

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

**Brother Jeffrey Gros, FSC**

### **The Challenge of Noncumenical Churches**

There are some churches that do not share the ecumenical vision and zeal that is at the core of Roman Catholic identity and that of Orthodox and Protestant member churches of the World Council. In fact, many of our own people are challenged to conversion to the ecumenical enthusiasm that so pervades the Holy Father's encyclical. However, it is important to recognize these fellow Christians, and to reach out to them in the dialogue of charity, even if they are not yet open to the dialogue of truth or the pilgrimage toward full communion.

Even when we do not share the hope of full eucharistic communion, we can begin to celebrate the communion we already share at the table of the Word. It will be important for Catholic students and candidates for Christian initiation to be introduced to ecumenically open Christians among these groups. There are some in all of these churches that are open to dialogue with Roman Catholics. It will also be important to learn to speak of these groups, even when they show an antiCatholic bias, with respect as fellow Christians, even if misguided.

It will surprise many to know that there have been thirty years of Catholic conversation with the Baptists. Their biblical seriousness, evangelistic zeal, affirmation of religious liberty and collaboration on some prolife issues make outreach to them important.

There has been an international Pentecostal dialogue for over twenty five years. While many Pentecostal congregations and church leaders have been slow to open up to the Catholic Church, the Catholic charismatic movement and more open pastors and educators make contacts increasingly possible. It will be important to find ecumenically sensitive representatives of these churches so that Catholic

students and parishes can learn to understand them as they understand themselves and, where possible, pray and collaborate with them.

There are also conservative evangelical churches, from the megachurches to the city churches among the poor, some of whom are very offensive in their evangelistic assertiveness or their narrowness. However, it is important to pray for these Christians, and to find and support those open to collaboration and dialogue with Catholics. A speaker from a local evangelical association can help a faculty, group of catechists, parish council, and possibly classes, to understand how to deepen Christian relationships with these groups. Improving communication will also help in diminishing their fear, hostility and aggressiveness toward Catholics.

### **Activities**

During this year celebrating our hopes in the Holy Spirit for full communion, we can add to the week of prayer regular prayers for the World Council of Churches; for the ecumenical Presbyterians, Reformed, United, Disciples and Methodist churches with whom we share the goal; and for the Pentecostal, Baptist, Holiness and evangelical churches with whom we share Christ, if not the goal of visible unity.

The diocesan ecumenical officer, where there are such, can be a help in designing programs, locating documents and suggesting personnel to help with this year's ecumenical educational program. Particular activities may include:

- 1) Design a prayer cycle for classes and parish, to lift up the particular churches in the neighborhood, the World Council Assembly, Catholic relations with other churches in different parts of the world, and particular ecumenical leaders, both Catholic and other.
- 2) Bring in pairs of speakers: Catholic and Methodist, Baptist, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, or Disciples, to give a presentation to groups, geared to the appropriate level, prepared from the results of the dialogues between the particular partner and the Catholic Church.
- 3) Arrange a catechists' inservice program on the World Council, Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, possibly including catechists for ecumenical partner churches.
- 4) Invite speakers from the council of churches to talk about their work, about preparations for the August

World Council Assembly, and about educational and service opportunities provided by the council.

5) Provide ecumenical service opportunities for students, at appropriate ages, with councils of churches or with ecumenical partners' congregational outreach.

6) Organize regular experiences of ecumenical dialogue over issues of importance in the community, issues before the World Council Assembly, or drawn from the results of ecumenical dialogues.

7) Arrange visits to congregations where the worship is experienced and discussed with representatives of the congregation, and students have an opportunity to relate the lived reality of the faith of a congregation to the history, theology and dialogue they may have studied.

8) Begin to bring ecumenical partners into the school and parish planning for any celebrations that are projected for the Jubilee 2000.

9) Bring successful couples in interchurch families to class to talk about their experience of church, faith, family and ecumenical urgency.

Many of the ecumenically oriented churches have experienced religious educators who can work with us in providing programs appropriate to the age, community and ecumenical needs of our parishes and dioceses. The Spirit has blessed our Church with many ecumenical signs of hope that are opportunities to engender enthusiasm and deepened appreciation of the Christian faith, during this year of preparation for the great Jubilee.

## Resources

Joseph Burgess, Jeffrey Gros ed., *Building Unity*, New York: Paulist Press, 1989.

— *Growing Consensus*, New York: Paulist Press, 1989.

Gunther Gassmann, ed., *Documentary History of Faith and Order: 1963-1993*, Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1993.

Jeffrey Gros, ed., *Deepening Communion*, Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1998.

*Week of Prayer for Christian Unity Materials*. Garrison, NY: Graymoor Ecumenical and Interreligious Institute.

John Paul, *That They All May Be One Ut Unum Sint*, Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1995.

Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1993

Lukas Vischer and Harding Meyer, Eds., *Growth in Agreement Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level*, New York: Paulist Press, 1984.

W.A. Visser't Hooft, *The Genesis and Formation of the World Council of Churches*, (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982).

World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Geneva, 1982. •