

A Word to the Comprehensive Review Task Group from the Dialogue Between The United Church of Canada and the Anglican Church of Canada

February 2015

Since 2003 The United Church of Canada and the Anglican Church of Canada have been engaged in a fruitful dialogue aimed at exploring how our two churches might draw still closer together to be more effective agents of God's mission in and for the world.

These conversations have included the similar and different ways in which our churches order their ministries and structures. Particular attention has been paid to the diverse ways our denominations exercise the ministry of *episkopé*, which we together understand to include elements of oversight, authority, support, and accountability.

This reflects the growing ecumenical consensus about this vital aspect of the church's ministry: "In every case *episkopé* is in the service of maintaining continuity in apostolic life and unity of life. In addition to preaching the word and celebrating the sacraments, a principal purpose of this ministry is faithfully to safeguard and hand on revealed truth, to hold the local congregations in communion, to give mutual support and to lead in witnessing to the gospel."¹

In its previous round of conversations this dialogue was able to conclude that "we find the ministry of *episkopé* present in its fullness in both the Anglican Church of Canada (especially in the ministry of bishops) and The United Church of Canada (especially in the ministry of presbyteries and conferences)."²

As the Comprehensive Review Task Group continues its work leading up to the General Council in August, it is our hope that this ministry of *episkopé* will be clearly retained and perhaps expressed even more plainly in whatever new courts/structures will emerge. The more clearly *episkopé* can be recognized in the structures of The United Church of Canada, the easier it becomes for ecumenical partners in Canada and beyond to work more closely together in mission.

The members of this dialogue therefore encourage the Comprehensive Review Task Group to keep a discerning eye on those places where *episkopé* will be located in whatever new structures it proposes, particularly in the light of the deepening agreement in the wider *oikoumene* about how this ministry of oversight and unity, authority and support, accountability and witness, is expressed in the structures of our churches.

¹ *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), §52.

² *Drawing from the Same Well: The St. Brigid Report*, p. 23. Available at www.united-church.ca and www.anglican.ca.

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