

## THE BISHOP AND CHRISTIAN UNITY: AN ECUMENICAL VADEMECUM

In Dutch, called HANDBOEK VOOR OECUMENE.

Overview of developments in ecumenism, practical recommendations, in the Catholic Church  
and  
overview of the different ecumenical dialogues.

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**PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING  
CHRISTIAN UNITY  
THE BISHOP  
AND CHRISTIAN UNITY:  
AN ECUMENICAL  
VADEMECUM**

**Preface**

The ministry entrusted to the bishop is a service of unity both within his diocese and of unity between the local church and the universal church. That ministry therefore has special significance in the search for the unity of all Christ's followers. The bishop's responsibility for promoting Christian unity is clearly affirmed in the Code of Canon Law of the Latin Church among the tasks of his pastoral office: "He is to act with humanity and charity toward the brothers and sisters who are not in full communion with the Catholic Church and is to foster ecumenism as it is understood by the Church" (Can 383 §3 CIC 1983). In this respect, the bishop cannot consider the promotion of the ecumenical cause as one more task in his varied ministry, one that could and should be deferred in view of other, apparently more important, priorities. The bishop's ecumenical engagement is not an optional dimension of his ministry but a duty and obligation. This appears even more clearly in the Code of Canons of Eastern Churches, containing a special section dedicated to the ecumenical task, in which it is particularly recommended that pastors of the Church "work zealously in participating in ecumenical work" (Can 902–908 CCEO 1990). In the service of unity, the bishop's pastoral ministry extends not just to the unity of his own church, but to the unity of all the baptized into Christ.

The present document, issued by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *The Bishop and Christian Unity. An Ecumenical Vademecum*, is offered as an aid to diocesan and eparchial bishops to help them better understand and fulfil their ecumenical responsibility. The genesis of this Vademecum began with a request from a Plenary Assembly of this Pontifical Council. The text was developed by the Council's officials in consultation with experts and with the agreement of the relevant dicasteries of the Roman Curia. We are now happy to publish it with the blessing of the Holy Father Pope Francis.

We place this work in the hands of the world's bishops, hoping that in these pages they will find clear and helpful guidelines, enabling them to lead the local churches entrusted to their pastoral care towards that unity for which the Lord prayed and to which the Church is irrevocably called.

**Kurt Cardinal Koch**  
*President*

† **Brian Farrell**  
Titular Bishop of Abitine  
*Secretary*

**Abbreviations**

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| <i>CCEO</i>  | <i>Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches</i> (1990)   |
| <i>CIC</i>   | <i>Code of Canon Law</i> (1983)  |
| <i>ED</i>    | <i>Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms of Ecumenism</i> (1993), Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity |
| <i>EG</i>    | <i>Evangelii gaudium</i> (2013), Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis   |
| <i>LG</i>    | <i>Lumen gentium</i> (1964), Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of the Second Vatican Council                                     |
| <i>PCPCU</i> | Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity   |
| <i>UR</i>    | <i>Unitatis redintegratio</i> (1964), Decree on Ecumenism of the Second Vatican Council  |
| <i>UUS</i>   | <i>Ut unum sint</i> (1995), Encyclical letter of Saint John Paul II on the ecumenical commitment                                   |

**Introduction**

## 1. The search for unity as intrinsic to the nature of the Church

Our Lord's prayer for the unity of his disciples "that they may all be one" is tied to the mission that he gives to them, "so that the world may believe" (Jn 17:21). The Second Vatican Council stressed that division among Christian communities "openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages the holy cause of preaching the Gospel to every creature" (*Unitatis redintegratio* [UR] §1). Insofar as Christians fail to be the visible sign of this unity they fail in their missionary duty to be the instrument bringing all people into the saving unity which is the communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In this we understand why the work of unity is fundamental to our identity as Church, and why Saint John Paul II could write in his milestone encyclical *Ut unum sint*, "the quest for Christian unity is not a matter of choice or expediency, but a duty which springs from the very nature of the Christian community" (*Ut unum sint* [UUS] §49, see also §3).

## 2. A real, though incomplete, communion

The Second Vatican Council's Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio*, recognised that those who believe in Christ and are baptised with water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are truly our brothers and sisters in Christ (see UR §3). Through baptism they "are incorporated into Christ" (UR §3), that is "truly incorporated into the crucified and glorified Christ, and reborn to a sharing of the divine life" (UR §22). Moreover, the Council recognised that the communities to which these brothers and sisters belong are endowed with many essential elements Christ wills for his Church, are used by the Spirit as "means of salvation," and have a real, though incomplete, communion with the Catholic Church (see UR §3). The Decree began the work of specifying those areas of our ecclesial lives in which this communion resides, and where and why the extent of ecclesial communion varies from one Christian community to another. Lastly, in recognising the positive value of other Christian communities, *Unitatis redintegratio* also acknowledged that because of the wound of Christian division "the Church herself finds it more difficult to express in actual life her full catholicity in all her bearings" (UR §4).

## 3. Christian unity as the concern of the whole Church

"Concern for restoring unity," wrote the fathers of the Second Vatican Council, "pertains to the whole Church, faithful and clergy alike. It extends to everyone according to the ability of each, whether it be exercised in daily living or in theological and historical studies" (UR §5). The insistence of the Council that the ecumenical endeavour demands the engagement of all the faithful, and not only of theologians and church leaders meeting in international dialogues, has been repeatedly emphasised in subsequent Church documents. Saint John Paul II in *Ut unum sint* wrote that the commitment to ecumenism, "far from being the responsibility of the Apostolic See alone, is also the duty of individual local and particular Churches" (§31). The real, though incomplete, communion that already exists between Catholics and other baptised Christians can and must be deepened at a number of levels simultaneously. Pope Francis has captured this in the phrase, "walking together, praying together and working together". By sharing our Christian lives with other Christians, by praying with and for them, and by giving common witness to our Christian faith through action, we grow into the unity which is the Lord's desire for his Church.

## 4. The bishop as the "visible principle" of unity

As a shepherd of the flock the bishop has the distinct responsibility of gathering all into unity. He is "the visible principle and foundation of unity" in his particular church (*Lumen gentium* [LG] §23). The service of unity is not just one of the tasks of the bishop's ministry; it is fundamental to it. The bishop "should sense the urgency of promoting ecumenism" (*Apostolorum Successores* §18). Rooted in his personal prayer, concern for unity must inform every part of his ministry: in his teaching of the faith, in his sacramental ministry, and through the decisions of his pastoral care, he is called to build and strengthen that unity for which Jesus prayed at the Last Supper (cf. Jn 17). A further dimension of his ministry of unity became evident with the Catholic Church's embrace of the ecumenical movement. As a consequence, the bishop's concern for the unity of the Church extends to "those who are not yet of the one flock" (LG §27) but are our spiritual brothers and sisters in the Spirit through the real though imperfect bonds of communion that connect all the baptised.

The episcopal ministry of unity is deeply related to synodality. According to Pope Francis, “a careful examination of how, in the Church’s life, the principle of synodality and the service of the one who presides are articulated, will make a significant contribution to the progress of relations between our Churches”.<sup>[1]</sup> The bishops who compose one college together with the Pope exercise their pastoral and ecumenical ministry in a synodal manner together with the entire People of God. As Pope Francis has taught, “The commitment to build a synodal Church — a mission to which we are all called, each with the role entrusted him by the Lord — has significant ecumenical implications”,<sup>[2]</sup> because both synodality and ecumenism are processes of walking together.

## **5. The *Vademecum* as a guide to the bishop in his task of discernment**

The ecumenical task will always be influenced by the wide variety of contexts in which bishops live and work: in some regions Catholics will be in the majority; in others, in a minority to another or other Christian communities; and in others Christianity itself will be a minority. Pastoral challenges, too, are extremely diverse. It is always for the diocesan/ eparchial bishop to make an appraisal of the challenges and opportunities of his context, and to discern how to apply the Catholic principles of ecumenism in his own diocese/ eparchy.<sup>[3]</sup> The *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms of Ecumenism* (1993, henceforth *Ecumenical Directory* [ED]) is the most important reference for the bishop in his task of discernment. This *Vademecum* is offered to the bishop as an encouragement and a guide in fulfilling his ecumenical responsibilities.

## **PART 1**

### **The promotion of ecumenism within the Catholic Church**

## **6. The search for unity is first of all a challenge to Catholics**

*Unitatis redintegratio* teaches that the “primary duty” of Catholics “is to make a careful and honest appraisal of whatever needs to be done or renewed in the Catholic household itself” (§4). For this reason, rather than begin with our relations with other Christians, it is necessary for Catholics, in the words of the decree, first “to examine their own faithfulness to Christ’s will for the Church and accordingly to undertake with vigour the task of renewal and reform” (§4). This inner renewal disposes and orders the Church towards dialogue and engagement with other Christians. It is an endeavour which concerns both ecclesial structures (Section A) and the ecumenical formation of the whole People of God (Section B).

### **A. Ecumenical structures at the local and regional level**

## **7. The bishop as a man of dialogue promoting ecumenical engagement**

*Christus Dominus* §13 describes the bishop as a man of dialogue, seeking out those of goodwill in a common pursuit of truth through a conversation marked by clarity and humility, and in a context of charity and friendship. The Code of Canon Law (CIC) Canon 383 §3 refers to the same idea, describing the ecumenical responsibilities of the bishop as “to act with humanity and charity toward the brothers and sisters who are not in full communion with the Catholic Church” and “to foster ecumenism as it is understood by the Church.” The ecumenical task of the bishop therefore is to promote both the “Dialogue of Love” and the “Dialogue of Truth”.

## **8. The bishop’s responsibility to guide and direct ecumenical initiatives**

Alongside the bishop’s personal disposition to dialogue is his role of leadership and governance. *Unitatis redintegratio* envisages the People of God engaged in a variety of ecumenical activities but always under “the attentive guidance of their bishops” (§4). Canon 755, situated in the part of the Code dedicated to the teaching function of the Church, stipulates that it is “for the entire college of bishops and the Apostolic See to foster and direct among Catholics the ecumenical movement” (CIC 755 §1). Moreover, it is the responsibility of bishops, both individually and in episcopal conferences or synods, to establish “practical norms according to the various

needs and opportunities of the circumstances” while being “attentive to the prescripts issued by the supreme authority of the Church” (CIC 755 §2 and CCEO 904, see also *Apostolorum Successores* §18). In establishing norms bishops, acting either singularly or in conference, can ensure that confusion and misunderstandings do not arise and that scandal is not given to the faithful. The Code of Canons of Eastern Churches (CCEO), which dedicates an entire Title to ecumenism (XVIII), underlines the “special duty” of the Eastern Catholic Churches in fostering unity among all the Eastern and Oriental Churches and highlights the role of the eparchial bishops in this endeavour. Unity can be furthered “through prayers, by example of life, by the religious fidelity to the ancient traditions of the Eastern Churches, by mutual and better knowledge of each other, and by collaboration and fraternal respect in practice and spirit” (Canon 903).

## **9. The appointment of ecumenical officers**

The *Ecumenical Directory* §41 recommends that the bishop appoint a diocesan officer for ecumenism who is to be a close collaborator with, and counsellor to, the bishop in ecumenical matters. It also proposes that he establish a diocesan commission for ecumenism to assist him in implementing the ecumenical teaching of the Church as set out in its documents and in the directives of the episcopal conference or synod (§§42-45). The ecumenical officer and members of the ecumenical commission can be important points of contact with other Christian communities and may represent the bishop in ecumenical meetings. In order to ensure that Catholic parishes are also fully engaged ecumenically in their locality, many bishops have found it helpful to encourage the appointment of parish ecumenical officers as envisaged in the *Ecumenical Directory* (§§45 & 67).

## **10. The Ecumenical Commission of Episcopal Conferences and Synods of Eastern Catholic Churches**

Where the episcopal conference or synod is sufficiently large the *Ecumenical Directory* recommends that a commission of bishops should be formed with responsibility for ecumenism (§§46-47). These bishops should be assisted by a team of expert consultants and, if possible, a permanent secretariat. One of the principal tasks of the commission is to translate the ecumenical documents of the Church into concrete action appropriate to the local context. When the conference is too small for an episcopal commission at least one bishop should be made responsible for ecumenical activity (ED §46) and may be assisted by suitable advisors.

The commission should support and advise individual bishops as well as the various offices of the conference in fulfilling their ecumenical responsibilities. The *Ecumenical Directory* envisages the commission engaging with existing ecumenical institutions at the national or territorial level. Where it is judged to be appropriate the commission should establish dialogues and consultations with other Christian communities. Members of the commission should represent the Catholic community or nominate a suitable alternative when invited to attend an important event in the life of another Christian community. Reciprocally they should also ensure an appropriate level of representation of ecumenical guests or delegates at important moments in the life of the Catholic Church. *Apostolorum Successores* §170 suggests observers from other Christian communities should be invited to diocesan synods, after consultation with the leaders of these communities.

The visit *ad limina apostolorum* provides an opportunity for bishops to share their own ecumenical experiences and concerns with the Pope, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and other curial offices. It is also an occasion in which bishops can seek information or advice from the Pontifical Council.

## **B. The ecumenical dimension of formation**

### **11. A people disposed to dialogue and engagement**

Through formation the bishop can ensure that the people of his diocese are properly disposed for engagement with other Christians. *Unitatis redintegratio* §11 counsels that those engaging in ecumenical dialogue should approach their task with “love of the truth, with charity, and with humility”. These three fundamental dispositions provide a helpful guide for ecumenical formation of the whole People of God.

Firstly, ecumenism is not premised on compromise as if unity should be achieved at the expense of truth. On the contrary, the search for unity leads us into a fuller appreciation of God's revealed truth. The bedrock of ecumenical formation, therefore, is that "the Catholic faith must be explained more profoundly and precisely, in such a way and in such terms as our separated brethren can also really understand" (UR §11). These explanations must convey an understanding "that in Catholic doctrine there exists a 'hierarchy' of truths, since they vary in their relation to the fundamental Christian faith" (UR §11). Though all revealed truths are believed with the same divine faith, their significance depends on their relation to the saving mysteries of the Trinity and salvation in Christ, the source of all Christian doctrines. By weighing truths rather than simply enumerating them, Catholics gain a more accurate understanding of the unity that exists among Christians.

Secondly, the virtue of charity demands that Catholics avoid polemical presentations of Christian history and theology and, in particular, that they avoid misrepresenting the positions of other Christians (see UR §4 & §10). Rather, formators informed by an attitude of charity will always seek to emphasise the Christian faith that we share with others and to present the theological differences that divide us with balance and accuracy. In this way the work of formation helps to remove obstacles to dialogue (see UR §11).

The Second Vatican Council insisted that "there can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without a change of heart" (UR §7). An appropriately humble attitude enables Catholics to appreciate "what God is bringing about in the members of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities" (UUS §48), which in turn opens the way for us to learn and receive gifts from these brothers and sisters. Humility is again necessary when, through encounter with other Christians, truth comes to light "which might require a review of assertions and attitudes" (UUS §36).

## **I) The formation of laity, seminarians and clergy**

### **12. A summary guide to the Ecumenical Directory on formation**

The ecumenical dimension should be present in all aspects and disciplines of Christian formation. The *Ecumenical Directory* first of all offers guidelines for the ecumenical formation of all the faithful (§§58–69). It envisages this formation taking place through Bible study, the preached Word, catechesis, liturgy and spiritual life, and in a variety of contexts, such as the family, parish, school and lay associations. Next the document offers guidance for the formation of those engaged in pastoral work, both ordained (§§70–82) and lay (§§83–86). It proposes both that all courses be taught with an ecumenical dimension and sensitivity, and that a specific course in ecumenism be a required part of the first cycle of theological studies (§79). The ecumenical dimension of seminary formation is particularly highlighted and it is recommended that all seminarians should be given ecumenical experience (§§70–82). The document also considers the continuing ecumenical formation of priests, deacons, religious and lay people (§91).

In 1997, the Pontifical Council issued guidelines entitled *The Ecumenical Dimension in the Formation of Those Engaged in Pastoral Ministry*. Its two parts deal respectively with the need to give an ecumenical dimension to each area of theological formation, and with the necessary elements for a specific course on the study of ecumenism.

## **II) The use of media and diocesan websites**

### **13. An ecumenical approach in using the media**

A lack of communication with each other over the centuries has deepened the differences among Christian communities. Efforts to foster and strengthen communication can play a key role in drawing divided Christians closer together. Those who represent the Church in social communications should be imbued with the ecumenical dispositions emphasised above. The Catholic presence through the media should demonstrate that Catholics esteem their Christian brothers and sisters and are a people open to listening and learning from them.

### **14. Some recommendations for diocesan websites**

Increasingly the internet is the medium through which the face of the Church is perceived by the world. It is a place where both the Catholic faithful and others will find the local Church represented and from where they will judge its priorities and concerns. Attention should be given to this new dimension of ecclesial life. The Church's concern for Christian unity in obedience to Christ, and our love and esteem for other Christian communities, should be immediately evident from the diocesan website. Those who administer diocesan websites must be aware of the responsibility that they have in Christian formation. The diocesan ecumenical officer and the ecumenical commission should be easily found and contacted through the website. The website can very profitably provide links to the webpage of the Ecumenical Commission of the Episcopal Conference or Synod, to the website of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and also to the local and national ecumenical councils.

The ecumenical page of a diocesan website is an excellent place to publicise events and news. However, permission should always be sought before using photographs of ecumenical partners as in some cases publicity can cause difficulties for them.

### **Practical Recommendations**

- To be familiar with, and make use, of the *Ecumenical Directory*.
- To appoint a Diocesan Ecumenical Officer. The *Ecumenical Directory* §41 recommends that each diocese should have an ecumenical officer who acts as a close collaborator with the bishop in ecumenical matters and can represent the diocese to other local Christian communities. Where possible this role should be distinct from the officer for interreligious dialogue.
- To establish a Diocesan Ecumenical Commission. The *Ecumenical Directory* (§§42–44) proposes that each diocese should have a commission whose task it is to bring a suitably ecumenical dimension to every aspect of the local Church's life. This body should oversee ecumenical formation, initiate consultations with other Christian communities, and promote joint witness to our shared Christian faith.
- To promote the appointment of Parish Ecumenical Officers. The *Ecumenical Directory* envisages each parish as a "place of authentic ecumenical witness" (§67, see also §45) with a parishioner appointed to be responsible for local ecumenical relations.
- } To be familiar with the norms established by the episcopal conference or synod. The *Ecumenical Directory* (§§46–47) suggests that each conference or synod should have a commission of bishops with a permanent secretary, or failing that a nominated bishop, with responsibilities for ecumenical engagement. This body or bishop has responsibility not only for the aforementioned norms, but also for engaging with ecumenical bodies at the national level.
- To ensure that there is a mandatory course in ecumenism at all seminaries and Catholic theology faculties in the diocese, and ensure that courses in sacred theology and other branches of knowledge have an ecumenical dimension.
- To share documentation and ecumenical resources through your diocesan website.

- To share ecumenical news through the website so that the faithful of a diocese can see their bishop meeting, praying and working with other Christian communities of the locality

## PART 2

### The Catholic Church in its relations with other Christians

#### 15. The many ways to engage ecumenically with other Christians

The ecumenical movement is one and indivisible and should always be thought of as a whole. Nonetheless it takes various forms according to the various dimensions of ecclesial life. Spiritual ecumenism promotes prayer, conversion and holiness for the sake of Christian unity. The Dialogue of Love deals with encounter at the level of everyday contacts and co-operation, nurturing and deepening the relationship we already share through baptism. The Dialogue of Truth concerns the vital doctrinal aspect of healing division among Christians. The Dialogue of Life includes the opportunities for encounter and collaboration with other Christians in pastoral care, in mission to the world and through culture. These forms of ecumenism are here distinguished for clarity of explanation, but it should always be borne in mind that they are interconnected and mutually enriching aspects of the same reality. Much ecumenical activity will engage a number of these dimensions simultaneously. For the purposes of this document distinctions are made in order to help the bishop in his discernment.[4]

#### E. Spiritual ecumenism

#### 16. Prayer, conversion and holiness

Spiritual ecumenism is described in *Unitatis redintegratio* §8 as “the soul of the whole ecumenical movement”. At each Eucharist Catholics ask the Lord to grant the Church “unity and peace” (Roman Rite, before the sign of peace) or pray for “the stability of the holy churches of God, and for the unity of all” (Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom, Litany of peace).

Spiritual ecumenism consists not only of praying for Christian unity but also of a “change of heart and holiness of life” (UR §8). Indeed, “All the faithful should remember that the more effort they make to live holier lives according to the Gospel, the better will they further Christian unity and put it into practice” (UR §7). Spiritual ecumenism requires conversion and reform. As Pope Benedict XVI said: “Concrete gestures that enter hearts and stir consciences are essential, inspiring in everyone that inner conversion that is the prerequisite for all ecumenical progress.”[5] Similarly, in his handbook of spiritual ecumenism Cardinal Walter Kasper wrote, “Only in the context of conversion and renewal can the wounded bonds of communion be healed”.[6]

#### 17. Praying with other Christians

Because we share a real communion as brothers and sisters in Christ, Catholics not only can, but indeed must, seek out opportunities to pray with other Christians. Certain forms of prayer are particularly appropriate in the search for Christian unity. Just as at the conclusion of the rite of Baptism we recognise the dignity we have all gained in being made children of the one Father and so pray the Lord’s prayer, it is equally appropriate to pray this same prayer with other Christians with whom we share baptism.

Similarly, the ancient Christian practice of praying the psalms and scriptural canticles together (the Prayer of the Church) is a tradition that continues to be common throughout many Christian communities and therefore lends itself to be prayed ecumenically (see ED §§117–119).[7]

In promoting joint prayer Catholics should be sensitive to the fact that some Christian communities do not practise joint prayer with other Christians, as was once the case for the Catholic Church.

#### 18. Prayer for unity: the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

The Second Vatican Council taught that “human powers and capacities cannot achieve ... the reconciling of all

Christians in the unity of the one and only Church of Christ” (UR §24). In praying for unity we acknowledge that unity is a gift of the Holy Spirit and not something we can achieve through our own efforts. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is celebrated every year from 18–25 January, or around the feast of Pentecost in some parts of the world. Each year materials are prepared by an ecumenical group of Christians in a particular region, centred on a scriptural text and providing a theme, a joint worship service and brief scriptural reflections for each day of the week. The bishop can very effectively advance the cause of Christian unity by participating in an ecumenical prayer service to mark the week with other Christian leaders, and by encouraging parishes and groups to work with other Christian communities present in the area to jointly organize special prayer events during this week.

## 19. Prayer for one another and for the needs of the world

An important aspect of spiritual ecumenism is simply to pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ, and in particular those who are our neighbours. Even if there are difficulties in local ecumenical relations, or if our openness to others is not reciprocated, we can continue to pray for the blessing of these Christians. Such prayer can become a regular part of our own personal prayer and of the intercessions in our liturgies.

*Ut unum sint* teaches that “There is no important or significant event which does not benefit from Christians coming together and praying” (§25). Christians from different traditions will share a concern for the local community in which they live and the particular challenges that it faces. Christians can demonstrate their care by marking together significant events or anniversaries in the life of the community, and by praying together for its particular needs. Global realities such as warfare, poverty, the plight of migrants, injustice and the persecution of Christians and other religious groups also demand the attention of Christians who can join together in prayer for peace and for the most vulnerable.

## 20. The Sacred Scriptures

*Unitatis redintegratio* describes the scriptures as “an instrument of the highest value in the mighty hand of God for the attainment of ... unity” (§21). The *Ecumenical Directory* urges that everything possible should be done to encourage Christians to read the scriptures together. In so doing, the document continues, the bond of unity between Christians is reinforced, they are opened to the unifying action of God, and their common witness to the Word of God is strengthened (see §183). With all Christians, Catholics share the Sacred Scriptures and with many they also share a common Sunday lectionary. This shared biblical heritage presents opportunities to come together for scripturally-based prayer and discussion, for *lectio divina*, for joint publications and translations,[8] and even for ecumenical pilgrimages to the holy sites of the Bible. The ministry of preaching can be a particularly powerful means of demonstrating that, as Christians, we are nourished from the common source of the Holy Scriptures. Where appropriate, Catholic and other Christian ministers may be invited to share the ministry of preaching in each other’s non-Eucharistic services (ED §135, see also 118–119).

## 21. Liturgical feasts and seasons

Similarly, we share with most other traditions at least the principal elements of the liturgical calendar: Christmas, Easter and Pentecost. With many we will also share the liturgical seasons of Advent and Lent. In various parts of the world our shared calendar allows Christians to prepare together for the celebration of the main Christian feasts. In some dioceses the Catholic bishop joins with other Christian leaders to issue joint statements on these important celebrations.

## 22. Saints and martyrs

“Perhaps the most convincing form of ecumenism,” wrote Saint John Paul II in *Tertio millennio adveniente*, “is the ecumenism of the saints and of the martyrs.” He goes on, “The *communio sanctorum* speaks louder than the things which divide us” (§37). Our churches are already united by the communion that the saints and martyrs share. A common devotion to a particular saint, shrine or image can be the focus of an ecumenical pilgrimage, procession or celebration. Catholics generally, and Catholic bishops in particular, can strengthen the bonds of unity with other Christians by encouraging devotions which are already held in common.

In certain parts of the world Christians suffer persecution. Pope Francis has often spoken of the “ecumenism of blood”.<sup>[9]</sup> Those who persecute Christians often recognise better than Christians do themselves the unity that exists among them. In honouring Christians from other traditions who have suffered martyrdom Catholics recognise the riches that Christ has bestowed on them and to which they bear powerful witness (see UR §4). Furthermore, although our own communion with the communities to which these martyrs belong remains imperfect, “this communion is already perfect in what we consider the highest point of the life of grace, *martyria* unto death, the truest communion possible with Christ” (UUS §84, see also §§12, 47, 48, and 79).

### **23. The contribution of consecrated life to Christian unity**

Consecrated life, which is rooted in the common tradition of the undivided Church, undoubtedly has a particular vocation in promoting unity. Established monastic and religious communities as well as new communities and ecclesial movements can be privileged places of ecumenical hospitality, of prayer for unity and for the “exchange of gifts” among Christians. Some recently founded communities have the promotion of Christian unity as their particular charism, and some of these include members from different Christian traditions. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata*, Saint John Paul II wrote, “There is an urgent need for consecrated persons to give more space in their lives to ecumenical prayer and genuine evangelical witness.” Indeed, he continued, “no Institute of Consecrated Life should feel itself dispensed from working for this cause” (§§100–101).

### **24. The healing of memories**

The expression the “healing of memories” has its roots in the Second Vatican Council. On the penultimate day of the Council (7 December 1965) a joint statement of Saint Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras “removed from the memory” of the Church the excommunications issued in 1054. Ten years later, Saint Paul VI first used the expression the “healing of memories”. As Saint John Paul II wrote, “The Council thus ended with a solemn act which was at once a healing of historical memories, a mutual forgiveness, and a firm commitment to strive for communion” (UUS §52). In the same encyclical Saint John Paul II stressed the need to overcome “certain refusals to forgive”, “an unevangelical insistence on condemning the ‘other side’ ” and “a disdain born of an unhealthy presumption” (§15). Because Christian communities have grown apart from one another, often harbouring resentments, attitudes such as these have, in some instances, become ingrained. The memory of many Christian communities remains wounded by a history of religious and national conflict. However, when communities on opposing sides of historical divisions are able to come together in a common rereading of history, a reconciliation of memories is made possible.

The commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017 was also an example of the healing of memories. In the report *From Conflict to Communion*, Catholics and Lutherans asked themselves how they could hand on their traditions “in such a way that they do not dig new trenches between Christians of different confessions” (§12).<sup>[10]</sup> They found it was possible to adopt a new approach to their history: “What happened in the past cannot be changed, but what is remembered of the past and how it is remembered can, with the passage of time, indeed change. Remembrance makes the past present. While the past itself is unalterable, the presence of the past in the present is alterable” (§16).

#### **Practical Recommendations**

- To pray regularly for the unity of Christians.
- To mark the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity with an ecumenically organized prayer service and encourage parishes to do the same.

- To engage with other Christian leaders about the possibility of holding joint scripture study days, ecumenical pilgrimages/ processions, common symbolic gestures, or the possible exchange of relics and holy images.
- To issue a joint message with another Christian leader or leaders at Christmas or Easter.
- To hold an ecumenical prayer service for a matter of common concern with other local Christian communities.
- To encourage your priests or pastoral assistants to meet regularly for prayer with other Christian ministers and leaders working in their neighbourhoods.
- To be aware of the ecumenical work of communities of consecrated life and ecclesial movements, and encourage this work.
- To ask the diocesan commission to work with other Christian communities to discern where a healing of memories might be necessary, and suggest concrete steps that may facilitate this

## F. The Dialogue of Love

### 25. The baptismal basis of the Dialogue of Love

All ecumenism is baptismal ecumenism. While Catholics might recognise all as brothers and sisters by virtue of our common Creator, they recognise a much more profound relationship with baptised Christians from other Christian communities who are their brothers and sisters *in Christ*, following the usage of the New Testament and the Fathers of the Church. Therefore the Dialogue of Love (or the Dialogue of Charity) attends not simply to human fraternity, but rather to those bonds of communion forged in baptism.

### 26. A culture of encounter in ecumenical bodies and events

Catholics should not wait for other Christians to approach them, but rather should always be prepared to take the first step towards others (see UR §4). This “culture of encounter” is a prerequisite for any true ecumenism. Therefore it is important that Catholics participate, as far as possible, in ecumenical bodies at the local, diocesan and national level. Bodies, such as Councils of Churches and Christian Councils, build mutual understanding and co-operation (see ED §§166–171). Catholics have a particular duty to participate in the ecumenical movement when they are in the majority (see ED §32). The Dialogue of Love is built up through the accumulation of simple initiatives which strengthen the bonds of communion: the exchange of messages or delegations on special occasions; reciprocal visits, meetings between local pastoral ministers; and twinings or covenants between communities or institutions (dioceses, parishes, seminaries, schools, and choirs). Thus, by word and gesture we show our love not only for our brothers and sisters in Christ but also for the Christian communities to which they belong, because we “joyfully acknowledge and esteem the truly Christian endowments” which we find there (UR §4).

It is the experience of many bishops that in the Dialogue of Love ecumenism becomes much more than a duty of their ministry and is discovered to be a source of enrichment and a fount of joy through which they experience “how very good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity” (Ps 133:1).

## Practical Recommendations

- To take the first step to meet with other Christian leaders.

- To pray personally and publically for other Christian leaders.
- To attend, insofar as it is possible and appropriate, the liturgies of ordination/ instalment/ welcome of other Christian leaders in your diocese.
- To invite, where appropriate, other Christian leaders to significant liturgical celebrations and events.
- To be aware of Councils of Churches and ecumenical bodies in your diocese and to participate as far as is possible.
- To inform other Christian leaders of important events and news.

## **G. The Dialogue of Truth**

### **27. Dialogue as an exchange of gifts**

In *Ut unum sint*, Saint John Paul II wrote that dialogue “has become an outright necessity, one of the Church’s priorities” (UUS §31). Through ecumenical dialogue each participant “gains a truer knowledge and more just appreciation” of its dialogue partner (UR §4). Saint John Paul II wrote that “Dialogue is not simply an exchange of ideas. In some way it is always an ‘exchange of gifts’ ” (UUS §28). In this exchange “Each individual part contributes through its special gifts to the good of the other parts and of the whole Church” (LG §13). Pope Francis has called for an active attentiveness to gifts in the other or potential areas of learning from the other which address our own ecclesial needs. “If we really believe in the abundantly free working of the Holy Spirit, we can learn so much from one another! It is not just about being better informed about others, but rather about reaping what the Spirit has sown in them, which is also meant to be a gift for us” (EG §246).

### **28. A dialogue that leads us into all truth**

The Dialogue of Truth is the theological dialogue which aims at the restoration of unity of faith. In *Ut unum sint* Saint John Paul II asked, “Who could consider legitimate a reconciliation brought about at the expense of the truth?” (§18). Rather, he insisted, full communion would come about “through the acceptance of the whole truth into which the Holy Spirit guides Christ’s disciples” (UUS §36). This is the same conviction expressed in the 2014 Jerusalem Common Declaration of Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew when they write, “We affirm once again that the theological dialogue does not seek a theological lowest common denominator on which to reach a compromise, but is rather about deepening one’s grasp of the whole truth that Christ has given to his Church, a truth that we never cease to understand better as we follow the Holy Spirit’s promptings.”

### **29. Theological dialogue at the international, national and diocesan level**

In the years following the Second Vatican Council the Catholic Church has engaged in many bilateral international theological dialogues with Christian world communions. The task of these dialogue commissions has been to address the theological disagreements which have historically caused division, but doing so in a manner which lays aside the polemical language and prejudices of the past, and that takes as the point of departure the common tradition.[11] These dialogues have produced documents which have sought to map out the extent to which the dialogue partners hold the same faith. They have addressed differences and sought to expand what the dialogue partners hold in common, and have identified the areas where further work is needed. The results of the dialogue provide the framework for discerning what we can and cannot appropriately do together on the basis of shared faith.

No less important is the work of the many national dialogue commissions operating under the authority of episcopal conferences. The national commissions are often themselves in dialogue with the international commissions, suggesting new areas for fruitful exploration and also receiving and commenting upon the documents of the international commissions.

The Dialogue of Truth conducted at the national and diocesan levels can have a particular importance with respect to the meaning and valid celebration of baptism. Local Church authorities have been able to formulate common statements expressing the mutual recognition of baptism (see ED §94). Other ecumenical working groups and initiatives also make a valuable contribution to the Dialogue of Truth.[12]

### 30. The challenge of reception

Reception is the process by which the Church discerns and appropriates that which it recognises as authentic Christian teaching. From the first preached word, down through the long history of Ecumenical Councils and Church teaching, the Christian community has exercised this discernment. Reception takes on a new significance in the ecumenical era. While bilateral and multilateral dialogues have over the years produced many agreed statements and declarations, these texts have not always entered into the life of Christian communities. The Joint Working Group between the World Council of Churches and the Catholic Church in its document on reception described ecumenical reception as “the evangelical attitude necessary to allow [the results of dialogue] to be adopted in one’s own ecclesial tradition”.[13] Saint John Paul II wrote that in order to receive the bilateral agreements “a serious examination needs to be made, which, by different ways and means and at various levels of responsibility, must involve the whole People of God” (UUS §80). This process of reception should involve the whole Church in the exercise of the *sensus fidei*: lay faithful, theologians, and pastors. Theological faculties and local ecumenical commissions play an important role in this regard. The Church’s teaching authority ultimately has the responsibility to express a judgment (see UUS §81). Bishops, therefore, are encouraged to read and evaluate particularly those ecumenical documents that are most relevant to their own contexts. Many contain suggestions which can be implemented at the local level.

While the texts produced by ecumenical dialogues do not constitute official teaching documents of the churches involved, their reception into the life of Christian communities helps all to reach a deeper understanding and appreciation of the mysteries of faith.

#### Practical Recommendations

- To identify what bilateral documents have been published between the Catholic Church and the principal Christian communities present in your diocese. The appendix of this *Vademecum* gives an introductory guide to the dialogues whose documents are available on the PCPCU website.
- To establish a diocesan or regional dialogue commission involving lay and ordained theological experts. The commission might engage in a joint study of the documents of the international or national dialogues or may address issues of local concern.
- To ask the commission to propose some concrete action that could be undertaken jointly by your diocese and another Christian community or communities on the basis of the ecumenical agreements that have been reached.

### H. The Dialogue of Life

31. The truths expressed jointly in theological dialogue seek concrete expression through joint action in pastoral care, in service to the world and through culture. The *Ecumenical Directory* states that the contribution Christians can make in these areas of human life “will be more effective when they make it together, and when they are seen to be united in making it”. “Hence,” the *Directory* continues, “they will want to do everything

together that is allowed by faith" (§162). These words echo an important ecumenical principle, known as the Lund principle, first formulated by the World Council of Churches, that Christians should "act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately" (Third World Conference of the Faith and Order Commission in 1952). By working together Catholics begin to live deeply and faithfully the communion that they already share with other Christians.

In this undertaking Catholics are encouraged to have both patience and perseverance, twin virtues of ecumenism, in equal measure: proceeding "gradually and with care, not glossing over difficulties" (ED §23), under the guidance of their bishops; yet showing genuine commitment in this quest, motivated by the urgent need for reconciliation and by Christ's own desire for the unity of his disciples (see EG §246, UUS §48).

## I) Pastoral ecumenism

### 32. Shared pastoral challenges as opportunities for ecumenism

Very often Christian communities in a given locality face the same pastoral and missionary challenges. If there is not already a genuine desire for unity among Christians such challenges can exacerbate tensions and even promote a spirit of competition among communities. However, when approached with a properly ecumenical spirit these very challenges become opportunities for Christian unity in pastoral care, called here "pastoral ecumenism". It is one of the fields which most effectively contributes to fostering Christian unity in the life of the faithful.

### 33. Shared ministry and sharing resources

In very many parts of the world, and in very many ways, Christian ministers from different traditions work together in providing pastoral care in hospitals, prisons, the armed forces, universities and in other chaplaincies. In many of these situations chapels or other spaces are shared to provide ministry to the faithful of different Christian communities (see ED §204).

Where the diocesan bishop discerns that it will not cause scandal or confusion to the faithful, he may offer other Christian communities the use of a church. Particular discernment is required in the case of the diocesan cathedral. The *Ecumenical Directory* (§137) envisages such situations in which a Catholic diocese comes to the aid of another community which is without its own place of worship or liturgical objects to worthily celebrate its ceremonies. Likewise, in many contexts Catholic communities are the recipients of similar hospitality from other Christian communities. Such sharing of resources can build trust and deepen mutual understanding between Christians.

### 34. Mission and catechesis

Jesus prayed "that they may all be one ... so that the world may believe" (Jn 17:21), and from its origins the ecumenical movement has always had the Church's mission to evangelise at its core. Division among Christians impedes evangelization and undermines the credibility of the Gospel message (see UR §1, *Evangelii nuntiandi* §77 and UUS §§98–99). The *Ecumenical Directory* stresses the need to ensure that the "human, cultural and political factors" involved in the original divisions between Christians not be transplanted to new missionary territories and calls for Christian missionaries from different traditions to work "with mutual respect and love" (§207).

The Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi tradendae* (1979) notes that in some situations bishops may consider it "opportune or even necessary" to collaborate with other Christians in the field of catechesis (§33, cited in ED §188 and in the *Directory for Catechism* §346). The document goes on to describe the parameters of such collaboration. The Catechism of the Catholic Church has proved to be a useful tool for co-operation with other Christians in the field of catechesis.

### 35. Interchurch marriages

The diocesan bishop is called upon to authorise interchurch marriages and sometimes to dispense from the Catholic rite for the wedding ceremony. Interchurch marriages should not be regarded as problems for they are often a privileged place where the unity of Christians is built (see *Familiaris Consortio* §78, and *Apostolorum Successores* §207). However, pastors cannot be indifferent to the pain of Christian division which is experienced in the context of these families, perhaps more sharply than in any other context. The pastoral care of interchurch families, from the initial preparation of the couple for marriage to pastoral accompaniment as the couple have children and the children themselves prepare for sacraments, should be a concern at both the diocesan and regional level (see ED §§143–160). A special effort should be made to engage these families in the ecumenical activities of parish and diocese. Mutual meetings of Christian pastors, aimed at supporting and upholding these marriages, can be an excellent ground for ecumenical collaboration (see ED §147). Recent migratory movements have accentuated this ecclesial reality. From one region to another there is a great variety of practice regarding interchurch marriages, the baptism of children born of such marriages, and their spiritual formation.[14] Local agreements on these pressing pastoral concerns are therefore to be encouraged.

### 36. Sharing in Sacramental Life (Communicatio in sacris)

As we have already seen, because we share a real communion with other Christians through our common baptism, prayer with these brothers and sisters in Christ is both possible and necessary to lead us into the unity that the Lord desires for his Church. However, the question of administering and receiving sacraments, and especially the Eucharist, in each other's liturgical celebrations remains an area of significant tension in our ecumenical relations. In treating the subject of "Sharing Sacramental Life with Christians of Other Churches and Ecclesial Communities" (ED §§129–132), the *Ecumenical Directory* draws on two basic principles articulated in *Unitatis redintegratio* §8 which exist in a certain tension and which must always be held together. The first principle is that the celebration of sacraments in a community bears "witness to the unity of the Church" and the second principle is that a sacrament is a "sharing of the means of grace" (UR §8). In view of the first principle the *Directory* states that "Eucharistic communion is inseparably linked to full ecclesial communion and its visible expression" (ED §129) and therefore, in general, participation in the sacraments of the Eucharist, reconciliation and anointing is limited to those in full communion. However, applying the second principle, the *Directory* goes on to state that "by way of exception, and under certain conditions, access to these sacraments may be permitted, or even commended, for Christians of other Churches and ecclesial Communities" (ED §129). In this sense the *Directory* expands on the second principle by stating that the Eucharist is spiritual food for the baptised that enables them to overcome sin and to grow towards the fullness of life in Christ. *Communicatio in sacris* is therefore permitted for the care of souls within certain circumstances, and when this is the case it is to be recognised as both desirable and commendable.

Weighing the claims of these two principles calls for the exercise of discernment by the diocesan bishop, always bearing in mind that the possibility of *communicatio in sacris* differs with respect to the Churches and Communities involved. The Code of Canon Law describes the situations in which Catholics can receive sacraments from other Christian ministers (see CIC 844 §2 and CCEO 671 §2). The canon states that either in danger of death, or if the diocesan bishop judges there to be a "grave necessity," Catholic ministers can administer sacraments to other Christians "who seek such on their own accord, provided that they manifest Catholic faith in respect to these sacraments and are properly disposed" (CIC 844 §4, see also CCEO 671 §3).

It is important to stress that the bishop's judgement about what constitutes a "grave necessity" and when exceptional sacramental sharing is appropriate is always a pastoral discernment, that is, it concerns the care and the salvation of souls. Sacraments may never be shared out of mere politeness. Prudence must be exercised to avoid causing confusion or giving scandal to the faithful. Nevertheless, Saint John Paul II's words should also be borne in mind when he wrote, "It is a source of joy to note that Catholic ministers are able, in certain particular cases, to administer the Sacraments of Eucharist, Penance and Anointing of the Sick to Christians who are not in full communion with the Catholic Church" (UUS §46).[15]

### 37. Changing ecclesial affiliation as an ecumenical challenge and opportunity

Changing of ecclesial affiliation is of its nature distinct from ecumenical activity (UR §4). Nevertheless, the ecumenical documents acknowledge those situations in which Christians move from one Christian community to another. Certain pastoral provisions, such as those formulated by the Apostolic Constitution *Anglicanorum coetibus*, respond to this reality. Local communities should welcome with joy those who wish to enter into full communion with the Catholic Church, though as the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults states, “any appearance of triumphalism should be carefully avoided” (§389).[16] Always maintaining a profound respect for the conscience of the individuals concerned, those who make known their intention to leave the Catholic Church should be made aware of the consequences of their decision. Motivated by the desire to maintain strong relations with ecumenical partners, in some circumstances it is possible to agree a “Code of Conduct” with another Christian community,[17] especially when addressing the challenging issues raised when clergy change affiliation.[18]

### **Practical Recommendations**

- To identify common pastoral needs with other Christian leaders.
- To listen to and learn from the pastoral initiatives of other communities.
- To act with generosity to help the pastoral work of another Christian community.
- To meet with and listen to the experiences of interchurch families in your diocese.
- To present to the clergy of your diocese the guidelines given by the *Ecumenical Directory* concerning the sharing of sacraments (summarised above) and, if there are any, the guidelines of the Episcopal Conference or Synods of the Eastern Catholic Churches. Help your clergy to discern when those conditions are to apply and when such sharing in sacramental life might, in individual cases, be appropriate.
- If your diocese or episcopal conference has no guidelines regarding the canonical provisions for exceptional sacramental sharing, and if you think such guidelines would be beneficial in your context, contact the ecumenical office of the episcopal conference and seek advice about proposing or preparing such a text.

## **II) Practical ecumenism**

### **38. Co-operation in service to the world**

The Second Vatican Council called on all Christians, united in their common efforts and bearing witness to a common hope, to set “in clearer relief the features of Christ the Servant” (UR §12). It noted that in many countries this co-operation was already taking place in defence of human dignity and to relieve the afflictions of famine, natural disasters, illiteracy, poverty, housing shortage, and the unequal distribution of wealth. Today we might add to this list: co-ordinated Christian action to care for displaced and migrant peoples; the fight against modern day slavery and human trafficking; peace-building; advocacy for religious freedom; the fight against discrimination; defence of the sanctity of life and care for creation. Christians co-operating in this way is what is intended by “practical ecumenism”. Increasingly, and as new needs arise, Christian communities are pooling their resources and co-ordinating their efforts to respond in the most effective way possible to those in need. Saint John Paul II called Christians to “every possible form of practical co-operation at all levels” and described this kind of working together as “a true school of ecumenism, a dynamic road to unity” (UUS §40). The experience of bishops in many parts of the world is that co-operation between Christian communities in service of the poor is a driving force in promoting the desire for Christian unity.

### 39. Joint service as witness

Through such ecumenical co-operation Christians “bear witness to our common hope” (UR §12). As disciples of Christ, schooled by the Scriptures and Christian tradition, we are compelled to act to uphold the dignity of the human person and the sacredness of creation, in the sure hope that God is bringing the whole of creation into the fullness of his Kingdom. By working together in both social action and cultural projects such as those suggested in §41 Christians promote an integral Christian vision of the dignity of the person. Our common service manifests before the world, therefore, our shared faith, and our witness is more powerful for being united.

### 40. Interreligious dialogue

Increasingly, at both the national and local levels, Christians are finding the need to engage more closely with other religious traditions. Recent trends of migration have brought peoples of different cultures and religions into what were previously predominantly Christian communities. Often the expertise at the disposal of an individual Christian community may be limited. Joint Christian co-operation in interreligious dialogue is therefore often beneficial, and indeed the *Ecumenical Directory* states that it “can deepen the level of communion among [Christians] themselves” (§210). The *Directory* particularly highlights the importance of Christians working together to combat “anti-Semitism, religious fanaticism and sectarianism”. Lastly, it is important not to lose sight of the essential difference between dialogue with different religious traditions which aims at establishing good relations and co-operation, and dialogue with other Christian communities which aims at restoring the unity Christ willed for his Church and is properly called ecumenical.

#### Practical Recommendations

- To identify in dialogue with other Christian leaders areas where Christian service is required.
  - To talk to other Christian leaders and your own diocesan ecumenical officer about what Christians are currently doing separately that could be done together.
  - To encourage priests to engage with ecumenical partners in service to the local community.
  - To ask diocesan agencies and Catholics engaged in social action on behalf of the Church in your diocese about past and present co-operation with other Christian communities and how this might be extended.
  - To talk to other Christian leaders about their relations with other religious traditions in your area.
- What are the difficulties and what can the Christian communities do together?

### III) Cultural ecumenism

**41.** Cultural factors have played a significant role in the estrangement of Christian communities. Very often theological disagreements stemmed from difficulties of mutual understanding arising from cultural differences. Once communities have separated and live in isolation from one another, cultural differences tend to widen and reinforce theological disagreements. More positively, Christianity has also contributed enormously to the development and enrichment of specific cultures around the world.

“Cultural ecumenism” includes all efforts to better understand the culture of other Christians and in so doing to realise that beyond cultural difference, to varying degrees, we share the same faith expressed in different ways. An important aspect of cultural ecumenism is the promotion of common cultural projects which are able to bring

different communities together and to inculturate the gospel again in our own age.

The *Ecumenical Directory* (§§211–218) encourages joint projects of an academic, scientific or artistic nature, and provides criteria for the discernment of these projects (§212). The experience of many Catholic dioceses shows that ecumenical concerts, festivals of sacred art, exhibitions, and symposia, are important moments of rapprochement between Christians. Culture, in a broad sense, presents itself as a privileged place for the “exchange of gifts”.

## Conclusion

**42.** The long history of Christian divisions and the complex nature of the theological and cultural factors that divide Christian communities are a great challenge to all those involved in the ecumenical endeavour. And indeed the obstacles to unity are beyond human strength; they cannot be overcome by our efforts alone. But the death and resurrection of Christ is God’s decisive victory over sin and division, just as it is His victory over injustice and every form of evil. For this reason Christians cannot despair in the face of Christian division, just as they cannot despair in the face of injustice or warfare. Christ has already defeated these evils.

The task of the Church is always to receive the grace of the victory of Christ. The practical recommendation and initiatives suggested in this *Vademecum* are ways in which the Church and, in particular, the bishop can strive to actualise Christ’s victory over Christian division. Opening to God’s grace renews the Church, and as *Unitatis redintegratio* taught, this renewal is always the first and indispensable step towards unity. An openness to God’s grace demands an openness to our Christian brothers and sisters, and, as Pope Francis has written, a willingness to receive “what the Spirit has sown in them, which is also meant to be a gift for us” (EG §246). The two parts of this *Vademecum* have sought to address these two dimensions of ecumenism: the renewal of the Church in its own life and structures; and engagement with other Christian communities in spiritual ecumenism, and the dialogues of Love, Truth, and Life.

Father Paul Couturier (1881–1953), a Catholic pioneer in the ecumenical movement and particularly of spiritual ecumenism, called upon the grace of Christ’s victory over division in his prayer for unity which continues to inspire Christians of many different traditions. With his prayer we conclude this *Vademecum*:

Lord Jesus, on the night before you died for us,  
 you prayed that all your disciples may be perfectly one,  
 as you are in your Father and your Father is in you.  
 Make us painfully aware of our lack of faith in not being united.  
 Give us the faithfulness to acknowledge,  
 and the courage to reject, our hidden indifference,  
 distrust and even enmity towards one another.  
 Grant that we all may meet one another in you,  
 so that from our souls and our lips there may ever arise  
 your prayer for the unity of Christians  
 as you will it and by the means that you desire.  
 In you, who are perfect Love,  
 grant us to find the way that leads to unity,  
 in obedience to your love and your truth.

Amen.

*The Holy Father Pope Francis has given his approval for the publication of this document.*

*From the Vatican, 5 June 2020*

**Kurt Cardinal Koch**  
*President*

† **Brian Farrell**  
 Titular Bishop of Abitine  
*Secretary*

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## **Catholic Documents on Ecumenism**

Second Vatican Council *Unitatis redintegratio* (1964), Decree on Ecumenism.

Saint John Paul II *Ut unum sint* (1995), Encyclical on Commitment to Ecumenism.

Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and United Bible Societies, *Guidelines for Interconfessional Cooperation in Translating the Bible* (1987).

Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* (1993).

Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *The Ecumenical Dimension in the Formation of those Engaged in Pastoral Work* (1997).

For these documents and for further documentation, information and resources see the website of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity ([www.christianunity.va](http://www.christianunity.va)).

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## **Appendix**

### **The international dialogue partners of the Catholic Church**

#### **Bilateral dialogue**

The work of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity is both to foster ever-closer relations with our brothers and sisters in Christ (the Dialogue of Love) and to strive to overcome the doctrinal divisions which prevent us from being able to share full, visible communion (the Dialogue of Truth). It conducts bilateral dialogues or conversations with the following Christian communities.[19]

#### **Orthodox Churches of the Byzantine Tradition**

Churches of the Byzantine tradition are united by the recognition of the seven ecumenical councils of the first millennium and the same spiritual and canonical tradition inherited from Byzantium. These Churches, which form the Orthodox Church as a whole, are organized according to the principle of autocephaly, each with its own primate and the Ecumenical Patriarch having, among them, the primacy of honour. The unanimously recognised autocephalous Churches are: the Patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Moscow, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia, and the Autocephalous Churches of Cyprus, Greece, Poland, Albania, and

the Czech Lands and Slovakia. Some of the patriarchates also include so-called “autonomous” churches within them. In 2019 the Ecumenical Patriarch granted a tomos of autocephaly to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. This Church is still in the process of being recognised by other Churches. The International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church as a whole, founded in 1979, has adopted six texts. The first three documents concerned the sacramental structure of the Church (Munich, 1982; Bari, 1987; and Valamo, 1988) and the fourth addressed the question of uniatism (Balamand, 1993). After a period of crisis, a new phase of dialogue began in 2006 focussing on the relationship between primacy and synodality and to date has adopted two documents (Ravenna 2007, and Chieti 2016).

### **Oriental Orthodox Churches**

The Oriental Orthodox Churches, also known as “non-Chalcedonian” because they do not recognize the fourth Ecumenical Council, are distinguished between three main traditions: Coptic, Syriac and Armenian. An international joint commission was established in 2003 bringing together all the seven Churches that recognise the first three ecumenical councils: the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church (Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin and Catholicosate of Cilicia), the Malankar Orthodox-Syrian Church, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church and the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church. A first phase of the dialogue culminated in 2009 with a document on the nature and mission of the Church. A new phase resulted in the adoption in 2015 of a document on the exercise of communion in the life of the early Church. The current dialogue is about the sacraments.

Parallel to this commission there is also a special dialogue with the Malankara Churches of South India. In 1989 and 1990, two parallel bilateral dialogues were established respectively with the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church and with the Malankara (Jacobite) Syrian Orthodox Church, and these were maintained despite the foundation of the commission mentioned above. These dialogues focus on three main themes: Church history, common witness and ecclesiology.

### **Assyrian Church of the East**

The dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East has produced many fruitful results. As a result of a first phase of dialogue on Christological issues Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV signed a *Joint Christological Declaration* in 1994, which opened new horizons for both theological dialogue and pastoral collaboration. Subsequently, the Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East planned two further phases of work: one on sacramental theology and the other on the constitution of the Church. The second phase of dialogue concluded with a wide consensus on sacramental issues allowing the publication by the PCPCU of the “Guidelines for Admission to the Eucharist between the Chaldean Church and the Assyrian Church of the East”, and an agreement on the final document entitled *Common Statement on Sacramental Life*, adopted in 2017. The third phase of the dialogue on the nature and constitution of the Church started in 2018.

### **Old Catholic Church of the Union of Utrecht**

The Union of Utrecht comprises six national churches that belong to the International Old Catholic Bishops’ Conference. Listed in the order of entry into the Union (1889 onwards) they are the Old Catholic Churches in the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, the Czech Republic, and Poland. The International Roman Catholic–Old Catholic Dialogue Commission was established in 2004. Its recent publication *The Church and Ecclesial Communion* incorporates the two reports of 2009 and 2016. It concludes that the shared understanding of the Church as a multilayered communion of local churches may open up common vistas and enable a common vision of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome within a universal synodal perspective.

### **Anglican Communion**

The Anglican Communion has 39 Provinces and more than 85 million members. Although others claim the name

Anglican, the communion is defined as being those dioceses whose bishop is in communion with the ancient

See of Canterbury. Ecumenical dialogue between the Anglican Communion and the Catholic Church began after the historic meeting between Saint Paul VI and Archbishop Michael Ramsey in 1966. The first Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC I) met between 1970 and 1981. It produced a high level of agreement on the topics of Eucharist and Ministry. ARCIC II took up the work of its predecessor on authority in an important document entitled *The Gift of Authority* (1999). It also produced agreed statements on salvation, Mary, ecclesiology, ethics and grace. Most recently ARCIC III has published an agreed statement on ecclesiology entitled *Walking Together on the Way*. The International Anglican–Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission (IARCCUM) is a commission of paired Anglican and Catholic bishops who seek to further the reception of ARCIC’s documents and to give greater witness to our common faith in service of those in need.

### **Lutheran World Federation (LWF)**

The Lutheran World Federation is a global communion of 148 Lutheran churches which live in pulpit and altar fellowship. LWF member churches can be found in 99 countries and together they have over 75.5 million members. The LWF was founded in 1947 in Lund. The Lutheran–Catholic Commission on Unity began its work in 1967. The dialogue between Catholics and Lutherans has continued uninterrupted since then. In the five phases of the dialogue, the Commission has published study documents on the gospel and the Church, ministry, Eucharist, justification and the apostolicity of the Church. Its current working theme is Baptism and growth in communion. An important historical milestone in Lutheran–Catholic relations was achieved by *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999). The theology of justification was the central theological dispute between Martin Luther and the church authorities which led to the Reformation. The *Joint Declaration* proposes 44 common affirmations relating to the doctrine of justification. On the basis of the high degree of consensus reached it was agreed that the condemnations in Lutheran Confessions and in the Council of Trent no longer apply. The document *From Conflict to Communion* (2013) marked the Lutheran–Catholic Common Commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017.

### **World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC)**

The World Communion of Reformed Churches and its member churches trace their roots to the 16th century Reformation led by John Calvin, John Knox, and Ulrich Zwingli, and to the earlier reforming movements of Jan Hus and Peter Valdes. WCRC member churches are Congregational, Presbyterian, Reformed, United/Uniting and Waldensian. In 2010, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) united to create the World Communion of Reformed Churches. The Reformed–Roman Catholic Commission officially began its work in Rome in 1970. A total of four phases of dialogue have been held by the Commission producing the following four dialogue reports: *The Presence of Christ in Church and World* (1970–1977); *Towards a Common Understanding of the Church* (1984–1990); *The Church as Community of Common Witness to the Kingdom of God* (1998–2005); and *Justification and Sacramentality: The Christian Community as an Agent for Justice* (2011–2015).

### **World Methodist Council (WMC)**

The World Methodist Council is an association of 80 churches from across the world. Most of these have their roots in the teaching of the 18th century Anglican preacher, John Wesley. Methodists have a long history of ecumenical covenants and so in many countries such as Canada, Australia and India, Methodists have become part of United or Uniting Churches. The Methodist–Roman Catholic International Commission began work in 1967. The Commission produces reports every five years to coincide with the meetings of the World Methodist Council. These reports have focussed on topics such as: the Holy Spirit, the Church, the sacraments, the apostolic tradition, revelation and faith, teaching authority in the Church, and holiness. The 2017–2021 phase of dialogue focusses on the theme of the Church as a reconciled and reconciling community.

### **Mennonite World Conference (MWC)**

The Mennonite World Conference represents the majority of the global family of Christian churches that have

their origins in the 16th century Radical Reformation in Europe, and particularly in the Anabaptist movement.

MWC membership includes 107 Mennonite and Brethren in Christ national churches from 58 countries, with around 1.5 million baptized believers. International conversations between the Roman Catholic Church and the MWC started in 1998 and produced one dialogue report, *Called Together to Be Peacemakers* (1998–2003).

More recently (2012–2017) the PCPCU has participated in a tripartite dialogue called the International Trilateral Dialogue Commission with the MWC and the LWF which finalised a report in 2017 entitled “Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church”.

### **Baptist World Alliance (BWA)**

The Alliance is a worldwide fellowship of Baptist believers formed in London in 1905. Currently there are about 240 member churches totalling approximately 46 million members. The Baptist movement began in 17th century England as a separatist movement breaking from the Puritans and advocating the radical separation of church and state. Early leaders of the movement (John Smyth and Thomas Helwys) became convinced that infant baptism was contrary to Scripture. Along with the Mennonites (Anabaptists), who influenced Baptist theology in Holland and beyond, Baptists do not practise infant baptism but advocate what they term “believers’ baptism”. The Baptist–Roman Catholic international conversations began in 1984. Two phases of international dialogues have produced two reports: *Summons to Witness to Christ in Today’s World* (1984–1988) and *The Word of God in the Life of the Church* (2006–2010). Currently, a third phase of dialogue is reflecting on the theme of common Christian witness in the contemporary world.

### **Disciples of Christ**

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) was born in the early 19th century in the USA, out of a search for both catholicity and unity. Christian unity is foremost in the Disciples’ doctrine of the church and in their witness to the kingdom of God. They refer to themselves as a “Protestant Eucharistic community” and frequently repeat that “our reconciling journey begins, and ends, at the [Eucharistic] Table”. The dialogue with the Catholic Church started in 1977 and has published four documents: *Apostolicity and Catholicity* (1982); *The Church as Communion in Christ* (1992); *Handing on the Faith* (2002); and *The Presence of Christ in the Church with particular reference to the Eucharist* (2009).

### **Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements**

The Los Angeles Azusa Street Revival Movement in 1906 is usually considered as the beginning of the Pentecostal Movement. Classical Pentecostalism has its origins in this Revival that soon formed into denominations in the protestant sense and have since become international networks such as the Assemblies of God, Four Square Gospel, and the Church of God. The Denominational Pentecostals which sprang from revivals in the 1950s within different Christian traditions while remaining within these confessional boundaries are normally called Charismatics (the Catholic Charismatic Renewal born in 1968 is part of this movement while remaining an ecclesial movement within the Catholic Church). Lastly Non-Denominational Pentecostals or New Charismatic Churches appeared in late 1980s and 1990s. At present Pentecostals and Charismatics are estimated to number about 500 million globally. The Pentecostal–Catholic dialogue began in 1972 and has produced six reports the most recent of which, *Do Not Quench the Spirit*, addresses charisms in the life and mission of the Church.

A series of preliminary conversations between a group of leaders of the New Charismatic Churches (NCC) and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity took place in the Vatican (2008–12). At the end of this preliminary phase, it was agreed to have a round of conversations to explore their identity and self-understanding (2014–18). A document entitled “The Characteristics of the New Charismatic Churches” resulted from the NCC’s reflections on these conversations. It is not an ecumenical document, but represents the NCC’s attempt to describe themselves in a dialogical context and is intended to help and encourage relations between Catholics and New-Charismatic leaders around the world.



Evangelicals are one of the first ecumenical movements in modern church history. Originally, the Evangelical Alliance, founded in 1846 in London, brought together Christians of Lutheran, Reformed, and Anabaptist traditions. In the founding of the Evangelical Alliance (now World Evangelical Alliance), a personal relationship to Christ was considered the fundamental uniting value, that is the sense of conversion (repentance) and spiritual rebirth (born-again Christians). Even though the Evangelicals agree on the four so-called exclusive articles of the Reformation (“*solas*”), at present issues around mission and evangelism are the core concern for Evangelicals, who belong to very many different ecclesial traditions from Anglicanism to Pentecostalism. The World Evangelical Alliance, an association of National Evangelical Alliances with a visible infrastructure, and the Lausanne Movement, which for the most part is an association of individual Evangelicals, represent the concerns of Evangelicalism today. Three rounds of international consultations have been undertaken between representatives of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the WEA and have produced three reports: *Evangelicals and Catholics on Mission* (ERCDOM, 1976–1984); *Church, Evangelisation and the Bonds of Koinonia* (1997–2002); ‘*Scripture and Tradition*’ and ‘*The Church in Salvation*’ – *Catholics and Evangelicals Explore Challenges and Opportunities* (2009–2016).

### Salvation Army

The Salvation Army has its roots in mid-19th century England, as a mission movement for the poor and marginalized. The founder, William Booth, was a Methodist minister. The Salvation Army operates in 124 countries. Its membership includes more than 17,000 active and more than 8,700 retired officers, over 1 million soldiers, around 100,000 other employees and more than 4.5 million volunteers. Salvationists can be classified as Evangelical Christians who do not practise any sacraments. A series of informal ecumenical conversations between Salvationists and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity began in 2007 in Middlesex, United Kingdom. There were a total of five meetings ending in 2012. A summary of the international dialogue was published by the Salvation Army in 2014 under the title *Conversations with the Catholic Church*.

### Multilateral dialogues

Through the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity the Catholic Church also engages in multilateral dialogues.

### World Council of Churches (WCC)

Founded in 1948, the World Council of Churches is “a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures, and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit” (*The Basis* adopted by the Third Assembly in New Delhi in 1961). The WCC is today the broadest and most inclusive organized expression of the ecumenical movement. It brings together 350 member churches including Orthodox, Lutherans, Reformed, Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists as well as Evangelicals, Pentecostals and United and Independent churches. All together they represent over 500 million Christians from all continents and more than 110 countries.

Although the Catholic Church is not a member of the WCC, there has been growing collaboration on issues of common concern since the Second Vatican Council. The most important collaboration for the pursuit of the goal of full visible unity is undertaken through the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU). This includes the Joint Working Group (established in 1965), collaboration in the field of ecumenical formation and education, and the common preparation of the material for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Catholic experts are also members of various commissions of the WCC such as the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, the Commission on Ecumenical Education and Formation, as well as various *ad hoc* working groups related to specific projects. Particularly important for resolving doctrinal, moral and structural divergences among the Churches is the Commission on Faith and Order, 10% of whose membership is Catholic. Since its establishment in 1948, the Commission has undertaken many studies on important ecumenical topics including Holy Scripture and Tradition, apostolic faith, anthropology, hermeneutics, reconciliation, violence and peace, preservation of creation, and visible unity. In 1982 it published *Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry* (*BEM*, also known as *The Lima Statement*), the first multilateral convergence statement on the issues at the heart of the ecumenical

debate. The official Catholic response (1987) expressed the conviction that the study of ecclesiology should take a central place in ecumenical dialogue in order to resolve remaining issues. In 2013, the Commission published a second convergence statement *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)*. A result of three decades of intense theological dialogue involving hundreds of theologians and church leaders, *TCTCV* demonstrates “how far Christian communities have come in their common understanding of the church, showing the progress that has been made and indicating work that still needs to be done” (Introduction). The official Catholic response (2019) makes it clear that without pretending to having achieved full agreement, *TCTCV* shows growing consensus on controversial issues regarding the Church’s nature, mission and unity.

### **Global Christian Forum (GCF)**

The Global Christian Forum is a recent ecumenical initiative that emerged at the end of the last century within the context of the WCC. It intends to create an open space – a forum – where representatives of the so-called “historic churches” (Catholic, Orthodox and post-Reformation Protestant churches) and those identified as “recent churches” (Pentecostal, Evangelical and Independent) could join together on an equal basis to foster mutual respect, to share faith stories, and to address together common challenges. The aim of the GCF is to gather around one table representatives of almost all Christian traditions, including African Instituted Churches, mega churches, migrant churches, and new ecumenical movements and communities. Represented in the GCF are many Christian world communions and world Christian organisations, including the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the Pentecostal World Fellowship, the World Evangelical Alliance and the World Council of Churches. Without formal membership, the GCF provides space for networking and for church leaders to explore issues of common interest in the fast changing context of global Christianity today.

### **Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE)**

The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) is a fellowship of over 90 Protestant churches which have signed the Leuenberg Agreement. Its aim is to implement church fellowship through common witness and service. Membership consists of most of the Lutheran and Reformed churches in Europe, the United churches originating from mergers of those churches, the Waldensian Church, and the European Methodist churches. Some European churches have remained outside the fellowship, such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Church of Sweden. In a worship service in Basel on 16 September 2018, the CPCE and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity committed to begin an official dialogue on the theme of church and church communion.

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[1]. Address marking the 50th anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015, citing the Address to the Delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, 27 June 2015.

[2]. *Ibid.*

[3]. It should be understood that all references to dioceses, diocesan bishops and diocesan structures apply equally to eparchies, their bishops and structures.

[4]. For example, because this *Vademecum* takes the perspective of the bishop, *communicatio in sacris* is here understood as a pastoral concern rather than an aspect of spiritual ecumenism.

[5]. First Message of Pope Benedict XVI at the end of the Eucharistic Concelebration with members of the College of Cardinals in the Sistine Chapel, 20 April 2005.

[6]. Kasper, Walter, *A Handbook of Spiritual Ecumenism* (New York: New City Press, 2007) §6.

[7]. See also *O Lord, Open Our Lips*, 2014 document of the French Anglican-Roman Catholic Joint Committee.

[8]. See Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and United Bible Societies, *Guidelines for Interconfessional Cooperation in Translating the Bible* (revised edition 1987).

[9]. For example see the address of Pope Francis in the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, 25 May 2014.

[10]. Lutheran–Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, *From Conflict to Communion* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt; Paderborn: Bonifatius, 2013).

[11]. Details of these theological dialogues can be found in the appendix to this document.

[12]. E.g. The Groupe des Dombes, the Ökumenischer Arbeitskreis evangelischer und katholischer Theologen, the theological conversations with Oriental Orthodox Churches initiated by the Pro Oriente Foundation, the Malines Conversations, Catholics and Evangelicals Together, and the St Irenaeus Joint Orthodox–Catholic Working Group.

[13]. *Ninth Report of the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches* (2007-2012), Appendix A “Reception: A Key to Ecumenical Progress” §15.

[14]. The bishop should take account of CIC 1125 or CCEO 814 §1.

[15]. Pastoral agreements have been reached with some Oriental Orthodox Churches for reciprocal admission of the faithful to the Eucharist in case of necessity (in 1984 with the Syrian Orthodox Church, and in 2001 between the Chaldean Church and the Assyrian Church of the East). Many episcopal conferences, synods, eparchies and dioceses have published directives or documents on this matter.

[16]. *Editio typica*, Appendix 3b.

[17]. The French Joint Committee for Catholic-Orthodox Theological Dialogue made such a proposal in its 2003 declaration *Éléments pour une éthique du dialogue catholique-orthodoxe*.

[18]. As an example, the Anglican-Roman Catholic Bishops’ Dialogue of Canada was able to agree a statement, “Pastoral Guidelines for Churches in the case of clergy moving from one communion to the other” (1991).

[19]. Before entering into ecumenical relations locally and nationally it is helpful first of all to establish that a particular Christian community is in a full communion relationship with one of the worldwide communions listed in this appendix. There are, for example, non-canonical Orthodox Churches, Anglican provinces or dioceses which are not in communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury, and many Baptist communities are not members of the Baptist World Alliance. Furthermore, there are also communities that do not have a representative global structure. Discernment is required when entering into ecumenical relations with such groups. It may be helpful to seek advice from the ecumenical commission of the bishops’ conference or synod, or from the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

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