

United Church Finds Uniting Easier Said Than Done

The purpose of the United Church of Canada is to be a uniting church. More ink has been used, therefore, on ecumenism than on any other subject. One of the seven presidents of the World Council of Churches is the Rev. Mrs. Lois Wilson, former moderator of the U.C.

In 1968 the then moderator Bruce McLeod worshipped with the Roman Catholics as part of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Objectors were considered behind the times and not obedient to the Holy Spirit.

McLeod said, "There are still those on each side, Protestant and Catholic, who are backing into the twenty-first century, their eyes fixed on divergent paths of long ago. But the day will not be theirs, God is not where they are looking. He is out in front, dragging us in spite of ourselves, and before we have fully made up our minds, into the unity of His love."

Forty years of negotiations For years the Anglican church was a main partner in merger talks. As early as 1885 the Church of England (Anglican) invited the Methodists and Presbyterian churches to confer on church union.

The present union negotiations began in 1943 at the invitation of the Anglicans. Since 1966 the Anglicans and United Churches worked together on Principles of Union. At the 1966 General Council of the UC these principles were adopted by an overwhelming vote.

In 1969 representatives of the UC and the Anglican church published "A Declaration of Faith." The authors said it was not intended "for use as a test of belief." It was drawn up as "a provincial statement subject to revision in the light of comments and continuing discussion." On the issue of authority and creeds it was said, "the church recognizes authority in the Scriptures and in tradition, and they are closely related. The Scriptures are the primary witness to Jesus Christ, the living Word. "The Bible was called "the story of a people's response to the revelation of God, who calls them to be His servants."

Some years later the Anglican House of Bishops released a "Statement of Counsel" in which it said, "We find ourselves agreed that the Plan of Union in its present form is unacceptable: most of us doubt that there is serious hope for a successful outcome of a further revision process."

UC Agreed, Anglicans Didn't

Since 1978 a joint Anglican United Task Force worked on a plan for formal, mutual recognition of those Anglican and UC ministers now serving both denominations. The UC agreed but the Anglicans didn't.

The proposal arose through the recognition of an established practice. In over 50 situations, in urban and rural congregations, and in chaplaincies, ministers of one or the other denomination served both church communities. Though the report stated that it was "not a plan of union," it was viewed by implication as a move "towards the mutual recognition of the ordained ' minister of the two churches."

Some UC leaders felt that the Anglican decision had led them further apart. Others sensed a "decided trend away from ecumenical work." Though UC leaders acknowledged "a feeling of hopelessness lately about achieving Christian unity," they still remain hopeful that someday the two denominations will be linked together.

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