



The United Church of Canada General Council

Marriage: Report of the Roman Catholic/United Church Dialogue

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Since establishment in 1975, the *Roman Catholic Church/United Church of Canada Dialogue* has discussed, and issued reports on, a number of topics. In 2004, following contrary briefs by their two churches to the Supreme Court of Canada on *same-sex marriage*, the Dialogue after deep reflection decided on Marriage as its next topic. Praying for the guidance of the Spirit, the Dialogue has wrestled the subject joyfully, and is now reporting consensually under the headings of Social Context, Theology of Marriage, Christian Wedding, Pastoral Care and Marriage in Society, as well as Conclusions and Recommendations. Appendix A contains a selected bibliography; and Appendix B the chronological list of persons involved in the dialogue on this subject from 2004 until 2012.

May 16, 2012

Roman Catholic Church/United Church of Canada Dialogue

Report

Introduction

In May 2004, at a moment of intense public focus on same-sex marriage, the General Council of The United Church of Canada and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops presented opposing factums before the Supreme Court of Canada on the question of legalizing such marriage in Canada. Given the theological and methodological differences that have characterized these two churches throughout their histories, one might interpret the very public debate between them and before the Supreme Court as their final and mutually exclusive words on the subject of marriage.

Within the context of that debate, however, and in the immediate wake of this public manifestation of the differences between our two churches, the Roman Catholic/United Church of Canada Dialogue participants reflected deeply upon its mandate:

- *to increase understanding and appreciation between the Roman Catholic Church and The United Church of Canada;*
- *to explore pastoral, theological and ethical issues, including those which may divide our churches; and,*
- *to learn from and be challenged by one another and commit to countering misinformation, stereotypes and prejudices that may influence the members of our churches.*

Dialogue participants came to the view that the group could best honour both the letter and the spirit of this mandate by taking *marriage* as its next topic. Further, the group approached its consideration of marriage in the light of its commitment to ecumenical Christian fellowship, not in the winner-take-all debating method of the legal system. Instead, members of the dialogue began an exploration of scripture and history, theology and pastoral practice related to the respective understandings of the two churches concerning marriage. We wanted to understand the other's perspectives, to consider similarities and differences in terms of theological method, and to identify areas of convergence and divergence as these relate to a theology of

marriage. We wanted to understand *how* each church came to its unique perspective and the reasons underlying each other's way of thinking about marriage. Most of all, while remaining honest about real differences, we wanted to discover ways to celebrate and to build upon our important commonalities, where we and others could work together in service to God's kingdom.

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