

Disciples-Catholic Dialogue to Focus on “Formed and Transformed by the Eucharist”



Nashville, TN (January 12, 2014) – The International Commission for Dialogue between Disciples of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church began its fifth round of dialogue on the theme for this phase, “Christians Formed and Transformed by the Eucharist.” This dialogue is co-sponsored by the Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

Meeting at the Disciples of Christ Historical Society in Nashville, Tennessee on January 8-12, 2014, the agenda focused upon two areas: (1) reviewing the previous four phases of dialogue (which have taken place from 1977 to 2009); and, (2) exploring the place of the Eucharist (the Lord’s Supper) in the life and practice of the Disciples and the Catholic traditions.

Papers on the background beliefs and practices of the Disciples of Christ were presented by the Rev. Dr. Newell Williams, President of Brite Divinity School at Texas Christian University, and on ecumenical developments in the Catholic Church (by Msgr. Juan Usma Gomez, co-secretary for the Catholic team) and in the Disciples of Christ (by the Rev. Dr. Robert Welsh, co-secretary for the Disciples team). The Rev. Prof. David M. Thompson, a long time Disciples participant in the dialogue from England, presented a paper offering an overview of the earlier work of the Commission.

Two major papers were offered to focus this year’s introduction to the theme of the dialogue: “The Place of the Eucharist in the Life of the Catholic Church,” presented by the Rev. Joseph T. Shenosky, S.T.D., Director of Pastoral and Apostolic Formation at St. Charles Borromeo Seminary in Pennsylvania; and, “Citizens of Heaven: The Eucharist and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)” by the Rev. Dr. Tom Best, retired Director of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches.

The meeting also shared in a Bible study on I Corinthians 11 led by the Rev. Dr. Merryl Blair, Senior Lecturer of First Testament at Stirling Theological College, University of Divinity (Melbourne) on “‘Discerning the body’: the Lord’s Supper in community.”

From its discussion, the Commission identified several points of common affirmations in our understanding and approach to the Eucharist, as well as naming some major points of difference and divergence which still need further exploration. The Commission understands this dialogue as a contribution toward realizing the long-range goal of full visible unity in one faith, one eucharistic fellowship, and common life in Christ.

The Most Reverend David Ricken, Bishop of the Diocese of Green Bay, Wisconsin [the Catholic co-chair of the Commission] stated, “It is a beautiful and challenging formal conversation around the teachings and practices in hopes of moving toward greater understanding and sharing in the life of faith.”

The Rev. Dr. Newell Williams, President of Brite Divinity School at Texas Christian University in Ft. Worth, Texas [the Disciples co-chair of the Commission] noted that, “An important component of each of our dialogue sessions is the time we spend together in daily worship and prayer. In those moments we are reminded that the unity we seek is finally a gift of the Holy Spirit.”

During the meeting, the Commission members were hosted by the Disciples of Christ Historical Society. They also shared in an informal gathering with local Disciples and Catholics, which included the Most Rev. David Choby, Bishop of Nashville, and other Catholic and Disciples leaders and seminarians.

The next session of the Commission will take place in June 2014 in Rome, Italy, around the topic “Formed by the Eucharist.”

Members of the dialogue commission:

For Disciples of Christ: Rev. Dr. Newell Williams (USA); Rev. Dr. Thomas Best (USA); Rev. Dr. Merryl Blair (Australia); Rev. Dr. James Duke (USA); Rev. Prof. David Thompson (United Kingdom); Rev. Prof. Angel Luis Rivera (Puerto Rico); and, Rev. Dr. Robert Welsh (USA), [co-secretary]

For Catholics: Most Rev. David Ricken (USA); Msgr. Michael Clay (USA); Dr. Mary Coloe, PBVM (Australia); Dr. Julien Hammond (Canada); the Rev. Joseph Shenosky, S.T.D. (USA); Rev. Michael Witczak, S.L.D. (USA); and, Msgr. Juan Usma Gomez (Vatican/Colombia) [co-secretary].