



The United Church in
Jamaica and the Cayman Islands

Theme Paper and Bible Studies

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“Holy Spirit, Renew and Transform Your Church”

A Production of

The United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands

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favouritism” [10:34]. The Gentiles who were considered to be inferior outsiders were given the same spiritual outpouring as those who considered themselves to be insiders!

For reflection or discussion

- How does this story of Cornelius and Peter speak to the missionary calling of our congregations?
- What are the challenging new frontiers in mission to which God is calling our congregations?
- What are the obstacles that we create and use as blocks to prevent us from witnessing beyond our social, economic and religious frontiers?
- How important a role does prayer play in our spiritual formation?
- How does the language in our prayers express genuine devotion to God?
- How do we use the scriptures as a tool in contemporary evangelism when our young people are no longer familiar with the language and ideas of the Bible?

HOLY SPIRIT, RENEW AND TRANSFORM YOUR CHURCH

Introduction

The times for engaging God’s mission and ministry are constantly changing. The climate and conditions in which we exercise ministry are becoming increasingly difficult and we face the threat of the values of the age subtly seeping into our psyche, lives and most of all, our theology, with detrimental effects on the life and witness of the Church. Last year, each Council engaged in what was called a **truth-telling** exercise. During these sessions, each Council took a hard look at the membership and ministry statistics of each congregation in the Council. The exercise revealed the following:

- A decline in our communicant membership since our Union in 1992;
- Controversy around what constitutes ‘worship’ in terms of its expression (Pentecostal, charismatic, traditional, as we know it to be);
- Members desire to see more expression of ‘the gifts of the Spirit’; and
- There is a deep concern for faithful stewardship and accountability on the part of our leaders and members.

Our Church is evidently concerned about the results of the truth-telling exercise which shows that in terms of membership our Youth and Young Adults are very minimal. There is a sense of disenchantment across the Church and many of us are crying out for help.

As our facilitator, the Rev. Oliver Daley reminded us so often in the sessions, “Truth is simply stating things as they really are.” Through our truth-telling exercise we were forced to acknowledge that the church is at a precarious place at this point in time and that we can no longer put off dealing with ‘things as they are.’ We must move to position ourselves for the renewal and transformation by the Holy Spirit. Renewal and transformation have always been a part of the Church’s understanding of God at work our midst.

The theme for our Synod, **Holy Spirit, Renew and Transform Your Church**, is daring and dangerous, for we are acknowledging the need for a stirring by the Holy Spirit as we seek to be God’s church for this time in the Cayman Islands and Jamaica. The question is: *Are we really, really willing and ready to accept this renewal and transformation?* These words beckon us to change and to be hungry for this change.

Surely, we said that we have been relying on the Holy Spirit for leadership and guidance over the years. But perhaps we have been taking the Holy Spirit for granted. Perhaps our understanding of the Holy Spirit's work is only seen through the manifestation of the spiritual gifts such as speaking in tongues, prophesying and miraculous healing. God's Spirit can also work in other ways in our lives, homes, institutions of work and learning, Church and the nation at large. The Holy Spirit cannot be boxed into a particular mould, for its nature is far too phenomenal for humanity to comprehend. ***The sooner we recognise and understand that the Holy Spirit is bigger than our mere human interpretation of its movement and work, then we are on our way for this revival we so desire and seek.***

We hope that this document will contribute to the process by broadening our understanding of what we are asking for as we explore the theme. To begin this process it is important that we ask the question, "What does it mean to be church?"

Church...What's that?

The word 'church' is the English translation of the Greek word 'ecclesia' which means the called out, gathering, assembly, with a particular identity. The Church is identified as people of Christ and with Christ. It means then that like Christ, ***we are called by God to participate in extending God's grace to all*** through our lives, actions, deeds and words. It is people therefore, who stand in need of renewal and transformation, not monuments and buildings.

As people we constantly struggle with what it means to be Christ's disciples and followers in this world. How well then can we extend God's grace to all when very few of our congregations are growing numerically and spiritually; when many of our programmes and plans have become outdated and irrelevant; when it seems easier for us to give ourselves over to sensationalism and 'heightened' emotions in worship, rather than allowing our souls, hearts and minds to be nourished and challenged to become authentic carriers of God's grace? Certainly, we need renewal and transformation that keeps us grounded in the tried and tested times of the church and world, which acknowledges God at the centre.

of their exclusivity being misinterpreted as racism! Peter experienced a deep spiritual crisis as he reflected on the meaning of the vision that sought to radically question his embedded understanding of how God was at work [10:15].

Peter's renewal and transformation journey started when he received the messengers from Cornelius' home who arrived with a surprising request for him to visit their leader at his home. Although he was somewhat uncomfortable with receiving these Gentiles, they were at his base and he could set the agenda for what he would and would not do. Peter gave them his safe food to eat. However, the journey that he made to Cornelius' home removed his cultural safety net and exposed him to crossing new boundaries. In contrast to God hearing the prayers of Cornelius, he had to use vision, angels, human messengers and the Holy Spirit to get Peter's attention [10:19]. Church leaders are sometimes difficult learners and most resistant to change deemed necessary by the Holy Spirit.

Baptised by the Holy Spirit

What happened in Cornelius' house resulted in the breaking of new mission ground! Peter, as a senior church leader was called to bear witness to someone considered to be a mere God-fearer—nothing more. Even after he agreed to the visit he was unsure what was required of him when he arrived. He was in for the shock of his life. He was ill-prepared for what was about to hit him and his companions. Religious and cultural barriers that had divided Jews from other nations were now broken down!

Luke makes it clear that the Holy Spirit is God's barrier-breaking agent that does not allow walls of division that keep people away from God's transforming love. Peter's sermon to the culturally diverse hearers in the house carefully delivered the story of Jesus as predicted by the prophets and fulfilled through his ministry, crucifixion and resurrection [10:40]. As he passionately delivered his yet-to-be completed message, what happened next completely surprised him. The Holy Spirit was poured out upon the Gentiles present in the same way that the Jews received it on the Day of Pentecost. Even more surprising was that they received the Holy Spirit without first being baptised! The short time spent at Cornelius' resulted in another conversion experience for Peter. He confessed: "I now realise that God does not show

Peter, a Jewish follower of Jesus, is also introduced as a man of prayer. [10:9] Prayer enabled in them a common spiritual discipline of discerning God's guidance. Prayer is the language of communicating with God's Holy Spirit. Although Peter and Cornelius were of different ethnic, socio-economic and religious backgrounds, they were open to visionary experiences disclosed through their discipline of prayer. They cultivated a lifestyle of prayer that taught them how to hear God's voice and to be obedient to him. So although they came from different backgrounds, they shared common spiritual experiences because of their commitment to prayer. The Lord has more light and truth to reveal to his church but it will come about only through the discipline of prayer.

Peter's regular commitment to the discipline of prayer exposed him to deep insights about God's purpose for the church beyond the usual familiar boundaries of race and culture. The strange and uncomfortable vision of unpalatable food while he was hungry set the stage for a profound divine revelation. This was a "heaven-opening" experience in which his normal embedded worldview about how God was at work in the world was exposed and found to be inadequate [10:11]. The menu that was spread before him was in fact an intentional work of the Holy Spirit, seeking to break new mission ground. The vision was forewarning him that he had many frontiers to cross before he would be ready to be used by God to bear witness beyond his narrow Jewish cultural boundaries. What the vision represented was not what his natural eyes saw as unholy food that was unhealthy for his culturally-shaped appetite. Rather, the vision was re-educating him through reflection to embrace new understanding and acceptance of God's table. It was now a place of hospitality and friendship, open to all who genuinely called upon his name. The tough lesson for Peter and the church today is this: conversion of the messenger is a prerequisite for the crossing of new cultural frontiers with the Gospel.

Converting the Converter

The church, like Peter, has restricted its capacity to cross new frontiers in mission beyond its "birds of a feather" community. Peter, being a typical Jew, felt that he was spiritually superior to others. The Jewish understanding of holiness meant that they demonstrated their devotion to God by setting themselves apart from others deemed to be ritually unclean because of their ethnicity and cultural habits such as their food

The United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands belongs to a rich heritage and tradition—the Reformed Family. The motto of this tradition, *Ecclesia Reformata, Semper Reformanda* ("a church reformed and always being reformed) suggests that we are always in a mindset of reformation. Based on this tradition, our theme is most appropriate for a time such as this. We continue to grapple with the 'powers' and 'empires' of the world, as they too impact the way we engage mission and ministry. Nonetheless, the spirit of the Reformation calls us in every age to discern God's calling for that particular time through the fundamental insights of the Reformation:

- God guides the Church through God's Spirit and Word.
- The Church must rely on the witness of the Holy Scriptures.
- The individual and the Church.
- Where two or three are gathered in my name I am in the midst of them.
- The Church is a body in which every member counts.
- God's Word gives guidance in all areas of life.
- Humanities' attitude towards the gift of creation.
- The proclamation of the Gospel and the use of violence are mutually exclusive.
- Unity is of the essence of Christ's Church.

These fundamental insights are indeed the core beliefs of the Reform Church and they urge us to constantly and consistently engage the process of renewal and transformation. What then does 'renewal' and 'transformation' mean?

Renewal, Transformation and the Holy Spirit

The word **renew** has a core meaning: *'to improve the condition of something.'* Some other shades of meaning of renew are: *to replace something worn, no longer suitable for use; to repeat a promise, to affirm or restate a promise or commitment; and to give somebody or something new energy, strength and enthusiasm.* The word **transform** speaks directly to change: *changing something dramatically, especially its appearance and usefulness; to change completely for the better.*

Now we turn to the word '**Spirit**'. **Spirit** is used in the English Bible to translate the Hebrew 'ruach' and Greek 'pneuma'. These denote **wind**,

breath and by extension, a **life-giving element**. The adjective ‘**Holy**’, speaks to the divine and mysterious power and presence of God in nature, individuals, communities which inspire or empower. The Holy Spirit is that aspect of God by which God’s active presence is manifested. *By inviting God, the Holy Spirit to renew and transform God’s church, we are genuinely asking God to breathe new life into the church, renewing our enthusiasm and commitment and inspiring new energy and strength within us. Our prayer is that our corporate worship, our outreach ministries, our fellowship and our relationship with the entire society will be impacted by our experience of renewal and transformation.*

Encounter with the Holy Spirit

Acts 1: 8 and 2: 1–13 embody all that we now seek from God. As it was in the case of the early church, it is not that the Holy Spirit is absent, but becomes present in a new and different way when one has an encounter with the Holy Spirit. Many may ask: How do we encounter the Holy Spirit? There is no single answer to such a question. But what is known for sure is that there is power and purpose when this encounter occurs. The Holy Spirit refines and readies us, strips away all that is unnecessary and purifies the individual and community so that they are ready to do what the Spirit of God leads them to do. It is God through the Holy Spirit who outlines the purpose and gives power for what the church seeks to proclaim.

The early church began as a community founded upon the purpose and power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit became the source of the Churches’ identity and mission. Similarly the source of the Church’s identity, mission and proclamation today must be God’s active, life-giving Holy Spirit. Acts 2: 1–13 is a reminder of how God seeks to break into the ordinary and everyday experiences of life. Just as God did on the Day of Pentecost, so today God desires to break into our everyday life and work among us, in us, with us, through us and all around us.

What does all this mean to us and for us? It means we must actively seek an encounter with the Holy Spirit personally and corporately so that the Holy Spirit may become the source of our purpose, proclamation and power in a new and different way. Also, if we are to become the carriers of God’s grace for the 21st Century, we may have to make

STUDY THREE

Holy Spirit, Renew our Missional Purpose - A Challenge to the Unchurched

Read Acts 10:1–48

Since the Church is a creation of the Holy Spirit, what then is it called to be and to do? Who sets the agenda for the church’s engagement in ministry and mission? Luke’s report on the birth and development of the early church offers us some insights into how new frontiers in mission can be crossed in order to reach peoples of other cultures. The example of Cornelius and Peter as reported in Acts 10 serves as a useful example in enabling leaders in how to communicate the Good News beyond their known home environment.

Prayer: A Prerequisite for Renewal and Transformation

Cornelius was a Roman serving in Palestine and was drawn to the beliefs, morality and scripture of the Jewish faith. As an outsider he developed a lifestyle of prayer and giving to the poor that were hallmarks of Jewish spirituality. Luke introduces Cornelius praying at his home at the ninth hour when the Jews would normally gather in the temple to communicate the evening sacrifice. The angel assessed that he was ready for a deeper relationship with God because he said to Cornelius, “God is pleased with your prayers and works of charity and is ready to answer you.” [10:4] The inward cleansing power of prayer and an outward expression of loving care to the needy constituted the necessary prerequisites of Cornelius’ readiness for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Before the local church leader Peter was contacted to share the Good News, God was already at work through his Holy Spirit preparing Cornelius and his family for their baptism with the Holy Spirit. The work of renewal and transformation is God’s! Could it be that we are failing as leaders of local congregations to give priority to in-depth prayers? Could it be that our prayers are not serious and therefore God does not take us seriously when we call upon him?

- Using one’s gifts for building unity and appreciating the gifts others bring, including gifts nurtured in the emphases of different denominations, e.g. the Seventh Day Adventists and the principle of the Shabbat: do we take rest seriously enough in the United Church? The Quakers with silence: do we make enough space/ have a balance between praise and worship and listening to God? Can we learn from the Orthodox, Roman Catholics and Anglicans who employ the arts and the senses in their liturgy, the drama/ceremony of the Eucharist, the use of the body in genuflecting, the visual stimulation of art (vestments, icons, special colours for the seasons, etc.), and the smell of incense? Could it be that each denomination has a unique ‘gift’ to edify others? If so, what is the ‘gift’ of the United Church—is it perhaps our commitment to live with diversity?

some radical decisions as to how we operate and function as a church administratively, pastorally and in mission. Moreover, it has implications for the accountability of our leaders for their spiritual and emotional well-being and integrity and for the leadership they offer in their contexts of ministry. It is the hope that for the next Synodical period 2007–2009 we will be able to experience this encounter for the renewal and transformation we are asking for.

We encourage you to keep the theme alive during the Synodical period. This can be done using topical sermons, the arts (music, poetry, dramatic expression & dance), Bible studies, spiritual reflections, panel discussions and seminars. We also encourage the auxiliaries (Women’s Fellowship, Men’s Fellowship, Young Adults Action Movement, Youth Fellowship and Church School) to explore the theme.

Conclusion

In the period leading up to Synod 2007 and beyond, we are urged to spend some time consciously and honestly reflecting on the theme, through the eyes of these sub-themes:

- Holy Spirit, Renew and Transform our Hearts and Minds
- Holy Spirit, Awaken our Consciousness—A Commitment to Ecumenism
- Holy Spirit, Renew our Missional Purpose—A Challenge to the Unchurched

May we all be made ready for the encounter we seek and as we search the scriptures. Facilitated by these studies may we truly experience the fullness of God the Holy Spirit as we cry out, “**HOLY SPIRIT, RENEW AND TRANSFORM YOUR CHURCH.**”

BIBLE STUDIES

STUDY ONE

Holy Spirit, Renew and Transform our Hearts and Minds

Introduction

There are different approaches that could be taken to an introductory study of the Holy Spirit. Four possible approaches could be to take a look at:

1. The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament
2. The Holy Spirit in the Gospels (particularly in Jesus' teachings)
3. The Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts (the first account of Church history)
4. The Holy Spirit in the New Testament Epistles (especially the writings of the Apostle Paul)

In your own time, it might be helpful with the use of a concordance or a study Bible to take each of these approaches. For example, read all the passages in the Old Testament that refer to the Holy Spirit and see what you discover. In this short study however, the starting point is Jesus' teachings in John's Gospel. Reference is also made to some of the New Testament epistles.

Read John 14: 16–26 & John 16: 5–15

For reflection or discussion

- List all the words that are used to describe the Spirit. [truth, comforter/counsellor/advocate]
- What are some of the functions of the Spirit? [remind, teach, convict/reprove]
- What do we think Jesus meant when he told his disciples that the Holy Spirit “dwells with you and will be in you?” [14:17 NRSV]

3. Action in Our Time and in Our Location
The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity for 2007 has the theme, **‘He even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.’** [Mark 7: 37] The theme was developed by Christians in Umlazi, South Africa, an area with a high percentage of the population infected with HIV, an area with high levels of poverty, crime and violence, and poor social infrastructure—sub-standard schools, housing and health facilities. We are called to action in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands, to work for unity within the body, so that we can help to transform the world. It is an opportune time to review the ideas outlined in the preamble of the constitution of the Caribbean Conference, which was launched in 1973 with the participation of our antecedent denominations: ***“We as Christian people of the Caribbean, separated from each other by barriers of history, language, culture, class and distance, desire, because of our common calling in Christ to join together in a regional fellowship of churches for inspiration, consultation and co-operative action. We are deeply concerned to promote the human liberation of our people and are committed to the achievement of social justice and the dignity of human beings in our society. We desire to build up our life in Christ and to share our experience with the universal brotherhood of humankind.”***

As a United Church, (one Church in two nations) we continue to emphasize the tremendous privilege and opportunity we have to live out our calling to building bridges of understanding and to celebrate our unity despite our diversity.

For reflection or discussion

Read I Corinthians 3

- background to/context of the passage
- nurture of Christian maturity/love—moving from ‘milk’ to ‘hard food’
- Dynamics of factionalism: the Paul faction, the Apollos faction, and perhaps most importantly, the ‘Christ’ faction—those who see themselves as superior Christians, but in fact become another faction, adding to the divisions.

therefore his desire for its unity. So important was the issue of the unity of the church that it became a subject of Jesus' prayer as he faced the ordeal of his death. It is also noteworthy that unity is linked to mission, that the unity that Jesus prayed for is also necessary for others to believe that Jesus is the Christ. God created the universe and all humanity. The word 'ecumenical' has its roots in a Greek word meaning 'the whole inhabited earth,' and is related to the word from which 'economics' comes, meaning the management of the household. Does our quest for unity include people of other faiths and the care of nature?

2. The Cultivation and Nurture of Christian Unity

At the heart of the cultivation and nurture of Christian unity is the cultivation and nurture of the capacity to love. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity celebrated annually since 1894 and sponsored by the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches has as its guiding force, the following words by Cardinal Mercier: "In order to unite with one another, we must love one another; In order to love one another, we must know one another; In order to know one another, we must go and meet one another." These words echo sentiments found in the Christian Testament, for example, in the First Epistle of John, "**Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us...God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.**" [I John 4: 11 – 12, 16b NRSV] The reality is that it is not always easy to love others, including other Christians. Even within our own congregations and within our denomination and our ecumenical bodies, the call to love often is a call to spiritual discipline, a call to make a decision to love even when it is difficult to like others. In some cases, conflict and disagreement with individuals, groups and institutions are not expressed in open discussion and challenge, but in the arguably, more dangerous reaction of withdrawing from encounters and joint projects with other Christians. How do we nurture the capacity to love in the home, school, community, church and through the media?

Reflection

Jesus' use of the spirit (descriptive and function) in these passages offers insights into understanding the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian.

He Teaches

Read John 14:26

Speaking to his disciples Jesus says that the Holy Spirit "shall teach you all things and bring all things (he has taught) to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said to you." The Holy Spirit therefore is given by God as our guide into what is truth. He does so firstly by bringing to our conscious memory the teachings of Christ that we have previously learned. It is therefore important to have some fuel that the Holy Spirit can use by regularly feeding on Christ's teachings. Secondly, the Holy Spirit guides us in situations or with knowledge that we might not have encountered before. For example, Jesus exhorts his disciples not to be anxious about defending themselves against their accusers. "When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say." [Luke 12:11–12 NIV]

It is up to each of us to develop a practice of active listening in which we become more and more sensitive to the Holy Spirit's guidance in the daily decisions we make in life.

Just as Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness where he was tempted [Matthew 4:1] and Philip was led to go and talk to the Ethiopian Eunuch [Acts 8: 29] and the apostles were instructed not to journey into Bithynia [Acts 16: 7], so too He leads us and we need to be responsive to that leading. This is what Paul means when he exhorts his readers in Galatians to 'walk in the Spirit' or as the NIV translates it, 'keep in step with the Spirit.' [Galatians 5: 25] The Holy Spirit then is our teacher, guide and reminder and as such, operates in the sphere of the mind and heart of the believer.

He Convicts

Read John 16:8

The word translated 'reprove' or 'convict' carries with it an understanding of a process that is both moral and cognitive—that it involves both heart and mind. The Holy Spirit on the basis of God's truth brings to our mind an awareness of what is right and wrong. This in turn influences our convictions and ultimately our actions. It is this process that gives rise to the formation of Christian character traits which Paul refers to as the 'Fruit of the Spirit'. [Galatians 5: 22 & 23] The work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian is therefore a vital part of the process of maturing spiritually. If we are to grow as believers we need the Holy Spirit.

For reflection or discussion

- How well are we regularly feeding on Jesus' teaching?
- What can we do to feed more?
- Try to recall and share with someone any experience you had when you felt directed by the Spirit.
- How can we know that it is the Spirit who is leading us?
- Read again the list of character traits in Galatians 5: 22 & 23. Consider each trait and rate yourself on a scale of 1–10 and say why?

Conclusion

Remember you and I are the church, as we ask the Holy Spirit for renewal and transformation, let it begin with us. Ask Him to take you to a deeper level of commitment and maturity in Christ. This He will do as we intentionally make time to learn more of Jesus' teaching and as we try to develop our active listening to the Spirit by making regular time to be with Him in our daily devotions, as well as occasional retreats for reflection and prayer. Let us also respond to His urging to address the attitudes and character traits that we need to change. Each of us must cry out: **'HOLY SPIRIT, RENEW AND TRANSFORM MY HEART AND MIND!'**

STUDY TWO

Holy Spirit, Awaken Our Consciousness - A Commitment to Ecumenism

The commitment to ecumenism is at the heart of the movement of Uniting and United Churches the world over. More than most denominations, our church has gone beyond the "courtship," or "concubinage" of local, national, regional and global Councils and Associations of Churches, and taken the radical risk of "marriage" - a public act of commitment to organic union, a decision to combine our diversities 'for better, for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and health.' This commitment cannot, however, be taken for granted as a unity of the body of Christ that is totally accomplished. We have perhaps a *sign* of the Kingdom of God, but the final culmination of the Kingdom has not yet taken place, and we therefore need to focus on that goal. It is necessary to avoid complacency or even the arrogance that could arise because we have a form of organic union, as form can easily become formality, devoid of the content of true commitment to unity.

It is in this spirit of always being in a process of conversion and transformation that we should heed the prayer that is in our sub-theme, 'Holy Spirit, awaken our consciousness.' To pray this prayer with sincerity, three steps could be taken:

- a. review our mandate for Christian unity, Jesus' prayer in John 17;
- b. cultivate and nurture the attitude necessary for unity, that is love; and
- c. identify the ways in which God is currently working for unity and calling us to participate in that work today.

1. Our Mandate for Christian Unity

"I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their world, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me." [John 17: 20, 21] At the heart of Jesus' love for the church is