

For the Sake of the Gospel

Mutual Recognition of Ordained Ministries in the Anglican and Uniting Churches in Australia

A SUMMARY

PARTS 1-3: Heritage, History and Hope

The report, [For the Sake of the Gospel](#), emerges from a long process of official dialogue between the Anglican Church of Australia and the Uniting Church in Australia. The two churches have long lived as neighbours, sharing in many ways in the ministry and mission of the Gospel. Progressively, in a spirit of ecumenical cooperation and in the Spirit of Christ who prays that the church might be one, they have determined to address those issues that continue to divide them and to move forward together 'for the sake of the Gospel.'

[For the Sake of the Gospel](#) begins with an outline of the historical background of our two churches, noting our common origins in the English and Scottish Reformation, and briefly describing how each church identifies itself (Part 2).

Part 3 recounts the historical context for the dialogue of the two churches. The dialogue has been carried on at a national level, and has already produced some important agreements, in particular, the Agreed Statement on Baptism (1985). It has also received the wisdom of international agreements (see 3.1-5).

The specific background to the present proposal is the decision of the churches in 1997-98 to enter into 'an intentional dialogue', with the particular aim of the 'mutual recognition of ministries', and the formation of a Joint Working Group for that purpose. [For the Sake of the Gospel](#) is the report of that dialogue.

It is important to note from the outset the limits within which 'mutual recognition of ordained ministries' is to be understood. A framework was adopted from another resource, *Steps to Unity* (see 1.5.2), which outlines four progressive steps towards ecumenical convergence. The meaning of those four steps is further spelt out in Part 6.1. [For the Sake of the Gospel](#) does not propose 'full organic union'. It does propose a degree of unity in line with steps (a) and (b) of that framework, i.e. a statement of agreement on essentials of faith and ministry, and a covenant of association and inter-communion.

PART 4: Essentials of Faith and Ministry

The Joint Working Group was able to make the following affirmation about the faith we hold in common (see 4.11):

We affirm that our churches share in the continuity of apostolic faith and ministry, while acknowledging our failures and brokenness in our mutual discipleship of Jesus Christ. We see in each other's churches an authentic desire to witness faithfully to the Gospel and to be engaged in God's mission in the world. As a consequence of affirming in each other's churches the essentials of faith and ministry, we recognise in each other's churches the presence of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church of Jesus Christ. We further recognise that in each of our churches there is a real and

effective expression of the proclamation of the Word, an authentic celebration of the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist, and an accountable practice of pastoral ministry.

This affirmation is based on the recognition that both our churches make common affirmations about the triune God, Jesus Christ as the incarnate Word, the Holy Scriptures, the ancient creeds, the Church, the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist, worship and mission. To serve and build up the life of the church, both churches have an ordained ministry. These affirmations are set out in part 4, paragraphs 1-10.

Each of these affirmations draws upon the authoritative doctrinal sources of each church and, in some cases, agreed statements between our churches.

PART 5: Ordained Ministries

On the basis of the theological agreements in Part 4, the Joint Working Group came to a second affirmation on ministry (5.9):

We affirm that both churches have a common ministry of leadership in the community of faith through the provision of the ordained ministries of presbyter (priest and minister of the Word) and deacon. Notwithstanding the differing ecclesial frameworks of our two churches (episcopal and presbyterial), we affirm that in each of our ordained ministries there is a real and effective expression of the proclamation of the Word, an authentic celebration of the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist, and an accountable practice of pastoral oversight. Both churches affirm a ministry of oversight (episkopé) that operates in different, distinct and in some respects comparable forms. In both churches this oversight operates communally, collegially and personally, and its purpose is to safeguard the unity and the apostolic mission of the church. As a result, the Joint Working Group affirms a substantial consonance between the two ministries of priest/minister of the Word and deacon in our two churches.

Consensus

The affirmation recognises 'substantial consonance' between the two churches on significant aspects of ministry, including an ordained ministry, established to serve the church and equip it for its life and work in the world. Within that ministry, both churches recognise:

- a presbyteral ministry (ministers of the Word or priests) charged to preach the Word, administer the sacraments, and exercise pastoral care (5.7);
- deacons with specific liturgical and wider social roles, including pastoral care, prophetic activity, and social engagement (5.8);
- a ministry of oversight, which is expressed communally, collegially and personally (5.4).

Differences

The affirmation also recognises some significant differences in the way these forms of ministry are exercised.

- One of the longest sections of [For the Sake of the Gospel](#) is the discussion in 5.4 of the ministry of oversight, (also identified by the Greek term episkopé, from which we derive the words

'episcopal' and even 'bishop' itself). Although both churches exercise oversight of ministry 'communally, collegially and personally', the Anglican church is committed to the personal episkopé of bishops, while the Uniting Church accentuates the corporate oversight of presbyteries.

- The manner of ordination differs in each church. Anglican deacons and priests are ordained by the bishop; Uniting Church ministers by the presbytery, presided over by its chairperson. This difference has some significant implications.
- The principal difference between the two diaconates is in their sacramental ministries. Anglican deacons are not authorised to preside at the Eucharist; Uniting Church deacons may do so within the context of their ministry.

PARTS 6-8: A Declaration of Agreement and a Proposal

The Joint Working Group arrived at the following agreement on essentials of faith and ministry (see 6.2):

- (a) Both churches hold to the essentials of faith as expressed in summary form in section 4 of this report. This covered the following areas: the Trinity, Jesus Christ, the Holy Scriptures, the ancient creeds, the church, baptism and the eucharist, worship, mission and ministry. As a consequence, we recognised in each other's churches the presence of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church of Jesus Christ.*
- (b) In respect of the ordained ministry, the Joint Working Group identified areas of consensus and differences in section 5 of this report. Both churches ordain people to the presbyteral (priest/minister of the Word) and diaconal ministries. Both churches recognise in each other's presbyteral ministries a real and effective expression of the proclamation of the Word, an authentic celebration of the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist, and the exercise of pastoral care. Both churches recognise in each other's diaconate an authentic ministry of service in the church and the world. Both churches recognise that these two orders of ministry operate within a ministry of oversight (episkopé) occurring in various forms. In the light of (a) and (b), the Joint Working Group finds a substantial agreement on the essentials of ministry in respect of these two orders of ministry.*

On the basis of converging, if not wholly compatible, understandings of the ordained ministry, the Joint Working Group proposes 'that our churches enter into a formal covenant of association and inter-communion on the mutual recognition of ordained ministries' (6.3).

If the two churches were to do this, a limited exchange of ministries would already be possible. The possibilities and the limitations are set out in 6.4.

Such a covenant of association and inter-communion is necessarily limited, though it could lead to further steps (see 7.3). The two churches have different ways of making decisions about such matters (7.1-2).

These steps toward the mutual recognition of ordained ministries are proposed 'for the sake of the Gospel'. The church's mission is restricted by the divisions between the churches. The Joint Working Group's conviction is that our churches are called, together, to grow in mission, the mission of the triune God (see part 8). For this reason we are called to take every possible step to give fuller expression to our unity in Christ.