

**LUTHERAN-ROMAN CATHOLIC DIALOGUE**  
**ANNIVERSARY OF 200<sup>th</sup> MEETING**

*Gerard Kelly*  
*Catholic co-chair*

1. As we mark this occasion of the 200<sup>th</sup> meeting of the dialogue, I would like to pay tribute to all who have been part of this dialogue. By my calculations, the past and present Catholic members of the dialogue add up to thirty-seven people. Together, they have brought us to where we are today. [Names of members, present, past and deceased were read out]. Please allow me to share just a few reflections on my experience of the dialogue.
2. My first contact with the dialogue came not long after I began my teaching career as a lecturer at Catholic Institute of Sydney in 1986. The first course I taught was on the Eucharist. One component of the course was the results from ecumenical dialogues, so we looked at *Sacrament and Sacrifice*. I had heard that after the document had been published there was a response from the relevant church bodies, so I wrote to Archbishop Faulkner to ask if I could have access to this for use in my class. This is the response I received from him.

Dear Fr Kelly,

Last Friday the Lutheran/Roman Catholic Dialogue discussed your request for a copy of the Responses made by the Churches.

All agreed that I forward to you the Responses and the Clarification of the Dialogue team.

The Dialogue has been a great experience for us all, and I hope that you and your students will be able to capture something of the spirit of ecumenism and ‘conversion’ which we have experienced.

With Easter greetings and prayers,

Yours sincerely in Christ,

+ Leonard A. Faulkner

Archbishop of Adelaide

I was taken by Archbishop Faulkner’s comment on the experience of the dialogue and the conversion that was part of the experience. This was a good introduction to the significance of this dialogue. It was something I would come to appreciate over a decade later when I joined the dialogue.

As an aside, a month after Archbishop Faulkner’s letter I received a letter from the Secretary of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference enclosing a copy of the response from the

Australian Catholic Bishops. That letter concluded, “The Committee for Ecumenism approves your using the response with the students but asks you to note that it is only for PRIVATE USE.”

3. The second moment I want to recall was the work on justification. By this time, I had joined the dialogue – in the final year of the work on justification. This was a great moment of learning for me. Of course, our work was going on simultaneously with the international work that led to the JDDJ.

After JDDJ came out I was invited onto one of those Sunday late night radio programs in Sydney, which in those days would have some religious content. I was invited to speak about the achievement of the agreement on justification. The interviewer’s opening question was, “Well, who are the winners in this?” I was somewhat taken aback by his couching this in terms of winners and losers. Yet sadly that is how some people might perceive the work we have been doing. This was a far cry from Len Faulkner’s comment about conversion.

4. The third memory I have was not long after justification, when the Vatican issued the document *Dominus Iesus*. In one or two sentences it basically unchurched every Reformation church. This was a moment of crisis for the dialogue. Between meetings, the co-chairs had met with the two heads of church to discuss how we would respond. The maturity of the dialogue by then, and the relationship that had been forged between our two churches, allowed us to find a way forward to address what was a difficult question. We spent the next seven years on the document that became *The Ministry of Oversight: The Office of Bishop and President in the Church*.

This document became a sort of prelude to the most recent document, *The Petrine Ministry in a New Situation*. Both these documents, I believe, addressed matters that each of our churches were facing in our internal life and which was probably also affecting our mission. For Catholics, it was the question of synodality. This topic featured as a chapter in *The Ministry of Oversight* – if I remember rightly, as the insistence of Denis Edwards. From where we stand now – in the final week of a synod on synodality in Rome – we are all aware of just how important this topic is in the Catholic Church and how prescient the work of this dialogue was. It is interesting to note that some of the suggestions that seem to be emerging from the Synod in Rome were already foreshadowed in the work our dialogue did.

In this context, I should also note the publication earlier this year of a study document prepared by the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, *The Bishop of Rome: Primacy and Synodality in the Ecumenical Dialogues and in the Responses to Ut Unum Sint*. The work of our dialogue was often noted in this study document. In one place they referenced the work of

this dialogue: “On the basis of the Lutheran–Catholic dialogue in Australia and its reflection on Lutheran synodal practice, it has been suggested that, in addition to the Synod of Bishops, a new “General Pastoral Council” at the universal level of the Catholic Church, including lay faithful, could be created, following the model of parish and diocesan pastoral councils established after Vatican II” (155).

5. There is one final memory I have, and it is somewhat broader than the dialogue. It was the occasion of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation, which was commemorated here in Adelaide in 2016. On that occasion our church leaders signed a common statement. Of course, it has a different status to our dialogue documents; it is not just the work of theologians but is a statement from our churches. Still, I think the then forty years of dialogue played a large part in making that statement possible. The statement included a hope that the bishops and the Lutheran Church of Australia and the Bishops Commission for Church Unity of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference might meet together to consider the pastoral challenges and opportunities facing the churches. The statement concluded by saying: “We encourage all members of the Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church to hear from God a call to be continuously transformed by our encounter with each other and to be living witnesses to the power of the gospel”. I believe that the work of our dialogue helps make that a reality. It is what Len Faulkner wrote in that letter he sent me in 1987.
6. As I thought about this evening, there was an image that came to my mind, and it was a set of the stained-glass windows at Chartres Cathedral in France. The image has the four evangelists being carried on the shoulders of the four major prophets. It reminded me that the present generation is carried on the shoulders of the previous generations. As we mark the 200<sup>th</sup> meeting of the dialogue, we give thanks for those who have gone before us. We can recognise them as pioneers of change who followed a path of conversion. I hope the dialogue continues to spark the imagination of people in our churches so that hearing the word of God we may live as one body, one Spirit in Christ.