



## **NEWS FOCUS - This week's International Anglican and Roman Catholic Commission meeting in Toronto**

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## Reaping the benefits of talking



***Praying together on Ash Wednesday eventually led to New Zealand Roman Catholics and Anglicans collaborating in a number of different ways – including a joint mission that serves 7,000 people, says Archbishop David Moxon, director of the Anglican Centre in Rome and Anglican co-chair of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC).***

About 23 years ago, says Archbishop David Moxon, formerly of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia and currently the director of the Anglican Centre in Rome, he and the local Roman Catholic bishop made an agreement that still makes him feel

hopeful. The two church heads decided to share the rite of imposition of ashes on Ash Wednesday – a tradition that continues in New Zealand today.

Outstanding doctrinal differences prevent the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches from being able to actually take communion together. But Moxon, who is also the Anglican co-chair of the [Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission](#) (ARCIC) – the two faith groups’ international ecumenical body – is encouraged about the prospect of ongoing dialogue. The relationships made between New Zealand Anglicans and Roman Catholics through sharing the Ash Wednesday rite, he says, led the two churches to spearhead a joint mission that involves nine Christian charities and serves about 7,000 people in the city of Hamilton, New Zealand.

“That idea of praying together, especially on Ash Wednesday,” Moxon said in Toronto Wednesday, 11 May, “provides the context for saying, ‘How can we rebuild from here?’”

Moxon and other members of ARCIC are in Toronto this week until 19 May for a joint meeting with its Canadian counterpart, the Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue of Canada

(ARC-Canada). The event marks the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the international Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue – and it's also the first time the third round of that dialogue, known as ARCIC III, has met with one of its national counterparts.

Co-chairs of both ARCIC and ARC-Canada gave a public presentation in Toronto Wednesday, in which they spoke of the challenges of dialogue and the progress that has been made.

Bishop Linda Nicholls, coadjutor bishop of Huron and Anglican co-chair of ARC-Canada, acknowledged that one challenge of ecumenical dialogue is that its benefits aren't always apparent to people.

“It does seem sometimes to be a work that remains hidden, as an esoteric side-line to the work of the church that is often unknown at the grassroots level,” she said. “When I say to people I’m going off to Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue, people look at me in puzzlement: ‘Why?’ or, ‘Is that still going on?’” Her words elicited a ripple of laughter from the audience.

Nevertheless, she said, the benefits of the dialogue are real. It can help dispel prejudices and misconceptions members of each church have about the other. It can also lead to on-the-

ground collaboration like the New Zealand mission described by Moxon, she said.

Another challenge of dialogue – making it sometimes seem as though it takes a step back for every two steps forward – is that the doctrine of a church’s ecumenical partner is not necessarily fixed, but can change from time to time, said Roman Catholic ARCIC co-chair Archbishop Bernard Longley, of the diocese of Birmingham, England.

The Anglican move to ordain women as priests, along with Pope Benedict’s 2009 creation of “ordinariates” for Anglican groups that expressed a desire to become Roman Catholic, are among the developments that have posed challenges to the dialogue, Nicholls said.

However, the Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue possesses unique virtues that have allowed it to keep moving forward, said ARC-Canada Roman Catholic co-chair Bishop Donald Bolen, of the diocese of Saskatoon – including the willingness of both sides to “stay at the table when things get difficult.

“When the dialogue partner does something that we feel is deeply problematic, there is a temptation to pull the plug, to walk away,” Bolen

said. “We do well to remember what St Paul says – ‘The eye can’t say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’ – when one part of the body suffers, all suffer.”

Dialogue co-chairs also praised the method of “receptive ecumenism” used by ARCIC and ARC-Canada, whereby each group reveals its weaknesses to the other.

Receptive ecumenism, Moxon said, means having each partner say to the other, “You tell me your worst nightmare in mission and I’ll tell you mine. In other words, show me your wounds.”

This mutual vulnerability in ecumenical dialogue, he said, “leads to a mutual courage, a mutual partnership to assist each other in overcoming, and healing, and redeeming together.”

The particular question that the current round of ARCIC, which began in 2009, is now grappling with is how moral discernment in the two churches is related to their ecclesiology – how their decisions on issues such as same-sex marriage, for example, might depend on their church structure, says Canon John Gibaut, director of Unity, Faith and Order of the Anglican Communion.

For about three years now, he says, ARCIC III has been working on a paper on one part of this question – how authority is vested in the structure of the two churches. The hope is that this paper will be essentially finished by the end of the current meeting in Toronto.

“That will be something really important to offer to the churches – it will be the basis on which the commission will next look at a variety of ethical questions,” he says.

Progress in ecumenism, Gibaut says, may be slow, but it has a real impact on the lives of believers. In Canada, improved relationships over the past few decades have benefited Anglicans and Roman Catholics in many ways, he says.

“I remember, as a child, the relationships were just awful,” he says. “And I think of the number of Canadian Anglicans who are in, say, inter-church marriages with Roman Catholics, or their children are attending Roman Catholic schools.

“I taught for 14 years at St Paul University, a Roman Catholic University. These things would have been unimaginable. . . I think of the social justice coalitions in this country which are so

heavily supported by Anglicans and Roman Catholics.”

Moreover, he says, relationships forged in ecumenical dialogue have helped the churches come together much faster and more effectively on other issues, such as modern slavery and human trafficking.

“Ecumenical progress is measured in decades, not in days,” he says. “And yet it does move, and it does change things, and we live in a very different world because of it.”

## **Toronto meeting promises to tackle tough issues**

**After nearly 50 years of discourse between the Catholic and Anglican communions, the official dialogue body wants to fine-tune how it studies the differences and similarities between two churches which both call themselves Catholic.**

“ARCIC III hasn’t proved itself yet,” said Sir David Moxon, Anglican co-chair of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, following an ecumenical evensong on Pentecost Sunday.



This third stage of the dialogue has been meeting since 2011, but has yet to publish a major document. It is currently studying how the Church arrives at moral teaching.

The official dialogue sponsored by the Vatican and the Archbishop of Canterbury is meeting in Toronto until today, May 18, when a concluding communique is expected from the meeting of 22 bishops, theologians and support staff. It is the first time the body has met in Canada and, to the knowledge of the participants, the first time in 50 years that ARCIC has met during Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit first revealed the global unity of the Christian message expressed in the diversity of languages from around the world.

ARCIC III expects to publish its first book within the next four months, said Moxon. The Anglican representative to the Holy See in Rome is currently in negotiations with publishers to bring out *Towards a Church Fully Reconciled*, a series of essays that “will tackle the tough difficulties,” Moxon said.

ARCIC has looked at its work since the Second Vatican Council and divided the issues into three categories — areas of agreement, issues on

which the churches are still seeking agreement and areas of disagreement.

Despite 80-per-cent agreement on such questions as Church structure, Eucharist, liturgy and ethics, disagreements on ordination of women to the priesthood and as bishops, ordination of openly gay bishops, blessings of same-sex relationships and moves in some parts of the Anglican communion to redefine marriage to include same-sex unions have derailed or slowed talks over the past decade.

The current topic of discussion at ARCIC is meant to meet these controversies head-on, said Canadian Anglican Bishop Linda Nicholls

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