

A People Made One:

Introduction

The title of this pastoral letter, "A People Made One," is a very old phrase taken from a commentary of St. Cyprian on the Lord's Prayer. It is quoted by Pope John Paul II at the end of his encyclical on ecumenism, *Ut Unum Sint* (That All May be One), and is a timeless reminder that our sincere desire and efforts to be united as God's people are necessary conditions for worthy prayer. Without these dispositions of heart and will, we must leave our gifts at the altar and first be reconciled with our neighbors. This is as true today as it was centuries ago.

Eleven years ago, on January 21, 1988, we Catholic bishops of Kentucky addressed a pastoral letter to you on the subject of ecumenism. In the year 1995, we also issued an Ecumenical Handbook for the Dioceses of Kentucky.¹ Now we believe it timely to return to this topic once more.

Reasons for Promoting Unity among Christians

Ecumenism, or the movement to promote unity among Christians, has been given very high priority by Pope John Paul II and therefore must be an integral dimension of church life today for Roman Catholics. We have been reminded on numerous occasions by the leadership of our Church that promoting the cause of Christian unity is the privilege and responsibility of all Catholics.

The Decree on Ecumenism states: "The concern for restoring unity involves the whole Church, faithful and clergy alike. It extends to everyone, according to the talent of each,..." (# 5)² Also, the Ecumenical Directory of 1993 states: "Those who are baptized in the name of Christ are, by that very fact, called to commit themselves to the search for unity." (# 22) And Pope John Paul II states in *Ut Unum Sint*: "The Catholic Church embraces with hope the commitment to ecumenism as a duty of the Christian conscience enlightened by faith and guided by love." (# 8)

A few paragraphs later, and in even stronger language, the pope says: "This unity, which the Lord has bestowed on his Church, and in which he wishes to embrace all people, is not something added on, but stands at the very heart of Christ's mission. Nor is it some secondary attribute of the community of his disciples. Rather, it belongs to the very essence of this community." (# 9)

There is an urgent necessity that all of us who follow our divine Savior do what is in our power to enable the prayer of Christ to be realized, "that all may be one as you, Father, are in me, and I in you: I pray that they may be one in us, that the world may believe that you sent me." (John 17:21)

Since promoting unity among Christians is such a basic and challenging responsibility, it must never be far from our awareness. Rather, it must become a permanent element in our consciousness, remembering always that to be a Catholic is to be ecumenical.

An additional reason for turning to this topic once again is that the context within which we work for unity among Christians has changed and continues to change. This has been acknowledged and affirmed by

A People Made One, continued

many, including Pope John Paul II. In speaking of the responsibilities associated with the office of papal primacy, he states that the context has changed, saying that the exercise of his primacy "is open to a new situation." (Ut Unum Sint, # 95)

The New and Changing Context

With the beginning of every new day, the world is at least a little bit different from the preceding day and every day before that. Although the body of eternal truths is ever the same, our grasp of those truths is enlarged and deepened. Additional information and new knowledge is added to the vast storehouse of data, experience and wisdom already accumulated.

Whether looked at from the perspective of science, economics, politics, art, culture, international relations, or religion, the world changes to some degree every day. With these changes comes the need to absorb and integrate what is new into the fabric of the past. Each day presents new challenges.

What is true of every other aspect of life is also true of ecumenism. Each day the ecumenical movement operates within at least a slightly new and different context, and with the passage of the years, the context changes considerably. Ecumenical dialogue among leaders of the various churches and ecclesial communities results in new insights and expanded theological horizons even as working together to alleviate human suffering and solve social problems brings about improved relationships among those not yet in full communion with one another.

Looking back, it is easy to see how different the ecumenical context is today from what it was before the Second Vatican Council. Prior to that historic and important event, the prevailing way of thinking about church unity on the part of Catholics was what came to be called an "ecumenism of return." Those who had broken ties and separated themselves from the Body of Christ should repent and return to the bosom of the Roman Catholic Church. But that has changed. Now Catholics are encouraged to acknowledge and reverence the gifts of Christ to his church in whatever Christian communities they may be found. And they are urged to do all in their power to hasten the day when church dividing differences will be removed.

Changes have also taken place in the thinking of Orthodox, Anglican and many Protestant Christians. The Orthodox envisioned the reunited Church as a return to the practice and faith of the first seven ecumenical councils and believed that Roman Catholics, Anglicans and Protestants had all embraced church dividing errors. Today, after years of dialogue, the Orthodox too are inclined to think of the restoration of unity in somewhat different terms and in light of developments during the past 900 years since the great division of East and West.

As for Anglicans and some Protestants, unity was sometimes conceived of in the past in structural terms so that the process would take the form of a merger of all the churches into one gigantic international church with a new identity. This would require those participating in the merger to give up their own individual identities as they became organically united into a new entity. Again, this idea has been abandoned in most ecumenical circles.

Still others thought of the unity of the Church in terms similar to the League of Nations or the United Nations model. And there were always those who believed and continue to believe that the Church is basically a spiritual entity so that unity could be achieved through the attainment of spiritual unity.

Once again, an exchange of ideas gave rise to new perspectives. As Pope John Paul II has observed, "ecumenical dialogue...makes surprising discoveries possible." (Ut Unum Sint, # 38) Theological reflection on the part of Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans, and Protestants resulted in much more carefully nuanced positions. The documents of the Second Vatican Council teach that all the baptized are incorporated into the Body of Christ, the Church, and that Christians are united in varying degrees, depending upon the extent to which they share in common the gifts with which Christ endowed his Church. It is acknowledged that those not in full unity or communion with the Catholic Church do, nonetheless, enjoy many of the gifts of the Church. "Moreover, some, even very many, of the most significant elements and endowments which together go to build up and give life to the Church itself, can exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church: the written Word of God; the life of grace; faith, hope and charity, with the other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit, as well as visible elements." (Decree on Ecumenism, # 3)

Orthodox, Anglicans and Protestants have also begun to think of church unity more in terms of degrees of communion rather than structural terms. If agreement can be reached regarding the essentials of faith and practice, then individual churches can be in full unity or communion with other churches without sacrificing the riches of their own traditions.

All of this has resulted in a much more positive attitude toward each other among the Christian churches. Rather than focusing upon what separates the churches, we are urged to concentrate on what we share in common and to work more diligently to overcome the differences that still divide us.

Consequently, the context and the climate within which we work for unity among Christians has changed considerably and continues to change. Since this is so, it is valuable to pause occasionally to take a closer look at where we are now and, to the extent possible, what to anticipate in the future, even while we continue to rely for guidance upon the landmark document of Catholic ecumenism, The Decree on Ecumenism of the Second Vatican Council.

Recent Accomplishments of the Ecumenical Movement

Even though it sometimes seems that little is happening by way of removing the barriers which divide Christians, closer examination reveals that in fact much is taking place. This includes not only improved relationships among Christians but also paving the way for the restoration of unity between churches now separated from one another. The following is just a partial listing of some of these accomplishments:

- 1) The Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism, issued by the Vatican in 1993, vastly expands previous directives and provides invaluable guidance for participating in the ecumenical movement for all segments of the Church.

A People Made One, continued

An entire twenty page chapter is devoted to ecumenical formation including formation of all the faithful, beginning with the earliest forms of religious instruction and including formation throughout every stage of life. Special emphasis is placed on ecumenical formation for those engaged in pastoral work, most importantly the formation of deacons and those preparing for service as priests.

The intent and contents of chapter three of this Directory were expanded greatly in a document entitled *The Ecumenical Dimension in the Formation of Pastoral Workers*, issued in March 1998. It elaborates in great detail on the content of ecumenical formation and forcefully reiterates its previously stated position that every kind of religious formation in the Catholic Church must include an ecumenical dimension.

Two additional chapters in the Directory deal with relationships with other Christians and various forms of ecumenical cooperation. In brief, Catholics are urged to interact and cooperate with other Christians and members of other religious traditions to the fullest extent possible, stopping only at the point where going further would compromise Catholic beliefs and practice.³

2) The Catechism of the Catholic Church, published in English in 1994, was an instant best seller and continues to attract great interest. This has great significance for the ecumenical movement, because its reception manifests a genuine interest among Christians everywhere in knowing what the Catholic Church officially teaches on a wide range of subjects. This in itself tends to break down the walls of suspicion that sometimes keep Christians at a distance from one another. Having information readily available to all who are interested opens many doors to further communication, dialogue, and understanding. Particular attention should be paid to paragraphs 820-22 of the Catechism, which deal specifically with ecumenism.

3) The papal encyclical, *Ut Unum Sint*, referred to above, has also been favorably received by a very extensive audience extending far beyond the interest of Catholic readers. In this remarkably candid and passionate appeal for Christian unity, Pope John Paul II leaves no doubt about his own commitment and that of the Roman Catholic Church to the cause of ecumenism. Not only does this encyclical review many of the basic principles of true ecumenism and outline some of the major issues to be dealt with but the pope even goes so far as to invite Catholic and other church leaders to undertake with him "a patient and fraternal dialogue" on the subject of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome (# 96) which is "open to a new situation." (# 95)

4) Outstanding among numerous fruits of ecumenical dialogue is the preparation of a Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. After many years of patient work on the part of Roman Catholic and Lutheran theologians, a high level of agreement has been reached on the basic and most difficult issue of the Protestant Reformation, namely, that of justification, or how people are saved. There is good reason to hope that continued dialogue will result in even greater progress in removing obstacles to full communion.

The success of Lutheran/Roman Catholic efforts represents but one of many fruitful results of dialogue. Agreed statements of the past thirty and more years fill volumes, and "these studies are important from two points of view: they demonstrate the remarkable progress already made, and they are a source of hope inasmuch as they represent a sure foundation for further study." (*Ut Unum Sint*, # 17)

5) Councils of Churches at the international, national, state and local levels have been organized not only to promote doctrinal agreement but also to serve as instruments through which common action can be taken on such things as social service and the formation of public policy. The churches have found much common ground on which they can agree and act, thus hopefully hastening the day when full unity will be achieved.

6) Finally, there must be included in this limited list of recent accomplishments of the ecumenical movement recognition by Catholics and other Christians of some responsibility for the holocaust in which the Nazis put six million Jews to death. The Catholic Church did this in its statement, *We Remember: A Reflection on the "Shoah,"* issued on March 16, 1998. Speaking of the neglect of some Christians, this document states that "We deeply regret the errors and failures of those sons and daughters of the church." (# IV) This and other statements make it clear that acknowledging our own sinfulness and asking for pardon is the beginning of true ecumenism.

Spiritual Ecumenism, An Ecumenism of Repentance

Starting with the Decree on Ecumenism of the Second Vatican Council, the leadership of our Church has repeatedly emphasized that the heart and soul of ecumenism is spiritual ecumenism or the ecumenism of repentance. As important as doctrinal agreement and harmony on practical matters are, there can be no true and lasting unity which does not start with prayer, repentance, reconciliation and the renewal of our own church. As the Decree on Ecumenism states, "There can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without interior conversion." (# 7) "This change of heart and holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians, should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement, and merits the name, *(Spiritual ecumenism)*." (# 8) Similar sentiments are expressed by Pope John Paul II, who says, "...the commitment to ecumenism must be based upon the conversion of hearts and upon prayer,..." (*Ut Unum Sint*, # 2)

It is sometimes difficult to admit that we have sinned and are, at least in part, responsible for the divisions, which have plagued the Church for centuries. But that is indeed the case, and several recent popes have not only acknowledged the responsibility of the Catholic Church but have apologized for wrongs inflicted upon others. "...often enough...both sides were to blame." (*Decree on Ecumenism*, # 3) And again, "The Catholic Church acknowledges and confesses the weaknesses of her members, conscious that their sins are so many betrayals of and obstacles to the accomplishment of the Saviour's plan." (*Ut Unum Sint*, # 3)

Because divisions among the followers of Christ have lasted so long, it is often easy for us to think it can be no other way. Divisions between Christians of the East and of the West are more than nine centuries old, and divisions between Roman Catholics, Protestants and Anglicans have lasted for nearly five centuries. What is more, these ancient splits have resulted in what today are thousands of Christian communities neither in full communion with the Roman Catholic Church nor with one another.

If we accept these divisions as inevitable and necessary, then we fail to experience the pain of division and fail both to pray and work to overcome differences. However, Christ prayed earnestly in his final hours that

his followers would be one even as he and the Father are one. "I pray...that all may be one as you, Father, are in me, and I in you; I pray that they may be [one] in us, that the world may believe that you sent me." (John 17:20-21) Divisions as they exist today are clearly contrary to the will of Christ. Believing this in our hearts, repenting for the role each of us has had in maintaining the divisions, and praying that the Lord will enable us to overcome all that separates us is what is meant by spiritual ecumenism. All Christians, responding to the prompting of the Spirit, are called upon to make this their very own prayer.

Unity Among Catholics

It is, of course, easy enough to lament a lack of unity between Catholics and members of other church communities, while failing to see and to deplore the lack of unity which sometimes characterizes the relationships of Catholics to one another, and of other church bodies within their own membership. A desire that our personal views prevail sometimes overshadows the principle so heartily endorsed by the Second Vatican Council, that there be "unity in essentials," "freedom in the various forms of spiritual life and discipline, in the variety of liturgical rites, and even in the theological elaborations of revealed truth," and "in all things let charity prevail." (Decree on Ecumenism, # 4) Sometimes spiritual ecumenism and an ecumenism of repentance find their greatest need within the churches themselves and not only between the members of separate traditions. Our own disunity aggravates the disunity found among all.

Fidelity to the official teachings of our Church is, of course, a prerequisite of all sincere efforts by Catholics to achieve unity among all Christians. Ecumenism is not a kind of political exercise in diplomacy whereby common ground is arrived at by compromise. In fact, looking upon our efforts in this way has led some to reject the very use of the term "ecumenism" and even to resist participation in ecumenical dialogue. From the Catholic point of view, true ecumenism can never involve compromise in matters of belief.

All genuine ecumenical efforts and all authentic dialogue must always be characterized above all by a prayerful search for a fuller understanding of divinely revealed truth. The attitude, however, that we alone are sincerely searching for this fuller understanding must be rejected. Nor is it right to question the motives of those who seemingly differ from us. Our common efforts must be tested by an ecumenism of the spirit and an ecumenism of repentance, lest pride lead us, even when most sincere, to fall into error.

Attitudinal Changes

Many things change when we emphasize what we hold in common with others rather than point to our differences. When we think of other Christians as incorporated into the Body of Christ, as they are by baptism (See Decree on Ecumenism, # 3), and stop thinking of them primarily as being in error or lacking the many gifts which we enjoy, then our entire attitude changes.

Attitudinal changes flow directly from spiritual ecumenism and the ecumenism of repentance. It is clear that the Second Vatican Council marked a new beginning for Catholics on this very point and that the popes since then have repeatedly stressed the importance of emphasizing what we have in common rather than what separates us from other Christians. We are urged to see the gifts which others bring to the ecumenical

movement rather than focus upon those areas in which agreement has not yet been achieved. As we said in our previous letter, "Christian unity is a gift of the Holy Spirit. Those of us who long for it must be willing to risk being surprised by the Spirit...When disagreement arises in interchurch dialogue and no solution is apparent, all would do well to commend the dispute to God in a prayerful spirit." (That All Christians Be One, pp. 23)

When Catholics Are a Religious Majority

The Catholic population of Kentucky is very unevenly distributed across our commonwealth. In some places, Catholics are the largest church body whereas in other places we are a very small minority. The practice of ecumenism must be adjusted to the situation in which Catholics find themselves.

When Catholics are a religious majority, it is easy to be less than sensitive to smaller churches and to justify the exercise of power by the fact that we outnumber others. In a democracy in which so many things are settled at the ballot box, it can be tempting to think that the ultimate criterion of what is good and true is determined by the rule of the majority. Just as we would not want to be subjected to that principle by others, however, so should we assiduously avoid, even subconsciously, any tendency to dominate others when we are in a majority.

Influence can be exercised in many ways. In the natural order of things, places of honor in a community and the prestige which follow sometimes are given to those churches prominent because of their size. In situations like this, it is more imperative than ever to remember that numbers, prestige, and material resources carry a heavy burden of responsibility and are not to be taken advantage of for the seeming gains which may follow.

When Catholics Are a Religious Minority

The situation is quite different, however, when Catholics are a religious minority, which is the case in most of Kentucky. On the surface of things it may sometimes appear impossible that we will ever be fully accepted by our Protestant neighbors. This, in turn, may prompt some to turn inwards and remain apart from the company of other Christians. This temptation needs to be resisted. The very fact of being a religious minority often provides unique opportunities to display the rich spiritual heritage that is ours. When it is necessary to rely solely on what we are and what we value as followers of Christ, and when the love of Christ for others is the primary factor in forming relationships, then we are able to see how being a religious minority need not leave us feeling as powerless as at first seems to be the case. Only then, perhaps, are we able to fully realize that true power comes from within and not from without.

Religiously Diverse Marriages

In a letter such as this, it would be unthinkable not to turn attention to marriages in which one spouse is a Catholic and the other is a member of another Christian community or of a non Christian tradition. These are often referred to as "mixed," ecumenical, or religiously diverse marriages. Although these marriages, by

their very nature, entail special responsibilities, they also present unique opportunities. In these marriages, much can be done to promote increased understanding and to keep alive and even increase the desire for unity among the Christian churches.

In the dioceses of Kentucky, the percentage of all marriages in which one partner is Catholic and the other is not varies greatly. In general, where there is a large population of Catholics the percentage stands at about 35-40 %, but where there are few Catholics the percentage rises to more than 60%. It is not the percentage, however, which should concern us most. Every religiously diverse marriage has special and different needs by comparison with marriages in which both spouses are Catholic. These needs must not be overlooked nor left unattended. Furthermore, there is good reason to see in religiously diverse marriages a fruitful area for ecumenical progress.

At a minimum, spouses in religiously diverse marriages should:

- 1) Respect the person and religious convictions of the other;
- 2) Be knowledgeable of the other's faith expression and be able to interpret it well;
- 3) Continually attempt to learn more about the faith expression of the partner;
- 4) Be willing to make sacrifices for the other;
- 5) Positively support the other in the practice of his/her religion;
- 6) Feel obligated to do everything together in the practice of religion except when the policies and practices of their individual churches prevent this.
- 7) Continually attempt to grow in knowledge of their own faith tradition and be able to interpret it well.⁴

Above all, persons in religiously diverse marriages should always remember that they can be in full spiritual communion with each other through their communion with God even though they are unable to share fully in the worship and sacramental life of the religious traditions of their spouses.

Practical Steps to Promote Unity among Christians

There are numerous things that Catholics can do, no matter where they live or what their situation may be. These are but a few suggestions:

- 1) Do all that is in your power to cooperate with programs that promote the spiritual renewal of your own parish. This is a way not only of removing obstacles standing in the way of progress toward full unity with other Christians but also of positively influencing the attitudes of others.
- 2) Find out who your religious neighbors are and reach out to them in love. Much flows from believing that promoting unity among Christians is an indispensable task and responsibility of all Catholics. It means developing an increased awareness of Christians from traditions other than our own, especially if they are members of small congregations. It certainly is not acceptable to ignore them or act as if they do not exist.

Send greetings to and share visits with these other communities of Christians on special occasions. Invite them to participate in special events in our Catholic parishes. The parish council or even a special ecumenical committee might take it upon itself to be responsible for doing this.

3) Frequently include unity among Christians in the intentions of your communal, personal and family prayers and penitential practices. Again, Pope John Paul reminds us, "Along the ecumenical path to unity, pride of place certainly belongs to common prayer, the prayerful union of those who gather together around Christ himself. If Christians, despite their divisions, become more united in common prayer around Christ, they will grow in the awareness of how little divides them compared with what unites them." (Ut Unum Sint, # 22)

4) Join in the ecumenical activities of the community, whether these are prayer services, dialogues, or social action. Many communities sponsor special observances to celebrate Thanksgiving Day or the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. This latter should elicit our faithful support, since it is a privileged expression of our common prayer, observed as it is throughout the world. Participate in these and, if they do not exist as ecumenical projects, consider starting them or at least invite other Christians to join the members of our parishes in giving thanks and praying for unity among Christians.

5) Support with your interest, involvement, prayers and financial contributions the ecumenical organizations that are to be found both statewide and on a local level. There are very many of these, and the number continues to grow. Pioneers among such organizations were: The Kentucky Council of Churches, the Northern Kentucky Interfaith Commission, the Kentuckiana Interfaith Community, the Community Ministries of Louisville/Jefferson County, and the Paducah Cooperative Ministry.

6) Families and parishes are encouraged to do all in their power to extend hospitality to all persons who are not Catholic, especially those in religiously diverse marriages.

7) Because of the large numbers of Baptists in our midst in Kentucky, Catholics should feel a special obligation to reach out in love to them. For more than thirty years, Catholics from Kentucky have served both as liaison to the Southern Baptist Convention and on dialogues and conversations with Southern Baptists. The prayers and support of all Catholics are needed to help render these initiatives successful.

Ecumenism and the Millennium

In the year 2000, Christians throughout the world will celebrate two millenniums (or two thousand years) of Christianity. This event will truly be a celebration for all Christians. It will be an ecumenical celebration if every effort is made to make sure it is a common celebration. It can be a common celebration to the extent that all the baptized are recognized as true followers of Christ, having been incorporated into Christ's body through their baptism. Those who have been baptized with water in the name of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are brothers and sisters of the same Christ.

A People Made One, continued

Intense preparations are underway and celebrations of this great anniversary are already taking place so that this anniversary will receive the recognition that it deserves. It is a great opportunity to express our faith in the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Regrettably, many celebrations will be of a strictly secular nature. One hears of stadiums and the like being reserved years in advance for musical performances and other celebrations. In the face of this, we need to be reminded that Jesus Christ is not just an historical figure, certainly not a secular figure. Consequently, our celebrations should be inspired by religious faith.

The celebration of this anniversary should include the themes of the jubilee year as outlined for us in the twenty-fifth chapter of the Book of Leviticus. Some of these themes are: the importance of rest and renewal for both body and spirit; avoiding an excessive accumulation of wealth; helping others; giving people another chance; an awareness that the earth and all its natural resources are the common property of all and are on loan to us from God; avoidance of "gouging" when people have special needs; the value of the gift of liberty to be experienced by all and not just a select few; the value of fasting and self-discipline; the importance of trust; and a reminder that we are all servants of God.

We can recognize in these jubilee themes many of the principles of social justice set forth by the Catholic Church. In fact, Pope John Paul II states in his apostolic letter, *As the Third Millennium Draws Near*: "The social doctrine of the church, which has always been a part of church teaching and which has greatly developed in the last century, particularly after the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, is rooted in the tradition of the jubilee year." (# 13)

Themes pertaining to the mystery of Christ must permeate the celebration of the millennium through and through. But this is also a time to reflect upon the mystery of the Most Blessed Trinity. In short, the Church will reflect upon and give thanks for all our gifts of creation, redemption and sanctification even as we anticipate enjoying the fruits of these gifts in life everlasting.

Conclusion

In looking back upon the history of Christianity, it is clear that disagreements have always been a part of the life of the Church. Whereas some controversies were healed and unity was restored, other disputes had long lasting effects. Some of the very early controversies regarding the nature of Christ resulted in divisions persisting to the present. The major divisions in the eleventh and seventeenth centuries have at times seemed insurmountable. However, there is reason for hope. Within the context of the approaching new millennium, Pope John Paul speaks of "a promising opportunity for fruitful cooperation" and a "new springtime of Christian life which will be revealed by the Great Jubilee if Christians are docile to the action of the Holy Spirit." (*As the Third Millennium Draws Near*, # 16 & # 18)

The ecumenical movement, which was born during the early years of the nineteenth century, has continued to flourish, although often without much fanfare and public attention, up to the beginning of a new millennium. Without doubt, this is the work of the Holy Spirit. That being the case, there is very good

A People Made One, continued

reason to expect the healing of longstanding divisions during the third millennium. That, indeed, is our fervent prayer, and we ask you to join us, that God will bring about a restoration of unity among God's people.

Yours in Christ,

The Most Reverend Thomas C. Kelly, O.P.
Archbishop of Louisville

The Most Reverend Robert W. Muench
Bishop of Covington

The Most Reverend John J. McRaith
Bishop of Owensboro

The Most Reverend J. Kendrick Williams
Bishop of Lexington

Study Guide for A People Made One

Week One

Purpose: The purpose of this meeting is to get to know each other and to discuss our responsibility to promote Christian unity (pp.1-2a of A People Made One).

Opening Prayer: For our opening prayer we will read aloud a passage from Scripture and a quotation from A People Made One. After a time of silent reflection each person is invited to respond to the questions: What word or phrase stands out for you in these readings? Why?

Scripture: Read John 17:20-21

A People Made One: "The Catholic Church embraces with hope the commitment to ecumenism as a duty of the Christian conscience enlightened by faith and guided by love."

Getting to Know Each Other: Each person has come to this discussion with a unique history. Invite each person in the group to introduce him/her self. In addition to the usual information (name, short personal history) share with each other your denominational background (were you raised in a religious tradition? Is your family circle of one tradition? What events in your history formed your present attitudes toward other Christian traditions? Have divisions among Christians caused you pain?

Discussion Topic: Our Responsibility to Promote Christian Unity

What harm do you think has been caused by the divisions among Christians?

Do you believe that Jesus wants his followers to be united? Why?

Do you agree that all baptized people are called to commit themselves to the search for unity? Has your parish responded to this call in the past? Have you as an individual responded to the call? Do you want to? What might you/your parish do to respond to this call?

Arrangements for Next Meeting: Time? Place? Refreshments? Leader? Does anyone have requests or suggestions about how we might enhance our time together?

Closing Prayer: Reread the passage from John and the passage from A People Made One with which you began the meeting. Invite people to offer petitions or prayers of thanksgiving. All respond with the words: "Lord, hear our prayer." Conclude by praying together: "Loving God, you have made all followers of Jesus Christ one through baptism. We are A People Made One. We know that you want us to be one around the eucharistic table. Help us to walk in faith, hope, and love with you and with each other so that the unity which you desire becomes a reality. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen."

A People Made One, continued

Week Two

Purpose: The purpose of this meeting is discuss the areas of ecumenical growth and change which the Roman Catholic Church, and we as individuals, have experienced in our life time (see pp. 2b-5 of A People Made One).

Opening Prayer: For our opening prayer we will read aloud a passage from Scripture and a quotation from A People Made One. After a time of silent reflection each person is invited to respond to the questions: What word or phrase stands out for you in these readings? Why?

Scripture: Read Acts 10:24-35

A People Made One: "Now Catholics are encouraged to acknowledge and reverence the gifts of Christ to his church in whatever Christian communities they may be found... It is acknowledged that those not in full unity or communion with the Catholic Church do, nonetheless, enjoy many of the gifts of the Church."

Discussion Topic: The Areas of Ecumenical Growth and Change which the Roman Catholic Church, and We as Individuals, have Experienced in our Life Time Did some of your religious education take place before the Second Vatican Council? Do you have personal recollections of what A People Made One refers to as an "ecumenism of return" If so, how did this ecumenical posture affect your relationships with friends, relatives, spouse, etc.?

What unspoken presumptions behind an "ecumenism of return" would make this posture a block rather than a step toward unity among Christians? Do you have close personal relationships with Christians who are not Roman Catholic? Do you have a lot in common with these friends? Would you describe yourselves as belonging to the same church or different churches? Why?

Is there anyone on earth whom you know who is wise enough to agree with you on everything? Is there a difference between lack of agreement on core ideas and values, and lack of agreement on less important matters? How do these questions relate to what A People Made One refers to as "degrees of communion?"

Can you envision a unity among Christian churches which does not involve complete structural unity and loss of identity? What models of unity already exist which might spur our thinking in this regard? Are you familiar with any of the resources listed in A People Made One as recent accomplishments of the ecumenical movement? If so, what is your acquaintance with this document? If not, does this fact lead you to any conclusions about the Church's success in calling us to a commitment to ecumenism?

A People Made One reminds us that we are "urged to interact and cooperate with other Christians and members of other religious traditions to the fullest extent possible, stopping only at the point where going further would compromise Catholic beliefs and practice." Do you think your parish, or you personally, are doing this? If we were, what forms do you think our cooperation would take?

A People Made One, continued

Arrangements for Next Meeting: Time? Place? Refreshments? Leader? Does anyone have requests or suggestions about how we might enhance our time together?

Closing Prayer: Reread the passage from Acts and the passage from A People Made One with which you began the meeting. Invite people to offer petitions or prayers of thanksgiving. All respond with the words, "Lord, hear our prayer." Conclude by praying together, "Loving God, you have made all followers of Jesus Christ one through baptism. We are A People Made One. We know that you want us to be one around the eucharistic table. Help us to walk in faith, hope, and love with you and with each other so that the unity which you desire becomes a reality. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen."

Week Three

Purpose: The purpose of this meeting is to discuss spiritual ecumenism and our need to repent (pp. 6-9a of A People Made One).

Opening Prayer: For our opening prayer we will read aloud a passage from Scripture and a quotation from A People Made One. After a time of silent reflection each person is invited to respond to the questions: What word or phrase stands out for you in these readings? Why?

Scripture: Read Luke 18:9-14

A People Made One: There can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without interior conversion.

Discussion Topic: Spiritual Ecumenism and Our Need to Repent

Do you agree that a change of heart, holiness of life, and public and private prayer for the unity of Christians are necessary components for meaningful ecumenism? Can you think of additional necessary components? What point is being made by calling this "spiritual ecumenism?"

Based on your own experience, do you think the Roman Catholic tradition has sinned against ecumenism? How? Were you taught prejudices against other Christians? Did this teaching result in your acting in ways which you now regret? Have you been the object of religious prejudice? What ramifications did such prejudice have in your life?

What do you think are the greatest gifts which the Roman Catholic tradition has given you? Are these gifts specific to the Roman Catholic tradition? As you become acquainted with other Christian traditions do you recognize strengths in them which Roman Catholics might experience as gifts? What are they?

Have you ever been positive you were right, and then in hindsight realized you were wrong? What caused you to see things differently? If two people who disagree are each positive they are right is there any reason for them to be in dialogue? Why does ecumenical dialogue depend on "being surprised by the Spirit?"

A People Made One, continued

Have you ever lived in an area where Roman Catholics were in the majority? What were the positives and negatives of this experience from an ecumenical point of view? Have you been the minority? What were the positives and negatives in this setting? Did you form ecumenical ties? How?

Do you have personal experience of a religiously diverse marriage (your own or someone close to you)? What have been the positives and negatives of such a marriage from an ecumenical point of view? Do you think that a loving, religiously diverse marriage in which each person knows his or her own tradition, supports the other in his or her tradition, and does everything together in the practice of religion except when the policies and practices of their individual churches prevent this has anything to teach us about ecumenism? What can the church learn from such a couple?

Would you regard a couple who lives a religiously diverse marriage as described above as being in spiritual communion with each other? What ramifications does such a belief have for our understanding of unity among churches?

Arrangements for Next Meeting: Time? Place? Refreshments? Leader? Does anyone have requests or suggestions about how we might enhance our time together?

Closing Prayer: Reread the passage from Luke and the passage from A People Made One with which you began the meeting. Invite people to offer petitions or prayers of thanksgiving. All respond with the words: "Lord hear our prayer." Conclude by praying together: "Loving God, you have made all followers of Jesus Christ one through baptism. We are A People Made One. We know that you want us to be one around the eucharistic table. Help us to walk in faith, hope, and love with you and with each other so that the unity which you desire becomes a reality. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen."

Week Four

Purpose: The purpose of this meeting is to decide how we can continue to respond to the call for ecumenical commitment (pp.9b-12 of A People Made One).

Opening Prayer: For our opening prayer we will read aloud a passage from Scripture and a quotation from A People Made One. After a time of silent reflection each person is invited to respond to the questions: What word or phrase stands out for you in these readings? Why?

Scripture: Read Ephesians 4:1-7

A People Made One: "The ecumenical movement... has continued to flourish... Without doubt this is the work of the Holy Spirit. That being the case, there is very good reason to expect the healing of long standing divisions during the third millennium."

Discussion Topic: How Can We Continue to Respond to the Call for Ecumenical Commitment?

A People Made One, continued

Do you desire Christian unity? Why? Do you think unity can be hastened by compromising our beliefs? If compromising our beliefs is not the answer, what is? Personal holiness is a prerequisite for ecumenism. What do you do routinely to try to grow in personal holiness? Does your parish promote spiritual renewal? How?

Do you know your religious neighbors? How do you reach out to them? How might you reach out to them?

Have you participated in any ecumenical dialogues? In any ecumenical organizations? What dialogues and organizations are available to you? What could you do to support the work of such groups?

Are you involved in any ecumenical social action? What? What groups in your parish or community are involved in ecumenical social action? What could you do to support the work of such groups?

Do you pray for church unity? Is a prayer for church unity included in your parish's Sunday petitions? Does your parish promote ecumenical prayer occasions? What might you do to see that your parish does these things?

Do you believe that unity is a gift of the Holy Spirit? Are you hopeful that the blocks which we human beings have put in the way of unity can be overcome? On what do you base your hope?

Closing Prayer: Reread the passage from Ephesians and from A People Made One with which you began the meeting. In addition to inviting people to offer petitions and prayers of thanksgiving, invite anyone who wishes to make a commitment to some action which is responsive to our ongoing call to work for church unity. All respond with the words, "Lord, hear our prayer." Conclude by praying together: "Loving God, you have made all followers of Jesus Christ one through baptism. We are A People Made One. Help us to desire unity more and more. Give us the wisdom, strength, energy, and courage to think and act in ways that promote church unity. We know that you want us to be one around the eucharistic table. Help us to walk in faith, hope, and love with you and with each other so that the unity which you desire becomes a reality. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen."