

## **Letter to the Cardinals**

**14th of September 1998, Feast of the Holy Cross**

Dear Cardinal,

We are faithful Catholic women and men of the People of God worldwide. Inspired by the Second Vatican Council, we feel impelled to assume co-responsibility for our Church and for the effective preaching of the gospel in the world today. This sense of co-responsibility has led us to reflect on the leadership needed in the Roman Catholic Church for today and the time to come.

Pope John Paul II, the present Bishop of Rome and Pastor of the Church Universal, has now completed twenty years of faithful service to our community worldwide in this double ministry. In those years, he has been a strong and unique presence in the world at large as well as the church. He played a pivotal role in the demise of totalitarianism in Poland and Eastern Europe. He has promoted peace and non-violence, urged an end to racism and ethnic hatreds, advocated for the needs of the poor and tried to heal long-standing antagonisms between the Christian and Jewish people.

Pope John Paul II is aware that the ministry of unity in our church and the leading of God's people will be enormously significant in the Third Millennium. Consequently, in *Ut Unum Sint* (n.95), he asked all those who are concerned about the future of the church to reflect on 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."

With great respect, we accept this challenge. We want to contribute our reflections to the worldwide process of discerning the characteristics needed by the person who will be called to be the "Servant of the Servants of God."

Pope John Paul II's health is a matter on constant speculation in the media, and some commentators have begun to analyse the gifts and backgrounds of those who might succeed him. But neither the Pope's health nor media speculation prompts our statement. Indeed, we seek to encourage public discussion on this important and delicate issue at a time when Pope John Paul II himself can take part in it.

The gospel urges us to be prayerful and reflective. The Second Vatican Council calls us to read the signs of our times. We have tried to follow that path as we considered the type of leadership we need and developed a statement to share with our brothers and sisters worldwide. We believe that this process must precede any examination of the qualifications of specific candidates for Bishop of Rome.

Thus, we Catholic women and men from around the world have reflected with great care on the model of church which we believe we need, and on the qualities needed in the next Bishop of Rome in order to maintain the unity of our church. The Universal Pastor we envision would be collaborative in style, inviting the world's bishops to share leadership with him and with other members of the People of God. He would listen as well as preach and dialogue as well as teach. As a brother bishop, he would retire at the age established for all bishops. He would respect the equality of all the faithful and end any discriminatory barriers to participation in ministries and decision making. This leader would embody the spirit of ecumenism, recognizing the Spirit of Jesus in all Christian churches, and dialogue with them to bring about the dream of Christian unity. And he would be a lover of the poor and marginalized, promoting justice in our world as well as our church. We encourage you to read and reflect upon our full statement that is enclosed.

This letter has been sent to Pope John Paul II and to all members of the College of Cardinals. Within a few days, it will be released to the media worldwide so that we may share our reflections with our global faith community.

Please know that we will pray for your deliberations and decision making from now until the time that the conclave selects a new "Pope for the Time to Come."

On behalf of the hundreds of thousands who authorized us to send you this statement, and especially those groups who formalized their agreement and whose names appear at the end of the statement,

(signed)

Elfriede Harth, Spokesperson  
International We Are Church Movement (IMWAC)