

Contents

Editorial 50

Articles

Roger Whittall Reflections on the Australian Lutheran–Catholic dialogue on the Augsburg Confession 54

Steen Olsen Good news and godly action: Anglicans and Lutherans working together in God’s mission 59

Peter Lockwood A chronicle of joy: plotting the path to full eucharistic agreement between the Uniting Church in Australia and the Lutheran Church of Australia 70

Jeff Silcock Where East meets West; International Lutheran-Orthodox conversations 2000–2018: a personal reflection 83

Geraldine Hawkes Receptive Ecumenism: a journey in patience, love and humility 93

Reflections

René Pfitzner The sliding doors of denominational affiliation 103

Emma Strelan From the Lutheran Church via Tabor College to the Uniting Church 105

Mark Juers What makes the grass on the other side of the fence greener? 106

Philippa Lohmeyer-Collins The fellowship of the church and the encouragement of believers 108

Leigh Newton Reflecting on leaving the LCA NZ 110

A chronicle of joy: plotting the path to full eucharistic agreement between the Uniting Church in Australia and the Lutheran Church of Australia

Peter Lockwood

Introduction

As with most inter-church dialogues, the long-term goal of the official dialogue between the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) and the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) has been to work and pray for full communion between our churches as an expression of the unity we have in Christ. That is not to say that full communion is pursued at the expense of more proximate goals, such as deepening our understanding and appreciation of the partner church's teachings and practices, testing inherited misgivings about the other church through careful listening and thoughtful probing, and preparing clearer and more comprehensive articulations of shared understandings. However, dialogue participants constantly bear in mind the final goal, that of full communion, the hope and promise of reciprocal eucharistic hospitality and shared ministries.

Another more immediate goal of the LCA–UCA dialogue has been to provide theological and liturgical resources for so-called cooperating congregations. These are congregations, or preaching places, that agree to receive the minister from either church as their minister where it is no longer viable for both denominations to maintain an ordained ministry, but where one church might do so with the support of the other. The dialogue determined that previous agreed statements, on baptism (1984), the Eucharist (1985), the ministry (1986), the church (1988), and Christology (1990), should be reformulated succinctly and then gathered into a publication, which came to be known as the Declaration of Mutual Recognition (DMR), to serve as the founding charter for such cooperating congregations. In other words, local mission and ministry imperatives drove the formation of DMR.¹

The brief theological statements in DMR were designed to demonstrate sufficient doctrinal agreement between our churches for cooperating congregations to get up and running, due to the urgency of providing ongoing ministry where needed.² It was agreed that the

1 DMR was adopted by the LCA in 2009 and the UCA in 2010.

2 The dialogue prepared helpful material for cooperating congregations, such as 'Guidelines for establishing Shared Ministry' (2009), and 'Rites of Installation and Induction' (2009). Another document, 'Guidelines for the oversight of cooperating congregations, LCA-UCA' (2012), was finalised only after the first cooperating congregations commenced. The LCA required that a UCA minister serving a cooperating congregation be male, teach baptismal regeneration, and confess Christ's presence in the sacrament. The UCA required that an LCA pastor in such a situation feel at ease with the ethos of the UCA.

DMR would not provide the essential basis for full communion. That would be a longer, more pains-taking task.

As the first major step towards formulating a *concordat* for full communion, to consist of agreed statements on core church teachings, the dialogue has prepared *At the Table: the Eucharist* (ATT), a comprehensive agreed statement on the Lord's Supper. Work on ATT commenced in 2011, and after helpful feedback from our two churches, it was received and adopted by the UCA Assembly Standing Committee on 13 November 2022, and by the LCA General Synod on 11 February 2023.³

At an early stage in the joint work on the Eucharist it was decided that a chronicle be compiled, to trace in broad-brush strokes the discussion at meetings and so provide the wider context for the development of each constituent part of ATT. The *Chronicle* was updated after each biannual meeting of the dialogue. It reflects ways in which misgivings have been allayed and reciprocal challenges have led to new insights. Highlighting in this way the cut and thrust of the conversations within the dialogue, it was believed, would lead to a deeper appreciation of the polished statements that finally emerged. It would give readers the opportunity to participate in the dialogue journey by providing background and context, thereby helping them to understand and embrace the finished document.⁴

Employing the principles of Receptive Ecumenism⁵

It was agreed from the outset that the dialogue would engage in the principles of Receptive Ecumenism, whereby we committed ourselves to exploring in depth the characteristic emphases of each church through in-depth conversation characterised by respectful listening. The practice of Receptive Ecumenism meant that we were constantly reminded to listen appreciatively to perspectives other than our own, and to remain open to new insights that had not formed part of our own tradition. Receptive Ecumenism also calls for a willingness to recognise blind spots in one's own tradition.

Receptive Ecumenism led the dialogue to appreciate the necessity of using fresh language for ATT rather than the shorthand terminology that would immediately be seen to represent one church or the other and therefore would have to be laboriously unpacked before it could be understood by the other church. Avoiding denominational jargon did not mean avoiding theological language, but it was also recognised that sound theology is best expressed in simple English. Receptive Ecumenism made us all the more eager to seek new and better formulations appropriate to the present time, within the broad sweep of a

3 In the form that ATT was presented for discussion and adoption at the 2023 synod of the LCA, see the 'Reports' section at <https://www.generalsynod.lca.org.au/business/agenda-2023-in-person-sessions/>.

4 It was finally agreed, however, that the *Chronicle* was better suited to separate publication in the theological journals of our respective churches. Rev. Dr. Rob Gallagher, UCA, was the initial author of the *Chronicle*, and following his retirement from the dialogue the author of this article saw the project through to completion. What follows is a revised version of the *Chronicle*.

5 The prime mover behind Receptive Ecumenism is Paul D. Murray, Catholic theologian at the University of Durham. The principles of the movement are presented in *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism* (Oxford University Press: 2008).

rich ecumenical theology of the Eucharist, while retaining without compromise all that our two traditions affirm.

Receptive Ecumenism calls on practitioners to adopt the posture of recipients as opposed to the ingrained habit of thinking primarily about how others might benefit from one's own wisdom. As a result, we developed the practice of asking representatives of the other church what they most wanted to safeguard in their tradition, and why, and what they wanted the other church to emphasise to a greater extent. This helped to identify most clearly what was at stake for each church and what might be gained from the other. In this way we came to understand each other better and to value more highly each other's critical emphases.

By adhering to these principles, we were also given the freedom to name our misgivings about the position of the other church on this or that aspect of eucharistic teaching. The intense conversation that ensued repeatedly led to the discovery that such misgivings were invariably based on limited, even false, understandings of the other tradition. Paradoxically, at the same time, we were led again and again to a better understanding and appreciation of our own tradition. The precepts of Receptive Ecumenism created an eagerness to find together a new place in the conversation, drawing on the best aspects of our churches' traditions in search of a new synthesis. The reward has been the refreshing discovery that our positions on the Lord's Supper complement one another far more than previously thought.

Focusing our gaze through collaboration

Midway through the journey the dialogue realised that meetings had mostly been spent spelling out the characteristic teaching and practice of our respective churches on the Eucharist, to determine points of overlap and difference. The time had come to undertake the more difficult, more urgent, and more gripping work of preparing agreed statements. This would be done by focusing attention on the liturgy of the Eucharist itself, so that the theological document that emerged would be based on the various aspects of the rite, and not simply consist of a disinterested treatise on the Lord's Supper.⁶ In doing so, it was hoped, the distinctive marks of either church, identified in our respective rites, might be viewed as enriching our understanding of the Eucharist as opposed to being viewed as reasons for ongoing separation at the Lord's Table.

It was then agreed that the heading for each section would be drawn from the liturgy, in most cases employing appropriate scriptural terms.⁷ Two people, one from each church,

6 At an early stage of the discussion the dialogue prepared a composite eucharistic liturgy that drew on the rites of both churches. This service order, 'A Great Prayer of Thanksgiving with Commentary' (2013), was intended to serve as a guide for cooperating congregations and as an educational tool in both churches. It certainly provided an ongoing reference point for the dialogue as the work continued on the constituent parts of the rite. 'A Great Prayer' can be accessed on the UCA website under Resources, Ecumenism, Lutheran–UCA Dialogue.

7 *At the Table: the Eucharist* was chosen as the title for the finished work. The main sections were headed: 'Do this in remembrance of me: Anamnesis'; 'This is my Body, this is my Blood: the Presence of Christ

were assigned the task of formulating the wording for each part of the rite, in order to initiate the discussion, always intense, always constructive, at successive meetings of our plenary gatherings.

A gratifying aspect of the dialogue was the thrill around the table when breakthroughs occurred during the discussion of a specific topic. There would be a momentary lull in the conversation. Then, as the conversation continued, the atmosphere was more that of prayer than dialogue. Some ventured that at these moments they gained a remarkable sense of the presence of Christ in the gathering. Certainly, with each new discovery, we were given the almost palpable impression that we had been growing into a far deeper appreciation of the divine sacramental mystery, as embraced in both churches.

The distinguishing marks of the LCA and the UCA

It was agreed among us that the LCA is primarily a confessional Church, while the UCA is primarily a confessing Church. This means that the UCA is not bound to its historical confessions in the same way that the LCA is bound to the *Book of Concord* of 1580. Even though both churches continue to draw on and learn from their confessional writings, it was readily acknowledged that whereas the teachings of the LCA are anchored primarily in its confessional tradition, the UCA is known for its openness 'to confess the Lord in fresh words and deeds'.⁸ We asked ourselves whether these different perspectives would rule out meaningful and effective dialogue. Without denying that our churches understand the authority of their confessional writings in different ways, it was quickly agreed that these very differences give the dialogue its vibrancy. The differences indicate how much we need each other for a fuller and richer expression of the universal church.⁹

Moving from hesitancy to consensus

The following section of the *Chronicle* shows the shifts that took place within the dialogue as it reflected on the various aspects of the eucharistic liturgy, leading beyond queries

in the Eucharist'; 'For the Forgiveness of Sins: Reconciliation and Mission'; and 'Take and Eat, Take and Drink: Fitting Participation'. Sections titled 'Children at the Table' and 'Lay Distribution beyond the Gathered Congregation' were included, as were sections on 'The Epiclesis' and 'The Fraction', the last two practices familiar to the UCA and from which the LCA representatives were eager to learn.

8 *Basis of Union* 11.

9 Not only do our respective strengths complement one another, the dialogue also took careful note of the high degree of consensus that has been achieved in ecumenical reflection on the Eucharist. For example, by paying attention to the renewed focus on Trinitarian theology, especially the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, the dialogue made every effort to adopt explicit Trinitarian statements in preference to traditional Christocentric statements, wherever it was thought to be appropriate. Additionally, we took careful note of agreed statements between Lutheran and Reformed churches in Europe, such as the *Leuenberg Agreement* (1973), and others that led to Lutheran-Reformed unions elsewhere (in Germany, England, Scandinavia and the United States). And information was gleaned from the sections on the Eucharist in recent World Council of Churches statements on church teachings and practices. Most important among these were *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Commission Paper 111 (1982), and *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper 214 (2013).

and misgivings to consensus, followed in each case by brief statements on the mutually enriching emphases of both churches.

This is my body, this is my blood: the presence of Christ in the Eucharist

An early misunderstanding was that the LCA members imagined that the UCA spiritualised the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. When this was examined closely it could not be sustained. Misgivings were allayed. The UCA affirms that in the Eucharist, Christ is present bodily under the species of bread and wine but extends its understanding of that presence by affirming the bodily, incarnate presence of Christ in the faith community gathered around the table. As the congregation consumes the elements it becomes what it consumes, namely the body of Christ (1 Cor 10:17). In the Eucharist, Christ offers believers a remembrance (*anamnesis*) of his sacrificial death for humankind, he absolves his people, he builds up the members of the community in faith and love, and he provides a foretaste of the heavenly feast. The Holy Spirit is appropriately invoked in the Epiclesis as the agent in the converting, saving work of the triune God.

For its part, UCA members were concerned that the LCA members appeared to reduce Christ's presence exclusively to the consecrated bread and wine. In response, the assurance was given that the LCA affirms that Christ is present both in the elements and in the community of believers, while distinguishing the modes of Christ's presence in each. Believers receive the sacrament as a gift of grace for their present and eternal benefit. As they receive the sacrament, Christ continues the work of transforming them into the body of Christ, through the Spirit, making Christ present in them and present to the world.

But it is true that the LCA has traditionally placed greater weight on the bodily presence of Christ in the consecrated elements. This is stated most succinctly in *The Small Catechism*, where Luther writes that the sacrament of the altar 'is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ himself for us Christians to eat and to drink'.¹⁰ The gifts of the sacrament, Luther continues, are 'forgiveness of sin, life and salvation', which are conferred on believers, not by eating and drinking per se, but by faith in Christ's words of promise, 'given for you' and 'shed for you for the forgiveness of sins', that accompany the reception of the elements.

In searching for terms to differentiate between these emphases, the dialogue initially characterised the LCA understanding as more ontological; that is, the LCA has been eager to describe the *nature* of Christ's presence in the sacrament. The UCA approach was characterised as relational; that is, the UCA focuses more on the *way* that Christ is present in those consuming the elements, both as individuals and as a faith community. The UCA highlights the gift of Christ in the sacrament as creating 'the communion of saints' for love and service, in such a way that the reconciliation of individuals to God coincides with the creation of the new community. And it could be said that the LCA highlights the 'certain

¹⁰ Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 362, 363.

comfort for troubled consciences' that people derive from the assurance of forgiveness, and thereby the freedom from self to serve the neighbour in love.

The impact of Christ's eucharistic presence in believers for the sake of the world is made clear, it was agreed, among other things by the context in which Paul cites the Words of Institution in 1 Corinthians 11. The words are quoted in the context of Paul's ministry of settling disputes among the believers, and dealing with the unworthy way in which the church was celebrating the sacrament. Following chapter 11, Paul goes on to speak about spiritual gifts in the one body in chapter 12, introduces the hymn of love in chapter 13 as the more excellent way, speaks of the importance of orderly worship in chapter 14, reaches a grand eschatological climax in chapter 15, and then returns to more practical matters such as the collection for the wider church and his travel plans, before extending personal greetings, in chapter 16. The presence of Christ in the elements permeates the full range of ecclesial relationships. If the ontology of the sacrament is understood properly, it emphasises that it is Christ, the giver, who is present, and that his presence has a profound influence on the nature and conduct of the community formed around the table.

These reflections led to a significant shift in the focus of the discussion from, 'How is Christ present?' to, 'Who is the Christ who is present?' By answering this question in terms of the one who gives his life for others, it became clear that the LCA and UCA emphases are indeed complementary; in fact, they need each other. The twin emphases—on the bodily presence of Christ in the elements, and on the mission of God to the church and the world—are needed for a balanced understanding of the Eucharist. In this, each church has a distinctive contribution to make.

What makes a valid celebration of the Eucharist?

The question was raised: 'What are the essential elements of a valid celebration of the Eucharist?' The discussion that followed provided one of many opportunities for initial misunderstandings of one church's position to be dealt with to the satisfaction of the other church. The issue of the valid Eucharist arose during the preparation of *A Great Prayer of Thanksgiving with Commentary*,¹¹ when LCA members became uneasy when UCA members identified not only the Words of Institution but also the Epiclesis and the Fraction as 'essential' for a valid Eucharist. LCA minds were put at ease, however, when it was explained that the word 'essential' means that the Epiclesis and the Fraction are considered necessary 'for a full diet of worship'.¹² For their part, UCA members were concerned that LCA members could say that, strictly speaking, only the Words of Institution (the *verba*) could be described as essential for a valid Eucharist. Few in the LCA would agree that the Eucharist should be whittled down to nothing but the *verba*. But to say that they alone are essential for a valid Eucharist, it was explained, was to focus attention on what makes the

11 See footnote 6, above.

12 'Ordered Liberty in Worship for UiW2', 1. This was distributed on CD-ROM with *Uniting in Worship 2* (Sydney: The Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia, 2005). Several other versions of this document exist, including at <https://ucaassembly.recollect.net.au/nodes/view/418> (accessed 6 Sep 2024), although this phrase is not present in all versions.

sacrament valid: Christ's command to 'do this in memory of me', and his promise to be present for the community with his gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

The Eucharist as sign and seal of Christ's presence with his people

The LCA members sought assurances from their conversation partners that the UCA does not hold to a purely symbolic understanding of Christ's presence in the sacrament. The issue arose when it was pointed out that the Westminster Confession employs the words 'sign' and 'seal' when speaking of Christ's presence in the sacramental elements. In reply it was pointed out that the UCA had taken pains to replace the nouns with verbs, as follows:

Christ signifies and seals his continuing presence with his people in the Holy Communion. In this sacrament of his broken body and outpoured blood the risen Lord feeds his baptised people on their way to the final inheritance of the kingdom. Thus, the people of God, through faith and the gift and power of the Holy Spirit, have communion with their Saviour, make their sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, proclaim the Lord's death, grow together into Christ, are strengthened for their participation in the mission of Christ in the world, and rejoice in the foretaste of the Kingdom which he will bring to consummation.¹³

Properly understood, it was shown, the two terms emphasise Christ's bodily presence, rather than suggest a symbolic or spiritual presence. When it is said that the Eucharist 'signs' Christ's presence, the people hear that there is a sign-off on Christ's presence in the sacramental elements, as with a signature at the end of a document. When it is said that the Eucharist 'seals' Christ's presence, the people hear that the Eucharist makes him present, or ensures his presence. In other words, the authenticity of Christ's presence is confirmed with a sign and a seal. To guard against a purely static understanding of Christ's presence, the words 'sign' and 'seal' are now utilised in the UCA to emphasise the action of God in the sacrament. As Francis McCaughey has written: 'In the bread and wine, the power of Christ's cross is brought into the life of believers.'¹⁴

This was a true breakthrough moment in the dialogue as LCA members grew to appreciate that the terms 'sign' and 'seal' do not imply a symbolic or spiritual understanding of the Eucharist for the UCA, but far rather they underscore the dynamic, active presence of Christ. In keeping with the commitment to avoid terms that are peculiar to one church or the other, these two do not appear in ATT.

The Lutheran term 'real presence'

The expression 'real presence' was also seen to create problems for the discussion on the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. For the LCA the expression is a shorthand phrase that captures core elements of Lutheran theology. To steer away from a term that required extensive unpacking before its meaning and significance could be determined, other terms were explored, such as 'bodily presence' or 'embodied presence'. Finally, the decision was

¹³ *Basis of Union* 8.

¹⁴ See J. Davis McCaughey, *The Basis of Union: A Commentary* (1971, revised and expanded, 2016), 41.

taken not to use qualifiers for 'presence'. It was also agreed that in addition to saying that Christ is present in the bread and wine, it was important to use action verbs with Christ as subject, such as Christ feeds, unites, and nourishes his people, as noted above. The dynamic presence of Christ implies that there is a flow of communion from Christ to the people and beyond, leading to a more holistic understanding of the sacrament.

UCA members were puzzled by the LCA distinction between Christ's special presence in the Eucharist and his general presence in other contexts, such as the worship assembly (Matt 18:20). While not denying the presence of Christ in contexts beyond the Eucharist, the LCA wants to say that Christ is uniquely present in the Eucharist, first, in terms of the unique mode of his presence (in bread and wine), and, secondly, in terms of the certainty that with the sacrament Christ is unquestionably present 'for us' (*pro nobis*) and 'for me' (*pro me*).

The expressions 'sign and seal', 'real presence', 'special presence' and 'general presence' are good examples of inhouse expressions that are associated with one church or the other and have been avoided in the statements of agreement in ATT, given the extensive explanation required to clarify their meaning and remove misunderstanding.

For the forgiveness of sins: reconciliation and mission

The LCA's emphasis on the 'for me' (*pro me*) character of the Eucharist sparked lively discussions on two or three occasions. Does not the heavy emphasis on forgiveness promote a self-centred personal piety, or an obsession with sin and guilt? Is it not too highly individualistic, considering that the second person pronouns in the Words of Institution are all plural? (see Matt 26:26–29) In response, the Lutheran representatives said that the focus on the individual has the intention and effect of releasing the individual—and the community—from self-centredness, guilt and fear, and it frees believers to live for God and for others.

While agreeing that the forgiveness of sins is bestowed in the Eucharist, the UCA members observed that the biblical accounts place the weight on the reconciliation of God and the community which is inextricably bound up with reconciliation between neighbours. The experience of forgiveness includes being embraced within the community by others—people equally broken and wounded—in a mutual togetherness of holding, forgiving, and accepting. God's love for the individual and the individual's love for the neighbour are not to be understood in sequential terms. The two go hand in hand.

The LCA emphasised that, in theological terms, God's love for the individual precedes the love that individuals show to one another. While these two dimensions cannot be neatly separated in practice or chronology, the LCA position is that when they are not distinguished, law (neighbour love) and gospel (God's love) become muddled, and justification and sanctification get confused. When the command to love the neighbour, understood as law, is placed alongside God's unconditional love for sinners, the focus inevitably moves away from God's justifying grace and falls instead on the believer's response of love for others. The result of such a move is the uncertainty that arises about

whether one has ever shown—and can ever show—sufficient love. The gospel is then all too readily obscured and diminished.

In response, the UCA suggested that justification applies both to the individual and to the community; justification is lived out communally. Believers' freedom and wholeness are found in their belonging within the body; their true identity is discovered within the community.

Furthermore, in UCA perspective, the gospel is also spoken of in terms of the relationship between the Father and the Son into which the believer is drawn by the Spirit. Nor can the dimensions of healing and restoration be overlooked. Might it be that an over-emphasis on the sinful condition of believers has had its deleterious effect in terms of low self-esteem and dysfunctional guilt? It was countered that underplaying personal sin and guilt can be equally problematic, in terms of the tendency to overlook personal culpability, and the failure to see that sin has consequences. An excessive focus on communal guilt has the potential to undermine a sense of personal sin, and it may lead to an inability to give a personal account of the faith, 'what Christ means for me'. In resolving these tensions, we agreed that personal and communal sin should not be played off against each other, and that confession of sin always occurs in the light of the promised absolution, an absolution declared so that the individual and the community may bask in the extravagance of divine grace, the final goal of confession and absolution.

A significant spin-off from this discussion was a decision to include in ATT a section about reconciliation vis-à-vis forgiveness. Recognising that there can be no reconciliation without forgiveness, it was proposed that the term 'reconciliation' was a broader unifying concept for the work of Christ in the Eucharist. The term 'reconciliation' has its application both before God (*coram Deo*) and before humanity (*coram hominibus*). With this in mind, the possibility was explored of placing forgiveness within the broader setting of reconciliation, so that justice can be done to the divine-human, the communal, the cosmic, and the eschatological dimensions of the Eucharist.

Certain comfort for troubled consciences

A major feature of the LCA understanding of the Eucharist is that the primary sacramental gift of forgiveness provides certain comfort for troubled consciences. Undoubtedly the absolution and the read and proclaimed word, addressed to the whole congregation, let alone the hymns and prayers, also assure believers of their peace with God through the forgiveness of their sins. But the Eucharist personalises the gift more profoundly and unquestionably, in that believers receive Christ's body and blood on their own lips and in their own mouths, removing all doubt that 'this truly means me'.

The emphasis on certain comfort for troubled consciences has not played a major role in formal UCA reflection on the Eucharist. UCA dialogue members addressed many questions to their LCA partners about the meaning and function of the phrase. However, while the language of 'certain comfort' is not used in the UCA context, UCA members affirmed that the personalised gift of forgiveness and the assurance that this brings are an

integral part of UCA heritage, through its liturgies, hymnody, and pastoral care practices.

The Epiclesis

The Epiclesis—the invocation of the Holy Spirit in the context of the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving—is more at home in UCA eucharistic practice, but it does appear in recent LCA services. Both churches welcome its inclusion and note that it revives a practice of the early church. The dialogue noted that historically there are two traditions in relation to the Epiclesis, one a consecratory prayer and the other a prayer for the blessing of the community. The focus of the Epiclesis on the work of the Holy Spirit helps to demonstrate that the Eucharist is a work of the Trinity.

Anamnesis

In two versions of the Words of Institution (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24,25), Christ commanded the church: ‘Do this in remembrance of me’ (*eis tēn emēn anamnēsin*). The dialogue agreed that Jesus’ words do not mean that the Lord’s Supper is simply a memorial meal, an opportunity to call to mind Christ and his sacrificial death for us on the cross, by regularly re-reading the last supper narrative, for example, or by re-enacting the meal in the church.¹⁵ Rather, the human act of remembering is the community’s response to God’s prior salvific remembering of us. Just as it is Christ, the risen and exalted Lord, who speaks to us whenever the gospel is proclaimed, so also in the sacrament Christ continues to give the church his crucified and risen body, as he did to the disciples at the last supper.

Furthermore, as a meal of remembrance, the Lord’s Supper bridges the gulf between past and present. The past is brought into the present and the present is made contemporaneous with the past. The Spirit works through the sacramental word, the effective promise of Christ, to make Christ present in the consecrated bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper.

The UCA defines Anamnesis (the eucharistic remembrance) as follows: ‘In “remembering” Christ we are “re-membered” in Christ, “rejoined” to him as he is present with us in the action of this meal. We are “re-called” to the presence of Christ in our midst’, which the LCA can affirm.¹⁶

Neither of our churches understands Anamnesis as a discrete element of the eucharistic liturgy. Rather, for both churches, the Eucharist itself has an inherently ‘anamnetic’ character. Anamnesis refers to the action of the liturgy as a whole, whereby the saving events of the past are recalled and made effective in the present. Therefore, speaking of ‘the’ Anamnesis can prove misleading.

¹⁵ A brief conversation took place regarding the way our two Churches understand ‘sacrifice’ in connection with the Eucharist. Dialogue members agreed there should be no suggestion that the Eucharist is a supplementary work to Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice on the cross. For both Churches the Eucharist is understood as a ‘sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving’. Through it, Christians are to be enabled more and more to offer themselves as a living sacrifice.

¹⁶ *Uniting in Worship 2*, 136; see also ‘A Great Prayer of Thanksgiving’, 6.

The Fraction

Christ broke the bread at the Last Supper, and ‘the breaking of the bread’ (*fractio panis*) quickly became one of the names for the entire liturgy (Act 2:42). Even though the Fraction (the one loaf and the breaking of the bread) has been a distinguishing mark of Reformed celebrations of the Eucharist, the dialogue quickly concurred that the practice greatly enriches the Eucharist for purposes of gospel proclamation, eucharistic teaching, and faith formation.¹⁷ As one of the visible manual acts that ensure a ‘full diet’ of the Eucharist, the UCA says that the Fraction is valuable, but not in the sense that its absence would make the Eucharist invalid. In view of the theological richness of the Fraction, the LCA may welcome the use of a single loaf or a large wafer and the accompanying rite of Fraction as an occasional practice prior to distribution. But there was a note of caution about overloading the liturgy with additional symbolic acts.

Worthy participation in the sacrament

Discussion of the topic of worthy participation in the Lord’s Supper showed again how one church emphasises a matter that receives little prominence in the other. The LCA speaks of worthiness in terms of recipients’ faith in the promise in Christ’s words, ‘Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins’. An indispensable dimension of worthy reception is the recipients’ awareness of their unworthiness of Christ’s gifts, in the spirit of the centurion who said that he was not worthy to have Christ enter his home and heal his servant (Luke 7:1–10). Paradoxically, worthy recipients are those who acknowledge their unworthiness, that is, their sin and their need of God’s grace and forgiveness. In *The Large Catechism*, also one of the Lutheran confessional writings, Luther says that those whose pride prevents them from seeing that they are unworthy sinners in need of grace and absolution, and therefore have ‘no intention of improving’, are the only ones who should absent themselves from the Lord’s table.¹⁸

At this point the LCA representatives appreciated a brief excursus from the UCA representatives on what John Wesley understood by describing the Lord’s Supper as a ‘converting ordinance’. Wesley did not have in mind conversion from unbelief to belief, from non-Christian to Christian, as has often been assumed. Rather, he had in mind those baptised believers who were concerned that their struggling faith, as small as a mustard seed (Luke 17:5–10), and their wayward behaviour, disqualified them from attending the Lord’s Supper. They thought they were unworthy of the all-surpassing gift of

17 In the simplest form of the Fraction, a loaf or large wafer is elevated and broken during the Words of Institution to coincide with the words, ‘Jesus took the bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it’. To make the Fraction more prominent it is sometimes performed, also in the UCA, either during the Lamb of God (Agnus Dei), or as a separate rite, with the breaking of the bread accompanying the words, ‘The bread we break is a sharing in the body of Christ’, followed by the raising of the cup and the words, ‘The cup we take is a sharing in the blood of Christ’. Then the bread and the cup are extended towards the congregation with the words, ‘The gifts of God for the people of God’. Among other things that it signifies, the Fraction draws attention to Christ’s broken body on the cross, and thereby vividly reminds worshippers of the world’s redemption through the cross, Christ’s perpetual fellowship in suffering, and the church’s vital role of living out Christ’s solidarity with the poor and broken of the world.

18 Kolb and Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord*, 473.

the sacrament. Wesley urged people with such a profound sense of their unworthiness to acknowledge that nobody has anything in their hands to offer God that could make them acceptable in God's presence. But they should stretch out their hands in total confidence and sheer delight that they have received the gracious invitation to come to the banquet as Christ's guest. And the ordinance of the Lord's Supper would have the ongoing effect of 'converting' them into people of firm faith, more and more confident of God's grace, and producing the fruit of the Spirit in abundance.

Our churches agree that worthy eating and drinking presupposes a recognition of the body and blood of Christ in the sacrament, and behaviour conforming to the gift that participants receive. The dialogue rejoices that we are in substantial agreement about 'worthy participation'. In particular, we agree that the sacrament pre-supposes the baptism of those attending, and faith in the words and promises of Christ regarding the sacrament.

The LCA has a specific rite of admission to the Lord's Table, which may follow confirmation instruction in the teenage years, or a shorter preparation for a younger child with no minimum age prescribed, at the discretion of the pastor and the parents. Baptism is the rite of admission to the Lord's Supper in the UCA, though a time of preparation is normal before people receive the sacrament for the first time.

The open and closed table

The dialogue also considered the vexed issue of the open and closed table. It would be too simplistic to say that the LCA practises a closed table and the UCA an open table. Even the expression 'open table' leaves open a range of possible interpretations. At one extreme, does it mean that the Lord's Table is open to all people irrespective of whether they are Christians or not? Does it mean that it is open to all the baptised, or only after confirmation? Or does it mean that it is open to all who confess Christ as Lord whether they have been baptised and confirmed or not? The UCA position is that the table is open to baptised believers who come to the table in due humility.

Within historical Lutheranism, 'closed communion' has been understood to mean that communion tables are for Lutheran communicants, except at the discretion of the pastor. The LCA's practice, however, is that the table is closed to the impenitent and unbelieving, not necessarily closed to non-Lutherans.¹⁹ Many LCA congregations include a statement in the Sunday bulletin about the significance of the Lord's Supper and what is expected of participants. In the UCA the words of the 'Invitation' state who may come to the table,²⁰ and it is understood that the liturgy well prepares worshippers to partake of the meal. In the LCA, the baptised receiving communion for the first time are prepared by instruction

19 The LCA's stance is set out in the document, 'Some Pastoral Guidelines for Responsible Communion Practice, 1990' (re-edited August 2001), cf. Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions (DSTO) Vol 2E. Access via <https://www.lca.org.au/commissions/cticr/>.

20 The 'Invitation to the Eucharist' in *A Great Prayer of Thanksgiving with Commentary* is worded: 'Christ invites to his table all who confess him as Lord, earnestly repent of their sin, and seek to live in peace with one another' (p. 4).

and a formal rite of admission to the table. In the event of visitors or newcomers presenting themselves for communion, ministers of both denominations would follow up pastorally. Ultimately, the dialogue decided that a separate section on the open and closed table was not necessary in ATT because it is well covered under the theme of worthy participation.

Lay distribution beyond the gathered congregation

It quickly became apparent that there was unanimity between the UCA and LCA on the practice of taking communion to those who are unable to attend worship. It was determined that the Eucharist may be regarded as continuing until the last person has partaken—including people at home, in hospital or in prison—when the sacrament is taken to them following the service. Both churches have the practice of training and installing lay people to take the elements to such people, using the rites of their church. In neither case are the elements re-consecrated, but the Words of Institution are read as a reminder of the consecration that occurred in the presence of the gathered community. Towards the end of the main service, it was agreed, it is good practice to alert the assembled congregation to the fact that the Eucharist is to be shared with specific people beyond their midst, who are named and prayed for.

Concluding comments

This revision of the Chronicle has been written in the conviction that readers would value the opportunity to accompany the dialogue on the journey it has taken to reach the goal of the great consensus on the Eucharist represented by ATT. The many difficult conversations that took place along the way may well have blocked the path to full agreement. But, combined with a happy blend of good will, prayer, and persistence, such frank exchanges undoubtedly contributed to the joy of the discoveries that kept on surfacing. As we listened to each other carefully, in the spirit of Receptive Ecumenism, we finally concluded that the specific nuances of our two churches need not be seen as barriers to full communion. Instead, we found that we were continually being enriched by the characteristic emphases of our partner church. And rather than viewing them as causes of ongoing separation, we kept discovering that they contributed to a more profound statement on the Eucharist, not only in fresh language but also without compromising the essential elements of our two traditions.

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