

## Resources

### **International Dialogues**

The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity website gives information about dialogues and some texts:

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/index.htm](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/index.htm)

A full list of past and current international dialogues involving the Catholic Church, together with the English texts of their agreed statements, is published by the Centro Pro Unione in Rome:

[http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/e\\_dialogues.html](http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/e_dialogues.html)

Christopher Hill & Edward Yarnold (eds.), *Anglicans and Roman Catholics: the search for unity*, SPCK, 1994.

International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission, *Growing Together in Unity and Mission*, SPCK, 2007.

W.G. Rusch & Jeffrey Gros (eds.), *Deepening Communion: international ecumenical documents with Roman Catholic participation*, USCCB, 1998.

### **Churches Together in England publications**

*Called to be One* (1996 consultation between the member churches of CTE; reprinted 2002)

Bill Snelson, *Enriching Communion*, 2006.

*Sharing Scripture*.

*Sharing Our Spiritual Treasures*.

The last two are available to download at [www.cte.org.uk](http://www.cte.org.uk) Click on: Resources+Shop > Free Leaflets.

### **Other publications**

Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. *The Search for Christian Unity*, 2002, especially chapter 5.

William Steele, *Ecumenism for Catholics*, Blackfriars Publications, 2003.

Association of Interchurch Families: [www.interchurchfamilies.org.uk](http://www.interchurchfamilies.org.uk)



© Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, 2009  
Published by the Committee for Christian Unity, CBCEW  
39 Eccleston Square, London SW1V 1BX

# TOGETHER IN CHRIST

## 4 Exploring Together What We Believe



For as long as most of us can remember relations between the main churches in our country have been friendly. However, this is a relatively recent phenomenon. During the many centuries of division between Christians, at best different communities lived parallel lives, at worst there was open hostility between them. Not surprisingly, those who work for Christian unity often find that they have to deal with a legacy of misunderstanding, mistrust, and hurt.

When the bishops at the Second Vatican Council urged all Catholics 'to take an active and intelligent part in the work of ecumenism' they recognised that much of this work would consist of talking with and learning from other Christians. 'In such dialogue, everyone gains a truer knowledge and more just appreciation of the teaching and religious life of both Communion. In addition, the way is prepared for cooperation between them in the duties for the common good of humanity.' *Vatican II, Unitatis Redintegratio (Decree on Ecumenism), n. 4.*

Almost as soon as the Council ended, international dialogues were established between the Catholic Church and other Christian communities: August 1965 - with the Lutheran World Federation; January 1967 - with the Anglican Communion; October 1967 - with the World Methodist Council; November 1968 - with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. These dialogues continue today and others have been added.

International dialogues have an impact here. The fruitful co-operation between the churches in England & Wales owes much to their work. Yet dialogue also needs to happen locally. Our own Catholic Bishops' Conference is in dialogue with the Church of England, the Methodist Church, the United Reformed Church, and the Oriental Orthodox Churches. Programmes which jointly explore the beliefs and practices of Christians of different traditions are also part of the life of a number of local, county and regional Churches Together groups.

## **Ask yourselves**

### ***How involved is our church in our local Churches Together, or equivalent?***

Frequent contact between the members of different congregations is the foundation of fruitful dialogue. Local clergy or ministers will often meet monthly, sometimes weekly. While taking account of laypeople's family and work responsibilities, the various churches in an area need to create attractive opportunities for meeting regularly.

### ***What ecumenical dialogue already takes place in our area?***

It is likely that some dialogue is already happening. When we meet those from other Christian traditions in an ecumenical context we naturally discuss our beliefs and the practice of our faith. Other more structured dialogues may also be taking place, for example in Lent courses or Bible study.

### ***How many people in our church have participated in another tradition's worship?***

Worship and belief are inextricably linked. It is particularly helpful for anyone seeking to understand the beliefs of other Christians to attend their worship. Many Catholic parishes celebrate the first Mass of Sunday on the Saturday evening, so we can both fulfil our obligation to attend Sunday Mass and take part occasionally in the Sunday services of neighbouring congregations.

### ***How does our church respond to interchurch families?***

'You live in your marriage the hopes and the difficulties of the path to Christian unity', said Pope John Paul II to interchurch families at York in 1982. As each partner in these marriages strives to be faithful to both their marriage vows and their faith, ecumenical dialogue takes place at a very deep level. Inter-church families have much to teach us about exploring our belief.

### ***What level of agreement already exists between the Catholic Church and other Christian traditions?***

Local conversations among Christians can be nourished by the fruits of the ongoing international ecumenical dialogues. Many are unaware of the considerable degree of agreement already arrived at with other Churches and Ecclesial Communities. For example in 1998, as a result of the dialogue between the Catholic Church and the World Lutheran Federation, there was a resolution of many of the disagreements surrounding the doctrine of justification, a key aspect of the dispute which led to the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. Most of the agreed statements from the various international dialogues are freely available on the internet.

## **How about**

### ***A forum to understand how each tradition thinks and acts***

Join together with one or more neighbouring churches to explore each other's understanding of an area of doctrine or practice. Suitable topics might be: authority in the Church; Baptism and Christian Initiation; marriage and family life; Scripture in the life of the Church. Invite someone from each church (clergy or lay) who is well versed in the subject to lead the discussion. Alternatively, suggest to the local Churches Together group that they organise a series of meetings in which each member church makes a presentation and leads the discussion on a doctrinal topic of their own choosing.

### ***Ecumenical Bible study***

In studying Scripture together, we find that different churches read Scripture differently. Every reading of the Bible involves the choice of some hermeneutical (interpretative) lens. Coming together ecumenically does not require agreement on the lens. It does require the commitment to listen sympathetically to interpretations which might seem unfamiliar. All of Scripture can be studied ecumenically, but some passages have a particular bearing on the call to Christian unity. For example: Mt 28:19-20; Jn 17:20-23; Rom 12; 1 Cor 12; Eph 1:3-10; Eph 4:1-16.

### ***Joint study of new teaching documents***

Many denominations publish documents addressing current domestic or international concerns, or examining particular aspects of the Christian faith. Examples from the Catholic Church in England and Wales include: *Mission of the Church to Migrants* (2008), *The Gift of Scripture* (2005), and *Cherishing Life* (2004). When such a document is published, encourage the congregation whose church is responsible for it to organise an ecumenical study day or evening.

### ***Making the international agreed statements better known***

A vital part of the quest for Christian unity is the 'reception' by Churches and Ecclesial Communities of the agreements reached by their officially appointed representatives. By 'reception' is meant a community's understanding that the agreement does not contradict its own tradition and will indeed advance and enrich it. Local churches and congregations have their part to play in this process. With your neighbouring churches arrange to meet to study some of the agreements which already exist.

Listening to the God who speaks also implies a reciprocal listening,  
the dialogue between the Churches and the Ecclesial Communities.  
Honest and loyal dialogue is the typical and indispensable instrument  
in the quest for unity.

*Pope Benedict XVI,*

*Homily at Vespers on the Feast of the Conversion of St Paul, 2007*