

A Pope for the Time to Come: Bishop of Rome and Universal Pastor

Preface: Now is the Time

"*Now is the acceptable time*" (2 Cor. 6) for Catholics throughout the whole world to reflect on what type of leadership, indeed what model of church, we need for the new millennium.

The Second Vatican Council (1962-65) invited all of us to read the signs of the times in the light of the gospel. It called our faith community to perpetual renewal. We have tried to be faithful to that call as we examine the life of our church and our need for a Bishop of Rome who can lead our faith community in a "universal agapé," or assembly of charity.

The millennium now passing away has been an age of division among Christians. It is our hope that the third millennium will become an age of reconciliation and unity.

In this spirit, Pope John Paul II invited all Christians to reflect on the future of the Papacy "*...that we may seek - together, of course - the forms in which this ministry [of Peter] may accomplish a service of love recognized by all concerned...to find a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless open to a new situation.*" (*Ut Unum Sint*, No.95).

At the same time, voices within the World Council of Churches are calling all Christian churches to commit themselves in the year 2000 to begin preparation for a Universal Christian Council.

We join our voices with these calls, and declare our readiness to renew our faith community in light of the signs of our times, and to dialogue and work with other churches on the basis of equality.

To realize these dreams, we offer our reflections on the qualities needed by our age in the next Bishop of Rome. We share our thoughts in the spirit of the woman in the gospel who mixed yeast with flour so that her bread might expand and nourish a community. This is our "yeast."

A Model of Church for our Times: Ever Ancient, Ever New

To build a vibrant church in the new millennium, we need to listen once again to Jesus and his first disciples who preached the equality of all persons (Matt. 23; 11-12; Luke 22: 24-26; Gal. 3:28). We need to build structures in our church which reflect that equality so that we may live, pray and minister to one another as a "discipleship of equals." Only then will we follow the example of Jesus who sends the Spirit, not to a small group, but to the whole community of faith. Only then will we

live out the teaching of Vatican II which recognizes us all as the People of God, co-responsible for decision-making in the life of our church.

We need to restore a church that values dialogue and justice in its internal life as well as its approach to the world. We need to reestablish a church that respects and celebrates our worldwide diversity, a church in which there is freedom to live our faith in different ways in different cultures. We need to resurrect a church that recognizes the importance of local churches where the Word is preached in ways that local cultures can hear it. The building of this restored church is the work of the whole People of God, not only the Bishop of Rome, other bishops and the clergy.

We begin by urging that we restore the practice of the early church and develop structures that permit the People of God to participate in a prominent way in the election of all church leaders. This would include the election of the Pope, the Bishop of Rome. This renewal of an ancient tradition will acknowledge the action of the Spirit in community of the faithful.

The Next Bishop of Rome

We would be greatly helped in renewing our church by a leader who reads the "signs of the times" in concert with the people, a collaborative Bishop of Rome who can listen as well as preach, and dialogue as well as teach. We need a leader who truly embraces and consults the *sensus fidelium* (sense of the faithful).

We especially need a leader who recognizes the awakening of women's consciousness as a significant "sign of our times." Women, more than half of our church, have grown conscious of their dignity and equality with men. They are calling our faith community to respect and implement that equality in its own life.

We need a Bishop of Rome who respects the differences among us as well as challenges us to live the gospel.

We need a Pope who distinguishes between his pastoral ministry as the Bishop of Rome, and the ministry of Peter in which he is in dialogue with the universal church. As Bishop of Rome, he serves the faithful of Rome as any bishop serves a diocese. He would retire at the age established for all bishops. As president of the worldwide *agapé*, he would act as a brother bishop who invites the world's bishops to share leadership with him and with other members of the People of God who are called forth by the faithful. In that spirit, he would reform the Curia (papal cabinet) so that it might serve, rather than dominate, other bishops and the church universal.

But most of all, we need a Bishop of Rome and a Universal Pastor who is:

*a visionary leader who promotes a profound discernment on church ministry by all the People of God and calls them to consider the possibility of welcoming into ministry all those qualified whatever their gender, marital status or sexual orientation;

*a respecer of the consciences of Catholics who calls forth a genuine public dialogue on the theologies, moral teaching and policies in the church so that our faith community might share experiences, begin to heal its alienation and resurrect a sense of unity and enthusiasm for the faith;

*a pastor who encourages academic freedom for theologians and other scholars in order to foster a healthy diversity of opinions in the church;

*a reconciler who welcomes "liberals" and "conservatives" to share the same church;

*a leader who recognizes the cultural pluralism of the church and celebrates the diversity that flowers in different parts of our world;

*a collaborator with a sense of history who is willing to restore the tradition of full participation of the people in church and who invites all Catholics to share governance and decision-making, including the election of church leaders;

*a pioneer who encourages initiative and experimentation and calls Catholics to develop an adult sense of responsibility for their faith community;

*an ecumenist who engages in serious dialogue with Christians of the Reformation and Orthodox traditions in an effort to bring about the dream of Christian unity;

*a brother to the Jewish people who will work to dismantle any vestiges of anti-Semitism and build strong bonds of spiritual kinship that recognize our common heritage flowing from Abraham and Sarah;

*a student of religious traditions other than Christianity and Judaism who welcomes interfaith dialogue, and seeks to learn from the rich diversity of insights in these traditions;

*a lover whose arms embrace the world and whose policies express a special solidarity with the poor and oppressed;

*a prophet who is tireless in promoting justice, equality, peace and nonviolence in our world and in our church;

*a lover of the earth who recognizes and promotes the integrity of all creation;

*a gentle soul with a sense of humor; and

*a Brother Bishop who can happily shed the trappings of the powerful of this world (*Luke 22: 25-26*) and walk with us as we together re-create our community of faith to make the Spirit of Jesus come alive in the third millennium.

**What we need in the new millennium
is a Bishop of Rome who is a Universal Pastor**