**French ARC: the Anglican-Roman Catholic Committee for France**

Official theological dialogue between the Anglican Communion and the Roman Catholic Church takes place through ARCIC, the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission. ARCIC was set up in the wake of the historic meeting of the Archbishop of Canterbury, [Michael Ramsey](https://iarccum.org/author/?a=1), and [Pope Paul VI](https://iarccum.org/author/?a=2) in 1966. The Common declaration issued on that occasion expressed the intention of both to inaugurate a “serious dialogue” which they hoped would “lead to that unity, for which Christ prayed”. From 1970 until the present, the three successive ARCIC commissions have produced a long series of agreed statements on many of the doctrinal and ecclesiological issues which have been the subject of disagreement since the time of the Reformation. Although there obviously remain areas of disagreement, the work of ARCIC has shown that in reality the two churches are much closer together theologically than we used to think.

From the start, ARCIC has spawned a large number of joint committees (referred to as ARCs) aiming to bring Anglicans and Roman Catholics closer at the national level. There are about 17 national ARCs around the world, of which French ARC is one.

French ARC, which started its work in 1970, meets about twice a year. With an official mandate from the Diocese in Europe of the Church of England and from the French Roman Catholic Bishops’ Conference, this joint Anglican-Roman Catholic Committee watches over the good relations which exist between Anglicans and Roman Catholics and seeks to encourage and develop them. There are normally five members from each Church as well as a representative of the Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe (TEC). The work is overseen by the two co-chairs (currently Reverend John Murray for the Anglican Church and Monseigneur Bernard Ginoux, Bishop of Montauban, for the Roman Catholic Church). The work is supported by the *Directeur du**Service national pour l’unité des chrétiens* (of the French Roman Catholic Bishops’ Conference), currently Père Miguel Desjardins.

Over several recent years the main focus of French ARC’s work has been the daily offices of Morning and Evening Prayer. Given that fuller eucharistic sharing seems to be ruled out for the foreseeable future, French ARC felt that the best way of praying together was through the non-eucharistic services of daily prayer. Its study of the history and practice of the daily offices, summed up in its publication *O Lord, open our lips*, demonstrated how recent liturgical reforms in our two Communions (following Vatican II and in Common Worship) have resulted in strikingly similar services of Morning and Evening Prayer (Lauds and Vespers). French ARC therefore recommends that when Roman Catholics and Anglicans wish to pray together they should simply use one or other of their existing daily offices rather than devising ad hoc ecumenical liturgies for the occasion. However, in order that the Common Worship offices can be used in ecumenical settings in France it is necessary for them to be translated into French.

French ARC therefore embarked on the substantial task of translating the essential parts of the *Daily Prayer* volume of Common Worship. This work was completed last year and our diocesan bishop has authorised experimental use of these translations for one year, 2022. They can be found on the website of the Diocese in Europe under “Resources”. Synod members are encouraged to make use of the translations during the coming months and to send any feedback to John Murray ([john.murray67@googlemail.com](mailto:john.murray67@googlemail.com)). During the course of this experimental year, the translations will be submitted to the House of Bishops of the Church of England for final authorisation, after which they will appear on the website of the Church of England.

At present French ARC is discussing two further topics of interest to both Churches. These are both areas where we feel that Anglicans and Roman Catholics are facing similar opportunities and challenges and can therefore seek to learn from a critical examination of one another’s experience (this kind of approach is known as “receptive ecumenism”).

1. *Lay ministries*. In both our churches there has in recent decades been a remarkable growth in formal or informal lay ministries of many kinds. Theologically, this is based on a rediscovery of the importance of the ministry of all the baptised. In a “mission-shaped Church”, laypeople are on the front line of living out the Christian gospel within a largely secularised society. At the same time, lay people are being called on to take a more and more active role in the internal life and worship of the Church; new forms and approaches to lay ministry have been evolving to meet these needs.
2. “*Synodality*”. Pope Francis has asked Roman Catholic churches worldwide to engage in developing a more “synodal” approach to church life. This means inviting the whole people of God, bishops, clergy and laity, to take part in discerning what the Spirit is saying to the church in our time. It is an attempt to move on from what is seen as an excessive clericalization of church life. By contrast, the Church of England has been committed for many years to a formal and statutory form of synodical government at all levels of church life. French ARC will therefore be taking a critical look at the theory and practice of synodality in Anglicanism; and Anglicans will be looking to be stimulated and challenged by the emergence of a new approach to synodality within the Roman Catholic Church.

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*May 2022*