

CONTINUED...

various Christian denominations.

"These numerous 'churches' contradict one another," he said. "If they are all 'church' in their own way, then this church is a collection of contradictions, and it is not in a position to offer men and women any clear direction."

Church commitment

On Sept. 18 Pope John Paul II assured members of a formal dialogue commission that the Catholic Church's commitment to ecumenical dialogue "is irrevocable." Members of that commission of Catholics and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches had considered canceling a session.

Also, on Oct. 1, Pope John Paul II defended *Dominus Iesus* at a midday blessing, saying it was necessary and actually offered a framework for dialogue.

"It has been very heartening to have the pope say in the last week his commitment to ecumenism is irrevocable," said Rev. Wondra, who had just returned from the 50th meeting of the Anglican-Roman Catholic Consultation in the United States (ARC-USA) in Washington, D.C.

"The Episcopal Church in the USA and the Anglican Communion are absolutely committed to continuing this dialogue. And the ARC-USA is absolutely committed to continuing its work. We don't question the commitment of the Roman Catholic Church. So the real issue is how the dialogue will proceed. My concern has to do with the way in which it proceeds is made more or less difficult."

The document raises questions "about what kind of ecumenism" the Catholic Church is committed to, she said. And for some Episcopalians, "it increases their lack of interest" in inter-church relationships.

"Our concern is not just about Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue, but among all churches," Rev. Wondra said. "This kind of

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statement does not help the unity of the churches, and we believe very firmly the unity of churches is God's will expressed by Christ."

Sister Beth LeValley, SSJ, president of the Greater Rochester Community of Churches, agreed. "It has impact. When you see Paul Womack upset about it ... then we've got to deal with it. I think we've got to be open to the fact people are upset about it and be open to dialogue," she said.

"I really do look forward to it if more comes out of it in terms of this debate, and how I bring my practical experience to the debate," Sister LeValley added.

GRCC, meanwhile, had decided to write its own theology of ecumenism to help guide its work, she said, noting that next year is the 10th anniversary of the ecumenical association, which actually dates further back in other forms.

"Now we have this flourishing relationship with a number of people in the ecumenical and interfaith community," she said. "The relationships are there, the working together is there." Yet, she said, "In working with other Christians, their view of the Roman Catholic Church is we are one big monolith that is called to move as one. For me, there are a lot of variations within the church. ... There's the hierarchical structure that maintains traditions and doctrine; the vowed are more servant prophetic; then there's theologians and the teaching function. ... So there is a multiplicity of roles."

Dominus Iesus comes from the hierarchical function, she noted.

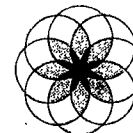
"I can only believe what I believe," Sister LeValley said. "I know my God is a loving, all embracing God. However, part of that loving as a Roman Catholic Christian and Sister of St. Joseph, is to reach out into other persons' reality, to listen to their truth and reality, and respect their reality."

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