



Office of the Presiding Bishop of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion

The Fourth Sunday of Holy Lent 2012

A Letter of Counsel to the Faith Communities of the Communion

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Since September of 2003, when the constitution was ratified for the Communion at the Constitutional Convocation, the ECC has grown in both numbers and in maturity. *“They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor among all the people. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.”* (Acts 2:46b-47) We have seen growth across the USA and in different parts of the world, as we witnessed the addition of a European Mission, and intercommunion agreements with other Catholic ecclesial bodies – completed in the United States and pending with South America. The presence of the Communion is also felt in Mexico, and inquiries have come in from Africa and Asia. We are becoming a global manifestation of the Catholic Church!

Still, as we anticipate the ECC Holy Synod of 2012, I look forward to further growth, and wish to share my vision with you, as I complete my second term as your Presiding Bishop. As you already well know, I intend to stand for re-election this year. If it is God’s will that I serve a third and final consecutive term as the Presiding Bishop, it is my hope to complete much of the development that my administration has begun. I always remind myself, and all who work for our Beloved Communion, that we are called to not merely make decisions regarding the ECC, but to discern the call of the Holy Spirit, for She is the giver of wisdom to the Church: the Comforter in our struggles, and the Guiding Light in our efforts.

My vision, which is shared by all the bishops of our beloved Communion, for us for the coming years is quite simple. It is our collective response to the need for making firm our foundation as a people of Catholic faith and for making sure our commitment to growth. In this we fulfill our call from Jesus, *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:19-20)

Our growth must be twofold:

1. We need to establish more parish communities throughout the world and especially in the United States. This must be the primary aim of the Communion. I call upon every

faith community to stretch its efforts in the direction of missional work, until that time when an ECC parish is established in every American city. I am continuously asked, “Is there an ECC worshipping community in my state?” “Is there an ECC parish in my town?” Sadly, I too often answer, “Not yet.” The great work of advancing a synodal Catholicism is yet to be felt by so many in the United States, and ultimately in other parts of the world.

2. We need to form a diocese (fully constituted local churches) in every state that has a sufficient number for a gathering of parishes. Our understanding of diocese is one in which the number of communities is small. Our parishes elect their diocesan bishop, and as such they should be able to elect someone they know. Additionally, they should have an ongoing relationship with their bishop. For us, the bishop of a diocese (the ordinary) is not simply an administrator and sacrament dispenser, but is the spiritual teacher and pastoral guide of the diocese. Our dioceses are relational, like a family, so that the bishop is like a spiritual mother/father, with members of the family that are both mature and young, seasoned and beginners, clergy and laity – all turning to the bishop as an *anam cara*, a soul friend.

The most powerful experience of such a diocese is that the voice of the people will be heard in the diocesan synod – where the laity and clergy will come to consensus with the bishop in the governance of the Church. What a new and exciting experience for those who have never known such participation! This is a benchmark of the ECC: that we have fulfilled the pledge to all our people that their voices will matter.

Our dioceses are autonomous members of our confederation – the Ecumenical Catholic Communion. This means that, while conforming to the ECC constitution, they will each create their own separate diocesan synod, elect their own bishop, and create a pastoral plan to fit the needs of their own diocese. This is the model of the ancient Catholic Church, which we have again embraced – to live the vision of ancient Catholicism.

While these two points may strike you as very basic, I assure you that this is a worthy plan for the next four years. It will take prayer, effort, collaboration, local meetings and some hard work to move in this missional direction. This is already happening in many places throughout the world. I have just received this communication from our sister, Mother Sue Ringler, pastor of one of our newer ECC parish communities in Arizona. *“Our Saint Teresa (Mission) is in the discernment process right now and Pastor Kate is in the process of putting together her paperwork for incardination in the ECC. So I believe this year they will leave their status as a Guardian Angels mission church and become their own parish! I'm already scoping out another part of the Phoenix area for our next mission church from Guardian Angels in 2013.”*

If each parish would establish an additional parish in its state, we could easily see the Communion double in the space of my next term. Additionally, it is my hope that a dozen new dioceses emerge during the coming period. It will be my work to urge and aid to birth these dioceses into existence, should God grant me another term as your Presiding Bishop. This is the focus of my present efforts, and will be the focus of my efforts until the ECC is accessible to all who wish to join us.

I wish to thank all who have contributed to the work of the Communion for so many years. Let us renew our vision, strengthen our resolve, and *“turn our eyes to Jesus, the author and fulfillment of our faith”* (Hebrews 12:2). Surely He guides us and abides with us on our collective journey as a beloved Communion.

Blessings of peace and joy be yours in this Lenten season,

+Peter E. Hickman

The Most Reverend Peter Elder Hickman, Presiding Bishop