

Internationale Altkatholische Bischofskonferenz der Utrechter Union
International Old Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Union of Utrecht
Präsident: Der Erzbischof von Utrecht
President: The Archbishop of Utrecht

**Communiqué of the International Old Catholic Bishops' Conference (IBC) in
Wislikofen /CH from 4th to 8th February 2007**

Once again ecumenical goals and relations to other churches was an important part of this year's four day meeting of the International Old Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Union of Utrecht (IBC). Owing to a variety of developments, the Union of Utrecht finds itself challenged to reflect on its ecumenical role and to develop this further. The Bishops' Conference commissioned a theologian to formulate an overall vision, which would help to draw together fundamental points of reference into concrete guidelines. In the discussion of the draft the following questions emerged:

- How can the ecumenical calling be seen in the light of the history of the Old Catholic Churches and in view of the present church situation?
- How best to set priorities in the light of limited resources?
- What do we regard as our most important ecumenical task?

The Bishops' Conference will address these questions in detail at its next meeting.

Bishop LaPlante, together with an adviser, from the Old Catholic Church of British Columbia, which last year was offered probationary membership of the Union of Utrecht by the IBC, was present. The report on the activities, the piety and practices, and the ensuing discussion about the theological basis of this church raised considerable doubts as to whether a common way was really possible. After intensive internal talks the Bishops' Conference came to the conclusion that their decision to offer probationary membership to the Old Catholic Church of British Columbia last year needed to be revised. They admitted to Bishop LaPlante that they had made a mistake in their estimation of a common Old Catholic identity and explained that the way to drawing his church into a wider fellowship could not be through the Union of Utrecht. Archbishop Vercaammen will now lend his support to seeing whether the Old Catholic Church of British Columbia could now find a home within into the local Anglican Church. As a result of this experience the Bishops' Conference also came to the conclusion that the existing guidelines for the inclusion of churches in the Union of Utrecht need to be reconsidered.

Bishop Klusmeyer, the official representative of ECUSA to the Union of Utrecht, reported on the situation in the Episcopal Church in America, which still finds itself both internally and externally in a very testing situation. The church has increasing problems with African Anglican churches that are erecting parallel church structures in the USA and thereby disrespecting diocesan boundaries. The Bishops' Conference hopes that a split within the Anglican Communion can be avoided. Such a split would also have negative repercussions for other churches, as it would undermine the credibility of the synodical-episcopal system.

Out of a number of talks the idea has emerged to try and create a *Communio* of independent synodical-episcopal constituted churches. To begin with the Bishops' Conference has made some preliminary enquiries as to whether the Philippine Independent Church and the Southern Indian Mar Thoma Church would be open to pursuing this idea. If the responses are positive an initial consultation would be planned for autumn 2007.

In the Commission on 'Catholicity and Globalisation' theologians from the Old Catholic Church, the Philippine Independent Church and ECUSA have been addressing the question as to the meaning of catholicity in a globalised world? During one week the commission

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worked on a statement, the text of which can be found under www.utrechter-union.org. The time frame for the commission's work is set for three years.

The international dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church is progressing well and work on a consensus paper is moving forward at a swift pace.

By comparison, the Old Catholic – Orthodox conversations have begun to falter. It is hoped that they can offer a fresh impulse to re-start the conversations in the near future. It was felt that the dialogue with the Church of Sweden was as yet too superficial and the commission should be asked to address the important theological questions of ecclesiology and the understanding of ordained ministry.

This year's in-depth topic was dedicated to spirituality. This largely focussed on an exchange of experiences in the light of developments of recent years and on the search for the important aspects of a possible Old Catholic spirituality.

The next meeting of the Bishops' Conference will take place in the Czech Republic from 24th to 29th February 2008.

Amersfoort and Berne, 2nd March 2007

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