

FIFTH REPORT OF THE JOINT WORKING GROUP BETWEEN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

INTRODUCTION

I. THE ECUMENICAL SITUATION

1. *Changes in the world community*
2. *The mission of the Church*
3. *The common ground and a common goal*
4. *Internal factors influencing ecumenical relationships*
5. *A new "tradition" of ecumenical common witness*
6. *Shared concerns and common responses*
7. *Acknowledging continuing differences*

II. FUNCTIONS AND OPERATIONS OF THE JOINT WORKING GROUP

1. *Functions*
2. *Collaborators*
3. *Style of Operation*

III. ACTIVITIES OF THE JOINT WORKING GROUP 1975-1983

A. PRIORITIES FOR COLLABORATION

1. *The Unity of the Church - the Goal and the Way*
2. *Common Witness*
3. *Social Collaboration*

B. ONGOING COLLABORATION

1. *Commission on Faith and Order*
2. *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*
3. *Relationships with Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME)*
4. *Dialogue with People of Living Faiths*
5. *Ecumenical Institute, Bossey*
6. *The Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Vancouver, July/August 1983*

IV. PROPOSALS FOR FUTURE WORK

1. *The way towards unity*
2. *Common Witness*
3. *Social Collaboration*
4. *Ecumenical Formation*
5. *Continuing Collaboration*
 - a) *Faith & Order*
 - b) *Dialogue with Other Faiths and Ideologies*
 - c) *Community of Women and Men in Church and Society*
 - d) *Joint Staff Meetings*

V. THE FUTURE OF THE JOINT WORKING GROUP IN THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

INTRODUCTION

By the time of the Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches there will have been over twenty years of official contacts between the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. The Joint Working Group, established in 1965 to serve this relationship has already submitted four official Reports to its respective authorities. The first three had simply recorded what had been done in study and collaboration. The Fourth Report, presented to the Fifth Assembly in 1975, also looked ahead to what should and could be done. This Fifth Report is presented in the same spirit.

Further, the last seven years have been crowded with Church and world events which have deeply influenced the one ecumenical movement and which call for more wide-spread and stronger commitment to its goals and its tasks. These events are first outlined here, in order that realism may mark the evaluation of past collaboration between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches and the projections for their relationship during the next decade.

I. THE ECUMENICAL SITUATION

1. Changes in the world community

Reflection must begin with a vivid consciousness of those changes in the world community which are transforming the cultural, economic, social and political relations between peoples.

The inescapable interdependence of all areas and peoples of the inhabited earth, is matched by increasing consciousness of that fact. The human family becomes more aware that it faces either a common future or a common fate. Threats to peace have so critically increased that life itself is at stake. Oppression and violence are destroying the fragile fabric of human communities. Appalling affluents and consumption of the earth's resources exacerbate growing impatience on the part of the poor and increasing frustration among those not so deprived but who feel themselves powerless to close the gap. New causes of contention continue to arise among nations. Many countries are split within by political and social divisions of great bitterness which lead to confrontation and violence. The precariousness of the economic situation, the breakdown of structures and services, unemployment, the slowness in finding a new world economic order, increase frustration and fear and cynicism. Religion, and its claim to be a source of hope, is questioned and labeled as away of easy escape from the world's predicament.

Yet, stronger than such events and moods, day by day there is love in the lives of so many people, goodness and selflessness still break through, expectation shines in the eyes of both young and old, the Gospel is shared by hungry hearts, hands are joined in confident prayer. Everywhere people begin to be conscious of their solidarity and to stand together in defense of justice and human dignity, their own and that of others.

2. The mission of the Church

Such is the context for the mission of the Church in the last two decades of this twentieth century. More than ever before, the divisions among Christians appear as a scandal. The lack of full visible unity among Christians weakens the Church's mission of reconciling human beings to God and to each other (see *2 Cor* 5:18-19), obscures the vision of Christ, the life of the world, and muffles his voice of hope.

More and more, churches are responding by a firm commitment "to the goal of visible unity in one faith and in one Eucharistic fellowship expressed in worship and in common life in Christ and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe" (Constitution of the WCC, Art. III). They are being drawn together as agents of reconciliation. In many situations they speak and act together as defenders of human dignity and the rights of peoples and individuals, and to offer hope and purpose by pointing toward "the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (*Jn* 1:29), including the sin which causes and perpetuates Christian divisions.

3. The common ground and a common goal

Since the Joint Working Group was set up almost two decades ago, far-reaching developments have taken place in relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant member churches of the World Council. Looking back one sees the growing awareness of the essential oneness of the people of God in each place and in all places, a oneness based on the real, though imperfect, communion existing between all who believe in Christ and are baptized in His name. Consciousness of this common ground has begun to transform the self-understanding of the churches. Their members are gradually acquiring a new picture of themselves and of their sisters and brothers in other

traditions, of the way in which they belong together, of their mutual responsibility and accountability before the world, and of their need “to overcome the obstacles standing in the way to perfect ecclesial communion” (4th Report, I a).

This common ground is more fully described in the Fourth Report of the Joint Working Group. Acknowledgment of it strengthens the conviction that the Roman Catholic Church and the member churches of the World Council in their bilateral and multilateral relationships share in one and the same ecumenical movement. More and more they are drawn to a common understanding of the goal of unity. This includes unity in one faith and in one visible ecclesial Eucharistic fellowship, “built up into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 2:5). And there is growing understanding that this vision of the one Church can be manifested as a conciliar fellowship of local churches which are themselves truly united.

4. Internal factors influencing ecumenical relationships

The continued relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches and its member churches is sustained by this acknowledged common ground and points to a common goal. But during the last two decades both bodies have undergone profound internal developments of their own which both ease and hinder many areas of collaboration.

Starting from the integration of the International Missionary Council and the entry of the Eastern European Orthodox Churches at the New Delhi Assembly (1961), the World Council of Churches has undergone major transformation, growing in membership to more than 300 churches. More and more it has become a truly world-wide fellowship. At the same time, and building on earlier affirmations about the ministry of the laity, it has reached out through many programs to make the ecumenical movement a reality among the whole people of God in the whole inhabited earth.

This process of growth and of transformation has faced the World Council with a double task. First, in becoming a truly world-wide fellowship it had to come to terms with the difficulty of living in a genuine dialogue not only of traditions but also of cultures, with all members participating in each other's lives, sharing burdens and resources, joys and sufferings. Secondly, in addressing itself to the life of its member-churches as total communities, it had to respond to the expectations of both women and men, lay and ordained, young and old in their mutual relationships in the ecumenical movement.

In the Roman Catholic Church, the strong call of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) for renewal in all areas of personal and communal life has awakened new energies whose potential is still in process of being realized. For instance, renewed awareness of the interrelation of the local church in bonds of communion with the other local churches and with the See of Rome opened up promising possibilities for understanding the place of unity and diversity within the Church and the nature of ecclesial communion. But the practical implications of this and of the collegiality it implies are still being worked out in new initiatives and new pastoral structures such as episcopal conferences and other regional and local bodies, and it is these which have primary responsibility for overseeing ecumenical activities.

The patient, unswerving work done under Pope Paul VI to implement the stance of the Second Vatican Council has been followed by the vigorous pastoral leadership of Pope John Paul II; both Popes have expressed a strong, clear ecumenical commitment.

The dramatic and often enthusiastic first steps of Roman Catholic ecumenical involvement were followed by difficulties, some expected, some unforeseen. The scope and complexity of the task is being accepted more realistically, and the differences in structure, history, and approach to problems, are more honestly taken into account, not least in the relations with the World Council and its member churches.

5. A new “tradition” of ecumenical common witness

It is a cause for joy that some quite notable convergences are emerging in theological understanding of those very issues which had been so divisive; for example, on the nature of the mission of Christ, on the Church and its unity, on baptism, Eucharist and ministry. Especially there has been a striking convergence in the appreciation of the centrality of the Word of God and the Eucharist in liturgical worship and this is being expressed in the similarity of forms used in Eucharistic worship. Convergence in forms of social action and common witness has been evident regionally and locally as churches have become more seriously engaged in trying to do everything together save what the conviction of faith forbids. There is at present a strong convergence in concern for prayer and spiritual life. This is marked by a number of new movements among laity and clergy which have spread across all traditions.

Indeed one can speak of a new “tradition” of ecumenical understanding, shared concerns, and common witness. At the same time, this new heritage is being challenged, because new voices are trying to be integrated into it. Strong accents from the experiences of Christian life and witness in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Oceania join those from Europe and North America. The various ecumenical agendas which these different Christian traditions work out in their search for an authentic confession of Christ in each place and situation are not always identical, and can cause tensions in the common exploration of the unfathomable riches of the Word of God for our times. In face of Christian renewal, there are different judgements about those cherished customs and practices which are so woven into the life of a church that they risk becoming identified with the substance of faith itself. Even the real convergences in theological understanding of faith and order are a strong challenge to churches to find the right ways to enable them to be received by all members. In fact, the remaining causes of division, theological or otherwise, are thrown into starker relief by those very convergences.

So the convergences, which some joyfully welcome as signs of the Spirit’s patient work, are questioned by others as inimical to what they believe to be their Christian identity. The dialogue within each church about dialogue between the churches is a constant pastoral necessity.

It is a deep concern that there are groups and whole communities within the structured life of the parent bodies of the Joint Working Group, as well as outside it, which stand apart from the explicit dialogue and from the binding relationship of collaboration. Many of them are distant from both the process and the conclusions of ecumenical reflection which thus become difficult to communicate in face of an attitude of estrangement.

Many churches, organizations and communities have learned to see the concerns for proclaiming the explicit Gospel of Jesus Christ, commitment to social justice, and spiritual renewal as inseparable elements of their total life, mutually nourishing, and a part of fidelity to their calling. Yet others want to separate one aspect at the expense of the others, a separation which goes across traditional confessional lines in a way that creates new divisions.

So both the Roman Catholic Church and the member churches of the World Council find in their ecumenical fellowship new kinds of potential divisions, even beyond the confrontation and polarization which mark many societies and the world as a whole. Both face the task of holding together the different elements of Christian witness and of keeping them vitally present in the one ecumenical movement. The common problems they face become a kind of new bond between the Council’s member churches and the Roman Catholic Church as they seek to build communion among their own membership and to overcome new kinds of tension and division. With this goes the need for a continued effort of ecumenical awareness-building and formation of a new generation of young church members, who are less aware of the scandal of the divisions which remain, of the goal of unity, and the urgency of the task.

6. Shared concerns and common responses

So in the last decade the World Council and its member churches and the Roman Catholic Church have found themselves with similar experiences. Under the shock of some of them they have sometimes been driven inwards to concentrate on their own concerns. Yet in many cases their response to the challenges has been parallel, almost identical.

The reports of the 1973 Bangkok and the 1980 Melbourne Conferences, together with the Nairobi Section I report on “Confessing Christ Today,” and Pope Paul VI’s Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Evangelization of the Modern World) affirm the inseparable relationship between proclamation of the Gospel and action for justice in all Christian witness. Several papal statements and some WCC programs such as those on Faith, Science and Technology and on Good News to the Poor, show a convergence in understanding of the witness of the churches and the priorities of mission.

This new perspective on contemporary ways of confessing Christ in word and life has been strengthened through the studies of the WCC Commission on Faith and Order, on “Giving Account of the Hope that is in us,” and through the “Common Witness” study of the Joint Working Group, which bring together the search for a common expression of the apostolic faith and the practice of common life and witness among the Churches.

There are also similarities in the concern for the role of the laity and the meaning and direction of laity formation in terms of the responsibility of the whole people of God to share the mission of Christ in and to the world.

New insights which women are making known about themselves and their awakened expectations of full participation in the life of church and society, pose theological and pastoral challenges and open up new possibilities. These have to be addressed together within the framework of a genuine community of men and women in church and society.

There is the challenge to the churches arising both from the remarkable progress in the multilateral studies of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council and at the same time from the proliferation and intensification of bilateral theological dialogues. Some of the latter, in which the Roman Catholic Church is engaged, have reached a stage that is of considerable significance for the partners and the ecumenical movement as a whole. How the further steps are to be taken will be inevitably a matter affecting all churches and will be of significance for the Faith and Order work where there is active Roman Catholic participation.

7. Acknowledging continuing differences

This brief survey of the relationship since the Joint Working Group came into being indicates progressive growth and convergence as well as the emergence of new problems.

As the JWG moves into a new phase of its work, there is a more realistic assessment of the differences between the two parent bodies, particularly on the international level, which still justify the answer given when the possibility of Roman Catholic membership in the Council was raised in the early 1970s - "not in the immediate future." Nor is it a question which is yet ready to be taken up again.

Among the reasons given are the way in which authority is considered in the Roman Catholic Church. It believes itself to be constituted as a "universal fellowship with a universal mission and structure as an essential element of its identity" (IV. Report, II). Thus it gives importance to the differences of structure between itself and the WCC member churches, and the differences of operation on a world level. Acknowledging this condition, a sense of realism has developed in the relationship which combines mutual respect and a practical attitude in face of the differences and the convergences achieved by two decades of experience.

The Roman Catholic Church acknowledges its responsibility within the one ecumenical movement and accepts the challenge of undertaking increased collaboration with the World Council of Churches and its member churches, despite its own non-member status.

The question asked in the Fourth Report remains valid: "How can the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, without forming one structured fellowship, intensify their joint activities and thereby strengthen the unity, the common witness, and the renewal of the churches?" The guidelines for the Joint Working Group as formulated in the Fourth Report have provided a clear orientation and framework and are here reaffirmed. If they are fully implemented, the Joint Working Group can be a more visible sign and expression of the relationship, in its role of servant to the two partners.

II. FUNCTIONS AND OPERATIONS OF THE JOINT WORKING GROUP

The description of the function of the JWG given in the Fourth Report continues to be an adequate indication of what it is and the way it works. It is intended to enable the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches to evaluate together the development of the ecumenical movement. As before it will be a joint group with continuity of membership and sufficient breadth of representation from both sides. As an instrument of the parent bodies it is in close contact with them and accountable to them.

1. Functions

The Joint Working Group aims primarily at discovering and assessing promising new possibilities for ecumenical development. It has the task of stimulating the discussion on the ecumenical movement and of being a challenge to the parent bodies by proposing new steps and programs.

The Joint Working Group endeavors to interpret the major streams of ecumenical thought and action in the Roman Catholic Church and in the member churches of the World Council of Churches. It facilitates the exchange of information about the progress of the ecumenical movement, especially at the local level.

The Joint Working Group seeks to establish collaboration between the various organs and programs of the Roman Catholic Church and of the World Council of Churches. In accordance with the principles and procedures of its parent bodies it encourages the genuine development of a relation which will facilitate such collaboration. To do so it draws upon the insights gained from local experience. As in the past, it remains a consultative group, not an operative agency. It may be empowered by the parent bodies to develop and administer programs it has proposed when this is called for.

As the Joint Working Group seeks to initiate and help keep alive the discussion on the implications of the

ecumenical movement in the Roman Catholic Church and in member churches of the World Council of Churches, it also seeks the best means of communicating its findings and recommendations. An essential aspect of its task is to share its findings with its parent bodies.

2. Collaborators

The Joint Working Group seeks to be in contact with a large number and range of ecumenical organizations and programs, especially on the local level. It may call upon various offices and programs of the parent bodies for assistance when special help is needed in certain areas in the process of collaboration. It also seeks information and advice from individuals and organizations which have particular ecumenical experience and competence.

3. Style of Operation

As the Joint Working Group seeks to meet the needs of the churches, the style of collaboration must be kept flexible. It must be adaptable to the various and changing needs. Therefore, it seeks to keep new structures to a minimum, while concentrating on ad hoc initiatives, as they are required by the actual developments within the ecumenical movement. On occasion, of course, particular projects may call for some structural organization which will be set up after due authorization. Flexibility of style does not mean unplanned activity or lack of accountability. Rather it means more careful attention to the setting of priorities and to the use of resources.

III. ACTIVITIES OF THE JOINT WORKING GROUP 1975-1983

In its Fourth Report the Joint Working Group gave a prospective outline of priorities for collaboration and joint action in the years following 1975. Three of them have engaged the Joint Working Group in a major degree and call for description in this section.

A. PRIORITIES FOR COLLABORATION

1. *The Unity of the Church - the Goal and the Way*

This question had featured prominently in the initial reflections of the Joint Working Group when it was in process of formation. It was introduced again in order to look at new common perspectives coming out of theological discussions involving the Roman Catholic Church and member churches of the World Council of Churches over the preceding decade. For since the Joint Working Group had come into being, a number of old questions concerning unity had been clarified. A study so wide in its implications would need to go on over a number of years and it was to be structured in three parts:

- (1) identification of the convergences beginning to appear between the RCC and WCC member churches;
- (2) studies and consultations on the goal of unity, with mention of (a) elements of unity, (b) the Church as sign and instrument;
- (3) consideration of the way to unity, i.e. the visible interim steps that lead to the goal.

The Joint Working Group itself took up the first of these in its meeting in 1977 as it looked at work already done and especially at the convergences in basic areas of faith and order. It had before it this material.

- draft notes on convergences between the RCC and the WCC
- reactions to the Faith and Order report, "One Baptism, One Eucharist and a Mutually Recognized Ministry";
- reactions to a survey on the extent to which churches have agreed on the mutual recognition of baptism, as administered by each other (the survey was published as Faith & Order Paper N. 90).

The Joint Working Group felt its work on this first part of the topic was only an initial step which would have to be developed in the future and this task still remains to be done.

Since the Joint Working Group is not itself an organ of study it sought the help of the Faith and Order Commission in organizing the second part of the study. Using the plans developed by the joint Working Group, the Commission organized a consultation at Venice in 1978 on the issue of unity in faith. From this came a report which, after revision by the JWG and by a number of theologians from various traditions was published as the Faith and Order Study Paper N. 100 with the title, "Towards a Common Profession of Faith." It makes these points:

- Ecumenical growth will require agreement on a common profession of faith;
- the essential elements of such a profession are known to us through the witness of the apostolic community transmitted in the Scriptures;
- the ancient professions of faith were developed in response to particular challenges and tensions;
- the needs of the contemporary world could lead the churches to give new emphasis to different aspects of the apostolic texts;
- diversity of doctrinal expressions in the divided churches is not always a sign of dividedness in the faith.

The significance of this phase of the study is that a first step has been taken to speak together of the one apostolic faith and of the convergences in theological understanding which can help Christians to move towards professing it together. Thus the study has started with a crucial point from which it can now move to the questions raised originally by the Joint Working Group.

The significance for the study of the other work being done in the Faith and Order Commission (where twelve Catholic theologians are members) ought to be noted. Since its 1978 meeting at Bangalore the Commission has had its own long-term study project, "Towards the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith Today." It had already identified this as one of the requirements for unity, along with the need for agreement on baptism, Eucharist and ministry. The study is being continued, preliminary reports have been published, and are now being put to WCC member churches and the RCC for response. This is a new and important step for the growth in theological convergence and has implications for the RC relation with the WCC, as member churches and the RCC are invited to look at the implications of this work.

The *Third part* of the study has concentrated on current forms of ecumenical collaboration, especially councils of churches, as illustrating ways to unity. At its meeting in 1979 the Joint Working Group outlined a proposal for developing this theme and an exploratory consultation was held in Venice in 1982 focusing on the role of councils of churches and "preconciliar structures" in promoting visible interim steps towards unity. The consultation reflected on the role of councils of churches as a means of meeting and mutual recognition, and of growing together towards full communion. It also looked at the importance of RC involvement in councils for fulfilling this role.

There are other elements which relate to the study. One was mentioned by the JWG in its Fourth Report when it spoke of the need "for an evaluation of the relation of bilateral confessional dialogues to one another and to multilateral conversations." Something was done towards this when between 1978 and 1980 the secretaries of Christian World Communions, the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and the Faith & Order Commission organized three sessions of a forum on bilateral dialogues which has enabled an exchange of information and some reflection on the necessary interaction between multilateral and bilateral approaches to unity within the one ecumenical movement.

2. Common Witness

This was the second of the principal questions to engage the Joint Working Group in the period after Nairobi and it was a major topic for discussion in its meeting in 1977. In the late 1960s the JWG had already done a study which was published in 1970 under the title "Common Witness and Proselytism." Meanwhile, common witness at all levels had increased greatly and took many new forms. Together with the rapid changes in society and in human relations, this seemed to warrant a new look at the topic. It was decided to begin with actual experience and the Ecumenical and Missiological Institute of Leiden generously enabled a survey to be made with a reflective analysis of the data obtained. This was the starting point for further work done in small groups and then in a larger consultation at Venice in 1979. The text produced was submitted to the JWG which authorized its publication at the beginning of 1981 with an appendix which contains examples from several countries of various kinds of common witness. It has been published, not as a definitive document, but as a working paper which can stimulate discussion and obtain reactions.

To appreciate the development to which the new study testifies it may be useful to compare the two studies commissioned by the Joint Working Group. That of 1970 began as an attempt to confront the problem of proselytism. While remaining somewhat marked by its problem-orientation, it was able to move forward to an effort at articulating the value of common Christian witness. This study remains a valuable point of departure and a resource for further work, but it needed to be reviewed in light of what has happened since 1970.

The 1981 study takes up parts of the previous document that had not been sufficiently utilized and expands others that require development. Its major thrust is an attempt to develop the notion of common witness on the basis of a new

understanding of unity and mission. The genuine practice of common witness on the local level in so many places has put the problem of proselytism in a different light, even if it is still a difficulty in new ways in some places. The study, in trying to reflect on and evaluate the new rich heritage of common witness, aims at drawing the attention of the churches to the importance of such witness for the unity that is sought and for the ecumenical movement as a whole. It also takes into consideration the factors which have stimulated common witness since 1971 and the difficulties which have impeded it. Here one sees the relevance of the examples which are attached as an appendix.

The timeliness of the new study and the need for such an instrument of sensitization may be seen by looking at two recent major statements on common witness. The first is taken from the report of the World Missionary Conference held at Melbourne in May 1980:

“In celebrating, we witness to the power of the Gospel to set us free. We can only celebrate in honesty if the churches realize the damage done to their common witness by the scandal of their comfortable life in division - we believe that unless the pilgrimage route leads the churches to visible unity, in the one God we preach and worship, the one Christ crucified for us all, the one Holy Spirit who creates us anew, and the kingdom, the mission entrusted to us in this world will always be rightly questioned” (*Your Kingdom Come*, p. 201).

The second is from an address given by Pope John Paul II:

“...Yes, the urgent duty of Catholics is to understand what this witness must be, what it implies and requires in the life of the Church... In all situations, according to circumstances, it would be necessary to endeavor, with great pastoral wisdom, to discover the possibilities of joint witness of Christians. Doing so, we will come up against the limits that our divergences still impose on this witness and this painful experience will stimulate us to intensify the effort towards a real agreement in faith ... It is necessary to advance in this direction with prudence and courage” (Address to the Plenary of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, Feb. 8, 1980, *Information Service* 43(1980/II).

3. Social Collaboration

From the time of the Second Vatican Council there has been quite a range of collaboration in the social field between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches. It took place in the context of the whole relationship between the two bodies and of the activity of the joint Working Group which concerned itself with this field from the beginning. Hence there was exchange of information, regular consultation and various contacts and efforts of collaboration between the agencies on each side.

a) A common effort was launched in 1968 with the setting up of SODEPAX as a joint venture of the Pontifical Commission, Justice and Peace, and the World Council of Churches. Described as “an ecumenical experiment,” it was given a three year mandate to awaken the Christian churches and their members to a realization of their obligations to promote social justice, human development and peace. With a competent staff, SODEPAX made a widespread response to local initiatives and began to work in six program areas - social communications, education for development, mobilization for peace, development research, theological reflection, work with peoples of other faiths.

After thorough reassessment SODEPAX continued with a much smaller staff and program, for three further mandates until 1980. In this period it concentrated on its program of education for development in the sense of awareness building. It served as a liaison between the Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace and the Unit of Justice and Service of the World Council of Churches, stimulating them to extend and intensify the already existing collaboration. In more recent times it issued a regular bulletin, “Church Alert.” SODEPAX maintained its local contacts and continued to act as a catalyst for some initiatives. It has been in making study and information resources for joint initiatives available to local situations, that SODEPAX perhaps rendered the greatest service.

However as a joint venture SODEPAX continually came up against problems concerning its own structure and function as well as the limits of the whole relation between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches. And this rendered its operation at times unduly difficult. It also happened that the whole wide range of social collaboration tended to become limited to what SODEPAX itself was doing. As a consequence initiatives that might have been taken up by the various responsible bodies on each side were neglected. Hence in 1980 it was decided that SODEPAX be discontinued.

b) Meanwhile, both within the churches and between them, differences on social ethics became acute in new ways.

Different ecclesial presuppositions, divergent attitudes to the role of ideologies, different approaches to methods of social and political changes, different stands on questions of sexual ethics, different understanding of the relation of Church and Society are some examples. So in 1975 while mapping out its program for the period after the World Council's Nairobi Assembly, the Joint Working Group listed collaboration in social thought and action among its priorities.

The present report deals only with activities between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches on the international level. But the ecumenical effort affected concrete situations and attitudes and brought about collaboration at all levels. Hence it is clear that although they are not mentioned in this report, all initiatives at the local, national and regional levels have a special importance. The Joint Working Group, insofar as it is within its competence, wants to promote and sustain them in their development and wider diffusion.

A new discussion began at the JWG meeting at Le Louverain in 1979 when an outline was formulated for a study on collaboration in social thought and action. Three areas for the work were pointed up: a) the respective characteristics of the two partners as they act in the social field. This would be an attempt to take seriously the difference in nature between them and the different styles of operation it implies; b) the areas of apparent convergence on issues of social ethics, and those of obvious divergence; c) points on which it is desirable to deepen and enrich the joint reflection of the RCC and the WCC. In specifying this plan further, the JWG in 1980 gave its opinion that the differences in structure and operation need to be taken fully into account if progress is to be made, emphasizing at the same time that "the differences in almost every case are not such as to prevent collaboration but rather call for sensitivity and careful planning to achieve coordination of efforts, participation in each other's studies and programs, or common action according to the circumstances. For what ultimately matters and indeed determines whether structures and styles of operation are experienced as helps or hindrances is the will to work together effectively" (Minutes of the JWG 1980, Marseilles).

The JWG was aware both that new means of expressing the collaboration would have to be sought, and that it was also necessary to find better instruments for the whole relation in this field. Therefore the JWG proposed a consultation to look at the structures and styles of operation on both sides and to find flexible intermediate instruments to reinforce the collaboration and develop new forms to express it. The consultation took place in March 1981 and the aide-mémoire it produced was given to the relevant organisms on each side in the hope that it might enable further steps to be taken together.

c) Until the present this study has been an effort to respond to the facts of the situation and to find ways to move ahead in developing the partnership between the bodies on each side. Because both the RCC and the WCC wished to find a concrete visible means to foster further collaboration, the JWG developed the idea of a new flexible body which would assist it in planning, perform a liaison function, and serve as a sign of the ecumenical will to work together. After the conversations of the Joint Working Group on social collaboration at Le Louverain and Marseilles, the Executive of the JWG advocated the setting up of a joint consultative group for social thought and action.

The constituent members of this joint consultative group are the sub-units of Unit II: i.e. the Commission on Inter Church Aid, Refugee and World Service (CICARWS), the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA), the Commission on the Churches' Participation in Development (CCPD), the Christian Medical Commission (CMC), the Program to Combat Racism (PCR), as well as one representative of each of the program Units: Faith and Witness, and Education and Renewal. On the Catholic side they are: the Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace, the Pontifical Council Cor Unum, the Pontifical Council for the Laity, the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. It is an interim structure to give visibility to the collaboration between the staffs on each side. It does not make decisions but is to help orientate the collaboration in the social field, to facilitate its coordination, and advise the Joint Working Group, where appropriate, suggesting initiatives to the JWG and to its participating bodies as well as receiving suggestions from them. It is to hold three meetings and then its role and continued existence will be reviewed.

The Joint Consultative Group considers its experience to date a positive one. It has allowed a general exchange of information and has proposed areas to be pursued, notably an effort of catechesis in the field of peace and disarmament and joint reflection on social involvement and proclamation of the Gospel. The joint Consultative Group can also provide a framework within which questions of immediate collaboration between the various commissions concerned with issues of justice and service in the WCC and the corresponding bodies of the RCC can be stimulated, further clarified, and organized on a more regular and organic basis. It seems it may be expected to play a modest but useful role in an area where more needs to be done. It feels that its initial period will help in finding more long-term forms of collaboration and foresees the possibility of its own continuance.

d) Relations between individual offices of the Holy See and sub-units of the World Council continued and intensified in the period 1975-1983:

- CICARWS, CCPD, and the Christian Medical Commission carried on various kinds of collaboration with the Pontifical Commission, Justice and Peace, and the Pontifical Council, Cor Unum. This included participation in each other's meetings, work groups and study groups as well as providing information and expertise for one another's works. It was helped by means of joint staff meetings between some dicasteries and some of the sub-units, which clarified positions and mutually enriched outlook and programs. One result of these joint staff meetings is the recent joint publication by CCIA/PCJP of the volume "Peace and Disarmament" (Documents of the World Council of Churches and of the Roman Catholic Church).

- There has been a special relationship between the Christian Medical Commission, the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity (since 1971) and Cor Unum. Among other things, this made it possible to have a Roman Catholic consultant with the CMC staff until summer 1979. Since then the position has not been filled. CMC invites Cor Unum, together with other RC participants, to all its meetings. CMC has participated in Cor Unum study groups on Health. There is cooperation at national and local levels which focuses especially on primary health-care and is expressed through more than twenty national coordinating offices for health, and through joint efforts in the procurement of pharmaceutical supplies.

- The Commission Justice and Peace has developed a relationship with Church and Society sub-unit through the latter's study, "Faith, Science and Technology."

B. ONGOING COLLABORATION

The mandate of the JWG requires it to initiate and promote collaboration between the organs and programs of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches. Throughout this past period it has supported many forms of collaboration which give significant expression to the relation between the two parent bodies. In addition to what has already been mentioned in preceding sections, the following are worthy of note:

1. *Commission on Faith and Order*

For almost 15 years the Commission on Faith & Order has had a number of Roman Catholic theologians among its official members. This has enabled the Commission to draw increasingly on RC participation of agreed statements on Baptism, Eucharist and the Ministry and in the broader effort to explore the conditions of a common confession of the apostolic faith today which incorporates the results of the study initiated by the Joint Working Group.

2. *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*

The Secretariat of the Commission on Faith & Order and the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity gave continued to convene an international group to prepare the common material for the celebration of this week, based on proposals coming each year from an ecumenical group in a particular country. The Week of Prayer continues to be of great significance in stimulating local ecumenical initiatives. The prayer cycle "For all God's People" offers a means of developing a new pattern of mutual intercession.

3. *Relationships with Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME)*

For several years a number of Roman Catholic missionary orders which work with the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples have established a consultative relationship with the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism of the WCC. They have also sent observer consultants to attend the meetings of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism. This collaboration has been particularly important for RC participation in the World Missionary Conference of CWME at Melbourne in 1980, as well as for the study on Common Witness, initiated by the Joint Working Group.

4. *Dialogue with People of Living Faiths*

Though not structured in ways comparable to the collaboration in the areas of Faith & Order and World Mission and Evangelism, a very fruitful cooperation has developed between the WCC Working Group on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies and the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Christian. In recent years attention has focused on dialogue with Muslims and both sides attach great importance to the continuation of this relationship.

5. *Ecumenical Institute, Bossey*

A new field of collaboration has opened up around the program of the Ecumenical Institute with the presence of

some RC students, a RC Board member, and the visit of the Graduate School to Rome each year at the end of its course.

For some time the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity has endeavored to ensure an effective RC presence with the teaching staff of the Ecumenical Institute both for the period of the Graduate School and the major courses sponsored by the Institute.

6. *The Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Vancouver, July/August 1983*

Since the time of the Second Vatican Council it has become increasingly possible for the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches to participate and in some way share in each other's great events. The Assembly of Vancouver offers also to the Roman Catholic Church the occasion to celebrate the ecumenical movement and renew its ecumenical commitment, even though it will be less directly involved in those aspects of the Assembly which make it the highest legislative body of the Council. There will be twenty Roman Catholic delegated observers at the Assembly as well as some advisers and guests. There is a considerable effort being made to inform Roman Catholics on various levels of the Assembly and to awaken an intelligent interest in it and to invite them to support it by prayer. By means of reports from several study consultations a RC contribution is also being made to the study process in the Assembly.

IV. PROPOSALS FOR FUTURE WORK

Before submitting proposals for its future work, the Joint Working Group wants to draw attention to a concern which applies equally to all areas of its activities. In the mandate of the JWG, given in the Fourth Report and reaffirmed here, hope is expressed that the JWG will "draw upon insights gained from local experience to foster... collaboration." Already in its interim account, published with the agreement of the parent bodies in 1980 (cf. "'Deepening Communion.' An Account of Current Work", *Ecumenical Review* 32, 2 (1980) 179ff), the JWG expressed its conviction "that it needs to receive greater visibility in order to stimulate local collaboration" (*ibid.*, 185). Examples were given there of how this objective could be achieved. They included the sharing of results of its deliberations with the constituencies on both sides, even at an interim stage, the sharing of study documents, visible gestures to highlight aspect of collaboration, visits, special meetings, using the Week of Prayer, and highlighting the Joint Working Group meeting itself.

1. *The way towards unity*

Were a reminder needed, the experience of the past decade would demonstrate that the necessary process of mutual clarification, study and negotiation is not itself enough to achieve unity. The ecumenical movement is an integral part of the whole reconciling work of Christ in which we participate most fruitfully by that holiness of life which is an identification with God's will. Essential to it is a conversion of heart and life both corporate and individual. This must vivify and motivate the necessary renewal of present structures and provide the impulse not only to bring Christians together and enable them to accept each other but to arrive at a common confession of the one faith and reconciliation in one ministry. It is, in short, the conversion to that which God wills for the Church. This is the condition which is indispensable for all the other efforts to be fruitful.

Significant progress has been made in recent years through bilateral and multilateral dialogues, in cooperation between the JWG and Faith & Order, as well as through the forum on bilateral conversations, in sharpening the common understanding of the goal of unity as well as discerning essential elements and conditions of unity. While the JWG is not itself the place for dialogue as such, it does have to concern itself with the whole relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the member churches of the World Council and must therefore interest itself in the results of the dialogues and their meaning for unity. The JWG should maintain close contact with the work of the Commission on Faith & Order, especially in the area of a common expression of the apostolic faith and in the deepening of agreement on the understanding and practice of baptism, eucharist and the ministry. The publication of the convergence statement, "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" presents a considerable challenge also for the Catholic side as it becomes necessary to determine how far this work does represent a convergence in faith.

In continuing the earlier joint program on the "Unity of the Church, the Goal and the Way," outlined in 1976, the Joint Working Group proposes to focus attention on those parts which have not been sufficiently taken up, i.e., (1) a renewed reflection on the Church as sign and sacrament, coming back after more than a decade to its earlier ecclesiological study on "Catholicity and Apostolicity"; (2) a continuation of the review of ecumenical structures of collaboration, specifically councils of churches and the other interim structures which already express a unity "in via." In pursuing this study, attention should be given to the themes proposed by the exploratory consultation organized by the Faith & Order Commission and the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity in 1982 on the significance of councils of churches in the ecumenical movement. These include the following:

- the ecclesial importance of the “recognition” and “fellowship” experienced in a council of churches;
- the place of councils on the way towards visible unity, and their role in promoting movement from one stage to another;
- the interaction of local, national, regional and world “levels” as these affect the life of councils and their member churches;
- the relation of councils of churches to other forms of ecumenical collaboration.

Further, to emphasize the search for “visible interim steps,” the JWG sees potential value in a reflection on the possibilities of common worship including the sharing of liturgical and devotional resources, the ecumenical significance of the veneration of saints and the encouragement of informed, mutual intercession (See *For All of God’s People*, (Geneva: WCC, 1978)).

Finally, in line with the effort of recent years to face together the pastoral care of mixed marriages, it would be valuable to reflect on what has been happening. It might be possible to see how this pastoral collaboration could intensify and become more widespread so that a better witness be given to the growing unity between churches.

2. Common Witness

Work for the visible unity of the Church and common witness in the world are intimately related. The two studies published by the Joint Working Group - “Common Witness and Proselytism” (1970), and “Common Witness” (1981), bring evidence to show that common witness is one of the essential ways of discovering and deepening the unity which is given in Christ while the strongest form of common witness is the will of the churches to give visible expression to the communion which already exists among them. This communion is not yet complete but common witness serves to show in striking ways how it is growing, and is a means of deepening it. Inevitably in giving witness together, divided Christians are brought in new and painful ways to face the divisions which remain, yet this very experience becomes, through witness given together, an impelling motive to work for the fullness of visible communion. Common witness does not confuse or hide the issue of division but helps the churches live and act together before the world in the name of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It is thus a test and condition for the ecumenical movement.

Therefore, the JWG affirms common witness as one of its priorities. It will explore ways in which the relationship between the RCC and the WCC may give evidence of it. It has also to work out the implications of the 1981 document for possible action at world level by the RCC and the WCC. The document is translated into several languages and it must continue to be the task of the JWG to ensure that it is brought in an adequate way to the attention of the RCC and the WCC member churches for reflection, reaction and implementation, so that they may renew their commitment to witness in unity and may explore fuller possibilities of common witness in their respective situations.

Part of the task is also an articulation of the import of the theological perspectives on common witness, outlined in the study document, for the other studies on the unity of the Church, for the reception of the doctrinal convergences being reached by the churches, and ultimately for the achievement of a sharing in eucharistic communion.

In view of the desire expressed at the time of the Second Vatican Council for a common declaration on religious freedom, and giving account to the present situation in the world which elicited the recent statement of the World Council of Churches on religious liberty, it becomes desirable to explore the possibility of working together on the question of religious liberty to secure a common witness.

Recently the Joint Working Group has stressed the need to stimulate ecumenical awareness and to give a new ecumenical formation on regional and local levels by various endeavors of common witness. One means of doing this may be through a series of joint regional consultations over the next few years to explore in a practical way opportunities for common witness.

3. Social Collaboration

Common witness includes the efforts of the churches to act together in the defense and promoting of human dignity, the relief of human need and the affirmation of justice and peace which must be expressed in human relationships and in the structures of society. The concern for Christian social responsibility is an integral part of the apostolic mission of the Church. Missionary perspectives necessarily open on to solidarity with the poor, justice, peace, respect for human rights, while the social responsibility of the Church has its context in the proclamation of the Word and the opening of the

human spirit to the transcendent.

This area however has also an integrity of its own and should continue to be seen by the JWG as belonging to its proper field of concern. Recognizing that social collaboration will continue to be conditioned by the differences in structure and method of working in the RCC and the WCC, the Joint Working Group should not cease to encourage the development of flexible forms of collaboration on the international as well as on national and local levels.

Despite the doctrinal differences among the churches, in recent years, an ecumenical convergence has been growing in the understanding of several issues in social ethics. Recognizing this convergence the JWG should look for ways which could help to make visible to a wider audience the joint commitment to these elementary affirmations about Christian social responsibility which are in conformity with the common Christian faith. In accordance with its earlier discussion at Le Louverain (1979), the JWG sees value in exploring possibilities of common pastoral and catechetical guidance and common work in the following areas

“a) Development: There is, for example, agreement that structural changes are required in the international economic order to correct inequities and spread the use of resources and the benefits of technology among all peoples.

b) Peace: Agreement exists, among other points, that the madness of the arms race diverts resources from development, increases the threat of force in international dispute, and creates the conditions for the destruction of the human race.

c) Human Rights: Based on inherent human dignity, the ‘image of God’ in us, and on our common redemption in Christ, the rights (inter alia) to life, to access to health care, to work, to a decent standard of living, to cultural identity, to education, to participation in public life, to dissent for consciences’ sake, to physical and psychological integrity, to freedom from torture, and to religious liberty, must be safeguarded by international agreement” (see Minutes of the JWG, Le Louverain, 1979).

Attention should also be given to the possibility of encouraging initiatives in the area of racism and concerning the role of women.

In addition, the Joint Working Group had noted in 1979 that there are on which convergence is lacking and which need to be explored further before common action could be possible. “These differences appear among the member churches of the WCC as well as between some of them and the Roman Catholic Church: the pattern of difference changes with the issues include: Aspects of the roles of women and men in the life of the community; patterns of family life, birth control and sexual ethics; forms and means of responding to the need for social change; and methodological approaches to ethics.

Finally, the Joint Working Group should look for ways to enrich and deepen the joint reflection of the WCC and the RCC on basic theological and ecclesiological themes which constitute the necessary background for deeper mutual understanding of ecumenical social responsibilities. Such themes are the relation of the Kingdom of God to this world, the role of faith in social problems, the relation between evangelism and struggle for justice in society, the action of the churches and the role of laity, the modes of intervention of the Church in the secular realm of society.

On a more practical level the JWG should entourage appropriate initiatives to come to a closer and more effective coordination between the network of RCC and WCC related service agencies at various levels in the area of aid and relief, in order to avoid the possibilities of divisive effects of separate programs for local communities.

It is important to find ways of sharing information about the considerable volume of ecumenical work going on in local situations and to evaluate this so that a fruitful interaction may be achieved between initiatives at various levels.

4. Ecumenical Formation

The JWG insists on the present urgency of the task of ecumenical formation. It stresses that the improved relations between still separated Christians are not enough. The scandal of Christian division and their deleterious effect on Christian witness continues to obscure the saving power of Christ’s Grace. God’s plan to sum up all things in Christ requires to be shown forth in the common proclamation of the one apostolic faith and in the communion of the one visible eucharistic fellowship and to be an active power in drawing the human community into reconciliation and oneness. Hence the need to deepen an understanding of the mystery of the Church.

Ecumenical formation is a process which includes several elements. It means imparting information about what God is doing through the ecumenical movement to draw his people into one. It entails learning about existing differences between Christians and their churches and about the new convergences being achieved. Such learning comes both from obtaining the relevant information and from involvement in the deeper levels of experience in the life of the Christian community at worship, in service and in witness. It comes too in the acknowledgment and practice of responsibility towards each other by communities of separated Christians as well as by their engagement in various forms of ecumenical dialogue.

The ecumenical dimension is an indispensable part of all processes of Christian formation and nurture, be it the formation of laity, youth work, programs of catechesis and religious education or theological training. Today many people, especially those participating in programs of laity formation, receive their most significant experience of the ecumenical dimension in the common effort for justice, peace and development. Such initiatives touch on urgent problems and bring Christians together in the exercise of responsibility for building the whole human community as well as relating global issues to daily action.

Reflection on the nurturing character of all these experiences is needed. It is clear that further ways have to be found of bringing together the different processes of learning, relating formal teaching processes to informal methods of learning (such as conscientization). This can also help Christians to appreciate the necessary relation between the goal of the unity of the Church and the concern for the unity of mankind.

Much has to be done if ecumenical formation is to become a full part of the whole Christian ministry. The impact of ecumenical initiatives among educators often remains on the professional level and insufficiently communicates with or benefits from the experience of parish and local communities. Promising new forms of Christian formation at various levels still often do not take sufficient account of the ecumenical movement and its role in the mission of the Church. More attention could be given to the ecumenical process found in frequent local and spontaneous efforts of local and spontaneous joint study and action (e.g., during Lent, etc.).

The formal catechetical programs of various churches often take the ecumenical dimension for granted. It is necessary to spell it out sufficiently and to exploit the new theological convergences. Opportunities of joining in common action with regard to catechetical materials or syllabuses, where this is possible (see the Apostolic Exhortation of pope John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*), must not be missed.

Young people have a new experience and often relate to events in the world with a special sensitivity. Better ways must be found of alerting them to the ecumenical dimension and its place in the total responsibility of Christians to and for each other and for the world. As they face life they need help to discern and to use those living situations where ecumenical learning takes place. In this they will need the wisdom and support of those who have pastoral and teaching roles in the Church. Likewise those who have leadership in the churches have to show confidence in young people and react with sensitivity to the contribution which they will make.

Another crucial area is that of theological education and particularly the education of pastors, perhaps the most influential point in ecumenical sensitization. There is a great range of possibilities but even where there are joint or collaborative faculties and programs more could be done to draw out their potential with the support and guidance of those responsible in the various churches. In some seminaries homage is paid to ecumenical ideals while there is an absence of any formal teaching about the ecumenical movement or its history and its theological, spiritual and pastoral significance for the Christian community. As well as trying to include the ecumenical dimension in the courses on theology it seems still necessary to have also courses which give explicit information and reflection on the ecumenical movement.

At this point in the history of the ecumenical movement and of the relations between the RCC and the WCC and its member churches a new effort has to be made to assess and use more effectively the resources for this basic task of ecumenical formation.

5. Continuing Collaboration

It will be the task of the Joint Working Group to look carefully at what can be done to develop and extend the regular pattern of collaboration and common effort with the various sub-units of the World Council of Churches. In several instances it is substantial and has its own rhythm and style, in others it is still necessary to be on the watch for possibilities of deepening what are as yet only initial contacts. There are several areas where immediate work has to be done.

a) Faith & Order

With completion of the study “Baptism, Eucharist and a Mutually Recognized Ministry” it is now important to find the right ways of obtaining reactions. First steps were taken at an earlier stage in the work and these did involve some Catholic theological faculties. Now the effort has to be made on a wider scale to have the document known and to test its conclusions so that the convergence in faith which it represents may become part of the consciousness of Christian people. Further necessary progress can take place only if discussion is aroused on all levels, especially on the implications of the convergences for the relationship between the churches.

A similar task has to be done with the study “Toward a Common Expression of the One Apostolic Faith Today,” although this is not yet in its final stages.

b) Dialogue with Other Faiths and Ideologies

The pattern of contact and exchange of collaboration now seems to have developed to the point where one or other initiative of common program could be undertaken and ways of giving visible and structured expression to the relationship be explored.

c) Community of Women and Men in Church and Society

Work on this theme has been done on the Roman Catholic side and is actively being pursued in the World Council of Churches. It involves many of the major issues of today seen from the angle of the involvement and responsible participation of men and women in the life of society. It seems desirable to do more towards a sharing of information and resources and, if possible, coordination of work with consideration given eventually to common efforts in evaluation and follow-up. It could be interesting also, and not only in connection with this question, to look together at the changes on each side in the understanding of the role of the laity over the last thirty years.

d) Joint Staff Meetings

Meetings between the staff of the individual responsible Roman dicasteries and the corresponding sub-unit of the World Council of Churches have proved their usefulness for exchange of information, mutual sharing of resources and discovering ways of developing the partnership. They already take place regularly between the Pontifical Commission justice and Peace with the Churches’ Commission on International Affairs and with the Churches’ Commission for Participation in Development, between the Dialogue with Living Faiths and Ideologies and the Secretariat for Non-Christians, between the Program for Theological Education and the Congregation for Catholic Education, between the Pontifical Council for the Laity and the Unit on Education and Renewal. It is important to be alert to new possibilities for bringing other partners from each side into such a regular contact.

V. THE FUTURE OF THE JOINT WORKING GROUP IN THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

1. The Joint Working Group was set up in 1965 by the RCC and the WCC as a manifestation of their need to work together in the ecumenical movement.

Its task was described as being to clarify the principles and methods of ecumenical collaboration while giving due account to the differences between its parent bodies, one a world-wide Church, the other a Council of churches. It has continued to emphasize, as was evident in the Fourth Report in 1975, the common ground between the churches engaged in the ecumenical movement, and affirmed the real though imperfect communion that already exists between the Roman Catholic Church and the churches in the fellowship of the World Council of Churches.

So the JWG expresses the will of member churches of the WCC and the RCC to meet, to grow in mutual recognition and to find new ways to be together in the service of unity and mission. Its structure is modest but with the confidence and support of its parent bodies it acts as a continuing reminder to the churches engaged in the ecumenical movement that dialogue and action, the restoration of communion and the commitment to common witness, to the unity of the Church and the renewal of the human community, belong together. So it attends to both the theological and the social and pastoral dimensions and tries to stimulate the interaction between all levels of ecumenical work. It is an instrument of its parent bodies with the task of keeping prominently before them and before all Christian churches the urgent need to grow in communion and to manifest the existing fellowship of churches through common witness.

2. In the period which lies ahead the JWG must review the contacts and collaboration taking place between the subunits of the WCC and partners on the RC side and try to find appropriate ways to expressing them. It must continue to be a vantage point from which the whole relationship and its place in the ecumenical movement is

surveyed. It will address itself anew to its priorities for the next period-the unity of the Church, common witness and social collaboration. Most challenging is the attention it must give to ecumenical formation. This theme reflects a new perspective and is a response to an urgent need in the current ecumenical situation which calls for the deepening of ecumenical consciousness and the identification of realistic and visible steps which can be taken together.

In all of this it becomes always more necessary that the JWG draw insights from what is happening locally. Here case studies of ecumenical initiatives will have a larger role to play and special attention will need to be given to the aspirations and experiences of the major regions with all their diversity and new promise. In turn the JWG has to make an increasing effort to communicate what it is doing and the significance of this-in the first place always to its parent bodies as it interprets major streams of ecumenical thought and action in the RCC and in member churches of the WCC. Increasingly it must find effective ways to communicate this also to all who have ecumenical and pastoral responsibility as it discovers and assesses promising new possibilities for ecumenical development. The JWG is in many ways in a unique position both to stimulate its parent bodies by proposing new steps and programs, and to respond to some of the major streams of ecumenical thought and action, surveying, interpreting, encouraging and challenging. This will meet the demand that the JWG be more and more a point to reflect on and analyze important events which affect the unity willed by Christ for the Church and the renewal of the human community. Only so can it have resources to contribute to a new ecumenical mentality among Christians.

3. The Joint Working Group is a small body and its immediate aims necessarily limited, but the bodies it serves have a wide constituency and broad responsibilities. The time in which we live needs the ecumenical hope which it promotes. It is a sign that new obstacles to ecumenical advance must also be faced without hesitation. With its vivid memories of the past two decades of the ecumenical movement it can keep Christians from the RCC and the member churches of the WCC aware of the great change that has taken place, helping them to consolidate these gains in the life of the Christian fellowship and to go along joyfully with what God is doing to bring his people into one.

June, 1982

[*Information Service* 53 (1983/IV) 104-119]