

**A Jubilee for the Future Church
(1/2)**

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As we prepare for the celebration of Christ's incarnation in the year 2000, all Christians are reminded of the prayer of Christ for the churches: "That they all may be one as you Father in me and I in you, that they all may be one in us that the world might believe that you have sent me."

From the very beginning of the preparations of the Catholic contribution to this celebration among all Christians, the Holy Father has had the hope that this commemoration might advance the unity of the Christian churches: "Among 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."

In Rome, the Holy Father will open the Holy Door of St. Paul's Basilica on Tuesday, January 18, 2000 "when the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity begins, as a way of emphasizing the distinctive ecumenical character of this Jubilee." (*Incarnationis Mysterium* #6) Would this not be a day when each Catholic school, in collaboration with its Christian neighbors, might find a way of lifting up a symbol of opening new relationships among Christians in the community, inviting priests and ministers into the school from the churches in the neighborhood or those to which our colleagues and students belong, or renewing the commitment of the school to promote unity among Christians? In certain areas, would it not be possible for the Lasallian school to be hosted in a Protestant, Anglican or Orthodox church to begin the Jubilee together?

This year is also a Lasallian jubilee, with the General Chapter starting on May 1, the fiftieth anniversary of De La Salle being designated patron of all teachers, and the centenary of his canonization. Would it not be a great occasion for Lasallian ministries to ask the Catholic parishes and Christian churches in the community to offer special prayers for the Chapter on the Sunday before May 1? Could not our ministries provide pictures of John Baptist de la Salle and popular biographies for Christian churches in the community during the month of May? Biographies may even be

appropriate for our colleagues from other religious and their community leaders. Lasallians may wish to make themselves available to tell the story of De La Salle and the importance of the call to teaching in parish schools and church groups during this month in the Jubilee year.

Preparing Together

Especially in the year of the Jubilee itself preparations should be made with other Christians. The Catholic schools will want to participate with the diocese in such ecumenical planning. It is to be planned "and carefully prepared in an attitude of fraternal cooperation with Christians of other denominations and traditions, as well as of grateful openness to those religions whose representatives might wish to acknowledge the joy shared by all the disciples of Christ." If the Holy Father's hopes are to be taken seriously, parishes and dioceses should join with Orthodox, Protestant and Episcopal churches before the planning begins, each bringing their own churches hopes, the needs of the community and the prospects for the Church's future around the table in their planning.

We cannot be faithful to the Holy Father's wishes if we develop our own Catholic programs, and then invite fellow Christians on board. Indeed, some dioceses around the US have invested their work from the very beginning of preparation, when the Holy Father issued his Apostolic Letter in 1994, in ecumenical groupings with other churches.

In the Papal Bull initiating the Jubilee, *Incarnationis Mysterium*, the Holy Father is emphatic in placing the ecumenical Christian character of the event as central, whatever Catholics from within their own traditions and piety bring to the celebration: "May this prayer [of St. Gregory of Nazianzen] to the Trinity for the Incarnation of the Son rise with one voice from all who have been baptized and share the same faith in the Lord Jesus. May the ecumenical character of the Jubilee be a concrete sign of the journey which, especially in recent decades, the faithful of the different Churches and Ecclesial Communities have been making. It is only by listening to the Spirit that we shall be able to show forth visibly in full communion the grace of divine adoption which springs from Baptism: all of us children of one Father." (#4)

Whatever we do as Catholics, by way of pilgrimages, indulgences and special prayers are to be seen in the light of the centrality of Christians celebrating together the Jubilee of the Incarnation: "The Incarnation of the Son of God and the salvation which he has accomplished by his Death and Resurrection are therefore the true criterion for evaluating all that happens in time and every effort to make life more human." (#1) Some of our Catholic devotions will not be shared by our Orthodox and Protestant fellow Christians as we prepare the Jubilee together, but these values, which the Holy Father places at the center of the hierarchy of truths on which we focus in 2000, are the common calling of all who bear the name of Christian.

The new *General Directory for Catechesis* will also be an important impetus and resource for our catechetical task in educating for unity as we celebrate the Jubilee: "Every Christian community, by the mere fact of being what it is, is moved by the Spirit to recognize its ecumenical vocation in the circumstances in which it finds itself, by participating in ecumenical dialogue and initiatives to foster the unity of Christians. Catechesis, therefore, is always called to assume

an 'ecumenical dimension' everywhere. This is done, firstly, by an exposition of all of Revelation....In the second place,brings to the fore that unity of faith which exists...explains divisions....and the steps being taken to overcome them...arouses and nourishes a true desire for unity...Finally, ..prepares children, young people and adults to live in contact..." (#197)

A New Look for a Jubilee

When the Jubilee idea was developed in the Catholic Church in 1300, it was already separated from the Oriental Orthodox (451) and Eastern Orthodox (1054-1204) churches. This early Jubilee was centered very much on Pope Boniface VIII's desire to strengthen loyalty to Rome, to the Pope and to popularize indulgences. In 1994, when Pope John Paul announced the Jubilee he gave very different emphases: social justice, unity of the churches and renewal of evangelization - while not neglecting the traditional themes of repentance, renewal and sacramental reconciliation.

Teaching this history in our schools will be important so that the reconciling intent of the Holy Father may be evident to the students, and that past tensions among Christians over indulgences, pilgrimages — especially violent ones like the Crusades — can be understood and steps made to heal these alienations.

However, even the indulgences and pilgrimages were situated within the biblical jubilee theme (Lev. 25) of relief of debt — especially for the poorest nations, solidarity with those in need — especially the refugees among us, respect for the land — ecology, and renewing our relationships among the world's peoples. It is this radical shift that is most remarkable about the view of history so important to the Holy Father since the beginning of his pontificate and his hope for ever deepening the conversion of the Catholic people to Christ and to the vision of the Church articulated in Vatican II. Rather than a time for pious activity alone, the preparation period has been one of education and evangelization as we look forward to the new millennium.

Even the indulgence, while noting the traditional Roman churches that may be visited, provides provisions for bishops designating their own cathedral or other shrines - even ecumenical ones one would suppose - as sites for pil-

grimage. What is most striking is the encouragement to provide works of mercy as well as church visitation: "if they visit for a suitable time their brothers and sisters in need or in difficulty (the sick, the imprisoned, the elderly living alone, the handicapped, etc.), as if making a pilgrimage to Christ present in them (cf. Mt 25:34-36), and fulfilling the usual spiritual and sacramental conditions...donating a proportionate sum of money to the poor; supporting a significant contribution works of a religious or social nature (especially for the benefit of abandoned children, young people in trouble, the elderly in need, foreigners in various countries seeking better living conditions); devoting a suitable portion of personal free time to activities benefitting the community, or other similar forms of personal sacrifice." (*Conditions for Gaining the Jubilee Indulgence*)

The pilgrimages noted to the shrines in the Holy Land may not be possible for many, but our schools can be centers for educating students about the historical significance of the shrines, the contemporary Christians, Muslims and Jews that live there, and the peace for which we pray during this Jubilee period. Our own Lasallian ministries in the Holy Land can be a way of making these places more vivid communities to which students and parents can relate more vividly, in solidarity for those who seek the peace of Jerusalem.

While Protestants and Orthodox will not participate in the idea of indulgences, we can participate together in the Jubilee values that signal our common participation in the communion of saints and the fruits of Christ's grace being effective in the world through our good works: "One sign of the mercy of God which is especially necessary today is the sign of *charity*, which opens our eyes to the needs of those who are poor and excluded. Such is the situation affecting vast sectors of society and casting its shadow of death upon whole peoples. The human race is facing forms of slavery which are new and more subtle than those of the past; and for too many people freedom remains a word without meaning. Some nations, especially the poorer ones, are oppressed by a debt so huge that repayment is practically impossible. It is clear, therefore, that there can be no real progress without effective cooperation between the peoples of every language, race, nationality and religion." (*Incarnationis Mysterium*. #12)

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