

**One in the Holy Spirit
Return to God, Rejoice in Hope
(1/2)**

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Pope John Paul holds out the hope that the great Jubilee celebration in the year 2000 will see the Christian churches closer to that full communion for which Christ prayed. As the Christians prepare for the anniversary of the Incarnation, there is a marvelous opportunity for educators and students to reflect on what the Holy Spirit is doing among the churches in the ecumenical movement, as the Holy Father invites us to do in his encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*.

In this year of the Spirit, we know that visible unity will be given only by his power: "What was accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit in the fullness of time' can only through the Spirit's power now emerge from the memory of the church." (TMA 44) This emphasis on the Spirit in our catechesis will allow us to help our people be receptive to the charisms of one another's churches and to the convergences the Holy Spirit has given to us in the ecumenical agreements. We need to deepen the communion we already share around the table of the Word.

Just as the Spirit endows each baptized person with charisms and gifts for the service of the Church (1 Cor 12:1-11, TMA 45), so the variety of churches in our neighborhoods and our world have received gifts, even in their separation, from which all benefit. As the Holy Father notes in his encyclical "At the stage [in our progress toward unity] which we have now reached, this process of mutual enrichment must be taken seriously into account." (UUS 87)

Last year, when we focused our catechesis on Christ, we turned our attention to our relationship with Anglican, Lutheran and Eastern Orthodox churches. In this year of the Holy Spirit we will reflect on the Spirit acting in the ecumenical movement through the World Council of Churches, and Catholic relationships with other Protestant churches, both ecumenical and evangelical.

The Spirit holds out to us a hope that we can all be one, even when our experience may discourage us. As educators we need to lift up the signs of hope in the dialogues, relationships and lives of ecumenical

leaders. "There is also need for a better appreciation and understanding of the signs of hope present in the last part of this century, even though they often remain hidden from our eyes." (TMA 46) Indeed, those who have lived through the Church's great transition of the last forty years can engender in our younger Catholics an appreciation of the ecumenical revolution, its enthusiasms and hopes, and the signs of progress.

In lifting up the gifts of the laity during this year, we need to learn from our Protestant brothers and sisters how laity can realize their baptismal ministry in full service to the Church. We can help our students to see ecumenical lay leaders in councils of churches, parish ecumenical projects, and diocesan leadership. All are called to faith in Christ's will for the unity of the Church and zeal to bring all Christians together. "In the church [signs of hope] include a greater attention to the voice of the Spirit through the acceptance of charisms and the promotion of the laity, a deeper commitment to the cause of Christian unity and the increased interest in dialogue with other religions and with contemporary culture." (TMA 46)

The World Council of Churches

While ecumenism begins at home, in the heart and in the parish, the churches also come together internationally. For fifty years Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant churches have celebrated an assembly in a World Council of Churches every few years to pray, challenge themselves with Christ's will for unity, and to lift up the signs of hope the Holy Spirit has given them. Since 1961 the Roman Catholic Church has participated formally in these assemblies, and since 1968 has been a full member of the Council's work for theological agreement, the Faith and Order Commission.

In 1998 the World Council celebrates its fiftieth anniversary assembly in Africa, under the theme "Return to God, Rejoice in Hope." The theme is the same later selected by the Holy Father for the Incarnation Jubilee in 2000. (Lv. 25) This is an appropriate year to trace the history of the ecumenical movement, the goals of the World Council to which the Roman Catholic Church is fully committed, and to review some of the documents.

The Pope speaks with enthusiasm of his experience in visiting the Council: "Nor can I forget the meetings...at the headquarters of the World Council of Churches, the organization committed to calling its member churches and ecclesial communities 'to the goal of visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship expressed in worship and in common life in Christ.'" (UUS 24)

In 1982 the World Council produced a text, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, which Pope John Paul singles out in his encyclical as a significant contribution. In implementing the Catechism of the Catholic Church, this document can be helpful in teaching the

sacraments. Likewise, the elements necessary for full visible unity, on which the churches agreed in the 1991 assembly, can usefully be studied as an integral part of Christian formation at appropriate levels.

In many communities there are councils or conferences of churches with which the Catholic Church is in relationship. Many episcopal conferences belong to national councils of churches. Some, like the Caribbean and the Pacific Islands belong to international regional councils. These groupings of churches can be rich resources for learning about ecumenical collaboration, for finding representatives of other churches to help educate Catholics, and opportunities for experiences of ecumenical service in the community.

As the Holy Father notes, such collaboration is an essential element of Catholic ministry: "Cooperation based on our common faith is not only filled with fraternal communion, but is a manifestation of Christ himself. Moreover, ecumenical cooperation is a true school of ecumenism, a dynamic road to unity. Unity of action leads to the full unity of faith." (UUS 40) Councils are ideal places for finding ecumenical experiences of service for those preparing for confirmation or involved in campus ministry.

In the months leading up to the Assembly, in August of 1998, regular ecumenical prayer, study, and dialogue can enhance the involvement of Catholic parishes, schools, universities and educational programs.

The Gifts of Ecumenical Churches

In this year of the Spirit, Catholic educators can work with ecumenically oriented Protestant churches who will themselves be preparing for the World Council Assembly, in looking at the results of the international dialogues, praying for the success of the Assembly, and bringing our people into the process of conversion central to the Jubilee theme.

Roman Catholics are in dialogue with Methodists, Presbyterians, Disciples of Christ, United Churches and Reformed Churches, with the goal of full communion. "A new task lies before us: that of receiving the results already achieved," says Pope John Paul, which "must involve the whole people of God." Results are not to remain "statements of bilateral commissions but must become a common heritage." (UUS 80)

Those studying the Catholic faith should come to know representatives of these churches in their community, through common worship, dialogue, visiting their churches, and knowing where we are on our journey to our common goal of unity.

The Methodist Church is an important ecumenical Church, and is present in many parts of the world. Like the Catholic Church it has a strong sense of spirituality, solidarity and deep social commitment. Collaboration in common projects in the community comes easily.

There have been rich results of the theological dialogues on the sacraments, authority, the nature of the church, social witness, ethics and tradition, but these are not widely known in the Methodist and Catholic communities. The Methodist emphasis on the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church makes this a particularly fruitful year to deepen relationships.

The Reformed (Calvinist) churches have a long history. They have given important gifts to the cultures where they have existed shared by their fellow Christians, such as the democratic forms of government, which was first developed in presbyterian and congregational churches.

In this year when we focus on the Holy Spirit at work in the charisms of the laity, we have much to learn from these churches. They have full lay participation in their parish councils (sessions or consistories), their diocesan assemblies (presbyteries or synods), and in the oversight of their universal church life (General Assemblies or Conventions). Dialogues on the laity, scripture and tradition, the unity we seek, the healing of memories, and ethics have been especially important with these churches.

The Christian Church/Disciples of Christ is a church born on the American frontier and has become a worldwide Church. It has a particularly strong zeal for the unity among Christians, from which we can all learn. They have weekly Eucharist and a very strong commitment to the role of the laity in the governance of the Church.

The dialogues on ethical issues with these churches are of particular importance in the moral formation of Catholics. The results of some of these conversations on very contentious issues where these churches seem to differ greatly in public policy, show that more common ground is shared in Gospel ethical values than is apparent from the different recommendations to the civil society.

The Methodist/Catholic dialogue shows common concerns for the sick and dying, even when there is not always the precise same witness on euthanasia. The Reformed/Catholic Ethics in the Search for Unity demonstrates that we share much more in our approaches to human rights and abortion, even when we differ on how society should handle these issues. These studies are important in Catholic education to demonstrate how, grounded in a common faith in Jesus Christ, sincere Christians can hold different ethical positions in good faith. (UUS 43)

In the context of the World Council Assembly, experience of local councils, and parish cooperation Catholics can look again at their ecumenical commitments and the understanding of the real, if yet imperfect, communion that binds us together in the Holy Spirit. (TMA 47)

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