

Men in the Church also wish to learn and to understand. There is, I believe, a genuine desire to recognize sexism where it exists, and to eradicate it when it is recognized. This is part of a wider movement among men in the Church who wish to collaborate with women, to be at ease with them, and with them to be recognized and respected as human beings anxious to live loving and faithful lives.

IV

THE NEED FOR RECONCILIATION

28. The heart and strength of any Christian community is its unity in Christ. It is our union with and in him which endows us with the vision and strength we need to respond to the Gospel in any given age. Without that spirit and a constant effort toward unity disputed questions become issues which divide rather than invitations to deeper life.

When the former happens, people take sides, perspective and proportion are lost, and it becomes important to win.

When, on the other hand, such questions are approached in a spirit of communion and prayer, they can be a great source of strength. Persons are eager to understand one another and basic human disagreements are seen in the wider context of values shared.

29. In my judgment, we need constantly to reform attitudes and practices among us which fall short of recognizing the full dignity and stature of every person.

But, if this is ever to happen with the depth and sincerity which all desire, it can happen only if we all, men and women, laity and clergy, enter more deeply into the fullness of the reconciliation to which Jesus calls us and which he has wonderfully achieved for us in his death and resurrection when he made "peace by his death on the cross" (Colossians 1:20).

Saint Augustine said of Christ, "You have touched me and I have been translated into your peace."¹⁰ The true peace of the Church and the peace of her members is the peace which Christ makes between us and among us.

The author of Ephesians explained so patiently to the Jews and pagans of the time and to us that, "now in Christ Jesus, you that used to be so far apart . . . have been brought very close by the blood of Christ. For he is the peace between us, and he has made the two into one and broken down the barrier which used to keep them apart, actually destroying in his own person the hostility caused by the rules and decrees of the law" (Ephesians 2:13-14).

30. The estrangement and even hostility which we find in our own hearts and the hearts of other men and women of the Church, come, as Paul says, from the long accumulation of our evil and as yet unredeemed ways: "Not long ago, you were foreigners and enemies, in the way that you used to think and the evil things that you did; but now he has reconciled you by his death and in that mortal body" (Colossians 1:21-22).

31. We are called to carry on the work of Christ, the work of lifting to full dignity in his body all men and women in the church, by beginning where Christ began — by reconciling all persons in himself and restoring peace to one another.

This is the hidden plan God so kindly made in Christ from the

beginning. In Christ we have all been "claimed as God's own," and the daily remembrance of this fundamental grace of our faith will give strength and truthfulness to our endeavors as we reach out more generously in love and respect to all women and men in the Church.

32. As I reflect on the tensions which exist in various ways among men and women in the Church, I can only conclude that this lack of Christ's peace is due to fear and the imperfection of our love. We have all read Saint John's claim, "perfect love casts out fear." Yet we fail to realize the great and thoroughly demanding challenge in these words. Individually and as a Church, we must devote our lives to growing in love and peace with one another.

33. We know that God desires our peace; that his words effect our peace; that Christ, himself, is the source of peace — peace with him and with one another. Together we need to hunger and thirst for this gift of God and humbly acknowledge that when and where it is absent among us as men and women in the Church, then our love is closed, imperfect and fearful.

Peace among Christians is a fruit of spiritual-mindedness and it is a gift from Jesus Christ. It is an achievement which is not possible for the world relying on its own resources. Jesus is our communion with God and with one another — not just at Eucharistic liturgies, but at Parish Council and diocesan committee meetings, at our family tables, in schools and shops and in all of the ordinary affairs of human life.

34. This is why in the matter of "Women in the Church," and in all other matters with which we struggle as a faith community, we pray that we may have that attitude to which we are called by the author of the Letter to the Philippians: "In your mind you must be the same as Christ Jesus. His state was divine, yet he did not cling to his equality with God, but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave, and became as we are; and being as all of us are, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross" (Philippians 2:5-8).

35. We know that the strength of God reveals itself in human weakness and we beg to be emptied of all that makes us unavailable to God's grace: our fears, our clinging to status, our sexism, our racism, our failure to work for the freedom of the oppressed. In positive terms, we pray for the help we need to become selfless servants to one another, even to our death.

V

THE DIGNITY OF EACH PERSON

36. We are blessed in our faith tradition with a wealth of values concerning the human person. The Word of God is the story of the communication of life and the restoration of hope. The dignity of the human person in the eyes of God shines through the Scriptures even in those events and personages which are difficult for the modern person to understand.

37. Jesus is the perfect expression of this. By his birth and life, his passion, death and resurrection, we are redeemed and made holy. He gave his life for all and communicated his life to his people.

38. It is the faith of the Church that through baptism we are joined to his dying and rising. We become one with him and so become an offering acceptable to the Father. Through the sacraments of initiation we become full persons in the Church.

39. The basic message which our loving God speaks to humankind is the unique goodness and loveliness of each person. "With everlasting love I have taken pity on you . . . my love for you will never leave you" (Isaiah 54). The motivation which draws each individual forward on the journey to respond to God's love, to search out one's own uniqueness and respond