

14th of September 1998, Feast of the Holy Cross

Pope John Paul II

Palazzo Apostolico Vaticano

I 00120 Città del Vaticano

Dear Brother John Paul II, Bishop of Rome and Minister of the Unity of the Church,
Servant of the Servants of God,

As your brothers and sisters in the faith of Jesus Christ, we write to share with you a statement that is the fruit of deep prayerful reflection by thousands of faithful Catholics around the globe. It expresses a vision of church and church leadership animated by the Spirit of Pentecost that calls us to "see visions" and "dream dreams" that bring our faith community ever closer to living the ideals of the gospel (Acts 2: 17).

We share this statement in a spirit of respect, offering you our prayers and congratulations on the occasion of your 20th anniversary as the Bishop of Rome and Minister of Unity in our Church.

We share with you a deep love for our church and a desire that it be a sacrament of liberation and sanctification in the world of our own time and in the millennium about to begin. In the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, we assume our responsibility for announcing and implementing the message that Jesus proclaimed and entrusted to us: "The Spirit of Our God is upon me because the Most High has anointed me to bring the Good News to those who are poor. God has sent me to proclaim liberty to those who are captive, recovery of sight to those who are blind, and release to those in prison – to proclaim the year of Our God's favor" (Luke 4,18-19).

The institutional church plays a particularly important role in making God visible among us. The Second Vatican Council encouraged us to participate fully in the life of our church. Thus we are all charged with watching carefully that the "body language" of this institution is congruent with the message of love and liberty proclaimed in the gospel and revealed to us as God guides us through history. This concern has moved us to urge a fundamental institutional renewal so that the gospel message might be heard by future generations.

Your writings and homilies attest to your love for the Church and your deep sense of responsibility for the institution. Although your vision of church and ours diverge in several respects, we are both animated by our faith, by the quest for a more loving and unified community and by an ardent desire to spread the gospel of Jesus with new vigor and enthusiasm in the coming millennium.

In your apostolic letter, Ut Unum Sint (n.95), you asked all those who care 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."

We have accepted your challenge with our enclosed statement. You have called us to think about the future, about the qualities necessary to lead the next generation and ultimately about your successor as the Bishop of Rome. Because of your leadership, we have chosen this significant date in the history of your ministry to encourage a widespread public dialogue about these questions which are raised in Ut Unum Sint.

Our statement matured through a rich dialogue process among groups that span the globe. We hope this is only the beginning of a process of wide participation by the Catholic faithful, as well as those of other faith traditions, in reflecting on the church of the future and the type of leadership that is needed. Ours is a modest contribution, but we offer it as our answer to your challenge in Ut Unum Sint.

May we all have the courage, as a community of faith, to incarnate the love of God in our world. May we all follow the example of the young Mary of Nazareth that called us 2000 years ago to be open to the Spirit of God so that we might share the fruits of that Spirit with the world. And may we follow the example of Jesus who welcomed everyone as sisters and brothers, children of one God in a discipleship of equals.

Yours respectfully,

Elfriede Harth

Spokeperson, International Movement We Are Church