

Editorial

Growth and Pain in Dialogue – Signs of Hope for the Future



I have been privileged to serve as member of the International Commission for Dialogue between the Disciples of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church for most of the twenty-five years that it has existed. During those years, I have witnessed moments of remarkable break-through in understanding and new discoveries of “the others’ theology, tradition and practice” as we honestly wrestled with continuing areas of difference and those issues that still divide us.

The issue of *Mid-Stream* offers the “results” of the third phase (1993-2002) of dialogue between Disciples and Roman Catholics in an agreed statement on *Receiving and Handing on the Faith: the Mission and Responsibility of the Church*. As would be expected, this third statement reflects a deeper maturity and reflection both in the topics addressed and in the articulation of agreements reached.

What may not be so easily apparent – though I believe is truly the most significant “result” of our twenty-five years together – is the growth we have experienced in sharing together in worship and prayer, entering into the sacred space of each others’ life and spirituality where true oneness in Christ is made known. And yet . . . while both of our churches strongly affirm the Eucharist, the Lord’s Supper, as the heart of our life as a people and as the central act of our worship, it is there that we experience the pain of our continued separation and division. It is at the Table that we remain divided in not being able to share the “sacrament of unity.” Indeed, it is this pain of continued division that keeps us together in dialogue.

In releasing its third “agreed statement,” the dialogue commission expressed the hope that this document might be published along with the two previous statements—*Apostolicity and Catholicity* (1982) and *The Church as Communion in Christ* (1993). These texts are included in this issue of *Mid-Stream* as a way to document our growth in agreement over

these years and as a resource for further reflection as our dialogue enters a new phase of conversation on the topic, “The presence of Christ in the Church.”

In a concluding paragraph of the agreed statement (para. 5.13) *Receiving and Handling on the Faith*, three major themes are identified and woven together in a way that begins to set the agenda for our future dialogue – indeed, I believe for the future of the ecumenical movement itself: communion and division, eucharist and proclamation, unity and evangelism.

The Church invites people into communion with God and with each other, but because of its divisions it fails to manifest that communion fully. All believers gathered at the eucharistic celebration are sent out into the world to proclaim Christ, but we cannot celebrate the eucharist together. That proclamation is therefore weakened. In this dialogue, we have increasingly come to recognize that the structures and instruments for the visible unity of the Church of God are part of the necessary obedience to the command of Christ who said, “Go . . . and make disciples of all nations” (*Matt 28:19*).

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Editor