

*Provisional English draft based on the German original*

## **Aid to Orientation**

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# Walking with Christ – Tracing Unity

Interdenominational marriages and sharing in the Eucharist

February 20<sup>th</sup> 2018

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## 1. We are encouraged by the spirit of ecumenism

(1) On 31 October 2016, at the beginning of the year to commemorate 500 years of Reformation, an ecumenical service was held in the Swedish city of Lund. There, Pope Francis and the President of the Lutheran World Federation, Bishop Munib Younan, addressed a burning pastoral issue in a Joint Statement: ‘Many members of our communities yearn to receive the Eucharist at one table, as the concrete expression of full unity. We experience the pain of those who share their whole lives, but cannot share God’s redeeming presence at the Eucharistic table. We acknowledge our joint pastoral responsibility to respond to the spiritual thirst and hunger of our people to be one in Christ. We long for this wound in the Body of Christ to be healed. This is the goal of our ecumenical endeavours, which we wish to advance, also by renewing our commitment to theological dialogue.’<sup>1</sup> These words express our – the German Bishops’ – heartfelt thoughts. In Germany it is especially important to take seriously the commitment arising from the Lund Joint Declaration. Our country is home to as many Catholic Christians as it is Protestant Christians, more or less. Ecumenical relations between Catholic and Protestant parishes have developed very well. The Year of Commemoration 2017 deepened our ecumenical communion. We are aware of ecumenical community with all members of the Council of Christian Churches in Germany (ACK). Now is the time to act and take an important step.

### *We wish to provide interdenominational marriages with pastoral support*

(2) In Germany, almost 40% if not more marriages are currently interdenominational marriages. If the married couple share a common faith in Jesus Christ, then their marriage joins or unites their denominations. [Annotation by the translator: The German phrase used here and throughout the whole document is ‘konfessionsverbindend’ in order to stress the communion in faith. This translation uses the word ‘interdenominational’ in terms of ‘konfessionsverbindend’.] They are in a vivid and respectful interaction with the religious conviction and practise of his/her partner. Their married life is thus a bond that unites the denominations. Strengthening these marriages and the life of faith that the spouses lead is therefore something we see as a special pastoral obligation. This applies as well with respect to the children that God bestows on married couples, who should be guided to faith by the witness of their parents.

(3) Again and again many of these couples speak of a strong longing to be able to receive the Eucharist together. This is why, in a Joint Statement with the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany on 500 years of Reformation entitled ‘Healing of

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<sup>1</sup><http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2016/10/31/0783/01757.html#ted> (accessed on 11 July 2017).

Memories – Witnessing to Jesus Christ<sup>2</sup>, we recalled the suffering of those who, although they are spouses in an interdenominational marriage, according to Catholic teaching ‘are usually not allowed to approach the Lord’s table together’. We declared that Holy Communion must not be functionalised as a ‘means to the end of the ecumenical rapprochement’. We also made clear that ecumenism cannot be reduced to the issue of table fellowship. With regard to pastoral support, however, we also pointed out that ‘in a given case, one conceivable pastoral criterion might be a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and a life led in solidarity with the Catholic Church’.<sup>3</sup> What form this support might take today, provided from within the living tradition of Catholic theology in ecumenical fellowship, is something we wish to demonstrate in this paper.

(4) At the ecumenical penance and reconciliation service we held together with the Evangelical Church in Germany at St. Michael’s church in Hildesheim on 11 March 2017, and the other services held in numerous places based on it, we publicly declared that: ‘Trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit, we undertake to provide marriages that unite the denominations with every support to strengthen their shared faith and promote the religious upbringing of their children.’<sup>4</sup> By issuing this paper we wish to take a step towards fulfilling this commitment.

### *We take the Pope’s encouragement seriously*

(5) In our efforts to show believers living in interdenominational marriages a pathway of pastoral support that in particular cases might lead to participation in the Catholic Eucharist becoming a possibility, we know ourselves in close affinity with Pope Francis. During a visit to the Evangelical-Lutheran community in Rome on 15 November 2015, the Pope gave this spiritual advice to a Protestant Christian woman who enquired about the possibility of taking Communion together with her Catholic husband of 30 years: ‘One faith, one Lord, one baptism. Speak with the Lord and go forward. I do not dare say more.’<sup>5</sup> This advice picks up the teaching of the Catholic Church. This teaching knows no general solution, as long as the communion of churches is not discerned as being such that the Eucharist can be celebrated

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<sup>2</sup> *Healing of Memories – Witnessing to Jesus Christ. A Joint Statement on the Year 2017*. Joint Statement No. 24, published by the Evangelical Church in Germany and the Secretariat of the German Bishops’ Conference, Hanover – Bonn 2016.

<sup>3</sup> *Healing of Memories – Witnessing to Jesus Christ*, 2.2.1.

<sup>4</sup> *Healing of Memories – Witnessing to Jesus Christ*, Draft Liturgy.

<sup>5</sup> The context of the Pope’s response was as follows: ‘A pastor friend of mine said to me: “We believe that the Lord is present there [in the Eucharist]. You believe that the Lord is present. So what is the difference? – “Well there are explanations, interpretations...” Life is greater than explanations and interpretations. Always refer to Baptism. “One faith, one Baptism, one Lord”, as Paul tells us and take all the consequences on yourself. I will never dare give permission to do this because I do not have the authority. One Baptism, one Lord, one faith. Speak with the Lord and go forward. I do not dare say more.’

[https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/november/documents/papa-francesco\\_20151115\\_chiesa-evangelica-luterana.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/november/documents/papa-francesco_20151115_chiesa-evangelica-luterana.html) (accessed on 19 March 2018).

together. For the sake of the salvation of souls, it knows exceptions to the rule and special paths for individual believers. Only God knows what faith the spouses share; the church hopes that it will grow within their marriage, and intends to nurture this growth.

*We are exercising our responsibility as Bishops*

(6) As German bishops we take seriously what the Second Vatican Council required in its Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio (UR)*. Regarding the question of Eucharistic communion with Christians of other churches, the Council Fathers declared the following: ‘The course to be adopted, with due regard to all the circumstances of time, place, and persons, is to be decided by local episcopal authority, unless otherwise provided for by the Bishops' Conference according to its statutes, or by the Holy See.’<sup>6</sup> We will show how spouses living in an interdenominational marriage can, with pastoral support, reach a conscientious decision that they can express publicly within the Catholic Church, which might also involve receiving Holy Communion. We will also show all those in the pastoral ministry what advice they can give to those affected who request it, so that they may revere the truth and liberty of the Holy Spirit in the most profound mystery of faith, God’s love of the human person.

(7) Many married couples and ministers, in what for them is an urgent situation, have, with understandable impatience and as an expression of their shared faith, sought their own path. Such practices can open up new wounds. We do not suggest that anyone has acted irresponsibly. However, we do join with the Apostle Paul in reminding everyone that ‘a man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup’ (cf. 1 *Cor* 11.28). We describe a path designed to strengthen the faith and unity of their marriage.

(8) We are aware that what we say about the possibility of a Protestant wife or a Protestant husband partaking in the Catholic Eucharist does not at the same time mean that the Catholic wife or the Catholic husband can join their spouse in taking Protestant Communion. A step of this kind presupposes a common understanding of communion and the Eucharist, the sacramentality of the church and the ministry (cf. *UR* 22), such that Eucharistic communion can then express and deepen the church communion that we have gained. We appreciate the ecumenical dialogues that have achieved substantial convergence in this area.<sup>7</sup> The

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<sup>6</sup> Second Vatican Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio* 8.

<sup>7</sup> Examples include: the Final Report of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC): *Eucharistic Doctrine* 1971 (‘Windsor Declaration’), <https://iarccum.org/doc/?d=2> (accessed on 19 March 2018); *Elucidations on Eucharistic Doctrine*, 1979, <https://iarccum.org/doc/?d=5> (accessed on 19 March 2018); Lutheran/Roman Catholic Joint Commission, *The eucharist*, 1978, published by the Lutheran World Federation, Geneva April 1980; <http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/l-rc/doc/e-l-rc-eucharist.html>; World Council of Churches Commission on Faith and Order, Paper No. 111, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, 1982 (‘Lima Text’), <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/baptism-eucharist-and-ministry-faith-and-order-paper-no-111-the-lima-text> (accessed on 19 March 2018); Ecumenical Study Group of Protestant and Catholic Theologians, *The Condemnations of the Reformation*

theological dialogue must continue. Regarding the possibility of a Eucharistic communion we look to the future with hope.

(9) This paper provides orientation on how in particular cases a path can be opened based on responsible personal decisions and recognised by the Church or Protestant wives and Protestant husbands living in interdenominational marriages to participate fully in the Eucharist. We wish to help these married couples reach or clarify their decision in the pastoral conversation that we are inviting them to take part in. We are reminded by Pope Francis that: ‘We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them.’<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Christ’s love urges us

(10) The Catholic Church emphasises the central importance of the Eucharist as the ‘fountain’, ‘source’ and ‘summit’ of Christian life (Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium [SC]* 10; *Lumen gentium [LG]* 11; *Presbyterorum ordinis [PO]* 5). Eucharistic practice and piety has undergone renewal through the reform of the liturgy. The ecumenical movement, which always relates to the Eucharist, has prompted an ecumenically open learning process for a deeper understanding of the Eucharist on all sides. Since the Second Vatican Council there have been an abundance of dogmatic clarifications, pastoral instructions and legal rules of the Catholic Church with regard to ecumenism.

(11) Our paper is underpinned theologically by the Second Vatican Council’s Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio*. Concerning the issue of Eucharistic fellowship and the taking of Holy Communion, the assembled bishops declare: ...‘Yet worship in common (*communicatio in sacris*) is not to be considered as a means to be used indiscriminately for the restoration of Christian unity’. This is the background for them to correlate two principles: first, that of the unity of the church which ought to be expressed; and second, that of the sharing in the means of grace’. The bishops declare: ‘Witness to the unity of the Church very generally forbids common worship to Christians, but the grace to be had from it sometimes commends this practice’ (*UR* 8).

(12) *Unitatis redintegratio* articulates the Catholic Church’s theology of the Eucharist. This is shaped by the witness of the Apostle Paul, who proclaims communion with the Eucharistic body of Christ as both a means and an expression of communion within the ecclesiastical body of Christ: ‘Is not the cup of blessing we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? And is

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*Era – Do They Still Divide?*, edited by K. Lehmann and W. Pannenberg, Minneapolis (1990); ARCIC’s *Clarifications of Certain Aspects of the Agreed Statements on Eucharist and Ministry*, 1993, <https://iarccum.org/doc/?d=19> (accessed on 19 March 2018).

<sup>8</sup>Pope Francis, Post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Amoris laetitia [AL]*, Nr. 37, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20160319\\_amoris-laetitia.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia.html).

not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf' (1 *Cor* 10.16-17). Without the Eucharist there is no church, and without the church performing her Lord's mission in the Holy Spirit, there is no Eucharist. This is why the Catholic Church sees an intrinsic unity of Eucharistic communion and church communion.

(13) Church communion is founded on baptism. In harmony with Holy Scripture, at the Second Vatican Council the Catholic Church declares of baptism that: 'Baptism therefore establishes a sacramental bond of unity which links all who have been reborn by it. But of itself Baptism is only a beginning, an inauguration wholly directed toward the fullness of life in Christ. Baptism, therefore, envisages a complete profession of faith, complete incorporation in the system of salvation such as Christ willed it to be, and finally complete ingrafting in eucharistic communion' (*UR* 22). Nurturing growth in faith is therefore a major task. Where conditions are conducive, Eucharistic communion is both an important expression and a strong driver of this growth. Where such conditions are not yet in place, full Eucharistic *communio* is the goal of ecumenism.

(14) According to the Code of Canon Law of 1983 (*CIC*) the sacraments of Eucharist and the anointing of the sick can also be administered to non-Catholic Christians. Members of Eastern Churches which do not have full communion with the Catholic Church can receive these sacraments if they seek such on their own accord and are properly disposed. (can. 844 § 3 *CIC*). With regard to believers who are members of other churches or ecclesiastical communities, the *CIC* declares: 'If the danger of death is present or if, in the judgment of the diocesan bishop or conference of bishops, some other grave necessity urges it, Catholic ministers administer these same sacraments licitly also to other Christians not having full communion with the Catholic Church, who cannot approach a minister of their own community and who seek such on their own accord, provided that they manifest Catholic faith in respect to these sacraments and are properly disposed' (can. 844 § 4 *CIC*).

(15) The *Ecumenical Directory of 1993 (ED)* follows the Council's Decree on Ecumenism (*UR*) and the *CIC (ED 125.129-132)*. With specific regard to marriages between Catholic and non-Catholic Christians, the Directory states: 'In all marriages, the primary concern of the Church is to uphold the strength and stability of the indissoluble marital union and the family life that flows from it.'<sup>9</sup> In this marriage the Catholic parent must have the same concern (cf. *ED* 151). At the same time, following the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II *Familiaris consortio (FC)* (1981), these marriages are valued for their sacramental communion in baptism, for their faith and for their ecumenical importance (cf. *FC* 78).

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<sup>9</sup> The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on ecumenism*, 1993, 144, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/general-docs/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_19930325\\_directory\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/general-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_19930325_directory_en.html).

Regarding admission of the non-Catholic spouse to Eucharistic communion, it is stated expressly: ‘taking into account the particular situation of the reception of the sacrament of Christian marriage by two baptized Christians’ (*ED* 159). This is followed by a summing up in relation to the celebration of marriage: ‘Although the spouses in a mixed marriage share the sacraments of baptism and marriage, Eucharistic sharing can only be exceptional and in each case the norms stated above concerning the admission of a non-Catholic Christian to Eucharistic communion [cf. nrs. 125, 130 and 131 above], as well as those concerning the participation of a Catholic in Eucharistic communion in another Church [cf. nr. 132 above], must be observed’ (*ED* 160).

(16) In his Encyclical *Ut unum sint* (*UUS*) St. John Paul II acknowledged the importance of ecumenism for the deepening of faith (cf. *UUS* 41-76), emphasising: ‘In this context, it is a source of joy to note that Catholic ministers are able, in certain particular cases, to administer the Sacraments of the Eucharist, Penance and Anointing of the Sick to Christians who are not in full communion with the Catholic Church but who greatly desire to receive these sacraments, freely request them and manifest the faith which the Catholic Church professes with regard to these sacraments.’<sup>10</sup> This statement directs our attention not only towards a particular situation, but also towards a particular attitude on the part of those requesting receipt of a sacrament in the Catholic Church. At this point the Encyclical refers to all believers ‘who are not in full communion with the Catholic Church’.<sup>11</sup>

(17) In his Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (*EdeE*) Pope John Paul II writes: ‘While it is never legitimate to concelebrate in the absence of full communion, the same is not true with respect to the administration of the Eucharist *under special circumstances, to individual persons* belonging to Churches or Ecclesial Communities not in full communion with the Catholic Church. In this case, in fact, the intention is to meet a grave spiritual need for the eternal salvation of an individual believer, not to bring about an *intercommunion* which remains impossible until the visible bonds of ecclesial communion are fully re-established.’<sup>12</sup> In the light of the CIC, this *gravis spiritualis necessitas* is explained as a state of ‘grave

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<sup>10</sup> Pope John Paul II, Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* on commitment to Ecumenism, 46, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_25051995\\_ut-unum-sint.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint.html).

<sup>11</sup> What is most striking here: *Ut unum sint* (46) as well as *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC 1398-1401), the *Compendium* (293) and *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (45-46) do not mention the availability of a person of the own community as only criterion among the conditions, although all of them refer to can. 844.

<sup>12</sup> Pope John Paul II, Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* on the Eucharist in its relationship to the Church, 45, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/special\\_features/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_20030417\\_ecclesia\\_eucharistia\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/special_features/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_20030417_ecclesia_eucharistia_en.html).

This reference to *gravis spiritualis necessitas* picks up on a rule found in the instruction of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity of 1 June 1972 concerning admission to Communion under special circumstances (*In quibus rerum circumstantiis* IV). The argument of *gravis spiritualis necessitas* has itself long been a topic addressed by Catholic theologians in the context of the salvific necessity of the sacraments, particularly Baptism. With respect to the Eucharist, it can be interpreted as a moral necessity for salvation since it comprises spiritual nourishment that over time is indispensable.

spiritual need' in which people must be helped. It consists in the fact that a profound longing by believers to receive the sacrament (cf. *UUS* 46) is not being met, thus jeopardising faith.

(18) A grave need arises when the faith that has led a woman and a man to bestow on each other and receive from each other the sacrament of marriage, then leads to a longing to share Holy Communion when they can see no way to satisfy this longing with the church's blessing. If this 'grave spiritual need' is not remedied, the marriage that is founded on Christ's love of the church may even be jeopardised (cf. *Eph* 5.32). Providing this help is a pastoral ministry that strengthens the bond of marriage and supports the salvation of people.

(19) Even in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris laetitia* (*AL*), published on 19 March 2016 following the Synod on the Family (5-19 October 2014 and 4-25 October 2015), Pope Francis appreciates the value of an interdenominational marriage lived in faith, referring to John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio*. Referring to the *Ecumenical Directory* he underlines compliance with the norms, which in exceptional cases permit admission of the non-Catholic party (cf. *AL* 247).

(20) In the rather different case of remarried divorcees, *Amoris laetitia* develops a hermeneutic designed to help end a situation of 'grave spiritual need' for interdenominational married couples. The Exhortation emphasises the formation of conscience, and creates an opening for pastoral care that also includes the question of receiving the Eucharist. *Amoris laetitia* declares that: 'If we consider the immense variety of concrete situations such as those I have mentioned, it is understandable that neither the Synod nor this Exhortation could be expected to provide a new set of general rules, canonical in nature and applicable to all cases. What is possible is simply a renewed encouragement to undertake a responsible personal and pastoral discernment of particular cases' (*AL* 300). Specific situations call for discernment. This 'Discernment must help to find possible ways of responding to God and growing in the midst of limits' (*AL* 305). We are exhorted to become more responsive to local circumstances, which will facilitate different solutions in particular regions that are precisely tailored to specific cases (cf. *AL* 3,199).

### 3. The ministry of Jesus Christ guides us

(21) A general admission to full participation in the celebration of the Catholic Eucharist for the non-Catholic party of an interdenominational marriage is not possible. The individual concerned must therefore reach a personal, conscientious decision after having given the matter due consideration in conversation with their pastor or another individual appointed to provide pastoral care. Since receiving Holy Communion is never only an individual occurrence, but always touches on fellowship within the church, this personal decision requires a firm commitment to the life of the church. This is why the pastoral conversation

plays an important role as the place where a good solution can be found for each individual case. This is also a place to discuss the sacrament of penance and reconciliation.

*We wish to strengthen sacramental life within marriage and the family*

(22) Jesus Himself led an unmarried life ‘for the sake of God’s reign’ (*Mt* 19.12). Yet he also saw the unity of man and woman, which includes a life of procreative sexual activity, as rooted in the creation of the human person herself (cf. *Mk* 10.1-12 parr.; *Gen* 1.26ff.; 2.24). He blessed children and recommended them to adults as role models (cf. *Mk* 10.13-16 parr.). Marriage and family life are exceptionally gifted ways of following Jesus.

(23) In the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* (*SaC*), published on 22 February 2007 following the World Synod of Bishops on the Eucharist (2-23 October 2005), Pope Benedict XVI reflects on the intrinsic link between the Eucharist and marriage (cf. *SaC* 27-29). He writes: ‘The Eucharist, as the sacrament of charity, has a particular relationship with the love of man and woman united in marriage. A deeper understanding of this relationship is needed at the present time.’<sup>13</sup>

(24) In interdenominational marriages, the denominational schism of the church of Jesus Christ (which is no fault of the spouses concerned) is often a cause of particular pain to them. At the same time, given the continued unfolding of the diaspora situation in our society both spouses have a high degree of responsibility for each other and for the faith of their children. They may experience their inability to live in the fully visible unity of the church as a situation of grave need. In that case, the desire to overcome the division that exists, which we share, may assume the form of a longing to participate in the Paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that we celebrate in the Eucharist.

(25) It is deeply painful when in an interdenominational marriage the non-participation in the Eucharist by the Protestant wife or Protestant husband is perceived as exclusion. This also hurts the couple’s relationship with the church. There is a risk that the couples and families involved may lose touch with the church. In these cases too, it is an important pastoral task to provide care, both for the salvation of the individuals concerned and for the flourishing of an entire marriage and family.

(26) Receiving Holy Communion is not the only way for non-Catholic Christians to participate in the celebration of the Catholic Eucharist as believers. Celebrating the Word of God, praying together, ‘spiritual communion’ or receiving a personal blessing are important signs of an ecclesial communion that is not yet complete. We respect and encourage the

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<sup>13</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* on the Eucharist as the source and summit of the Church’s life and mission, 27, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_exh\\_20070222\\_sacramentum-caritatis.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20070222_sacramentum-caritatis.html).

interdenominational married couples who have chosen this path, and we see in it a strong sign of ecumenical community.

(27) However, we cannot ignore the fact that a situation of ‘grave spiritual need’ may arise when a genuine yearning for Holy Communion is not satisfied. In such cases, opening up the possibility of addressing and putting to an end this ‘grave spiritual need’ is a pastoral ministry that strengthens the bond of marriage. The married couple may know that the church-dividing obstacles do not break the bond of their marriage and it is also likely to enable the spouses to feel united when celebrating the Eucharist ‘in Christ’, despite all the obstacles that divide our churches.

*We will nurture marriage and the family as ‘small-sized Churches’*

(28) The early church regularly met in house churches. We read of the early community in Jerusalem that: ‘Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts’ (*Acts* 2.46). At that time, many family bonds had been torn apart by faith. However, because freedom of conscience is a higher good than ties to the natural family, which in a traditional society also sought to control religious matters, new forms of family life in faith did emerge as Jesus Himself had promised they would (cf. *Mk* 10.28ff. par.). Not infrequently the New Testament Scriptures speak of Christian families in which parents and children live together in faith (cf. *Rom* 16.5,10,11; *1 Cor* 7.14; 16.15; *Col* 4.15; *Philem* 2).

(29) Married couples are joined together not only through baptism, but also through the sacrament of marriage. The Second Vatican Council already indicated that the communion of marriage and the family ‘might be regarded as the domestic Church’ (*LG* 11: ‘*velut Ecclesia domestica*’). In his Exhortation on the family, St. John Paul II characterised the family as a ‘small-scale Church’ (*FC* 48, see also *FC* 86: ‘little Church’ [*‘ecclesiola*’]) (cf. *CCC* 1656-1657). However, no church can exist without the Eucharist. Just as the church lives from the Eucharist, in Christian marriage – as *Amoris laetitia* emphasises– ‘the food of the Eucharist offers the spouses the strength and incentive needed to live the marriage covenant each day as a “domestic church”’ (*AL* 318, with reference to *LG* 11).

(30) The sacramental power of sanctification is also manifested in an interdenominational marriage. It is revealed in the mutual love between the spouses, in the way they raise their children together in faith, and in their active participation in the life of the church. Deep hurt may result when these spouses, joined together in the sacrament of love, are seeking the unity promised in Christ but are unable to share in the Eucharist. In an *ecclesiola* of this kind, conjugal communion can be deepened by celebrating the Eucharist together in faith. The church must do everything to ensure that the deepest wellspring of this conjugal communion does not threaten to dwindle.

*We invite interdenominational couples to hold a spiritual conversation*

(31) On the evening of Easter Day, the Gospel according to St. Luke tells us that Jesus is following two disciples who are on the way from Jerusalem to Emmaus, because they think that Jesus' death has brought everything to an end, and they are unable to believe in His resurrection (cf. *Lk* 24.13-35). Jesus holds a conversation with them. He accompanies them along the way, and asks them why they are sad. He opens the Holy Scripture for them, and from there enables them to understand the salvific significance of His suffering. They recognise Him, because he blesses the bread and breaks it for them at the evening meal. In retrospect they confess: 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?' (*Lk* 24.32) Now they can return to Jerusalem and share their faith in Christ with the entire early church (cf. *Lk* 24.33-35). In this story we see a model sketched out for the kind of spiritual conversation we would like to hold, and that we are inviting people to join us in.

(32) There are interdenominational marriages in which the spouses do not wish to take the step of sharing in the Eucharist for reasons of faith and conscience; others decide to do so. What is crucial is the question of how the Eucharist deepens the bond with Jesus Christ and the bond between the spouses, and strengthens communion within their family. This question needs to be discussed within a marriage, together with the other spouse, and if possible with the children and parents as well. Here too the principle applies: 'There can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without a change of heart' (*UR* 7), i.e. without turning to God and holding a deep conversation with Him from within.

(33) We believe in a conscientious decision by the spouses in an interdenominational marriage for whom the shared life of faith and the religious upbringing of their children is concerns of the heart. We also believe in pastoral care for married couples that deepens faith. Spouses should find a secure path along which they can decide whether their non-Catholic spouse, provided that he or she is baptised and believes, can receive the Eucharist in the Catholic Church.

(34) In all cases there needs to be wise and sensitive pastoral care. We bishops, who are responsible for a pastorally correct practice of administering Holy Communion (cf. can. 844 § 4 *CIC*), must promote continuous training in this field for those who as pastoral ministers are required to hold conversations in faith and accompany married couples on the way of discernment 'according to the teaching of the church and the guidelines of the bishop' (*AL* 300).

#### 4. Belief in the presence of Jesus Christ unites us

(35) Anyone wishing to join the Lord's Table in the Catholic Church is faced with the question of whether they share the Catholic Church's Eucharistic belief (cf. *EdE* 46). In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the *Catechism for Adults*, which we issued as the Bishops' Conference, this Eucharistic belief is described comprehensively. The Catechism also deals with the traditional topics of Eucharist theology. Some of these topics are often seen differently by the Catholic and Protestant sides. In the ecumenical dialogue, however, they have been dealt with such that rather than focusing on differences, the two sides have instead made the links easier to recognise.

(36) For the Catholic Church three dimensions of the Eucharist are especially important: communion with Jesus Christ, communion with each other in the whole Church, and communion with the world. All three dimensions are articulated in the proclamation of the Word of God and in the Eucharistic Prayers. All three are intrinsically linked and form an inseparable unit.

##### *We are in communion with Jesus Christ*

(37) The Second Vatican Council looks back at the beginnings of the church in Jerusalem (cf. *Acts* 2.42) and declares: 'From that time onwards the Church has never failed to come together to celebrate the paschal mystery: reading those things "which were in all the scriptures concerning him" (*Lk* 24.27), celebrating the Eucharist in which "the victory and triumph of his death are again made present"<sup>14</sup>, and at the same time "giving thanks to God for his unspeakable gift" (*2 Cor* 9.15) in Christ Jesus, "in praise of his glory" (*Eph* 1.12)' (*SC* 6).

(38) In the celebration of the Eucharist we proclaim the death of Christ, through whom God reconciled the world to Himself (cf. *2 Cor* 5.19), and confess the presence of the risen Lord in our midst. In the elements of bread and wine the salvific presence of Jesus Himself is real. In the offerings of bread and wine Jesus gives Himself for the salvation of all whom God has designated for accomplishment in His kingdom. 'Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him' (*Jn* 6.56).

(39) In the celebration of the Eucharist the gift of his life on the cross by Jesus Christ is recalled which has been symbolically anticipated in the Lord's Last Supper. This is the biblical meaning of Jesus' exhortation: 'Do this in remembrance of me' (*Lk* 22.19; *1 Cor* 11.24). Wherever the Eucharist is celebrated, it is always and at that place only the one bread of Jesus and the one chalice of Jesus that are consecrated; it is always the one body of Christ that is

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<sup>14</sup> Council of Trent, Session XIII, *Decree on the Holy Eucharist*, c.5: Concilium Tridentinum, *Diariorum, Actorum, Epistolarum, Tractatum nova collection*, ed. Soc Goerresiana, Vol VII. Actorum pars IV (Freiburg i. Br. 1961), 202.

eaten and the one blood of Christ that is drunk (cf. 1 *Cor* 10.16-17). Everywhere the one Jesus Christ Himself is present.

(40) The Catholic Church sees the Eucharist as a ‘meal’ because it refers to Jesus’ Last Supper (*Lk* 22.20; cf. *Jn* 13.2) and because the Eucharist anticipates the banquet in the Kingdom of God (cf. *Lk* 14.15). She recognises in the Eucharist the ‘sacrifice of praise’ (*Heb* 13.15, cf. *Ps* 50.14,23; *Hos* 14.3) that she offers to God without giving Him anything other than that which she has received and continually receives: herself.<sup>15</sup> Like Ignatius of Antioch, she sees the Eucharist as the ‘medicine of immortality’ (*Letter to the Ephesians* 20.2), because it guarantees here on earth the hope of eternal life. It is a ‘viaticum’, provision for the earthly pilgrimage, because it is the ‘heavenly bread’ (*Jn* 6.32), the ‘bread of life’ that is Jesus Himself (*Jn* 6.35).

(41) In his homily at the Eucharistic celebration to mark the end of the World Youth Day at Cologne-Marienfeld on 21 August 2005, Benedict XVI said that the ‘transformation of the world’ is celebrated in the Eucharist: ‘violence is transformed into love, and death into life ... This first fundamental transformation ... brings other changes in its wake. Bread and wine become his Body and Blood. But it must not stop there; on the contrary, the process of transformation must now gather momentum. The Body and Blood of Christ are given to us so that we ourselves will be transformed in our turn. We are to become the Body of Christ, his own Flesh and Blood. We all eat the one bread, and this means that we ourselves are made one.’<sup>16</sup> Bread, ‘fruit of the earth and work of human hands’, becomes the body of Christ; wine, ‘fruit of the vine and work of human hands’, becomes the blood of Christ. To express this transformation aptly, along with the Fourth Council of the Lateran (*DH* 802) the Council of Trent speaks of ‘transubstantiation (*transsubstantiatio*)’<sup>17</sup>. By eating the body of Christ and drinking the blood of Christ we partake in Christ’s body and blood (cf. 1 *Cor* 10.16f.). This is the ‘mystery of faith’ that we confess in the celebration of the Eucharist.

(42) The Catholic Church believes in the abiding salvific presence of Jesus Christ in the elements of bread and wine. This is why she knows Eucharistic adoration: ‘Receiving the Eucharist means adoring him whom we receive. Only in this way do we become one with him, and are given, as it were, a foretaste of the beauty of the heavenly liturgy. The act of adoration outside Mass prolongs and intensifies all that takes place during the liturgical celebration itself’ (*SaC* 66). In the Eucharistic adoration those who pray deepen and ascertain their belief in the presence of Christ in the Eucharist and along with this their own disposition

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<sup>15</sup> Augustine declares: ‘This is the sacrifice which the Church continually celebrates in the sacrament of the altar, a sacrament well-known to the faithful where it is shown to the Church herself that she is offered in the offering which she presents to God’ (*De civitate Dei* 10,6).

<sup>16</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Homily during his Apostolic Journey to Cologne on the Occasion of the XX World Youth Day, Cologne – Marienfeld, 21 August 2005, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2005/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20050821\\_20th-world-youth-day.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20050821_20th-world-youth-day.html).

<sup>17</sup> Council of Trent, Session XIII, 11 Oct. 1551, *Decr. de ss. Eucharist.*, c. 4 [DH 1642]).

for receiving the Holy Communion. Because the Catholic Church believes in the remaining salvific presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharistic gifts, she treats the Eucharistic elements with particular reverence. The tabernacle in which the consecrated hosts are kept, originally for communion to the sick, and the eternal light that burns in every Catholic church, are visual symbols of this faith.

(43) To receive Christ's body and blood, each baptised Christian is required to desire and deepen what is *most conducive* to communion with Jesus Christ (Ignatius of Loyola). Only with trust in our hearts our deeds can respond to this mystery that we celebrate in the Eucharist.

### *We are in communion with each other and with the whole Church*

(44) The unity of the church is founded in the covenant that Jesus established through the Last Supper (cf. *Mt* 26.28; *Mk* 14.24; *Lk* 22.20; *1 Cor* 11.25). This covenant is God's communion with His people. It joins Israel and the church. It relates not only to the community that assembles to celebrate the Eucharist, but also to the 'One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church' of all times and regions.

(45) The Second Vatican Council states that: 'In the earthly liturgy we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, a minister of the holies and of the true tabernacle; we sing a hymn to the Lord's glory with all the warriors of the heavenly army; venerating the memory of the saints, we hope for some part and fellowship with them; we eagerly await the Saviour, Our Lord Jesus Christ, until He, our life, shall appear and we too will appear with Him in glory' (*SC* 8). The petition for the dead spoken in every Eucharistic Prayer also expresses the eschatological unity of the whole church, which includes the living and the dead. In this ecclesiastical sense Mary the Mother of God and the saints are invoked. They deepen our communion with Jesus Christ and our communion with each other that He mediates.

(46) According to Catholic teaching, the celebration of the Eucharist in the church is tied to those ordained in the ministerial priesthood (cf. *LG* 10). Every celebration of the Eucharist is led by an ordained priest, who is part of the unity of the church. In each Eucharistic Prayer we pray for the Pope, the Bishop of Rome, who is the 'perpetual and visible principle and foundation of the unity both of the bishops and of the faithful' (*LG* 23). We pray for the local bishop and for all bishops who, as the college in communion with the Pope, are the 'visible principle and foundation of unity in their particular churches' (*LG* 23). We pray for the priests and deacons, who work for the bishops. We pray for 'all who exercise ministry in the Church', because all contribute in their own way to the church's growth.

### *We are in communion with the whole world*

(47) Even in the oldest witnesses to faith it becomes clear that those who celebrate the Eucharist not only do so for themselves, but also do so in the world for the salvation of this world (cf. 1 *Jn* 2.2). By celebrating the mystery of faith we offer on behalf of the whole world the offering of reconciliation that is Jesus Christ Himself. In the celebration of the Eucharist Christ's commitment for all on the cross becomes symbolically present. Those who join in the celebration are involved in the singular action despite the historic gap. They fully offer themselves to God as well as their lives, their intercession for others and for the dead in Christ. We thus stand in the midst of the world ministering to the world that God loves: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life' (*Jn* 3.16).

(48) The communion of the Eucharist with the whole world is manifested in many ways. The prayer of intercession opens our eyes to the joys and cares, and the misery and hope of other people, and to the integrity of creation. Not least, the Eucharist and *diaconia* belong together. Saint Paul and James impress on us that celebrating the Lord's Supper fosters solidarity with the poor (cf. 1 *Cor* 11.17-34; *Jas* 2.1-13). Christ the Lord is our minister – most profoundly so in the Eucharist. This obliges us to minister to all, to those whom His mission brought Him. This ministry is more than ethics. It is the ministry of salvation. It grows from the gift of reconciliation itself, and therefore itself performs the ministry of reconciliation.

(49) The sacramental celebration is closely linked to the church's social, cultural and environmental engagement in the world. 'The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. [...] That is why this community realizes that it is truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds.'<sup>18</sup> Whoever receives the body of Christ is called to serve peace, in order to promote the freedom and unity of humankind.

(50) We must respond to this mystery that we celebrate through our deeds. We are aware of our weakness. This is why we begin each celebration of the Eucharist by confessing our sins before God and our fellow human beings. In case of grave trespass the sacrament of penance must precede the sacrament of Eucharist. We know that we only respond to the mystery of the Eucharist when we give food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty, when we welcome strangers and the homeless, when we clothe the naked, when we tend to the sick and when we visit the incarcerated – because only then do we encounter Jesus Christ (cf. *Mt* 25.35-40). Yet

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<sup>18</sup> Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern world *Gaudium et spes [GS]*, 1, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html).

for the very reason that we fail in this, we venture to continue celebrating the promise of this transformation anew. We ourselves are after all among those who are most in need of compassion, and we believe we experience it in Jesus Christ in its purest form when we celebrate the Eucharist.

## 5. Unity in Christ is a source of joy to us

(51) For many people, marriage is the most important place where they wish to live in gratitude for the peace that Jesus Christ bestows on His people (cf. *Eph* 2.14). We do not overlook the fact that many marriages collapse. We thank all those who take care of children, even though they may be single or are raising their adopted children. In this paper we speak of those who share their lives and their faith in an interdenominational marriage. In our Joint Statement with the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany, we described the deep hurt that until recently was caused in many cases when believers wished to enter into what used to be referred to by the derogatory term ‘mixed marriage’.<sup>19</sup> We are pleased that this has changed.

(52) An interdenominational marriage that unites sacramentally already partially realises the church communion that we hope to achieve. A marriage of this kind that is lived in faith is a ‘housechurch’ in intrinsic communion with the Eucharist. Marriage enjoys the closest possible communion with the Eucharist, because all sacraments that find their centre in the Eucharist are in communion with each other, and because Eucharistic communion and ecclesiastical communion are most closely connected. Marriage is a blessed form of life that realises communion with Christ in communion between the spouses and with the whole church. This distinguishes it as being centred on the Eucharist. Faith bestowed by the Holy Spirit breathes life into the conjugal communion. This ‘housechurch’ must of course be lived in this way: entering more deeply into faith, and in communion with the whole church.

(53) Participating regularly in the celebration of the Eucharist is both a source and a zenith of conjugal communion for those who share the Eucharistic belief of the Catholic Church.<sup>20</sup> This communion does not end automatically with the death of one of the spouses. It exists not only when both spouses attend Holy Mass together, but also when they take Holy Communion at different times and in different places. The children are involved as their age and their faith dictate. Catholic children must have received First Holy Communion. Protestant children are

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<sup>19</sup> *Healing of Memories – Witnessing to Jesus Christ*, 3.3.

<sup>20</sup> The ‘Declaration on the Way’ published by the Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America advocates couples receiving Holy Communion together ‘especially for those Catholic-Lutheran marriages who attend church regularly’ (Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Declaration on the Way. Church, Ministry, and Eucharist*, Minneapolis 2015, p. 118).

[http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Declaration\\_on\\_the\\_Way.pdf](http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Declaration_on_the_Way.pdf)

normally admitted to Protestant Communion after confirmation, through which they usually gain religious autonomy. Hence nothing is automatic. In all cases, sound pastoral care is important for all married couples.

(54) We invite all interdenominational married couples to seek a conversation with their pastor/priest, or another individual appointed to provide pastoral care, to come to a decision which follows their own conscience as well as preserves the unity of the church. We invite all those who have so far not taken Holy Communion together, because they saw in the rules a prohibition. We also invite those who have been taking communion together for a long time, so that they can clarify their practice in an atmosphere of trust. We hope they understand that we are inviting them to follow their own consciences by reaching a decision in a pastoral conversation. As we issue our paper we believe it is important that they serve the freedom of conscience, the responsibility of faith and peace in the church.

(55) In a conversation of this kind it may turn out that the Protestant wife or Protestant husband is unable to share in a Catholic understanding of the Eucharist as presented in this paper. In such cases our invitation still stands, and we invite these spouses to stay with us on the path of trust in the Lord. No one needs turn away. On the contrary, all are invited to continue along the path of living and learning together in search of deeper unity. ‘Spiritual communion’ and requesting a blessing can be steps along this path.

(56) All those in interdenominational marriages who, after having carefully examined their consciences in a spiritual conversation with their pastor/priest or another individual appointed to provide pastoral care, conclude that they affirm the faith of the Catholic Church, and must end a situation of ‘grave spiritual need’ by satisfying their longing for the Eucharist, may join the Lord’s Table in order to receive Holy Communion.

(57) Anyone who receives Holy Communion is receiving one and the same body of Christ like everyone else. It is the same grace, the same covenant, the same Eucharist. All are seated at the same table of the Lord. The Catholic Church is in real communion with the other churches and church communities, albeit a communion that is incomplete. An interdenominational married couple sharing the Eucharist after having made a personal conscientious decision reminds us that there is a need of further growth in communion in the concrete situation of this married couple as well as among the separate churches. Thus, the interdenominational married couples sharing the Eucharist and longing for the unity of the church, become at the same time symbol and impetus for the forthcoming in search of the full communion of all Christians.

(58) The question of interdenominational married couples receiving Holy Communion together is an important pastoral issue that must be answered within the church. Spouses have promised to remain faithful to each other. In faith, they commit to the indissolubility of marriage. This indissolubility can be strengthened when the spouses not only share faith, but

also join the Lord's table together. We will rely on spiritual conversations held 'in a sincere search for God's will and a desire to make a more perfect response to it' (AL 300). There will be conversations where both spouses find themselves able in their personal case to trust the mystery of the Catholic Church's faith, and long to become completely at one in Christ and His Church by joining in celebration of the Eucharist, so that God may strengthen their marriage and their family. For the Catholic Church it will then be a 'source of joy' (*UUS* 46, *EdE* 46) to administer the sacrament of the Eucharist to them. We German bishops wish to share in this joy, and therefore expressly welcome all those who follow this path.

## **Annex: Guidance on holding a conversation**

We German bishops invite interdenominational married couples to hold a pastoral conversation in order to clarify whether a Protestant wife or Protestant husband may receive Holy Communion in the Catholic Church or not. This conversation should be offered by a pastor/priest or another individual appointed to provide pastoral care.

### *Holding a good conversation*

How can a good conversation on participation in Holy Communion be guided in faith?

There are no fixed rules. The conversation requires an open mind, and discretion when dealing with others. It requires the space provided by a relationship of trust to reflect on the pros and cons, the motives for reaching a particular decision and the effects it may have. Without prayer it cannot be productive. It presupposes an inner freedom on the part of the participants, also with respect to their own habits and desires. It should be conducted in a spirit of mutual respect and humility, love of the church and her teachings, and love of celebration of the Eucharist. It should support and clarify a decision that serves the freedom of conscience, the truth of faith and the unity of the church.

Ignatius of Loyola advises taking important decisions in a conversation with Christ. He expects Christ to announce Himself and show a person the way (*Spiritual Exercises*, No. 15). This can succeed when people are open to such a conversation with God. The most important basic attitude is hope of *magis*: that which is *most conducive* to communion with God (cf. *Spiritual Exercises*, No. 23).

### *Discovering faith in prayer*

Christoph Cardinal Schönborn of Vienna offered some simple orientation:

‘Whoever can say Amen to the Eucharistic Prayer with an honest heart, can also receive the fruit of this Eucharistic prayer, Holy Communion, with an honest heart.’

Referring to a Eucharistic Prayer is a good way to discuss what the church believes when she celebrates the Eucharist. The conversation is not an exam. Its purpose is to clarify the personal situation of the individuals concerned.

### *... in communion with Jesus Christ*

In the Catholic Church’s Eucharistic Prayer II the priest prays to God the Father on behalf of the congregation:

‘May all of us who share in the body and blood of Christ be brought together in unity by the Holy Spirit.’

In this prayer we express the mystery of the Eucharist itself: the unity with Jesus Christ that God the father bestows on us through the Holy Spirit. This unity with Jesus Christ already prefigures the unity of the whole church, indeed the unity of all humankind. When we celebrate the Eucharist, it is not just good human coexistence that we are aiming for. The Eucharist is a sacrament. It is a visible sign that works invisibly to shape all of life. It unites us with God; it mediates the salvation bestowed by Jesus Christ. It is filled with the Holy Spirit, whom we ask to descend and transform the offerings of bread and wine, and ourselves too. Jesus Christ is present in the elements of bread and wine. It is He Himself whom we receive when we eat the host, the body of Christ, and drink from the chalice, the blood of Christ.

*... in communion with each other and with the whole church*

In Eucharistic Prayer II, after praying to partake ‘of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ’ in order to be ‘brought together in unity by the Holy Spirit’, the priest continues:

‘Lord, remember your Church throughout the world; make us grow in love, together with N. our Pope, N. our bishop, and all the clergy. Remember N., whom you have called from this life.

Remember our brothers and sisters who have gone to their rest in the hope of rising again: bring them and all the departed into the light of your presence.’

In this prayer we turn to God, the Father, who assembles His people throughout the world. We celebrate the Eucharist in communion with all elements of the Body of Christ, the living and the dead. This is why there is special room for the prayer for the dead in each celebration of the Eucharist. No matter what congregation is celebrating the Eucharist, it is always the one Eucharist of Jesus Christ. In the Eucharistic Prayer we pray for the Pope and the bishops, because they serve the unity of the church that grows from its unity with Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. Priests and deacons work together with the bishop, in communion with all who minister to build the church.

Pope Francis reminds us in *Amoris laetitia* of an image in the Holy Scripture which he relates to the house church, but which would be appropriate for any house of God. It opens our eyes to the mystery of faith in which all who celebrate the Eucharist participate:

‘We can never forget the image found in the Book of Revelation, where the Lord says: “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will go in and eat with him, and he with me” (Rev 3.20). Here we see a home filled with the presence of God, common prayer and every blessing’ (AL 15).

*... in communion with the whole world*

In Eucharistic Prayer II the priest closes with:

‘Have mercy on us all; make us worthy to share eternal life with Mary, the virgin Mother of God, with the apostles, and with all the saints who have done your will throughout the ages. May we praise you in union with them, and give you glory through your Son, Jesus Christ. In this prayer we open ourselves for the salvation of the world that Jesus – the ‘saviour of the world’ (*Jn* 4.42) – brings. We also pray on behalf of all those who are unable to pray. In the hope of resurrection and the conquest of all neediness, we open our hearts for all creatures that must suffer and that require our active solidarity. We become attentive to all signs from creation that show us the way to God.

In his Encyclical on the Eucharist, Pope John Paul II expressed this in a way which includes the idea that all who participate in the Eucharist recognise their own mission, their own task and their own responsibility:

‘By its union with Christ, the People of the New Covenant, far from closing in upon itself, becomes a “sacrament” for humanity, a sign and instrument of the salvation achieved by Christ, the light of the world and the salt of the earth (cf. *Mt* 5.13-16), for the redemption of all. The Church's mission stands in continuity with the mission of Christ: “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you” (*Jn* 20.21)’ (*EdE* 22).

### *Coming to a good decision*

The trustful conversation on the issue of whether a Protestant wife or Protestant husband in an interdenominational marriage can receive Holy Communion in the Catholic Church should lead to a conscientious decision that is in harmony with the church’s teaching and practice.

It is in this conversation that it may become clear that it is better not to attend communion, because the Eucharistic belief is not fully shared, and another form of participation in Holy Mass would be more appropriate. It is then important to continue walking along this path with Christ so that unity in faith grows.

In this case, when Holy Communion is administered the individual concerned may request a blessing by crossing their hands in front of their chest, or placing their right hand on their left shoulder, as is the practice in the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian countries, as well as in some regions of Germany. Asking for a blessing is itself an expression of faith. It says, the Catholic Church is also a blessing for me, even though I cannot partake of Holy Communion, because I do not share the Eucharistic belief or do not experience a profound longing to receive the Eucharist. Nevertheless I would like to be blessed, so that I myself may be a blessing for others. This too may be an appropriate and faith-nurturing way to share in the celebration of the Eucharist and develop a more intimate communion with the body of Christ.

Yet it may also be that the hunger for the bread of life can be satisfied by receiving Holy Communion in the Catholic Church. It will then be a joy to administer and receive the Eucharist – in communion with the whole church.