

**UPDATE on the Roman Catholic/United Church of Canada dialogue**

*following the meeting of November 18—20, 2008, held at the YM/YWCA Mountain Lodge in Banff, Alberta*

The following members of the RC/UC dialogue gathered in Banff for this meeting, with the primary task of beginning to write together a report for both their churches on the topic of marriage, which has been the focus of their meetings since 2005.

*Representing the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops:*

Dr. Michael Attridge, University of St. Michael's College, University of Toronto

Mr. Julien Hammond, Archdiocese of Edmonton

Dr. Maureen McDonnell, Regis College, University of Toronto

Ms. Janet Somerville, Toronto, secretary to the dialogue for the CCCB

*Representing the United Church of Canada:*

Dr. Gail Allan, Program Coordinator, Inter-church and Inter-faith Relations, United Church of Canada

Rev. Dr. Richard Bott, St. Andrew's Haney United Church, Maple Ridge, B.C.

Mr. David Lee, Ottawa

Mr. Allan Seal Buckingham, General Council Executive, United Church of Canada

*Regrets:* Rev. Gai Burns, United Church of Canada

Archbishop Anthony Mancini, Archdiocese of Halifax (newly appointed to this dialogue by the CCCB, replacing Bishop Luc Bouchard of the Diocese of St. Paul in Alberta)

*Co-chairs for this meeting: Richard Bott and Julien Hammond*

The first presentations discussed at this meeting were reflections on married love, and on marriage as a vocation to love. In spite of the many differences in theological emphasis, and the few full-fledged disagreements about the nature of marriage that are well known between our two churches, there is unswerving agreement on the primacy of love as the promise, the grace and the greatness of married life. For the Roman Catholic side, Dr. Maureen McDonnell prepared a paper in which she reflected on the perspective shift in official Catholic teaching during and since the Second Vatican Council. The 1917 Code of Canon Law stated that the primary purpose of marriage is the procreation and education of children. *Gaudium et Spes* and other Vatican II documents continue to see openness to parenthood as essential to the marriage covenant; but they do not speak of "primary" and "secondary" purposes of marriage, speaking instead of children as the fulfillment of married love, and emphasizing the centrality of the inter-personal love of the spouses in their equal personal dignity.

Dr. McDonnell also led the group in an examination of three very recent documents published by and/or for the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. They are: 1) *What does marriage add to your love? Pastoral Message to Young Couples on Marriage and Family in the Catholic Church*; 2) *Towards a True Sexual Liberation*; and 3) *Marriage in the Catholic Church: Frequently Asked Questions*.

David Lee offered for discussion an "occasional paper" he had prepared for the dialogue: *Some (Partial) Reflections on Love*. This brief essay complemented another paper David offered after our April 2008 meeting: *A Christian Layperson Looks at Marriage*. Together, David Lee's essays emphasized the many ways of describing marriage that are common to both churches: it is a

*calling to a covenant relationship, in a union of two persons that has a sacramental dimension, through which God intends to grace the couple with love, enjoyment, companionship and support for the whole of their lives, and through which the couple is called to fulfill their familial/parental, social and other responsibilities in this world, which is God's world.* For Christians, married love is intended to reflect God's love of us, "for everyone who loves is born of God and knows God...No one has ever seen God, yet if we love one another, God lives in us and God's love is perfected in us." Yet marriage is not for bible-believing Christians only. As a pillar of human life it concerns the whole human family, and the varieties of love understood from Greek philosophy as *agape*, *filia* and *eros* are intertwined in marriage and are all necessary to it. Sacrificial love is also necessary, as radical readiness to "go the distance" in a love as faithful as that of Jesus on the cross and in his risen presence.

The next document considered by the dialogue was a longer paper (still in draft form) called *From There to Here: The United Church of Canada's Struggles with Sexuality and Marriage*. Dr. Gail Allan obtained permission from colleagues in the Justice, Global and Ecumenical Relations Unit who are working on the document to share it with us. *From There to Here* is being composed because many partners of the United Church have asked questions about the more recent policies of the church, especially with regard to same-sex marriage. The document explains the history of the policies, as well as the structures of governance through which they were voted into place. Gail emphasized that the decision-making around same-sex issues has been carefully integrated with the evolving work of the church on biblical interpretation and on justice issues. The group affirmed the importance of looking at this document together, calling it very helpful in understanding the evolution of United Church policies in terms of the theological categories and disciplines that matter most in that church.

After some lively discussion of particular phrases in *From There to Here* (treating gender as "a social construct" grated on several Catholic imaginations!), the group girded its loins for the difficult task of writing together. Helpful in getting started was the "*Texte Martyre*" (first draft) prepared by David Lee. To add fuller content to David Lee's draft outline, the group split up into pairs of writers on the following topics:

- The history of where we started, i.e. the opposing "facta" brought before the Supreme Court of Canada by each of our churches (drafters: Hammond and Buckingham)
- Summaries of the two major presentations on the theology of marriage, by Dr. Philip Ziegler (in 2005) for the UCoC and by Bishop Luc Bouchard (2007) for the RCs. (Drafters: Buckingham and Somerville)
- Marriage liturgies of the two churches (Drafters: Bott and McDonnell)
- Theological anthropology of the two churches, as relevant to the understanding of marriage (Drafters: Allan and Attridge)
- Current social context for marriage in Canada (Drafters: Lee and Somerville)
- Primacy of love in marriage (Drafters: Lee and McDonnell)

After time for working in pairs ran out, the group appointed Julien Hammond and David Lee as co-editors that they will put together after receiving by e-mail the drafts begun at this meeting.

The date of the **next meeting** of the dialogue was set for **March 24-26, 2009** at the Queen of Apostles renewal centre in Mississauga.