



The Church: towards a Common Vision

Chapter 3 - The Church:
growing in communion
Summary and Questions

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Opening Prayer

Gracious Father,
we humbly beseech you for your holy catholic Church.
Fill it with all truth; and in all truth with all peace.
Where it is corrupt, purge it; where it is in error, direct it;
where it is superstitious, rectify it; where anything is amiss, reform it;
where it is right, strengthen and confirm it; where it is in want, furnish it;
where it is divided and rent asunder, make up the breaches of it,
O Holy One of Israel;
for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

Archbishop William Laud, 1573-1645

Read: Ephesians 4:11-16



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A reminder of Chapter 3 read over this last week –
AND QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

A Already but not yet (33 – 36)

- The church – already a visible sign of the community God wills for all of creation. Some of the signs are: receiving and sharing the faith of the apostles, breaking and sharing in the eucharist, praying with and for one another, proclaiming and witnessing to the good news, and working together for justice and peace.

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- As a pilgrim community, the Church also contends with the reality of sin, and therefore recognizes the need for self-examination, penitence, conversion, reconciliation and renewal.

QUESTION

1 *How do you understand the Church to be 'Already but not yet'?*





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B. Growing in the essential elements of Communion: Faith, Sacraments, Ministry (37 – 57)

- the ecumenical movement exists to assist the churches in their work towards “communion in the fullness of apostolic life” in sacramental life, recognized ministry, conciliar relations and decision-making, common witness and service to the world.

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Faith (38 and 39)

- Integral to the life and ministry within the Church
- Substantial agreement on doctrine amongst the churches
- Ongoing discussions and dialogues on matters pertaining to the understanding of Scripture and the role of tradition.



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QUESTION 2

The document states that the essential elements of Communion are Faith, Sacraments and Ministry. How do you understand the faith that has been entrusted to us?

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Sacraments (40- 44)

- Growing convergence among the churches on the meaning of baptism
- A dynamic and profound relationship between baptism and the eucharist
- The celebration of the eucharist calls us to reconciliation and sharing



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- Differences in description of the sacraments –
mysterion (God's saving work is communicated in the action of the rite) or ordinance (the action of the rite is performed in obedience to Christ's word and example).



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QUESTIONS

3 *What is the relationship between the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion?*

Does your local church insist that a person be baptized before receiving Holy Communion? If not, should it?

4 *How are the relationships within your Christian community affected by the fact that the eucharist demands reconciliation and sharing by all those who are brothers and sisters in the one family of God?*



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Ministry within the Church (45 – 47)

- Different patterns of ministry discussed
- The threefold pattern – episkopos – presbyteros – diakonos (bishop, presbyter, deacon) mentioned and the question asked: Is faithfulness to the Gospel linked to our understanding of ministry?

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QUESTION

5 How is ministry exercised in your local church community and in the UCA?





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The Gift of Authority (48 – 51)

- All authority in the church comes from its Head, Jesus Christ – exercised in his teaching, ministry, and forgiveness of sins. This authority was shared with the apostles, and exercised by those in ministries of leadership

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QUESTION

- 6 *Jesus taught that authority must be understood as humble service – a service (diakonia) of love without any domination. Is this your experience of authority within your congregation and the UCA as a whole?*



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The Ministry of Oversight (52 – 53)

- the Church is made up of people with a diversity of gifts for ministry – and each Church, or tradition has its own structures for episkopé – the means by which the Church maintains continuity in apostolic faith and unity of life
- Oversight – personal, collegial and communal



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The authority of Ecumenical Councils (54 – 57)

- *Early Councils of the Church did much to define doctrinal positions of the Church*
- *Primacy among Bishops was an issue*
- *The ecumenical movement has been instrumental in providing a conciliatory space in which issues of unity of the whole Church can be discussed*

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QUESTION

7 What do people see in other churches concerning authority that they admire?

- *The UCA has episcopate by councils, especially presbyteries. Would it be helpful to have a personal episcopate also?*
- *Are Presbyterial Ministers, in effect, Bishops?*
- *If not, how would you define the difference?*



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Basis of Union

- The Uniting Church therefore so organizes its life that locally, regionally, and nationally government will be entrusted to representatives, men and women, bearing the gifts and graces with which God has endowed them for the building up of the Church...
- Each Council will recognize the limits of its own authority and give heed to the other councils of the Church, so that the whole body of believers may be united by mutual submission in the service of the Gospel. (Para 15)

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- Does this model of authority work well for your community? For the UCA as a whole?

