

THE MALINES CONVERSATION GROUP

The Malines Conversation Group, under the patronage of Cardinal Godfried Danneels and The Right Reverend and Right Honourable Lord Williams of Oystermouth, seeks the renewal of the Church through focussed dialogue between Anglicans and Roman Catholics. This small, focussed international network of theologians has received the blessing of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity at the Vatican, and the Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth Palace. Like the Malines Conversations of the 1920s, the Group is a grass-roots gathering of theologians who have committed themselves to work for the unity of the Church according to Christ's will, and who see ecumenism, in the words of Pope St John Paul II as "an organic part of her life and work, which consequently must pervade all that she is and does." Christian witness is strengthened when the churches stand together as one, and is weakened by our divisions. We believe that the time is right for brave Christian decisions and hope-filled actions. The informal nature of our conversations gives us a degree of freedom to discern and determine subjects for reflection.

Desiring to stand in the tradition of the first Malines Conversations, convened by the visionary Cardinal Mercier of Mechelen (Malines), the Group's first meeting in March 2013 at the Monastery of Chevetogne in Belgium included reflection on socio-cultural, liturgical and ecclesial developments from the time of the Malines Conversations to the present, and on the anthropological dimension of liturgical experience in our two Communion. During the meeting, the Conversation participants joined the monks of Chevetogne for their worship, both in the Byzantine and Latin rite traditions. They also went on pilgrimage to Mechelen and joined in prayer at the tomb of Cardinal Mercier. Though not intentionally planned this way, the meeting was held during the same historic week as the inauguration of the Petrine Ministry of Pope Francis and the enthronement of Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, and was imbued with the hope which those events carried for the life of our two Communion, and the future of our relations.

A second meeting took place in April 2014 in Canterbury and London. This meeting focused on themes surrounding communion, memory and the future. We celebrated the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Vatican II Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, which stated, "Among those [churches] in which Catholic traditions and institutions in part continue to exist, the Anglican Communion occupies a special place." Fifty years on, we pray that our churches will find a new depth of communion and a new strength of common witness. The group met for daily worship and plenary discussion of academic papers, and for seminars with Cardinal Danneels and Lord Williams, as well as a meeting and discussion with Archbishop Justin Welby and Cardinal Vincent Nichols. The group was hosted in the House of Lords, and for a dinner in the Jerusalem Chamber of Westminster Abbey, attended by ecclesial and diplomatic representatives. In 2015, the Group will meet at Boston College, for discussions surrounding Sacramentality.

At the recommendation of those responsible for coordinating ecumenical relations in the Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion, the Malines Conversations Group will remain in close communication and collaboration with both the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) and the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission (IARCCUM). The number of participants is intentionally limited, to allow for the detailed conversation, and for the growth of friendship which characterised the first Malines Conversation.

