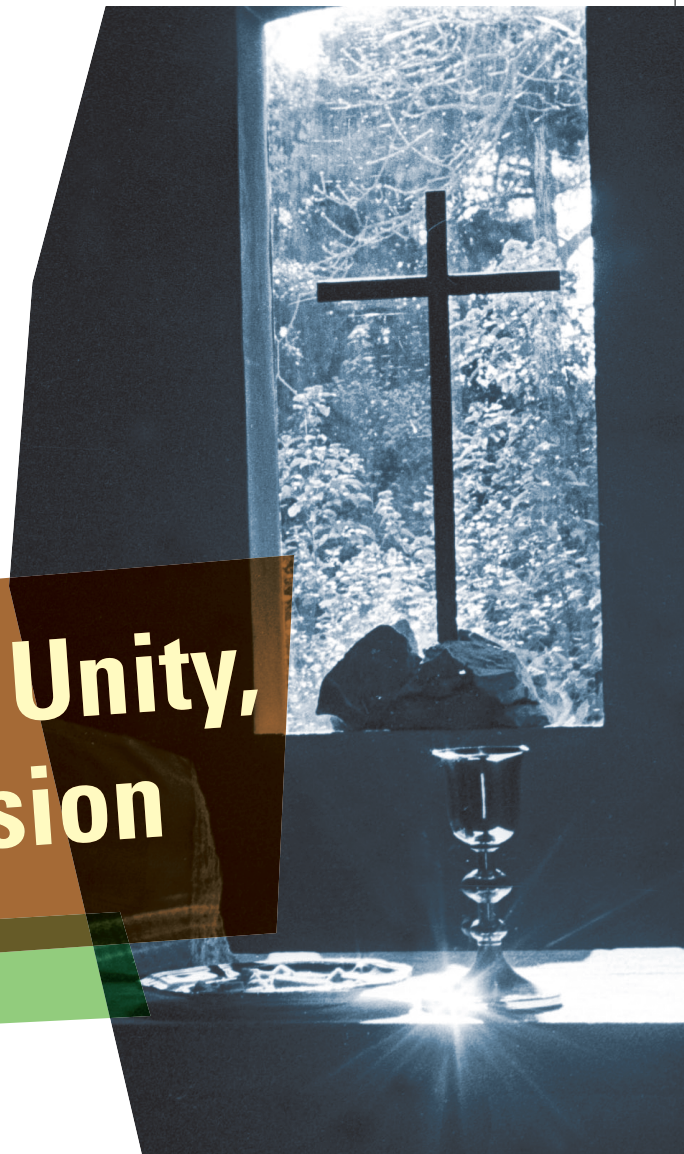


FAITH AND ORDER

Oikoumene

**Churches Affirming Unity,  
Overcoming Division**

World Council of Churches



## A Passion for Unity

Christians are one in Christ: unity is their birthright, as members of the one body of Christ. Through the modern ecumenical movement, the churches are seeking to live out this truth – to make Christian unity both evident and effective through common confession, witness and service. They recognize increasingly that, just as no member of the body can say to another “I have no need of you” (1 Corinthians 12:21), so the churches need each other. They recognize that their unity in Christ is greater than the differences in belief, and the tragedies of history, which divide them. They recognize Christ’s will that this unity be both visible and effective.

Dramatic changes have occurred: churches are sharing in life, witness and service in ways which were unthinkable only 20 or 50 years ago. Yet for all these ecumenical advances, divisions remain on some crucial issues of faith and

life, sometimes to the point where the churches’ unity seems threatened, where they cannot recognize each other’s members and ministries, where their witness and service is impaired. Their division is most painfully evident when they cannot all gather for the one eucharist (the Lord’s supper).

## A Commitment to Unity

The Faith and Order Commission exists to address these issues. It lives and works on the boundary between unity and division – celebrating unity, honouring authentic diversity, healing divisions. As an integral part of the WCC and today’s ecumenical movement, it works with the churches

- **To affirm the *basis* of their unity**  
Christian unity reflects the unity of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is rooted in our common belonging to Christ, expressed in most cases through common baptism. Christian unity is for the glory of God, and in obedience to Christ’s command. It is part of God’s plan “for the fullness of time” (Ephesians 1:9-10).
- **To honour the *authentic diversity* among them**  
Christian unity does not mean uniformity! Churches work together to identify the fundamental and necessary elements of our common faith.

*Delegates at the fifth world conference on Faith and Order, Santiago de Compostela, Spain, 1995*



Within that framework, a variety of theological positions and practices can obtain. As these are shared within the ecumenical fellowship, each church enriches the others and is enriched by them.

*A church at the monastery of St Sergius, Zagorsk, Russia • The Church of The Good Shepherd, Chennai, India. • Church near Honiara, Solomon Islands*

- **To *identify* – and help overcome - issues which divide them**

Churches are divided by divergent theological positions and practices, and by memories of past conflicts. As human communities, they are challenged by sinful forces such as racism.

Churches need to be alert to – and work against – *all* the causes of division among them.

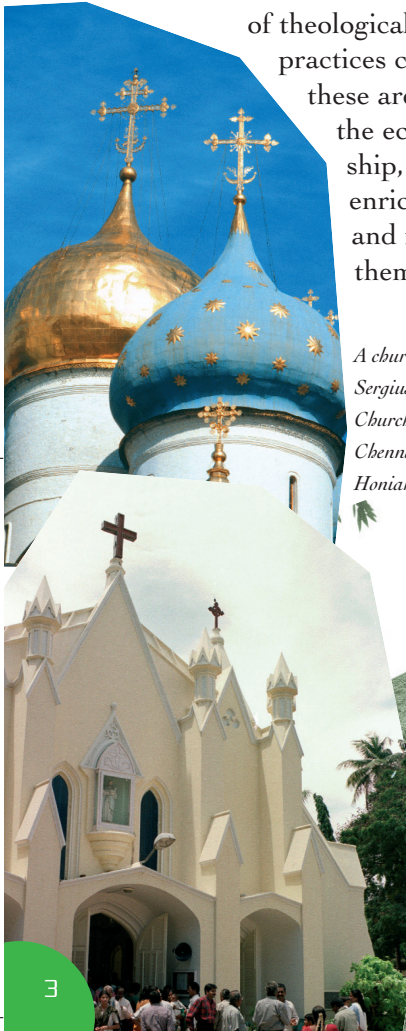
- **To make clear the *implications* of their unity**

Christian unity is also for the sake of a more credible and effective Christian witness and service. It fosters healing and just reconciliation,

among the churches and in the world. As Desmond Tutu reminded the fifth world conference on Faith and Order (Santiago de Compostela, Spain, 1993): “Apartheid is too strong for a divided church.”

### What’s in a Name?

Beginning as a movement, Faith and Order helped energize the “ecumenical awakening” of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Inspired by the Edinburgh mission conference in 1910, and in touch with the Life and Work movement which was promoting the churches’ common social witness, Faith and Order mobilized theologians and church leaders. Their aim: to address centuries-old sources of church division – theological, historical, social - in obedience to Christ’s prayer “that they may all be one” (John 17:21), and as an impulse for renewal within and among the churches.





*Delegates at the first world conference on Faith and Order, Lausanne, Switzerland, 1927*

Why the name? The term “Faith” points to the basic theological issues which unite – and sometimes still divide – the churches. “Order” refers to issues of organization and structure (such as ministry, ordination and authority) which continue to challenge the churches today.

In 1948 the Faith and Order and Life and Work movements came together to form the World Council of Churches. Thus from

the WCC’s beginning it has been clear that theological reflection, witness and service, and faith formation are all central to the life of the church and cannot exist apart from each another. Faith and Order has collaborated with a wide range of WCC partners over the years, including the Commission on Mission and Evangelism; Justice, Peace and Creation; the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey; Inter-Religious Relations; the Programme to Combat Racism, and the Decade to Overcome Violence.

As a movement, Faith and Order is also linked to work on unity being done around the world through Faith and Order programmes in the churches, national or regional councils, and ecumenical institutes, as well as specialized groups such as the Ecumenical Disabilities Advocacy Network (EDAN).

## Diverse... and Accountable

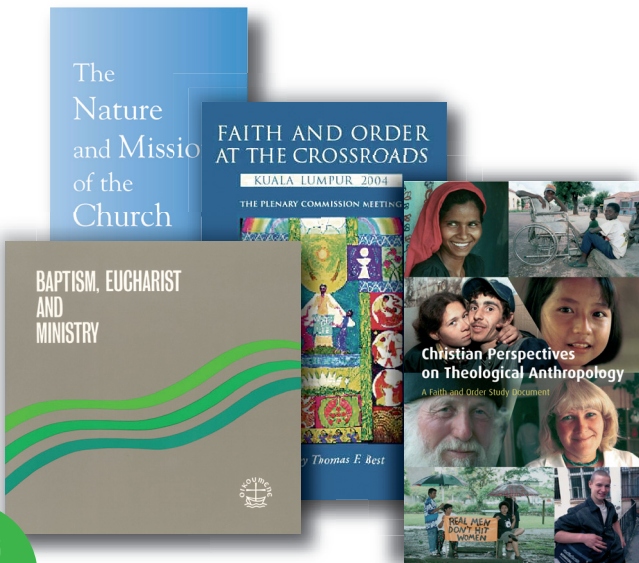
The WCC’s Faith and Order Plenary Commission is comprised of 120 persons, of whom 30 serve on an executive body, the Standing Commission. All commissioners serve as agreed representatives of their churches and are drawn not only from all the major Protestant, Anglican and Orthodox confessions within the WCC fellowship, but also from non-WCC member churches (including the Roman Catholic Church and Pentecostal churches). The Commission reflects the theological, regional and cultural diversity of the church world-wide. Its commitment to serve the churches, and its breadth of membership, gives the Commission its unique role in fostering theological reflection, reconciliation and renewal today.

Through its world conferences, Commission meetings, studies and

publications Faith and Order helps focus the churches' reflection on the foundations, implications and challenges of unity. It is best known for the ecumenical best-seller *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* – now translated into 40 languages, and a basis of many subsequent agreements among the churches. The study "Towards a Common Confession of the Apostolic Faith" sought to relate the ancient creeds

to today's language and thought-forms. Other studies have related unity to the historical and social sources of division, and explored the relation between the faith of the church and its life and witness in the world ("The Community of Women and Men in the Church", *Church and World*, "Ecclesiology and Ethics").

Over the years the Commission has tried to anticipate new developments affecting the churches, and their impact on its work. At its most recent meeting (in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in 2004) the Commission experienced how local churches live as a minority in a non-Christian culture. How will growing religious plurality affect the search for Christian unity in the future? This question is now on the Faith and Order agenda.



## Facing the Challenges of Unity Today

In addressing the challenges of unity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Faith and Order draws on Commissioners and other specialists and church



6

leaders. Insights from theologians, biblical scholars, liturgists and

*Holy Communion in an Orthodox Church, Russia.*

worship leaders, ethicists, missiologists, social scientists, local pastors and others – all are brought to bear on the search for unity today.

Recent areas of work include:

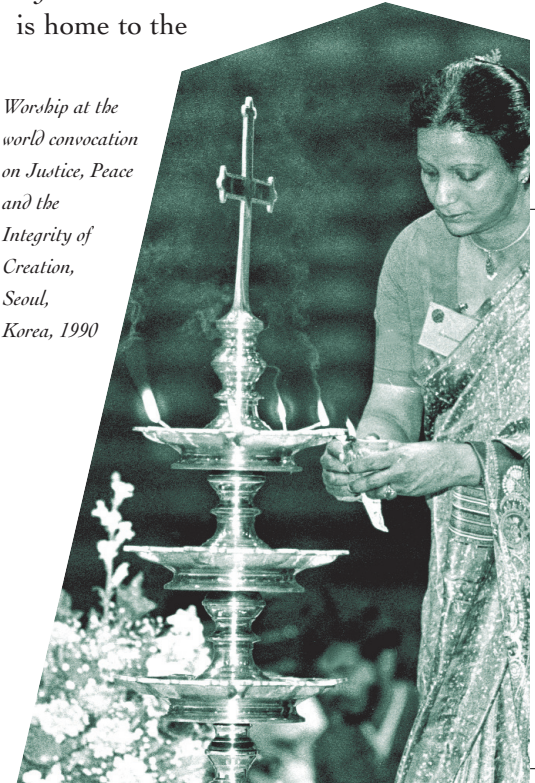
*Ecclesiology* – continuing from *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, seeking to clarify what the churches can say together about the church and its mission today, and to provide a framework for further work on issues which divide the churches today; *baptism* – promoting wider mutual recognition of baptism, and overcoming divisions in the churches’ understanding and practice of baptism; *ethnic identity, national identity, and*

*the search for the unity of the church* – providing theological resources for churches in situations of conflict, where ethnicity and nationalism challenge their unity; *theological reflection on peace* – seeking theological bases for the churches’ vocation to work for peace and for life in a violent world.

*Theological anthropology* – tackling modern challenges to the understanding of the human person made “in the image of God”, and providing resources for the churches’ common ethical reflection; *hermeneutics* (interpretation) – reflecting on challenges to unity resulting from different understandings of the Bible, as well as how the churches understand (and sometimes *misunderstand*) each other’s cherished symbols; *worship* – exploring how worship undergirds and inspires the search for unity, and reflecting on the significance of worship in ecumenical contexts. Faith and Order also produces

materials for use in worship, the most widely-known being the annual *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity* (jointly produced, and now co-published, with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity) and the *Ecumenical Prayer Cycle*. Faith and Order is home to the

*Worship at the world convocation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, Seoul, Korea, 1990*



WCC's Worship Consultant, who supports the worship life of the WCC and partner organizations.

Faith and Order has special relationships with two partners. It serves, at their request, as a contact point among the *united and uniting churches*. Through reports on church union negotiations and international consultations, Faith and Order helps bring their unique experience of church union to bear on issues facing all the churches today. It also works with the bilateral discussions conducted by the *Christian World Communions*. Through regular consultations, Faith and Order helps place the

results of dialogues and agreements between specific churches within the broader context of the whole ecumenical movement.

## Faith and Order... and You

Is unity anymore, in today's world of violence, fundamentalism, globalisation, genetic engineering and climate change? *Yes*, for many reasons. Christian unity – evident and effective – is for the glory of God, and in obedience to Christ's command. And we know that "divided churches cost lives" (Northern Ireland): when Christians confess and proclaim Jesus' good news together, and act together, they can make a greater impact for good.



*Holy Communion at St. Paul's Church,  
Hådsten, Denmark, 1985*

Faith and Order seeks reactions to its studies from churches, but also from councils of churches, ecumenical institutes, study centres, pastors and lay study groups, and individuals. We encourage you to learn how you can become involved in the Faith and Order discussion through your own church, council of churches or in other ways. If local opportunities are lacking, you may want to start your own group for discussion of these issues. Your perspective and input on issues of unity is important!



*Church musicians at the Evangelical  
Theological Seminary, Matanzas,  
Cuba, 1999*

## The World Council of Churches

The WCC is the broadest and most inclusive among the many organized expressions of the modern ecumenical movement, a movement whose goal is Christian unity. The WCC brings together more than 340 churches, denominations and church fellowships in over 100 countries and territories throughout the world, representing some 560 million Christians and including most of the world's Orthodox churches, scores of denominations from such historic traditions of the Protestant Reformation as Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist and Reformed, as well as many united and independent churches.

For its member churches, the WCC is a unique space: one in which they can reflect, speak, act, worship and work together, challenge and support each other, share and debate with each other. As members of this fellowship, WCC member churches:

- are called to the goal of *visible unity* in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship;
- promote their *common witness* in work for mission and evangelism;

- engage in *Christian service* by meeting human need, breaking down barriers between people, seeking justice and peace, and upholding the integrity of creation;
- foster *renewal* in unity, worship, mission and service.

The WCC's work is financed by contributions from its member churches and funds received from church-related organizations, foundations and individuals.

*The Holy Scripture*



**Faith and Order**  
**World Council of Churches**  
 P.O. Box 2100  
 150 route de Ferney  
 CH-1211 Geneva 2  
 Switzerland

**Tel.** + 41.22.791.6111

**Fax** + 41.22.791.0361

**Email:** [faithandorder@wcc-coe.org](mailto:faithandorder@wcc-coe.org)

**Website:** <http://www.wcc-coe.org>

© 2006, WCC

Photo p.1: *Chapel, Pomeyrol Community, France, © WCC, John Taylor*

Photo credits: p.2, 3:  
*Peter Williams/WCC*

p.4: *Greppin Maupas, Lausanne*

p.5: *Ulrich Schweizer*

p.6: *Chris Black / WCC, Peter Williams*

p.7: *Paul Jeffrey / WCC*

p.8: © WCC