

Called to Common Witness

A Joint Statement by the Evangelical-Roman Catholic Dialogue in Saskatoon¹

June 2015

The Status of this Joint Statement

The Joint Statement published here is the work of the local dialogue between the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon and the Saskatoon Evangelical Ministers' Fellowship. It is a study document produced by participants in the dialogue and is here released so that it may be widely discussed. It is not an authoritative declaration of either the Catholic Church or of the Saskatoon Evangelical Ministers' Fellowship, who have each commended the document for study and reflection in local churches.

Preamble

1. In recent years, Evangelicals and Roman Catholics in Saskatoon have discovered each other in new and positive ways. This new relationship has developed between pastors and ministers, church leaders and laity from our churches, but has its roots in the close relationships between neighbours, co-workers, and family members who have shared with each other their desire to be faithful disciples. Breaking from the old pattern of distrust and dismissal, we have discovered in each other people of faith who seek to sincerely follow Christ. Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we have discovered that Christ is present with us as we walk together, breaking open God's word and sharing in all that God has been doing.
2. Prompted by Christ's prayer for oneness in John 17 and his command to love one another in John 15:12, nine Catholics representing the Saskatoon diocese and ten Evangelicals representing the Saskatoon Evangelical Ministers' Fellowship agreed to meet together beginning in December 2011 and continuing to the present. The goal of these meetings has been to engage in conversation regarding the possibilities of shared witness for Christ in our city and wherever Christ would lead.
3. We have undertaken this conversation in the hope of attaining greater understanding and appreciation of our respective beliefs and traditions, developing meaningful relationships, and seeking guidance for God's desires in these matters. We also hope to offer a vision of potential collaborative action on the part of our communities.

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4. In this emerging dialogue there has been no intent to settle all the differences of belief among us, to compromise the beliefs and convictions of any individual or denomination, or to be the primary initiators of any proposed common mission. There has been a keen desire on both sides to hear the promptings of the Holy Spirit within this interchange and respond accordingly.

5. We have confirmed that both traditions have the highest regard for the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, and the authority of the Holy Scriptures. In this process we have acknowledged that our Scriptures are similar but different as a result of the Catholic acceptance of the Old Testament Apocrypha or Deuterocanonical books as inspired. Our interpretation of the Holy Scriptures often coincides; in other places there is sharp disagreement. Many of these differences have persisted, and run deep. What God will do with us and with our dialogue partner we do not know, but we trust God's ability to reconcile where we ourselves cannot. Meanwhile, these discussions have been occasions for intensive examination and clarification of our theological positions.

6. This document represents the fruit of this dynamic, life-filled conversation which we have experienced, and is presented as a statement of our ongoing journey towards a common witness. Confident in the continued prayer of Christ for our endeavours, we are bold to confess together our shared faith, to acknowledge our central differences, and to affirm our common mission. We offer this as a gift to our communities and invite prayer and genuine dialogue.

7. It is our profound hope that you will choose to join the conversation!

We Confess our Shared Faith

8. As people of faith guided by the Holy Spirit we confess together our faith in God, who is the Father of all, the source and sustainer of all creation. We confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, the Son of the living God, born of the Virgin Mary, who by the power of God became flesh, living and dying a fully human existence, the historic Jesus of Nazareth. He is the first born of creation, the first fruit of the new creation; in his life, death, resurrection, and ascension he opens the way to salvation for all creation. We confess the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who comes from God the Father and leads us back to God, who inspires us to respond in faith, hope, and love, renewing and transforming us in the image of Christ. We confess the Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – who together are worthy of our worship and praise.

9. We believe that all people are created in God's own image and likeness, gifted with personhood, endowed with dignity, and called to live in holiness with God and in harmony with all creation. Through human rebellion, sin entered the world, corrupting the divine order, resulting in a disruption of harmony at all levels. God's eternal plan is to rescue his fallen creation, to call humanity to repentance, gathering his adopted children into one family, one community, in anticipation of the final restoration of all things in Christ.

10. We believe that God has made known to us the truth of his own being. God speaks to us most clearly through the Word of God incarnate, Jesus Christ, in whom the divine and human natures are united in one person, sent to redeem all of creation. God speaks to us through the patriarchs, prophets, and poets, through the people of Israel called to be a light to the nations, through holy men and women in all times, by the example of those who have given their lives in witness and service. God speaks to us in a unique and authoritative way through the Holy Scriptures, the word of God written by human hands and minds under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. God speaks to us through the Christian community when the Word is proclaimed and the sacraments are celebrated. In all of this, God's revelation to us is mediated through the Holy Spirit who illumines our hearts and minds.

11. We are humbled by the gift and the mysteries of salvation revealed to us in the passion of our Lord Jesus, who suffered humiliation and death at our own hands, and yet through the power of the Holy Spirit was raised to life by God's love for us. In his life and ministry, Jesus announces the gracious reign of God's kingdom. In his death, Jesus atones for the sins of the world. In his resurrection, Jesus breaks the bonds of sin and death and reveals God's power to transform death into life, darkness into light, despair into hope. In his ascension, Jesus returns to his Father, reveals to us our final end, and continues his unique mediation for his people. In Jesus, we discover the promise of eternal life in God's heavenly kingdom and anticipate the resurrection of the dead and the renewal of all things at his second coming.

12. We acknowledge our sins and the sinfulness of all humanity. Sin is to turn away from God and submit to the temptation of the Evil One; to repent is to turn back towards God. Even in our sinfulness, God still loves us, calls us back, and gives us grace to strengthen us in our faithful response. In his mercy, God justifies the repentant sinner by grace on account of faith and gives new life in Christ.

13. We are gathered together by the Holy Spirit into one body in Christ. The church is God's people called together for worship, fellowship, and service. The church is built upon the sure foundation of Christ himself, and built up by the witness of the faithful, particularly in the face of persecution. In proclamation of the Word and celebration of baptism and communion, the church is present as a sign of God's kingdom, a sacred encounter with Christ. Despite its historic divisions, the church of Christ is one through all the ages. As professed by the apostles and the saints it is God's holy people throughout the world, undivided by race, language, or gender. As members of the body of Christ, the community of disciples, we share in God's mission to the world.

14. We are called by Jesus to follow him as disciples in and through the power of the Holy Spirit. We turn our hearts to God in prayer, giving thanks and praise, expressing grief, seeking pardon, and asking help for every need. We are commanded by Christ to love one another as he loves us, and to lead a life of service to all. He has commissioned us to proclaim the good news of

salvation, to baptize all nations in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to teach all that he has commanded, and to lead all people to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

We Acknowledge our Central Differences

15. Professing our common faith together, we Evangelicals and Catholics acknowledge our continuing differences over issues that we consider to be matters of revealed truth and important to our life in Christ.

Scripture, Authority and Leadership

16. We profess together that the Scriptures are God's word, holy and inspired, trustworthy and true, and authoritative for all time; they are therefore our primary guide to faith and practice. Yet, we recognize that historical developments have given us some variation in the Old Testament texts; Catholics accept as inspired the apocryphal or deuterocanonical writings, and while some Evangelicals would consider these profitable and useful for instruction, they would not see them as inspired or authoritative. In addition, we differ on the role of the post-apostolic Tradition in understanding and interpreting the scriptural witness. We also differ on how we weigh personal biblical interpretation in regard to communal discernment and how we employ the spiritual gifts of teaching, leading, and healing expressed in the ministry of the church. Ultimately, many of our disagreements are rooted in differing perceptions of how God's authority is expressed within the Christian community.

Nature of the Church

17. We proclaim together that God's people are gathered to be a community of believers sharing in God's life and mission in the world. However, there are significant differences in our understanding of the essential nature of the church. Evangelicals tend towards individual and local expressions of church while Catholics tend towards communal and universal expressions of church. Evangelicals do not embrace the Catholic emphasis on the historic continuity of the apostolic ministry in the institutions and clerical offices of the church, particularly the ministry of bishops and the papacy. Catholics disagree with the understanding of some Evangelicals that the essential nature of the church can be expressed independently with no other association of believers. Catholics question the multiplicity of denominations and diversity of forms of church government among Evangelical churches.

Salvation through Christ

18. We confess together our sinfulness, our total dependence upon God's forgiveness, and the centrality of Christ's life, death, resurrection, and ascension for salvation. Evangelicals and Catholics both believe that salvation comes through a personal acceptance of Christ's gift of saving faith. Nevertheless, we continue to differ over matters relating to the process of salvation.

Evangelicals object to the Catholic doctrines of purgatory and indulgences. Further, Evangelicals are concerned about Catholic doctrines regarding the redemptive value of suffering, mediation of the church in the sacraments, and the role of works in the justified believer. Catholics, however, affirm that good works do not arise apart from God's grace. Catholics remain concerned by some Evangelical understandings of the assurance of salvation; the doctrine of election; and tendencies towards an individualistic approach to salvation.

Sacraments and Ordinances

19. We profess together the risen Christ through the public proclamation of faith in the waters of baptism and participation in the Eucharist or Lord's Supper. Notwithstanding, significant points of divergence exist between our two traditions on these matters. Although most Evangelicals celebrate baptism and the Lord's Supper, these are usually understood as ordinances – acts commanded by Christ which witness to a personal conversion and a public proclamation. Catholics affirm the personal and public dimensions of these ordinances but use the term “sacrament” to reflect that God is the one who acts through physical elements, public signs, and inward faith in order to confer grace. In addition to baptism and the Eucharist, Catholics embrace five other sacraments: confirmation, penance, anointing of the sick, ordination, and marriage as well as a number of other practices considered to be sacramental. Catholics see in each of the sacraments the real presence of Christ and effective channels of grace.

Prayer, Mary, and the Communion of Saints

20. We affirm together the role of Mary as Mother of God and model of discipleship. However, Catholic devotional language and practices regarding Mary, as well as the saints, have raised concerns for Evangelicals. In response, Catholics point to the ancient teaching that distinguishes between the worship appropriate to God alone and the veneration that may be offered to those who lead us to Christ. Furthermore, Catholics believe that the communion of saints encompasses all Christians of every time and place, with whom there can be a lively sharing in spiritual goods such as prayer, even with those who have gone ahead of us. Prayer seeking the intercession of the saints is understood by Catholics within this broader context. When Evangelicals protest that no other person is required to aid in our communication with God, Catholics respond that devotion to the saints is not required of any believer. Nevertheless, Evangelicals still disagree with the practice of devotion to the saints and reject the Marian dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption, as well as language that might suggest a role as co-mediator.

Additional factors

21. We acknowledge that the preceding is not a comprehensive list of all theological differences between our two groups. As we address these issues together, we recognize that we may also encounter non-theological sources of division such as ideological, political, cultural, national, and regional disputes. These factors can sometimes become embedded in our theological expressions and our ecumenical relationships. Sensitivity to these factors can assist our

communities in bridging the gaps of misunderstanding and suspicion. While there are real and important reasons for the divisions between our communities, we hope our work together will illuminate these issues and help us to identify the causes and the extent of our division. It is a powerful witness when Christians can reach across dividing lines to work together in Christian mission. Our common witness to a unity that transcends these differences professes a Gospel that encompasses all creation.

We Affirm our Common Mission

22. Our two communities share a common conviction about the Christian life: Christ is forming us by the Holy Spirit into a faithful people called together and sent into the world to participate in his life and mission. As Christ's body, the Church is the instrument of God's mission for the healing and redemption of all creation. Although we have differences about certain aspects of the life of faith, we share convictions about Jesus that ground our call to common witness and mission. Compelled by the love of Christ, we therefore urge our communities to look for ways to worship and work together.

23. Among the possible areas of cooperation in witness and mission, we propose the following:

- **Worship and Prayer.** All missional activity is rooted in the worship of the Triune God and the mandate of Christ. We encourage citywide, church-to-church, and leaders-to-leaders initiatives in worship and prayer, particularly in prayer for unity as Christ wills.
- **Fellowship.** We affirm the building of relationships within our communities that manifest the common love we have in Christ.
- **Listening to God's Word.** We welcome the study of the Bible together, formation in discipleship, and continuing dialogue.
- **Proclaiming the Gospel.** We celebrate initiatives for sharing the good news of Jesus Christ and inviting hearers to a life of faith.
- **Marriage and Family.** We value marriage and family life and applaud joint initiatives in the preparation of couples for marriage, enrichment of marriages, support of interchurch families, and pastoral care of those struggling in their marriages.
- **Children and Youth.** We welcome joint initiatives in ministering to children and youth, assisting them to grow into mature and committed Christians, and guiding them into ways of engaging in the life of faith, witness, and service.
- **Social and Ethical Issues.** We uphold the dignity and sanctity of human life at all stages. We affirm joint efforts to address the social and ethical concerns of our day, such as

poverty and homelessness, abortion and euthanasia, issues pertaining to human sexuality, and other areas of human need and suffering – in all instances witnessing to God’s desire that all life be protected and valued, and witnessing to the saving love of God in Jesus Christ.

- Direct outreach to those in need. We commend working together to address human needs within our communities: to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, and visit the sick and imprisoned.
- Engagement in the Public Sphere. As churches, we share a common conviction that religion has an essential role in a pluralistic society. We call for appropriate engagement with issues of public policy from the perspective of Gospel values, witnessing to God’s redemptive love for each and every person. We affirm advocacy in areas such as economic policy, health and social services, education, peace and warfare, care of creation, criminal justice, new genetic technologies, and religious liberty.

24. We are called together by our common faith in Christ to work, where possible, in a spirit of unity. In the person of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, we find our mission and purpose as human persons called into relationship with each other, with all of creation, and with the life of the holy Trinity.

25. Several key people have sowed the seeds of our current relationship. We give thanks for the ministry of Fr. Bernard de Margerie who has worked tirelessly for Christian reconciliation and unity for over 50 years; for the leadership of Eric Stolte, Bill Blackmon, and others who brought the Saskatoon Evangelical Ministers’ Fellowship together and gave it a vision of mission for the whole community; and for the prayer ministry of Pastor Ken Rutherford who alongside many others prayed that Christ would be exalted in his body of believers.

26. Giving thanks to God for our common faith, we recommit ourselves to the mission that Christ has given us. Together we will seek to find ways before Christ to reconcile our continuing differences. We pray together that God will bring us to unity so that the world may believe.

Members of the Dialogue

Evangelical:

Pastor Harry Strauss, co-chair; Carmen Bellamy; Leanne Bellamy; Bill Blackmon; Pastor Brendon Gibson; Pastor Harley Johnson; Jodi Kozan; Dr. Jeromey Martini; Grant Myhre; Pastor Bob Parker

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