Catholic-Methodist Dialogue: Convergent Understandings of the Ministry of Oversight

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Abstract

Four decades of ecumenical dialogue between Roman Catholics and Methodists have deepened understandings of the nature of the Church especially in the Ministry of Oversight. Nine quinquennial reports from the International Commission for Dialogue between Roman Catholics and Methodists serve as the focus for this study of ministerial oversight. Catholics and Methodists share a history of full communion for fifteen centuries. The shared history sees the three-fold structure of ministerial oversight emerge from within diverse pastoral practices in primitive Christianity. Divergent histories include the post-Reformation rise of John Wesley’s Church of England renewal movement and unique ministerial oversight within Methodism. Since the Second Vatican Council, ecumenical dialogue has led the conversation partners to a deeper mutual understanding of the Church as communion, through collegiality and connectionalism, even as divergent practices of ministerial oversight similarly work in service of communion amid common pastoral challenges.
Acknowledgments

I hope my long-deceased parents would be proud of these writings on the Ecumenical Dialogue between Roman Catholics and Methodists. As I grew up, I thought everyone went to church twice on Sundays just like we did when we had weekend visits to my Methodist (paternal) grandmother. I am grateful to my diocesan bishop, the Most Reverend Edward U. Kmiec, Roman Catholic Bishop of Buffalo, for asking me to pursue Advanced Studies in service of ordained ministerial formation at Christ the King Seminary, East Aurora, NY, USA. Both Bishop Kmiec and our seminary Rector, Rev. Peter Drilling, Th.D. (University of St. Michael’s College and University of Toronto), have supported me in this later-in-life intellectual journey. I wish to express gratitude to my seminary colleagues as well as parishioners and friends, all of whom expressed words of encouragement and understanding during the entire process. Yet, I acknowledge and am forever indebted to Professor Margaret O’Gara as she shepherded me through the writing process, even as she faced her own health issues. The lessons she taught me about Ecumenical Dialogue, both in class and in our meetings, witness to the legacy she has left with all who desire Christian unity. The lessons she taught so many of us about living life in the face of illness remain dear in our hearts as she has moved into the realm of eternal life.
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Introduction:
Watching Over Each Other in Love-The Ministry of Oversight

“I will give you shepherds after my own heart who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.” – Jeremiah 3:15 (New Revised Standard Version)

“The mission of the Bishop of Rome within the College of all the Pastors consists precisely in ‘keeping watch’ (episkopein), like a sentinel, so that, through the efforts of the Pastors, the true voice of Christ the Shepherd may be heard in all the particular Churches.” – John Paul II, Ut Unum Sint, §94

“In the longer term, the dialogue will have to return to the matter of the Petrine ministry—now in a firmer ecclesiological framework, and helped by Pope John Paul II’s Ut Unum Sint. (In response to John Paul’s invitation for a ‘patient and fraternal dialogue’ on ‘the universal ministry of unity’), To my mind, the need for such a pastor and teacher increases with the ‘crisis of faith’ that marks sophisticated Western society and, on the positive side, with the rapid spread of a culturally and spiritually varied Christianity in many areas of the globe.” – Geoffrey Wainwright, Methodist, Scholar¹

Parents and godparents keep watch over children. Law enforcement officers keep watch over people and property to protect the peace and order of a community. Teachers keep watch over their students and their learning, just as doctors and nurses keep watch over their patients’ health and well-being. Pastors and preachers keep watch over an ecclesial flock through particular participation and cooperation with Holy Oversight. These ministers of oversight watch over in love the spiritual journey of companions in Christ for whom they are entrusted to keep watch with a ministerial charism of servant-leadership.

Christians proceed on their spiritual journey in relationship to the Triune God, empowered by agape, the gift of holy love as mediated through an ecclesial communion, watched over in love by those entrusted with the ministry of oversight. The gospel message of Jesus Christ emerges today from within the ministry of that ecclesial communion through the medium of relationships: parents, godparents, and children; colleagues and co-workers; neighbours and strangers; pastors, priests, and preachers. Love offered, shared, given, and received communicates sacred presence that draws all to a convergence in Christ. Each ecclesial community shapes sacred space, through the gift of grace, into a dwelling place for personal

encounter between the believer and Holy Presence. Here, the ministry of oversight, *episcope*, helps to form and reform the faith life of a believer in relationship to God and in relationship with others.

Ministerial oversight keeps watch over the good order of ecclesial communion, whatever the denominational tradition, size, or location of the faith community. Even though this type of servant-leadership is directed toward building up the Body of Christ in unity, the understanding and exercise of ministerial oversight continues to stand as an obstacle on the pathway to wholeness and holiness as convergent in Christ. For ecclesial communions with a developed ministry of oversight (*episcope*) such as Roman Catholicism and Methodism, an office and function that should serve to bind believers in unity can be perceived as the source of continuing division within Christianity.

Since the Second Vatican Council, Roman Catholics and Methodists have entered into a relationship of ecumenical dialogue to identify that which unites the ecclesial communions to each other in Christ as a “real, but imperfect communion” as well as the areas of divergence. Four decades of dialogue cannot easily overcome centuries of separation. But conversations between these ecclesial dialogue partners have brought into the space of shared understanding significant consensus and convergence in doctrine and discipline. Amidst real and practical differences between Catholics and Methodists, significant similarities exist across several areas, including in the Ministry of Oversight, the episcopacy. Differences in vocabulary and emphasis aside, Catholic and Methodist *episcope* is directed toward *koinonia*, communion. As the dialogue partners proceed forward, in delicate but deliberate steps, each brings gifts to exchange, enriching their respective ecclesial communions and drawing them forward into an ultimate convergence in Christ.

This study of ministerial oversight as expressed through the Catholic-Methodist ecumenical dialogues begins in Chapter One, “Shared History, Divergent Stories,” with a brief historical survey. From apostolic foundations in the New Testament developed a three-fold structure of ministerial oversight for primitive Christianity. From that three-fold structure emerged the pastoral practice of a monarchical episcopate as attested to by the early Church Fathers. Ministerial leadership by a bishop, supported by presbyters and assisted by the deacons, became normative in much of the Church during the second century. That structure continued to
evolve and devolve over time, leading to the Protestant Reformation. Two centuries later, the ministerial efforts of Anglican priest John Wesley lead an ecclesial reform and renewal movement within the Church of England which developed into a separate society now called Methodism. Wesley called for renewal by the spreading of scriptural holiness through itinerant preaching, activity he envisioned as overseen by a ministerial structure similar to the apostolic foundations of early Christianity.

Chapter Two examines “Turning Points: Moving Toward Dialogue,” the foundation for the substance of this study, beginning with the affirmation of the ecumenical movement through the exercise of unique ministerial oversight by the Catholic bishops of the world at the Second Vatican Council. A relationship of international dialogue between Roman Catholic and Methodist representatives was the first of the several bi-lateral conversations to emerge from conciliar teaching as Catholics and Methodists began meeting in 1967. Annual meetings of representatives have, since then, produced nine quinquennial reports issued by ecclesial representatives to the World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church’s Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. The focus here is on the ministry of oversight in the perspective of these reports.

Chapter Three, “Convergent and Divergent Agreements,” examines the significant areas of divergence in the dialogue reports between Catholics and Methodists in their separate understanding and exercise of ministerial oversight, including in apostolicity, authority, and the meaning of ordained ministry. These areas of disagreement drive the dialogue agenda for continuing conversations, serving as real reminders that ecclesial relationships require continuing engagement in discovery and discernment.

Chapter Four, “Episcope and Koinonia: Ministerial Oversight and Communion,” surveys similarities between Catholics and Methodists, signs of hope witnessed within pastoral practices of ministerial oversight extending from parallel understanding of Church with collegiality and connectionalism. Episcope (oversight) and koinonia (communion) are interrelated within the organic reality that is the Church’s nature and mission. Catholics and Methodists envision ministerial leadership as directed towards and flowing from a Christ-communion. Both ecclesial communions share beliefs that hope for the gift of Christian unity converging in the glorified Christ. Catholics and Methodists face similar challenges on a global scale requiring imaginative
and courageous *episcopos* as leadership responds to the mandate to watch over others in love as the mission of the gospel moves forward into uncharted territory. Concluding reflections are then given.

The road to wholeness in Christianity is through holiness, travelled together with, in, and through Christ who first called a cadre of companions to join him in the journey to Jerusalem and the cross, culminating in the complete offering in return to the Father. As we look back to see from where we came, we attend to opportunities in the present days of grace. We look forward in hope, recognizing that our unity in Christ amidst diversity is a dynamic reality energized by hope that completion will yield the glories of heavenly fulfillment.

The partners in ecumenical dialogue in addition to those who journey to discover the truth can find wisdom in these words from Cardinal Walter Kasper, President-emeritus of The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Kasper, who suggested that “ecumenical dialogue in love and truth” is “essential to the nature of the church,” urged patience and perseverance in the process of ecumenical dialogue, “When we do what we can do in faith, we can be sure that God’s Spirit does his work, too, leading us together to one flock under one shepherd (John 10:16).”

As we enter into examination of dialogue and divisiveness, the words of Pope John Paul II provide perspective for this journey into truth’s discovery. Noting that “God’s plans are often inscrutable,” John Paul dialogues with the question of why the Holy Spirit permitted divisions among the disciples of Christ. “Could it not be that these divisions have also been a path continually leading the Church to discover the untold wealth contained in Christ’s Gospel and in the redemption accomplished by Christ? Perhaps all this wealth would not have come to light otherwise...”

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Chapter 1

Shared History, Divergent Stories

“I exhort the elders among you to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it. Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away.” – 1 Peter 5:1b,2,4 (Revised Standard Version)

Roman Catholics and Methodists share a history of full communion in the Church spanning more than fifteen centuries, including the first formative centuries of Christianity as Church identity and structure developed within diverse cultural and linguistic contexts. Although division in religious practice now separates Roman Catholics and Methodists, dialogue with their shared history portrays how their stories later diverged.

Christian shared history begins in the Paschal Mystery, the death and resurrection of Christ and the gifting of the Holy Spirit. Spirit-empowered disciples believe they have been called by the Risen Christ to bear witness to the Christ-event as expressed in New Testament writings. That message moves forward over time and across place, beyond the small band of original followers of Jesus from the intimate confines of Jerusalem out to a Gentile world. The gospels proclaim a pattern for servant-leadership modeled and embodied in Christ’s ultimate self-gift of kenosis, self-emptying on the cross, self-giving service to which all of Christ’s disciples are called. Paul’s plentiful writings reveal a unique apostolic role in his mission to the Gentiles, establishing and overseeing in love early church communities through teaching, preaching, and exhortation. Paul responded to what he believed was a life-changing call by the Risen Christ by handing on through an apostolic ministry what he had received. The Pastoral Epistles give a glimpse of the later first century structuring of these burgeoning communities of disciples through development of the ministerial roles of overseer, elders, and deacons. Crucial is the concern to maintain continuity with the original apostolic witness and fidelity to the Christ-mandated mission of gospel proclamation. Thus, the foundations were laid during the New Testament and Patristic eras of a Ministry of Oversight, an apostolic exercise of servant-leadership in faithful connection to Christ.

Parallel patterns for the ministry of oversight developed in the second and third century Church from first-century apostolic foundations: a scriptural “episkopus,” perhaps in the spirit of
Paul as missionary apostle to the Gentiles. This was a role the founder of Methodism, John Wesley, envisioned for himself: an historical episcopacy, centered on apostolic succession as guarantee of fidelity to the original gospel, firmly connected to the original apostolic mission, and at the heart of ecclesial self-understanding for Roman Catholicism. These modes of ministerial oversight can be considered complementary components for pastoral supervision within the Church even amidst divergent practices of servant-leadership by early Christians.

The teaching by Jesus on servant-leadership in the synoptic gospels includes a Last Supper discourse in Luke’s gospel offered within a dispute among disciples over rank and importance. Jesus said, “I am among you as one who serves” (Luke 22: 27c) proclaiming His abiding presence in self-giving service present in the unity of table companionship. Luke’s Acts of the Apostles reveals a developing ‘apostolic ministry’ in early Christianity beginning with “The Twelve” made complete with the selection of Matthias as “ overseer” (Acts 1:21) to replace Judas. The Twelve were “eschatological figures” of a “restored Israel” standing for the twelve tribes, a position that originated in their call to service by Jesus. The Twelve represented continuity with God’s covenantal promises to Abraham and his children, important to an early Jewish Christian community in Jerusalem.⁴ Raymond Brown suggests that the Twelve expressed a “collective influence in meetings that decided church policy,” as a group in a “foundational role.” Brown suggests that the role of Peter and the collective role of the Twelve indicate a “memory of pastoral responsibility” with specifying the nature of their supervision.⁵

In Acts, pastoral needs of Jerusalem’s Hellenist-Jewish Christians inspire a response by the Twelve in their decision to empower for service and administration seven Greek “deacons” through prayer and laying-on-of-hands by the Twelve (Acts 6:2). Later, gathered in “Council” at Jerusalem (Acts 15:6), missionary apostles Paul and Barnabas, along with Peter, “the apostles and elders,” decided the Christian initiation pathway for Gentiles. “Each of these supervisory groups would have managed the distribution of the common funds, made decisions affecting the

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life style of Christians, and entered into discussion about policy as regards converts’ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit within the diversity of their particular situation.

The authority of the gospel empowers Paul’s ministry of oversight as “missionary apostle” to the Gentiles. Raymond Brown believes that Paul envisioned an apostle to be a person called and sent by the Risen Jesus to proclaim the gospel, but not necessarily as “a local, residential church leader.” According to his letters, Paul exercised apostolic supervision through teaching, exhortation, reproving, and in judgment against members whose behaviour threatened the unity of a church. Although not one of the Twelve, Paul’s missionary efforts are a faithful apostolic witness through gospel-centred communities and, later, martyrdom in Rome.

The pastoral situation became more complex as expressed in the Pastoral Epistles. A void of leadership followed the deaths of the original apostolic witnesses like Peter, Paul, and James, as the original memory faded. Second-generation “apostolic delegates” such as Timothy and Titus received the mantle of authority as apostolic successors to Paul because of their ministerial association with him and his connection to the original apostolic witness to the gospel and his call by the Risen Christ. Raymond Brown suggests that “apostolic delegates” such as Timothy and Titus “would have constituted an intermediary stage between that of the apostle’s (Paul) great personal authority over the churches founded by him (40s-60s) and the period when the local church leaders became the highest authorities (second century).”

1 Timothy lists qualifications for those called to the ministry of oversight. “Whoever aspires to the office of bishop (Gk episkopos) must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well.” (1 Timothy 3:1-3) The Letter of Paul to Titus adds, “He must have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching, so that he may be able both to preach with sound

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6 Brown, 327-328.
7 Brown, 328.
8 Brown, 328.
9 Brown, 329.
doctrine and to refute those who contradict it.” (Titus 1:9) These early church leaders were expected to maintain good order within their church (as they would within their own households) and remain in faithful connection to the apostolic foundation.

The priority for these late New Testament era ministerial leaders, according to former Lutheran scholar Donald Juel, appears to be organizational stability to ensure that “sound doctrine” remained at the heart of emergent church communities. Juel sees the shift toward organizational stability within the Pastoral Epistles in reference to Timothy and others appointed to oversee a *paratheke*, or bank deposit, as the overseers “act as a banker” so as to “guard the deposit” (I Tim 6:20; II Tim 1:12,14) entrusted to him as an overseer, especially in terms of teaching, *didaskalia.*

Thus, the essential question arises, “What constituted fidelity to the tradition, and how will that fidelity be guaranteed?” Ministerial oversight portrayed within the Pastoral Epistles involved safeguarding fidelity to the gospel and managing well the household of faith in relationship to that gospel. The overall evidence from the New Testament Church does not indicate a singular way of ministerial oversight, although Paul’s response to differences and disagreements within particular churches during his apostolic ministry ultimately appealed to the gospel he preached (Letter to the Galatians). Thus, there were complementary ways servant-leadership was exercised in the first-century Church.

The three-fold structure of ministerial leadership, bishop, presbyter, and deacon as referenced in the Pastoral Epistles included a council of elders (presbyters), which exercised authority for the benefit of the faith community, in relationship to a single overseer, who may or may not have been an elder. This corporate body, entrusted with daily direction of the community, “had some credentials such as age and experience, association with the original disciples of Jesus, being the first converts to Christianity in the group, which indicated a right to leadership.” The presbyteral group would almost appear to mirror a role similar to that played

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10 Juel, 351.
11 Juel, 352.
by the Twelve in Jerusalem. In any event, from that group leadership developed the “presbyter-bishop” model, which developed into the single ministerial overseer in the second century.\footnote{Brown, 338.}

Writings from the late first century, such as in the \textit{Didache}, as well as second and third century writings by Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus, and Cyprian, reveal the genesis of movement from diverse practices towards a single pattern for ministerial supervision and oversight, a “monarchical” episcopacy, an overseer entrusted with ministerial leadership within a complex structure with presbyters and deacons. As the second-century church grew in prominence, it faced multiple threats including questionable teachings such as Gnosticism, which claimed faithfulness to the gospel as inspired solely by the Holy Spirit through a secret knowledge. Yet, those early communities believed the guiding oversight of the Holy Spirit was present in their need for stability, apostolic connection, and, as Bernard Cooke asserts, “continuity for the church as it goes through historical change.”\footnote{Cooke, 59.}

The \textit{Didache}, written after the Pastoral Letters but prior to the letters of Ignatius of Antioch, portrays the transition as “prophets” of the day remained authoritative alongside a developing structure of episcopacy. “(And) turn toward the prophets, (allowing them) to eucharitize as much as they wish” from \textit{Didache}, 10:7; which continues later with “Appoint, then, for yourselves, bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord...for they themselves are your honoured ones with the prophet-teachers.” \textit{(Didache 15:1-2)} The itinerant ministry of the word by the “apostle-prophets” called for a welcome within the church, but suggested that an “apostle” is a “false prophet” if he stayed three days or asked for silver. Ministerial leadership for some communities included at the time itinerant service by “prophets” as well as “overseers” and “deacons” chosen by the community as “worthy of the Lord.”\footnote{Aaron Milavec, \textit{The Didache: Text, Translation, Analysis, and Commentary} (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003), 25, 27, 35.} The situation in the post-New Testament era remained in flux even as the reality of pastoral need directed pastoral practice.

Early second-century letters by the bishop of Antioch, Ignatius, presume the presence and practice of structured ministerial supervision as centered upon a single overseer. Ignatius wrote
letters to early faith communities to promote unity of the church around a single bishop (within a threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter, deacon). Ignatius asserted that “we must regard the bishop as the Lord himself” (Ephesians 6:1)\(^\text{16}\) as he called for respect given even to a bishop with “youthful appearance” and yielding to him as “one who is wise in God; yet not really to him, but to the Father of Jesus Christ, the Bishop of all.” (Magnesians 3:1) His greeting to the Philadelphians reminded them of their firm establishment in “godly harmony” through the sufferings and resurrection of Christ, “especially if they are one with the bishop and presbyters and deacons who are with him, who have been appointed by the mind of Jesus Christ, whom he, in accordance with his own will, securely established by his Holy Spirit. (Philadelphians, Greeting)

The epistle penned by Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans reveals a developed understanding of church unity within the context of relationships through the bishop and worship of Christ.

Flee from divisions, as the beginnings of evils. You must all follow the bishop, as Jesus Christ followed the Father, and follow the presbytery as you would the apostles; respect the deacons as the commandment of God. Let no one do anything that has to do with the church without the bishop. Only that Eucharist which is under the authority of the bishop (or whomever he designates) is to be considered valid. Wherever the bishop appears, there let the congregation be; just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic church. It is not permissible either to baptize or to hold a love feast without the bishop. (Smyrnaeans 8)\(^\text{17}\)

Relationship between the ministerial overseer and his congregation, especially in a Eucharistic context, appears as essential to the identity of the church.

The early second century letters of Ignatius must have influenced John Wesley, since he included them in his eighteenth century anthology, *The Christian Library (Volume One)*. Methodist scholars today acknowledge the role that the writings of Ignatius had in the eventual development of the Methodist episcopacy. Andrew McGuire writes in “Methodists and Episcopacy—A Dialogue with the Early Centuries” that modern day Methodists would welcome the emphasis by Ignatius on unity and the relationship between the overseer and community


\(^{17}\) Holmes, 189, 191.
McGuire explains, “The Ignatian bishop did not exercise authority capriciously or without reference to the people” as “the bishop is not isolated from his people” but in his authority “his relationship with his people is a reciprocal one.”

Methodist scholar James K. Mathews sees Ignatius as showing what a bishop does as he experiences it and what would be considered common practice at the time. Mathews discusses how Ignatius compares “a bishop to a helmsman in a storm-tossed sea.” (Letter to Polycarp)

In a footnote, Mathews likens the elevated cathedra, the bishop’s symbolic seat of teaching authority in the cathedral of the local church, to a steersman’s seat “looking out over the nave (From Latin, navis, “ship”), steering by his navigational knowledge (theology) through a troubled world.”

The image of “strings to a lyre” (Ephesians 4:1) helped Ignatius express analogously the relationship between presbyters and their bishop. Ignatius believed “The bishop on earth represents the true Bishop—Christ. This wholeness manifested locally and implied universally is (original emphasis) the Church Catholic.”

Later in the second century, Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, countered the Gnostic secret knowledge with the authority of the four gospels and apostolic succession guaranteeing faithful connection to Christ and the original apostolic witness. Mathews and most Methodists perceive this as problematic if a guarantee of apostolicity depends solely on succession.

The third-century bishop and martyr Cyprian wrote of unity of the Church in relationship to the bishop and the episcopacy. “This unity we ought firmly to hold and assert, especially those of us that are bishops who preside in the Church, that we may also provide the episcopate itself to be one and

19 Andrew McGuire, “Methodists and Episcopacy,” 40.
21 Mathews, 44.
22 Mathews, 44.
23 Mathews, 46.
24 Mathews, 36-37.
undivided,” adding a sentence later, “The episcopate is one, each part of which is held by each one for the whole.” Thus, the single minister of oversight embodies church unity and apostolic connection within authoritative teaching.

From the Catholic perspective, the insights of Francis Sullivan reflect Catholic belief that within historical evidence and theological reflection a bishop ministers as successor of the apostles through divine institution. Sullivan explains Catholic teaching that “the episcopate provided the instrument that the post-New Testament Church needed to maintain its unity and orthodoxy.” Sullivan concludes that under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the faithful recognize the teaching authority of the bishop in succession to the apostles, “the reception of the bishops’ teaching as normative for faith is analogous to the reception of certain writings as normative for faith.” Sullivan appeals to the belief that as the Holy Spirit guides the Church in discernment of the normative writings, so the Holy Spirit guides the tradition of authoritative apostolic teaching handed down “from the apostles by the succession of bishops in the churches.” Sullivan concludes that “without the leadership of its bishops, the early Church could hardly have achieved a consensus on the canon of Scripture” or “overcome the very real threat Gnosticism posed to its unity and orthodoxy.”

Although a shared history between Roman Catholics and Methodists continued from the time of early Christianity into the sixteenth century, different perceptions of the need for ecclesial reform resulted in the eventual ecclesial split moving forward from the Protestant Reformation. Two centuries after the original schism, Methodism developed as a renewal movement which emerged from within the eighteenth century Church of England. Anglican priest John Wesley called Christians to “scriptural holiness” through a renewal of preaching and the Christian life to be in more faithful continuity with what Wesley referred to as “primitive Christianity.”

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27 Sullivan, 230.
The context for the Protestant Reformation began during the medieval era with the rise and fall and rise again of the papacy, the primacy of the successor to Peter within the medieval episcopacy in the West. From the Patristic Era, especially after the fourth century official recognition of Christianity, a distinction developed between the ordained ministry and the laity. There was an increasing emphasis on the cultic identity of the ordained, as the bishop became identified with Christ the High Priest. In the High Middle Ages, dialogue developed about sacramental ‘character,’ the indelible mark left by unrepeatable sacraments such as holy orders. “For most theologians of the Middle Ages, the doctrine of character conferred in ordination is used as the key to explaining the efficacy of sacramental actions performed by an unworthy minister.”

Yet, episcopal orders in the medieval era were not separate from presbyteral orders since both participated in the priesthood of Jesus Christ. The “essence and loftiest powers of priesthood” were given in “presbyteral ordination” as “the bishop is what a presbyter is, only a little more so—he can ordain, and his power of the keys extends to the realm of excommunication.” With a greater emphasis on transubstantiation in the Eucharist, “priesthood as a cultic reality has gradually gained center stage in preference to apostolic proclamation of the gospel.”

Formerly-Lutheran scholar Michael Root sees this shift toward the fullness of the priesthood in the presbyteral order as expressive of medieval ecclesial realities. As the Church grew in population and geographic coverage, “the parish became the true assembly, the altar community” as “the presbyter/priest became the effective ordinary minister of the sacraments received by a typical layperson and effective head of the primary Christian community for most Christians.” The rise of the presbyteral order in the Medieval Era mirrored the ministerial oversight exercised by bishops in the Patristic Era as the identity of the single overseer centered on serving as pastor and teacher of a “local church.” In addition, medieval-period bishops were ensconced in the power structure of feudal society.

28 Cooke, 580.
29 Cooke, 580.
From the time of Gregory VII in the eleventh century, papal supremacy increased, in the face of opposition by secular rulers, reaching greater heights especially in the reforms of the thirteenth century including renewal through establishment of religious communities such as the Franciscans and Dominicans. Papal dominance collapsed with the Western Schism (1378-1417) which resulted in the brief rise of the conciliarist movement advocating ultimate ecclesial authority in a council with the pope as supreme head. Yet, following the Council of Constance (1414-1418), papal dominance re-emerged from the ashes of three rival papacies of the Western Schism as conciliarism declined. Calls for reform of the church to better meet the ministerial needs of the faithful converged in an ecclesiastical “perfect storm” as a religious movement and the beginnings of a divided modern church.

The Council of Trent (1545-1563) reformed early modern Roman Catholicism through improved oversight by the bishop for his diocese, better preparation for priests through seminary formation, and a renewed emphasis on preaching and teaching. Tridentine reforms stressed the visible and structural aspects of the Church, reemphasized the cultic aspects of priesthood, and strove to bring order from the diversity of pastoral practices to include a more unified celebration of the Eucharist. As Bernard Cooke summarizes, “Tridentine structuring of the Roman Catholic Church represents a long step forward in the papacy’s reassertion of absolute authority.”

Culmination of centralization of papal authority reached its peak in the later part of the nineteenth century with the First Vatican Council’s definition of papal infallibility.

Rising individualism and the Pietistic movements lead seventeenth and eighteenth-century English Protestant believers towards a more personal and affective expression of belief and worship as religious practice and preaching collapsed into moralism and partisanship, with appeal to reason rather than faith, all bordering on the deism of the age. Anglicans John Wesley and his brother Charles, along with George Whitefield, responded to the apparent pastoral need left in the wake of dry and empty preaching and religious expression; as a result, they transformed eighteenth-century religious practice in England and, eventually, America.

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31 Cooke, 142.

32 Cooke, 304-310.
“Methodism can be said to have several beginnings,” states Methodist theologian Mathews who asserts that some see it as “a renewal movement that has broken out repeatedly in the history of the church.” Others see the genesis of Methodism in John Wesley’s upbringing by his mother, herself a daughter of a famous Dissent preacher, with John Wesley being rescued at age five from a rectory fire in Epworth, England, where his father served as an Anglican pastor. Another beginning of Methodism can be identified in the formation of the early “Holy Club” which the Wesleys and Whitefield began at Oxford in 1729 or the 1738 formation of an Anglican society in London.

From these varied beginnings, Methodism arose as a renewal movement through Wesley’s mission in an apostolic spirit to form religious societies. Wesley’s apostolic labours included “incessant itineration” across Britain and Ireland. His self-appointed supervisory oversight of preachers as a “scriptural episkopos” lead to coordination of pastoral care in a “connexion” of burgeoning Methodist societies. His ministry of oversight included the crafting of a common discipline in his General Rules, all in faithful response, as he believed, to the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Wesley held within his lifelong ministerial oversight the contrasts and contradictions of the Church of England of his time. As an Anglican priest, he believed firmly in the celebration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, respecting the authority of the Church of England. Yet, as an evangelical, he saw pastoral needs and preaching as the priority above any restrictive ecclesiastical authority. Methodist scholar David Chapman traces the turning point for Wesley to a spiritual crisis that followed a disastrous missionary trip to America and the ‘conversion’ experience of May 24, 1738, as quoted from Wesley’s Journal:

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s Preface to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an

33 Mathews, 67.
34 Mathews, 68-69.
assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.\textsuperscript{35}

Chapman suggests that Wesley spent his life as “the tutor of Methodism, producing theology to help ordinary people face practical programs in the Christian life.”\textsuperscript{36}

The New Testament and early Church Fathers influenced Wesley who envisioned the first four centuries of Christianity as the story of inward transformation as a response in faith, outwardly revealed in acts of righteousness as fruits of the Spirit. Wesley believed the Constantinian peace of the early fourth century was the beginning of the end for idyllic primitive Christianity resulting in eventual corruption through abuse of power and position.\textsuperscript{37} Wesley himself remained Anglican, a “sacramentarian” and “High Churchman,” in conflict within himself between the importance of baptism and the Lord’s Supper in the church proper and the needs met by a proliferation of itinerant lay preachers ministering “scriptural holiness” within growing Methodist societies.

Wesley did not desire separation from the Church of England, but the exigency of pastoral need especially among the Methodists present in America, lead Wesley to establish a structured order to Methodism for America. In 1784, American independence and Wesley’s desire to continue his renewal movement after his death shifted the course of American Methodism. Wesley took it upon himself as an Anglican priest to ordain ministers for America. These included Thomas Coke along with Francis Asbury, who was already in America, as the first joint superintendents with two elders ordained by Wesley to administer baptism and lead the Lord’s Supper. Exercising the ministry of oversight as he had done over the conference of itinerant preachers he had formed previously in England, Wesley established a three-fold ministry, deacon, elder, and superintendent, for an American Methodist church. At the same time in England, Wesley created a self-perpetuating corporate body to be known as the Conference to exercise collectively the ministry of \textit{episcope}, the ministry of oversight for British Methodism.

\textsuperscript{35} David Chapman, \textit{In search of the catholic spirit: Methodists and Roman Catholics in Dialogue} (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2004), 7.

\textsuperscript{36} Chapman, 24.

\textsuperscript{37} Chapman, 18-19.
Wesley continued to ordain for service in Scotland, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and the West Indies and revised Anglican worship for Methodist usage. Separation from the Church of England had been set in motion, an event that the Anglican cleric Wesley had hoped to avoid.

Wesley’s anti-Catholicism remains as much a part of his legacy as his establishment of a Methodist communion. Wesley’s strong influence, through example and writings, extended his lifelong anti-Catholic attitudes, a product of his times, as religious invective well into the twentieth century. In his lifetime, Wesley opposed religious persecution which Roman Catholics suffered in England, perhaps due in part to the influence of Dissent Preaching. Yet, Wesley appealed to Roman Catholics in a somewhat conciliatory manner through his 1749 Letter to a Roman Catholic, calling for a ‘softening of hearts.’ His message centered on his understanding of ‘true, primitive Christianity’ the shared history he explained through classical teachings about the Trinity and salvation as well as the early creeds.

Wesley crafted his first written challenge to Roman Catholicism in his pre-conversion, 1735 letter “To a Roman Catholic Priest,” an open letter expressing his distrust of “the Romanists” because of what he viewed as the selective manner of reading history including classical theologians. Honouring of religious imagery, as commended by the Council of Trent, smacked of idolatry in Wesley’s eyes. He asserted Catholicism’s seven sacraments, Eucharistic transubstantiation, communion under one species, purgatory, the cult of the saints, and the supremacy of the pope were decisions by the Council of Trent that had added wrongly to the ‘Book of Life.’

In 1753, Wesley authored a pamphlet asserting that all that the church believed must be proven in Sacred Scripture. Firmly supporting the superiority of the Church of England over Roman Catholicism, Wesley railed against the degeneration of public worship in Catholicism.

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38 Chapman, 15.
39 Chapman, 32-33.
40 Chapman, 24-25.
from the simplicity of early Christianity, Catholicism’s equating Tradition with Scripture. Wesley declared Christ to be the sole head of the Church instead of the pope.  

Controversy ensued with the 1760 Roman Catholic *A Caveat against the Methodists* written by Richard Challoner, Vicar-Apostolic of the London district. Challoner contended that Methodism’s appeal to continuity with apostolic teaching posed a threat to an already-struggling Roman Catholicism in England. According to Methodist scholar David Chapman, Wesley responded to Challoner’s challenges by contending that “the Church of Christ is universal, one, holy and orthodox, with an unfailing succession of pastors and teachers under the direction of the Holy Spirit,” traditional marks of the Church which Wesley felt were lacking in Roman Catholicism because of error and division in the past. Wesley rejected “uninterrupted succession from the apostles” for “Romish bishops.” Wesley contended that the validity and effectiveness of sacraments were dependent upon the worthiness of the minister in contrast to Catholicism’s belief that the will and intention of the Church were independent from the worthiness of the minister.

Chapman concludes, “If only Challoner and Wesley could have engaged in theological dialogue instead of controversy, some of their differences might have been resolved.” It was not until the seismic shifts of the twentieth century took place that dialogue replaced diatribe as the perception of the shared history between Roman Catholics and Methodists converged in long-needed theological conversation.

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41 Chapman, 25.
42 Chapman, 38.
43 Chapman, 39.
44 Chapman, 39.
45 Chapman, 40.
Chapter 2

Turning Points: Moving Toward Dialogue

“The Catholic Church considers it her duty to work actively for the fulfillment of that great mystery of unity for which Christ prayed so earnestly to His heavenly Father on the eve of His great sacrifice. The knowledge that she is so intimately associated with that prayer is for her an occasion of ineffable peace and joy. And why should she not rejoice sincerely when she sees Christ’s prayer extending its salvific and ever increasing efficacy even over those who are not of her fold?”

--Pope John XXIII, at the Opening of the Second Vatican Council, October 11, 1962

Steps and missteps have marked Western Christianity’s post-Reformation journey, including from the time of John Wesley and his efforts to renew his native Anglican Church via scriptural holiness in an effort to recapture the essence of ‘primitive’ Christianity. The efforts of a single believer such as John Wesley, whose affective experience of salvation dramatically changed his life, resulted eventually in millions of adherents drawn to a holiness movement as embodied within the Wesleyan-Methodist tradition. Long after his passing, Wesley’s writings continue to serve a unique ministry of oversight within the Methodist communion. This eighteenth-century Anglican priest turned itinerant preacher and self-styled “scriptural episkopos,” a force for renewal and change, could never have imagined the Holy Spirit-inspired change of course brought about by the efforts of a single Roman Catholic priest entrusted for a short time with the apostolic ministry of oversight for and in relationship with the world’s Catholics.

In 1958, the medieval-styled cloistered conclave in the Sistine Chapel comprising the College of Cardinals produced a curious selection from their cadre, 78 year-old Cardinal Angelo

47 According to the World Methodist Council “Day Five Newsletter for the World Methodist Conference Durban South Africa 2011” there are 77 member churches from 135 countries which participate in Conference with approximately 70 million participants in the Wesleyan-Methodist communion. [www.worldmethodistcouncil.org](http://www.worldmethodistcouncil.org) (Accessed November 2, 2011).
Roncalli, long-time diplomat and Patriarch of Venice. Roncalli reached into the medieval past, choosing the papal name John, last used in the fourteenth century by a French cleric. Called to the papacy at the age of 78, Roncalli’s service as an elderly priest chosen to fill the Petrine “shoes of the fisherman” as Roman Pontiff and Bishop of Rome had been expected to be a quiet, uneventful time of transition. Few could have imagined the historic exercise of apostolic ministry of oversight that would unfold during his five-year tenure as the new pope decided within his first few months in office to convoke an Ecumenical Council of the world’s bishops. The pope surprised everyone, perhaps including himself, as he announced his intention for a Council, the Bishop of Rome as Roman Pontiff and Universal Pastor together in congregation with the world’s Catholic bishops.

Four years after his election, John XXIII presided at the Council’s Opening Session as 2,000 Catholic bishops gathered at the Vatican. Deliberations and decisions of the Church Fathers during four sessions between 1962 and 1965 dramatically transformed the Church’s worship. They completed the self-understanding of the Church’s nature and mission left unfinished since the First Vatican Council and, reflecting the desire of John XXIII for a ‘new Pentecost,’ they renewed engagement by the Church with the Modern World and initiated conversation with other Christians as a first step toward greater Christian unity.

The turning point signalled by the Council Fathers encouraged participation in a twentieth-century ecumenical movement begun in 1910, an activity which previously had been ignored or forbidden for Catholics. Neither Catholics nor Protestants, separated for centuries, could have imagined this turn of events, this step taken forward through the exercise of apostolic ministry of *episcope*, watching over in love the world’s Catholics, by a pope in council with the bishops, all successors of the apostles.

Admitting to “a sudden flash of inspiration,” Pope John XXIII, “trembling with a little emotion, but with humble firmness of purpose,” announced his plans first to seventeen cardinals at the Benedictine cloister adjacent to the Basilica of St Paul-Outside-the-Walls at the conclusion of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the feast of the Conversion of St Paul, January 25, 1959. The pope proposed a General Council of the Church and a Roman diocesan synod, which he hoped would “lead to the desired and long awaited modernization of the Code of Canon Law, which is expected to accompany and to crown these two efforts in the practical application of the
rules of ecclesiastical discipline, applications the Spirit of the Lord will surely suggest to Us as we proceed.”

The 1917 Code of Canon Law reflected an incomplete ecclesiology from the First Vatican Council which had been interrupted in 1870 by the invasion of Italian unification forces into Rome. The Church Fathers, European and American for the most part, were forced to flee before finishing their magisterial efforts which had defined papal infallibility without placing Petrine primacy in relationship to the episcopacy.

John XXIII launched the Church’s twenty-first Ecumenical Council by quoting St Cyprian to the gathered episcopacy about the undivided unity of the Church as “she spreads her luxuriant branches over all the earth” as the “one mother of countless generations” who are “animated with her breath.”

He believed that the church must play an instrumental role sharing “a treasure of incalculable worth” with the surrounding modern society. “And our duty is not just to guard this treasure, as though it were some museum-piece and we the curators, but earnestly and fearlessly to dedicate ourselves to the work that needs to be done in this modern age of ours, pursuing the path which the Church has followed for almost twenty centuries.”

The exact nature of Christian unity that John XXIII envisioned remains a mystery since his brief papacy ended between the first and second sessions of the council. His closing words to the First Session called upon the cooperation of all to implement the Council’s decisions “with promptness and generosity.” He told the Church Fathers and gathered guests, “Then, doubtless, will dawn that new Pentecost which is the object of our yearning—a Pentecost that will increase the Church’s wealth of spiritual strength and extend her maternal influence and saving power to every sphere of human endeavour.”

Angelo Roncalli began his ministerial priesthood at the beginning of the twentieth century, a century of sound, noise, and tumult for the Church and the world. The twentieth-

century Church stood at a critical turning point surrounded by the lingering chaos of ancient prejudices, accidents of history, colliding ideologies and theologies, the Enlightenment elevation of the ‘subject,’ an Industrial Revolution, national identities emerging through European movements of unification, the tragic toll in loss of human life and dignity from two devastating armed conflicts fought among Christian nations, and a ‘cold war’ being waged through a superpower stand-off. The presence of God appeared powerless and insignificant to some in an increasingly complex, secularized modern society of which the Church was wary.

In the eyes of Angelo Roncalli, the modern need to proclaim an authentic Gospel of Jesus Christ and to engage the world was greater than ever. Just as the first apostles in the New Testament era engaged their surroundings through inspired mission, the modern apostles entrusted with the ministry of *episcopoe* had to emerge through a crisis of imagination, inspired anew to encounter and engage Christians and the world in dialogue, continuing conversations of a theological, pastoral, and ministerial nature. Polemics had plagued past conversations, poisoning the ecumenical landscape for centuries and hindering fruitful proclamation of the gospel. A Roman Catholic Ecumenical Council presented the opportunity for fresh, new creative activity in service to the gospel mission and the common good.

The welcome that was extended to the council of thirty-nine official observers and representatives from Protestant Churches to the council stood out as another significant turning point that set this council apart from most previous conciliar endeavours. Those official Observers included three representatives from the World Methodist Council. In addition to their daily presence at the General Congregations of Bishops, Christian ministers and theologians participated (in growing numbers over the Council’s four sessions) through written interventions as well as countless informal conversations over coffee. This input of ideas and insights occurred not only between the Observers and the Council Father but among the Observers themselves.

Anglican Bishop John R. H. Moorman, part of the Church of England delegation which was the first to accept an invitation to the council by the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, wrote of the types of influence the non-Catholic Observers had on the proceedings, due in part to seating in a prominent position next to council officials. “Our presence made the Council more than just a domestic affair, concerned with nothing more than the Roman Catholic Church,” notes Moorman, who added that some Roman Catholic bishops
“were very keen that a new era in Church relations would come out of the Council.” The Anglican prelate noted those informal conversations with Roman Catholic bishops resulted in the Observers having a unique ‘voice’ in conciliar deliberations. The presence of the Observers at daily Mass in St Peter’s, first resisted by some of the Protestants Observers, became significant in the development of a relationship rooted in prayer through which all were influenced positively by the exchange of ideas. As the Council drew to a close in December 1965 the successor to Pope John XXIII, Paul VI, invited the Council Fathers and the Observers to an extraordinary worship service, a Liturgy of the Word, at the papal basilica of St Paul’s Outside-the-Walls where the original call for a council had been made. The Observers were to take active roles in this prayer gathering as recognition of their unique presence at the proceedings. Thus, a new era of engagement in ecumenical conversation began in the sanctifying context of prayer and worship.

From the beginning, the Council Fathers expressed a clear vision of their hopes with the opening words of The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium, SC) promulgated by Paul VI December 4, 1963.

The sacred Council has set out to impart an ever-increasing vigor to the Christian life of the faithful; to adapt more closely to the needs of our age those institutions which are subject to change; to foster whatever can promote union among all who believe in Christ; to strengthen whatever can help to call all mankind into the Church’s fold. (SC §1) In other words, paramount in the minds of the world’s Roman Catholic bishops as they addressed “reform and promotion of the liturgy” (SC §1) was renewal of Christian faith life within the context of greater Christian unity, all in the service of deepening the relationship of Christ with humanity throughout the world.

On November 21, 1964, the Church Fathers approved and Paul VI promulgated two documents foundational for ecumenical dialogue: The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium, referenced LG); and the Decree on Ecumenism (Unitatis Redintegratio,}


In *Lumen Gentium*, the Council addressed for the benefit of the church and the world “the nature and universal mission” (*LG* §1) of the church as “in the nature of sacrament—a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men.” (*LG* §1) The need “to achieve full unity in Christ” prompted a “greater urgency” to the church’s responsibility in the face of “the condition of the modern world.” (*LG* §1)

Later in the chapter on “The Mystery of the Church,” the Council clarified the relationship between the “Church of Christ” and the Catholic Church.

This Church, constituted and organized as a society in the present world, subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him. Nevertheless, many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside its visible confines. Since these are gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, they are forces impelling towards Catholic unity. (*LG* §8)

By their specific use of the word “subsists,” the bishops do not strictly identify the Church of Christ with the Roman Catholic Church. For the first time, there is acknowledgement of the presence of ecclesial elements outside the confines of the Roman Catholic Church. These “ecclesial elements” present in multiplicity had the potential draw Christians into a greater unity and catholicity.

The simultaneously issued Decree on Ecumenism developed more specifically this ecclesial insight, reiterating the need for the restoration of unity among Christians. “Christ the Lord founded one Church and one Church only” and “such division openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages that most holy cause, the preaching of the Gospel to every creature.” (*UR* §1) Those believers in Christ, including those baptized “are put in some, though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church.” (*UR* §3) The Church Fathers acknowledged that “the most significant elements and endowments which together go to build up and give life to the Church itself, can exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church” including “the written Word of God; the life of grace; faith, hope and charity, with the other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit.” (*UR* §3) The bishops, therefore, called upon Catholics to “acknowledge and esteem the truly Christian endowments” found among “separated brethren” and not to forget that “anything wrought by the grace of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of our separated brethren can contribute to our own edification.” (*UR* §4)
If the magisterial efforts by the Second Vatican Council have been likened to “opening windows” allowing in the winds of renewal and change as part of a Holy Spirit-directed “new Pentecost,” then the image of an “opened door” in welcome to Christian “neighbours” invited in for dialogue spoke to the common search for a Christ-desired unity and convergence among believers. The welcomed presence of Methodist Observers for the four conciliar sessions served as a turning point to usher in a new era of relationship among “separated brethren.” All stood poised on the threshold, ready to step into a new era of the Church in Christ on its journey toward the kingdom.

The Methodist representatives proceeded from St Peter’s Basilica after the conclusion of the final session of the Second Vatican Council in December 1965 to seek support from among their communion to initiate what a few years prior had been considered nearly impossible, a bilateral ecumenical dialogue with official Roman Catholic representatives. At their summer 1996 meeting, the World Methodist Council accepted the Vatican invitation to appoint representatives to an international commission. The Joint Commission for Dialogue between the World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church met for the first time in October 1967 near Rome, with annual meetings continuing (including this year) at locations throughout the world.

Since 1971, the Joint Commission’s reports to the World Methodist Council and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity have been known by the meeting location of the World Methodist Council at which they were presented. The first two quinquennial reports from Denver (1971) and from Dublin (1976) are known only by where they were presented to the World Methodist Council meeting. The practice of giving a specific title beyond the place-name began with the third report, Toward an Agreed Statement on the Holy Spirit, the Honolulu Report (1981). The Nairobi Report (1986) represented a significant movement into ecclesiology with Towards a Statement on the Church while the Singapore Report (1991) is officially known as The Apostolic Tradition. The Rio de Janiero Report (1996) was entitled The Word of Life: A Statement on Revelation and Faith. The Brighton Report (2001), Speaking The Truth In Love: Teaching Authority Among Catholics and Methodists, represented a shift in the document’s structure as it begins with a biblical reflection on Ephesians 4:1-16. The practice of including shared scriptural meditations continued with the Seoul Report (2006) The Grace Given You in Christ: Catholics and Methodists Reflect Further on the Church, which begins with reflections

Although distrust defined the relationship between Roman Catholics and Methodists well into the twentieth century, there had never been a formal separation or accompanying condemnations between the two ecclesiastical bodies since Methodism grew away gradually from the Anglican Communion. A former Roman Catholic co-secretary of the Joint Commission, Msgr. Richard Stewart, suggested in a 1982 lecture reflecting upon the first decade of Methodist-Catholic dialogue, “The gap between us is none the less real, but it is not complicated by those historical hard feelings and resentments which so often linger on after the polemics of a schism.”⁵⁵ Stewart added that despite divergent doctrines and practices, “when Catholics and Methodists meet, they find themselves soon on the same ‘spiritual wavelength.’”⁵⁶ In Section I: General Retrospect of The Denver Report, the Joint Commission noted that as the dialogue partners reflected on how each appears to the other, “without any glossing over difficulties, that there were yet more solid grounds for affinity” (Denver [1971] §6).

Lacking a clear road map so as to embark on a journey towards the ultimate destination, the gift of unity in Christ, the dialogue partners embarked on a natural, human process similar to renewing acquaintances with formerly-estranged family members and learning their ‘particularities’ and ‘peculiarities.’ Commitment to prayerful discernment and study has drawn

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the ecumenical partners into a deeper relationship as they have delved more deeply into each other’s doctrines and disciplines. Trust and honesty have continued to develop over four decades among a changing cast of Christian colleagues in conversation across the table. In the introductory letter to the Joint Commission’s most recent report, “Encountering Christ our Saviour: The Church and Sacraments” (Durban Report [2011]) Methodist Co-Chair Professor Geoffrey Wainwright and Catholic Co-Chair Bishop Michael Putney referenced their shared experience in their annual week-long meetings, as “participants grew in friendship and mutual understanding” which “is the result of serious, honest dialogue which, being authentically ecumenical, does not involve any compromise or ambiguity.” Forty years prior, pioneering ecumenical partners penned in their first report, the Denver Report, 1971, “Measured against our age-old estrangements, our progress in ecumenical experience in the past three years has been swift and surely led by the Spirit. But measured against the exigencies of our Churches and the challenge of our times, it leaves us aware of the distance that still lies between us now and our professed goals” (Denver [1971] §131). Patience and perseverance as openness to the Holy Spirit has borne fruit through a slow, methodical process, as accomplished progress has deepened the desire for unity.

Like a rose gradually opening, progressively producing brilliant beauty through the coordinated movement of each petal, each quinquennial report has built upon previous statements, allowing trajectories of thought to be clarified gradually, in consensus and convergence, or as divergence and difference. As ecclesial communions structured for the good of the order through episcopal oversight and ministerial succession, Catholics and Methodists appear at first glance to be similar on the surface, with bishops (or superintendants) as ministers of oversight, ordination rites, sacramental practices including infant baptism and Eucharist, and an emphasis on holiness. As the dialogue partners clarified to each other (and to themselves) a shared understanding of the nature of the Church, including koinonia-communio, an ecclesiology of communion, particularities become more apparent over time: the understanding and exercise of the essential ministry of oversight (Catholic collegiality and Methodist Conference/connection); essential continuity of apostolicity (Catholic apostolic succession and Methodist apostolic mission); authoritative teaching (Catholic “infallibility” through college of bishops in communion with the Bishop of Rome, the pope, and Methodist “indefectibility” through the Conference); the nature of ordination and the role of ordained ministers especially in
Eucharistic presidency; the priesthood of Christ within the royal priesthood of the baptized for Catholics and Methodists; and the Catholic ordained priesthood as the service of the priesthood of the baptized.

Starting with the 1981 Honolulu Report “Toward an Agreed Statement on the Holy Spirit”, dialogue has focused increasingly on specific doctrines and disciplines in search of solidarity in Christ. The Honolulu report states, “Christ’s authority is mediated through the Spirit, who is Love...Whether it be the personal authority of holiness or the charism of episcope conferred by the Spirit on the ordained ministry...(it) ought to be accepted on the ground it comes from this source” (Honolulu [1981] §33). Catholics and Methodists agree that the Church has authority to teach and is guided by the Spirit of truth in that ministry.

The fruits of this dialogue include clear insight and succinct articulation that serves a building of understanding beyond Catholics and Methodists. For example, the 1986 Nairobi Report, “Towards a Statement on the Church” begins with a beautiful statement expressing the shared sense of ecclesial identity in relationship to the Trinity:

Because God so loved the world, he sent his Son and the Holy Spirit to draw us into communion with himself. This sharing in God’s life, which resulted from the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit, found expression in a visible koinonia of Christ’s disciples, the church (Nairobi [1986] §1).

The Joint Commission expressed in the same report the goal for the Catholic-Methodist dialogue, “We are committed to a vision that includes the goal of full communion in faith, mission and sacramental life” (Nairobi [1986] §20). The 1991 Singapore Report, The Apostolic Tradition, acknowledges “doctrinal consensus” as dependent upon “a fresh creative act of reconciliation which acknowledges the manifold yet unified activity of the Holy Spirit through the ages. It will involve a joint act of obedience to the sovereign Word of God” (Singapore [1991] §94). The nature of this ‘fresh creative act of reconciliation’ for the Church to stand ready to receive the gift of unity in “full communion” may well involve the issues that surround the Ministry of Oversight for Catholics and Methodists.
The two most recent reports, Seoul [2006] and Durban [2011], present the most in-depth articulation of a shared understanding of the Ministry of Oversight, Apostolicity, Ordained Ministry, and Priesthood, bringing forward “from the storeroom” the treasure-trove of insights from previous documents. The Seoul Report’s Chapter Three, “Deepening and Extending Our Recognition of One Another,” admits honestly to past criticisms by the dialogue partners of one another, yet articulates recognition of “considerable agreement reached over the years of our recent dialogue.” Catholic and Methodist representatives agreed that “It is time now to return to the concrete reality of one another, to look one another in the eye, and with love and esteem to acknowledge what we see to be truly of Christ and of the Gospel, and there of the Church, in one another” (Seoul [2006] §97).

The Durban Report [2011] wove together strands of thought from previous documents into a theological tapestry with varying shades and hues of understanding. For example, the Singapore Report [1991] affirmed that those entrusted with the ‘apostolic function’ of ministerial oversight, which includes “solicitude for all the churches; carry a ministerial responsibility that “the community remain one, that it grow in holiness, that it preserve its catholicity and be faithful to apostolic teaching and to the commission of evangelization given by Christ himself” (Singapore [1991] §74). Later in that same report, both communions acknowledge episcopate as “vital for the life of the Church” with the teaching office, “maintaining unity in the Truth” the principal task (Singapore [1991] §93). This pattern of theological reflection continues in the Brighton Report [2001], “Methodists and Catholics affirm together the place within the community of believers of authoritative servants of communion and connection in love and in truth, authorised agents of discerning and proclaiming the truth of the Gospel” (Brighton [2001] §51).

Catholic and Methodist representatives describe “Now I understand” moments as they each “explain the way in which their respective structures relate to the Church’s fundamental interconnectedness” and thereby recognize the meaning of each other’s terminology and titles (Seoul [2006] §105). Therefore, harmony resounds through parallel understandings of what had seemed like differing doctrines or disciplines or at least differing vocabulary for expressing parallel ecclesial realities which bear a striking resemblance to each other, both as complements and in contrast.
The pathway to understand the particular teachings and practices of the Ministry of Oversight for Catholicism and Methodism begins in each ecclesial communion’s theology of Church, the starting points which seem to stand in direct opposition to each other. Catholicism begins with the ecclesial community as a whole, a communion in which an individual believer participates through baptism. “Catholic ecclesiology goes from the community to the individual, and regards the whole as greater than the sum of its parts.” Dynamic, mutual, and interdependent relationships describe the Catholic notion of the Church. “Each individual is saved by being taken up into that greater whole, just as each local church, likewise, participates in the mystery of the universal Church.” The Church’s location is not within “a federation of previously existing local churches and neither is the community a collection of existing individual Christians” (Seoul [2006] §99). This greater whole embraces the apostolic foundations and the communion of saints, the “cloud of witness” that surrounds believers as the ecclesial Body of Christ in the Mystical Body of Christ.

Methodist ecclesiology begins with and within the individual believer, in a graced relationship with God, and moves toward a group of believers in Christ, gathered in community through a connectional principle. Thus, Methodists envision the Church as the sum of its parts, in what is described as a “more existential and episodic approach” to Church while Catholics tend to be concerned with “fundamental structural considerations such as historical continuity and succession.” These starting points complement each other rather than conflict as “the Church needs precisely those structures that enable individual Christians and local churches to achieve their true identity in and through communion. The one and the many, the individual and the community, achieve their identity simultaneously in the life which is patterned after the Trinity” (Seoul [2006] §99).

The Methodist “connectional principle” focuses on “Christian Conference” as the authoritative way to discern God’s will for the Church. Conference includes participation by laity and ordained ministers, a multiplicity of checks and balances within the ecclesial structure, which the Methodist Communion believes is led by the gift of the Holy Spirit. The prominence of lay activity stems from the very origins of Wesley’s Methodist renewal movement, as lay preachers and leaders played an essential role in the life of the Methodist ecclesial communion. Although lay participation arose as much out of pastoral necessity as theological principle, “Methodism’s reliance upon the contribution of lay people rests on the conviction that the Holy
Spirit generously bestows gifts upon the whole people of God for the sake of the Church’s ministry and mission” (Seoul [2006] §115).

In previous reports, the Methodist Conference was described as containing “full authority within the church for the formulation and interpretation of doctrine” acknowledging “charismatic individuals” like John Wesley as chosen by God to touch the lives of people beyond the ecclesial structures (Brighton [2001] §51). The corporate exercise of episcope includes authority over preachers and discipline while specific individuals within Methodism serve as bishops or superintendents, all of which is described by the United Methodist Book of Discipline, “To guard, transmit, teach and proclaim, corporately and individually, the apostolic faith as it is expressed in Scripture and tradition, and, as they are led and endowed by the Holy Spirit, to interpret that faith evangelically and prophetically” (Brighton [2001] §74-75) quoting The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church (1996) §414.3.

Methodist Conference remains a “prudential means of grace” (as envisioned by John Wesley) as a “gathering of lay and ministerial leaders” and in bringing together “the diversities of the people of God” as they seek to “speak the truth in love” to one another through the direction of the Holy Spirit (Brighton [2001] §94). The Conference embodies the belief that God empowers the entire communion of the baptized since all Christians are a “ministerial and priestly people” as ordained ministers and laity who share baptism in Christ share as well “gifts of authority” (Brighton [2001] §95). Therefore, Methodist Conference serves as the “chief instrument of connection,” in which they oversee corporately the whole life of the communion and has final authority over doctrine, approves services and hymn books, authorizes ordinations to take place during the Conference, and elects bishops and presidents (Brighton [2001] §96).

Catholicism’s “articulated ecclesiology” shares a similar sense of connectional communion in terms of collegiality, the dual dynamics of a communion across space and a communion across history. In both dimensions of the Church’s communion, Catholics envision “bishops as nodal points of the web of ecclesial communion in Christ which spans space and time.” The collegiality of those entrusted with the ministry of oversight, the episcopacy, visibly manifests an ecclesial communion across space, while apostolic succession of bishops expresses a continuity and communion over time (Seoul [2006] §128). The bishop as Minister of Oversight embodies ecclesial unity in Christ within his functions of teaching, sanctifying, and governing,
and through his relationship with the college of bishops and its head, the Bishop of Rome. For Catholics, the bishop is the point of contact for unity.

Thus, unity within Catholicism as communal reality, whether Church universal, the particular Church (the diocese), or the parish, is at the heart of the Ministry of Oversight, a communal reality that is also deeply personal as exercised by a bishop who participates in the fullness of Christ’s priesthood through the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Exercise of episcope unfolds in a multiplicity of relationships, between the bishop and the apostolic foundations, between the bishop and believers in Christ, and between each bishop and the Bishop of Rome, the pope, in the College of Bishops.

Methodism envisions the ecclesial endeavour bearing both individual and corporate components. The Methodist stress on sanctification through scriptural holiness within an individual believer is balanced by a connectional ‘social’ aspect of governance through servant-leadership. The Spirit-led Ministry of Oversight is exercised in the Conference as a corporate gathering of believers, clergy and lay, holding ultimate authority, with a Superintendent/Bishop performing day-to-day supervision for the good of the order. Conference manifests the connectional principle among the baptized and between individual faith communities.

For Catholics and Methodists, there are no ‘lone rangers,’ pastors who serve as ‘super’ ministers on their own, separated from a Spirit-led ecclesial structure in which the Ministers of Oversight are empowered and to which they are accountable. Ministerial oversight builds up the body of believers at the same time that it mirrors the relational aspect of ecclesial life which reflects and participates in the life of the Trinity through “watching over each other in love.” No one serves, leads, or continues the mission of Christ disconnected from communion or connection, including continuity with apostolic foundations, but must always work collaboratively through, with, and for the people of God.

The 2011 Durban Report reiterates words from the 1991 Singapore Report and the 2001 Brighton Report. “Koinonia and episcope imply one another” (Singapore [1991]§92). Therefore, the ministry of oversight (episcope) and communion (koinonia) stand in an intimate relationship to one another as essential ecclesial elements. Participation within this relationship of “perfect love” comes from the Divine Gift of koinonia, the life of God within God and revealed in Jesus especially from the first call of his apostles. “There can be no such thing as private and
individualistic Christianity.” Christian identity is embedded in horizontal and vertical relationships, “to belong to the community gathered around the Risen Lord by the power of the Holy Spirit (Seoul [2006] §60). Catholics and Methodists agree that a Christian community requires “effective pastoral ministries of unity and oversight (episcopate)” as willed by Christ towards the reality of “one visibly united, universal Church, even though they may differently identify the structures needed for such full communion” (Seoul [2006] § 61). The minister of oversight engages in the building of communion from which spiritual gifts and ministries flow through the gift of the Holy Spirit within the overseer as well as the community, a community from which that minister is called and to which that minister seeks to build up in Christ.

Communion, collegiality, Christian conference, and connection are not mere static realities, standing in opposition simply because of the lack of complete church union between Catholics and Methodists. Rather, ecclesial bodies of believers, as a communion or a connection, must move forward, change, grow, and relate to one another and the world in a spirit that understands and embraces the harmony that sounds from difference and diversity. Unity is not uniformity. Communion and connection draw us into a deeper relationship, tending towards the ultimate convergence in Christ whose return in glory the Church awaits.

“Unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity are already gifts of God to his Church, marks of God’s continuing and faithful presence. But we are a pilgrim people, and those marks are both gifts and goals, already present but not yet fully realised” (Seoul [2006] §66).

Catholics and Methodists acknowledge the inseparability of the nature and mission of the Church, as “the call to personal holiness, the call to communion and the call to mission intrinsically belong together” (Seoul [2006] §73). The ecumenical endeavour requires an attitude of ‘both-and’ instead of ‘either-or.’ The reality of both communion and connection entails a complexity through interwoven strands of thought and practice. Communion and connection are lived for Catholics and Methodists in this eschatological in-between time between the already and the not-yet as a pilgrim people of God.

Church through the Holy Spirit in continuation of the original pattern established in Christ’s call of the apostles. “Apostolic communities need people to do for their own time what the apostles did in theirs: to pastor, teach and minister under the authority of the Good Shepherd and Teacher, the Servant Lord” (Seoul [2006] §89); (Rio [1996] §84).

The dialogue partners understand ordained ministry as an “ecclesial element” that they seek to affirm in each other. Catholics and Methodists converge in understanding all forms of ministry as “communal and collegial” in service to the whole community of faith so as to preserve and strengthen those believers in truth and love. “In both Churches, oversight is exercised in a way which includes pastoral care and authoritative preaching and teaching” (Seoul [2006] §91), (Brighton [2001] §81). Therefore, ministers serve as trustworthy means of divine grace, an activity recognized by the dialogue partners in one another.

Those called to apostolic ministry following the Pentecost-event participate in and continue the threefold ministry of the crucified and risen Christ in teaching, sanctifying, and governing, whether in the first century or the twenty-first century. “Apostolic ministry exists in the ministry of those individuals and corporate institutions that the community of faith recognizes and acknowledges as continuing the work of the apostles.” (Durban, p. 45) The Joint Commission acknowledges that significant differences remain between Catholics and Methodists over the manner of connection with apostolic foundation and the orderly transmission of apostolic ministry. For Catholics, “the succession of bishops serves, symbolizes and guards the Church’s overall apostolic continuity” while “Methodists attach great significance to ministerial succession through the Conference as evidence of their continuing faithfulness to the apostolic tradition” (Durban [2011] p. 45) and regard ministerial succession as an important symbol of continuity but not essential criterion for apostolicity. Continuity for Catholics is through the exercise of ministry by the episcopacy within apostolic succession, while for Methodists continuity is in the apostolic labours of witness and mission through varying ministries, including but not exclusively the episcopacy. The dialogue partners jointly stated that “apostolicity is not a case of all or nothing. Like communion, it has different degrees” (Durban [2011] p. 45) Catholics and Methodists envision apostolicity through connection to and continuity with ‘primitive Christianity’ as the apostolic guarantee.
Although Catholics and Methodists differ in their views of ordination, especially sacramentality, they both believe that ordained ministers are Christ’s “authorized and authentic” representatives of ministry within the Church, serving as “signs and instruments of his grace and power enabling the baptized to be strong in Christ and to serve as he wills.” Durban, p. 46 (2011) Both ecclesial communions believe that ordained ministers are pastors among God’s people to enable the baptized to participate in Christ’s ministry to build up the Church for mission in the world. As a gift from God, “the institution and transmission of the ordained ministry stems from the divine will and purpose of the Church” (Durban [2011] p. 47).

Catholics and Methodists understand ordained ministry as a twofold representation in which “they represent both Christ to the Church, and also the people themselves before God and the world” (Durban [2011] p. 48). Both communions see that ordination creates a new sustained relationship with Christ and the Church.

“The new and permanent relationship created when the Church ‘sets apart’ an individual for ministry affects the whole of a person so that the state of ordination principally entails ‘being’ a minister, and not just the exercise of particular ministerial functions. Ordained ministers who no longer carry out ministerial duties, as a result of retirement or for some other reason, do not thereby cease to be ordained ministers.” Durban, p. 49 (2011)

Even though Methodists do not consider ordination as a “sacrament,” ordination is irremovable and is celebrated once. “The fact that, according to Methodist polity, a person may be ordained only once to the same order of ministry rests on an unarticulated theological conviction that this event (like Baptism) is so significant for the individual and for the community as to be unrepeatable” (Durban [2011] p. 49). The dialogue partners specify in the Durban Report that “ordained ministers do not receive their authority by delegation from the people of God” and “ordained ministers participate in the priesthood of Christ in a way that is proper to their distinctive ministry, and not solely as baptized individuals.” Durban, p. 51 (2011)

The relationship between the ministerial priesthood and common (or royal) priesthood of the baptized presents a continuing challenge for the dialogue partners. Both ecclesial communions agree that there is the singular priesthood of Jesus Christ, into which believers are baptized and through which they participate in Christ’s self-offering to the Father. “When the Church exercises its priestly ministry, it does so only by participating in the priesthood of Christ,
who alone is the priest of the New Covenant in the truest or fullest sense” (Durban [2011], p. 50).

Catholics emphasize the ministerial priesthood to be at the service of the priesthood of the baptized, that as the “essential difference between the common priesthood of the people of God and the ministerial priesthood is reflected in the way each is exercised” (Durban [2011] p. 50). As distinct but related priesthoods, the ministerial priesthood for Catholics cannot be considered as separate from the priesthood of the faithful. Catholic teaching indicates “the two proper sharings in the one priesthood of Christ within the Church” are ‘ordered to one another’” (LG §10, as referenced in Durban [2011] p. 51).

Methodists speak of priesthood in terms of the priesthood of the faithful and not as a term of reference to ordained ministers. The Durban Report reiterates the British Methodist Deed of Union §4 that Methodist ministers “hold no priesthood differing in kind from that which is common to all of the Lord’s people” and “no priesthood exists which belongs exclusively to a particular order or class of persons” (Durban [2011] p. 51). Methodists reference the priesthood of Christ in the Church as descriptive of the people of God and not in particular to ordained ministers.

The dialogue partners ponder whether “different forms of participation” in the one priesthood of Christ constitutes an “essential difference” between the ministerial and the common priesthood” (Durban [2011] p. 52). Especially in relationship to celebration of the Eucharist, Catholics and Methodists “must consider whether and how it is possible to regard the ordained ministry as the means through which Christ makes his priesthood present and effective among the people of God” (Durban [2011] p. 52). The question for continuing conversation centres on whether the ordained minister represents Christ to the Church, as “the capacity of the ordained minister to act in the Church on behalf of Christ depends also on the particular effect that ordination has on an individual” (Durban [2011] p. 52).

Within the section of The Ministry of Oversight, differences between Catholics and Methodists on ordained ministry and teaching authority are highlighted in terms of “infallibility” and “indefectibility” of the Church. Through the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, Catholics understand bishops as “authoritative servants of communion” guided by the Holy Spirit through a charism of infallibility gifted to the Church and exercised in particular
circumstances by bishops teaching authoritatively and collegially in communion with the Bishop of Rome when assembled in an ecumenical council and through exercise of the ‘ordinary universal magisterium.’ (LG §25) Reception of doctrine is not a necessary criterion determining the infallibility of authoritative teaching, although “a doctrine that is not received by the people of God in the practice of their faith does not achieve its intended effect in the life of the Church” (Durban [2011] p. 54).

Methodists rely on the indefectibility of the Church as they have confidence in the Holy Spirit’s guidance “without investing any particular agent or institution with a sure charism of authoritative discernment” (Durban [2011] p. 54). Methodist Conference teachings are not believed to be error-free as reception of teaching by the faithful in the Methodist tradition confirms the particular exercise of teaching authority. “In Methodist understanding, the exercise of authority in the Church is necessarily provisional and subject to revision under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who leads the Church into the truth” Durban, p. 54 (2011). The Methodist Book of Discipline continues as a “work in progress.”

Convergence and divergence stand back-to-back as a reminder of the progress made and progress needed towards the reconciliation required to remove the scandal of division among Christians. At the conclusion of the Seoul Report, the Joint Commission suggested areas of “serious divergence” between Methodists and Catholics. These are formidable obstacles, including the participatory role of the laity in authoritative teaching (important aspect for Methodist Conference and connection), the episcopacy in apostolic succession (an ecclesial essential for Roman Catholicism), and the “assurance” of certain authoritative acts of teaching (i.e. Catholic infallibility and Methodist indefectibility) (Seoul [2006] §136).

The Durban Report raised two questions for both ecclesial communions: to Roman Catholics regarding the ordination of women and to Methodists about the presidency of the Eucharist in relationship to a developing understanding of ordination as an “effective sacramental rite by which these ministers (bishops and presbyters) are equipped with the necessary gifts and power to act in his name.” Durban, p. 56 (2011)

In summary, the dialogue proceeds forward in a theological spirit of hope. Significant progress towards understanding of foundational doctrines and discipline has been made over the four decades of discernment, dialogue, theological reflection, and prayer. The Ministry of
Oversight, whether by an individual or corporately, is seen as essential to ecclesial identity for Roman Catholics and Methodists. *Episcope* and *koinonia*, oversight and communion, are the ecclesiological cornerstones as the ministerial overseer(s) serves and participates in an intimate connection with the body of believers, the Mystical and Ecclesial Body of Christ. “*Episcope* and *koinonia* imply one another” (Singapore [1991] §91). Exercise of ministerial oversight remains connected to and in continuity with apostolic foundations, whether through ministerial succession or faithful apostolic witness and mission. Ordained ministry is seen as “sign and instrument of Christ’s ministry” with the rite of ordination having a sacramental character. The ordained minister represents Christ to the Church and represents the Church before God and the world. And the orderly transmission of the ordained ministry is a sign and instrument of the apostolicity of the Church (Durban [2011] p. 56 “Summary Conclusion”).

Catholics and Methodists continue to journey together, beyond two centuries of polemics that had constricted the catholicity of the Church and weakened the mission of proclaiming the Gospel. Just as John Wesley found inspiration and strength at a critical turning point to take the risk and embark on a movement of renewal through scriptural holiness, Pope John XXIII envisioned an inspiring “new Pentecost” of renewal and movement toward greater Christian unity. Convergence and agreement serve well the search for the truth and that which continues to separate Catholics and Methodists. Discernment of divergent issues occurs through the critical lens of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, affirmed by Pope John Paul II, and the continuing efforts of the Joint Commission for dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council.
"The true union that you ought to seek with creatures that attract you is to be found not by going directly to them but by converging with them on God, sought in and through them...It is...by making themselves more spiritual in the embrace of God, that things draw closer to each other and, following their invincible natural bent, end by becoming, all of them together, one”

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

“There is no convergence without ascent. We may say that it sums up the whole of Teillhard’s moral teaching on love.” – Henri de Lubac, S.J.

“It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.” – Antoine de Saint Exupery, *The Little Prince*

“There is no such thing as bad weather, just bad clothing.”—Norwegian saying

Convergence by Christians through ecumenical dialogue leads ultimately to convergence upon the final consummation of the “all in all” as the fulfillment of Divine Promise in Christ whose Advent in glory we wait. Even as Roman Catholic and Methodist representatives come to agreement as expressed through documents and a synthesis report offered to their respective communions, reception by the faithful including those entrusted with the ministry of *episcopate* lags behind. What happens within the sacred confines of annual theological conversations may not “mark progress” for those in the pews. Slow progress marks ecumenism’s pathway that converges on God in the final goal of “full communion in faith, mission and sacramental life” (Nairobi [1986] §20) that will “depend upon a fresh creative act of reconciliation which acknowledges the manifold yet unified activity of the Holy Spirit throughout the ages. It will involve a joint act of obedience to the sovereign Word of God” (Singapore [1991] §94).

Ultimately, convergence upon God and ascent in Christ requires the eyes of faith opened to see


essential matters visible and invisible. That is the uncharted territory, the undiscovered country which awaits those who embark on the divinely-inspired ecumenical journey.

International Commission member Dr Paul McPartlan, in an address on the Catholic-Methodist dialogue to a 2005 conference at Southern Methodist University, reiterates, “It is primarily by spiritual ecumenism that we ascend together” and through a mutual attraction by the partners to each other “it is imperative to reckon with the concrete reality of one another.”61 As the dialogue partners incline towards one another as they move towards unity, the reality of divergent doctrine and discipline must be addressed. Bishop Michael Putney, Catholic Co-Chairman of the Catholic-Methodist international dialogue, acknowledges the work of the Holy Spirit as “Methodists and Catholics continue to work to overcome their differences” thereby “discovering that they need some of each other’s gifts to be truly themselves” even as their differing approaches reflect the same fundamental differences which prompted the Reformation. These differing approaches are unique to the particular identities of Methodist as “a renewal movement” and of Roman Catholicism as a “church determined to hold fast to the apostolic tradition as it perceives it.”62

In the face of progress, do we find ourselves in the midst of an “ecumenical winter”? President emeritus of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Cardinal Walter Kasper, notes the contrast between initial enthusiasm that resulted in consensus, convergence, and clarification of differences with a cooling down that accompanies a maturing process. “The original enthusiasm has given way to a new sobriety; questions about the ecumenical methods and the achievements of the past decades, and doubts about the future, are being expressed.”63 Cardinal Kasper raises questions that can serve as parameters for theological reflection and discernment of ecclesial essentials at the heart of the ecumenical endeavour. These include,

62 David Chapman, In search of the catholic spirit, xiv.
“Where are we? What has been achieved? What has still to be done? What can we, and where should we, move ahead?”64

International dialogue Methodist Co-Chairman Geoffrey Wainwright notes “the increasing urgency of a common witness between Methodists and Catholics in the contemporary religious and cultural situation.” He notes the similarities between Pope John Paul II’s appeal for a “new evangelization” and John Wesley’s sermon “On the General Spread of the Gospel.” Yet, even accompanied by “substantial agreement on the core of the faith,” a “full recognition of Methodism’s ecclesiality” is still lacking, which Wainwright believes serves as “a stimulus to the continuing doctrinal dialogue.”65

Unity in Christ, rooted in the prayer of Jesus to the Father on the threshold of his entry in the Paschal Mystery, “that they may all be one” (Jn 17:21), stands at the heart of Christ’s mission, as “it belongs to the very essence of this community (of his disciples). God wills the Church, because he wills unity, and unity is an expression of the whole depth of his agape (emphasis original).”66 Pope John Paul’s renewal of commitment by Roman Catholicism to the ecumenical endeavour echoes the words and spirit of the Second Vatican Council’s Decree on Ecumenism that personal and communal conversion to the Gospel is required as believers pass from principles to actual practice. “There can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without interior conversion,” (UR §7) envisioned by John Paul in the “increased sense of the need for repentance: an awareness of certain exclusions which seriously harm fraternal charity, of certain refusals to forgive, or certain price, of an unevangelical insistence on condemning the ‘other side’, of a disdain born of unhealthy presumption.” (Ut Unum Sint, UUS §15) Ecumenical dialogue even by eminent scholars requires honest, authentic acknowledgement of sins stemming from ancient prejudice.

The pope asserts the Roman Catholic viewpoint through his teaching that the Church’s exercise of authority, including in an “ecumenical venture,” is in “the service of truth and

64 Cardinal Walter Kasper, Harvesting the Fruits, 3.
65 David Chapman, In search of catholic spirit, x-xi.
charity” as “The Catholic Church acknowledges and confesses the weaknesses of her members, conscious that her sins are so many betrayals of and obstacles to the accomplishment of the Saviour’s plan.” (UUS §3) Noting that the path toward unity and community is “difficult but so full of joy,” he exercises his own ministry of episcope through faithful truth-telling as addressed to a broad audience, including but not exclusively Roman Catholic:

Christians cannot underestimate the burden of long-standing misgivings inherited from the past, and of mutual misunderstandings and prejudices. Complacency, indifference and insufficient knowledge of one another often make this situation worse. Consequently, the commitment to ecumenism must be based upon the conversion of hearts and upon prayer, which will also lead to the necessary purification of past memories. With the grace of the Holy Spirit, the Lord’s disciples, inspired by love, by the power of the truth and by a sincere desire for mutual forgiveness and reconciliation, are called to re-examine together their painful past and the hurt which that past regrettably continues to provoke even today. All together, they are invited by the ever fresh power of the Gospel to acknowledge with sincere and total objectivity the mistakes made and the contingent factors at work at the origins of their deplorable divisions. What is needed is a calm, clear-sighted and truthful vision of things, a vision enlivened by divine mercy and capable of freeing people’s minds and of inspiring in everyone a renewed willingness, precisely with a view to proclaiming the Gospel to the men and women of every people and nation. (UUS §2)

A purposeful “purification of past memories” requires patient vigilance throughout the process. The obstacles which can serve as barriers will remain immovable even within stated agreements of consensus and convergence on doctrine and discipline if the partners do not address the reality of divergence between them well as within their respective communions. Catholic and Methodist representatives gathering in an annual theological conversation increasingly embrace the sentiments of this 1995 Roman Catholic papal encyclical. Even lacking formal separation, past memories and misconceptions from both partners require acknowledgement in the light of day. Ancient and popular prejudices born of fear and mistrust play a silent role in the conversation, requiring a healing that begins in and returns to prayer through which the movement of the Holy Spirit is experienced.

That stated, there has still been a remarkable amount of convergence based on faith foundations shared by both ecclesial communions that continue to engage in conversation over four decades after a lack of meaningful engagement over two centuries. Agreements cover a broad spectrum of ecclesial concerns from consensus to “where convergence has been achieved to varying degrees in matters which have been viewed in the past as divisive, even though this
convergence falls short of full agreement” to those topics “which are more resistant to consensus or convergence,” even setting apart these areas in the synthesis document in italics. Faithful and faith-filled participation by the members of the International Commission in a “serious, honest dialogue” without “compromise or ambiguity” emerges from faithful participation in each communion’s ministry of oversight. What results at this point in the process are what Methodist scholar David Carter calls “the most critical and neuralgic issues in theological dialogue.”

The concrete, historical reality of the life of the Church serves as the substance for authentic dialogue as the ecclesial body of Christ lives in real-time relationship with one another in Christ through a graced presence of love, mercy, forgiveness, reconciliation, and truth. Those ordained to minister as servant-leaders through participation in the ministry of Christ as priest, prophet, and shepherd-king truly “converge on God” so as to build up the body of the baptized. This concrete, historical ecclesial reality carries with it a variety of dynamics, holy and not-so-holy, at work within Roman Catholic and Methodist faith communities in need of renewal and reform through the gift of the Holy Spirit. As the dialogue partners live in “real, but imperfect communion,” each faces unique challenges to communion from within as well.

Just as the shared faith in the Risen Christ impels the baptized toward unity, so there are other “centrifugal tendencies,” forces at work within fragile humanity that can drive a wedge into the realization of that unity. One Holy Thursday papal homily, which spoke to the transformative relationship with Christ by way of participation through remembrance of the Paschal Feast, referred to fragmentation within the “spiritual and social ‘mystical body.’” Pope Paul VI, speaking in 1969, asked, “How will it (the Church) be able to be built up by activity that would like to be called apostolic, when this is deliberately led by centrifugal tendencies and when it develops, not the mentality of communitarian love, but rather that of partisan polemics.” He


completed his homily by making an appeal for “interior unity as the Passover of the Lord demands” by referencing an appeal by St Ignatius of Antioch in his letter to the Romans.\(^{69}\)

As Roman Catholics and Methodists share in the Christ-inspired desire for deeper Christian unity, challenges to that unity within each communion remain. Reception of these dialogue reports remains a challenge, including for British Methodists who, according to David Carter, expressed “scant enthusiasm, and a considerable degree of apathy or hostility” to a 2007 presentation of a report, *What kind of Bishops?* by the British Methodist Conference to the circuits and districts. Reception by British Methodists of an historic episcopate for the sake of unity had been referenced in several previous Catholic-Methodist dialogue reports. Carter suggests that some British Methodists “cherish outdated prejudices against Anglican prelacy and others took the rather isolationist view that Methodism had managed perfectly well without any form of episcopacy.”\(^{70}\) This comes after input by the British Methodist Conference to the International Commission that had suggested openness to the establishment of an episcopacy to replace the superintendency as part of the ministry of oversight, for the apparent sake of unity. Yet, a consensus was lacking in the effort to reengage within the continuity expressed through an historical episcopate. In addition, the British Methodist Faith and Order Committee received lukewarmly the Seoul 2006 report from the International Commission, suggesting “that progress on Catholic-Methodist relationships was not uniform throughout the world.”\(^{71}\) Complexity from intra-communion relationships can confound and make even more “neuralgic” divergent issues, indicating the diverse nature of the Methodist communion and the power of local disagreements that colours the perception of other ecclesial comminations including Roman Catholicism. Reception of these ecumenical finds by either ecclesial communion has been tentative at best.

Areas of divergent doctrine and discipline, more apparent in the face of progress toward consensus and convergence, continue to serve as the focus of theological reflection, in faithful service to the particular ministry of oversight for each ecclesial communion. Questions the


dialogue partners raise from a shared faith as well as from within their own unique historical and theological developments pull the process forward. Cardinal Kasper proposed that the “crux of ecumenical dialogue” centers on divergent understandings of church ministry and apostolicity, even quoting then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, who stated that the “tradition and apostolic succession” are the “core question in the Catholic/Protestant debate.” Kasper contended that the answer to this question of the church’s apostolicity and succession requires agreement about “the essence of the church, its basic sacramental structure, and its significance for the mediation of salvation.”

Cardinal Kasper believed that the continuing conversation between Catholics and Protestants in general about ministry, including that of the *episcope*, requires the development of an ecclesiological context with an accompanying pneumatological component. Appealing to the Orthodox position on apostolicity and succession, Kasper wrote, “they give the episcopal structure a much more strongly pneumatological basis than does the tradition of the Western church, and they insert this structure more clearly into the totality of the church, understood as communion” with “this continuity (of apostolic ministry) realized ever anew in the Holy Spirit (which) is received and acknowledged afresh by the church.” Understanding the complexity of apostolicity and succession beyond a linear succession from the apostles so as to include a vertical component, the ever-new gifting of the Holy Spirit, helps to reintegrate the essential connection developed from early Christianity between *successio*, *traditio*, and *communio*, lost since medieval times when a more juridical approach to ministerial structuring arose. In other words, the process of handing on and receiving, the transmission of a living faith through apostolic succession, serves communion, unity within the body of Christ. From the Roman Catholic point of view, Succession, Tradition, and Communion exist as an organic unity within the Church, overseen in love by the ordained servant-leaders empowered by the Holy Spirit.

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73 Kasper, *Leadership in the Church*, 142.

74 Kasper, *Leadership in the Church*, 141.
Kasper further clarified this broadened understanding of apostolicity through reference to the Second Vatican Council’s Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum, DV §8): “The Tradition that comes from the apostles makes progress in the Church, with the help of the Holy Spirit” with a “growth in insight into the realities and words that are being passed on” as “the Holy Spirit, through whom the living voice of the Gospel rings out in the Church—and through her in the world—leads believers to the full truth.” Kasper referenced further the Second Vatican Council’s Decree on Missionary Activity that acknowledges apostolicity through the action of the Holy Spirit within the mission of the church, part of the vertical dimension of ministerial succession. In other words, a pneumatological dimension is essential in the understanding of succession beyond a mechanical, linear approach connecting the current practice of the ministry of oversight with apostolic foundation.

Divergent understandings of the exercise of the ministry of oversight and the authority contained within remain evident even within apparent progress through four decades of Catholic-Methodist dialogue. Geoffrey Wainwright wrote on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the dialogues of how Catholics and Methodists came from “diametrically opposed approaches to our question of the common applicability to Christians and to the Church of categories connected with maintenance in truth.” The 1981 Honolulu Report on the Holy Spirit acknowledged agreement on the authority of Christ mediated through the Holy Spirit within Word and Sacraments and then witnessed to by Creeds and Confessions. “Within this context, what persons or bodies in the Church can give guidance on moral issues and with what authority” (Honolulu [1981] §46)? Wainwright suggested that guidance on doctrinal issues in addition to moral issues can also be included in the Commission’s question.

For Wainwright, Kasper, and any who are on the quest for Christian unity beyond the “real, but imperfect communion” in which we now stand, questions posed from within the divergent doctrines and disciplines point the way for continuing theological reflection within dialogue. Wainwright echoes concerns similar to Kasper’s about where the Church is, who makes up the Church, and who exercises authority. “Where is one to look for an authoritative discernment and proclamation of the gospel? Who decides on the location and composition of

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the Church? Who determines its membership?" In the spirit of Wesley’s insights, Wainwright suggested that the Church needs “institutional bonds in times and space” through “official authority, lodged in persons capable of decision” to discern whether “the pure Word of God is preached and the Sacraments be duly administered according to Christ’s institution,” words Wesley himself had borrowed at his time from Article XIX of the Church of England. Authority is not so much the issue as it is to whom authority has been entrusted and who exercises it in continuity with apostolic foundation.

Wainwright referenced the 1986 Nairobi Report section “Structures of Ministry” that the development of the three-fold ministry, the Scriptural canon, and classical creeds during the post-New Testament periods “were under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.” Continuing, he wrote “we are not agreed on how far this development of the ministry is now unchangeable and how far loyalty to the Holy Spirit requires us to recognize other forms of oversight and leadership that have developed, often at times of crisis or new opportunity in Christian history.” (Nairobi, §29) As representative of Methodist belief, Wainwright suggested his ecclesial communion would prefer a more “dialectical relationship” between the two aspects of ministerial succession described in the Nairobi document: “The succession in ministry is guaranteed by episcopal laying-on of hands in historical succession and authentic transmission of the whole faith within the apostolic college and the communion of the whole Church” (Nairobi [1986] §31)(Emphasis by Wainwright). The following sentence reiterates the practice of ministerial succession in Methodism “as a valuable symbol of the church’s continuity with the church of the New Testament, though they would not use it as a criterion.” (Nairobi §31) Expressing his own belief, Wainwright added that he would prefer the wording about the symbol of ministerial succession “as an independent criterion” to be either sufficient or necessary for Methodism.

Although reception of the report on ministerial oversight structure of either ecclesial communion has been lacking, theological reflection following release of each quinquennial

76 Geoffrey Wainwright, Methodists, 67.
77 Geoffrey Wainwright, Methodists, 67.
78 Geoffrey Wainwright, Methodists, 85.
79 Geoffrey Wainwright, Methodists, 85.
report has not. Scholars’ questions, comments, and insights serve to clarify the parameters for this ecumenical partnership which helps determine specifically the topics for future conversations. These observations contribute concrete feedback even though church union remains over the horizon, a distant hope. Careful, continuing engagement by Catholic and Methodist representatives proceeds slowly forward through a difficult and potentially dangerous minefield of divergence and difference towards the goal of “full communion in faith, mission and sacramental life.”

Since the mid-1980s, Catholic theologians have engaged several of the texts in a “dialogue” on behalf of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Jean M.R. Tillard, OP, raises the essential question to the 1986 Nairobi Report *Towards a Statement on the Church* about what exactly is precisely required for “full communion” and wonders about the nature of mutual recognition of other forms of oversight and leadership ministries mentioned in the report (Nairobi [1986] §29) “without rigorously working out the conditions for full and authentic Church life of the kind in which each could situate itself in relation to the other.”

Tillard questions the Nairobi report also about the direction of the ecumenical path “if we continue to characterise the Methodists as essentially a *devotion* movement (Nairobi [1986] §24d), a group analogous to *spiritual reform* groups (Nairobi [1986] §24b) and a *spiritual tradition* (Nairobi [1986] §26).”

Jared Wicks, S.J., reads the 1991 Singapore Report *The Apostolic Tradition* through the critical lens of the Second Vatican Council’s Dogmatic Constitution on Revelation, *Dei Verbum* §8, expressing the understanding of Tradition as “active transmission and living reception of the apostolic faith by manifold means.” Therefore, the ordained minister of the Church stands in service of this transmission of the gospel, the means of grace, and the universal call to holiness through the Holy Spirit.

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Wicks asserts that the apostles’ ministry and the response of that original apostolic generation of believers helped create the Church’s identity through a pneumatological process. Citing the Council of Nicea as an example of a response to the “improper inculturation of the faith in a Hellenistic milieu,” Wicks suggests that preserving the apostolic tradition has always been a struggle as “the apostolic faith is beset by myriad threats to its authentic meaning and full realization” despite the clear role defined for ordained ministers. Thus, from the Catholic viewpoint, empowerment of the corporate body, the college of bishops that succeeds the apostolic college, to act in a binding manner to resolve differences, serves to maintain that apostolic teaching in the truth by God’s Spirit.  

Finally, Wicks suggests that a Catholic reading of *The Apostolic Tradition* sees the “fecundity of Tradition” as essential to an understanding of the community of believers as a “living organism” with Tradition as “corporate memory.” Therefore, “the ordained ministry stands in service of this fundamental transmission and the continued development of corporate life.”  

Even in light of this “fecundity of the Tradition,” fertility seen within developments of new teachings and practices, all needs to be discerned through a “charism of truth” as exercised by an episcopal ministry of oversight within the foundations of apostolic teaching. Wicks wonders, “Can Protestants see the fecundity that such a corporate reality must have? Can they see that this fecundity can well lead in certain circumstances to fresh insights into components of the apostolic legacy itself? Can they see the fruits of such development of insight becoming normative for communities of faith and for the personal confession and ordered life of believers?” Wicks sees the 1991 Singapore Report as a point of arrival and point of departure in the ecumenical venture between Catholics and Methodists. In other words, ongoing progress requires continuing engagement in the ecumenical endeavour.

In Reflections on the 1996 Rio Report, *The Word of Life*, William Henn, OFM Cap., reiterates previous differences between the dialogue partners, especially the most visible obstacle, ordained ministry, even though Roman Catholics and Methodists agree on the

83 Jared Wicks, “Commentary,” 228.
84 Jared Wicks, “Commentary,” 228.
85 Jared Wicks, “Commentary,” 229.
important role ordained ministry plays within the Church’s communion “to safeguard and foster its common life.” Sharing in Eucharistic communion remains beyond reach since the dialogue partners, “identify differently the ministers who bears this corporate responsibility in space and time, and the kind of teaching authority committed to them” (Rio [1996] §120).

Henn notes that the Rio Report does not name tradition as a criterion for discernment of faith even though tradition plays an important role in discerning the truth of revelation. Divergent approaches are discussed within the section on Pastoral Discernment (Rio [1996] §67-71) between the Roman Catholic teaching office of the bishops in unity with the Bishop of Rome and the role that the Conference plays in Methodism to “discern what God wants to be preached and done in today’s world” (Rio [1996] §70). Henn believes that conversation must continue about the nature of God’s will within pastoral discernment. 86 Henn highlights concisely the other differences within The Word of Life report including the need for greater understanding of how the two communions understand “institution by Christ” for the sacraments; further exploration of the understanding of unity in faith between Methodist embrace of just the “essentials” versus the Roman Catholic emphasis that the “whole” of revelation requires an assent of faith. 87

The 2001 Brighton Report, “Speaking the Truth in Love: Teaching Authority among Catholics and Methodists,” grounds the theological issues that have arisen in the actual ecclesial life of both communions,” according to Ralph Del Colle of Marquette University. Del Colle notes that the Brighton Report offers for the first time examples of teaching authority within each ecclesial communion.

Bishops locally (with their college of presbyters) and together in college and council under the presidency of the Bishop of Rome fulfill this ministry on the Catholic side. Methodists identify the Conference—a regular gathering of clergy and laity—with its superintendent ministers (or bishops in some cases) acting in its name as this instrument (§19). Both expect the assistance of the Holy Spirit although the structures and the nature of the charisms are different. Methodists would not assert the “charism of unfailing truth and faith” given to bishops or attribute the charism of infallibility potentially exercised by the pope or the pope in union with the bishops that Catholics do (§20). Methodist

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87 William Henn, “Reflections,”132.
conferences may formulate doctrine with a degree of authority (not necessarily guaranteed from error) that obligates its members if it is in agreement with Scripture (§21).

Del Colle states that differences are “clearly stated and not surmounted” between Roman Catholics and Methodists on “the implications of full sacramental attribution to ordained ministry.” The Catholic viewpoint of a “guaranteed quality of a sacrament” (Brighton §61) with “the active presence of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit (§68) comes into confrontation with the Methodist viewpoint in which “authoritative discernment and proclamation” is called into question because of human sinfulness and fallibility. This raises the question from Roman Catholics to Methodists on the exact nature of “criteria they verify that a particular means is a trustworthy channel of God’s grace” while Methodists question Catholics on whether “the guaranteed quality of a sacrament” takes full account of human weakness (Brighton [2001] §61). Del Colle wonders whether, to this point, there had been only rather incremental progress within the dialogue.

Del Colle notes that by repetition the dialogue partners return to the “real sticking point” several times (Brighton [2001] §61, 68, 80, 120), “the guaranteed or sacramental dimension of office” which separates Roman Catholics and Methodists regarding the teaching authority of the Church. Beyond the divisions that remain over sacramental orders, historic episcopate, and apostolic succession, Del Colle proposes from the Catholic viewpoint the question, “Is the corporate exercise of episcopate—as in a Methodist Conference—or the college exercise of episcopate—as in a Reformed presbytery or classis—equivalent to the personal exercise of episcopate by a bishop in the Catholic Church?” More clearly is the essential question, “Can corporate and collegial exercises of episcopate manifest (the essence of sacramentality!) the personal (in the Christological and Trinitarian sense of the term) attributes of oversight which also requires a liturgical expression and enactment?”

89 Ralph Del Colle, “Commentary,” 5.
The last two reports, *The Grace Given You in Christ: Catholics and Methodists Reflect Further on the Church*, Seoul 2006, and *Encountering Christ the Saviour: Church and Sacraments*, Durban 2011, represent an even greater depth of theological articulation building upon the previous reports. Fr John Ford, C.S.C., proposes that the central question raised by the Seoul 2006 report is that of ecclesial identity, “What is the Church in God’s plan of salvation?” (Seoul §45) Among the myriad of images of the Church presented in the report is that of “sacrament,” (Seoul [2006] §13), an insight that arises from the teachings of the Second Vatican Council which speaks of Church as a sign and instrument of communion with God and unity among humankind. (LG §1) Ford notes “a certain ambiguity or tension” within this image. “On the one hand, an over-emphasis on the spiritual or invisible element may ignore the real struggles that the Church has experienced through the centuries or may downplay the Church’s mistakes” while, in counter-position, “over-emphasis on the visible or institutional element in the Church may lead to considering it an organization similar to many others and so vested with the weakness inherent in all human structures.” Sacramentality plays a key role in the continuing articulation of differences, according to Ford, including “the sacramental nature of ordination, the magisterial role of the episcopate in apostolic succession, the authoritative character of certain acts of teaching, the place and role of the Petrine Ministry.” The essential differences as noted by Ford in the “different ecclesiological ethos” (sacramental and structural terms for Catholics; personal and functional terms for Methodists) raises the question how these different approaches can be brought together through sharing of gifts which themselves differ (practical, flexible gifts for Methodists, and permanent, stable gifts for Catholics).

Reflections by Methodist scholar David Carter on the last two dialogue reports presents another perspective on differences between the two communions. He reiterates from *The Grace Given You in Christ* the divisive issues including authority and structure of ministry as well as


the priestly nature of episcopal and presbyteral ministry. He is able to shed light on the distinctive nature of ordained ministry within the Methodist communion as had developed from within the early Wesleyan tradition and involved full-time availability for a “particularly apostolic discipline of itinerant availability.”  

Over time, Methodists came to stress the preaching and pastoral aspects of ordained ministry, especially for presbyters while Catholics have continued an emphasis on the sacramental and priestly aspect of presbyteral ministry, especially by presiding at the Eucharist. The difference within episcopal ministry, as especially developed within American Methodism with its episcopal structure, came from the Methodist episcopacy centering on the “apostolic labour of evangelisation, of initiating, leading, superintending and setting an example” as the episcopate “drove the mission, determining priorities through its key role in stationing the ministers.”  

Carter continues that in modern times, the bishop has exercised a greater teaching role but still restricted to “silent” and non-voting presiding within the General Conference which maintains governing authority and ‘oversees’ the office of bishop.

Carter’s reflection on the Durban 2011 report reiterates the central divergent issue, the nature of ordained ministry and the means of its transmission, as the “key neuralgic points of ecumenical dialogue.” Carter sees the entire chapter on ordained ministry presented “in the context of the overall ministry and apostolicity of all the baptized, a balance being maintained between an emphasis upon the apostolicity of the whole Church and a stress on Christ’s particular choice of the apostles to carry on his ministry of teaching, serving and priesthood.” Later, Carter notes that Catholics and Methodists disagree over “the exact location of the ministers and instruments responsible for oversight” (Catholic college of bishops in communion with the Bishop of Rome, Methodist Conference and Connexion structure that includes ordained and laity) as well as the “quality of assurance attributed to the solemn decisions and definitions of the organs of episcope in the two communions.”

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Carter adds a final postscript to this latest reflection, similar to comments made in his reflection upon the Seoul 2006 document, on the ordination of women to the presbyterate and episcopacy. As Roman Catholic and Methodist representatives admit that agreement appears impossible on this issue, Carter appeals to the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, the sources of authority for Methodism which date back to Wesley himself: Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience, as the experience of women’s ordination could enrich the Church, enhance catholicity, and change the process of reception. At this point, this Methodist question appears to be unanswerable from the Catholic viewpoint for the foreseeable future.

Acknowledgement of divergent doctrines and disciplines could lead to discouragement within the ecumenical endeavour. The excitement extending from the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council into the beginning of bilateral dialogue between Roman Catholics and Methodists could appear to be waning as the situation appears wonting of significant movement toward church union. The term “winter of ecumenism” has arisen as a way to capture the sense of cooling off of the original ecumenical fervour. When Lutheran Pastor and General Secretary of the World Council of Churches the Rev. Dr. Olav Fyske Tveit met Pope Benedict XVI in the autumn of 2010, he re-presented the image of the “ecumenical winter” within a hopeful context and the practical considerations of a Norwegian winter. “What is so terrible about winter? We know that winter can be beautiful, and we know that winter is only one of four seasons. In winter we have time for reflection, time to think about what we have experienced in the past and what we expect from the future, and, of course, how we can prepare for the future.”

Pope Benedict himself envisions the journey towards Christian unity as a “moral imperative” in answer to a “precise call of the Lord.” In his homily to conclude the 2011 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the pope reiterated that “the search for the re-establishment of unity among the divided Christians cannot therefore be reduced to recognition of the reciprocal differences and the achievement of a peaceful coexistence” but rather to deepen a common

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“patrimony” “with reciprocal knowledge, with the ecumenical formation of the new generations and, especially, with conversion of heart and with prayer.”

Confidence in the progress made in this particular ecumenical dialogue sparks hope that Roman Catholics and Methodists share similar understandings despite different vocabularies that express divergent concrete historical experiences. Cognizant of the differences, engagement in theological reflection and conversation continues as each ecclesial communion moves forward toward that clear goal of “full communion in faith, mission, and sacramental life” aware of the movement of the Holy Spirit in the midst of their dialogical partnership.

Chapter 4

Episcope and Koinonia: Ministerial Oversight and Communion

In days to come the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that we may walk in his paths.” – Isaiah 2:2-3b (New Revised Standard Version)

The people of the earth, “the natural units of humanity” as he (Teilhard de Chardin) called them, must (he declared) achieve earthly harmony through the very variety of their racial characteristics,—characteristics which reciprocally enrich one another. He gave each of them this watchword: “Remain true to yourselves, but move ever upward toward greater consciousness and greater love! At the summit you will find yourselves united with all those who, from every direction, have made the same ascent. For everything that rises must converge.” —Max H. Begouen, Foreword, Building the Earth, Teilhard de Chardin, S.J. ¹⁰¹

The harvesting of the fruits of ecumenical dialogue continues as Catholic and Methodist representatives come to consensus and convergence on ecclesial essentials, even as they agree to disagree in answer to specific, ongoing doctrinal and discipline questions. The partners in ecumenical dialogue engage in theological conversation surrounded by an increasingly secularized western society, even as proclamation of the gospel goes global. For Catholics and Methodists, convergence comes in a common understanding and parallel practice of communion ecclesiology as well as in deepening insights into the episcope’s critical role in service to koinonia. A shared understanding of ministerial oversight as servant of communion is a critical component to affirm the pastoral responses by each ecclesial communion to a rapidly changing landscape.

When American writer Flannery O’Connor grabbed onto the phrase “Everything that rises must converge” in 1961 as the title for a short story, she said that those words were timely “applying to a certain situation in the Southern States & indeed in all the world.”¹⁰² Winds of change stirred societies as well as the Church, from the nascent civil rights movement that was


beginning to move from the American South into the political mainstream to the election and inauguration of the first Catholic President of the United States. Even *aggiornamento*, the spirit of renewal that captured the religious imagination with a coming ecumenical council beginning in 1962, stirred Catholics like O’Connor, whose faith had been lived in the ‘Christ-haunted’ south as a minority her whole life.\(^{103}\)

This phrase about convergence, derived from the thought of the French Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who died on Easter Sunday 1955, and who referenced the dynamic integration of the material, scientific, and theological. The phrase has not been exhausted of meaning by usage over these past five decades, and speaks eloquently to the deepest longing of the human heart including within the Christian households of faith. Today’s situation seems more serious as centrifugal forces buffet the world with fear and terror, threatening to pull it asunder, often drawing ecclesial communions inward, instead of promoting a graceful posture of mission and movement toward the world. Hope appears lacking as despair and meaninglessness threaten to engulf an increasingly secularized society as well as to pressure religious adherents into sectarianism. Holiness accompanies hope as ecclesial necessities in a loving, faithful exercise of ministerial leadership.

As ecclesial communions, Catholicism and Methodism incline toward Christian unity through ministers of oversight who embody hope through holiness. Already in a real, but imperfect communion, movement into greater unity remains tenuous as parochialism and schism always threaten each group from within. Inspired and empowered ministerial overseers stand in the breach, steadied by apostolic foundation to serve as a visible sign of communion, holiness, and hope. Although the ministerial contexts vary between Catholicism and Methodism, parallel practices of and teaching about *episcopate* and *koinonia* have developed even as similar internal and external challenges to unity exist for both groups.

Catholic parish closures anger factions, resulting in a divisive spirit that fails to witness to a ‘catholic spirit’ and unity within the particular church, striking at the root-relationship of communion between the bishop, the presbyterate, and the entire body of baptized believers as lived within a parish community. Schism by the Society of St Pius X over liturgical changes and

\(^{103}\) Brad Gooch, *Flannery*, 331-332.
the meaning of teachings by the Second Vatican Council continues to disturb unity and peace within the Catholic Church. Within the Methodist Church, opposing realities of declining participation within the traditional Wesleyan axis of the Anglo-Western world and an explosive growth of mission in Asia, Africa, and South America create opposing forces that appear to weaken connection and ecclesial interdependence, and spur calls for stronger oversight by bishops. Catholicism and Methodism live as well within the tension between dual realities of the local and universal Church, with each desiring priority over the other.

Is history repeating itself from primitive Christianity, when believers would seek stability and solace as whirlwind chaos envelopes and stirs apocalyptic attitudes? Early Christian communities, built on apostolic foundations, seemed to be directed in hope to a fulfillment of Christ’s promised return in glory, even as they perceive themselves to be powerless in the face of persecution and threats to unity from “irregular” gospels not of apostolic origination. How are our Catholic and Methodist communities today beacons of hope, heralds of holiness as a pilgrim people, led by ministerial oversight? How do different ecclesial communions exercise similar ministerial leadership as they encounter the same challenges?

A true encounter with the proclamation of a transformative Gospel that is Jesus Christ creates metanoia, a conversion, a change of mind and heart turned toward holiness. Ministerial leaders who are called and consecrated to be at the service of that Gospel guide faith formation in the lifting up of the body of believers in Christ. The movement of Jesus to Jerusalem and the cross as offering to the Father served as method and model for others whose lives were to be oriented away from selfishness and lifted in a glorified Christ-convergence. In Ut Unum Sint, Pope John Paul echoed the teaching of the Second Vatican Council that commitment to the ecumenical endeavour required interior and communal conversion, and “No Christian community can exempt itself from this call.” (UUS §16)

Catholics and Methodists dwell as ecclesial bodies in a “real, but imperfect communion,” each part of a “Pilgrim Church” here on earth, “endowed already with a sanctity that is real through imperfect” (LG §48). As stated in “The Pilgrim Church,” Chapter VII, of Lumen Gentium, “The Church, to which we are called in Christ Jesus, and in which by the grace of God we acquire holiness, will receive its perfection only in the glory of heaven” as Christ, “sitting at the right hand of the Father” actively draws humanity to the Church and a communion within.
The particular *episcopate* in Catholicism and Methodism participates in this action of the Risen Christ who leads all towards “the promised and hoped for restoration” begun in Christ and continuing in the Church (*LG* §48).

Methodists and Catholics share the particular importance of the universal call to holiness, the perfection of love. For Catholics, this has been articulated in the Second Vatican Council as “shown forth in the fruits of grace which the Spirit produces in the faithful” as witnessed in “helping others to grow in holiness” (*LG* §39). As Christ is called to be one, so holiness is one, even in the diversity of ways and tasks of life, “sanctity which is cultivated by all who act under God’s Spirit.” The Council calls the bishops, “the shepherds of Christ’s flock,” to minister in holiness and humility, so that this minister of oversight will be for all, including themselves, “an outstanding means of sanctification” (*LG* §41). This echoes the call by John Wesley in the eighteenth century for a cadre of itinerant ministers of the word, ordained and laity, to spread scriptural holiness throughout the land.

In today’s world, apocalyptic attitudes percolate under the surface. Theological reflection on ecclesial realities, including ministerial oversight and communion, may be engaged through a variety of filters. Given the specific ministerial challenges of our time, reflection through the critical lens of Eschatology might best serve this analytic process. “Eschatology serves as the definitive vantage point from which to contemplate the entirety of Christian revelation, theology, spirituality, ethics, and wisdom.” ¹⁰⁴ Eschatology draws the Christ-believer upwards in hope beyond present difficulties through faithful confidence in a definitive Divine Revelation, in the tension between the Already and the Not Yet. Catholic and Methodist ecclesial communions dwell in the uncertainty of societal changes and pastoral challenges which require ministerial oversight to become more Christ-focussed, directed toward ‘wholeness’ and ‘holiness’ in communion.

The eschatological nature of the ecumenical movement frames the words of Jesus’ “priestly prayer” in John’s gospel, “that they may all be one” (Jn 17:21) with urgency and hope to accomplish a human task entrusted to faithful stewards who await the return of the Master.

This task in stewardship, as a type of ministerial oversight, extends from and remains rooted in the Trinitarian relationship of koinonia-communio between Father and Son, offered as Divine Gift. Ecumenism as an eschatological imperative and mandate beckons Catholics and Methodists towards a singular goal, converging in Christ, the Alpha and the Omega, at the “summit” of the eschatological mountain. Methodist scholar Geoffrey Wainwright suggests that “it is unthinkable that the feasting in God’s final Kingdom will take place at ‘separate tables,’” as he quotes a Russian proverb, “the walls of separation do not reach up to heaven.”

To the benefit of Catholics and Methodists, an episcopal polity dedicated to service and holiness structures communion with a similar sense of divine institution and shepherding. Through an eschatological framework, we begin with the “end” in mind as we seek after the ends, teleos, of all of our efforts, the purpose and meaning of structured ministerial discipline which bears a striking resemblance for Catholics and Methodists in teaching and practice. Methodist theologian Geoffrey Wainwright takes up John Wesley’s 1746 question, “What is the end of all ecclesiastical order?” which Wesley posited was “to bring souls from the power of Satan to God and to build them up in His fear and love.” The ends and purpose of “ecclesiastical order” are made manifest in an ecclesial commission to “watch over others in love” as ministerial overseers lead a pilgrim people, reconciled and forgiven, from a koinonia in time into completion and convergence in the glorified Christ.

A brief examination of the common ecclesial teleos, the “end of all ecclesiastical order,” koinonia for both Catholics and Methodists, whether collegial or connectional, reveals communion as resident in the heart of “watching over others in love,” episcope. For example, Methodist connexionalism “describes the relationship among Methodist churches, their internal unity, interconnectedness and interdependence and the structures which hold the tradition in intra-church communion; its reference is both diachronic and synchronic.” Methodist connection is visible among faith communities, oversight through the Conference and

105 Geoffrey Wainwright, Embracing Purpose: Essays on God, the World and the Church (Peterborough: Epworth, 2007), 222.
106 Geoffrey Wainwright, Methodists in Dialog, 73.
episcopacy, structures called to apostolic continuity through mission. Connection and continuity with John Wesley and the early founders of the Wesleyan Methodist movement remains important through the “Bishops Ordination Chain” and “Historical Record of Bishops” both found on the Council of Bishops section of the United Methodist Church website.  

For Catholicism, collegiality among the bishops expresses “the multifariousness and universality of the People of God; and of the unity of the flock of Christ, in so far as it is assembled under one head” as bishops exercise authority for the good of the whole Church, “the organic structure and harmony of which are strengthened by the continued influence of the Holy Spirit.” (LG §22.2) “Collegiate unity is also apparent in the mutual relations of each bishop to individual dioceses and with the universal Church.” (LG §23.1) The Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church (Christus Dominus, CD) would reiterate the teaching on the collegial relationship among bishops in the universal Church as well as expanding upon the connective relationship a bishop has with his diocese and other nearby bishops within episcopal conferences and ecclesiastical provinces. The connection between the diocesan bishop and his priests mirrors the collegial bonds operative through the Catholic Church. “All priests, whether diocesan or religious, share and exercise with the bishop the one priesthood of Christ” (CD §28) In other words, collegiality, communion, and collaboration are essential to the pastoral ministry offered and worship led by bishops and witness to in relationships with other bishops, their presbyterate, and within and for the People of God.

Catholic teaching about communion and ministerial oversight continues to develop from the conciliar foundations. Pope John Paul II implemented in 1983 a revised Code of Canon Law to put into practice the ecclesiology of communion and the episcopacy from the council. In his Apostolic Constitution Sacrae Disciplinae Leges promulgating the new code, Pope John Paul II spoke to “objective content” that “reflects the collegial care of all my brothers in the episcopate

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for the Church”¹⁰⁹ within a social, visible, hierarchical, and organic structure to the Church, as the Code of Canon Law brings order to mutual relations within a “communion.”¹¹⁰

An Extraordinary Synod of Bishops was held in 1985 to mark the twentieth anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council. The Synod stated in the final report “The Church, in the Word of God, Celebrates the Mysteries of Christ for the Salvation of the World” that “The whole importance of the Church derives from her connection with Christ,” and the diverse ways that Council described the Church (body of Christ, bride of Christ, temple of the Holy Spirit) must be taken as a whole as they “complete one another”(Section II. A. 3.).¹¹¹ The ecclesiology of communion/koinonia is the “central and fundamental” idea present in conciliar teaching, the “foundation for order in the Church” and presents balance in the relationship between “unity and pluriformity” in the Church (Section II. B. C.).¹¹²

Pope John Paul’s 1992 Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Pastores Dabo Vobis (PDV) (“I will give you shepherds after my own heart”—Jer. 3:15) on priestly formation relates the nature of ministerial priesthood to communion. “It is within the Church’s mystery, as a mystery of Trinitarian communion in missionary tension, that every Christian identity is revealed, and likewise the specific identity of the priest and his ministry.” (PDV 12.2)¹¹³ Further along, “The ordained ministry has a radical ‘communitarian form’ and can only be carried out as a ‘collective’ work (PDV 17.1) and “The ministry of priests is above all communion and a responsible and necessary cooperation with the Bishop’s ministry, in concern for the universal


¹¹⁰ Pope John Paul II, Sacrae Disciplinae Leges, 3.


Church and for the individual particular Churches, for whose service they form with the Bishop a single presbyterate.” (PDV 17.2)

The 1993 Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism from The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity further develops the *episcope-koinonia* connection.

The communion in which Christians believe and for which they hope is, in its deepest reality, their unity with the Father through Christ in the Spirit...Those who live united in faith, hope and love, in mutual service, in common teaching and sacraments, under the guidance of their pastors are part of that communion which constitutes the Church of God. This communion is realized concretely in the particular Churches, each of which is gathered around its Bishop. (§13)¹¹⁴

In his Apostolic Letter, *Nova Millenio Ineunte*, to close the millennial jubilee of the year 2000, Pope John Paul II calls for the Church in the new millennium to be “the home and the school of communion” (§43) with a “spirituality of communion” for members of the Mystical Body of Christ who would consider each other as “those who are part of me” (§44), strikingly similar to John Wesley’s call to “watch over each other in love.” The pope specifies further,

“Communion must be cultivated and extended day by day and at every level in the structures of each Church’s life. There, relations between Bishops, priests and deacons. Between Pastors and the entire People of God, between clergy and Religious, between associations and ecclesial movement must all be clearly characterized by communion...The theology and spirituality of communion encourage a fruitful dialogue between Pastors and faithful...the spirituality of communion by prompting a trust and openness wholly in accord with the dignity and responsibility of every member of the People of God, supplies institutional reality with a soul.” (§45)¹¹⁵

Finally, the updated and revised *Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops (Apostolorum Successores)* in 2004 from the Vatican Congregation for Bishops represents the most recent Catholic teaching on the episcopacy. The bishop as “teacher of doctrine, priest of sacred worship, and minister of governance” is to be assisted in pastoral care by his presbyterate.

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“The Bishop should have a lively sense of being the foundation and visible principle of unity for his particular Church. He should promote and continually safeguard ecclesial communion in the diocesan presbyterate...This spirit of communion with the Bishop will encourage priests in their own pastoral solicitude as they lead their people towards community with Christ in the unity of the particular Church.(§63)”

Recent years have seen Methodism engage actively in theological reflection, especially within the United States, about the nature of connectionalism. Within connectionalism there exists in Methodism a tension between the local and global engagement as the Wesleyan Methodist tradition becomes more established in a global context, including in South Korea, Africa, and South America. The fruits of a strong sense of mission undertaken by the entire Methodist connection are experienced through a worldwide growth that comes under the direction of the episcope whose leadership role is more greatly emphasized. Hence, while Roman Catholics increasingly emphasize the need for episcope to be exercised within and for communion, Methodists explore and recover the emphasis on episcope as it should give leadership within connectionalism.

Continuing renewal and reform as led by the Methodist Conferences and Council of Bishops within the evolving Book of Discipline has resulted in significant reflection upon the Methodist episcopacy itself. Methodism and Catholicism each encounter an increasingly secularized Western culture as well as a shift from committed religious membership and participation to an individualistic spiritual practice especially by young adults. This trend contrasts with the significant growth of the Wesleyan Methodist tradition in Asia, Africa, and South America, some of the same geography for growth in Catholicism.

United Methodist leaders in the United States have been portrayed as “uncharacteristically blunt” in statements responding to the findings from recent studies about the state of faith communities. “Leaders, beginning with the bishops and including lay and clergy across the Connection, must...immediately, repeatedly, and energetically make it plain that our current culture and practices are resulting in overall decline that is toxic,” states the Call to Action Steering Team which concludes, “Business as usual is unsustainable” as “dramatically different new behaviours, not incremental changes, are required.” The United Methodist Call to

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Action Steering Team commissioned in 2010 a Vital Congregations Research Project with data from 32,228 churches in North America indicating effective pastoral leadership, multiple small groups, diverse worship styles, and spiritually engaged laity in leadership roles results in church growth. Accommodating and integrating the contributions by new church members sustains that church growth.\footnote{117}

The Methodist General Conference directed the Council of Bishops to commission a Task Force to Study the Episcopacy and report to the General Conference in 2008. The General Conference focussed the work of the Task Force on “fundamental, post-Christendom issues that the Church faces and that affect its capacity to fulfill its mission.” They reflected on leadership and “the critical importance of bishops in facing our challenges and achieving our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”\footnote{118}

The Task Force members envisioned, “The United Methodist Church needs creative, visionary, dynamic, thoughtful, caring, energetic bishops and it needs a theology of the office that summons to just such transformative exercises of superintendency” to include disciple-making, revitalization and growth, pursuit of unity, development of effective leadership at all levels, and maintaining a Wesleyan tradition.\footnote{119} As a result of this report, the 2008 General Conference amended the Book of Discipline to now read:

¶ 403. The Role of Bishops and District Superintendents—Bishops and superintendents are elders in full connection.

1. Bishops are elected from the elders and set apart for a ministry of servant leadership, general oversight and supervision (¶ 401). As followers of Jesus Christ, bishops are authorized to guard the faith, order, liturgy, doctrine, and discipline of the Church. The role and calling forth of the bishop is to exercise oversight and support of the Church in its mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. The basis of such discipleship of leadership (episcope) lies in discipline and a disciplined life.

\footnote{119} Task Force to Study the Episcopacy, Report, 3.
The paragraph continues as the bishop is expected to possess a “vital and renewing spirit” through worship and the practice of personal holiness; the bishop is to be committed to the role of teaching; the bishop is to have a vision of the Church, especially working in partnership with the Council of Bishops, ordained and lay leadership; the bishop is to embody a prophetic commitment for the transformation of the Church and the world; the bishop is expected to display a passion for understanding, reconciliation and unity; the bishop maintains the discipline and order of the Church by “consecrating, ordaining, commissioning, supervising and appointing persons in ministry to the Church and the world,” sharing with other bishops oversight of the entire church and working in collaboration with the Conference and various committees.  

Many of those desired attributes for Methodist episcopacy could be considered as part of an episcopal mandate for the Roman Catholic bishop.

On November 1, 2011, the United Methodist Church Council of Bishops released a letter “For the Sake of a New World, We See a New Church: A Call to Action” to initiate changes and renewal for the ecclesial communion to better respond to the pastoral exigencies of the day. Honest assessment of the current Methodist ecclesial situation is presented:

Especially in Africa and Asia, we find multiple examples of Wesley evangelism, discipleship, and witness for social justice. In the U.S. and Europe, however, we recognize that our church’s strength and vitality have diminished over the last several decades. Both Europe and America face cultural trends that are very difficult. We confess that at times we have lost our way, substituting maintenance for mission, bureaucracy for vision, and passivity for passion.

Acknowledging a “growing lack of trust among the parts of our Connection,” the Council of Bishops has recommended to the 2012 General Conference that “different actions and patterns of leadership by bishops, clergy, and laity in their conferences” must be “grounded deeply in the spiritual disciplines of prayer and fasting.” Renewal for United Methodism requires strong leadership and partnership within the Body of Christ, rooted in disciplines of holiness.

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Those words sound similar to those from Pope Benedict XVI in his recent Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Africae Munus (AM)* on the Church in Africa in service of Reconciliation, Justice, and Peace. As he addressed “the Members of the Church” he directed a pointed, collegial message to the African bishops:

“Your own holiness must be outstanding, to the benefit of those entrusted to your pastoral care...Your life of prayer will nourish your apostolate within. The bishop must be someone in love with Christ.” (*AM* §100)

He urges the bishops to “Love and respect your priests (as) esteemed co-workers in your episcopal ministry. Imitate Christ!” (*AM* §101). The pope reminds his episcopal brothers, “Your first duty is to bring the good news of salvation to all, and to offer the faithful a catechesis which leads them to a deeper knowledge of Jesus Christ” adding “See to it that laypeople acquire a genuine awareness of their ecclesial mission and encourage them to engage in it with responsibility, always seeking the common good.” (*AM* §103) Appealing to Christ the Good Shepherd, the pope as head of the college of bishops reminds his brother bishops as good pastors to be present to their diocese, “exemplary in life and conduct” with their diocese. The pope envisions the bishops of Africa as the first promoters of communion and cooperation on that continent.

These are but two contemporary examples of similar ecclesial responses to pastoral exigencies by Catholics and Methodists. Although church union is still well below the horizon of immediate possibility, recognition of parallel paths of ministerial oversight in service to *koinonia*, communion or connection in Christ, stirs hope and prompts an openness of mutual enrichment. For Catholics, manifestation of *koinonia-communio*, communion, is in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, celebration of the Lord’s Supper under the presidency of the bishop or an ordained ministerial priest. Participation by the Ecclesial Body of Christ in this action of worship, through thanks and praise, song and silence, gesture and movement, taking, blessing, breaking and sharing, remains for Catholics the action of Christ in the Mystical Body, the Real Presence of which is shared in the Communion Rite. Eucharistic presidency is directed toward building the Body of Christ, a transformative communion lived day-to-day in the world. *Episcope* and *koinonia* are most clearly visible in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, especially when the bishop presides gathered with his presbyterate. The Sacrament of the Eucharist
embodies and reveals the Church’s sacramental re-presentation of Christ who is the very Sacrament of God.

The last two Catholic-Methodist dialogue reports (Seoul 2006, Durban 2011) indicate that the conversation has prompted suggestions that Methodism reconsider their understanding of the Eucharist in light of shared insights and clearer ecclesial self-understanding by Methodists. From the Seoul Report (2006), Methodist representatives call for a deepening of Eucharistic theology as based in John Wesley’s Anglican background in which weekly celebration of the Lord’s Supper is normative as well as the extensive Eucharistic hymnody written by Charles Wesley. In the Durban Report (2011), Charles Wesley’s hymnody was used extensively to articulate Methodist practice in the section on the Eucharist. But, Methodist acknowledgement of a sacramental nature (without naming it so) of ministerial ordination has raised questions about the presidency of the Methodist Lord’s Supper, usually by an ordained minister, but from rare necessity by a lay person.

*Lex orandi, lex credendi*, the law of prayer is the law of belief, remains an important principle for both ecclesial communions, although more so for Methodists who have carried forward a “sung theology” in hymnody. Therefore, doxology, ritual worship of God, which believers raise through words and actions, manifests ecclesial beliefs and appeals to that common convergent ascent to Christ. Similarities in particular prayers and rituals, which accompany the ordination of bishops for Catholics and Methodists, speak to the parallel paths towards Christian unity.

“Ordination to this ministry is a gift from God to the church. In ordination, the church affirms and continues the apostolic ministry through persons empowered by the Holy Spirit.”

So states the “Theological and Liturgical Introduction” for the *Services for the Ordering of Ministry in the United Methodist Church, 2008*, as currently approved for use in the United Methodist Church through 2012. “The rite of ordination is the climax of a process in which the faith community discerns and validates the call, the gifts, and effectiveness for apostolic ministry

by agency of the Holy Spirit.”\textsuperscript{123} Consecration of Methodist bishops can take place during a session of Conference or at another time as decided by the Conference. Laying on of hands, as it originates from the early church, serves as a “sign of episcopal unity and collegiality” with the bishops present imposing hands and sharing in the consecratory prayer as a sign of acceptance into the episcopal college. A minimum of three bishops are to participate in the laying on of hands, an activity which the Methodist directives indicate is restricted to bishops.

After the bishop-elect is called by name and the call is affirmed by the congregation, Scripture is proclaimed followed by an Examination by the presiding bishop. This examination is addressed to the bishop-elect “to guard the faith, to seek the unity, and to exercise the discipline of the whole church; and to supervise and support the church’s life, work, and mission throughout the world.” The bishop-elect is called to “preach and teach the truth of the gospel to all God’s people, to lead people in worship, in celebration of the Sacraments, and in their mission of witness and service in the world, and so participate in the gospel command to make disciples of all nations” as they “lead and guide all person entrusted to (their) oversight.”\textsuperscript{124}

Following a four-fold questioning of the bishop-elect, the Laying on of Hands and Prayer follow, which invokes God to fill the heart of the newly consecrated bishop with love “that he may feed and tend the flock of Christ, serve in the ministry of reconciliation, and supervise and support the life and work of the church” through a “pure, gentle, and holy life.” Following that prayer, the new bishop receives a book of the Scriptures with instruction from the presiding bishop to “Be to the people of God a prophetic voice and a courageous leader. Be to the flock of Christ a shepherd.”\textsuperscript{125}

The Catholic rites for Ordination of a Bishop are similar, although a great emphasis is placed on apostolic succession. In a similar manner, the ordaining bishop calls the bishop-elect by name, with a mandate from the pope read, with assent given then by the congregation. The homily serves as an explanation of the Order of Bishop while a portion is directed to the bishop-

\textsuperscript{123} United Methodist Church, \textit{Services for Ordering}, 8.
\textsuperscript{124} United Methodist Church, \textit{Services for Ordering}, 82.
\textsuperscript{125} United Methodist Church, \textit{Services for Ordering}, 84-85.
elect, focussing on service, proclamation of the Word, and the direction to “devote yourself wholeheartedly to seeking every kind of grace for them from the fullness of Christ’s holiness.” The homiletic instruction exhorts the bishop-elect to be a “faithful steward” of the mysteries of Christ and to “love all whom God places in your care, especially the priests and deacons, your co-workers in the ministry of Christ, but also the poor and the weak, immigrants and strangers.” Ultimately, the newly ordained bishop is to “keep watch over the whole flock.” Questioning of the bishop-elect in the presence of the people comes from “ancient rule of the holy Fathers” regarding preaching, teaching, building up the Body of Christ within the communion of bishops, obedience to the pope, service to the people of God as well as the poor and strangers, and to be a prayerful good shepherd.

Following the Laying on of Hands by the bishops present, two deacons hold open the Book of the Gospels over the bishop-elect’s head during the Prayer of Ordination. The beginning of the Ordination Prayer for a Catholic bishop is nearly identical to the beginning of the Methodist Ordination Prayer. All the ordaining bishops join in during the portion of the prayer that refers to the “Spirit of governance” while the ordaining bishop alone prays that the new bishop may be pleasing to God by his “meekness and purity of heart.”

After the newly-ordained bishop is anointed on the head with chrism, that same Book of the Gospels that had been literally “hanging over his head” is handed to the newly-ordained bishop with the words, “Receive the Gospel and preach the word of God with all patience and sound teaching.” Following reception of episcopal insignia including a ring, miter, and crosier, the newly-ordained bishop receives the sign of peace from the other bishops present.

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Similar ordination rites portray the richness of common ground shared in episcopal polity for Catholics and Methodists even as they share a foretaste in the heavenly banquet of koinonia through a “real, but imperfect communion.” The urgency for ecumenical dialogue, which moves the companions on the journey forward towards Christ in readiness to receive the Gift of Christian Unity, empowers a similar movement outward to proclaim the gospel with apostolic zeal and upward in hope and holiness converging in Christ. The ministerial overseer, whether John Wesley or Pope Benedict XVI, leads in holiness and hope by connection to Christ and in communion with the Church. This servant-leadership requires attention to horizontal as well as vertical koinonia, the ecclesial communion shared here and the ecclesial communion to which we hope to be raised in glory with our forebears in faith, the saints. Pope John Paul in Ut Unum Sint presents the ecumenical endeavour as eschatology in the Communion of Saints.

While for all Christian communities the martyrs are the proof of the power of grace, they are not the only ones to bear witness to that power. Albeit in an invisible way, the communion between our Communities, even if still incomplete, is truly and solidly grounded in the full communion of the Saints—those who, at the end of a life faithful to grace, are in communion with Christ in glory. These Saints come from all the Churches and Ecclesial Communities which gave them entrance into the communion of salvation. (UUS §4)

Dialogue is inherently relational in which both parts of the conversation are changed by the presence, the ideas, and the gift of the partner in conversation. We live genuine affection within a communion of life, as either the domestic church of the family or the Church of Christ. This communion is shared, expressed, and deepened in the give and take of relationship, which for Christians, converges through, with, and in the Risen Christ. Leaders serve the good of the order, whether for a household, a parish household of faith, or the household of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. Ministerial leadership of oversight, episcopate, serves the ends of koinonia, communion in Christ. For Catholics, that ministry of oversight participates in the priesthood of Christ as exercised by the bishop through the teaching, sanctifying, and governing functions of Christ. Bishops minister within communion, including the College of Bishops and the presbyterate of the particular Church the bishop has been called to lead. For Methodists, the ministry of oversight is both personally and corporately exercised, in Conference and through connectionalism as a form of communion similar to collegiality. Recognition of the similarities can serve to strengthen Catholics and Methodists, as a pilgrim people, called collectively to holiness lived in the hope for heaven.
Theological reflection centered in the nine reports of the Joint Catholic-Methodist Commission presents consensus, convergence, divergence, difference, and progress. Representatives from each ecclesial communion represent well their doctrines and disciplines as they remain true to their particular experience of *episcope* and *koinonia*. Their dialogue is not just about theological abstraction but emerges from the concrete historical reality of the Church from the unique perspective of each communion.

John Wesley noted in his journal, “I look upon all the world as my parish; thus far I mean, that, in whatever part of it I am, I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty to declare unto all that are willing to hear, the glad tidings of salvation.”

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