

## On the Anniversaries of *Ut unum sint* & the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity

# New ecumenical publications

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May and June 2020 marked the anniversaries of two events that can rightly be considered milestones in the ecumenical commitment of the Catholic Church.

On one hand, it marked 60 years since the establishment on June 5, 1960, at Saint John XXIII's request, of the Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity. This was the official beginning of the Roman Catholic Church's journey along the path to re-establishing Christian unity, one that had been underway since the beginning of the twentieth century between the Churches of the Reformation, the Orthodox Churches and the Anglican Communion. Then, a few years later, the Second Vatican Council's decree, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, gave doctrinal foundation to this search for visible unity among Christ's disciples.

In 1988, the Secretariat underwent a name change to become the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, and over the course of sixty years, theological dialogues have begun with various Churches. Many meetings between leaders of Churches have since fostered mutual understanding, the multiplication of joint prayer gatherings worldwide and the birth of effective collaboration between Christians. In this way, relationships between these various Christian components have changed. As Pope Francis often states, by following this path we are "on the way": The Holy Spirit is the protagonist and unity will be his gift.

Each Pope, beginning with St. John XXIII, has given his own specific contribution to ecumenism. And, so, too, Saint John Paul II. May 2020 also marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the release of the encyclical, *Ut unum sint* (*On Commitment to Ecumenism*). There, among other things, is the Pope's well known, open invitation to dialogue on the exercise of the primacy of the bishop of Rome.

The extent to which fraternal relations have grown over these sixty years emerges clearly in Pope Francis' letter to Cardinal Kurt Koch, president of the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity, on the 25th anniversary: "I too share the healthy impatience of those who sometimes think that we can and should do more. [...] At this moment, my thoughts turn to my beloved Brothers, the heads of the different Churches and Christian communities, and to all our

brothers and sisters of every Christian tradition who are our companions on this journey. Like the disciples of Emmaus, may we experience the presence of the risen Christ who walks at our side and explains the Scriptures to us. May we recognize him in the breaking of the bread, as we await the day when we shall share the Eucharistic table together."<sup>1</sup>.

Then, at times we hear ecumenism is at a standstill. But perhaps this is only because we are not sufficiently informed about ongoing developments. During a recent Vatican news interview, Cardinal Koch announced the launch of a new publication, *Acta Oecumenica*, with the purpose of furthering greater receptivity and ecumenical formation. A second piece of news from the Dicastery also included the release of an ecumenical Vademecum for bishops. "The bishop's pastoral ministry", states the Vademecum, "extends not just to the unity of his own church, but to the unity of all the baptized into Christ."<sup>2</sup> "The Vademecum intends to help the bishops more deeply understand and carry out their ecumenical responsibility", said the Cardinal during the interview.<sup>3</sup>

Ecumenical commitment is a mutual "exchange of gifts", an exchange most especially of lives lived in accordance with the Gospel. By putting the Gospel into practice, we too will experience the same reality that St. Paul writes to the Ephesians: «One body and one spirit, [...]; one Lord, one faith, one baptism "(cf. *Eph* 4: 4-5).

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Cardinal Kurt Koch on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the encyclical *Ut unum sint*, May 24, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2020/12/04/201205a.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/it/news/2020/2020-06-05-interview-koch-vatican-news.html>.