

ALONG THE WAY

Bishop

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own initiative, manifest(s) Catholic faith in this sacrament and (is) properly disposed." (1993 Directory for Ecumenism, 131; cf. Canon 844.4)

Since Vatican II's Decree on Ecumenism was promulgated on Nov. 21, 1964, the churches and ecclesial communities "which come from Christ and lead back to him (and) belong by right to the one Church of Christ" (*Unitatis Redintegratio* 3) have made great strides in honest dialogue and in dramatic steps toward reunion. I hope it is abundantly clear to all that under my leadership and with my full blessing, this diocese has made serious efforts to advance ecumenical relations in recent years. Our efforts have been mirrored in local churches all over the world. However, let no one be fooled into thinking that there is not much more to be done or that reunion is but a week or two away.

Unfortunately, one parish in our diocese, without respect for theology, for church discipline, for the sensitivities of other churches and ecclesial communities, or even for my authority, had simply begun acting as if the issues that still divide the churches have disappeared. Vatican II foresaw such shortsightedness and wrote, "This sacred Council urges the faithful to abstain from any frivolous or imprudent zeal, for these can cause harm to true progress towards unity." (*UR* 24)

Consequently, I ask that the norms of the church concerning the extension of Eucharistic hospitality to those not yet with one us in the bond of charity in the Roman Catholic Church be observed.

4. The church's teaching as an expression of unity.

Vatican II reminded us that bishops have "the obligation of fostering and safeguarding the unity of the faith and of upholding the discipline which is common to the whole Church." (*LG* 23) There is but one faith because there is but one Gospel — that taught the Apostles by Christ Jesus. It is important to remember that it was for the preservation of the living Gospel in the church that "the (A)postles left bishops as their successors, giving them 'their own position of teaching authority.'" (*Dei Verbum* 7)

Consequently, the task of authoritatively interpreting the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of tradition, belongs to the local bishop in his diocese, to the bishops of the Catholic Church dispersed in their dioceses or gathered in ecumenical council or to the bishop of Rome in his role as pastor and teacher of all the faithful. No teacher, no pastor, no congregation can ever take the place of these representatives of Christ Jesus of whom he said: "The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects the One

who sent me." (Luke 10:16)

In one parish of the diocese, an authority different from the local bishop (teaching in union with his brother bishops and the bishop of Rome) has been introduced as the highest authority for that community — i.e. a priest directly interpreting what Jesus would do if he were present today. With this principle of interpretation, some scriptural passages can be advanced and others suppressed, some church teachings can be affirmed and others denied, some disciplines raised up and others discarded. Ultimately this distorted principle denies to the living church the guiding presence of the Holy Spirit because it asks only "What would Jesus do?" It should rather ask "How is the Spirit directing the churches?" for the Lord is now risen and the Holy Spirit now sent to guide the church to all truth. (John 16:13)

Lest there be any misunderstanding, let me use an illustration. Pope John Paul II, in *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (4) taught that the "Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful." Since the Holy Father's Apostolic Letter of May 22, 1994, I have firmly accepted and held this definitive doctrine of the church and have asked that all those under my pastoral care do the same. And yet at least one priest has maintained, against my role as teacher, that the ordination of women is a matter of justice, that if Jesus were on earth today He would speak against this injustice. As a consequence, this priest continues to preach and teach and act against *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*. In this stand there is no acknowledgement of apostolic succession, of the role

of authoritative teaching, of the role of the Holy Spirit in the church. This teaching calls all of us to humility, openness and docility. Where these qualities are lacking, the unity of faith cannot be served.

Because of this situation, I call on all priests, deacons, pastoral administrators, pastoral associates, catechetical leaders and all who participate in my office of preaching and teaching to adhere to the teaching of the church. "So, in maintaining, practicing and professing the faith that has been handed on, there should be a remarkable harmony between the bishops and the faithful." (*DV* 10)

5. The church's pastoral practice as a sign of unity.

Vatican II said very little about human sexuality and absolutely nothing about the condition of homosexuality. But the council did set forth several principles on which the Vatican congregations and the various conferences of Catholic bishops have built in this regard in the post-conciliar era. First of all, the council fathers taught that "all Christians, in any state or walk of life, are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love." (*LG* 39). Secondly, all Christians "have the right to receive in abundance the help of the spiritual goods of the Church, especially that of the Word of God and the sacraments." (*LG* 37) Finally, pastors "should recognize and promote the dignity and responsibility of the laity in the Church." (*LG* 37)

I will not repeat here all that I have written in my recent pastoral letter "We All Need Redeeming." I only wish to reiterate that, with the support of the papal magisterium and the bishops of the United States, this diocese has made a seri-

ous commitment to extend the care and affection of the Church of Rochester to gay and lesbian Catholics. I am very pleased that at least a handful of parishes in the diocese have set the pace for us. I look forward to the day when every parish, following their good example, will welcome gay and lesbian people into its midst.

In the meantime, I would like to begin planning for the possibility of a diocesan sponsored weekly Mass in several areas of the diocese for those gay and lesbian persons who choose to worship together, awaiting a day when they can feel welcome in their own faith communities. I have already asked our diocesan staff to begin preliminary discussions in this regard and, when the time is right, I will ask that our priests be generous in giving of their time to make them possible.

Lest this effort divide the community, I ask that as of Nov. 16 no priest be involved in any competing service sponsored by Dignity/Integrity. In addition, I ask priests and other pastoral leaders who minister with gay and lesbian people not to step outside the unity of the church's discipline by blessing same-sex unions.

I appreciate your attention to the five points I have set forth above. It is my hope that you will think about them and identify any questions they may raise for you. If you do have questions or would like further clarification, you might speak to your pastor or to a member of your parish staff.

Thank you for your faithful love of our church and for all that you do to nourish our life together. Please join me in the prayer of Jesus "That all may be one." (John 18:21)

Peace to all.

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