

The Ecumenical Catholic Communion at Ten Years: An Ancient Dream Realized

Greetings to all the Sisters, Brothers, and Friends of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion!

Dearly Beloved Ones,

Ten years ago, in September of 2003, representatives of eleven independent Catholic communities of faith gathered for a constitutional convocation at Saint Matthew Church in Orange, California. The convocation was called to consider a proposed constitution as a means of entering into a formal covenantal relationship with one another, and as a means through which this relationship would be governed into the future. After vigorous discussion and debate it was moved that those representatives present, being duly authorized by their respective faith communities, vote to ratify the constitution. A unanimous vote followed. All representatives then present in solemn assembly signed the constitution on September 19, 2003, and the constitution became the governing document of our new ecclesial organization. And, so, the Ecumenical Catholic Communion was born.

Since that time our beloved communion has grown from those original eleven faith communities from six states and one territory of the USA to include more than fifty communities from 14 states and one territory in the USA as well as from the Netherlands, Belgium, Poland, Lithuania, and Austria. Even now there are several additional communities throughout the USA, South America, Europe, Asia, and Africa who are expressing a desire to join the Ecumenical Catholic Communion. The ECC is rapidly becoming a global phenomenon, as many concerned and like minded Catholics of good will are seeking for a more inclusive expression of our common Catholic tradition for a new millennium.

In similar words to what I had written to you more than a decade ago, I now write to you again: We now stand at the dawn of the third millennium of the Christian Movement and quite possibly a new era in the history of the church. As we, the Christian faith communities of The Ecumenical Catholic Communion, continue this first decade of the twenty-first century we remain poised and ready to continue in the noble endeavor that has been entrusted to us by the Holy Spirit.

Up to the present time the Ecumenical Catholic Communion has been small and, to some, insignificant. Yet, I am convinced that this is changing. The power of ideas has been known to change the course of human history. We possess sacred ideals, which have proven to be a bright beacon of hope for many. These very ideals that we have embraced will ultimately have a lasting impact upon the entire Church of Jesus Christ. This is so

because they are rooted in the very teachings of Jesus himself. These ideals are nothing less than the ripening fruit of the *Gospel of Christ* in our time.

We labor, in response to the call of the Spirit, for the living reform of the Catholic Church. Although our efforts have thus far gone unnoticed by the majority of our contemporaries in the larger church, I remain convinced that our day is yet to come. I am convinced that we are indeed practicing the Catholicism of the future.

As we have undertaken to work for justice within the walls of the Church, so we are committed to the reform of the entire Church. We are working for the positive transformation of the Catholic Church in our time and for future generations.

What kind of Church are we looking for?

We believe that the Catholic Church of the future will become a truly compassionate church, fully embracing the truth of the *Gospel of Jesus*.

We believe that the Catholic Church of the future will become a truly "catholic" (i.e., universal) church where all are welcome, where the dignity of each is honored, and where everyone is invited to share in the saving work of Christ.

We believe that the Catholic Church of the future will become a truly united church, where the barriers of sectarianism are broken down and the bridges of understanding and cooperation are built.

We believe that the Catholic Church of the future will become a truly ecumenical church, where all the baptized are embraced as one and where common ground is diligently sought with non-Christians.

Someday, being Catholic will be defined by these ideals, rather than one's membership in a particular organization; being Catholic will be understood as a matter of what is in one's heart, rather than one's allegiance to a religious group; being Catholic will consist in following the teachings of Jesus, not conformity to the dictates of a particular church leader.

Therefore, it is my joy to designate the Third Sunday of September to be observed in perpetuity with great celebration as the anniversary of the founding of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion!

Let us therefore move forward into this new millennium with renewed commitment and courage as we together continue in our noble endeavor for the reform and renewal of Christ's church in our time!

May the blessing of the Father's grace and the love of Jesus and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit continue to be upon us as we celebrate ten years of praying together, suffering together, struggling together, and working together to birth the church of Jesus Christ of the third Millennium!

The Most Reverend Peter E. Hickman
Presiding Bishop Ecumenical Catholic Communion