

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 Münchenwiler/CH from 26<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2006**

At this year's meeting, the Old Catholic Bishops of the Union of Utrecht focussed on their ecumenical links and ongoing conversations with other churches.

The International Roman Catholic – Old Catholic Dialogue Commission is presently working on a common text on 'The Church'. Good progress has been made in the discussion on the meaning of the sacraments, in particular the sacrament of ordination, and on the petrine ministry of the Bishop of Rome, much to satisfaction of the Bishops' Conference.

The Orthodox – Old Catholic discussion group dealt at their last meeting with the ordination of women to the priesthood. As was to be expected the discussion proved to be difficult but will be continued at their next meeting.

The new members of the International Anglican – Old Catholic Co-ordinating Council came together for the first time. Their goal: to find ways in which the unity of both churches can be fostered through a closer co-operation between Old Catholic and Anglican parishes.

Throughout last year the Old Catholic Bishops' Conference sent observers to meetings of various Anglican commissions and institutions. The IBC took note of their reports and discussed the significance of the issues which were raised for the Old Catholic Churches. To this end Bishop J. Gledhill (Representative of the Archbishop of Canterbury) and Bishop M. Klusmeyer (Representative of ECUSA) also reported on topical issues and developments in their own churches.

The results of the Anglican – Old Catholic Theologians' Conference held in Leeds (UK) on the theme of the ecclesiology of both churches revealed differences in understanding. These could well lead to practical problems in co-operation as and when the possibilities of common structures are pursued. Related issues were discussed further but no significant results have yet emerged. The exchange will be taken up in the preparations of the Ecumenical Directory, which the Bishops' Conference would like to complete next year.

For a number of years the Bishops' Conference has been in contact with the 'Old Catholic Church of British Columbia', based in Vancouver (Canada), which has applied to join the Union of Utrecht. During this time there have been extensive consultations, as required by the statutes of the IBC. On the one hand the Bishops' Conference is of the opinion that a positive development is possible, on the other hand recognises that a number of questions remain, especially in relation to the question of theology and the validity of orders. As a result it was decided to offer the Old Catholic Church of British Columbia a conditional status within the IBC for a period of six years to enable both sides to get to know each other better.

At this year's General Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Archbishop Vercauteren was elected onto the Central Committee. He reported extensively on the work of the General Assembly and offered the IBC a number of proposals on how the theological work of the Old Catholic Churches could be fed into projects of the WCC. The bishops largely agreed to these proposals, whilst recognising that the extent to which such co-operation could be undertaken would depend on the availability of personnel.

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Once again the bishops devoted considerable time to the subject of Christian marriage. The three, very different, papers only highlighted how complex and difficult it is to address this topic. The need for further work on the topic was recognised and commissioned.

The Swiss Church raised with the IBC the matter of whether deacons, who are involved in the pastoral care of the sick and those in hospital, could administer the sacrament of anointing. From the ensuing discussion it was clear that the question was not an issue in the other churches. The possibility of deacons anointing in this context of this pastoral care was not, as such, ruled out.

The next meeting of the IBC will take place in Switzerland in February 2007.

Amersfoort and Berne, 24<sup>th</sup> April 2006

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