

**ONE IN CHRIST'S BAPTISM
CALLED TO BE ONE
IN CHRIST'S CHURCH**

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When Pope John Paul invited Orthodox and Protestant leaders and scholars to study with him how his office might better serve the unity of all Christians in 1995, many were surprised at the positive response, most clearly articulated by Anglican, Lutheran and Methodist leadership. Yet for the millions of families with husband and wife of different churches, but a common faith in Jesus Christ, a common baptism and a common hope for full communion between their churches, the dialogue of conversion to which the Holy Father calls us is a daily happening.

As Christians approach together the Year 2000, they share with Pope John Paul "the most fervent petitions which the Church makes to the Lord during this important time, as the eve of the new millennium approaches, is that unity among all Christians of the various confessions will increase until they reach full communion."

Each day we realize our call to promote prayer, hope and understanding that will bring Christians closer together. In this 1997 year that focuses on Christ and our common baptism, we have a marvelous opportunity to pray, study and reflect together on progress that has been made and hopes that we can put forward for deeper levels of communion among our churches.

In families and parishes, in the workplace and schools, we have opportunities to encounter fellow Christians, share in our common mission of witnessing the Gospel with the world and prayer to our common Lord and Savior. However, in this year of Christ, we can also take time to reflect more specifically on our hopes for deepening the unity we already experience in baptism, and to study the agreements we have reached with particular churches.

AGREEMENTS REACHED

As Catholics we have moved beyond just the experience of knowing that we are incomplete until all Christians are one. We realize that somehow our Church is wounded until we are able to reach out in a spirit of repentance and dialogue to all who confess Christ. We are in relationship with many churches with the goal of full visible unity, and progress has been dramatic. As educators, one of the major tasks the Holy Father has put before us in the encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* is making the results of these thirty years of dialogue more widely known.

In this year of Christ we can focus on several of the churches with whom we have special relationships. Next year, in the year of the Holy Spirit, there are other Christian churches that can be the focus of our reflection and prayer.

In the modern world we live and work with a rich variety of Christians, some of whom are committed with us to full unity and to work and prayer together toward that unity. There are also those who are fellow Christians and who share a common baptism, but who are not as open to dialogue and do not see, with us, the goal of visible unity.

This year we will look at the Eastern Orthodox Churches, the Lutheran Churches and the Anglican/Episcopal Church for special prayer, reflection and study. The dialogues with these churches in the last thirty years have been especially fruitful, and the parish and diocesan relationships particularly important.

Some dioceses and parishes have developed particularly warm - even covenant - relationships with congregations of these churches. Where these relationships have not been solidified, in some parishes and dioceses, the year of Christ provides a hopeful opportunity.

THE EASTERN CHURCHES

The Orthodox Churches of the East, centered in Moscow, Constantinople, Damascus and other parts of the ancient world, though not equally present through out the the world, have a particular place in Roman Catholic relations. We were in full communion with them for 1,000 years, we share the sacramental system and a Eucharist centered life with bishops and priests whom we recognize.

However, the great weight of the millennium of separation, the wounds of the crusades and current tensions in Eastern Europe, the Balkans and the Middles East, make work with the Orthodox particularly challenging. While there have been successful dialogues, the relations with these churches requires particular care.

We need to help our Orthodox sisters and brothers understand Catholics better. We need to bring Pope John Paul's spirit of repentance for the past failings of Catholics, especially the Crusades, insensitive evangelism, and European imperialism, to this relationship. We need to teach Catholics about the sad failures of their predecessors, the present - sometimes painful - reality of these churches, and our hopes for healing and reconciliation.

It is important that our people not only know of Catholic failings, but also of modern initiatives to rectify the past and build bridges. The meetings of Popes and Patriarchs, of bishops, and of scholars should model the encounters possible in schools and parishes. The experience of Eastern liturgical life, Orthodox or Catholic, are integral to the liturgical formation of all Catholics.

Beyond the Eastern Orthodox Churches there are also the Eastern churches from whom we have been divided, about our understanding of Christ, since 431 and 450. These include the Oriental Orthodox: Coptic, Ethiopian, Erutrian, Armenian, and Syrian. There is also the Assyrian Church of the East, with whom we have reached an accord in 1994. With both of these families remarkable historic agreements, on the nature and person of Christ, have been reached in the modern ecumenical movement. While these communities are not present in all areas of the world, it is important to pray for these churches and to understand their history as part of our own.

In some parts of the world, major portions of our student bodies are made of Christians from Eastern or Oriental Orthodox backgrounds. Therefore, Lasallian educators carry a particular challenge to know the traditional alienation and the dramatic strides made toward reconciliation, and see that these become integral to the educational programs of Lasallian schools.

We even have an agreement on Eucharistic hospitality with the Syrian Patriarch of Antioch and Pope John Paul, making it possible for us to receive Holy Communion at one another's churches. Because of the marriages between Oriental Orthodox and Catholics and their historical significance, it is important to know about our progress with them, even when they are not very numerous in our community.

REFORMATION CHURCHES FOR JESUS YEAR REFLECTION

In the Vatican Council's Decree on Ecumenism the Anglican Church is singled out for specific recognition as

having a special relationship with the Catholic Church. This is because of their sacramental structure, with bishops, priests and deacons, claims of apostolic succession, and commitment to the catholicity of the Church in space and time. Dialogue with the Anglican Communion has been particularly fruitful, and parish and diocesan relationships quite deep.

With the Lutheran Church the dialogue has moved along in a most promising way, with the most serious theological studies produced in any dialogue. The Lutheran community was the first to be separated at the time of the Reformation, with the division deepening after the Augsburg Confession of faith in 1530.

Thirty years of dialogue have produced amazing areas of agreement, leading to a Joint Declaration on Justification by Faith, which is proposed for sometime after 1997, the 450th anniversary of the Decrees on Justification of the Council of Trent. This decision by the Roman Catholic and some Lutheran Churches will be a challenge for us as educators to help our people to understand, celebrate and incorporate into our prayer, educational and liturgical life. Celebrating the achievements of these two dialogues, and bringing our people up to where the Church is, will be an important part of the Jesus year of Jubilee preparation.

DIALOGUE PROGRESS AND CELEBRATION

With the Anglican Churches and the world wide Anglican Communion, thirty years of dialogue have produced dramatic levels of agreement. The agreement is such that the Vatican has acknowledged that sufficient work has been done in the areas of Eucharist and ministry. We have come to full agreement on the nature and form of the Eucharistic celebration, the way in which we speak of the Mass as a sacrifice together, the real presence of Christ, and the priest as minister of the Eucharist.

These agreements, developed in the 1970's, have been positively evaluated by the Vatican and the Anglican Lambeth Conference in the late 1980's and early 1990's. They mean that our catechesis by Catholics and Anglicans about the sacraments have to take account of this progress.

While the ordination of women complexifies our progress on ordained ministry, it by no means compromises the progress made on the issues where agreement is claimed. Significant progress has also been made on issues of authority, the papacy and the nature of the Church. In fact, it was Archbishop George Carey of Canterbury who was among the first to welcome explorations on papal renewal for the unity of the Church, when Pope John Paul offered the idea.

Sacramental preparation will be particularly influenced by these discussions, since we can say that we have a common faith, with Anglicans, on the nature of the Eucharist, but because we do not yet recognize Anglican orders we are not able to receive together. Obviously, these agreements are so new - 1994 - that both Anglicans and Catholic have a challenging catechetical task ahead of us. Certainly the Jesus year provides opportunities for common prayer, hospitality and study.

With the Lutherans our agreements have touched on all five of the areas that Pope John Paul singles out in his encyclical: 1) Scripture and traditions; 2) the Eucharist; 3) the ordained ministry; 4) teaching authority, bishops and the papacy; and 5) Mary. This will be a year in which these dialogues can be reviewed, and incorporated into the catechetical programs of parishes and schools. Lutheran and Catholic parishes will be especially enriched by study of agreements on the question of Justification by Faith, central to our common understanding of God's free gift of grace in Jesus Christ.

The Joint Declaration may affirm that we believe together: "our entire hope of justification and salvation rests on Christ Jesus and on the gospel whereby the good news of God's merciful action in Christ is made known; we do not place our

ultimate trust in anything other than God's promise and saving work of Christ." Such a common Lutheran - Catholic understanding of a doctrine which was at the core of the Reformation, will have the effect of making the condemnations of the Council of Trent and the Lutheran Confessions no longer applicable to one another.

This will enable us to teach the Paschal Mystery together with a new common spirit. This will give us, above all, an added emphasis to preach the free, unmerited gift of God's grace, which overrides any sinfulness of our own, and gives us the Holy Spirit by which we are able to respond in faith, in a way that should bring vitality and security to our trust in God's love. In a world dominated by pressures for competition, self reliance and success, this gracious word of faith, hope and love brings alive our teaching of Christ in ways that free the Christian of the burden of guilt and legalism. Helping adults and youth alike to talk about the activity of grace in their lives is an opportunity for Catholics and Protestants to find together a common ground in Christ's saving grace.

ACTIVITIES

During this year, celebrating our baptismal unity and being called to full communion, we can add to the regular Week of Prayer celebrated in Catholic schools and parishes, special services to lift up the Anglican, Lutheran and Orthodox relationships. Invitations can be made to priests and ministers of these traditions to speak, celebrate with us, and to bring in dialogue partners to talk about the implications of these agreements in the lives of our churches.

Special study programs can be devised to help our Catholic people understand the liturgy, history and present life of these fellow Christians, and our hopes for full communion. The dialogues themselves can be the subject of inservice programs for parish staff and school faculties. Boards and leaders from the communities can work with Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant counterparts to give practical plans for keeping our communities and institutions in permanent contact through prayer, common educational programs and projects in the community.

The diocesan ecumenical officer, where there is one, can be a resource to parishes, schools and institutions in locating partners, providing resources and advising on programs that will assist in realizing the zeal for the unity of the Church implicit in our planning for the Jubilee 2000. •

RESOURCES

US Catholic Conference

Ronald G. Roberson, ed., *Oriental Orthodox-Roman Catholic Pastoral Relationships and Interchurch Marriages*.

John Borelli and John Erickson, *Orthodox and Catholic in Dialogue*.

Magisterial Documents

John Paul, *Ut Unum Sint: That the World May Believe*
Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism

Paulist Press

Joseph Burgess, Jeffrey Gros, Eds., *Growing Consensus*.

Jeffrey Gros and Joseph Burgess, ed., *Building Unity*.

Lukas Vischer and Harding Meyer Eds., *Growth in Agreement*
Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level.

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity Materials

Christopher Hill and Edward Yarnold, SJ, *Anglicans and Roman Catholics: The Search for Unity*, The ARCIC documents and their reception, London: SPCK/CTS, 1994.

Michael Kinnamon, Brian E. Cope, eds., *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Basic Texts and Voices*, Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1997.