

'Faith' and 'Order':

**What are they
and how do they relate?**



A paper from the VCC Faith & Order Commission

This is a working document. It aims to inform others of the official position on the various Christian Churches in Victoria. We have endeavoured to describe these positions accurately; however the Faith & Order Commission does not speak for the Churches, nor has this document any authority from member Churches.

The poem on page 15, "The Church on the Hill", is by John O'Brien and is taken from *Around the Boree Log*, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1921 and is kindly reproduced with permission from HarperCollins Publishers.

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Introduction

Despite the talk of the 'winter of ecumenism' that Christians are felt to be shivering in, there is often a holy impatience amongst us that wants to ask, 'What are we waiting for – don't we all believe in the same thing – aren't we all united in our faith in Christ?' Yes! We can shout!

Then the 'Buts' and the 'Howevers' start. Faith in Christ 'Yes', but never infant baptism! Faith in Christ 'Yes', however we draw the line at insisting on apostolic succession! The way we shape or order our faith starts to separate us. This process cannot be ignored as merely secondary. People have gone to the stake over these things!

This short paper of the Faith and Order Commission of the Victorian Council of Churches hopes to provoke some reflection and reponse on the meaning of 'Faith' and 'Order' and how they relate to each other. It is intended for those who ponder on this tension between the common faith we in large part share, and yet heart-felt divisions still exist.

The members of the Commission commend it especially to church leaders and teachers, theological students and parishioners. All those in fact, who want to know a little more about why we Christians struggle to obey the Lord's command to be one (John 17:21)

Faith and Order

Most Christians have a reasonable idea of what 'faith' means, and appreciate its different facets – trust in God as revealed in Christ, and the content of Christian believing. Faith resists being tightly defined, but it takes shape as it is expressed. It is 'ordered' towards the life of faith, a life lived out in relationship with others. On the other hand, faith which is formless can be said to lack 'order', or even to be 'disordered'.

Yet 'order' for many Australians carries a negative tinge, of being 'ordered around', or 'boxed in'. Although it is not always a popular subject, it is differences about 'order' which largely divide Christians: who can be baptised, the meaning of ordained ('ordered') ministries, or what rules are to be followed in moral life, for example.

Australians respond to a vision which inspires a renewal of order. This is seen in community responses to great need, such as bushfire or flood. People offer amazing resources to restore 'order' in a broken situation, exercising enormous mutual faith and goodwill in the process. When there is a vision of faith-ful community, order is appreciated and sustained: but where order is perceived to be tyrannous, faith in others evaporates into suspicion.

The Christian vision is one of life lived in communion with the triune God, with one another, and with the whole creation. Faith in God which translates into faith in others does so through instruments of order which give shape and substance to vision.

This paper thus seeks to explore what 'faith' and 'order' mean in the light of this vision of communion, so as to strengthen our common life in Christ. It is especially concerned with how faith and order relate, and what matters about them for the task of seeking to deepen Christian unity.

A local ecumenical experience

A suburban Inter-Church Council was holding one of its periodical joint services. It was the turn of the Churches of Christ to host the service, to be held on a Sunday evening. (It is the usual practice of Churches of Christ to celebrate the Lord's Supper at the morning service weekly, as the central point of the service). The hosting minister announced his intention to include a celebration of the Lord's Supper in the joint service. He felt deeply 'convicted' that this was a necessary way of expressing unity as Christians.

At the ecumenical service, the only Catholic present was the president of the Inter-Church Council. Some ecumenically-aware members of the host church felt deeply embarrassed by what they perceived to be a great lack of sensitivity on the part of their minister. They felt that he had no understanding of the different theological positions held by Catholics and Protestants in relation to the Eucharist.

This event raises a host of questions. Would it have been better for the Inter-Church Council to have planned the service jointly, so that they could all own it? Could the host minister have explained the importance of the Lord's Supper for his tradition, inviting others present to observe prayerfully, so as to gain a greater understanding of that tradition?

There are also questions raised by this incident which go beyond planning a particular service. To what extent can an individual's 'conviction' go against their church's tradition? How do we balance the tangible expression of different traditions (their 'order') with the conviction of the essential unity of Christ's Church ('faith')? And are differing assumptions about 'faith', 'order' and 'unity' being hidden in these questions? Do differing visions of Christian communion / fellowship lie beneath the differing attitudes involved – could a common vision bring not only greater understanding, but also set forward practical steps towards deeper unity in faith and order?

If this paper is being considered by a group (which should be ecumenical in nature), it may be helpful to discuss these questions before going further:

How do you react to the minister's action, AND to the responses of others present?

Clearly the issues were sharp enough for some not to take part, or be embarrassed: can you identify some of these?

In what ways do you see 'order' and 'faith' described in this story?

What ideas of 'communion' do you think those present hold?

To what degree are they broken or cracked visions?

What common vision might assist them in growing together?

The questions which arise from this story highlight how different theological understandings affect the way different traditions order their life and worship. In other words, how 'faith' relates to 'order'.

Ordering and the Spirit

The 'wind/Spirit blows where it wills', John's Gospel tells us, while Paul wrote that 'the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life'. Such teaching would appear to set the Spirit over and against order; they are often appealed to when a movement has become institutionalised, and seek to box in the Spirit of God.

On the other hand, the fundamental faith or vision which first moves group of people to work for some common cause gradually takes form and shape in a structure. This is a common, even everyday, experience, and one we commonly speak of in terms of 'spirit'. A roster that a family organises to structure its life together embodies its 'community spirit'; a nation's constitution gives an order, permanence and continuity to its 'founding spirit'; the 'team spirit' of a sports team takes shape with rules, traditions and elaborate club hierarchies. All are examples of faith or vision taking shape, a vision expressed in terms of spirit.

Families, sports teams and nations are familiar with the need to balance the relationships of spirit and structure. All are caught up in the process of moving forward into the future, trying to faithfully adapt the spirit of the group to new structures, under the impact of change. This is also the case for Christian faith: the vision of community which Jesus taught and lived continues through the work of the Spirit of Christ, shaping and forming the Church of God. We are constantly tempted to turn concrete structures of communion (patterns of conversion, forms of prayer, ordained ministries for example) into the 'letter which kills', rather than appreciating them as ways by which the Spirit works to give life.

The charismatic movement has brought new opportunities and challenges in the relating of faith to order. Those who share a charismatic experience often feel a sense of openness to one another across different Christian traditions which challenges the barriers raised by existing church orders. Sometimes, however, it leads to new barriers, even to setting up of new denominations: those who do so believe that their experience of faith cannot be contained within existing patterns.

A particular example of faith and order in charismatic perspective is 'baptism in the Holy Spirit'. How does a particular experience of the Spirit, often of a person who has been a practising Christian for some time, relate to the Spirit's work in baptism which marks the beginning of Christian life? More generally, how are movements for the renewal of faith related to the ordering of the corporate life of the church? On the one hand, such movements can be frozen out by rigid understandings of order; on the other, without appropriate ordering they can distort or disintegrate Christian faith and experience.

A Salvation Army Perspective

For the Salvationist, the Christian life is one of both faith and order. Salvation from sin and its consequences as revealed in the Scriptures is initially God's work. Repentance toward God, and faith (in the sense of trust) in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who is truly and properly God and truly and properly man, is our necessary response. Regeneration through the Holy Spirit, and continuance in that state, depends on continued obedient faith in Christ. Holiness of life, an extension of regeneration, is made possible when, as an act of faith, a person allows God to cleanse the life from all known sin and take control of everything one knows of him or herself.

As a condition of commissioning (ordination), every Salvation Army officer promises to teach within the framework of The Salvation Army's Article of Faith, both privately and publicly. The statements in the paragraph above summarise the main points of these articles. All Salvation Army soldiers (adult members) similarly endorse this teaching as part of their covenant before being publicly 'sworn-in'. On this occasion of solemn pledging, the new soldiers also promise to act in ways demonstrating how their faith overflows into an order of action. For instance, they pledge to make the values of the Kingdom of God the standard for their lives,

show Christian integrity in their actions, maintain Christian ideals in all their relationships, and abstain from the use of addictive substances and harmful activities which could enslave body or spirit.

However, order, in the sense of a predictable liturgy, is not a characteristic of Salvation Army worship. Basic components may be re-arranged considerably. Formalism is studiously avoided and active participation, rather than passive observation, encouraged.

Extemporaneous prayer and voluntary testimony to God's work in life are often included. The Salvation Army accepts that all of life is sacramental and questions reliance on any ceremonial form, or order, being essential either to one's spiritual's welfare or even to demonstrate Christian unity.

Men and women have equal opportunities to lead worship, or command a corps (church). Rather than debate which form of water baptism is acceptable, and in what circumstances, The Salvation Army emphasises the 'one baptism' is that of (or in) the Holy Spirit. The element of 'solemn pledging' implied in baptism as practised in other churches is catered for in swearing-in of senior soldiers mentioned above.

Order is clearly observable in the administration of the Movement. Simple guides to methods of evangelism and basic Christian ethics are entitled 'orders and regulations'. Amongst other things, these orders and regulations outline the expectation that Salvationists will use their time, talents and financial resources in the many-sided evangelical and social services operations of The Salvation Army. International order throughout the 100 different countries in which the Movement operates is through the world leader, called the General. All appointments are made on the on the authority of the General. and notifications to officers they are changing appointment are termed as 'farewell orders'.

Salvation Army evangelical work, social services ministry and administration are each seen as manifestations of God's love for the world. They are expressions of faith and dedication in a context of order for officers, soldiers and the organisation, facilitating mobility and rapid response to need.

Some questions for discussion:

In the Australian culture – and sometimes even in the wider church – The Salvation Army is seen as a social services organisation rather than a genuine part of the body of Christ. What aspects of its faith and expressions of order confirm for you that it is genuinely part of the body of Christ? What aspects of its faith and order do you find challenging?

How do you understand faith being ordered towards Christian practice?

How do practical matters of order determine the boundaries of faith communities? For example, are there patterns of behaviour (such as The Salvation Army's requirement of abstinence from addictive substances for its adherents) which should be a condition of person being in fellowship with other Christians?

Jesus – the Way

John's gospel portrays Jesus saying 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life' (John 14.6), and the first Christians were characterised by being members of the 'Way' (Acts 9.2). The logic or patterning of the life of Jesus reflected in the gospels is thus also a fundamental ordering of the community he gathers – the church, the body of Christ, following and caught up in him as the Way.

Jesus accepts the authority of civic rulers ('render unto Caesar') and the structures of the Jewish religious life ('go show yourselves to the priests'). Yet he was not bound by religious convention (eg. plucking grain, healing on the Sabbath, washing hands). Within this flexible acceptance of societal structures, Jesus is remarkably open in his relationships – acting with impartiality, being free from attitudes of what we would now call racism or sexism (cf his interaction with Samaritan and Canaanite women). Jesus is always 'among' and not 'over', and serves without being servile, utterly distinct from the Platonic Master / Slave relationship, characterised by hierarchy and subordination. Jesus receives as well as giving (cf those who fed him, washed his feet, gave him drink). His activity is both on the mountain and in the market place. He sends his disciples out to experience the Way: they return to consolidate and share their learning (Luke 10). There is always a dynamic, an exchange, an ebb and flow.

Whatever further structures the church may have developed whereby it is ordered, these fundamental patterns are essential to its ordering. What does this look like in the realities of church life, however, conditioned by so many centuries of careful development of faith?

A Uniting Church minister is approached by a woman who is planning to marry a Orthodox man. She is an infrequent worshipper in a Uniting Church, but for various reasons was not baptised as a child (the baptism of infants being a common practice of the Uniting Church and its antecedent

denominations). Her fiance's priest has asked for evidence of her baptism. If she has not been baptised, the wedding cannot take place in an Orthodox church, because she would not be a member of the faithful. But her fiance's family is very insistent that the wedding be Orthodox. She is confronted by an important decision about baptism, but it is motivated by the other important decision about marriage. She feels that to ask for baptism here would be for the wrong reasons, and in any case, false to her casual religious commitment.

The Uniting Church minister sees her marriage as being a God-sent opportunity for her to consider baptism, seeing it as good a reason as any for thinking about a deepened commitment to faith. But, then, should she be baptised in the Orthodox tradition, in which she hopes to marry, but whose culture and language is very different to her own? Should she be baptised in the Uniting Church, her own background, in which case she puts at risk a basic unity in faith with her husband.

This story illustrates that unity in order (where one is baptised or married) cannot be easily separated from unity in faith. Both are aspects of 'being in communion' with God and one another. Very practical consequences arise from differences in order, as much as from differences in faith. Which is prior for communion: unity in faith, or unity in order? Differences over this question touch some fundamental aspects of ecumenical reflection about communion, differences that are especially marked between Eastern and Western traditions.

Faith and Order in Communion: East and West

The Western churches (Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Uniting etc) generally tend to say 'no unity in order without agreement on faith'. The Eastern churches, however, tend to put this the other way around. 'To be agreed in faith is to be united in order', the Orthodox say. Whichever approach is adopted, both should be understood as deriving from a deepening of the common vision of being in communion with God, and so with one another. It is only as this vision is renewed that genuine progress towards deeper expression of unity in both faith and order can be sustained.

A renewal of such a vision is indeed possible, even after centuries of division, a renewal which leads to growth in unity. A striking example is the division between the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches since the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD). Christological issues, touching key aspects of faith in Christ, divided these ancient churches and led to a breakdown of communion between them. If they did not agree on such central matters of doctrine, they could not receive the holy communion at each others' altars. Since several churches equally rejected the Council of Chalcedon, these dissenting churches long ago agreed to be in communion with each other - Syrian, Armenian, Coptic. Recent agreement between theologians and leaders of the several churches has led to a common affirmation on Christology, the central point of the Chalcedonian dispute. In the light of this, they are evidently members of one church, confessing the same faith of Christ, and communion is being restored.

Centuries of divisions, and of churches being ordered in different cultural and other situations, cannot be healed overnight. But the ancient anathemas are being lifted, and in some places communion between members of the different churches is being practised. Unity in order here follows from unity in faith. These observations ought perhaps to be put alongside the often negative perception of

the Orthodox as refusing communion on the grounds of disunity in faith. There is a positive and creative side to this theological position, one which is bearing practical ecumenical fruit throughout the world in our own centuries, the healing of the first great schism in the Church.

Unity, uniformity and diversity

Unity in order does not seem to mean uniformity of order. The Armenian, Syrian and Coptic churches, though now in communion with one another, developed markedly different pastoral practices, liturgies and ways of ordering the life of the clergy over the centuries. In different lands practices differed from one another, and from the customs of churches in communion with Constantinople. Unity in these things has not been a stumbling block, merely a problem requiring discussion and agreement. Protestants have a good deal to learn from this Orthodox experience, in learning ways to express the diversity of their traditions within a unity of communion in faith.

The Anglican tradition prides itself on holding diversity in balance with unity, though at the local parish level this is not always evident. Anglicans view faith as ordered in three main ways: in the 'good works' of daily life which are the fruit of faith; in having all things done 'decently and in order', especially in liturgy; and in a structured (three-fold) ministry consisting of the 'orders' of bishop, priests and deacons. 'Order' is thus thought of as closely related to practical holiness, liturgical life, and ordained ministries. An ordained person who is a hypocrite, or a poor liturgical leader or preacher, will command little respect (by laity or clergy). 'Order' is thus valued, and high standards are expected.

Yet Anglicans have generally been wary about defining precisely the nature of 'order'. Those who have tried to hold to tight understandings of 'order' have largely failed to carry the day with others. There are two major exceptions here: a) presidency of a parish (and so the eucharist) requires a priest, and b) the historic episcopate is to be retained in any ecumenical union, but not enforced on others (which apparently inconsistent position was the reason the English Anglican-Methodist scheme failed). A recent example of Anglican flexibility about order is the ordination of women: those parts of the Anglican Communion who ordain women have their communion with other parts 'impaired', but it is still real. Tension over matters of order, as well as wide diversities of expression of faith, are thus clearly present in the Anglican Communion, yet a strong sense of belonging to one Communion remains.

In the Roman Catholic Church, 'order' refers generally to the way that the life of the church is ordered, including states of life (celibacy and marriage), and distinct ways of participating in the life of the Church ('religious' orders, or societies expressing differing aspects of the lay apostolate), sacramental and liturgical order, and canon law. Many of these features appear in other Communion, whether Protestant, Orthodox or Anglican. But the Roman Church also discerns a distinctive Petrine ministry, that distinctive 'ordering' of the life and faith of the church exercised by the Bishop of Rome.

The teaching of this church holds that the basic structures (order) of the church are more than accidents of history, but are bound up together with faith, and that both faith and order derive from Christ. Thus, while acknowledging the historical conditioning in the emergence of the church's order, there is a given-ness about it, in and through the ongoing work of the Spirit of Christ. A recent statement puts this position as follows: 'Thus the divinely instituted ecclesiastical ministry is exercised in different degrees by those who even from ancient times have been called bishops, priests and deacons' (Lumen Gentium 28).

Faith, understood as both the content of God's self-revelation, and the Spirit-inspired human response to God, is strictly related to Order in the Roman Catholic tradition only in a very few instances. But these cases carry considerable weight, because they concern central matters: for example, the form and matter of the sacraments, the three-fold order of ministry (deacons, presbyters, bishops), apostolic succession, the Petrine ministry.

How these basic 'givens' have unfolded in the life of the church depends on the changing factors of history, culture and place. Nevertheless, much of this historical unfolding and adaptation of the 'ordering' of the church come to be understood, as time has gone on, as firm and settled, so that it now appears to many as part of 'The Faith': this is particularly the case with canon law, liturgical texts, and many parish structures.

The basic questions involved here are the visibility of the church and its sacramentality, which in turn rest on issues such as the interpretation of the Scriptures, the place of Tradition and the role and status of authority in the life of the church. These are the underlying topics noted for further discussion after responses had been made to BEM: 'Scripture and Tradition', 'Sacrament and Sacramentality' and 'Ecclesiology' – in short, the 'golden oldies' of ecumenism.

The exciting, confusing process of adapting these givens in the Roman Catholic Church is happening for all the world to see. How is episcopacy or even the papacy compatible with a more participatory, synodical form of ordering the life of the church? Is not the priesthood of all God's people just as divinely instituted as episcopacy? The Roman Catholic community would appear to find itself at a point in time where there is growing tension (hopefully leading to a better discernment) between 'Faith' and 'Order'.

Faith, Order and Australian contexts

A number of issues touching faith and order are fermenting among Australian Christians generally today, affecting some churches more than others, but touching all nonetheless. The experience of Australian churches in the past falls into two broad groups: Roman Catholics, The Salvation Army and some Orthodox churches have been ordered more from 'above' downwards, whereas other traditions work more from 'below' upwards. In reality, both aspects are mixed in most traditions, but it is useful to distinguish them.

A further factor is the shift from a homogenous village ethos to an multi-cultural, urban, one. Consider this poem by John O'Brien, 'The Church upon the Hill':

A simple thing of knotted pine
And corrugated tin:
But still, to those who read, a sign
A fortress on the farthest line
Against the march of sin.
Though rich man's gold was lacking quite,
We built it strong and sure,
With willing hands and (Faith's delight)
The savings spared, the widow's mite,
The shillings of the poor
Nor could it fail to meet the eye
And reverent thoughts instill,
As there above the township high,
And pointing always to the sky,
It stood upon the hill
And through our lives in wondrous ways
Its holy purpose led
From limpid lisping cradle-days
To where the silent moonlight lays
White hands upon the dead.

This poem evokes, with much love and even more romance, fragrant memories of parish life in the bush. The parish church was not only a building for worship, nor were the parish boundaries simply lines on the ground. The parish church became an important focus for 'belonging' in the local area.

The human need to belong is universal. For Christians that need is transformed by Jesus' words, 'While two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them' (Matt. 18:20). This is what the Church believes about its gatherings. How these gatherings have been shaped or ordered has varied around the basic pattern of the parish. NB: the word 'parish' is itself a challenge. The Greek word from which it comes, paroikia, means a stay or sojourn in a foreign country where you did not enjoy your usual rights. Which makes a gentle reminder that 'our citizenship is in heaven' (Phil 3:20).

In Australia, rural parishes, like those in the poem of John O'Brien, were strictly defined by geography and the tyranny of distance. These compact communities saw themselves as responsible for all the members of their particular Christian tradition in that district. These rural communities became centres of social as well as religious activity. Fetes, Sunday School picnics, football teams, debating societies, Scouts and Girl Guide troupes were common ways that all Christian communities used to order their life together so that the faith they held could be deepened and nourished.

These communities, however, often corresponded with ethnic groupings. Irish equals Roman Catholic; Scottish equals Presbyterian; German equals Lutheran; English equals CofE. This double identity, ethnic and ecclesial, reinforced the sense of belonging, but also brought confusion between faith and culture. It raises considerable problems in suburban contexts, especially as Australian urban society has moved into a post-Christian ethos. For example, Religious Education in government schools is not uncommonly the one time in the week when children are divided along primarily ethnic lines!

Although geography and distance are still strong factors in rural parish life today, ethnic bonds in most Christian traditions are a faint memory, and social life is no longer centred on the churches. With greater mobility and massive social change in the country, the romantic vision of John O'Brien and the little church upon the hill, and all it stood for, is changing too. While the majority of regular churchgoers still order their faith in their local parish church (cf Matt. 18:20), city life forces a distinction between a Christian community and a parish in the traditional, geographical sense.

Ordering faith in community

Where we live will always be one of the most important factors that govern the way we order our lives. But today it does not strictly govern the way we order our faith as it did in the past. Many people now belong to a Christian community to which they must travel some distance, because that community, for various reasons, suits them. It is a voluntary group, rather than one given or defined by geography. Much of this development is understandable, but it has its drawbacks. For example, members of a congregation which is 'associational' rather than geographic may well have strong reasons to resist change, since this may call into question the reasons for their choosing the congregation in the first place. Personal choice can thus become a disproportionate element in the ordering of the congregation's life.

Changes in patterns of community, especially in the major metropolitan centres, have led to many people seeking a sense of belonging in small communities. Mobility, dormitory suburbs, changing work patterns and gender roles, the rapid emergence of schooling as the dominant lifestyle of young people, and the growth of many sub-cultures, for example, change the assumptions made about what the ordering of life means. In traditions where large parishes (500-1000+) are the norm, small groups within the one congregation can be helpful; in others the congregation can itself function as a small group. A great advantage of small groups

in a Christian setting is that faith can be lived out in a highly incarnational way. But there is also the great danger that such cells will become so inward-focussed that faith will become disconnected with its ordering in wider worlds of society and church.

The trend toward smaller communities can be seen in an increasing exclusive orientation to the local congregation on the part of Christians from all traditions, with 'order' only mattering at this level. Higher or wider levels of being church are then seen as having merely administrative rather than pastoral (or theological) value. Again, ordained ('ordered') ministers can come to be viewed as mere employees, rather than as those people (whether paid or not) whom God calls to preach, teach and model faith so that the people of God may be ordered towards Christian service and mission. Such trends may be a product of the growing individualism in Australian society, supported by the 'franchise mentality' in much business. Such comments must not be seen as criticising a congregational church polity, since traditionally it emphasises the richness and sufficiency of each congregation rather than denying the theological significance of wider ecumenical relationships: the Disciples of Christ, for example, have espoused both a congregational polity and a keen ecumenical vision from their beginning.

In short, in contemporary Australia faith is increasingly being privatised. Some traditions privatise it through liturgy which, while in ethos very 'traditional', is so specialist as to be esoteric, rather than open to the wider community. Some privatise faith through placing such an emphasis on particular experiences that it becomes confused with feelings, and disordered. Others have so imbibed the spirit of relativism in much of the post-modern ethos that faith is reduced to mere personal opinion, and a sense of 'the faith' is minimalised or even dismissed. In short, the pressures of such individualism, rationalism, and functionalism which are pervasive in much of modern society have had major effects on the churches, all of them tending to disorder faith.

Some questions for discussion:

In what ways and at what levels might churches feel threatened by the breakdown of the ancient pattern of the territorial parish?

How might the work or leisure-time focus of much community life be related to church life?

How are churches adapting Jesus' command, and the constant Christian tradition, that we are to gather and 'make church' event-fully, as a sacrament or instrument of Christ's presence?

What is the place of small groups in your own church? How might they support or undermine an ecumenical ethos?

Faith and Order: 'trust and obey'

The call to faith in Christ cannot be dissociated from the call to follow his example of costly obedience to God. Such obedience, especially as it proceeds from idealistic response to the Spirit's promptings, can and has been corrupted into the manipulation of others by those charged with the responsibility of ordering the life of Christian communities. Legalistic morality misconstrues the gracious nature of faith, while disordered life makes for discarnate faith. The task of shaping Christian faith therefore involves ongoing concern with order: the ecumenical vocation entails seeking to discern how differing ways in which such ordering has taken place can become ways of diverse unity, rather than walls of separation. Such a calling involves concern with the boundaries of the church (cf faith and baptism), the ordering of its mission (cf recognition of ministries), or the shape of its common life (cf eucharistic hospitality, moral formation).

Conclusion

The people of God who are called out to be the church in the world, are chosen to bear a precious gift to that world – the gift of faith. We believe that such faith draws us into the vision of a world made new by the steadfast, recreating love of God. Such a faith, we believe, is borne through history in an ordered way.

This short paper of the Faith and Order Commission of the VCC, might help us to consider not only the church's need to maintain the ordered freshness of its faith, but also to witness to the world this gift of ordered faith.

In such a diverse society that we are becoming in Australia, the Christian community can say that diversity can be held within a unity; that the yeasty words of prophecy and vision, can become the daily bread we need. That mystery which lies at the heart of things, can be touched and known.

The Christian community is called to mirror upon earth something of the life of the heavenly, life-giving mystery of the most holy Trinity, three yet one, present and intimately close, yet deeply beyond all human knowledge. Of course, this is both the church's gift and its call, to itself and the world.

To that God we give glory and thanksgiving.