

# Basic Outline for the Disciples–Catholic International Commission for Dialogue

Sixth Phase 2020-2025

## BACKGROUND

1. In its most recent agreed statement, *“Do This in Memory of Me: Christians Formed and Transformed by the Eucharist,”* the Commission focused on how, in the celebrations of the Eucharist (the Lord’s Supper), members come to know the faith and to be shaped by it. The Commission’s work over the six years was marked by a distinctive process which sought to provide, as far as possible, an “inside experience” of one another’s eucharistic liturgies, practice and understanding. The attempt was to enter into the “eucharistic world of each church” by rediscovering the profound sense of the eucharistic liturgy itself, especially in its formative and transformative components.

2. By focusing on their eucharistic liturgies, Disciples and Catholics alike learned much from the other, and much about themselves. Not only were some misconceptions clarified, but we began to understand the inner logic of the eucharistic celebration of each tradition and how much the two traditions share in common, even though it is expressed in different ways.

3. We also experienced and became aware that Catholics and Disciples share pain at the reality of their separation, especially at the celebration of the Eucharist. The report named that even this awareness and mutual acknowledgement of the pain of separation at the Table might lead to mutual repentance and forgiveness, and to opening paths of healing and eventual reconciliation.

## PROPOSED TOPIC AND THEMES FOR NEXT PHASE

4. Since the beginning of our International Commission for Dialogue between the Disciples of Christ and the Catholic Church, the goal of the dialogue has been the full visible unity between our two communions. In the agreed report of phase 1, members of the Commission stated that we “are convinced that the oneness we received by the grace of God in baptism must find its completion in visible ecclesial unity.” The report of phase 3 was even more explicit: “From the beginning of the Disciples-Roman Catholic Dialogue in 1977, the goal was to enable all Christians to be together in the visible unity of the one Church of God.” And then, in the report from our fifth phase of dialogue: “From its beginning, the goal identified for the dialogue is the full visible unity of our churches expressed in the common celebration of the Eucharist.”

5. In drafting the final section of the fifth report, *“Looking to the Future,”* the Commission came to the conclusion that, in our forty years of dialogue, we have not sufficiently explored the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to our unity and our oneness in Christ. While expressing its confidence that “through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we are walking together towards the restoration of the unity that our Lord Jesus Christ prayed for on the eve of his passion as we look for the day of our full visible unity,” the report concluded that, “The Commission is convinced that for both Catholics and Disciples of Christ, the Holy Spirit has an essential role in the sacramental life of the Church. Exploring the work of the Holy Spirit, especially in baptism and the Eucharist, may provide us with a promising framework to further the positive work we have done during this phase of the dialogue, and to explore those areas where we have not yet reached agreement.”

## **PROGRAM OF THE SIXTH PHASE**

With the preceding comments as background, we propose that the 6th phase of our dialogue take up the critically important topic of the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to the unity of the Church, especially in relation to the ordained and lay ministries of the church. We intend to explore these issues in a positive way that will open the dialogue commission to the leading and guidance of the Holy Spirit both in our theological dialogue and discovery, and through our shared worship and prayer together.

It is therefore proposed that the topic of the sixth phase be: **“The Ministry of the Holy Spirit” (2 Cor 3)**. The general goal is to examine together the scriptural sources and subsequent developments that provide elements for understanding the personal and instrumental working of the Holy Spirit in the ordered community of the Church, and especially in those set apart to its service. Catholics and Disciples hope to identify common theological foundations regarding the ongoing guidance and sustaining presence of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of the Church. After identifying their common understandings, they will look to those areas which require further work.

### **2020 Meeting 1 – Introduction**

The first meeting will give ample time for the members to get to know one another, to familiarize themselves with the earlier stages of the dialogue, and to understand the general issues set out in paragraphs 1-5 above. In particular, there will be a focus on how our two traditions have generally understood the work of the Holy Spirit in the life and ministry of the Church.

Proposed papers to include:

- a review of past reports of the Commission in general and in particular moments touching on the Holy Spirit and ordained ministry in the Church;
- the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church and “eucharistic ecclesiology” (from a Catholic and Disciples perspective); and,
- a biblical reflection on the role of the Spirit in constituting the community of believers.

### **2021 Meeting 2 – The Holy Spirit as Gift**

The Holy Spirit enables ministers to exercise their service to and on behalf of the Church. The meeting will explore the Ministry of the Holy Spirit as the gift of the very person of the Spirit for the permanent building up of the Body of Christ (2 Cor 3).

Proposed papers to include:

- exploring how the Holy Spirit is a gift from the point of view of each tradition; and,
- a biblical reflection on 2 Cor 3 and related passages.

### **2022 Meeting 3 – A Personal and Communal Gift**

The grace given in ordination is a grace of the Holy Spirit: it is a gift given individually to each ordained minister (through the laying on of hands and prayer), which at the same time constitutes in the ministry of the whole Church. “The gift in thee” (1 Tim 4:14). (See the Pastoral letters to Timothy and Titus.)

Proposed papers to include:

- a biblical study of emerging ministries in the New Testament; and,
- Catholic and Disciples understandings of the relationship of the personal and the communal in ministry in the Church.

### **2023 Meeting 4 –What the Holy Spirit Does at “Ordination” According to the Scriptures**

At ordination the candidates receive the Holy Spirit. The basic elements are presented in the New Testament (2 Tim 1:6; 1 Tim 4:14; 1 Tim 6). [Through the laying on of hands a gift is permanently given. Promise/prophesy and fulfillment. Rekindle the grace of God].

### **2024 Meeting 5 – Liturgical Celebration of Ordination in Our Two Communities Today**

The Holy Spirit working in a renewing way through the centuries. Ordained ministry as a charismatic and permanent instituted gift of the Holy Spirit (Heb 6:2). The Church as a place where the Holy Spirit is continually at work. Anamnesis. Epiklesis. Rites of ordination.

### **2025 Meeting 6 – Producing a Report for Transmission to the Churches**

There will be a drafters’ meeting between meetings 5 and 6 to prepare a draft Final Report, with input from the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity and the Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council.

## **PROCESS OF THE MEETINGS**

*A basic outline is proposed for each meeting in this sixth phase of dialogue.* That is, during each meeting, papers on the main topic from both sides will be prepared ahead of time. The length of the papers will be 4000–4500 words. The authors will be expected to read their papers, with presentations no longer than 40 minutes. During this sixth phase each dialogue member will be asked to prepare at least one presentation or bible study.

The meeting will consist of plenary discussions of the papers followed by work in teams (Disciples and Catholics). After each paper, questions of clarification are asked. Then the teams formulate questions for each other. Each participant will be invited by the moderators to share in writing the key insights of each day.

Each day will normally start and end with prayers (15–20 minutes) led alternatively by representatives of both teams. Each meeting will also include a Bible reflection which will be of a devotional tone.

Daily Mass will be celebrated for Catholic members (Disciples often attend). The Disciples will celebrate the Lord’s Supper once during the meeting (Catholics often attend). All is done within the bounds of ecclesial discipline. Commission members will also be given the opportunity to attend a local Sunday worship of our host’s congregation.

## **IMPORTANT REMARKS**

1. The goal of the 6th phase of the Disciples-Catholic International Commission for Dialogue remains the full visible unity of our two communions. We look forward to the day when we can share together at the Eucharistic table. This search for unity will always be a search for the truth of the common faith of the Church. In our path to Christian unity, remaining divisive differences act as a constant call to regular prayer, study and dialogue.

2. As affirmed in our fifth report: “Unity will not come about as a miracle at the very end. Rather, unity comes about in journeying: the Holy Spirit does this on the journey. If we do not walk together, if we do not pray for one another, if we do not collaborate in the many ways that we can in this world for the People of God, then unity will not come about!” [Pope Francis, *Homily, Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Basilica of St Paul Outside the Walls, Rome, 25 January 2014.*]

3. In this new phase, the participants will continue the discovery of one another as Christians and churches, each living out the faith in its own distinctive way, and each with something to teach, and to learn from, the other about faithfulness to the Gospel: “Making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3), in obedience to the prayer of Jesus at the eve of his passion “that they all may be one...so that the world may believe”

So let us continue to journey together as pilgrims on the way, in the power of the Holy Spirit!

*Background documents in preparing for the Dialogue:*

- Previous Agreed Reports from the first five phases of our dialogue
- A reflection on the nature of ecumenical dialogue
- Brief documents sharing information of the Disciples of Christ for members of the Catholic team, and brief documents sharing information on the Catholic Church for the Disciples team.

**DATES FOR THE MEETINGS:**

First meeting: August 19-23, 2020 (Lexington, KY)  
Second meeting: June 25-30, 2021 (Rome, Italy)  
Subsequent meetings: Last weekend of June 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025, (beginning on Friday evening and concluding on the following Tuesday), with exact dates to follow

**DRAFTING “CORE GROUP” FOR THE DIALOGUE**

Disciples of Christ

Dr. Robert Welsh, Co-Chair  
Rev. Paul Tch  , Co-Secretary  
Dr. Tom Best

Roman Catholics

Bishop David Ricken, Co-Chair  
Msgr. Juan Usma Gomez, Co-Secretary  
Dr. Michael Witzcak