

CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVES: *THE CHURCH:*  
*TOWARDS A COMMON VISION*—INTEREST GROUP

Convener: Catherine E. Clifford, St. Paul University  
Moderator: Catherine E. Clifford, St. Paul University  
Presenter: Brian Flanagan, Marymount University  
Presenter: Kristin Colberg, College of St. Benedict / St. John's University

Catherine Clifford introduced this first meeting of the new Interest Group devoted to Catholic responses to the most recent consensus statement of the World Council of Churches' Commission on Faith and Order, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (CTCV). Clifford noted that in 1983 the Board of the CTSA had established a Special Commission tasked to produce a research report on the first convergence text of the commission, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (BEM). That commission worked over a three year period under the leadership of Michael A. Fahey, S.J., and produced a careful study of the Lima document in *Catholic Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*. The present convergence text is the fruit of a process that began in the wake of the reception of the BEM document when it became apparent to the Faith and Order Commission that much of what prevented the churches from taking further steps towards full communion, even in light of significant agreement on questions of sacramental theology, was rooted in persistent divergence on matters of ecclesiology. From 1993 onward the commission worked to draft a series of consensus texts. The first two versions, *The Nature and Purpose of the Church* (1998) and later *the Nature and Mission of the Church* (2005), were qualified as "stages on the way to a common statement" and were circulated widely. In an effort to contribute to that consultation process, an Interest Group was established from 2003 to 2005 at Fahey's initiative, dedicating three years to the study of the 1998 document. A number of these papers were published in *Ecumenical Trends*. The present Interest Group is conscious of the CTSA's continuing ecumenical responsibility, and aims to promote further study and reception of the work of the Faith and Order Commission by Catholic scholars.

Brian Flanagan's paper, "The Church: A Catholic View of a Common Vision" explored the historical development of CTCV with particular attention to its ecclesiological method. He noted that where the previous versions had included materials set aside in distinct "text boxes" - areas of continuing disagreement or requiring further study - the final version has fully integrated a discussion of these matters. Does the inclusion of this material detract from the convergence at the center of concern? Also noteworthy are the many footnotes in the document which draw from the previous work of Faith and Order and from many of the bi-lateral dialogue. This inclusion, Flanagan suggested, gives it the character of a harvesting or receiving text. He welcomed the precision in the use of "communion/koinonia" language. In response to earlier drafts, some had asked whether the term was not being asked to bear more meaning that was possible, or than the biblical witness might permit. Finally, Flanagan observed that CTCV has succeeded in setting the church more firmly in the context of the world, with mission as the driving force of its identity. This approach will surely resonate with the orientations of the Pope Francis' leadership of the Catholic Church in our day.

Kristin Colberg spoke of how CTCV serves as an important resource for contemporary dialogue between Catholic and Reformed Churches in America, a conversation which includes representatives of the National Conference of Catholic

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Bishops and of the United Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Presbyterian Church (U.S.), the Reformed Church in America and the United Church of Christ. The most recent meeting of that dialogue was focussed on unity and diversity in the church, the second of four ecclesiological themes that are to be considered for the round; other themes, to be explored in future meetings, include mission and identity, authority and episcopacy, and ministry and ordination. The fundamental question facing these churches, and placed before them by CTCV, is whether it is possible to recognize a common exercise of *episkope* beyond the various structures of the diverse communities, with their contrasting emphases on the personal and collegial dimensions in the structures and exercise of authority.

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