Your Grace, Eminences, Excellencies, Sisters and Brothers in Christ.

The origins of IARCCUM extend back fifty years, and are imbedded in the event we are marking today with this symposium to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the visit of Archbishop Michael Ramsey to Pope Paul VI in 1966. As we know, at that time, in their common declaration Pope and Archbishop called for serious dialogue “founded on the Gospels and on the ancient common traditions”.

Although we cannot know what shape this serious dialogue took in the minds of Pope and Archbishop, it is at least intriguing to think that it might have included a wish for an instrument that was IARCCUM shaped. How can we speculate on that? We now know that the Malta Joint Preparatory Commission, which followed up on the request of Archbishop and Pope in its 1968 report, proposed not only a theological dialogue, which became ARCIC, but also a Matrimonial Commission (to address issues of mixed marriages). But here is a fact that seemed to slip from our corporate memory: the Preparatory Commission proposed an instrument led by the hierarchy to work on such things as theological education, collaboration on projects, promotion of common prayer, and cooperation on mission strategy and activity. In fact it was only the theological dialogue, ARCIC, that took root at the international level. The Matrimonial Commission met 6 times to address the matter of mixed marriages and published its conclusions in 1975.

But the third proposal of the Archbishop and the Pope, for an instrument to be led by the hierarchy to work on practical collaboration in all areas of Church life, to lead to our growing together and working together for solutions to the problems of the world, lay dormant for several decades.

We need to acknowledge the importance of Archiepiscopal – Papal official visits. When Archbishop George Carey visited Pope St John Paul II in 1996 the two Church leaders stated that “it may be opportune at this stage in our journey to consult further about how the relationship between the Anglican Communion and the Catholic Church is to progress”. Their suggestion was the taking up of the third of the 1966 dimensions to our international dialogue, some 40 years later.

So work began to put flesh on the suggestion of Archbishop and Pope, and in May 2000 in the city of Mississauga,near Toronto, Canada, Archbishop Carey and Cardinal Edward Cassidy of the PCPCU convened a meeting of bishops, many of whom were Anglican Primates or RC presidents of Episcopal Conferences. This high level meeting was to consider how, after 35 years of theological dialogue, to bring the formal engagement of our Communions to a new stage of common life, in accordance with what Michael Ramsey and Paul VI and the Malta Joint Preparatory Commission had proposed.

We chose Canada as the venue as it was the country where there was a long and unbroken history of national ARC committee and joint bishops’ meetings. Primates, Archbishops or Senior Bishops from Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, Brazil, Canada, England, Ireland, India, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Southern Africa, Uganda, United States and the West Indies were invited. They came already as pairs from their country or region. There is something deeply scriptural about this, drawing from the Emmaus image of disciples journeying together.

For 6 days in May 2000 these bishops lived, prayed, studied, dreamed and discerned together. They were led in a review of the theological dialogue by Fr Jean-Marie Tillard. They listened to experiences from different regions of the world and were struck by the extent of common action for social justice and joint pastoral care in which Anglican and Roman Catholic clergy and lay people were involved. At the same time they were filled with concern at the problems that our disunity causes to the mission of the Church in a fragmented world.

When they reviewed systematically the results of ARCIC dialogue and appreciated the very impressive degree of agreement in faith that now exists, they concluded that as bishops – leaders of the Church’s mission – they now had no choice, they could no longer escape their serious joint responsibility to lead God’s people forward towards the unity which our Lord wills for his Church. They were compelled to affirm that our communion (albeit still not fully visible) could no longer be viewed in minimal terms; it was a rich, life-giving, multifaceted communion, in which the Churches were now able to bring shared gifts to their joint mission in the world.

So those 6 days in May 2000 were a profound time of conversion to furthering our path to unity, a *kairos* time. The bishops said “it is the time to bridge the gap between the elements of faith we hold in common and the tangible expression of that shared belief in our ecclesial lives”.

One of the outcomes of Mississauga was a most unusual document, the likes of which has been rarely seen in 2000 years of Church history. The bishops produced a statement, *Communion in Mission,* but also an Action Plan! The centre of that plan was the establishment of a new joint working group.

This working group visited Pope John Paul II and the Archbishop of Canterbury right away to get endorsement for its new work. In due course this working group became known as IARCCUM. In the meeting with Pope John Paul II he said some moving words which undergird the work of IARCCUM: “Only the experience of deeper communion will enable us to bear more effective witness to Christ in the world and to accomplish the mission which he has entrusted to us”.

This was the establishment of a unique instrument in the ecumenical world. IARCCUM is a type of commission that does not exist as far as we know between any two Churches at the global level. It is not just dialogue, not just cooperation, but makes manifest in common action, witness and prayer the very real fruit of our theological dialogue in ARCIC. And importantly it seeks to be faithful to one of the important agreements reached on the nature of episcopal ministry: that our bishops share in the task of promoting and building the unity of the Church, and of leading God’s people in the service of Christ’s mission in the world.

At our gathering over these days in Rome, which is actually part of a pilgrimage from Canterbury to Rome, our pairs of bishops come now from 19 countries or regions. We call them IARCCUM Bishops at Large. This builds on the model of the Mississauga meeting of 2000 when pairs of bishops, Anglican and Roman Catholic, were brought together from regions of the world. The Bishops at Large are jointly to give leadership to the Churches in their region in the work of IARCCUM, focussing on areas of communication of the fruits of the ARCIC dialogue, engaging in common work and witness, promoting local and national dialogue and study, and fostering common prayer.

Thus 50 years after the Archbishop Ramsey – Pope Paul VI meeting, we are inspired by and implementing their vision.

+David Hamid

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