialogue were identified. These were:

- The Indissolubility of Marriage
- Sacrament and Sacramentality
- Baptism
- Intercommunion
- Mutual Recognition of Ministers
- The Fullness of the Church of Jesus Christ
- Pastoral Care of Interchurch Families

The members of the dialogue did not meet again until March 2002. By then the membership of the dialogue had changed, and at that meeting it was suggested that the topic of 'mission' should be examined. As the dialogue progressed it became obvious that three of the issues noted in 1999 are always present:

- Intercommunion
- Mutual Recognition of Ministers
- The Fullness of the Church of Jesus Christ

However, for the purposes of this dialogue these issues highlight a difficulty that was noted in 1999:

Our incapacity to reach agreement is in part rooted in the seriousness of the issues, a seriousness which itself is part and parcel of the international nature of and lines of responsibility within the Roman Catholic Church, international to a degree not matched by the Uniting Church in Australia, which has a greater measure of national autonomy. ³

Nevertheless, during the course of this dialogue, a report from the International Methodist-Catholic Dialogue Commission, *The Grace Given You in Christ*,⁴ has advanced ideas that encourage members of our present dialogue to keep all

²The texts can be found in Raymond K. Williamson, ed., *Stages on the Way: Documents from the Bilateral Conversations between Churches in Australia* (Melbourne: Joint Board of Christian

Education, 1994), 244-245, 246-251, 252-264.

³ Ibid., 78.

⁴ Report of the International Commission for Dialogue Between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council, *The Grace Given You In Christ: Catholics and Methodists Reflect Further on the Church* (Lake Junaluska, North Carolina: The World Methodist Council, 2006). The Uniting Church in Australia is a member of the World Methodist Council.

issues on the table. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit there is no need for a 'too hard basket'. Although this present report does not deal directly with the issues identified in our earlier report, it enters into an area of great contemporary significance to both our churches. As the members of the dialogue began examining the topic of mission, it became obvious that the use of the word 'mission' had undergone considerable change during the twentieth century.⁵ The theological ferment that grew out of the ecumenical movement of the twentieth century encouraged the churches not only to re-examine the Scriptures but to explore what the various Christian traditions meant by words such as 'mission', 'evangelism', 'evangelisation' and 'salvation'. The members of this dialogue joined in this exploration and found that, although the two churches use differing vocabularies, there was, as should be expected, a common basic understanding – the church participates in the mission of God.

Mission (sending, being sent) is central to who God is and what God does. The Father sends the Son and the Holy Spirit. Jesus sent out the company of his disciples (the church) to continue his mission. Being sent, being on mission, is both the church's response to God and the expression of the church's life in God. When the topic of 'mission' was first considered in this dialogue it was as a response to the imperative of proclaiming the Gospel in the midst of the secularised society in which we live. In his Apostolic Exhortation after the Synod of Oceania, Pope John Paul II wrote to the Catholic Church in Australia and other parts of Oceania: "The central concern of the Synod Assembly was to find appropriate ways of presenting to the peoples of Oceania today 'Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour'."⁶ In its *Basis of Union*, the Uniting Church in Australia "prays that it may be ready when occasion demands to confess the Lord in fresh words and deeds".⁷ The members of the dialogue agree that such an occasion makes its demands upon the churches now. However, this has been an ecumenical dialogue in which the principal concern has been to explore the theological aspects of mission and its contemporary demands. What is offered is not a program for mission, but an examination of the theological nature and scope of mission.

As the dialogue progressed, six ways through which the church participates in God's mission were identified: worship (*leitourgia/doxologia*), communion (*koinonia*), proclamation (*kerygma*), service (*diakonia*), witness (*martyria*) and teaching (*didache*). These aspects of the church's response to God's mission are not discrete but interdependent. Each supports and informs the others, and together they allow for human participation in the divine purpose. So that this report can fairly record the dialogue that has occurred, the chapters which follow present each church's understanding of mission, examine points of convergence and divergence, and suggest how this will help our churches to find appropriate ways of presenting 'Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour'.

⁵ For example, see David J. Bosch, *Believing in the Future: Toward a Missiology of Western Culture* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1995), esp. chapter 4. See also his *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991).

⁶ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Oceania: Walking His Way, Telling His Truth, Living His Life* (Strathfield, N.S.W. : St Paul's Publications, 2001), para 4. Hereafter *EO*.

⁷ *The Basis of Union as Approved by the Congregational Union of Australia (1973) the Methodist Church of Australasia (1974) and the Presbyterian Church of Australia (1974) for the Formation of the Uniting Church in Australia (1992 Edition)*, (Collingwood, Vic.: Uniting Church Press, 1992), Paragraph 11.

Chapter 2

Roman Catholic Church Perspectives on Mission

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We proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us – that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ (1 Jn 1: 2-3)

The Second Vatican Council cites these words of scripture at the beginning of its *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*.¹ As words that point us toward the intention of God's mission to draw all into communion through Christ in the Holy Spirit, they provide an outline of the major dimensions of a Roman Catholic perspective on the church's mission. Fellowship, or better, communion in God's life both provides the initiative for, and the consequence of the church's proclamation of the good news that Jesus Christ is the salvation of God.² Eternal communion with God is revealed through the Father's sending of the Son and the Spirit. Faithfully responding through the power of the Spirit, the church's purpose is to be that human community throughout history by means of which God brings about unity among people and unity between humanity and the holy Trinity through its witness to and proclamation of the Gospel. The opening words of Vatican II's *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity* state:

Having been divinely sent to the nations that she might be "the universal sacrament of salvation," the Church, in obedience to the command of her founder (Mk. 16.15) and because it is demanded by her own essential universality, strives to preach the Gospel to all people. The apostles, on whom the Church was founded, following the footsteps of Christ "preached the word of truth and begot churches." It is the duty of their successors to carry on this work so that "the word of God may run and be glorified" (2 Th. 3.1), and the kingdom of God proclaimed and renewed throughout the whole world.³

In continuity with this teaching and in the light of the work of the 1974 Synod of Bishops, Pope Paul VI, in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, offers a "meditation" on the imperative for the church to preach the Gospel. The imperative to evangelise, to preach the Gospel to all people, constitutes, he says, "the essential mission of the church."⁴ The church exists "in order to evangelize, that is to say, in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God, and to perpetuate Christ's sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of His death and glorious resurrection."⁵

Paul VI acknowledges that the preaching of the Gospel is a complex process made up of various interrelated elements. Among those elements, he notes “the renewal of humanity, witness, explicit proclamation, inner adherence, entry into community, acceptance of signs, apostolic initiative.”⁶

¹ *Dei Verbum*, 1. Hereafter, *DV*.

² Pheme Perkins. “The Johannine Epistles,” in Raymond Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Roland E. Murphy. Eds. *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall. 1990), 989.

³ *Ad Gentes*, 1. Hereafter, *AG*.

⁴ *EN*, 14.

⁵ *EN*, 14.

⁶ *EN*, 24.

Our dialogue with the Uniting Church has brought to the fore the complexity of trying to understand together the various elements that constitute the nature of the church’s mission. However, a commonality emerged regarding the categories through which we understand our own distinctive approaches to mission, and through which we have come to understand each other’s position. Together we have come to approach the nature of the church’s mission under the following headings: Liturgy, Communion, Service, Proclamation, Witness, and Teaching. This chapter examines these various elements from a Roman Catholic perspective, after an introductory section outlining a Roman Catholic understanding of the foundation of the church’s mission in the divine mission as revealed in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

1. The Mission of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit

The Second Vatican Council’s *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* understands the “sending” of the Son and the Spirit as the origin and purpose of the church and its commission to be a sign and instrument of unity.⁷ However, the document precedes its reference to these “sendings” with reference to the one who sends: the eternal Father.⁸ Accordingly, “the universal Church is seen to be a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”⁹ and has its own identity of “being sent” in the missions of the Son and the Spirit. This conciliar teaching has been further explained in the following way:

God has given the Church its missionary character. The people of God are a missionary people because the Father sent his Apostle, Jesus Christ whose words are life (John 10:10) and who brings life. Through the mission of the Son an essential aspect of the intimate mystery of God is revealed to human beings. After the glorification of Jesus, the Father sent the Apostle, the Holy Spirit, so that the love of God might be a power in human hearts. The Spirit bears witness to Jesus and makes the members of the Churches the witnesses of Jesus.¹⁰

The foundation of the church’s mission in the life of the Trinity is the basis for the church’s understanding of its missionary activity; indeed, the church is missionary “by nature.”

The Church on earth is by its very nature missionary since, according to the plan of the Father, it has its origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit.¹¹

All the baptised have a part to play in the church’s mission.

Each disciple of Christ has the obligation of spreading the faith to the best of his (sic) ability. ... Thus the church prays and likewise labours so that into the People of God, the Body of the Lord and the Temple of the Holy Spirit, may pass the fullness of the

whole world, and that in Christ, the head of all things, all honor and glory may be rendered to the Creator, the Father of the universe.¹²

⁷ *Lumen Gentium*, 3 & 4. Hereafter, *LG*.

⁸ *LG*, 2, 3, and 4.

⁹ *LG*, 4.

¹⁰ Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, "Memorandum from a Consultation on Mission," *International Review of Mission* 71 (1982), 460.

¹¹ *AG*, 2.

¹² *LG*, 17.

2. Mission and Worship: *Doxologia/Leitourgia*

The Roman Catholic Church understands the church to be in the nature of a sacrament, a sign and instrument of communion with God and unity among all people.¹³ As such it reflects the light of Christ and carries out its "sole" purpose, to see "that the kingdom of God may come and the salvation of the human race is accomplished."¹⁴ The Roman Catholic Church realises that it is not the Reign of God. Rather, it is a people brought into "unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit"¹⁵ that receives a mission of "proclaiming and establishing among all peoples the Reign of Christ and of God",¹⁶ so that it understands itself as "the seed and the beginning of that kingdom."¹⁷

The mission of the Church is carried out by means of that activity through which, in obedience to Christ's command and moved by the grace and love of the Holy Spirit, the Church makes itself fully present to all peoples in order to lead them to the faith, freedom and peace of Christ by the example of its life and teaching, by the sacraments and other means of grace. Its aim is to open for all people a free sure path to full participation in the mystery of Christ.¹⁸

Pre-eminent among the ways in which the Roman Catholic Church makes itself fully present to the world in is its liturgical life: "the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the church is directed; it is also the fount from which all her power flows."¹⁹ Through its liturgical life, the church is drawn into the God-given gift of the fullness of divine worship that is Jesus Christ, the one mediator between God and humanity, the means of our salvation.²⁰

The liturgy daily builds up those who are in the Church, making them a holy temple of the Lord, a dwelling-place for God in the Spirit, to the mature measure of the fullness of Christ. At the same time it marvellously increases their power to preach Christ and thus show forth the Church, a sign lifted up among the nations, to those who are outside, a sign under which the scattered children of God may be gathered together until there is one fold and one shepherd.²¹

The whole liturgical life of the Roman Catholic Church revolves around the church's seven sacraments, the heart of which is the eucharist. Every liturgical celebration is the action of Christ and his Body, the church. In the celebration of the eucharist the Roman Catholic Church understands that Christ is present in the person of his minister, in his Word, in those gathered and in the eucharistic elements.²² From the whole of the liturgical life of the church and especially the eucharist,

Grace is poured forth upon us as from a fountain, and the sanctification of people in

Christ and the glorification of God to which all other activities of the Church are directed, as toward their end, are achieved with maximum effectiveness.²³

This being said, the Roman Catholic Church also realises that for this full effectiveness to take place those who are the church need to be enabled to participate in the liturgical life of the church, aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the church's rituals so as to be enriched by them: for "it is

¹³ LG, 1.

¹⁴ *Gaudium et Spes*, 45. Hereafter, GS.

¹⁵ LG, 5.

¹⁶ LG, 5.

¹⁷ LG, 5.

¹⁸ AG, 5

¹⁹ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10. Hereafter, SC.

²⁰ SC, 5.

²¹ SC, 2.

²² SC, 7.

²³ SC, 10.

through the liturgy, especially, that the faithful are enabled to express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church."²⁴ In his Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Oceania*, in response to the Special Synod of Bishops for Oceania (1998), Pope John Paul II wrote to the Catholic Church in Australia and other parts of Oceania. He acknowledged the synod's recognition of a "greater participation of the People of God in the liturgy as one of the fruits of the Second Vatican Council, which has led in turn to a greater sense of mission."²⁵ Also, that Catholics in Oceania evidenced a greater understanding that "prayerful celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice enables them to follow the path of personal holiness and to play their part in the Church's mission."²⁶ However, Pope John Paul II offers a challenge to the Roman Catholic Church with regard to the centrality of the eucharist in the church's achieving of its purpose. The Sunday eucharist, where Christians gather round the table of the Word and bread of life,

is the privileged place where communion is ceaselessly proclaimed and nurtured.

Precisely through sharing in the Eucharist, *the Lord's Day* also becomes *the Day of the Church*, when she can effectively exercise her role as the sacrament of unity.²⁷

3. Mission and Communion: *Koinonia*

The 1985 meeting of the Synod of Bishops marked the twentieth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council. At the Synod, the gathered bishops deliberated on the nature of the church and came to the conclusion that "communion" is the driving principle for the church.

The ecclesiology of Communion is the central and fundamental idea of the Council's documents. Fundamentally it is a matter of communion with God through Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit. This communion is to be had in the Word of God and in the sacraments. Baptism is the door and the foundation of communion in the Church; the Eucharist is the source and the culmination of the whole Christian life (cf LG 11). The communion of the Eucharistic Body of Christ signifies and produces, that is, builds up, the intimate communion of all the faithful in the Body of Christ which is the Church (1 Cor. 10:16).²⁸

The theology of Communion emerges as the central theme in Catholic ecclesiological reflection after the council. This is particularly the case in the teaching of Pope John Paul II. For example, in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, to mark the beginning of the new millennium, he wrote:

To make the Church the home and school of communion; that is the great challenge facing us in the millennium which is now beginning, if we wish to be faithful to God's plan and respond to the world's deepest yearnings... A spirituality of communion indicates above all the heart's contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us, and whose light we must also be able to see shining on the face of the brothers and sisters around us.²⁹

What is the relationship between the missionary nature of the church and the nature of the church as a communion? Pope John Paul II offers a way of understanding this relationship in his Pastoral Exhortation, *On the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World (Christifideles Laici)*.

Communion begets communion: essentially it is likened to a mission on behalf of communion ... Communion and mission are profoundly connected with each other; they interpenetrate and mutually imply each other, to the point that the communion represents both the source and the fruit of mission: communion gives rise to the mission and mission is accomplished in communion.³⁰

²⁴ SC, 2.

²⁵ *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 39. Hereafter *EO*.

²⁶ *EO*, 40.

²⁷ *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 36. Hereafter *NMI*.

²⁸ *Final Report*. Section C.1.

²⁹ *NMI*, 43.

This is the key to understanding the Catholic approach to the relationship between *koinonia* and mission. The church is a communion whose mission is to build communion, communion among people, communion of all people with God, communion of all people with the larger creation. Because of this, work to restore unity among Christian churches, efforts to build relations with other world religions, work for justice and peace, and work to protect the environment are integral to the mission of the church, as expressions of the fundamental mission of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all the nations. All of these in their own ways build communion among people, of people with God and of people with the rest of creation. This communion is centred on and initiated by the Triune God. It is a communion in Christ. All are bound together in him by the Holy Spirit and in Christ all are given a share in his relationship with the Father. The mission of the church is to share in the Spirit's work of extending that communion to the ends of the earth. Everything which brings people closer together, even if they do not know Christ, can be part of this mission. Dialogue with members of other world religions for the sake of humanity and work for the cause of peace and justice in the world build human community and so are integral to the mission of the church of serving the divine communion. The communion of the church and extending communion are not unrelated therefore to the biblical notion of the Reign of God, and the expansion of God's Reign. The Reign of God could be called communion with God.

4. Mission and Service: *Diakonia*

The Catholic Church understands itself as a community of persons alongside and with all other peoples. The opening words of the Second Vatican Council's *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Contemporary World* speak of the solidarity that exists between the church and all people.

The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor and afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well.³¹

The church is a communion of people in Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit, that seeks the fullness of the Reign of God, as it bears the message of salvation in, with and for the world. The church's mission is of a religious nature,³² which in itself includes all aspects of human life. "In fact, the Church is able, indeed it is obliged, if times and circumstances require it, to initiate action for the benefit of all people, especially of those in need, like works of mercy and similar undertakings."³³ The Second Vatican Council goes on to teach:

Whatever truth, goodness, and justice is to be found in past or present human institutions is held in high esteem by the Council. In addition, the Council declares that the Church is anxious to help and foster these institutions insofar as it depends on it and is compatible with its mission. The Church desires nothing more ardently than to develop itself untrammelled in the service of all people under any regime which recognises the basic rights of the person and the family and the needs of the common good.³⁴

³⁰ CL, 32.

³¹ GS, 1.

³² GS, 42.

³³ GS, 42.

³⁴ GS, 42.

At the heart of the Roman Church's mission of service of all people is its belief that human persons, in deep relationship with one another as social beings (Gen 1:27), are created in the image of God to know and love their creator.³⁵ This is revealed most fully through the mystery of the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15) who

has restored that likeness to God which had been disfigured ever since the first sin. Human nature, by the very fact that it was assumed, not absorbed, in him, has been raised in us also to a dignity beyond compare. For, by his incarnation, he, the Son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each person.³⁶

The Second Vatican Council teaches that as all people are created in the image of God, they have the same origin and nature. Through Christ's redemption they enjoy the same divine calling and destiny; there is here a basic equality between all, which needs to be given greater recognition.³⁷ In this respect, all "forms of social or cultural discrimination in basic personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, colour, social conditions, language or religion"³⁸ need to be eradicated as incompatible with God's design.

Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical *On Christian Love (Deus Caritas Est)* offers a sustained reflection on the practice of love demanded of the church. The responsibility of the whole church is to practise love. "The entire activity of the Church is an expression of a love that seeks the integral good of humanity. ... Love is therefore the service that the Church carries out in order to attend constantly to humanity's sufferings and needs, including material needs."³⁹

The pope explains this in the context of the church's nature:

The Church's deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility of proclaiming the word of God (kerygma-martyria), celebrating the sacraments (leitourgia), and exercising the ministry of charity (diakonia). These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable. For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being.⁴⁰

5. Mission and Proclamation: *Kerygma*

The proclamation of “the full and living Gospel”⁴¹ is, for Roman Catholics, at the heart of the mission of the church. This proclamation includes telling the story of salvation achieved through Christ in the power of the Spirit, demonstrating its power through lives of faith, as well as offering to others the possibility of salvation through present encounter with Christ in the Spirit. This proclamation is central to the worship of Catholics; it is central to the church’s outreach of evangelisation to the whole world. “The church exists in order to evangelise.”⁴²

The close relationship between the church as communion and the mission of the church, so clearly enunciated in Pope John Paul II’s *Christifideles Laici*, highlights the special place of the proclamation of the Gospel in the life of the church. This proclamation incites its hearers to personal faith in Jesus Christ and adherence to the Christian community. As Pope John Paul II stated:

³⁵ GS, 12.

³⁶ GS, 22.

³⁷ GS, 29.

³⁸ GS, 29.

³⁹ DCE, 19

⁴⁰ DCE, 25.

⁴¹ DV, 7

⁴² EN, 14.

It is always the one and the same Spirit who calls together and unifies the Church and sends her to preach the Gospel “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). On her part, the Church knows that the communion received by her as a gift is destined for all people. Thus the Church feels she owes to each individual and to humanity as a whole the gift received from the Holy Spirit that pours the charity of Jesus Christ into the hearts of believers, as a mystical force for internal cohesion and external growth.

The mission of the Church flows from her own nature. Christ has willed it to be so: that of “sign and instrument... of unity of the entire human race”. Such a mission has the purpose of making everyone know and live the “new” communion that the Son of God made man introduced into the history of the world. In this regard, then, the testimony of John the Evangelist defined in an undeniable way the blessed end towards which the entire mission of the Church is directed: “That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (I Jn 1:3).⁴³

In *Ecclesia in Oceania*, Pope John Paul II writes: “The central concern of the Synod Assembly was to find appropriate ways of presenting to the peoples of Oceania today ‘Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.’ But what is this new way to present him, so that many more will meet him and believe in him?”⁴⁴ The Catholic Church in Oceania, along with the church around the world, is struggling with how to undertake this new form of evangelisation or proclamation of the Gospel.

In that same Apostolic Exhortation, Pope John Paul II focused on the relationship between communion and mission and in particular upon the mission of evangelisation.

In evangelisation, the Church expresses her own inner communion and acts as a single body, striving to bring all humanity to unity in God through Christ. All baptised have the responsibility of proclaiming the Gospel in word and action to the world in which they live. The Gospel must be heard in Oceania by all people, believers and nonbelievers, natives and immigrants, rich and poor, young and old. Indeed all these

people have a right to hear the Gospel, which means that Christians have a solemn duty to share it with them. A new evangelisation is needed today so that everyone may hear, understand and believe in God's mercy destined for all people in Jesus Christ."⁴⁵

While the mission of the church takes many forms, all are related to communion, where the proclamation of the Gospel has a central place. Communion exists in Jesus Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit and opens up for all people the possibility of their entering into a life-transforming relationship with God in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, a relationship that will save and liberate, will bring reconciliation, redemption and sanctification. This is only possible if all Christians share in the mission of witnessing to Jesus Christ by their lives and in their words.

How this evangelisation should and could take place in contemporary Australia is a question as yet unanswered by the various Christian communities. Pope John Paul II has called Catholics to a new evangelisation, an evangelisation which responds to the new situation of our secularised 'post-modern' world.

6. Mission and Witness: *Martyria*

Christians are called to witness to Christ at all times and places, for example, when they are engaged in dialogue with other world religions and other people in the pursuit of justice and peace. They never cease to be ambassadors to Christ by their words and actions.

⁴³ *CL*, 32.

⁴⁴ *EO*, 4.

⁴⁵ *EO*, 18.

Paul VI reflects on what he names a "wordless witness" in his meditation on the preaching of the Gospel, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. He mirrors the approach of St Francis and his companions, who saw their mission as preaching the Gospel, but only "using words if necessary." St Francis' focus is on a Gospel life lived in action that reflects the love of God in Christ. Paul VI puts it this way:

Take a Christian or a handful of Christians who, in the midst of their own community, show their capacity for understanding and acceptance, their sharing of life and destiny with other people, their solidarity with the efforts of all for whatever is noble and good. Let us suppose that, in addition they radiate in an altogether simple and unaffected way their faith in values that go beyond the current values, and their hope in something that is not seen and that one would not dare to imagine. ... Such a witness is already a silent proclamation of the Good News and a very powerful and effective one. ... All Christians are called to this witness.⁴⁶

Witness to the Gospel, as the ordinary way of life for Christians, reflects the teaching of the Catholic Church in its understanding of the universal call to a holy way of life. The Second Vatican Council grounds this call to holiness in the one holiness of God, Father, Son and Spirit.⁴⁷ The church is holy only in the gift of God's holiness, but all in the church are called to a holy way of life in Christ, who is the "author and maker" of holiness.⁴⁸ Holiness is the gift of the Spirit who moves Jesus' disciples "interiorly to love God with their whole

heart, with their whole soul, with their whole understanding, with their whole strength, and to love one another as Christ loved them.”⁴⁹ This divine call to holiness is God’s gift grounded in the grace of baptism:

The followers of Christ, called by God not in virtue of their works but by his design and grace, and justified in the Lord Jesus, have been made children of God in the baptism of faith and partakers of the divine nature, and so are truly sanctified. They must therefore hold on to and perfect in their lives that sanctification which they have received from God.⁵⁰

For the Catholic Church, this gift of holiness is expressed in the church’s teaching on the communion of saints, and the singling out of some witnesses as sure signs of holiness to inspire others in their imitation of Christ. These are called saints, but all are called to be saints.

7. Mission and Teaching: *Didache*

Jesus Christ is both the model and the content for the teaching dimension of the Roman Catholic Church’s understanding of mission.

The Word of God, through whom all things were made, was made flesh, so that as a perfect man he could save all women and men and sum up all things in himself. The Lord is the goal of human history, the focal point of the desires of history and civilisation, the centre of humanity, the joy of all hearts, and the fulfilment of all aspirations. It is he whom the Father raised from the dead, exalted and placed at his right hand, constituting him judge of the living and the dead. Animated and drawn together in his Spirit we press onwards on our journey towards the consummation of history which fully corresponds to the plan of his love: “to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph. 1:10).⁵¹

⁴⁶ *EN*, 21.

⁴⁷ *LG*, 39.

⁴⁸ *LG*, 40.

⁴⁹ *LG*, 40.

⁵⁰ *LG*, 40.

The Holy Spirit, as the divine animator, is the living memory of the church.⁵² This same Spirit establishes the church’s continuity with its apostolic beginnings founded by Jesus, so that the Gospel is proclaimed everywhere for all time.

By preaching everywhere the Gospel (cf. Mk. 16:20), welcomed and received under the influence of the Holy Spirit by those who hear it, the apostles gathered together the universal Church, which the Lord founded upon the apostles and built upon blessed Peter their leader, the chief corner-stone being Christ Jesus himself (cf. Apoc. 21:14; Mt. 16:18; Eph. 2:20).⁵³

The whole church retains this mark of apostolicity, as the “Christian vocation is, of its nature, a vocation to the apostolate,” which is constitutive of every action of the church.⁵⁴ However, within the church there is a diversity of ministry while there is unity in mission.⁵⁵ The particular ministry that engages the teaching function of the whole church belongs in a special way to the “magisterium”, i.e., the teaching office of bishops with the pope at their head.

The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but is rather its servant. It teaches only what has been handed on to it. At the divine command and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it listens to this devoutly, guards it reverently and expounds it faithfully.

All that it proposes for belief as being divinely revealed it draws from this sole deposit of faith.⁵⁶

Nevertheless, since the whole body of the faithful participate in the prophetic office of Christ,⁵⁷ it might also be said that the church is a community of teachers. Together, each and all in the church are called to be teachers on mission. Priests are one example:

Through the sacred ordination and mission which they receive from the bishops, priests are promoted to the service of Christ the Teacher, Priest and King.⁵⁸

So that,

Whether by their exemplary behaviour they lead people to glorify God; or by their preaching proclaim the mystery of Christ to unbelievers; or teach the Christian message or explain the Church's doctrine; or endeavour to treat of contemporary problems in the light of Christ's teaching – in every case their role is to teach not their own wisdom but the Word of God and to issue a pressing invitation to all people to conversion and holiness.⁵⁹

Also, all the laity are called through their baptism and hence by their participation in the prophetic office of Christ to the proclamation of the Gospel.⁶⁰ Christian couples, for example, are

for each other, for their children and for their relatives, co-operators of grace and witnesses of the faith. They are the first to pass on the faith to their children and to educate them in it. By word and example they form them to a Christian and apostolic life.⁶¹

⁵¹ GS, 45.

⁵² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1099.

⁵³ LG, 19.

⁵⁴ *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 2. Hereafter, AA.

⁵⁵ AA, 2.

⁵⁶ DV, 10.

⁵⁷ LG, 12.

⁵⁸ *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 1. Hereafter, PO.

⁵⁹ PO, 4.

⁶⁰ LG, 35; AA, 10.

⁶¹ AA, 11.

A final example of teachers at the service of the church's mission is that of theologians. The church connects theological endeavour to the prophetic function of the church in its mission to the world.⁶² "Theological science responds to the invitation of truth as it seeks to understand the faith. It thereby aids the People of God in fulfilling the Apostle's command (cf 1 Pet 3:15) to give an accounting for their hope to those who ask it."⁶³

⁶² Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian*, para. 3-5.

⁶³ *Ibid.* para 6.

Chapter 3

Uniting Church Perspectives on Mission

Version 3 November 2008

The Uniting Church in Australia came into being in 1977 after decades of dialogue between The Congregational Union of Australia, the Methodist Church of Australasia and the Presbyterian Church of Australia. The dialogue between the three churches was conducted by a group known as the Joint Commission on Church Union. The content and direction of the dialogue was published in two booklets: *The Faith of the Church* (1959) and *The Church: its Nature, Function and Ordering* (1963). The initial guiding questions for this discussion were: “What is the Church’s Faith? Where is it found? How can we as individuals, and the Churches from which we come, strengthen our grasp of the Faith by which we are held?”¹ Underlying these questions was a desire to seek both within and beyond the boundaries of the doctrines of those denominations that came into union and listen afresh for God’s Word, Jesus Christ. These discussions led the churches to ask the fundamental question “What is God’s will for us now?”² Throughout both booklets, the theme of the unity of the church guided those involved in the dialogue to the conclusion that God was calling the churches to bear witness to that unity which was both Christ’s gift and will for the church.³ Hence, from these discussions arose the foundational document of the Uniting Church – *The Basis of Union* (1971).⁴ In the *Basis* the Uniting Church expresses its self-understanding as living and working “within the faith and unity of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church”.⁵ In this document the Uniting Church “presupposes that there is, and can be, only one Church of God, one Body of Christ, one fellowship of the Holy Spirit. It also presupposes that this Church’s given unity is more fundamental, and will prove more decisive, than its many obvious divisions.”⁶ The *Basis* asserts that “the faith and unity of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church are built upon the one Lord Jesus Christ.”⁷

One of the consequences of this approach is the claim that what the uniting churches were doing was “in fellowship with the whole Church Catholic”.⁸ Thus integral to the Uniting Church’s self-understanding are the links between the faith of the church, the unity of the church and the mission of the church. The very act of union was a witness to this relationship and expresses a key underlying theme of unity within the mission of the Uniting Church. The *Basis* not only acted as the foundational document but has been recognised as providing ongoing theological guidance and authority since that time.⁹ Thus, in developing a clearer understanding of the Uniting Church’s perspective on the mission of the church, the *Basis* guides our thinking. The *Basis* points to numerous sources for developing an understanding of the mission of the church. First and foremost it points the church to Jesus Christ, the Word of God, and God’s mission revealed in him.

¹ Joint Commission on Church Union, *The Faith of the Church* (Melbourne: Joint Board of Graded Lessons, 1959), 11.

² Joint Commission on Church Union, *The Church: Its Nature, Function and Ordering* (Melbourne: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1963), 8.

³ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 1.

⁴ Hereafter in main text, *Basis*.

⁵ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 2.

⁶ Michael Owen (ed.), *Witness of Faith: Historic Documents of the Uniting Church in Australia*

(Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 1984), 5.

⁷ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 3.

⁸ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 1.

The *Basis* also directs the church's attention towards the work of the Holy Spirit, who has been sent forth so that people may trust God.¹⁰ Additionally, the place and authority of the Scriptures as testimony to God's Word is emphasised. As well as this, the *Basis* acknowledges the Creeds, certain Reformation witnesses, and scholarly interpreters, as all witnessing to Jesus Christ and God's work in and through him. In seeking to elucidate the Uniting Church's perspective on mission we listen for the voice of the living Word of God speaking through these sources.

The engagement of the church within God's mission is spoken about in the *Basis* in terms of worship, witness and service.¹¹ It is important to stress that the church's mission consists in the integration of these three realms of the human response to God's action in Jesus Christ. It cannot be reduced to any one of them on its own. Nor can the church's call be reduced to getting out and engaging with things in the world to promote social, economic or political change. The mission of the church can only be articulated in terms of the relationship between the ministry of Jesus, the sending of the Spirit and the status of the church as an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself. Whilst worship, witness and service have been given different priority in different settings and at different times, for the most part they are understood by Uniting Church members, clergy and lay, as expressing the mission of the church. However, it is appropriate, within the context of this dialogue, to elucidate these three aspects of the mission of the church as well as explore new avenues of expressing the mission that arises out of the *Basis*.

To this end, the writers of this chapter began by recognising that the mission of the church is defined by the mission of God in Jesus Christ and through the Spirit. The first section of this chapter will thus examine the understanding of the mission of God in the world from a Uniting Church perspective. The writers also recognised that this mission of God is intrinsically linked to worship (*doxology* and *leitourgia*), communion (*koinonia*), service (*diakonia*), proclamation (*kerygma*), witness (*martyria*) and teaching (*didache*). These aspects of the church's life, rather than having an order of priority, could be thought of as overlaying, or possibly indwelling, one another. Thus, in seeking to define the mission of the church, each of the elements will then also be briefly discussed in their relationship to mission.

1. The Mission of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit

The *Basis* expresses the mission of God in Jesus Christ in terms of reconciliation. "In Jesus Christ 'God was reconciling the world to himself' (2 Corinthians 5:19 RSV). In love for the world, God gave the Son to take away the world's sin."¹² This statement points to a twofold action on God's part. In Jesus Christ God was not only dealing with sin but creating a new order of creation 'reconciled' with God. It is also clear in this definition that the work of salvation rests with God alone.¹³ This is a reflection of a Reformed understanding which emphasises that, in being God's gracious, saving work and grounded in God's self giving love, this is not an abstract grace. The *Basis*

⁹ In 1997 the ongoing status of the *Basis of Union* was recognised at the National Assembly when it amended the Constitution of the Uniting Church in Australia, inserting a new clause to read: "The Church, affirming that it belongs to the people of God on the way to the promised end, lives and works within the faith and unity of the one holy catholic and

apostolic church, guided by its *Basis of Union*.” (Minute 97.37.01).

¹⁰ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 3.

¹¹ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 1.

¹² *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 3

¹³ “The whole work of salvation is effected by the sovereign grace of God alone.” *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 3.

is clear that this saving act of God is initiated and accomplished in the particularities of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection.

Jesus himself, in his life and death, made the response of humility, obedience and trust which God had long sought in vain. In raising him to live and reign, God confirmed and completed the witness which Jesus bore to God on earth, reasserted claim over the whole of creation, pardoned sinners, and made in Jesus a representative beginning of a new order of righteousness and love.¹⁴

In contrast to a certain popular Protestant reserve about the church, the *Basis* highlights the particular vocation of the church as the visible public testimony to God’s reconciling work. The church is not an optional addendum to God’s reconciling work but is precisely its direct consequence.¹⁵

God in Christ has given to all people in the Church the Holy Spirit as a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation. The Church’s call is to serve that end: to be a fellowship of reconciliation, a body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole, an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself.¹⁶

At the same time, paralleling this re-discovery of the soteriological importance of the church, the engagement with twentieth century discussions of eschatology also meant that the framers of the *Basis* did not conflate the church with Christ. As one of the framers, has put it:

The meaning of Jesus Christ is not exhausted in ecclesiastical realities, but is to be fully expounded only in terms of the universal eschatological reconciliation and renewal. The Church’s function is to serve that. Its nature is to be described in terms of its participation in the process and anticipation of the end of it. ¹⁷

In saying that the church is a fellowship of reconciliation, the Uniting Church understands the church to be both a provisional and an anticipatory body. Whilst the church provides a foretaste of the coming Reign of God¹⁸ the church does not establish that Reign but serves it and whilst it awaits that kingdom “the Church does not have a continuing city but seeks one to come.”¹⁹ Thus, the Uniting Church understands that, in the power of the Holy Spirit, the church participates in the life of God and the promised coming Reign of God.

Hence, the *missio Dei* from the perspective of the Uniting Church is about the reconciliation of the creation with its creator, which is the action of God alone. It is through Christ alone that the world is reconciled to God and it is through grace alone that God draws human beings and the creation, through Christ and in the Spirit, towards a new order of righteousness and that people might respond to this action of God through their reconciliation

¹⁴ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 3.

¹⁵ In its first Report, *The Faith of the Church*, the Joint Commission on Church Union highlighted this in these terms: “The Church can no longer be regarded as an addendum to the Biblical message: she is integral to it. She is Israel renewed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and by the gift of the Holy Spirit. The call, the redemption, and

the destiny of the People is the second great theme of the Bible: complementary to the great theme, the Name and the Purpose of the One who calls, who redeems and in whose presence man (*sic*) reaches his lost home. God, and the Church: these, as has been said, are the two great Biblical doctrines." *The Faith of the Church*, new ed. (JBCEANZ, 1978), 26.

¹⁶ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 3.

¹⁷ Michael Owen, *Back to Basics: Studies on the Basis of Union of the Uniting Church in Australia* (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 1996), 82n.

¹⁸ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 8.

¹⁹ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 3.

that people might respond to this action of God through their reconciliation with one another and their common participation in the work of God in Jesus Christ and the coming Reign of God. It is the mission of God in Christ through the Spirit that determines the mission of the church. Given this description of the mission of God, we turn now to look at the mission of the church as expressed in relationship with worship, communion, service, proclamation, witness and teaching.

2. Mission and Worship: *Doxologia / Leitourgia*

The mission of the church revolves around God's mission in Christ, which ultimately reconciles the creation with its creator. Jesus himself, throughout his life, continually pointed away from himself and to God and God's action. Paradoxically, Jesus' worship of God, which was exhibited in *his* obedience to God and which included *his* participation in and fulfilment of Israel's own traditions of worship, is *the* offering of human worship which is acceptable to God.²⁰ This self-offering of Jesus Christ culminating in the cross continues through Jesus' ascended life where Jesus goes on mediating between God and the creation, offering vicarious praise to God on behalf of the whole creation.²¹ As an important aspect of God's mission in Christ, Jesus' worship of God included both his participation in the rites of the covenant people as well as the living out of his life in obedience to God. The church is drawn into this doxological action of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the worship of the church is a communal celebration of, and participation in the work of the one true worshipper, Jesus Christ.

The *Basis* locates the key and decisive elements in the church's corporate worship as follows. It is in baptism that the Christian life begins, in communal listening to Scripture that God's Word is heard and in the fellowship of the Lord's Supper that Christians are fed and strengthened for service.

The *Basis* declares that Christ is present in the preaching of the Word²² and that "The Word of God on whom salvation depends is to be heard and known from Scripture appropriated in the worshipping and witnessing life of the Church."²³ The presence of Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, draws the worshipping community into Christ's worship and enables it to appropriate the message of reconciliation and empowers it to serve that future reconciliation promised for all things.²⁴ The Word celebrated in reading and preaching is also celebrated in the sacraments. The *Basis* "commits its ministers to... administer the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper as effective signs of the gospel set forth in the Scriptures."²⁵

The Uniting Church recognises two sacraments as part of its worshipping and witnessing life of mission. These are baptism and Holy Communion or the Lord's Supper. With regard to baptism, the missional imperative to make disciples of all nations stands alongside the command to baptise them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.²⁶ The Uniting Church recognises this imperative to baptise, asserting that it is the

²⁰ cf. Lk 4:16ff; Lk 22:15-20.

²¹ cf. Hebrews 8-10.

²² 'Christ who is present when he is preached among people is the Word of God who acquits the guilty, who gives life to the dead and who brings into being what otherwise could not exist.' *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 4.

²³ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 5.

²⁴ Cf. 1 Cor 15:28.

²⁵ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 5.

²⁶ Matt 28:19.

effective sign whereby people are initiated into "Christ's life and mission in the world, so that they are united in one fellowship of love, service, suffering and joy, in one family of the Father of all in heaven and earth, and in the power of the one Spirit."²⁷ This claim is consistent with the underlying emphasis of the *Basis* that the gift of unity in Christ and through the Spirit rises above any denominational identity, thus associating baptism with the work of Christ. In this way baptism is understood as an aspect of the worshipping life of the church which incorporates individuals into the Body of Christ and his mission.

Similarly the Holy Communion or Lord's Supper is given by Jesus to the church as an *effective* sign and foretaste of the coming kingdom. Whilst there were those reformers who saw the Lord's Supper as simply a sign and remembrance, this view has been rejected in the Uniting Church. Hence, the *Basis* says of the Lord's Supper:

The Uniting Church acknowledges that the continuing presence of Christ with his people is signified and sealed by Christ in the Lord's Supper or the Holy Communion, constantly repeated in the life of the Church. In this sacrament of his broken body and outpoured blood the risen Lord feeds his baptized people on their way to the final inheritance of the Kingdom. Thus the people of God, through faith and the gift and power of the Holy Spirit, have communion with their Saviour, make their sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, proclaim the Lord's death, grow together into Christ, are strengthened for their participation in the mission of Christ in the world, and rejoice in the foretaste of the Kingdom which Christ will bring to consummation.²⁸

The Uniting Church's understanding is that Christ is truly present, transforming the lives of people as they participate in communion. Through the eucharistic worship of the church, God grounds believers in their relationship with God and with one another, and they are given a foretaste of the coming Reign of God. This foretaste is a present participation in the coming glorification of God and empowers the church in its mission of reconciliation.

God's mission in Christ, which is to deal with the brokenness in our relationship with God (sin) and to draw all things to God, is both celebrated and participated in through the power of the Holy Spirit in gathered worship. In gathering together, the church embodies what it is already in Christ and what it is becoming through the Spirit.²⁹ The worship of the gathered community undergirds the mission of the church and empowers people for their daily life of worship.

Whilst gathered worship focuses individuals in their faith and their calling into mission, their worship continues in their personal devotional life and actions of faith. The words of mission which accompany the blessing at the end of the gathered worship are not so much a conclusion to worship as a transition from the gathered worship into the daily life of worship, witness and service.³⁰ This call to live a daily faith involves the various aspects of mission discussed in this paper and is understood as being grounded in the life of prayer.

²⁷ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 7.

²⁸ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 8.

²⁹ Cf. *Basis of Union* Paragraph 15.

³⁰ For example: "I appeal to you, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." *Uniting in Worship II* CD-Rom Resources.

3. Mission and Communion: *Koinonia*

Integral to the mission of God in Jesus Christ is God's will to draw all things into communion with the triune life of God. The will of God for a communion in being is expressed poignantly in Jesus' prayer of John 17 when he prays, not only that the unity of believers will be the same unity as shared by the Father and the Son, but that they will share in the very unity of God.³¹ This gift of union with God and one another, given through the power of the Holy Spirit, is cited as a fundamental imperative in the mission of the Uniting Church. In the very act of union the uniting churches were "seeking to bear witness to that unity which is both Christ's gift and will for the Church."³² This is a unity that Jesus indicates is given so that the world might believe.³³

Whilst this unity is celebrated and expresses the worshipping, witnessing life of the church, the Uniting Church also places great importance on the unity of believers and the work of ecumenism. In fact the very name *Uniting* indicates a continuing commitment to the unity of the church, and so to seeking greater unity within the church through further union with other confessions.

In the *Basis*, the Uniting Church claims that it lives and works within the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, thereby openly recognising the existence of the church in other denominations. The *Basis* states: "The Uniting Church recognises that it is related to other Churches in ways which give expression, however partially, to that unity in faith and mission."³⁴ In this recognition of the unity of the church as God's will the Uniting Church clearly understands that this unity should be reflected more fully. So it is that, "The Uniting Church declares its desire to enter more deeply into the faith and mission of the Church in Australia, by working together and seeking union with other Churches."³⁵

This view of the unity of the church is reflected in the gathered worship. For example, baptism is understood as initiating people into Christ's life and mission through the Uniting Church.³⁶ Similarly, "The Uniting Church in Australia, welcomes and invites Christians of all churches, who respond to Christ's invitation to his table, to receive the elements of bread and wine. The emphasis in this approach is to allow the decision to come to the table to be with the individual baptised person who hears the invitation as from the Lord and so responds to him."³⁷ In addition, "The Uniting Church enters into unity with the Church throughout the ages by its use of the confessions known as the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed. The Uniting Church receives these as authoritative statements of the Catholic Faith."³⁸ The gifts of the church's members are used for the building up of the whole and are understood as a means through which Christ works and bears witness to himself. Thus, the promised union of all things in God is anticipated by the unity of the church. Whilst division remains, seeking further unity continues to be an important aspect of the church's mission.

³¹ Jn 17:20-24.

³² *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 1.

³³ Jn 17:21.

³⁴ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 2.

³⁵ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 2. It is important to note that at the time of union The Uniting Church recognised a particular role in ecumenism in the Asia-Pacific region. It stated, 'It believes that Christians in Australia are called to bear witness to a unity of faith and life in Christ which transcends cultural and economic, national and racial boundaries, and to this end the Uniting Church commits itself to seek special relationships with Churches in Asia and the Pacific.' *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 2.

³⁶ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 7.

³⁷ Report of the National dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Uniting

The desire for unity, however, stretches beyond ecumenism and into the whole world. In the inaugural *Statement to the Nation* made in 1977, the Uniting Church declared: "We, who are members of the first Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia, address the people of Australia in this historic moment. The path to unity has been long and at times difficult, but we believe this unity is a sign of the reconciliation we seek for the whole human race."³⁹

Thus, the unity of believers with one another and God witnesses to God's intention for all things and calls the church into the service of the creation for which Christ died.

4. Mission and Service: *Diakonia*

God's mission in Christ is also expressed in Christ's compassion for the world. This compassion revolves around bringing reconciliation and wholeness to people's lives. The incarnation of Christ reflects God's concern for the creation and the promise of God is for a renewal of the creation.

Christ's compassion occurs at personal and communal levels as Christ forgives, heals, exorcises, and recognises people at the margins of society. God's compassion for the world is most fully expressed in Christ's death which takes away the sin of the world. The *Basis* expresses the belief that "the Church of God is committed to serve the world for which Christ died."⁴⁰ This service finds its roots in Christ's work and is remembered in the liturgy as the people of God join Christ in his intercessions for the world. The encounter with the Christ, who offered prayers and supplications during his earthly life⁴¹ and who acted with compassion, continues to draw people into his ministry.

The Uniting Church has a strong commitment to serving the world as it participates in the mission of God. The *Basis* "acknowledges with thanksgiving that the one Spirit has endowed the members of Christ's Church with a diversity of gifts, and that there is no gift without its corresponding service: all ministries have a part in the ministry of Christ."⁴² All members of Christ's Body are expected to take upon themselves the form of a servant in order that God's loving care is known among people.⁴³ As indicated above, this approach is both at the personal level, as Jesus responded to individuals in their need, as well as at a communal level. This means that the Uniting Church is involved with a range of caring and healing ministries beyond the scope of the congregation, particularly through the structures of Uniting Care Australia. In addition, the Uniting Church perceives itself to have an advocacy role within the community at local, national and international levels.⁴⁴ Thus, the Uniting Church believes that in seeking healing and justice and the building of community, it is responding to the call to be a body of reconciliation within this world. To this end it encourages its members in their daily work to be "instruments through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself."⁴⁵

³⁹ The *Statement to the Nation* can be found at <http://nat.uca.org.au/home/>

⁴⁰ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 1.

⁴¹ Heb 5:7.

⁴² *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 13.

⁴³ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 16.

⁴⁴ *The Statement to the Nation* (1977) particularly reflects such values.

⁴⁵ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 3.

5. Mission and Proclamation: *Kerygma*

In Christ God proclaims the beginning of a new order of righteousness and love, pointing the creation towards its promised end: union with God. This good news of salvation is given for the church to share. Just as “Jesus of Nazareth announced the sovereign grace of God whereby the poor in spirit could receive God's love”⁴⁶ so too the church is called to preach “Christ the risen crucified One and confesses him as Lord to the glory of God the Father.”⁴⁷ In the *Basis* the Uniting Church expresses its hope that through continuing renewal, God would “use their common worship, witness and service to set forth the word of salvation for all people.”⁴⁸ This gospel imperative to share the message of salvation reflects Christ's command of Matthew 28:19, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.” Hence, the evangelical tradition of the church which is particularly focussed on sharing the Gospel message is also essential in the participation of the church in the mission of God.

The proclamation of Christ as Lord takes place first and foremost in the context of the congregation and is given a sacramental quality in the *Basis*. “Christ who is present when he is preached among people is the Word of God who acquits the guilty, who gives life to the dead and who brings into being what otherwise could not exist.”⁴⁹ However, the firm belief found in the *Basis* is that all people are called to respond to God's love in Christ and the proclamation must be made beyond the gathered congregation also. It declares, “To God in Christ all people are called to respond in faith. To this end God has sent forth the Spirit that people may trust God as their Father, and acknowledge Jesus as Lord.”⁵⁰ The proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ occurs, in the power of the Holy Spirit, through human witness in word and action.⁵¹ This witness of the church is guided by the scriptures which are recognised as being “unique prophetic and apostolic testimony, in which it hears the Word of God and by which its faith and obedience are nourished and regulated.”⁵² Whilst recognising that there are particular gifts in evangelism,⁵³ that is to say bringing others to faith, “The Uniting Church affirms that every member of the Church is engaged to confess the faith of Christ crucified and to be his faithful servant.”⁵⁴

6. Mission and Witness: *Martyria*

The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ bear witness to God's work of salvation. In bearing witness Jesus reveals the truth of his identity and the work of God that he has been sent to do. So it is that in John 5:36 Jesus declares, “The works that the Father has given me to complete, the very works that I am doing, testify⁵⁵ on my behalf that the Father has sent me.”

This witness is given so that the world may believe and partake in knowledge of God.⁵⁶ Jesus' mission includes his witness to the work of salvation being carried out by God in Israel's history and conclusively through himself. Jesus' witness to his identity and God's work in him is taken up by the

⁴⁶ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 3.

⁴⁷ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 3.

⁴⁸ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 1.

- ⁴⁹ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 4.
⁵⁰ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 3.
⁵¹ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 4.
⁵² *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 5.
⁵³ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 11.
⁵⁴ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 13.
⁵⁵ Greek = *marturian*.
⁵⁶ Cf. Jn 17:3.

disciples and all those who believe, as part of the mission of the church. This means that, as an aspect of mission, the witness of the church is shaped by Jesus' own mission of witness. The Uniting Church reflects Christ's mission of witness through its own life. It does this by the very act of union in which it was "seeking to bear witness to that unity which is both Christ's gift and will for the Church."⁵⁷ It seeks to continue this by responding to the call to be "an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself."⁵⁸ In responding to this call, the witness of the church is understood as a participation in Christ's self-witness and his witness to the work of God's Holy Spirit for the whole creation.

As previously noted, in the *Basis*, the church's mission is frequently described in the summary phrase "worship, witness and service". The witness of the church here is also understood as closely tied to its proclamation to the world of all that God has done in Christ, and the service and teaching in which it engages in the name of Christ. It is a witness which is to be faithful in every challenge.

7. Mission and Teaching: *Didache*

God's ministry in and through Jesus Christ is also typified as a teaching ministry. The predominant message of Jesus, standing in the Deuteronomic tradition, is the coming of the Reign of God. This reflects the focus of the Old Testament — God's restoration of the whole of creation, including humanity. The Reign of God is core in the understanding of the Israelite people — God's everlasting and total reign over all creation.⁵⁹ The coming of the Reign of God, expressed in the Old Testament, is the hopeful expectation of the reinstatement of law and justice to humanity.

Jesus teaches as a Jewish Rabbi of the period. He is recognised as such by his contemporaries who call him 'teacher' (e.g. John 3:2). Jesus' teaching takes place in the synagogue and in more informal settings. His teaching often, but not exclusively, takes the form of an exposition of the law.⁶⁰ As part of his mission Jesus' teaching focuses on incorporating others into the vision of the coming Reign and its proclamation. This mission of teaching is handed on to the disciples, and thus to the church in following generations. A key expression of Jesus' command is to be found in Matthew 28:19, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you."

The teaching ministry of the church is understood in the Uniting Church as being grounded in Christ's teaching as the church continues to listen to its Lord afresh. In this the Uniting Church recognises its responsibility to continue to learn from Christ as well as instruct others about Jesus Christ and his teachings. This process of learning and teaching is considered a communal act taking place in dialogue with the teachers and witnesses to the faith through history⁶¹ as well as in the present age.⁶² In the Uniting Church the

⁵⁷ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 1.

⁵⁸ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 3.

⁵⁹ For example, Ex 15:18; Ps 103:19 and Jer 10:7-10.

⁶⁰ Cf. Matt 22:34-40.

⁶¹ “The Uniting Church continues to learn of the teaching of the Holy Scriptures in the obedience and freedom of faith, and in the power of the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, from the witness of the Reformers as expressed in various ways in the Scots Confession of Faith (1560), the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), and the Savoy Declaration (1658). In like manner the Uniting Church will listen to the preaching of John Wesley in his Forty-Four Sermons (1793).” *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 10.

National Assembly takes particular responsibility for the oversight of the teaching of the church because, as the *Basis* sets out, it has responsibility in the matters of doctrine.⁶³

As in the ministry of Jesus, it is difficult to draw a clear distinction between preaching or proclamation [*kerygma*] and teaching [*didache*]. But it is clear that each needs the other. The assumption of the framers of the *Basis* appears to be that in speaking about preaching the Gospel as proclamation of the Good News of salvation, there is also within that proclamation a *content* that is about understanding, apprehending and teaching the faith that is preached.

Teaching receives quite some attention in the life of the Uniting Church through the work of Ministers of the Word, Deacons, Youth Workers, Community Ministers and Lay Preachers. It is there in the day-to-day work of ministry, both ordained and lay. The sacrament of baptism, by which people are incorporated into the Body of Christ, brings with it an expectation that the Christian community will ensure that the baptised are instructed and nurtured in the faith. “The Uniting Church will baptize those who confess the Christian faith, and children who are presented for baptism and for whose instruction and nourishment in the faith the Church takes responsibility.”⁶⁴ Further, the *Basis* calls for ways in which those who have been baptised may be enabled to grow in the faith of their baptism. There has been from the earliest days of the Uniting Church a commitment to deepen its understanding of confirmation and, with Christians from other churches, to explore its relation to baptism and eucharist.⁶⁵ This implies a task of teaching directed to that end – and an invitation to do it ecumenically.

The *Basis* makes clear that the church is expected to engage in teaching the faith it proclaims. The Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds are to be used by ministers in their responsibility to preach the Good News in today’s world, attending to the Creeds which were:

framed in the language of their day and used by Christians in many days, to declare and to guard the right understanding of that faith. The Uniting Church commits its ministers and instructors to careful study of these creeds and to the discipline of interpreting their teaching in a later age. It commends to ministers and congregations their use for instruction in the faith, and their use in worship as acts of allegiance to the Holy Trinity.⁶⁶

Likewise, attention is drawn to key writings of Christian leaders and scholars of the Reformation period in which the faith was expressed. The Uniting Church:

commits its ministers and instructors to study these statements, so that the congregation of Christ’s people may again and again be reminded of the grace which justifies them through faith, of the centrality of the person and work of Christ the justifier, and of the need for a constant appeal to Holy Scripture.⁶⁷

Further, the *Basis* draws attention to the Uniting Church's contemporary and ecumenical participation in the church and its engagement with contemporary life and thought as it acknowledges the work of those who seek to further elucidate the scriptures.⁶⁸

⁶² The Uniting Church lives within a world-wide fellowship of Churches in which it will learn to sharpen its understanding of the will and purpose of God by contact with contemporary thought. *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 11.

⁶³ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 15e.

⁶⁴ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 7.

⁶⁵ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 12.

⁶⁶ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 9.

⁶⁷ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 10.

⁶⁸ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 11.

For the Uniting Church the mission of the church is defined by the *missio Dei*, the mission of God. This is understood first and foremost through the revelation of Jesus Christ which is spoken of in the Scriptures. The mission of God as the reconciliation of all things with God through Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit is lived in a range of ways. God's mission in Christ involves:

- the right response of praise to God (*doxology/leitourgia*);
- the building of union between God and the creation and within the creation (*koinonia*);
- the healing of a hurting and unjust world (*diakonia*);
- the sharing of this message of good news with others (*kerygma*);
- the witness to the truth of Christ and God's mission in and through him (*martyria*); and,
- the teaching of Christ's teachings (*didache*).

As participants, through the power of the Spirit, in God's mission in Christ the church in its expression of mission reflects these interrelated aspects of God's mission. The Uniting Church clearly understands this as the task of the whole church. "The Uniting Church affirms that every member of the Church is engaged to confess the faith of Christ crucified and to be his faithful servant."⁶⁹ The Uniting Church perspective on mission is a perspective that attempts to listen for what God has done, is doing and will do in the context of the whole creation and of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.

Chapter 4

Reading and Understanding Each Other

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After outlining key aspects of the respective Roman Catholic and Uniting Church understandings of mission, it is the goal of this chapter to bring these aspects of the church's mission into further dialogue. The ultimate goal of ecumenical dialogue is visible unity. However, this cannot happen "in one bound"¹ so to speak. This chapter seeks to provide an approach toward some intermediate goals of understanding for our respective churches as we search for recognition of the one Christian faith in each other's understandings of the church's mission. We are seeking greater mutual understanding, a deepening of what we already have in common, growth together in our Christian faith, and the renewal of our churches on our way to unity.²

The chapter proceeds by following the headings of chapters two and three. For each section there is first a reading of the Catholic position by the Uniting Church, which is followed by a reading of the Uniting Church's position from a Catholic Church perspective. These respective readings take account of the following dimensions: the common ground discovered in reading each other's position, some particular emphases that are acknowledged as important, and any differences which each church considers also need to be highlighted for further dialogue.

1. The Mission of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit

A Uniting Church reading of the Catholic perspective

The Uniting Church finds much common ground with the Roman Catholic Church in the basic understanding of mission. Both churches affirm that it is God's mission (*missio Dei*), God-given and God-initiated. Both understand that the church participates in the continuing mission of the triune God, although we find that this is often conceptualised somewhat

differently. The Uniting Church can affirm the Roman Catholics statement that “the foundation of the church’s mission in the life of the Trinity is the basis for the church’s understanding of its missionary activity.”³

While it is more characteristic for the Uniting Church to emphasise the proclamation of God’s reconciling work in Jesus Christ, calling for the response of faith to what God has already done in Christ and continues to do through the Spirit, it can also speak of God’s mission to draw all people into communion with Christ. The quest for the restored unity of the one, holy catholic and apostolic church which is strongly stated in the *Basis of Union* clearly implies a longing for God’s people to be at one with God and with one another, as Jesus and the Father are one and as Jesus prays that they may be one (Jn 17). The goal and the process of mission, God’s work of reconciling

¹ Walter Kasper. “The Nature and Purpose of Ecumenical Dialogue,” *Ecumenical Review* 52 (2000), 296.

² Ibid.

³ See Chapter 2.

people to God and to one another, may also be understood as God’s drawing people into the communion of the Trinity.

The Uniting Church also recognises the imperative to preach the Gospel to all people, to evangelise (Matt 28: 19-20). Making disciples of Jesus Christ, in every dimension of that continuing process, is essential in the life of the church. The church is missionary “by nature” and witness to the Gospel is a call on the lives of all God’s people.

It is noted that there are differences in terminology, in the imaginative conceptualisation of the church, its worship, witness and service, and how God is understood as acting or being with humanity and in the church. This will be explored further in the following sections. These are differences which no doubt can be traced back to the theological debates of the sixteenth century (e.g., the struggle to find the most appropriate ways to speak of Christ’s presence in the eucharist) and to recognise the ways of God’s continuing revelation and presence in the world.

This is a complex but vital question for dialogue, because of the changing understanding of mission and because of the several inter-related aspects which characterise the nature of the church as essentially missional.

A Catholic reading of the Uniting Church perspective

A Catholic reading of the Uniting Church’s position on God’s mission finds common ground where the mission of the church is founded in the *missio Dei*. The mission of the church has its origins in the trinitarian life of God, and the missions of both the Son and the Spirit.

It is recognised by Catholics that the Uniting Church’s emphasis on the term “reconciliation” is important for understanding the church’s mission. God’s action in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit is primarily one of reconciliation that addresses human sinfulness, which humanity itself has no power to overcome. Linked with and integral to God’s act of redemption through reconciliation is God’s establishment of the community of persons who are the church, “a fellowship of reconciliation.” “It is the mission of God in Christ through the Spirit that determines the mission of the church.”

The Catholic Church can recognise this understanding to be in accordance with its faith. It teaches that the church is missionary by nature and has its origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit.⁴ Also, that

God decided to enter into human history in a new and definitive manner, by sending his own Son in human flesh, so that through him he might snatch people from the power of darkness and of Satan (cf. Col 1:13; Acts 10:38) and in him reconcile the world to himself.⁵

Common agreement regarding the nature of the relationship between mission and reconciliation is expressed strongly in the report *Towards a Common Understanding of the Church* (1990). The report is the fruit of international dialogue between the Catholic Church, and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. Together they confess that Christ, established as Mediator, achieves our reconciliation in all its dimensions: God reconciling humanity, human beings reconciled with each other, and humanity reconciled with God.⁶

⁴ AG, 2.

⁵ AG, 3.

⁶ International Reformed Catholic Dialogue. Final Report (1990): "Finalization of Final Report: 'Towards a Common Understanding of the Church'," 71. See http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/r-rc/doc/e_r-rc_2-printable.html [accessed 14/11/2005].

And,

The Church is called into being as a community of men and women to share in the salvific activity of Christ Jesus. He has reconciled them to God, freed them from sin and redeemed them from evil. "They are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom 3:24).⁷

A note of difference between our churches, when speaking of the fundamental notion of the mission of the church, is the different emphases on reconciliation and of unity. The Uniting Church more readily uses the term 'reconciliation' while the Catholic Church highlights the goal of 'unity'. The respective meanings of these terms are not in opposition to each other. Rather, they are complementary.

2. Mission and Worship: *Doxologia / Leitourgia*⁸

A Uniting Church reading of the Catholic perspective

The Uniting Church recognises that the worship of the gathered congregation, the liturgical life of the church, is central for both churches. The Uniting Church partners in the dialogue note the Roman Catholic understanding that the gathered congregation at worship is both the central expression of that communion to which the mission of the church is directed (Christ present with his people, centrally in the eucharist) and the empowerment of the church for mission. The Uniting Church speaks of Christ as present, speaking and acting through the preaching/proclamation of the word and the celebration of the sacraments, baptism and the Lord's supper, and the worship of the church as the nourishment of God's people to strengthen them in their participation with Christ in his mission in the world. The order of service for the Lord's Day recommends a scriptural "word of mission" before the final blessing.

Within this acknowledgment of the centrality of the worship of the gathered people of God for both churches, certain differences in terminology and ethos are noted. One example is the use of the word "sacrament", which

for the Uniting Church has the precise meaning of baptism and holy communion/eucharist/the Lord's supper. This word in Roman Catholic terminology is more widely used for several rituals, for the whole church and for the relationship of God with many aspects of the created world which may be understood as sacramental. We also note a subtly different way of speaking of Christ's relationship with his human members in his body, the church — what has been described as a different equilibrium. While the Uniting Church expresses its understanding of God/Christ/Spirit as acting through what the church does in worship (proclamation and sacrament), witness and service, it maintains an acute awareness of the distinction between God and humanity. The church and its members can disobey and fail its Lord. We recognise that the Roman Catholic Church expresses its understanding of Christ's presence and action in the church with a sense of closer identification with what the church, particularly the priest, does. This is to be seen in the approach to absolution or forgiveness of sins, where the priest in the name of Christ absolves, while the Uniting Church preference is to announce Christ's words of grace, "Your sins are forgiven".

A Catholic reading of the Uniting Church perspective

The Catholic partners in the dialogue find common ground with the Uniting Church's statement on the centrality of Christ and his work of

⁷ International Reformed Roman Catholic Dialogue. Final Report (1990), 85. reconciliation as fundamental to any notion of Christian worship. They recognise the power of the proclamation of the word to draw us into the worship of Christ and the role of baptism in initiating us into Christ's life and mission. They appreciate the Uniting Church emphasis on the Eucharist as an effective sign and foretaste of God's kingdom. Finally the Catholic side sees in the Uniting Church notion of "words of mission" an affirmation of its own understanding of the eucharist as "Missa" (Mass) in which liturgy and life interpenetrate.

The dialogue has highlighted the strong Roman Catholic emphasis on ecclesiology and its approach to sacramentality which is different from the more restricted Uniting Church usage of the word "sacrament" in reference to Baptism and Eucharist. A Catholic perspective would always begin with the liturgy as an ecclesial act of the whole Body of Christ while the Uniting perspective springs from Jesus' obedient worship of God as seen in the Scriptures. In the Catholic approach, ecclesiology is expressed through broad notions of sacramentality in which the church itself and its manifold sacramental actions become a witness to the world and signs of God's universal salvific embrace.

For this reason, perhaps, Catholics are generally more comfortable with the term "liturgy/*leitourgia*" whereas the Uniting Church gravitates more naturally to "doxology/*doxologia*".⁸ The first (etymologically 'the work of the people or public service') places the emphasis on the communal response to God's grace in word, symbol and action; the second begins with the honour and praise due to God. This is a reminder to Roman Catholics that their shorthand expressions such as "Baptism initiates us into God's family" cannot reduce worship to merely human actions: God takes the initiative and acts in the liturgy and human actions occur as a faith response under the influence of the Holy Spirit. To the question, "Who celebrates the liturgy?" the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* answers, "Liturgy is an 'action' of the whole Christ (*Christus totus*)."⁹ "It is the whole 'community', the Body of Christ united with

its Head, that celebrates.”¹⁰

This raises an issue which, from a Catholic perspective, will need further attention, namely, the notion of ‘participation’ in the liturgy and hence in the saving, reconciling work of Christ: how would one understand such a ‘joint action’ between Christ and the church? We pour water and Christ acts to reconcile. This is an ecclesial question which addresses the nature of the church as the Body of Christ. Whether through such things as a common Creed or the office of bishop, a missionary church will need a strong sense of communion beyond the gathered assembly in order to establish a solidarity with the church of all times and places: this provides an impetus to participate in the mission of Christ and will be a sign of the congregation of all languages and cultures in the eschaton — “I shall draw all people to myself” (Jn 12:32). Are we then in a position to address the extension of the notion of sacramentality and to ask whether this provides us with a suitable category for understanding the way in which the church mediates salvation in Christ to the world?

Catholic participants in the dialogue affirm a common joy in the recognition of God’s word which calls us to conversion and summons us to mission. Together we embrace the eschatological dimension of the liturgy

⁸ “Doxology” (Latin: *doxologia*) was the word initially chosen for this section although we came to recognise that much of what has been discussed in the dialogue is the worship of the gathered congregation usually referred to as liturgy (Greek: *leitourgia*) in the Catholic Church. For the UCA “doxology” recalls an early catechism which answered the question about the chief purpose of humanity by saying “to glorify God and enjoy him forever”.

⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1136.

¹⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1140.

which provides the end and goal for mission — “Thy kingdom come”. We affirm by our common baptism, by the shared gift of the Holy Spirit, and by the dialogue process itself a desire to overcome the scandal of division at the table of the Lord which impedes and distorts the mission of Christ.

3. Mission and Communion: *Koinonia*

A Uniting Church reading of the Catholic perspective

The Uniting Church recognises the very important emphasis in recent Roman Catholic understanding of *koinonia* as a fundamental idea in its ecclesiology. It is also recognised in the Uniting Church that “communion” is of the nature of the church, not simply a dimension of mission. The mission of the church and the communion of the church are both fundamental to the nature of the church. The church participates in the communion of the Trinity, and the goal of its mission is that all be drawn into that communion with God and with one another for which humanity has been created and redeemed. The idea of communion is also seen to respond to that longing of humanity to find its place, its home, in communion with God, for itself and the wider creation.

This emphasis is not inappropriate within Uniting Church understanding as it is closely linked to the idea of unity, the oneness for which Christ prayed and to which the Uniting Church seeks to be committed because it is at the heart of the Gospel. The Uniting Church has the vision, based in the life, death and resurrection of Christ, that this unity of all Christ’s people may become visible in the life of the church on earth. Communion/*koinonia* can be understood as the vital depth dimension of all

relationships within the new creation, achieved in Christ's reconciling work on the cross and in the continuing work of the Holy Spirit.

When the Uniting Church speaks about reconciliation and Christ's work of reconciliation, communion with God and God's people is understood as an essential aspect of this gift of grace. The emphasis on the *missio Dei* as the reconciling work of God in Christ can therefore be enriched with the explicit understanding that this work of God is for the purpose of bringing all into living communion with God and all God's people, the eschatological hope towards which we move. Our conviction, that it is God's will that there be unity in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, receives new depth through the concept of communion (*koinonia*) as the living relationship with God in Christ in which the church exists and will live forever.

A Catholic reading of the Uniting Church perspective

The Catholic Church finds common ground with the Uniting Church's position of holding communion as integral to the church's nature and in accord with the faith of the church. Communion defines the church's mission, as mission defines the theological notion of communion that the church is. The impetus for the church's communion is a gift of the Holy Spirit whose intention is to draw all people into communion with God. This movement to communion in God is foundational for the ecumenical activity of the church. For both churches baptism gives entry into the church, which is the foundation for life in Christ. The desire of the Catholic Church is to deepen its unity with other churches, in which it recognises elements of what it is to be the church. The Catholic Church understands that there are various degrees of communion between the churches. Further, both churches look to the missionary role of the church as a communion with God and between people as motivation for working toward unity of all things in God. Together our churches place an emphasis on the sign of unity that the church is, in anticipation of the fullness of God's reign.

We note here the Uniting Church's practice of eucharistic hospitality, which is a particular point of emphasis with regard to the meaning of communion, and also a point of difference from the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church understands itself as not able to invite Christians from those churches and ecclesial communions with which it is in partial communion to share in the eucharist. For the Catholic Church full participation in eucharistic communion is a sign of the fullness of communion in the church.

4. Mission and Service: *Diakonia*

A Uniting Church reading of the Catholic perspective

The Uniting Church notes the large area of common ground about service. An aspect of the mission of the church, for both churches, is to offer service to the world, based either in the notion of common humanity created in the image of God, or Christ's service of this humanity on the cross without distinction of race, social status or gender. Our two churches in Australia aim to serve the wider community in similar ways through a range of services. Whether one uses Johannine language, where the word "love" is central or Pauline language, employing other concepts drawn from Christ's ministry and the work of the Spirit, "love" is quite basic. Paul speaks of love as the best way of all (1 Cor. 13).

It is noted, however, that different theological grounding of the rationale for service is given in the two chapters.

The Catholic perspective speaks of an underlying basis for service as found in creation: that all people are made in the image of God to know and love their creator. The humanity and dignity of all people are thus recognised and all are to be served by Christ's people. This is shown most fully in Jesus Christ, that all people have the same divine calling and destiny. Resulting from this, all forms of cultural and racial discrimination need to be eradicated and the activity of the church is to be an expression of love that seeks the integral good of humanity.

The Uniting Church section on service in chapter three begins with Christ, serving the world by his death, as the starting point for the church's ministry of service. The church is to model itself on Christ and participate in his service to the world. Christ's service to those who met with discrimination in his day, not only the respectable, leads the church to the same engagement in service to work for justice and peace. There is reference also in Chapter 3 to the gifts of the Holy Spirit given to all, and the corresponding gifts for each person's ministry of service.

These points may be understood as complementary rather than contradictory. They may be seen also as opening up a range of questions which face the churches in their mission of service. How do we seek to serve in Christ's name those who belong to other world religions? How do we offer Christian service through the employment (e.g., under equal opportunity legislation) of those who do not offer their service in the name of Christ?

A Catholic reading of the Uniting Church perspective

The Catholic Church finds common ground with the Uniting Church on the centrality of the Incarnation for understanding the church's mission. A Catholic emphasis on the Incarnation understands Jesus Christ's unity with all creation as a restoration of God's likeness in which all people are created. A particular emphasis of the Uniting Church is the reconciliation that is brought about by God through the Incarnation. In the light of our dialogue, for both churches the coming of Christ signifies a deep participation in God's mission by the church enabled through Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

A consequence for both our churches is the significance of the connection between Incarnation and faithful response by the church in service to the world. Christ's redemptive act is a universal act of God's love and provides the foundation for the church's Spirit-guided acts of love of neighbour. This service of love for the world, as the Uniting Church phrases it, has for both churches its ecclesial origins in the church's liturgical life. An important consequence of the churches' faithful response is their mission formed by solidarity with all people. Particularly important for both churches is the implication of how the church is at service to the world, and ecumenically, how the churches might offer this service in faithful partnership for the deepest needs of the world.

5. Mission and Proclamation: *Kerygma*

A Uniting Church reading of the Catholic perspective

The Uniting Church finds much common ground with the Roman

Catholic Church in its discussion of the evangelical nature of the church and its mission. The Uniting Church speaks of the proclamation of the Gospel, or evangelisation, as calling hearers to personal faith in Jesus Christ and adherence to the Christian community. In this way people are drawn into the communion of the life-transforming relationship with God in Jesus Christ. The Uniting Church also identifies with seeing the need to find new forms or new ways of proclaiming the Gospel in the cultural settings of Oceania, including Australia, and the understanding that it is the task of all God's baptised people to engage in this mission of witnessing to Christ by their lives and words. It too struggles to find ways both to encourage the people of the church and to equip them by developing their gifts for the work of evangelism, while also acknowledging that some people have particularly highly developed gifts for this work.

A strong emphasis in the way that the Uniting Church uses the word "proclamation", which is not found as much in Chapter 2, is the understanding that the Gospel is proclaimed also in every service of worship where the scriptures are read and preached. The preaching is understood not simply as teaching, but as an event through which God addresses the people gathered and inspires them in their faith and daily living, for their mission and service in the world. The Gospel is proclaimed both within the church and beyond the church to those who have not yet responded in faith.

A Catholic reading of the Uniting Church perspective

The Catholic Church finds common ground with the Uniting Church in acknowledging the intimate connection between the proclamation of the gospel and the christological and ecclesiological dimensions of the church's mission. The mission of proclamation is an imperative to share the gift of the good news of salvation that the church has received in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ is both the saving Word proclaimed by the church and the content of this Word. The imperative to proclamation draws the church to share the good news with the whole world. The good news of salvation is not simply for the church, but by virtue of the nature of the gift the church becomes missionary, offering the Word of life to others to draw all into communion with God. Our churches affirm that all members of the church are called to be missionary and proclaim the gospel each in their own way.

Both churches also present an emphasis on proclamation that is directed to those who are baptised members in the church. The gift of the Spirit provides the impetus for a faithful response by those who hear and receive the Word to form the church, and who likewise provide voice for the Word to be proclaimed as the church's mission to the ends of the earth.

6. Mission and Witness: *Martyria*

A Uniting Church reading of the Catholic perspective

Again the Uniting Church finds much common ground with the Roman Catholic Church in the writing about mission and witness. Both agree that Christ's people are to engage in witness to Christ in words and actions. Although perhaps it is not often articulated, the Uniting Church would recognise that sometimes the silent witness of a holy life may be an effective witness. Witness to Christ is to be offered by the whole life of the Christian.

As the Uniting Church uses the expression “worship, witness and service” to express the essential life of the church, the understanding of “witness” places a certain emphasis upon giving an account of what God has done in Christ and on what God is doing through the Spirit in the present world in the lives of people. The witness points to Christ in words but also in actions. Certainly service may also be Christian witness. (As the dialogue progressed, the degree of inter-relationship and overlapping of the several ideas selected to explain the understanding of mission became more evident.)

The Uniting Church notes the quotation from Pope Benedict's *Deus Caritas Est* where he speaks of the church's three-fold responsibility of proclaiming the word of God (*kerygma-martyria*), celebrating the sacraments (*leitourgia*) and exercising the ministry of charity (*diakonia*).¹¹

The Uniting Church sees also the importance for the Roman Catholic Church of the memory of the past witness offered by Christians, particularly those who have been canonised as saints. While the UCA does not give the same prominence to canonised saints and their witness by holy lives, even to death, as does the Catholic Church, there is a recognition of many faithful Christians from all generations in the commemorations found in *Uniting in Worship II*.¹² They are listed for commemoration on particular dates and classified as one of the following: apostle, witness to Jesus, martyr, Christian thinker, Christian pioneer, reformer of the church, person of prayer or faithful servant. To see and know their story of witness is to be encouraged in our witness today. Many names are common to the lists of both churches. The Catholic emphasis on the importance of the holy personal life as witness to Christ resonates with the holiness emphasis, the work of the Holy Spirit to sanctify the lives of believers, inherited by the Uniting Church from Methodism. This common value is noted also in *The Grace Given You in Christ*, the report of the International Commission for Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council, 2006.¹³

A question which relates “witness” to “*koinonia*” concerns how effectively the witness of the church is offered to the world beyond the church, when the world sees the church as not having that unity and communion in itself which it proclaims is the goal which God has for all the people of the world.

¹¹ DCE, 25. See Chapter 2.

¹² See 566ff.

¹³ Section 110.

A Catholic reading of the Uniting Church perspective

The Catholic Church's understanding of witness finds common ground in the Uniting Church's emphasis on how each individual Christian is to be a witness to Jesus Christ to fulfill the mission of the church. Agreement is acknowledged in that the church is a corporate witness in Christ through the Holy Spirit. By virtue of their Christ-like lives Christians fulfill the church's mission and seek to draw others into communion with God.

However, there is a different emphasis in the approaches taken by the respective churches here in the way of witness. The Uniting Church places significant emphasis on the saving work of God in Jesus Christ as the content of those who are witnesses to Jesus Christ. The Catholic Church places an emphasis on how the church is witness through each person faithfully responding to what is named as the universal call to holiness, and as the communion of saints. Both approaches are found in each church with different emphasis.

7. Mission and Teaching: *Didache*

A Uniting Church reading of the Catholic perspective

The Uniting Church is able to affirm with the Roman Catholic Church chapter that “Jesus Christ is both the model and the content of the teaching dimension of the church, and that the Holy Spirit, the divine animator, is the living memory of the church, establishing apostolic continuity with the apostolic faith, the faith witnessed to in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments”. As Christ requires (Matt 28: 20), teaching all that he commanded must follow the baptism of all people, whether it is the formation of children or adults in the faith. Teaching is subsequent to the proclamation of the gospel as people respond in faith, but may also be part of the work of evangelisation which precedes baptism. The Holy Spirit is the teacher *par excellence* in all the effective teaching of the church.

Responsibility for the teaching function of the church is, however, understood differently in each church. The Uniting Church recognises that in the Roman Catholic Church this responsibility is held by the college of bishops with the Pope as their head. They, in turn, are responsible for teaching in their local areas, which takes place through the work of priests, teachers and parents in the home. In the Uniting Church the National Assembly has final authority for these matters.

That there is much common ground recognised between the churches is shown by the fact that the theological colleges of both churches work together with other churches in groupings of colleges, often as part of universities, in several parts of Australia. People from our respective churches also regularly attend educational events organised by the other church.

A Catholic reading of the Uniting Church perspective

The Catholic Church finds common ground with the Uniting Church in the christological and pneumatological bases and content of the church’s teaching function as this relates to the church’s mission. Jesus Christ is the model for, and content of the church’s teaching. The Holy Spirit enables and guides the authenticity of the church’s teaching for the fulfillment of its mission. Also, both the Catholic and Uniting churches relate a function of teaching to all the members of the church, and make this connection to the apostolic nature of the church. Authentic teaching by the church has its foundation in Jesus’ teaching that seeks to draw all into God’s kingdom. Through the power of the Spirit this teaching is handed on through the apostles to the church in history.

However, there is a difference in the way the two churches understand the institutional structure for the ministry of teaching is to be expressed in their respective churches. Both churches understand there is one mission, but a variety of ministries for teaching in the church. Yet, the Catholic Church understands that the magisterium provides the necessary structure for authentic teaching in the church. The Uniting Church has a variety of ministries that provide for authentic teaching in the church.

Chapter 5

Learnings and Challenges

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Through the drafting of Chapter 4, we, the participants in this dialogue, were able to observe how the dialogue has moved away from its initial focus on the contemporary challenges and practical aspects of the church's mission. Throughout the exchange of perspectives captured in Chapter 4, we have sometimes learned about the other from the points made and at other times from the points omitted. We have been engaged in a process which has resulted in greater understanding of each other. We have sought to recognise the Christian faith as we know it in each other's church, worship, life and theology. We have found ourselves graced by the gifts of new perspectives or emphases to which we had previously given little attention. Chapter 5 now outlines those learnings and considers those matters of difference between us which may give impetus to new explorations for understanding and for further engagement in common mission.

1. The Story of the Dialogue

The story of our five years of dialogue began with a determination to examine the distinctive approaches of our two traditions regarding the topic of "the mission of the church". What emerged fairly early was that there was much similarity between our two approaches that could be captured in the six aspects of the life of the church summarised by the six Greek words that have structured chapters two, three and four.

At many points of our dialogue along the way, much of the energy of the discussion was given more to the background assumptions underpinning both the similarities-despite-differences and the differences-despite-similarities. In the end, our dialogue was therefore less specifically about the practical aspects of the mission of the church today than about the nature of the church as missionary.

One of the affirmations we most clearly shared was that both our traditions affirm the very nature of the church as missionary. Dialogue around that fundamental issue led us to a deeper understanding of each tradition's broader theological vision underpinning how each sees the nature of the church. However, always in the background of our conversations was the awareness that we are related in an imperfect although real communion. Like all divisions among the churches, our division was seen to impede the effectiveness of the church's mission. Indeed during the five years of meeting together, we came to acknowledge God's presence and activity within our respective churches and to realise that to engage in this dialogue was itself to participate in the *missio Dei* because it was an active desiring for full communion.

It is tempting to think that our ongoing engagement with each of our two churches will be determined by our capacity to resolve the various theological disagreements which have been identified in chapters two to four, and which tend to reflect the historical, theological and doctrinal divergences between our two traditions. However, although the dialogue has highlighted

these theological “differences”, “divergences”, and “disagreements”, we have come to see that these can be sometimes only functions of different emphases and perspectives, rather than as fundamental causes for division with regard to understanding the mission of the church.

The dialogue was indeed a learning process giving rise to new understandings of ourselves and of the other; this learning process was the major “result” of our dialogue. Perhaps this confirms the appropriateness for our own experience during this dialogue of the phrase ‘receptive ecumenism’ being used in other ecumenical discussions. Hearing the other’s perspective provided the opportunity for learning, as it afforded the opportunity to clarify misunderstandings, since, as the dialogue progressed, we often came to understand that we had at times mis-heard the other. However, questions and challenges remain as a result of this learning, and it is these which we will note, after first highlighting the commonalities and differences which have emerged.

2. Commonalities

The most striking commonality to be observed at the outset is our fundamental agreement on the grounding of the mission of the church in the life of the triune God and the mission of God in human history as revealed in God’s sending of his Son Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. The significance of our agreement at this level should not, we believe, be underestimated. Ultimately this is the foundation of our common conviction about the missional nature of the church.

The worship of the gathered community was likewise recognised by our dialogue as central to our common ecclesial visions of a missionary church. Both our traditions believe that it is in word and sacrament that Christ is truly present and it is there that the identity of the community of disciples, the Body of Christ, is most clearly expressed. In worship we Christians are empowered by the nourishing grace of God to participate in God’s mission. There was also basic agreement around the idea that the communion to which the church is called is pivotal to our respective ecclesiologies, and for that reason is itself central to our understanding of mission. The unity of the Body of Christ is a sign of the unity of all things to which the missionary God is bringing all creation.

Our two churches are agreed that the posture of the church towards the world is one of service. For all our shared emphasis on the particularity and visibility of the church and its role in the *missio Dei*, the church is not an end in itself. Precisely because of its grounding in God’s own life, the church is oriented towards the world in service.

Over and above the obvious agreement that the proclamation of the gospel is central to the church’s mission, our dialogue revealed a deeper agreement around this issue. The proclamation of the gospel by the church is not simply the means by which men and women are summoned to faith, but the ongoing proclamation of the gospel within the church continually addresses the people of God with the claims of the gospel and thereby draws them more deeply into being the church and therefore more deeply into the *missio Dei*.

Our churches commonly affirm that the category of witness implies more than the verbal proclamation of the gospel, but extends to the exemplary actions of Christ’s disciples. Both our traditions affirm that lives conformed to Christ in the obedience of personal holiness can be the means of

unspoken witness to Christ, and that all Christians are called to conform their lives to Christ in this way.

Our discussion around teaching revealed not only our agreement that a ministry of teaching is essential for the church to be equipped for mission, but also our common conviction that Jesus Christ is both the model and the content of the teaching.

3. Differences

Within our broad agreement surrounding the relationship between the missionary nature of the church and the triune life of God, we realised that our churches use slightly different language to describe the goal of God's saving work. Where the UCA tends to speak of God drawing people into God's reconciling work, the Catholic Church more often speaks of people being drawn into the communion of the Trinity. We concluded that no substantial issue was at stake in this difference.

In the midst of our common understanding of the relationship between mission and worship, we acknowledge that our traditions differ around a cluster of ecclesiological issues. These are focused in our different understandings of 'sacrament', which point in turn to different theologies of ecclesial mediation. This, in turn, raises further questions about the manner in which we recognise and acknowledge God's presence outside the church (an issue which will be raised again below).

Our common view that the communion of the Body of Christ is essential to the missionary nature of the church puts into sharp relief our different accounts of eucharistic hospitality. This particular difference does, of course, take us back to the issues of the Reformation and to a difference which causes pain to both our churches. Further discussion will need to address whether the shared agreement on the missionary nature of the church will help to reframe a dispute which has traditionally been treated through received categories of the eucharist and the nature of the church, and of sacraments and ministerial order.

We discovered that our commonly held view on the importance of service (*diakonia*) for the church's participation in the *missio Dei* nevertheless was informed by two different perspectives: a common humanity created in the image of God (RC) and the example of Jesus serving the world (UCA). It was concluded that this difference was of no fundamental significance.

On the relationship between mission and kerygma, we found that there were no major differences.

Our discussion of the relationship between mission and witness pointed to only minimal differences, the key one being the UCA's tendency to regard witness as something verbal, whereas the Catholic Church more naturally speaks of the comprehensiveness of witness through word and life. Whilst this difference was instructive about our respective theological traditions, it was finally perceived to be a case of complementary rather than contrasting differences, and of no significance for our shared understandings of mission. The differences identified in our discussion of teaching focused on the different institutional structures related to the church's teaching ministry. The hierarchical and centralised Catholic magisterium stands in contrast to the UCA's more diffuse teaching authority, even if in the latter the Assembly is invested with 'determining responsibility'. This is not irrelevant to further reflection on the place of teaching in the mission of the church as it impacts upon what is taught. This, in turn, raises questions of apostolicity.

Therefore, our dialogue encountered no substantial differences in our respective ecclesial visions regarding either the missional nature of the church or what constitutes its mission. The differences that did emerge oftentimes related to the widely acknowledged confessional differences that have accompanied our separated histories.

As we come to the end of our dialogue, we are conscious of issues which invite further exploration in future dialogues, or ways in which we can here and now work more closely together for the sake of a more faithful mission, and issues which indeed are hindering the church's mission.

Throughout our discussions, it emerged that our differences could sometimes be explained by our respective appropriations of diverse theologies already present in the New Testament. For example, the Pauline tradition highlights the notion of 'reconciliation' and the Johannine tradition highlights that of 'unity'. We do not believe, however, that these are significant differences. Indeed, the origins of those differences within the diversity of the New Testament could perhaps be fruitfully explored further in a future dialogue.

Our common agreement that the *missio Dei* cannot be reduced to the life of the Church leads to a further question of God's presence and activity outside the church and of the significance of such presence and activity for the church. This issue was briefly touched on at various points in our dialogue. Interestingly, the different emphases placed by our respective traditions on ecclesial mediation did not appear to be a factor in this mutual affirmation. In the context of a discussion on mission, further reflection on this issue would require attention to the significance of such extra-ecclesial divine activity for evangelism/evangelisation and also the church's ministries of service. What, for instance, is to be said about those with whom the church works in common cause in welfare, health, advocacy, education etc, but who are indifferent or even opposed to the gospel which underlies the churches' acts of service?

In the light of our agreement that the unity of the Body of Christ is a sign of the unity of all things to which the missionary God is bringing all creation, our inability to share at the one table of the Lord remains a barrier to the church's effective participation in the *missio Dei*. Would the reframing of the issue of eucharistic hospitality in terms of the priority of the church's mission, on which we have such close agreement, open up possibilities for resolution of this issue that has eluded our churches when the discussion is framed by divergent views of the relationship between the eucharist and the nature of the church, and of sacrament and ministerial order? We are very much aware that this issue was also raised at the end of the previous dialogue and was then proposed for further exploration, a task we acknowledge that we have not taken up. But that the issue has re-emerged leads us to propose with greater urgency that it be the topic of a future dialogue theme.

We offer these fruits of our dialogue to our churches, in the hope that we might work more urgently towards the unity that God wills, for the sake of a more effective participation in God's mission in the world.
