



The Holy See

**LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY
FOR THE 50th ANNIVERSARY OF THE DECREE "UNITATIS REDINTEGRATIO"**

[Multimedia]

Your Eminences,

Dear Brother Bishops and Priests,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I cordially greet you all and thank you for this meeting, which coincides with the 50th anniversary of the promulgation of the Decree of the Second Vatican Council on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*. On that 21st of November 1964 the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* and the Decree on Catholic Churches of the Eastern Rite *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* were also promulgated. These three documents taken together, and profoundly linked to one another, offer the vision of Catholic ecclesiology as it was proposed by the Second Vatican Council. That is why you chose to dedicate your sessions to reflecting on how *Unitatis Redintegratio* can continue to inspire the ecumenical commitment of the Church in today's changed setting.

First of all, we can rejoice in the fact that the Council's teaching has been broadly received. In these years, on the basis of theological purposes rooted in Scripture and in the Tradition of the Church, the attitude of we Catholics toward Christians of other Churches and ecclesial communities has changed. The hostility and indifference that dug seemingly unbridgeable chasms and caused such deep wounds are now a thing of the past, while a process of healing has begun that permits acceptance of the other as a brother or sister in the profound unity that comes from Baptism.

This change of mentality, due to *Unitatis Redintegratio* and to the ecumenical action that followed it, can and must penetrate ever more deeply into the theological teaching and in the pastoral practices of Dioceses, Institutes of Consecrated Life, Associations and ecclesial Movements. In all the faithful there must always be a growing awareness of the commitment that implies the will of Jesus expressed in his prayer to the Father on the eve of His Passion: "That they may all be one"

(Jn 17:21).

This anniversary also invites us to give thanks to God for the many fruits that have been reaped in this half century. In particular, the Council's recommendation has been brought about, that is, appreciation of how much good and truth there is in the lives of Christians of every community.

All this has enabled closer contact with other Churches and Ecclesial Communities and new forms of cooperation to be developed. Ecumenical translations of the Sacred Scriptures have been very important in this regard. Christians of different Churches and Ecclesial Communities are working together at the service of a suffering and needy humanity, for the protection of human life and its unalienable dignity, to safeguard Creation, and against the injustices that afflict so many people and peoples.

As a Bishop of the Church which presides in universal charity, I wish to express my gratitude to all those who in the course of these 50 years have been lavish in various ways at the service of the reconciliation and the communion among all believers in Christ, particularly to those who have worked in the Secretariat for Christian Unity and in the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. While we give thanks, we must recognize that among Christians, we are still divided, and that disagreement on new anthropological and ethical subjects make our journey toward unity more complicated. However, we must not surrender to discouragement and resignation, but continue to trust in God who plants in the hearts of Christians the seeds of love and of unity, in order to confront with renewed momentum today's ecumenical challenges: to cultivate spiritual ecumenism, to turn to advantage the ecumenism of blood, to walk together on the path of the Gospel.

Spiritual ecumenism, which reaches a high point in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, lives and develops through countless channels, which truly only the Lord sees, but which we, too, often have the joy of knowing: it is a worldwide network of prayerful moments which, at parish and international levels, spread the oxygen of the authentic ecumenical spirit through the body of the Church; a network of acts, which see us united and working together in so many works of charity; and it is also a sharing of prayer, of meditation and other texts which circulate on the web and can contribute to raising awareness, respect and mutual esteem.

With regard to the ecumenism of blood, *Unitatis Redintegratio* itself invited that we esteem it by acknowledging the God-given capacity of our brothers and sisters of other Churches and Christian communities to bear witness to Christ even to the supreme sacrifice (cf. n. 4). There has been no shortage of such witnesses in these 50 years and they continue even in our day. It is up to us to welcome them with faith and allow their strength to impel us to convert to an ever fuller brotherhood. Those who persecute Christ in his faithful make no differentiation between confessions: they persecute them simply because they are Christians.

In these months, meeting so many non-Catholic Christians, or reading their letters, I have been able to see how, despite the open questions that still separate us, there is a strong and widespread desire to walk together, to pray, to know and love the Lord, to cooperate in service and in solidarity with the weak and the suffering. I am convinced of this: on a common path, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit and learning from one another we can grow in the communion which already unites us.

Dear brothers and sisters, 50 years after the promulgation of *Unitatis Redintegratio*, the pursuit of full Christian unity remains a priority for the Catholic Church, and thus it is daily one of my chief concerns. Unity first and foremost is a gift of God and the work of the Holy Spirit, but we are all called to cooperate, always and in every circumstance. I therefore thank you for all of your work and, in entrusting you to the maternal intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, I ask you to please pray for me and for my ministry, and I bless you from my heart.

From the Vatican, 20 November 2014

FRANCIS