

**Group 2 Report on NMC
Faith and Order Plenary
Kolymbari, Crete
October 14, 2009**

Group 2 expresses our appreciation for work of the study group that produced *The Nature and Mission of the Church*. We believe that this document advances ecumenical conversation and marks an important step on the journey toward convergence and/or consensus on the cluster of thorny issues related to ecclesiology. We do not believe that NMC is mature as a convergence statement and therefore would not recommend the first of the options Dr. Shastri listed in his paper -- namely, to close the process and publish NMC in its current form as a convergence text. Revisions should be made that take into account the responses of the churches, universities, seminaries, and the Plenary Commission.

We commend the study group for underlining in the very title of the revised document -- *The Nature and Mission of the Church* -- that mission lies at the very heart of ecclesiology; but we believe that this reality should be more thoroughly articulated and deeply explored in the text. Some believe that a more fully developed discussion of mission may enhance the reception of NMC or its successor document in the churches.

Many of us found the plenary paper of Metropolitan Corillos especially challenging in this regard. The question his comments prompted for our group is whether the very structure of the project and the formulation of its central questions are inherently Northern and therefore largely irrelevant to the lived faith of Christians in the global South -- here, of course, we are using global "North" and "South" to describe social, economic, and political realities rather than as strictly geographical designations. Many of us responded favorably to his suggestion that Faith and Order facilitate a process of reflection on ecclesiology from the perspectives of the global South.

All of us expressed concern at the relatively small number of responses to NMC from the churches. We recommend that the churches who have not yet responded be contacted again. We believe that it may be useful to offer a short extension of the deadline for response, perhaps six months.

We had considerable discussion about whether the timeline for response sufficiently accounted for the variety of ways member churches make decisions. The ecclesiastical structures of many of our member churches allow for a relatively expeditious consideration of texts like NMC either by councils of theologians or theologically trained clergy; but many of our churches have more local, non-hierarchical, and dispersed processes of consideration that must be followed. Aside from the issues that arise from different structures and patterns of decision-making, there are, among our churches, vast differences of wealth and access to technologies of communication and means of travel. These realities must be taken into consideration as we design the procedure and set the timeline for response.

We further noted the problem of accessibility posed by language and medium. While we acknowledge that translation of NMC or any other Faith and Order text into every language represented by WCC member churches is impractical, we note that all of the languages into which NMC was translated -- English, German, French, Spanish, and Russian -- are European languages. We appreciate the rationale that the translation of documents is an expensive enterprise and is necessarily limited in scope; but we note that the argument cuts both ways. It

begs the question: if translation is so expensive, why are we spending all of our limited translation budget on producing exclusively European-language texts? This sends a message that perhaps we do not wish to send. We urge Faith and Order to consider publishing NMC and other texts in two or three non-European languages. At the very least, as we establish deadlines for response, we need to be aware that the process of reception and comment will be slower for churches that receive a text written in a non-native language.

In summary, we offer these specific suggestions:

- that the January 2010 deadline be extended about six months and churches be contacted again and encouraged to respond;
- that Faith and Order pose specific questions that highlight a few very important issues raised by the text and solicit brief concrete responses to those questions from member churches that have not yet responded;
- that members of the Plenary Commission encourage our churches to respond;
- that we encourage our churches to engage the discussion of NMC on the congregational level;
- that we give particular attention to issues related to the accessibility of texts; and
- that Faith and Order and WCC consider adding a couple of non-European languages to the list of official languages or at least to the list of languages into which official documents are translated.

We think that we can best encourage the churches to participate in reflection on the nature and mission of the church by:

- making it easier to identify the main points raised by the text;
- enhancing the discussion of mission in the document;
- more clearly tying the discussion of mission to specific economic, sociological, and political contexts, and the overarching context of economic and cultural globalization;
- addressing the issue of interfaith dialogue as it relates to the nature and mission of the church; and
- helping local councils of churches foster conversations about NMC.

Respectfully submitted,

Rick Lowery