

One Bread One Body

**A teaching document on the
Eucharist in the life of the Church,
and the establishment of general norms
on sacramental sharing**

**Catholic Bishops' Conferences of
England & Wales
Ireland
Scotland**

1998

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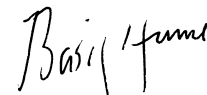
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Foreword

Our three Bishops' Conferences of England and Wales, Ireland, and Scotland have produced this teaching document as a way of reaffirming the place of the Mass at the very centre of our Catholic life. We commend it to all Catholics in Britain and Ireland as a source of study and reflection. It will be of particular value to all those responsible for teaching about the Mass: priests and deacons; catechists; teachers in our Catholic schools; and parents, who have the first responsibility for educating their children in the faith of the Church. We hope it will help all Catholics to a greater understanding of the Mass, and of the Presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament.

We offer it also to our fellow Christians, with the hope that it will help to clarify what the Catholic Church believes about the Eucharist. At the end of this document we present our general norms on sacramental sharing between Catholics and other Christians in our countries. These can only be understood and appreciated in the light of the teaching on the Eucharist which is the main part of our document. We look forward to that day when all obstacles to full visible communion are overcome, and all Christians can celebrate the Eucharist together, sharing as 'one body' the 'one bread' of the Lord.



*Basil Hume, Archbishop of Westminster
President of the Bishops' Conference of England & Wales*



*Seán Brady, Archbishop of Armagh
President of the Bishops' Conference of Ireland*



*Thomas Winning, Archbishop of Glasgow
President of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland*

Part 1: Introduction

*Because there is one bread,
we who are many are one body,
for we all partake of the one bread.¹*

1 As Catholic bishops, we have a special care for preserving and deepening the unity of the one body of Christ, his Church, a unity in love and in truth, in holiness and in mission. We are ‘eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’.² In this endeavour, our particular responsibility is to proclaim the Gospel, and to teach in the name of Christ and his Church. We seek to ‘speak the truth in love’ so that all may grow together into Christ who is the Head of the Body and the source of our unity.³ In our longing for unity of faith and life among all Christians, faithfulness to the truth is our first duty and desire.

*“speak the truth
in love”*

2 It is above all at the Eucharist that Christians become one in Christ, sharing together as ‘one body’ the ‘one bread’ of the Lord. An understanding of the Eucharist is essential, therefore, to the search for Christian unity. There can be no full unity among Christians that does not embrace unity in the Eucharist, and no full unity in the Eucharist without a shared understanding of all that the Eucharist contains and signifies. The primary purpose of our document is to present the teaching of the Catholic Church on the mystery of the Eucharist.

3 At the heart of the life of the Catholic Church has always been the celebration of the Eucharist, or the Mass as Catholics often call it.⁴ Taking part in the Mass is the hallmark of the Catholic, central and crucial to our

*“taking part in
the Mass is the
hallmark of
the Catholic”*

1 *1 Corinthians* 10.17 (all quotations from Scripture are taken from the Revised Standard Version, *Common Bible*, unless otherwise noted).

2 *Ephesians* 4.3.

3 *Ephesians* 4.15-16.

4 Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1328, 1332.

Catholic identity. The first Christians devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles, to their 'communion' with each other, and to prayer, and met together in their homes for 'the breaking of bread'.⁵ Over the centuries, Catholics in many countries have risked their lives in order to celebrate Mass in times of persecution. Their courageous faith remains an inspiration and example to the Catholic community today. For Catholics now, as in the past, the Eucharist is the source and summit of the whole Christian life.⁶ It is the vital centre of all that the Church is and does, because at its heart is the real presence of the crucified, risen and glorified Lord, continuing and making available his saving work among us. The Second Vatican Council reminded us: 'the most holy Eucharist holds within itself the whole spiritual treasure of the Church, namely Christ himself, our passover and our living bread'.⁷

“a mystery to be pondered and revered”

4 The Eucharist is a most precious gift of the Lord to his Church. It is a mystery to be pondered and revered. At the heart of this document is a presentation of the richness of Catholic teaching on the Eucharist. We offer it with confidence, for this mystery is indeed a life-giving truth, a 'pearl of great price'.⁸ We urge Catholics in our countries to refresh and renew their belief in the Eucharist, their understanding of Catholic teaching, and their reverence for this great mystery of faith.

“we look forward to continuing dialogue”

5 As we offer this document, we take special account of the ecumenical situation in our countries. Catholics and other Christians live side by side, as communities of faith, praying and working together, and also as individuals, especially when united in marriage. Much progress has been made over the last thirty years in

⁵ *Acts of the Apostles* 2.42.

⁶ Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, no. 11.

⁷ *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, no. 5 (unless otherwise noted, all quotations from the Second Vatican Council are from *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, volume II, edited by Norman P. Tanner S.J., London and Georgetown, 1990).

⁸ *Matthew* 13.45.

particular along the path of mutual understanding, cooperation and commitment to one another, 'a path difficult but so full of joy'.⁹ Official dialogues between the Catholic Church and other Christian communities have been very fruitful. There has been growing agreement about many aspects of the mystery of the Eucharist, and we are glad to make use of the results of these dialogues in our document. Because of this deepening relationship, Christians in Britain and Ireland increasingly have 'a burning desire to join in celebrating the one Eucharist of the Lord'.¹⁰ This growing together in truth and in love is a blessing from God which can help Catholics themselves to understand their ancient and unchanging faith in a deeper way. We look forward to continuing dialogue, especially in response to the publication of this teaching document. We hope that it will provide an opportunity for further joint reflection, discussion and prayer.

6 Most Christians in our countries are now conscious of being 'not strangers but pilgrims', aware of our divisions and yet evermore committed to finding a way forward together. It is above all at the Eucharist that Christians feel most acutely the pain of their divisions. As bishops, we experience that situation ourselves. We are gladly and irrevocably committed to growing in unity with our fellow Christians until we reach full communion and can celebrate the Eucharist together in one visible Church of Christ.¹¹

“not strangers but pilgrims”

7 Christians are one band of pilgrims, but continued disunity obscures God's invitation to all humanity to share his life, and makes the Gospel harder to proclaim.¹² There is much need for mutual forgiveness between Christians, re-examining together our past and 'the hurt

⁹ Pope John Paul II, Encyclical *Ut unum sint*, no. 2.

¹⁰ Pope John Paul II, Encyclical *Ut unum sint*, no. 45.

¹¹ Cf. Pope John Paul II, Encyclical *Ut unum sint*, no. 3.

¹² Cf. Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC II), *Church as Communion*, no. 4.

that past regrettably continues to provoke even today.’¹³ Persecution and sectarianism have never been one-sided, even within our own islands. For our part as Catholic bishops we repent of and ask forgiveness for any responsibility we have for the continued dividedness of Christ’s disciples in our countries. We recognise our failures in love and compassion, in the search for truth and justice. We know our need of the continual reformation and purification required of the whole Church as we go on our pilgrim way.¹⁴

“to reaffirm and share our Catholic faith in the mystery of the Eucharist”

8 Our first purpose in presenting this document is to reaffirm and to share with others our Catholic faith in the mystery of the Eucharist. This faith embraces the making present of Christ’s saving death and resurrection, the real presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, and the inseparable bond between the mystery of the Eucharist and the mystery of the Church. Also closely linked with the Eucharist are the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Anointing of the Sick. Our second purpose, on the foundation of our Church’s doctrinal principles and current discipline, is to establish the norms to govern sharing of these sacraments between Catholics and other Christians in our countries. The fundamental principles of our Catholic faith remain ever the same. Norms, however, can be developed and changed over time, on the basis of the Church’s deepening understanding of that faith. In establishing these norms, we are responding to the recommendation in the *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* (referred to from now on as the *Directory*), published in 1993 by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

¹³ Pope John Paul II, Encyclical *Ut unum sint*, no. 2.

¹⁴ Second Vatican Council, *Decree on Ecumenism*, no. 6; *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, no. 8.

9 Each sacrament of the Church has its own special significance and grace. As bishops we are responsible for preserving their full integrity. We offer this document with that duty very much in mind. We do so in obedience to God’s Word, and with a keen desire to safeguard the integrity of the Eucharist in particular. It is of special concern to us that when someone receives a sacrament he or she knows and desires what the Church means by that sacrament. It is right to expect that anyone who receives Holy Communion in the Catholic Church should manifest Catholic faith in the Eucharist. This document presents the most important points of that faith. Our special focus is the intimate connection between the mystery of the Church and the mystery of the Eucharist. We pray that it will help to deepen mutual understanding on this matter which is so often a source of difficulty in our ecumenical journey together. Our document is intended as a resource. Other presentations of its doctrinal content may well flow from it. We recommend that our readers refer to the sections on the sacraments of the Eucharist, Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1322-1532, as a starting point for further study and reflection.

Part 2: Our Catholic Faith

“Catholic faith in the Eucharist and Catholic faith in the Church are two essential dimensions of one and the same Mystery of Faith”

10 No individual thread of Catholic doctrine can be fully understood in isolation from the total tapestry. Catholic faith in the Eucharist and Catholic faith in the Church are two essential dimensions of one and the same Mystery of Faith, rooted first and foremost in the awesome mystery of God in his saving love, reconciling the world to himself in Jesus Christ.¹⁵

Christ our Saviour Source and Centre of Communion

“to believe in God is to enter the ‘we’ of the family of God”

11 ‘God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.’¹⁶ As Christians we are united in our faith that Jesus Christ is Lord and Saviour. What do we mean by ‘salvation’? There is no simple answer to this question. Christians through the centuries have used a rich variety of ideas rooted in the New Testament. One idea, however, remains central. We are saved not as private or isolated individuals, but as a people, as a community, as a family. Salvation is, of course, a deeply personal gift from God: we are each called by name and are asked to respond in faith. Yet, ‘it has pleased God ... to sanctify and save men and women not individually and without regard for what binds them together, but to set them up as a people who would acknowledge him in truth and serve him in holiness.’¹⁷ To believe in God is to enter the ‘we’ of the family of God.

15 2 Corinthians 5.19.

16 John 3.16.

17 Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, no. 9; cf. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic letter *Dies Domini*, no. 31.

12 The mystery of salvation is a mystery of *communion*. This idea of ‘communion’ (*koinonia* in Greek, *communio* in Latin) lies at the very heart of our Christian faith. We are accustomed to using the word ‘communion’ first and foremost of the sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ. This ‘Holy Communion’ with Our Lord, either at Mass or afterwards when the sacrament is brought to the sick and housebound, has as its aim our ever-deeper communion with one another in the family of Christ’s Church, and above all with the communion of the Holy Trinity, the intimate union of God the Father and God the Son in the unity of the Spirit of Love. It is this which will make our joy complete,¹⁸ a joy rooted in the Good News that ‘God is love’.¹⁹

“the mystery of salvation is a mystery of communion”

13 We are called to be the communion of saints, gathered together and made holy by the Lord who wills us to be truly ‘at-one’ with him. The literal and original meaning of ‘atonement’ is ‘at-one-ment’. God sent his Son ‘to gather together in unity the scattered children of God’,²⁰ seeking ‘to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth,’²¹ and ‘making peace by the blood of his cross.’²² Christ is in person the peace between us. He makes us one, breaking down the barriers not only between Jew and Gentile, but between all people, so that we might be reconciled to God in one body.²³ God wills ‘to draw humanity into communion with himself and with one another, so as to share his life, the life of the Holy Trinity.’²⁴ This communion will be complete only in the final fullness of the Kingdom of God, but it is already visibly present here and now in the Body of Christ, his Church.

18 1 John 1.4; cf. John 15.11, 17.13.

19 1 John 4.8.

20 John 11.52 (*Jerusalem Bible*).

21 Ephesians 1.10.

22 Colossians 1.20.

23 Ephesians 2.14-16.

24 Second Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC II), *Salvation and the Church*, nos. 1 & 29.

“to be one as the Father and the Son are one”

14 It is above all through the sacraments of Baptism (and later, Confirmation) and the Eucharist that we enter into this deep communion of life and mission with our crucified and risen Saviour. Through Baptism we are made one with Christ by the power of God’s Holy Spirit, dying with Christ to our old selves and rising to new life in him as sons and daughters of the Father, sisters and brothers of each other. Sharing in common the life of God who gives himself to us in love, we are able to be one as the Father and the Son are one.²⁵ The continual prayer of the Risen Lord in his Church is ‘that they may be one, even as we are one.’²⁶ This is our prayer also, as servants of the communion of the Church.

The Church, Sacrament of Salvation

The Church and the Sacraments

“his invisible presence is made visible and tangible for us”

15 The Risen Lord has promised to be with us always, to the end of time.²⁷ How can we be in touch today with Jesus Christ, who no longer walks the earth in the same way as he once did? We believe that his invisible presence is made visible and tangible for us through special ‘sacramental’ signs. A sacrament is far more than simply a signpost pointing towards something greater elsewhere. Each sacrament is an effective sign which makes present what it signifies. Sacraments are ‘specific ways in which, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Risen Jesus makes his saving presence and action effective in our midst.’²⁸ Because the Lord is present and at work in them, sacraments ‘bring into our lives the life-giving action and even the self-giving of Christ himself.’²⁹ Through sacramental signs, instituted by Christ himself, we are put ‘in touch’ with the saving mystery of Christ

²⁵ John 17.22-23.

²⁶ John 17.11; cf. 17.21, 22.

²⁷ Matthew 28.20.

²⁸ Joint Commission for Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council, *The Word of Life*, 1996, no. 98.

²⁹ Cf. Joint Commission for Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council, *Towards a Statement on the Church*, 1986, no. 16.

here and now. The more we respond in faith to his presence, the more a sacrament becomes a truly life-giving encounter with Jesus himself. This understanding of ‘sacrament’ - the invisible presence and action of the Risen Lord made powerfully present through visible signs - lies at the heart of our Catholic faith.

16 As Catholics, we are long accustomed to thinking of the seven sacraments, above all Baptism and the Eucharist. But the word ‘sacrament’ is also used of the Church itself. The Second Vatican Council referred to the Church as the ‘universal sacrament of salvation’.³⁰ In Christ, the Church is ‘as a sacrament or instrumental sign of intimate union with God and of the unity of all humanity’.³¹ This teaching shows how intimately interwoven are the Church’s nature and its mission. By the power of his Spirit, Christ continues to draw people together into spiritual communion with himself and with each other. This communion is made visible and tangible in a community of faith and of love, the Church. The Church is the visible unfolding here and now of God’s gift of salvation, our sharing together in the eternal communion of God’s life of love. Through the Church’s proclamation of the Good News, its witness and its sacramental life, God reaches out to touch the lives of all and to gather them together as one in himself. The Church as a community must be an effective proclamation of the Gospel, ‘the living Gospel for all to hear.’³²

17 Each of the seven sacraments (Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, Marriage and Holy Orders) can be fully understood only within the setting of the visible community of the Church. The Church is the company of those who have been given the gift of faith, a faith by which they respond in a deeply personal way to the call of Christ and follow him as his disciples. By the power

“universal sacrament of salvation”

“acts of the Risen Christ in the Spirit, given in and through his Church”

³⁰ Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, no. 48.

³¹ Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, no. 1.

³² Cf. *Roman Missal*, Preface of the Apostles II.

of the Holy Spirit, they are intimately united to Christ as a body to its head, above all through the sacraments of the Church. All the sacraments are acts of the Risen Christ in the Spirit, given in and through his Church.

“receiving Holy Communion is the climax of the process of initiation begun by Baptism”

18 Baptism is ‘the gateway to life in the Spirit, and the door which gives access to the other sacraments.’³³ It is a point of departure, a sacred beginning to membership of the Pilgrim Church. It is directed towards ‘acquiring of fullness of life in Christ’, ‘a complete profession of faith’ within the visible unity of the Church, and finally ‘a complete participation in Eucharistic communion.’³⁴ Our desire to share fully in the Eucharist is very much a fruit of the grace of our baptism. Receiving Holy Communion is the climax of the process of initiation begun by Baptism.

“the Church is most fully and visibly itself when it gathers for the Eucharist”

19 The Church is most fully and visibly itself when it gathers for the Eucharist. There the Church expresses what it already is by God’s gift, and what it must more truly become - a community of faith and love, one in Christ, holy by the power of the Spirit, catholic in the integrity of its faith and the universal scope of its outreach, apostolic in its living continuity with the faith and mission of the apostles and the Church throughout the ages. This communion with the Church across continents and centuries is a communion in the Spirit, but ‘made flesh’ in a visible way, above all in the Eucharist and through the bishops and priests who preside at the Eucharist. This teaching is central to the Catholic understanding of the Church. The intimate link between the Church and its celebration of the Eucharist will be an essential point to remember when it comes to thinking about the meaning of receiving Holy Communion.

³³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1213.

³⁴ Second Vatican Council, *Decree on Ecumenism*, no. 22 (as translated in *The Documents of Vatican II*, edited by Walter M. Abbott SJ, London and Dublin, 1966).

The Catholic Church and other Christians: full and partial communion

20 Christ’s Church is a communion, a community whose members share or hold in common the divine life and the mystery of salvation: ‘one Lord, one faith, one baptism’.³⁵ The Catholic Church claims, in all humility, to be endowed with all the gifts with which God wishes to endow his Church,³⁶ all the invisible and visible elements needed by the Body of Christ for its life of discipleship and mission. This is what we mean by our firm conviction that the one Church of Christ ‘subsists in the Catholic Church’,³⁷ that the fullness of the means of salvation, the entirety of revealed truth, the sacraments and the hierarchical ministry are found within the Catholic communion of the Church.³⁸ These means of grace are there to serve our communion with each other in Christ, to keep us open and listening to one another in the Spirit of Truth, and to bring us into conformity with the Father’s will. Christians are in ‘full communion’ with the Catholic Church when they hold in common *all* the gifts of grace with which Christ has endowed his Church.

“the one Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church”

21 Our belief that the Catholic Church is uniquely gifted in this way does not imply that Catholic people and their ordained ministers are perfect in the life of the Spirit. As Catholics we should be very conscious of our failings over the centuries. We have much of which to repent, and we know very well that we have not made and do not make full use of the many means of grace entrusted to the Church by our Lord. We can often be put to shame by the holiness, love and missionary zeal of our fellow Christians. The fullness of communion which we claim is not only a gift, but also a challenge to the Catholic Church from the Lord: to become more fully and truly in its life and work what it already is by God’s free

“a gift and a challenge”

³⁵ *Ephesians* 4.5.

³⁶ Cf. Pope John Paul II, Encyclical *Ut unum sint*, no. 11.

³⁷ Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, no. 8; cf. no. 14.

³⁸ Cf. *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* (1993), no. 17.

gift of grace. This claim still means, however, that the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Christ is to be found in its fullness, though imperfectly, in the visible Catholic Church as it is here and now.³⁹

*“although wounded,
our communion
with each other
has never been
destroyed”*

22 The Catholic Church rejoices in the many elements of holiness and truth to be found in other Christian communities: ‘the written word of God; the life of grace; faith, hope and charity, with the other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit, and visible elements too.’⁴⁰ All of these properly belong to the one Church of Christ: ‘To the extent that these elements are found in other Christian communities, the one Church of Christ is effectively present in them.’⁴¹ Our common baptism is the sacramental bond of unity between us,⁴² and Catholics readily recognise the real though partial communion existing between all the baptised. Although wounded, our communion with each other has never been destroyed. ‘Many bonds still unite us: we confess the same faith in the one true God; we have received the same Spirit; we have been baptised with the same baptism; and we preach the same Christ.’⁴³ Other Christians do not share everything in common with us, and so are not in full communion with the Catholic Church, but we understand all people who believe in the Lord and have been properly baptised as being ‘in some kind of communion with the Catholic Church, although this communion is imperfect.’⁴⁴ There are varying degrees of communion, depending on how much Christians share together in the mystery of salvation and the means of grace. The more that is shared, the more people are in communion with one another. Some Christian communities share more with us than others, and so are in closer unity with the Catholic Church.

39 Cf. Pope John Paul II, Encyclical *Ut unum sint*, no. 14.

40 Second Vatican Council, *Decree on Ecumenism*, no. 3.

41 Pope John Paul II, Encyclical *Ut unum sint*, no. 11.

42 Second Vatican Council, *Decree on Ecumenism*, no. 22.

43 Introduction to the *Final Report* of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC I), no. 1.

44 Second Vatican Council, *Decree on Ecumenism*, no. 3.

Christ’s gifts to his Church already shared by our fellow Christians ‘impel towards catholic unity.’⁴⁵ Catholics believe that full unity among Christians ‘will come about when all share in the fullness of the means of salvation entrusted by Christ to his Church.’⁴⁶ Such unity will be achieved only ‘under the inspiring grace of the Holy Spirit.’⁴⁷ Here is the challenge to all Christians as we try to live more faithfully our baptismal calling: ‘Baptismal communion tends towards full ecclesial communion. To live our Baptism is to be caught up in Christ’s mission of making all things one.’⁴⁸

The Eucharist

The Eucharist and the Word of God

23 Christian faith is centred on the person of God’s living Word, made flesh and present among us.⁴⁹ ‘Through all the words of Sacred Scripture, God speaks only one single Word, his one Utterance in whom he expresses himself completely.’⁵⁰ As Christians we find our nourishment and strength in the Scriptures precisely because God speaks to us now through them. Word and Sacrament are a seamless robe. Scripture and Eucharist are intimately interwoven in the life of the Church: ‘... the Church has always venerated the Scriptures as she venerates the Lord’s Body. She never ceases to present to the faithful the bread of life, taken from the one table of God’s Word and Christ’s Body.’⁵¹ This nourishing with God’s Word takes place in a special way at Mass. The Eucharist is where the Scriptures are most at home and where they speak most powerfully to us. In the early Church, it was those books which were read at the

*“the one table of
God’s Word and
Christ’s Body”*

45 Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, no. 8.

46 Pope John Paul II, Encyclical *Ut unum sint*, no. 86.

47 Second Vatican Council, *Decree on Ecumenism*, no. 4.

48 *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, no. 22.

49 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 108.

50 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 102.

51 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 103; cf. Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, no. 21.

Eucharist which became accepted as the ‘Canon’ of Scripture. Today those same Scriptures keep us in living communion with the witness of the Apostles. It is in hearing God’s Word that the Church is built up and grows. The Catholic Church finds the roots of its teaching on the Eucharist in the Scriptures, always read within the living Tradition of the whole Church.⁵²

*“unity with God
and unity with
each other belong
together”*

24 The meaning of the Eucharist is rooted in the faith of the people of the Old Testament, especially in the doctrine of ‘covenant’. The covenant was a treaty or alliance between two parties, used in the Scriptures of the special relationship which God established with his people, Israel. There were close links in Jewish thought between ‘covenant’, ‘sacrifice’ and ‘communion meal’. In the Book of Exodus (24.1-11), God’s new relationship (covenant) with his chosen people is sealed with the pouring of blood (sacrifice) and the eating together of some of the sacrificial food (communion). Moses said of the blood, ‘Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you’.⁵³ The blood was sprinkled upon both the altar (symbolising God) and the people, a powerful expression of the unity of life which God establishes between himself and Israel. By eating the sacrificial food together, the people were made one as they shared the blessings of God. The fundamental Covenant which spans the Old Testament and the New Testament remains the same: ‘I will be their God and they shall be my People.’⁵⁴ Unity with God and unity with each other belong together. Only those ready to enter fully into God’s covenant could share together in the communion sacrifice. To participate in the ‘communion’ is to commit oneself to God and to the people he makes his own.

⁵² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 113.

⁵³ *Exodus* 24:8.

⁵⁴ *Jeremiah* 31.33; cf. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic letter *Dies Domini*, no. 41.

25 Through the prophets, God promised his people a ‘covenant of peace’, writing his law on their hearts.⁵⁵ Our Christian faith is that Jesus Christ is the Mediator of this new covenant.⁵⁶ At the Last Supper, Jesus echoed the words of Moses: ‘This is my blood of the covenant’,⁵⁷ or ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood which will be poured out for you.’⁵⁸ By sharing together the cup of blessing, the cup of eternal salvation, we enter together into this new covenant established by the pouring out of his blood upon the cross. Jesus is the Anointed One, the ‘Messiah’ or ‘Christ’, who provides us with the new manna, the bread of life, the sacrificial gift of his own body and blood.

*“the new covenant
in my blood”*

26 The Synoptic Gospels (*Matthew, Mark* and *Luke*) and St Paul understood the Last Supper as Jesus celebrating the Passover with his disciples. John’s Gospel preserved the Passover theme by setting the death of Jesus at the moment the Passover lambs were being slain in the Temple. Jesus’ death is that of *the* Passover Lamb, the Suffering Servant of God, led like a lamb to the slaughter.⁵⁹ Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, the one whose life given for us and poured out for us brings healing and peace. By our communion together in the body and blood of Christ, we are drawn deeper into the community of the new covenant, ever more committed to God and to each other in Christ. By taking part in the Eucharist, we are united with the living Christ in his work of reconciliation.⁶⁰

The Eucharist as Memorial of Christ’s sacrifice

27 ‘Amen’ is a word we use often in our prayer and worship. Although sometimes translated simply as ‘So be it!’ or ‘Yes’, it comes from a Hebrew root which implies firmness and sureness. When we say ‘Amen’ at various

*“saying ‘I believe’
as a sharing in the
‘we believe’
of the Church”*

⁵⁵ Cf. *Isaiah* 55.3, 59.21, 61.8; *Jeremiah* 31.31-34, 32.40; *Ezekiel* 37.26.

⁵⁶ *Hebrews* 12.24.

⁵⁷ *Matthew* 26.28.

⁵⁸ *Luke* 22.20 (*Jerusalem Bible*).

⁵⁹ Cf. *Isaiah* 53.7.

⁶⁰ Cf. *2 Corinthians* 5.18-20.

times during the Mass - above all our 'Great Amen' at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer - we proclaim that we believe what has been said, that we unite ourselves to the prayer and that we are committed to all that it means. It involves a personal affirmation, saying 'I believe' as a sharing in the 'we believe' of the Church community gathered for worship.

28 When we receive Holy Communion, and hear the words 'The body of Christ', 'The blood of Christ', our response of faith is 'Amen' to the One who is offering and giving himself to us. This 'Amen' is, of course, an affirmation of the real presence of the Body and Blood of the Lord, but it is more than that. It is at one with the 'Great Amen', and we cannot properly separate the two. Above all, we confess our readiness to enter into all that Christ has achieved for us by his death and resurrection, the gift of salvation made present for us here and now as we celebrate Mass together.

“the celebration of the Eucharist makes sacramentally present the whole mystery of salvation”

29 It is here that we come to the heart of our Catholic understanding of the Mass: the celebration of the Eucharist makes sacramentally present the whole mystery of salvation. The Mass is the sacrament of salvation, the memorial of the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We say 'Amen' to this truth of faith when we receive Holy Communion.

“we believe that this once-for-all event of salvation becomes effectively present for us through the power of the Holy Spirit every time the Mass is celebrated”

30 We rejoice that we share this understanding with many of our fellow Christians, but it is still a point of division for others. Since the Reformation, many Christians in the West have rejected Catholic teaching on the Eucharist as 'sacrifice' because they believed it denied the unique saving work of Jesus Christ, a free gift of grace to be accepted by faith. Ecumenical dialogue should have made it clear to our fellow Christians that Catholics also are firmly committed to belief in Christ's 'one, perfect and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the world'; that 'Christ's redeeming death and resurrection

took place once for all in history', and that there 'can be no repetition of or addition to what was then accomplished once for all by Christ.'⁶¹ Yet we believe that this once-for-all event of salvation becomes *effectively* present for us through the power of the Holy Spirit every time the Mass is celebrated: 'The Eucharist is the heart and summit of the Church's life, for in it Christ associates his Church and all her members with his sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving offered once for all upon the cross to his Father.'⁶²

31 This 'sacrificial' understanding of the Eucharist needs renewed emphasis even among Catholics. In some Catholic circles there can appear to be a confusion between the celebration of Mass on the one hand, and a Communion Service or 'Celebration of the Word and Communion' on the other. The Eucharist or Mass is much more than a service in which we are led in prayer, hear the Word of God and receive Holy Communion. There are certainly proper occasions for Communion Services, above all the Commemoration of the Lord's Passion on Good Friday. When no priest is available, Catholics cannot celebrate Mass. Instead, they are sometimes invited to reflect on the word of God and to pray together, and then to share Christ's body and blood consecrated at a previous Eucharist.⁶³ This is not the same as the Mass, however. No Communion Service can substitute for the celebration of the Eucharist, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

“this 'sacrificial' understanding of the Eucharist needs renewed emphasis”

61 Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC I), *Eucharistic Doctrine*, no. 5; cf. Joint Commission for Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council, *Growth in Understanding* (1976), no. 66.

62 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1407; cf. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic letter *Dies Domini*, no. 43.

63 Cf. leader's introduction to a *Celebration of the Word and Communion*, approved for interim use from Advent 1996 by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales; cf. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic letter *Dies Domini*, no. 53.

“do this as a memorial of me”

32 At the Last Supper, Jesus said to his apostles, ‘Do this as a memorial of me.’⁶⁴ Our use of the language of ‘memorial’ is rooted in the Last Supper, when ‘Jesus gave the Passover Meal its definitive meaning.’⁶⁵ It was used by the ancient Fathers of the Church, by the great medieval theologians, and by the Council of Trent, as a way of expressing the relation between the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ and our celebration now of the Eucharist.⁶⁶ ‘Memorial’ is a word that lies at the heart of the Eucharistic Prayers of East and West.

“a memorial of his own passion and resurrection”

33 What do we mean by a ‘memorial’? At the Passover meal each year, the Jews celebrate a memorial of the Exodus. At the Last Supper, Christ gave the Passover celebration its full meaning. In doing so he entrusted to us a memorial of his own passion and resurrection. A biblical memorial is far more than simply calling to mind past events and their significance: in the liturgical celebration of these events, they become present and real.⁶⁷ A memorial means at very least ‘the making effective in the present of an event in the past.’⁶⁸ Catholic use of the word ‘memorial’ in the Eucharist involves *making effectively present here and now* an event in the past. A memorial is a sacred gateway into living communion with God in his work for our salvation. By the power of the Holy Spirit, ‘the Church’s living memory’,⁶⁹ the saving events of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are recalled and made powerfully present for us.⁷⁰ Their saving power touches our lives today, and through us can touch and transform the lives of all. Very much anchored in the present, we are united across time with the past, and indeed with the future, by the eternal Spirit of God, who is the same

64 1 Corinthians 11.24-25; Luke 22.19.

65 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1340; cf. no. 1334.

66 Cf. Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC I), *Elucidation* (1979), no. 5.

67 Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1363.

68 Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC I), *Eucharistic Doctrine*, no. 5.

69 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1099.

70 Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1104.

yesterday, today and tomorrow. The prayer *O Sacrum Convivium*, attributed to St Thomas Aquinas, acclaims this mystery of the Eucharist: ‘O sacred banquet in which Christ is our food, his passion is recalled, the soul is filled with grace, and a pledge of the life to come is given to us.’

34 In the Eucharist, Christ’s gift of his life to his Father for our salvation is made present, so that we may be united with him in his sacrifice and be accepted in him by the Father: ‘In the celebration of the memorial, Christ in the Holy Spirit unites his people with himself in a sacramental way so that the Church enters into the movement of his self-offering.’⁷¹ The Mass is the ultimate act of worship. By our communion with the Risen Christ, we become one with him in his giving of himself to the Father. Our lives are at-one with his as he commends his spirit to the Father. United with Christ, we lift up our hearts to the Father and give him thanks and praise. ‘Through him, with him and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit’, the Church becomes ‘an everlasting gift’ to the Father,⁷² ‘a living sacrifice of praise.’⁷³ We give to God all that he first gave to us, all that we are and have, uniting ourselves with the self-giving of Jesus himself. Our sharing in the Eucharist should make us a sacrificial people, lifting up and laying down our lives in love for God and for one another, and sharing all that we have and are with those in need.

“a living sacrifice of praise”

35 Because of the Church’s intimate communion with Christ, as a body to its head, the Eucharistic sacrifice is offered to the Father by the ‘whole Christ’, head and members together. ‘In the Eucharist the sacrifice of

71 Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC I), *Elucidation* (1979), no. 5; cf. ARCIC’s *Clarifications on Eucharist and Ministry* (1994): ‘In the celebration of the eucharistic memorial, the self-offering of Christ is made present. The community, gathered around the ordained minister who presides in Christ’s name, enters into communion with this self-offering.’

72 Eucharistic Prayer III.

73 Eucharistic Prayer IV.

Christ becomes also the sacrifice of the members of his Body. The lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer and work, are united with those of Christ and with his total offering, and so acquire a new value.⁷⁴ Because Christ's one sacrifice is present in the Eucharist, 'all generations of Christians can be united with his offering.'⁷⁵

“the sacrifice of Christ and the Eucharistic sacrifice are one single sacrifice”

36 In the Eucharist, the Church powerfully and effectively 'proclaims the death of the Lord until he comes.'⁷⁶ The sacrifice of Christ and the Eucharistic sacrifice are one single sacrifice. This means that through the Eucharist Christ's saving power reaches not only those gathered in celebration, but also all those in communion with us in any way, both the living and the dead. We offer the Eucharistic sacrifice 'for ourselves and those who are dear to us' and for 'those who have died and have gone before us marked with the sign of faith'.⁷⁷ We ask our Father: remember and welcome not only our Christian brothers and sisters who have died, but also 'all the departed',⁷⁸ 'all who have left this world in your friendship',⁷⁹ 'all the dead whose faith is known to you alone.'⁸⁰ We pray that Christ's sacrifice, which has made our peace with the Father, may 'advance the peace and salvation of all the world.'⁸¹ We include among those who take part in our offering not only those present and all God's people, but also all who seek him with a sincere heart.⁸² We should come to Mass with all humanity and all creation in our heart, so that the joy of salvation may reach through our celebration to all the world.

74 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1368.

75 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1368.

76 *1 Corinthians* 11.26.

77 Eucharistic Prayer I.

78 Eucharistic Prayer II.

79 Eucharistic Prayer III.

80 Eucharistic Prayer IV.

81 Eucharistic Prayer III.

82 Eucharistic Prayer IV.

37 When we come forward together in procession to receive Holy Communion at Mass, we do so as a pilgrim people seeking to enter into Christ's offering of himself to the Father. The 'bread of life' we share is Christ's Body given for us; the 'cup of salvation' we drink is Christ's blood poured out for us. It is Christ giving, offering, sacrificing himself whom we receive. Receiving Holy Communion can never be separated, therefore, from the whole meaning of the Eucharist as the sacrament or memorial of Christ's sacrifice, the making present of his death and resurrection here and now for our salvation. The table of the Lord is the altar of his sacrifice.⁸³

“the table of the Lord is the altar of his sacrifice”

38 The sacrificial nature of the Mass was solemnly proclaimed by the Council of Trent and reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council. It continues to be carefully presented in the revised Order of Mass promulgated by Pope Paul VI in 1969 (the *Missal Normativa*), and especially in the Eucharistic Prayers of the *Roman Missal*. Although there have been changes in its celebration through the centuries, the Mass remains the same, from the 'breaking of bread' of the first Christians and the Eucharist described by St Justin Martyr in the second century, to the Mass celebrated after the Council of Trent and the same Mass celebrated today using the missal of Pope Paul.

39 The people of God are the worshipping community which offers the sacrifice of Christ to the Father. The Eucharist is the action of the whole Church, and this should be expressed in the way we celebrate together. Today's *Roman Missal* bears witness to the ancient and unbroken tradition of the Catholic Church. It complements and enriches the liturgical norms of the Council of Trent. Above all, it seeks to draw Christ's priestly people more deeply into the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice through their 'conscious, active and fruitful participation', so that they may grow in holiness.⁸⁴

“the Eucharist is the action of the whole Church”

83 Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1182, 1383.

84 *General Instruction on the Roman Missal*, no. 5.

“Christ presides in and through the visible ministry of a bishop or priest”

40 The Risen Lord in person calls together his Church and presides invisibly over the Eucharist as our Head and great High Priest.⁸⁵ It is our Catholic faith that Christ presides in and through the visible ministry of a bishop or priest. In the midst of God’s priestly people, the bishop or priest is the living sacramental sign and instrument of Christ as our Head and Shepherd, our Teacher and High Priest.⁸⁶ The Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission’s *Clarifications* state that ‘the one who presides is thus the minister of the sacramental self-offering of Christ.’⁸⁷ Because the Eucharist is the memorial of Christ’s sacrifice, the action of the presiding minister ‘stands in a sacramental relation to what Christ himself did in offering his own sacrifice.’⁸⁸ The priest ‘offers sacramentally the redemptive sacrifice of Christ.’⁸⁹

41 It is Catholic teaching that ‘only a validly ordained priest can be the minister who, in the person of Christ, brings into being the sacrament of the Eucharist.’⁹⁰ It is therefore essential that the one who presides at the Eucharist be known to be established in a sure sacramental relationship with Christ, the High Priest, through the sacrament of Holy Orders conferred by a bishop in the recognised apostolic succession. The Catholic Church is unable to affirm this of those Christian communities rooted in the Reformation. Nor can we affirm that they have retained ‘the authentic and full reality of the Eucharistic mystery’.⁹¹ This is why reciprocity in sacramental sharing is not possible with

85 Cf. Report of the Anglican-Methodist International Commission, *Sharing in the Apostolic Communion* (1996), no. 90: ‘the Risen Christ is the true president at each celebration of the Eucharist ...’

86 Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, no. 12.

87 *Clarifications on Eucharist and Ministry* (1996).

88 Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, *Ministry and Ordination* (1973), no. 13.

89 *Response of the Holy See to the Final Report of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission* (1982).

90 *Response of the Holy See to the Final Report of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission* (1982).

91 Second Vatican Council, *Decree on Ecumenism*, no. 22; cf. no. 3.

these communities, whereas the same difficulty does not arise with the Eastern Churches [see later, nos. 103, 117]. It is also why the reconciliation of ministries is so essential to the full reconciliation and visible unity of Christians. Lack of validity in the sacrament of Holy Orders does not mean, however, that the ordained ministry and Eucharistic celebrations of these communities are not used by the Spirit of Christ to draw God’s people into the mystery of salvation. Catholics may, on occasion, properly attend and join in the prayer of such celebrations and find in them a source of inspiration and encouragement.

42 Each of us worships at Mass according to our degree of communion with the Catholic Church. There are many different ways to take part in the Mass, and different ways of benefiting from that participation. There can be celebration of the Eucharist which truly gives grace even when it is not possible to have the full sharing that comes through receiving Holy Communion. This is an important point. At nearly every Catholic celebration of Mass there are people in differing degrees of spiritual and visible communion with the community gathered there. A typical congregation includes mainly Catholics who are able to receive Holy Communion and so participate fully in the Eucharist. There are plenty of other people, however, who are warmly welcome and who know they are taking part in a real way even though they may not receive Communion. There are unbaptised people being prepared to be initiated into the Church, as well as baptised Christians on the way towards Reception into Full Communion with the Catholic Church. There are Catholics who are in new relationships established after one or both partners have suffered the trauma of breakdown in their marriages, and who are unable therefore to participate fully in the Eucharist they celebrate. Some Catholics present may be in irregular marriage relationships and for that reason may not go to communion. Other Catholics, humbly conscious of

“there can be celebration of the Eucharist which truly gives grace even when it is not possible to have the full sharing that comes through receiving Holy Communion”

serious sin, are there knowing they need the sacrament of Reconciliation before coming forward to Communion. There are young children who are not yet ready to receive their first Holy Communion. Also taking part are fellow Christians who are present to worship God and join in the prayer of the Church, either alone or with their loved ones, but who do not feel ready or willing to come into full communion with the Catholic Church: perhaps they come to Mass able to say 'I believe', but not able fully to share the 'We believe' of the Catholic community.

43 Even though some may not receive *sacramental* communion, all are united in some way by the Holy Spirit. The traditional idea of *spiritual* communion is an important one to remember and reaffirm. The invitation often given at Mass to those who may not receive sacramental communion - for example, children before their First Communion and adults who are not Catholics - to receive a 'blessing' at the moment of Communion emphasises that a deep spiritual communion is possible even when we do not share together the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ.

"a foretaste of our future unity"

44 The Eucharist is not only the memorial of the death and resurrection of the Lord, but also a sign and foretaste of the final unity of the Kingdom of God. From celebration to celebration, God's pilgrim people advances towards the great banquet in heaven, 'when all the elect will be seated at the table of the kingdom.'⁹² It is the Lord of Glory who comes to us in the Eucharist, and we anticipate there 'the joys of the age to come.'⁹³ We celebrate together the communion we already share, but we are also very aware of the imperfection of our unity, even among Catholics gathered to share together the one Bread of Life. We come forward to receive Holy

⁹² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1344; cf. Joint Commission for Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council, *The Apostolic Tradition*, 1991, no. 67.

⁹³ Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC I), *Eucharistic Doctrine*, no. 11.

Communion as a foretaste of our future unity as God's pilgrim people, and our 'Amen' should include a real commitment to the fullness of that unity. It is as well to remember, in the pain, sorrow and frustration of our journey together as fellow Christians, yearning for unity and yet still disunited, that fullness of communion is a gift of God's grace, and that we will have to 'wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.'⁹⁴ This does not mean, of course, that we simply sit and wait. God wills to work through us, and the Eucharist consecrates those who take part in it to be instruments and ambassadors of reconciliation.

The Eucharist and the presence of Christ

45 Jesus Christ promised to remain with his disciples until the end of time, and he is with us in many different ways. He is present through the word of God, 'in that he himself is speaking when Scripture is read in the Church.'⁹⁵ He is present in the sacraments, and when the Church prays in word or song. Jesus promised: 'Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.'⁹⁶ The whole life and work of the Church is sustained by this promise of the continual, real and living presence of its Risen Lord. The Church community itself is the sacrament of Christ's presence in the world. Christ is present in a special way in the poor, the sick and the imprisoned, and must be recognised there.⁹⁷ All these forms of presence are linked with one another, and cannot be separated.

"he is with us in many different ways"

46 The 'supreme form of Christ's presence' is in the Mass.⁹⁸ There too the Risen Jesus is present and active in various ways, offering his Church the special gift of himself: 'It is the same Lord who through the proclaimed word invites his people to his table, who through his

"the supreme form of Christ's presence is in the Mass"

⁹⁴ *Roman Missal*.

⁹⁵ Second Vatican Council, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, no. 7.

⁹⁶ *Matthew* 18.20.

⁹⁷ *Matthew* 25.31-46.

⁹⁸ Pope Paul VI, Encyclical *Mysterium Fidei*, no. 38.

minister presides at that table, and who gives himself sacramentally in the body and blood of his paschal sacrifice.’⁹⁹

47 Pope Paul VI wrote of Christ’s sacramental presence in the Eucharist: ‘It is called the “real” presence, not in an exclusive sense as though other forms of presence were not “real”, but by reason of its excellence. It is the substantial presence by which Christ is made present without doubt, whole and entire, God and man.’¹⁰⁰ Here we reach the heart of Catholic faith in the particular and mysterious way in which Christ is present in the Eucharist, and to this we say ‘Amen’ when we come forward for Holy Communion.

48 In the Eucharist, we become one Body with Christ in his sacrificial giving of himself to the Father. We are also united in deep communion with each other through our common sharing in the same Lord. St Paul weaves these two teachings intimately together: ‘The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.’¹⁰¹ If we are to have such living communion with Christ, then he must be truly present. Only then can we be one with him and at-one with each other in him. If we are to be ‘one Body’ with our Head, then Christ must be bodily present, albeit in the mystery of his risen, glorified body and in a way which is beyond our natural senses.

*“This is my Body ...
This is my Blood”*

49 What Christ said of the bread and wine at the Last Supper is still true today through the ministry of his priests: ‘This is my body’, ‘This is my blood’.¹⁰² Through

99 Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC I), *Eucharistic Doctrine*, no. 7.

100 Pope Paul VI, Encyclical *Mysterium Fidei*, no. 39.

101 *1 Corinthians* 10.16-17.

102 *Mark* 14.22-24.

the great Eucharistic Prayer of thanksgiving, ‘the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ by the action of the Holy Spirit, so that in communion we eat the flesh of Christ and drink his blood.’¹⁰³

50 Catholics believe that Christ in the Eucharist is ‘truly, really and substantially’ present.¹⁰⁴ We can preserve intact our faith in this unique gift of Christ to his Church only by insisting on a change in the inner reality of the bread and wine. Catholic teaching emphasises this conversion of the inner reality (or ‘substance’) of the bread and wine into the inner reality of the body and blood of Christ: ‘By the consecration of the bread and wine, there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood.’¹⁰⁵ This happens ‘in a way surpassing understanding’,¹⁰⁶ by the power of the Holy Spirit who is ‘the artisan of God’s masterpieces, the sacraments of the new covenant.’¹⁰⁷ Through this transforming action of the Spirit, ‘Christ’s body and blood become really present and are really given’, so that we may be united in communion with Christ himself.¹⁰⁸ In its *Elucidation*, the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission stated clearly: ‘Before the eucharistic prayer, to the question: “What is that?”, the believer answers: “It is bread.” After the eucharistic prayer, to the same question he answers: “It is truly the body of Christ, the Bread of Life.”’¹⁰⁹

*“truly, really
and substantially
present”*

103 Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC I), *Eucharistic Doctrine*, no. 10.

104 Decree of the Council of Trent, DS 1651 (Denzinger-Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolum Definitionum et Declarationum* 36th edition).

105 Decree of the Council of Trent, DS 1642 (as quoted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1376): this change is usually referred to as ‘transubstantiation’.

106 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1333.

107 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1091.

108 Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC I), *Eucharistic Doctrine*, no. 9.

109 ARCIC I, *Elucidation*, no. 6.

“this presence can be grasped only by faith, not by our senses”

51 The word ‘substance’ is not used in Catholic teaching in any material sense, but rather as a way of referring to that ‘inner reality’ which ‘stands under’ what we see and touch and taste. Catholics speak of Christ being present ‘under the forms of bread and wine’. The visible elements, the forms of bread and wine, become the ‘blessed sacrament’ of the invisible and mysterious presence of the risen and glorified Lord. This presence can be grasped only by faith, not by our senses.¹¹⁰ The whole Christ is present, but ‘in such a way that the breaking of bread does not divide Christ.’¹¹¹ We do not break Christ when we break the consecrated ‘host’. St Thomas Aquinas once addressed Christ in a homily: ‘In the breaking of bread, you are not broken, nor are you divided. You are eaten, but, like the burning bush, you are not consumed. You are whole and entire and perfect in each and every fragment of the host, as visual appearances are multiplied in a hundred mirrors.’ There is no breaking or division of the mysterious reality of Christ, only of the sacramental signs.¹¹² Each person who receives communion receives the whole Christ. This has the power to bring about an extraordinary unity among those who receive, a true unity ‘in Christ.’

“sanctify yourself by partaking also of Christ’s Blood”

52 We receive the whole Christ when receiving Holy Communion either under the form of bread or under the form of wine, but Catholics are ‘encouraged to desire Communion under both kinds in which the meaning of the Eucharistic banquet is more fully signified.’¹¹³ St Cyril of Jerusalem, in the fourth century, summed up the practice of the early Church for coming forward for Holy Communion: ‘Make your left hand a throne for your right, since your right hand is about to welcome a king. Cup your palm and receive in it Christ’s body, saying in

110 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1381.

111 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1377.

112 See St Thomas Aquinas’ hymn, *Lauda Sion*: ‘A sumente non concisus, non confractus, non divisus, integer accipitur. ... Nulla rei fit scissura, signi tantum fit fractura.’

113 *General Instruction on the Roman Missal*, no. 240; cf. no. 241.

response “Amen”. ... After partaking of Christ’s body, go to receive the chalice of his blood. ... Bow your head and say “Amen” to show your homage and reverence, and sanctify yourself by partaking also of Christ’s blood.’¹¹⁴ Receiving from the chalice expresses powerfully the sacrificial nature of the Mass. By taking part in the Eucharist we are drawn deeper into the new and everlasting covenant which was sealed with the blood of the Lamb. Our communion together in the blood of Christ is our communion with the sacrificial self-giving of Our Lord. As we take the cup of salvation, we say that we are ready to drink from the cup that he drank,¹¹⁵ and to give ourselves in sacrificial love as servants of salvation [see also no. 25].

53 Christ is present in this special way whether or not we believe in him or are open to him. His presence ‘does not depend on the individual’s faith in order to be the Lord’s real gift of himself to his Church.’¹¹⁶ But as in any relationship of love, his offering of himself has to be met by faith if a life-giving encounter and deep personal communion is to take place. Although Catholics rightly emphasise the conversion of the bread and wine in the Eucharist, it is ultimately the conversion of human hearts that is God’s loving will. At Mass there is a two-fold sending of the Holy Spirit: firstly, to transform the bread and wine, already symbols of our lives, into the body and blood of Christ; secondly, to transform the lives of those who receive the sacrament into the Body of Christ, ever more united with one another in Christ. We receive the sacrament of Christ’s body and blood so that we might more powerfully *be* the sacrament of Christ and his salvation in the world: ‘The bread and wine become the sacramental body and blood of Christ in

“receiving Holy Communion should always imply a longing to be more closely united with the Church”

114 *Mystagogical Catecheses*, Sermon 5, 21-22, as translated in *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation* by Edward Yarnold, Slough 1971.

115 Cf. *Mark* 10.35-40.

116 Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC I), *Eucharistic Doctrine*, no. 8; cf. Joint Commission for Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council, *Growth in Understanding*, Dublin 1976, no. 54.

order that the Christian community may become more truly what it already is, the body of Christ.¹¹⁷ The Eucharist is a Church-making sacrament, and receiving Holy Communion should always imply a longing to be more closely united with the Church as a member of Christ's body.

“the very act of coming to Mass on Sunday is a proclamation of our faith and commitment, and a witness to the world”

54 Sunday is the first of all days, the Lord's Day, the day when Christ our Saviour rose from the dead. Christians in our countries need to work together to make this day special to the Lord, but it is above all the celebration of the Eucharist, Sunday after Sunday, which keeps it holy. 'The Sunday celebration of the Lord's Day and his Eucharist is at the heart of the Church's life.'¹¹⁸ Sunday is 'the foremost holy day of obligation in the universal Church',¹¹⁹ and taking part in the Mass every Sunday is 'a testimony of belonging and of being faithful to Christ and to his Church.'¹²⁰ As bishops we reaffirm this obligation, and urge all Catholics in our countries to take part in the Eucharist every Sunday. The very act of coming to Mass on Sunday is a proclamation of our faith and commitment, and a witness to the world. We also strongly encourage daily Mass and Holy Communion when this is possible. God then feeds us with bread from heaven each day of our pilgrim journey, as he fed his people each day with manna in the desert. It is the Lord in person who invites us to come to him in the Eucharist and to receive him: 'Take this, all of you, and eat it', 'Take this, all of you, and drink from it', 'Do this in memory of me.'

“a much-loved focus of devotion”

55 At Mass and afterwards, Catholics express their faith in the real presence of Christ by genuflecting or bowing deeply as a sign of adoration. The radical conversion of the inner reality of the bread and wine means that the

117 Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC I), *Elucidation*, no. 6.

118 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2177; cf. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic letter *Dies Domini*, throughout.

119 *Code of Canon Law*, can. 1246.1.

120 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2182.

consecrated elements remain the 'Blessed Sacrament' of Christ's presence when the celebration of the Eucharist is over. Any remaining consecrated hosts are treated with the utmost reverence. For Catholics, reservation of the Blessed Sacrament is 'a sign of Christ's abiding presence in the Church and a much-loved focus of devotion.'¹²¹ Always centred on the actual celebration of the Eucharist, the sacrament is reserved for taking communion to the sick and for silent adoration. 'In his Eucharistic presence he remains mysteriously in our midst as the one who loved us and gave himself up for us, and he remains under signs that express and communicate this love.'¹²² As bishops we wish strongly to encourage prayer before the Blessed Sacrament: this includes extended periods of Exposition, Benediction and personal visits to church for prayerful adoration. Our response of 'Amen' when we come forward for Holy Communion includes an acceptance in faith of the permanence of the sacramental presence of the Lord, and a readiness to reverence that presence in our hearts, in our prayer and in the way we act in church, together and alone.

Holy Communion and Full Communion

56 The Mass, like the whole of our Christian faith and discipleship, should be something deeply personal, but never private. In all its parts, it is the action of a community rather than merely a gathering of individuals. We may come to church by our separate ways, but we assemble as Christ's Church, visibly united by the power of the Holy Spirit.

“deeply personal, but never private”

57 The Eucharist is a hallowed means towards healing the divisions and deepening the unity of those who take part in any way. The Church's unity is rooted and centred in the Eucharist: 'The Eucharist is the creative force and source of communion among the members of the Church, precisely because it unites each one of them

“a hallowed means towards healing divisions and deepening unity”

121 English and Welsh Bishops, *Response to the Final Report of ARCIC I*, no. 19.

122 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1380.

with Christ himself.¹²³ We become companions in the literal sense of the word, sharing bread together, the Bread of Life.¹²⁴ The Eucharistic Prayers of the Catholic Church are prayed ‘in union with the whole Church’.¹²⁵ We pray for the Catholic Church, that the Father may grant it ‘peace and unity throughout the world.’¹²⁶ We pray that ‘all of us who share in the body and blood of Christ may be brought together in unity by the Holy Spirit’, that we may ‘grow in love’ together with the Pope and bishops,¹²⁷ and that we may ‘become one body, one spirit in Christ,’¹²⁸ ‘healed of all division.’¹²⁹ The healing and uniting power of the Eucharist is such that we can ask the Father to unite all his children, ‘wherever they may be.’¹³⁰

“be reconciled with one another first”

58 This healing power of the Mass is important for Catholics gathered together in worship. There are times when we need to be reconciled to one another, when our little faith needs to be renewed and strengthened, when our love needs to be refreshed or brought to life again. The offering to each other of the ‘kiss’ or sign of peace before receiving Holy Communion expresses something of this. St Cyril of Jerusalem taught that ‘the kiss joins souls together in search of complete forgiveness from one another. ... So the kiss is a reconciliation, and therefore holy.’¹³¹ Others saw it as a profession of unity and mutual love before we share together the ‘one bread’ as the ‘one body’ of Christ.¹³² Jesus himself calls us to be reconciled

123 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on some aspects of the Church understood as Communion*, no. 5.

124 The word ‘companion’ is rooted in the Latin *cum* (with) and *panis* (bread).

125 Eucharistic Prayer I.

126 Eucharistic Prayer I.

127 Eucharistic Prayer II.

128 Eucharistic Prayer III.

129 Eucharistic Prayer I for Masses of Reconciliation.

130 Eucharistic Prayer III.

131 *Mystagogical Catecheses*, Sermon 5, 3, as translated in *The Awakening Rites of Initiation* by Edward Yarnold, Slough 1971.

132 E.g. Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Baptismal Homily IV*, 39-40; cf. *General Instruction on the Roman Missal*, no. 56b; Pope John Paul II, Apostolic letter *Dies Domini*, no. 44.

with one another first before offering our gift at the altar.¹³³ We come to the Eucharist as sinful pilgrims struggling along the way to holiness. But we believe that Christ is there to welcome us and to say his word of healing, to sanctify and transform our lives, and to deepen our unity with the Holy Trinity and with one another in his Church.

59 Each celebration of Mass is one Eucharistic moment in the life of the Church from East to West, and through the ages. The community gathered for Mass does not celebrate on its own, but as united with ‘all who hold and teach the catholic faith that comes to us from the apostles.’¹³⁴ A truly Catholic community is open to every other such community, united in Christ by the Spirit so as to be one in truth and in love. This is an essential part of our Catholic understanding. This unity of the universal Church is a communion in truth, in love and in holiness. It is rooted in sharing the same faith and in our common baptism, in the Eucharist, and also in communion with the bishops of the Church united with the Bishop of Rome. These three signs and sources of unity - shared faith, shared Eucharist and shared ministry - belong together.

“shared faith, shared Eucharist, shared ministry belong together”

60 In Catholic teaching, full communion of faith is made clearly visible above all at the Eucharist, the celebration of Mass.¹³⁵ The simple act of receiving Holy Communion is the highest expression of a living and visible unity of faith and life with the community which celebrates that Eucharist. Full participation at a Catholic Mass through reception of Holy Communion normally implies full communion with the Catholic Church itself. What we are doing when we receive Holy Communion can never be divorced from our faith in what we are as a community of faith and love: ‘The celebration of the

“full participation at a Catholic Mass through reception of Holy Communion normally implies full communion with the Catholic Church itself”

133 *Matthew* 5.23-24.

134 Eucharistic Prayer I; cf. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic letter *Dies Domini*, no. 34.

135 Pope John Paul II, Encyclical *Ut unum sint*, no. 97.

Eucharist is of itself a profession of faith in which the whole Church recognises and expresses itself.¹³⁶ Sharing Eucharistic Communion should always imply sharing in the profession of that Catholic faith. Full Eucharistic sharing is a profession of the fullness of the faith of the Church [see also, however, nos. 89-94, 96].

“in communion with our Pope and bishops”

61 The whole Catholic Church is involved in every celebration of Mass. We are not simply a group of believers gathered around a priest at an altar in a particular place. We are united with our local bishop, and through him with the whole college of bishops united with the Pope. This is why we include the names of our bishop and of the Pope in the Eucharistic Prayer. We are not simply praying for them; we are expressing our communion with them. The bishop is associated with every parish celebration of Mass. This was symbolised for several centuries in Rome by the Pope sending a particle of the consecrated bread from his celebration of Mass to each priest presiding at a local celebration, so that they would not be separated from communion with him.¹³⁷ This particle (known as the *fermentum*) was then added to the chalice before the distribution of communion, to express the truth that the Eucharist is the sacrament of the unity of the Church. We can also say that ‘the Pope is associated with every celebration of the Eucharist’, as the sign and servant of the unity of the universal Church.¹³⁸ The words of our newest Eucharistic Prayer express this faith: ‘Strengthen the bonds of our communion with N. our pope, N. our bishop, with all bishops, priests and deacons, and all your holy people.’¹³⁹ Receiving Holy Communion at a Catholic Mass implies a longing for communion in faith and love with the local Catholic bishop and the Pope.

136 Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, *Instruction on admitting other Christians to Eucharistic Communion in the Catholic Church*, 1972, no. II.2.

137 Cf. Pope Innocent I (401-417), *Letter to Decentius*, V.

138 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1369.

139 *Eucharistic Prayer for Masses for Various Needs and Occasions*.

62 We believe that when a person receives Communion at a Eucharistic celebration, he or she should be expressing a deep unity of faith and love with that particular community, and with the wider communion to which that community belongs. Normally when people receive Holy Communion at a Catholic celebration of Mass, they should be saying: ‘We are in full communion with the Catholic Church, united with the bishop of this local community and with the Pope.’ This aspect of the Eucharist is deeply rooted in the life of Catholics in Britain and Ireland. In the days of persecution, faithfulness to the Catholic celebration of the Mass and faithful communion with the Pope went hand in hand as the key visible signs of the fullness of Catholic faith. In Catholic teaching, receiving Holy Communion cannot be separated from this ‘ecclesial’ understanding of the Eucharist. We can further illustrate this teaching in two ways.

63 Often in the early Church, a Christian travelling away from home would take a letter from their own bishop, who would confirm that the person was in full communion with him. The ‘away bishop’ would then check the list of bishops with whom he was in full communion. If the person’s ‘home bishop’ was on that list, the traveller would be admitted to communion at the Eucharist in that town. Allowing someone to receive communion in one’s church was an acceptance of that person as being a full member of the communion of churches to which the host community belonged.¹⁴⁰

64 This same point is made by the Catholic rite of receiving a baptised Christian from another denomination into the Catholic Church. Baptism means that a person is already in partial communion with the Catholic Church. The final rite of welcome is called

“we should not forget that the Eucharist is a Sacrament of Initiation”

140 Cf. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, San Francisco 1996; pp. 87-88; Ludwig Hertling, ‘Communio und Primat - Kirche und Papsttum in der christlichen Antike’ in *Una Sancta* 17 (1962), pp. 91-125.

'Reception into *Full Communion*', and the climax of this rite is the reception *for the first time* of sacramental communion at the Catholic Eucharist. In other words, receiving Holy Communion is the supremely powerful sign that the person is now a full member of the Catholic Church. It is an *effective* sign which on that one occasion, the Mass of Reception, actually brings about the state of full membership. We should not forget that the Eucharist is a Sacrament of Initiation. When young children make their First Holy Communion, they too are brought into a new and deepened communion with the Catholic Church.

“united with the angels and the saints”

65 This deepened communion brought about by the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist includes not only that with the members of the pilgrim Church here on earth, but 'also between these and all who, having passed from this world in the grace of the Lord, belong to the heavenly Church or will be incorporated into her after being fully purified.'¹⁴¹ In the Eucharistic Prayer, we ask for a share in the fellowship of Mary, the Mother of God, the apostles, the martyrs and all the saints,¹⁴² and we pray to be made worthy to share eternal life with them.¹⁴³ We are united with the angels and the saints in the heavenly liturgy as we worship God, and we pray: 'When our pilgrimage on earth is complete, welcome us into your heavenly home, where we shall dwell with you for ever. There, with Mary, the Virgin Mother of God, with the apostles, the martyrs and all the saints, we shall praise you and give you glory through Jesus Christ, your Son.'¹⁴⁴

141 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on some aspects of the Church understood as Communion*, no. 6; cf. Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, no. 49.

142 Eucharistic Prayer I.

143 Eucharistic Prayer II.

144 *Eucharistic Prayer for Masses for Various Needs and Occasions*.

66 At the end of Mass, we are sent forth in peace to love and to serve the Lord, in deeper communion, we hope, with each other and with the whole Church. We receive the body of Christ so that we may go forth as the Body of Christ into the world, the living sacrament of his presence in the midst of others. Through the Eucharist we become more profoundly the Church and we are sent forth as the Church to fulfil our mission in and for the world. There is an intimate and inseparable link between Mass and mission, between worship and way of life.¹⁴⁵ Our communion with Christ means that we share not only his life but also his mission. At each Eucharist, the Risen Christ says to us anew: 'As the Father sent me, so am I sending you',¹⁴⁶ and breathes his Spirit upon us. The Spirit we receive anoints us afresh to bring good news to the poor, since any true communion with the living Lord will lead us to recognise him in those most in need.

“an intimate and inseparable link between Mass and mission, between worship and way of life”

67 The celebration of the Eucharist commits us to the poor and should flow into social action; our active love for the poor and oppressed, the sick and the sad, leads us back to the Eucharist as the source and summit of all we do. 'To receive in truth the Body and Blood of Christ given up for us, we must recognise Christ in the poorest', his brothers and sisters.¹⁴⁷ Jesus himself powerfully reminds us that whatever we do for those in need, we do for him.¹⁴⁸ In the early Church, bishops like St John Chrysostom challenged those who recognised Christ in the breaking of bread to recognise him also in the broken lives of those around them: 'Would you honour the body of Christ? Do not despise his nakedness; do not honour him here in church clothed in silk vestments and then pass him by unclothed and frozen outside. Remember that he who said, "This is my body", and made good his words, also said, "You saw me hungry and gave me no

“the celebration of the Eucharist commits us to the poor and should flow into social action”

145 Cf. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 32; cf. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic letter *Dies Domini*, no. 45.

146 *John 20.21 (Jerusalem Bible)*.

147 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1397; cf. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic letter *Dies Domini*, nos. 69-73.

148 *Matthew 25.31-46*.

food”, and, “in so far as you did it not to one of these, you did it not to me”. In the first sense the body of Christ does not need clothing but worship from a pure heart. In the second sense it does need clothing and all the care we can give.’¹⁴⁹

In the *Eucharistic Prayer for Masses for Various Needs and Occasions*, we pray: ‘Open our eyes to the needs of all; inspire us with words and deeds to comfort those who labour and are overburdened; keep our service of others faithful to the example and command of Christ. Let your Church be a living witness to truth and freedom, to justice and peace, that all people may be lifted up by the hope of a world made new.’ As bishops, we pray that all of us in the Catholic community may say and live our ‘Great Amen’ to those words.

Reconciliation and the Anointing of the Sick

68 Before moving on to a discussion of sacramental sharing in the Eucharist, for which an understanding of the teaching of the Catholic Church is so essential, it is important to include some teaching on the Sacraments of Reconciliation (or ‘Confession’) and the Anointing of the Sick. As with the Eucharist, we can properly understand these sacraments only in their setting within the communion of the Church. Both are intimately bound up with and directed towards the Eucharist.¹⁵⁰ Both are sacraments of healing by which the Risen Christ touches the lives of his friends and followers through the visible ministry of his Church.

69 Reconciliation lies at the heart of the Good News of Jesus Christ, who came to reconcile us with his Father and with one another. In this sacrament of forgiveness, we confess the holiness and mercy of God, who grants us pardon and peace. Through the absolution given by the

“forgiven by God and, at the same time, reconciled with the Church”

¹⁴⁹ *Homily 50*, as given in the *Divine Office* for the Office of Readings on Saturday of Week 21.

¹⁵⁰ *Code of Canon Law*, can. 897.

priest in the name of the Holy Trinity, a member of the Church is forgiven by God and, at the same time, reconciled with the Church which is wounded by our sins.¹⁵¹ We are made at-one again both with God and with the Church. This is a vital gift to the Church as we pursue together our pilgrim path of conversion and growth in holiness. Christ’s Church is ‘at one and the same time holy and always in need of purification’.¹⁵² ‘In its pilgrimage on earth Christ summons the Church to continual reformation, of which it is always in need, in so far as it is an institution of human beings here on earth.’¹⁵³ The same is true of each and every member of the Church. Christ reaches out to touch our lives with his gifts of healing of soul and renewal of communion, above all through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It is a sacrament of ‘spiritual resurrection’.¹⁵⁴

70 ‘Reconciliation with the Church is inseparable from reconciliation with God.’¹⁵⁵ Renewal of communion with Christ and renewal of full communion with his Church go hand in hand. Jesus himself not only forgave sinners, but also drew them back into the community of God’s People from which their sin had alienated or even excluded them. We see this especially when Jesus welcomed sinners and ate with them, ‘a gesture that expresses in an astonishing way both God’s forgiveness and the return to the bosom of the People of God.’¹⁵⁶ When Jesus gave authority to Peter and the other apostles to ‘bind and loose’,¹⁵⁷ he was using a Jewish expression for excluding from and then re-introducing someone into the community. Catholics believe that the Risen Christ has made his Church the sign and instrument of his gift of forgiveness and reconciliation.¹⁵⁸

“renewal of communion with Christ and renewal of full communion with his Church go hand in hand”

¹⁵¹ *Code of Canon Law*, can. 959.

¹⁵² Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, no. 8.

¹⁵³ Second Vatican Council, *Decree on Ecumenism*, no. 6.

¹⁵⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1468.

¹⁵⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1445.

¹⁵⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1443.

¹⁵⁷ *Matthew* 16.19; 18.18.

¹⁵⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1442.

71 In coming to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, repentant sinners open their lives again 'to God and to the communion of the Church in order to make a new future possible.'¹⁵⁹ This sacrament reconciles them to the Church, repairing or restoring the communion damaged or broken by sin. This teaching was powerfully expressed in the early Church in its rite of 'public penance'. When a member of the Church fell into serious sin, he or she was excluded from Eucharistic Communion during a long period of fasting and penance. Once this was completed, the person was reconciled by the bishop and restored to full communion with the Church. It was clear that invisible reconciliation with Christ and visible reconciliation with his Church belonged closely together: the visible was the sacrament of the invisible.

72 Although sin is something deeply personal, it is never private. It always affects others for the worse, just as holiness affects others for the better. Since the Body of Christ suffers from the sin of its members, the Sacrament of Reconciliation has 'a revitalising effect on the life of the Church'.¹⁶⁰ Anyone who comes as a sorrowful sinner to Christ in this sacrament should be seeking not only the forgiveness of God but also deeper communion with the Church as God's community of reconciliation and resurrection. Since serious sin excludes a person from full participation in the Eucharist and full communion with the Church, receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation should always involve a desire for restoration to both Eucharistic communion and full unity with the Church.

"Christ continues to touch those who are seriously ill or frail through old age with the gift of the Holy Spirit"

73 The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is also an act of the Risen Lord through the community of the Church. Christ continues to touch those who are seriously ill or frail through old age with the gift of the Holy Spirit, bringing strength, peace and courage in their difficulties. Through the priest who anoints, the

159 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1455.

160 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1469.

whole community of the Church gathers with their prayer and their loving care. As Christ's Body we are strengthened by the continued communion with us of those who are sick. Once again, although Christ touches the lives of the sick in a deeply personal way, this sacrament is always a celebration of the community of faith rather than a private ritual.

74 Serious sickness often physically cuts a person off from full participation in the life of the Christian community. It can seem to impair full visible communion with the Church, especially when it gathers for the Eucharist. When we are ill or house-bound, we can feel isolated from God's family, and weakened by the lack of visible, tangible involvement. Through the sacrament of Anointing, we are kept 'in touch' with the community of the Church in our sickness, and the bonds of communion are refreshed and strengthened. Through the laying-on of hands and the anointing with oil, the sick are empowered to serve the Lord in a new way, and the Church turns to them for their prayerful assistance and support. As with the Sacrament of Reconciliation, a desire to receive this sacrament of healing should imply a longing for deeper communion with the Church. Participation in the Eucharist and full communion with the Catholic Church is maintained above all by receiving Holy Communion at home or in hospital, ideally directly from the celebration of Mass. Taking Holy Communion and the sacraments of Reconciliation and Anointing of the sick is the richest way of making visible to them that they are still in living communion with the Body of Christ.

"kept in touch with the community of the Church in our sickness"

75 The sacraments of Reconciliation and Anointing remind us of the bountiful mercy and healing compassion of God, deepening and strengthening the communion of the repentant sinner and of the sick person both with God himself and with the Church. These sacraments bring healing and peace to the Church.

Part 3: Together yet divided

The pain of our brokenness

“simply taking the pain away does not in itself bring healing”

76 St Paul uses the image of the human body to express something of the unity of the members of the Church, among ourselves but above all ‘in Christ’, our Head. Sadly, any discussion of sacramental sharing sharply focuses our attention on Christian disunity, and on the need for reconciliation and healing. When there is brokenness in our human body, there is pain. Pain is a keen reminder that there is something wrong, that we need healing. Simply taking the pain away does not in itself bring healing; it can sometimes dull our sense of the need for serious medical attention. Much the same can be said of the Body of Christ, his Church. We are called to be one, and we seek together more urgently than ever before to be one band of pilgrims, united in faith and in love, in holiness and in mission. This makes us feel even more strongly the pain of our divisions, above all at the Eucharist when we are unable to share together as one Body the one Bread of Life.

“this pain can be a powerful stimulus to putting our energy into the real healing of our disunity”

77 This pain can be a powerful stimulus to putting our energy into the real healing of our disunity, moving from the partial communion we already enjoy to the full communion which will enable us to share together the one table of the Lord. There are times when sacramental sharing is to be commended, but it cannot be justified simply by the desire to remove the sense of sorrow and hurt when we are together and yet not fully together, at a celebration of the Eucharist. Feeling strongly that we want to do something together does not necessarily mean that it is the *right* thing to do. Catholic teaching allows exceptional sharing only when strong desire is accompanied by a shared faith, grave and pressing spiritual need, and at least an implicit desire for communion with the Catholic Church.

78 It is at the Eucharist above all that the continued dividedness of Christians is most visibly evident. The Eucharist may not, therefore, be the appropriate liturgical celebration when divided Christians meet together to celebrate the partial communion they already share. When as Christians we do come together for the Eucharist, we should not celebrate in a way that suggests a degree of unity which we do not have. For this reason, as Catholic bishops in Britain and Ireland, we do not judge the celebration of the Eucharist at an ecumenical gathering or event to be a situation in which sacramental sharing might be considered as appropriate in our countries.

Mixed marriages

79 The pain of disunity can be felt most acutely by committed Christians of different communions who are intimately united by the sacrament of Marriage, and by their children. In marriage, a new community is created, and we speak of the Christian family as being a ‘domestic church’.¹⁶¹ Husband and wife are called to be ‘one flesh’, and to mirror in their lives the love of God for his people and the deep communion between Christ and his Church. They are ‘caught up into divine love’, and enriched by the redeeming power of Christ and the saving activity of his Church.¹⁶² When a Christian not in full communion with the Catholic Church marries a Catholic, he or she enters into ‘a partnership of the whole of life’ (*consortium totius vitae*) with the Catholic, and *vice-versa*. That person is already in partial communion with the Catholic Church through Baptism. A new form of communion, still partial and incomplete, is brought about through the sacrament of Marriage.

“in marriage, a new community is created”

161 Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, no. 11.

162 Second Vatican Council, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, no. 48.

80 There are different kinds of mixed marriages. Some are often described as inter-church marriages, involving two practising and committed Christians. As Catholic bishops, we recognise the potential ecumenical significance of such marriages. Husband and wife enjoy a communion which can be a powerful stimulus to their Christian communities to seek the full visible unity to which we are called by the Lord. To have such couples in our midst is a challenge to our divided communities to grow ever closer together, so that we can share fully the nuptial unity of God's Kingdom, completely at-one at the Wedding Feast of the Lamb.

“still partial and incomplete”

81 Such couples and families, however, are not in full communion with each other in their Christian faith. The sacrament of Marriage does not remove the incompleteness of the communion shared by the Catholic Church and the faith community of the other Christian. When husband and wife are members of Christian communities not yet in full communion with one another, they face an obstacle to the full unity of their family life. This will remain as long as the faith communities to which they belong continue to be divided. The sacrament of Marriage makes a couple 'one flesh' and hopefully 'one heart', but it does not make a couple in a mixed marriage fully one in the faith of the Church. This is why the *Directory* reminds us, 'The perfect union of persons and full sharing of life which constitutes the married state are more easily assured when both partners belong to the same faith community.'¹⁶³ When an inter-church couple decide to marry, however, aware of the particular difficulties involved, the Catholic Church wishes to give them all the help they need and to be enriched in turn by their married life. As bishops, we urge priests, deacons and the whole Catholic community to support such couples as fully as possible with their prayer and pastoral care.

163 *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, no. 144.

82 The Second Vatican Council taught that 'no Christian community can be built without roots and foundations in the celebration of the most holy Eucharist'.¹⁶⁴ This is true of the special community of the married couple and their family. The ideal, of course, is the fullness of communion achieved by husband, wife and children sharing as one the Body and Blood of the Lord. This was beautifully expressed by the Christian writer Tertullian 1,800 years ago: 'How shall we ever be able adequately to describe the happiness of that marriage which the Church arranges, the Sacrifice strengthens, upon which the blessing sets a seal, at which angels are present as witnesses, and to which the Father gives his consent. How beautiful then the marriage of true Christians, two who are one in hope, one in desire, one in the way of life they follow, one in the religion they practise. ... Side by side they visit God's church and partake of God's Banquet.'¹⁶⁵

“how beautiful ... the marriage of true Christians”

83 Inspired by such a vision of Christian married life, a couple in a mixed marriage may well have a strong desire to receive Holy Communion together, to be fully united at the Lord's table. The *Directory* identifies such marriages as possible situations when in certain circumstances the Catholic Church may admit the non-Catholic partner to Holy Communion.¹⁶⁶ The fact that a couple share not only the sacrament of Baptism but also the sacrament of Marriage can be seen to make them a special case, but the *Directory* still reminds us that even though 'the spouses in a mixed marriage share the sacraments of baptism and marriage, Eucharistic sharing can only be exceptional.'¹⁶⁷ There will sometimes be a deep sense of pain and sadness when they find themselves divided at this most sacred moment of unity.

“a couple in a mixed marriage may well have a strong desire to receive Communion together”

164 Second Vatican Council, *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, no. 6.

165 Tertullian, *Ad uxorem*, 8.

166 *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, no. 159.

167 *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, no. 160.

As bishops, we are sensitive to this, and try to understand as best we can. The hurt felt by such couples at the heart of the Church's memorial of the sacrificial cross and resurrection of Christ can remind us of the urgent need for the healing of Christian dividedness.

“a sign of the degree of unity we already share”

84 A couple in a mixed marriage need as far as possible to centre their life together on the celebration of the Eucharist, and to be sustained by this celebration in their special ‘call to be one’. We recall, however, the important distinction between ‘celebrating the Eucharistic Sacrifice’ and ‘receiving Holy Communion’. As we saw earlier, there are many different ways of participating in the Eucharist, even for those unable for one reason or another to be admitted to Holy Communion. This is true in a special way for married couples and their children. In many Catholic churches, those unable to receive Holy Communion are strongly encouraged to go forward for a ‘blessing’ at the same time as others go forward for the sacrament. They join the same procession to the altar, expressing the real though still imperfect communion that already exists between Christians. In much the same way, a Catholic in a mixed marriage who joins his or her spouse at the Eucharistic celebration of another denomination can express the partial communion between Christians by going forward for a blessing when Communion is distributed, where this is the custom of that Christian community. This idea of ‘spiritual communion’ is an important part of our Catholic tradition which we should not lose. Reciprocal acceptance of a ‘blessing’ by Catholics and other Christians at each other’s Eucharistic celebrations is something which we encourage as a sign of the degree of unity we already share.

“any marriage is an exchange of gifts”

85 In a mixed marriage, the sacramental bond between husband and wife means that the Christian not in full communion with the Catholic Church can share in the

benefits of the Mass through his or her union with the Catholic spouse. Through the regular reception of Holy Communion by the Catholic (and their children), the other partner can be kept in close communion with the Catholic Church. This is especially true when husband and wife go together to the Catholic Eucharist, not yet completely one in faith, unable to participate fully together, and yet celebrating as deeply and completely as possible the sacred communion of life they share through their Baptism and Marriage. As in many other parts of their married life, husband and wife learn to depend upon one another, to lean on each other, to receive from each other. Any marriage is an ‘exchange of gifts’. Two committed Christians will be mutually enriched by each one’s involvement in the life, prayer and sacramental rites of their particular Christian community.

86 There are degrees of communion in the mystery of the Eucharist just as there are degrees of communion with the Church. Christ’s saving power can touch the lives of an inter-church couple and family in many ways through the Eucharist, even though they cannot normally participate fully together in the celebration. A Christian family is indeed a ‘domestic church’, but an inter-church family is a sharply focused image of Christians as they are in reality, united in many ways in Christ and yet still not fully at-one in faith. When accepted with loving humility and spiritual courage, the sadness felt by such couples can be a positive force for the life of the Church. As the *Directory* reminds us: ‘When members of the same family belong to different Churches and ecclesial communities, when Christians cannot receive Communion with their spouse or children, or their friends, the pain of division makes itself felt acutely and the impulse to prayer and ecumenical activity should grow.’¹⁶⁸

168 *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, no. 27.

Separated and divorced Catholics at the Eucharist

87 Although this is not a focus for this document, we feel as bishops that we cannot ignore the spiritual needs of those who suffer the pain of breakdown in their marriages. Those who have separated or divorced and have not remarried need much support and care from the Church. This is emphasised by Pope John Paul II: ‘Loneliness and other difficulties are often the lot of separated spouses, especially when they are the innocent parties. ... The situation is similar for people who have undergone divorce, but, being well aware that the valid marriage bond is indissoluble, refrain from becoming involved in a new union. ... Here it is even more necessary for the Church to offer continual love and assistance, without there being any obstacle to admission to the sacraments.’¹⁶⁹ The last point is particularly important. Being separated or divorced does not in itself mean that a person may not receive Holy Communion.

“receive them with love and help them participate in the life of the Church”

88 Priests and deacons must also show a special pastoral care for people involved in a new relationship where one or both of the partners has been validly married before. These also, for different reasons, experience the pain of not being able fully to participate in the Eucharist by receiving Holy Communion. The Catholic Church has reaffirmed her practice of not admitting to Holy Communion people who have divorced and remarried.¹⁷⁰ This does not mean, however, that the Church wishes to exclude them from its life. Priests should receive them with love and help them participate in the life of the Church. Out of love for the truth, it is also important that pastors discern carefully the different situations of the divorced and remarried, and take to heart especially those who have sincerely tried to save their first marriage and have been abandoned through no

169 Pope John Paul II, Apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 83.

170 Pope John Paul II, Apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 84; cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1650; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *The Reception of Holy Communion by the divorced and remarried* (1994), throughout.

fault of their own.¹⁷¹ The whole Catholic community should embrace and support the divorced and remarried, and make sure they do not think of themselves as cut off from the Church. They are welcome to participate in the Mass as fully as their state of life allows. All we said earlier about different ways of taking part without receiving Holy Communion applies to them in their own way [see nos. 47-48]. They are to be helped ‘to deepen their understanding of the value of sharing in the sacrifice of Christ in the Mass, of spiritual communion, of prayer, of meditation on the Word of God, and of works of charity and justice.’¹⁷² All people who find themselves excluded from complete participation in the sacraments, for whatever reason, must be supported as fully as possible in their faith and spiritual life.

Spiritual need: personal and ecclesial

89 What should the Catholic Church do when other Christians who long for Holy Communion, or for Reconciliation and the Anointing of the Sick, cannot celebrate these sacraments in their own Christian community? Should we allow such fellow pilgrims to be deprived of the Bread of Life, or the pardon and healing of the Lord? The Church seeks to respond with sensitivity to the spiritual needs of the baptised. The general principle remains that sharing fully the sacramental life of the Catholic Church is acceptable only among ‘those who share its oneness in faith, worship and ecclesial life.’¹⁷³ Given the spiritual importance of the sacraments, however, access to them may be permitted, or even commended, ‘in certain

“sensitivity to the spiritual needs of the baptised”

171 Cf. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 84; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *The Reception of Holy Communion by the divorced and remarried*, no. 5, 9.

172 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *The Reception of Holy Communion by the divorced and remarried*, no. 6; cf. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 84; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1651.

173 *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, no. 129.

circumstances, by way of exception, and under certain conditions.¹⁷⁴ We say this as Catholics precisely because of our deep faith that the Bread of Life is vital spiritual food for the Christian life, and because we are increasingly and joyfully aware of the real though imperfect communion of other Christians with the Catholic Church.

90 The Second Vatican Council laid down two key principles which govern sacramental sharing: ‘first, the bearing witness to the unity of the Church, and second, the sharing in the means of grace. Witness to the unity of the Church generally forbids common worship, but the grace to be had from it sometimes commends this practice.’¹⁷⁵ It is tempting to allow one principle to dominate the other, either to exclude sacramental sharing altogether, or to allow a great deal of such sharing. Catholic teaching insists that the two basic principles must always be taken into account together. They are, in fact, complementary.

*“receiving the
Body and Blood
of the Lord is vital
for our life of grace”*

91 We are a pilgrim people, struggling at all times to move from sinfulness to holiness. We come to the Eucharist knowing that we are unworthy, but trusting in the Lord’s word of healing forgiveness and in his power to transform and renew us. The Eucharist is spiritual food for the baptised, enabling us ‘to overcome sin and to live the very life of Christ’.¹⁷⁶ In St John’s Gospel, Jesus teaches us: ‘unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you’.¹⁷⁷ Being nourished by the new manna of the Bread of Life is as vital to our spiritual pilgrim journey as was nourishment by the old manna for the pilgrim people of Israel in the

174 *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, no. 129.

175 Second Vatican Council, *Decree on Ecumenism*, no. 8 (as translated in *The Documents of Vatican II*, edited by Walter M. Abbott SJ, London and Dublin, 1966).

176 *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, no. 129.

177 *John* 6.53.

wilderness.¹⁷⁸ The Eucharist is the heart of the Christian life, and receiving the Body and Blood of the Lord is vital for our life of grace. ‘As the sacrament of full union with Christ and of the perfection of the spiritual life, the Eucharist is necessary to every Christian. ... Any baptised person has a spiritual need for the Eucharist.’¹⁷⁹ We should not be surprised when Christians who are living intensely the life of grace feel a compelling need for the food of eternal life.¹⁸⁰

92 This spiritual need of every Christian is something deeply personal, but never private. Holy Communion is spiritual food which unites a Christian to Jesus Christ, but it ‘is far from being simply a means of satisfying exclusively personal aspirations, however lofty these may be. The union brings about the union of the faithful themselves with each other.’¹⁸¹ Spiritual nourishment is always ‘ecclesial’: it involves the visible community of the Church. The Jews received the manna from heaven as God’s chosen community. We are fed today with Christ, the Bread of Life, through and in the Body of Christ, the Church, and as members of that Church. Sharing Catholic sacramental life always involves communion with the visible Catholic Church, even for other Christians when, in situations of grave and pressing need, they are admitted to the sacraments. ‘Spiritual need of the Eucharist is not therefore merely a matter of personal spiritual growth: simultaneously, and inseparably, it concerns our entering more deeply into Christ’s Church, “which is his body, the fullness of him

*“spiritual
nourishment is
always ecclesial”*

178 Cf. *Exodus* 16.13f.

179 Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity, *Instruction on admitting other Christians to Eucharistic Communion in the Catholic Church* (1972), no. III.1; IV.

180 Cf. Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity, *Instruction on admitting other Christians to Eucharistic Communion in the Catholic Church* (1972), no. III.2.

181 Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity, *Instruction on admitting other Christians to Eucharistic Communion in the Catholic Church* (1972), no. III.2.

who fills all in all” (*Ephesians* 1.23).¹⁸² Our communion with one another in love and in truth is an essential dimension of our communion with the Lord. What, then, do we mean by a spiritual need to be admitted to Holy Communion? It is both ‘a need for an increase in spiritual life and a need for a deeper involvement in the mystery of the Church and of its unity.’¹⁸³ All of this is as important for Catholics regularly receiving Communion as it is for other Christians asking to be admitted to Communion.

“only the full reconciliation of Christians can make formal the full sharing together of the Sacrament of Unity”

93 Whatever exceptional sharing may be possible, only the full reconciliation of Christians can make normal the full sharing together of the Sacrament of Unity. We can see from the *Acts of the Apostles* that the Eucharist is shared by those who have received the same baptism and who live together in visible communion, sharing the same faith.¹⁸⁴ St Paul vigorously reminded the Corinthian Christians of the essential link between the ‘one body’ and the ‘one bread’.¹⁸⁵ His account of the Last Supper is set in the context of concern about divisions when Christians assembled together, and about justice for the poorer members of the community. He warned the Corinthians that ‘anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgement upon himself.’¹⁸⁶ ‘Discerning the body’ refers both to Christ’s eucharistic body (Holy Communion) and to his ecclesial body (the Church), with its faith, sacraments and its ordained ministry. The tradition of the early, undivided Church always made sharing fully the same faith the

182 Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity, *Instruction on admitting other Christians to Eucharistic Communion in the Catholic Church* (1972), no. III.3.

183 Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity, *Instruction on admitting other Christians to Eucharistic Communion in the Catholic Church* (1972), no. IV.2.

184 *Acts of the Apostles* 2.42-47.

185 *1 Corinthians* 11.17-34.

186 *1 Corinthians* 11.29.

condition for sharing fully the same Eucharist.¹⁸⁷ The *Directory* reminds us, ‘Eucharistic communion is inseparably linked to full ecclesial communion and its visible expression.’¹⁸⁸ The gift which Christ offers us through his Church is ultimately union with himself in the fullness of that faith, hope and love which constitutes the Body of Christ. This is an understanding of the Eucharist which as Catholic bishops we wish to reaffirm strongly.

94 When we come forward to receive Holy Communion at the Eucharist, we are not lining up as isolated individuals, couples, families or groups to be nourished and sustained for our Christian lives. We come forward together as the Body of Christ to receive the Body of Christ. We receive the Body of Christ so that we may be more truly together the Body of Christ in the world. As St Augustine of Hippo reminded us, at the Eucharist we receive what we are, and we become what we receive: ‘You reply “Amen” to that which you are, and by your reply you consent. For you hear “the Body of Christ” and you reply “Amen”. Be a member of the Body of Christ so that your “Amen” may be true.’¹⁸⁹

“we receive what we are, and we become what we receive”

187 Cf. Note from the Episcopal Commission for Unity to Catholic priests and faithful concerning Eucharistic hospitality with Christians of Reformation Churches in France, March 1983.

188 *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, no. 129.

189 *Sermon* 272.

Part 4: General Norms

Introduction

95 The *Directory* strongly recommends that each diocesan bishop should establish norms for judging situations of grave and pressing spiritual need when Christians not in full communion with the Catholic Church may be admitted to Holy Communion and to the sacraments of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick. These norms should take into account any which may have been established already by the Bishops' Conference. In the absence of norms established either by the diocesan bishop or by the Bishops' Conference, Catholic priests are to follow those of the *Directory*. In order to guide Catholic pastors in our countries, our Bishops' Conferences now establish norms on this important matter. There are two sets of norms: one concerning Christians from Eastern Churches, the other concerning Christians from Churches and ecclesial communities of the West. Catholic priests are to discern each individual case only in accord with the norms established by their diocesan bishop, or, in the absence of such diocesan norms, those which the Bishops' Conferences of England and Wales, Ireland, and Scotland promulgate in this document, each for its own territory.

96 According to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, the doctrine that 'common worship' should signify the unity of the Church generally rules out sacramental sharing, but the gaining of grace may sometimes commend it.¹⁹⁰ The then Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity established norms for such sharing in several documents, including the *Ecumenical Directory* (1967), the *Instruction on admitting other Christians to Eucharistic Communion in the Catholic Church* (1972), and a *Note interpreting the 'Instruction on admitting other Christians to Eucharistic Communion*

under certain circumstances' (1973). The current *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* (1993) refers to the second and third of these documents in the establishing of norms.¹⁹¹ Canon 844 of the *Code of Canon Law*, canon 671 of the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, and articles 104, 122-125, 129-132 and 159-160 of the *Directory* form the foundation of the norms which we establish in this document. We also refer our Catholic community to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (nos. 1398-1401) and to Pope John Paul's encyclical letter *Ut unum sint* (no. 46).

97 The question of sacramental sharing is a serious one, and a proper understanding of the issues involved is a matter of urgency. This is true not only in our own countries, but in many parts of the world. It is not merely a local question, or one relevant only to situations brought about by sectarian bigotry. It has been a serious issue from the first days of Catholic involvement in the ecumenical movement, and now often takes centre stage in our meetings and gatherings together. There have been strong appeals from the leaders of other Christian communities, from Catholics and other Christians involved in ecumenical activities and events, and from wives and husbands involved in inter-church marriages, for a more open approach by the Catholic Church to the admission of other Christians to Holy Communion.

98 We are aware that ministers in other Christian communities often invite all baptised Christians in good-standing with their own churches, including Catholics, to come forward for Communion. Some Catholic priests have acted outside the prescribed norms and invited other Christians to receive Communion, on occasion even issuing an open invitation. There are Catholics who do not see the difficulty in receiving communion at the Eucharist of another Christian denomination; some have

¹⁹⁰ Second Vatican Council, *Decree on Ecumenism*, no. 8.

¹⁹¹ *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, no. 130, footnote 135.

alternated, for example, between receiving communion at Catholic and Anglican Sunday services. In these ways, Catholic teaching about the Eucharist, and the discipline that reflects this, has been either ignored or judged negatively against the practice of ‘open Communion’ by others.

“remain faithful to the discipline of our Church ... mutual respect is an essential courtesy as we journey together in Christ”

99 There is clearly need for greater catechesis on the meaning of the Eucharist. We hope this document will help Catholics and our fellow Christians to a deeper understanding and acceptance of Catholic teaching and discipline on this matter. It is precisely our own desire for the full communion of all Christians, as well as our fidelity to Catholic doctrine on the nature of the Church and the meaning of the Sacraments, which make us appeal to Catholics to remain faithful to the discipline of our Church. We appeal also to our brothers and sisters in other Christian communities, and to their pastoral leaders, to respect that discipline, just as we seek to respect the liturgical and sacramental discipline of other communities.¹⁹² Such mutual respect is an essential courtesy as we journey together in Christ.

“a source of great joy”

100 We recognise, however, the growth of unity and mutual understanding between Christians in recent decades. Although ‘it is not yet possible to celebrate together the same Eucharistic Liturgy’, increasingly we speak together to the Father ‘with one heart’ in a degree of communion with each other which would have been unimaginable a century ago.¹⁹³ This new context means that we can look at our ancient faith and current practice in a renewed way, with new possibilities opening up before us. It is in this light that, as Catholic bishops, we gladly echo the words of Pope John Paul II: ‘It is a source of great joy to note that Catholic ministers are able, in certain particular cases, to administer the sacraments of

¹⁹² *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, no. 107.

¹⁹³ Pope John Paul II, Encyclical *Ut unum sint*, no. 45.

Eucharist, Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick to Christians who are not in full communion 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.’¹⁹⁴

101 At the same time, such sharing can only be ‘by way of exception’.¹⁹⁵ The Codes of Canon Law and the *Directory* do not allow regular reception of Holy Communion by Christians not in full communion with the Catholic Church. For the doctrinal reasons which run through this document, our starting-point is the canon that ‘Catholic ministers may lawfully administer the sacraments only to Catholic members of Christ’s faithful, who equally may lawfully receive them only from Catholic ministers’.¹⁹⁶ Exceptions to this are allowed for by the same canon, and it is to those that our norms are addressed.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ Pope John Paul II, Encyclical *Ut unum sint*, no. 46.

¹⁹⁵ *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, no. 129.

¹⁹⁶ *Code of Canon Law*, can. 844.1; *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, can. 671.1.

¹⁹⁷ *Code of Canon Law*, can. 844.2-5; *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, can. 671.2-5.

Sacramental sharing with Christians from Eastern Churches

Norm on the admission of Christians from Eastern Churches

102 Catholic ministers may lawfully admit to Holy Communion, and to the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Anointing of the Sick, members of the Eastern Churches not in full communion with the Catholic Church, if they spontaneously ask for these sacraments and are properly disposed.¹⁹⁸

Commentary

103 Between the Catholic Church and the Eastern Churches not in full communion with it, there is a very close communion in matters of faith. Pope Paul VI spoke of there being ‘an almost total communion’.¹⁹⁹ These Eastern Churches ‘possess true sacraments, above all - by apostolic succession - the priesthood and the Eucharist, whereby they are still linked with us in closest intimacy.’²⁰⁰ These fundamental bonds of faith, sacraments and ministry allow the Catholic Church to permit and even recommend some sharing in liturgical worship, even the Eucharist, with these Churches, ‘given suitable circumstances and the approval of the Church authority’.²⁰¹ In this, proper respect should be given to the discipline of the Eastern Churches for their own faithful, and any suggestion of proselytism should be avoided.

198 *Code of Canon Law*, can. 844.3; cf. Second Vatican Council, *Decree on Eastern Catholic Churches*, no. 26.

199 Quoted in Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity, *Instruction on admitting other Christians to Eucharistic Communion in the Catholic Church* (1972), no. V.

200 Second Vatican Council, *Decree on Ecumenism*, no. 15.

201 Second Vatican Council, *Decree on Ecumenism*, no. 15.

Norm on Catholics approaching ministers of the Eastern Churches

104 Whenever necessity requires or a genuine spiritual advantage commends it, and provided that the danger of error or indifferentism is avoided, it is lawful for any Catholic for whom it is physically or morally impossible to approach a Catholic minister, to receive Holy Communion, or the sacraments of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick, from a minister of an Eastern Church not in full communion with the Catholic Church.²⁰²

Commentary

105 It is comparatively rare for Catholics in our countries to seek to share in the sacraments of the Eastern Churches. The Catholic Church permits such participation on certain conditions, but it is very important that Catholics carefully respect the discipline of those Churches which may not allow such sacramental sharing.²⁰³

202 *Code of Canon Law*, can. 844.2; *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, can. 671.2; *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, no. 123; cf. Second Vatican Council, *Decree on Eastern Catholic Churches*, no. 27.

203 *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, no. 124.

Sacramental sharing with Christians from other Churches and ecclesial communities

Norm on the admission of Christians from other Christian faith communities

106 Admission to Holy Communion and to the sacraments of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick may be given to baptised Christians of other faith communities if there is a danger of death, or if there is some other grave and pressing need. This may at times include those who ask to receive them on a unique occasion for joy or for sorrow in the life of a family or an individual. It is for the diocesan bishop or his delegate to judge the gravity of the need and the exceptional nature of the situation. The conditions of Canon Law must always be fulfilled. The exceptional nature and purpose of the permission should be made clear, and appropriate preparation should be made for the reception of the sacrament.²⁰⁴

Commentary

107 The Catholic Church recognises that in particular circumstances, by way of exception and under certain conditions, admission to Holy Communion and to the sacraments of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick may be permitted, or even commended, for Christians belonging to communities not in full communion with the Catholic Church. The norms we establish apply to individual cases rather than categories of situations. When applying these norms to a particular case, there is no intention to present that case as a type or precedent for other apparently similar cases. In other words, a specific and particular case is being acted upon rather than a category being created. Each individual case in which admission is sought must be examined on its own merits.

²⁰⁴ *Code of Canon Law*, can. 844.4; *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, cans. 129-131.

108 In what particular circumstances might admission to the sacraments be allowed? The *Directory* gives general permission in one case only: danger of death. In other cases, a discernment of the situation of the individual has to be made. The general description of such need is that it be ‘grave and pressing’. What, then, would be examples of such ‘grave and pressing need’? The 1967 *Ecumenical Directory* highlights people suffering persecution or in prison, but also mentions ‘other cases of such urgent necessity’.²⁰⁵ A later document made clear that such cases are not limited to situations of suffering and danger. Christians not in full communion with the Catholic Church could find themselves ‘in grave spiritual necessity and with no chance of recourse to their own community’, such as when scattered in predominantly Catholic regions.²⁰⁶ The Church’s law requires the need to be both grave *and* pressing. Such a need is more than a passing desire, or something arising simply from the sadness of feeling left out in a particular celebration.

“grave and pressing need”

109 What do we mean by a ‘unique occasion’ in the life of a family or an individual? We are thinking of an occasion which of its nature is unrepeatable, a ‘one-off’ situation at a given moment which will not come again. This may well be associated with the most significant moments of a person’s life, for example, at the moments of Christian initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, First Communion), Marriage, Ordination and death.

110 The *Directory* also envisages that a grave and pressing need may be experienced in some mixed marriages. This is the only circumstance explicitly added to those mentioned in previous documents. Precisely because of problems concerning Eucharistic sharing which may arise from the presence of other Christians, it is envisaged that a mixed marriage will usually be

²⁰⁵ No. 55.

²⁰⁶ Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity, *Instruction on admitting other Christians to Eucharistic Communion in the Catholic Church*, no. VI.

celebrated outside Mass. In our countries, the bishops have given consent to the celebration of such a marriage within Mass, when it seems appropriate to the couple and to the presiding Catholic minister. If a large number of people belonging to different Christian traditions is to be present, the fact that they cannot receive Holy Communion needs to be considered. They should, however, be invited to participate in every other way they can, and the priest or deacon should encourage them to do so.²⁰⁷

111 The decision whether the bride or groom who is not a Catholic may be admitted to Eucharistic communion must always be made in keeping with the general norms regarding the conditions for such admission, ‘taking into account the particular situation of the reception of the sacrament of Christian marriage by two baptised Christians.’²⁰⁸ As we stated earlier, the sharing together of the sacraments of baptism and marriage creates a sacred bond between husband and wife, and places the couple in a new relationship with the Catholic Church. The spouse who is not a Catholic remains, however, someone who is not in full communion with the Catholic Church, and for this reason the *Directory* stresses that ‘Eucharistic sharing can only be exceptional’.²⁰⁹ Even when the bride or groom is indeed admitted to Holy Communion at a ‘Nuptial Mass’, it is not envisaged that this be extended to relatives and other guests not in full communion with the Catholic Church.

“other unique occasions for joy or sorrow in the life of a family or individual”

112 What might be meant by other unique occasions for joy or sorrow in the life of a family or an individual? These are situations in which there may be an objectively grave and pressing spiritual need for a person to receive Holy Communion. We give examples of such

207 Cf. Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales, *Mixed Marriages, Revised Directory* (1990), norm 9.

208 *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, no. 159.

209 *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, no. 160.

circumstances, without in any way intending to suggest categories of situations in which admission to the sacrament would be generally granted. The admission of a particular individual on one such unique occasion does not mean that another individual would necessarily be admitted in a similar situation. Requests to be admitted to Holy Communion may come from the parent of a child to be baptised during Mass, or receiving First Holy Communion or Confirmation; the parent or wife of someone being ordained;²¹⁰ the intimate family of the deceased at a Funeral Mass; Christians who cannot easily approach a minister of their own community, such as those confined to an institution of some kind, although most hospitals and prisons in our countries have Anglican, Presbyterian, Church of Scotland and Free Church chaplains who minister there on a regular basis. There may be occasions when it is admission to the sacraments of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick which is the most grave and pressing spiritual need, due in part to the absence of such sacramental rites in some faith communities. Each situation will be judged individually according to the norms.

113 Who is to make the decision in each case? Except when there is a danger of death, it is for the diocesan bishop or those delegated by him to judge whether there is a grave and pressing need. When an individual Christian decides, after prayer and reflection, that he or she should approach the local priest about their circumstances, the latter must also make a discernment about whether this should be brought to the local bishop or his delegate for a decision. A Catholic priest may not make such a decision himself unless duly delegated by his bishop.

210 Besides the parents of ordinands, this may also include the wives of permanent deacons or of former Anglican priests being ordained to the Catholic priesthood.

114 What conditions must always be fulfilled? The *Code of Canon Law* lists four conditions which are re-stated in the *Directory*.²¹¹

- **that the person be unable to approach a minister of his or her own community for the sacrament desired;**

In our countries, occasions when such fellow Christians cannot physically find a minister of their own community will be rare. There may be times, however, such as in the particular circumstances or on the unique occasions exemplified above, when access to one's own minister is impossible given the very nature of that occasion.

- **that the person greatly desire to receive the sacrament, and ask to receive it of his or her own initiative;**

The grave and pressing spiritual need should be something discerned by the person concerned, rather than in response to an invitation given by the Catholic priest. Priests and other Catholic ministers should issue neither general nor specific invitations to other Christians to receive Holy Communion. It is important that there be adequate time for the proper process of discernment and judgement, and for appropriate preparation for reception of the sacrament.

- **that the person manifest Catholic faith in the sacrament desired;**

In this document we have given an outline of the fundamental aspects of Catholic faith in the

²¹¹ *Code of Canon Law*, can. 844.4; *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, can. 671.4; *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, no. 131.

Eucharist, and to a lesser extent of Catholic faith in the sacraments of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick. For a Christian who does not regularly worship at a Catholic church, being a frequent communicant at his or her own church may well indicate a love for the Eucharist. Others may regularly attend a Catholic celebration of the Eucharist, with their Catholic spouse or family for example, and this may speak loudly of a commitment to the Eucharist. It does not necessarily follow, however, that their understanding of the Eucharist and its implications is in harmony with that of the Catholic faith.

- **that the person be properly disposed.**

The same is asked of a Christian not in full communion with the Catholic Church as is expected of a Catholic wishing to receive the sacraments. There are Catholics who are unable to receive Holy Communion because of their being, for example, in a state of serious sin or in an irregular marital situation; the same may be true of another Christian seeking admission to Holy Communion. The Eucharist is an awesome and holy gift of God to his Church: it should be approached with reverence and great care as we seek to welcome the living Lord into the temple of our lives.

115 Catholic priests should treat with kindness and sensitivity other Christians who seek admission to these sacraments, welcoming them with pastoral love even when their request cannot be granted. Asking a few simple questions can help to discern the situation in each individual case. What is the nature of the person's spiritual need? Are all of the necessary conditions fulfilled? What special circumstances prevent the person from approaching a minister of his or her own

“welcoming them with pastoral love even when their request cannot be granted”

community? What is unique about this particular moment or occasion? Is there sufficient faith in the sacrament desired? That is, does the person believe in general terms what the Catholic Church believes, and certainly not deny the essentials of Catholic belief in the particular sacrament? Is he or she properly disposed, a person not in a state of serious or scandalous sin and ready to approach the sacrament with humility and reverence? Is he or she open to the growth of visible unity among Christians? Such careful discernment is very important, as the sacraments should not be denied to those whom the present law of the Church allows to receive them.

Norm on Catholics approaching ministers of other Churches and ecclesial communities

116 Whenever necessity requires or a genuine spiritual advantage commends it, and provided the danger of error or indifferentism is avoided, Christ's faithful for whom it is physically or morally impossible to approach a Catholic minister may lawfully receive Holy Communion, and the sacraments of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick, from ministers in other faith communities whose sacraments are accepted as valid by the Catholic Church.²¹²

Commentary

117 Whereas in the case of the Eastern Churches, it is lawful for Catholics to receive the sacraments in such situations from a minister of an Eastern Church, this is not the case with those Christian communities which find their roots in the Reformation. A Catholic seeking these sacraments must do so 'only from a minister in whose Church these sacraments are valid and from one who is known to be validly ordained according to the Catholic teaching on ordination.'²¹³ For historical and theological reasons, there are special difficulties with regard to Anglican orders. These remain unresolved in spite of what some see as a change of circumstances in the twentieth century, for example through achievement of reaching some important agreement between Catholics and Anglicans on the nature of ordained ministry. We are very much aware that this is a sensitive question, and one which can be a source of hurt to ministers of communities with whom we seek to work as friends in the name of Christ. However, we have to say to members of the Catholic community in our countries that it is not permissible for Catholics to receive Holy Communion, or

212 *Code of Canon Law*, can. 844.2; *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, no. 132.

213 *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, no. 132.

the sacraments of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick, from ministers of the Anglican Communion (the Church of England, the Church of Ireland, the Church in Wales, the Scottish Episcopal Church), the Church of Scotland or of other faith communities rooted in the Reformation. It is for this reason that exceptional sacramental sharing between the Catholic Church and these faith communities cannot be reciprocal, whereas this is sometimes a real possibility with the Eastern Churches not in full communion with the Catholic Church [see earlier, no. 41].

‘May we all be one’

118 Many will have hoped for encouragement of greater sacramental sharing. Others will think we have gone too far. We too are conscious of the difficulties of not being able to share one table of the Lord with our brothers and sisters in Christ. As Christians together, we walk in pilgrimage towards the Father, still deeply wounded by our lack of full communion in faith. The fundamental principle which underlies our norms, is that ‘the Eucharist is properly the sacrament of those who are in full communion with the Church.’²¹⁴ It is important that Catholics themselves understand this doctrine. We appeal in love and in truth to the whole Catholic community in our countries for their faithfulness to the deepest meaning of the Mass. Our norms are also rooted in our desire for the full visible unity of all Christians. We echo the words of Pope John Paul: it is precisely ‘for the sake of furthering ecumenism’ that we appeal for our norms to be respected.²¹⁵

119 We bishops have addressed together the situation in our countries at this moment, open to the spiritual needs expressed by others and yet at the same time faithful to the Catholic understanding of the Church and the Eucharist, and to the discipline of the Catholic Church. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* suggests, ‘The more painful the experience of the divisions in the Church which break the common participation in the table of the Lord, the more urgent are our prayers to the Lord that the time of complete unity among all who believe in him may return.’²¹⁶ We know only too well that the Catholic Church’s understanding of itself and our convictions about who may and may not be admitted to Holy Communion can and do cause distress both to

“the Eucharist is properly the sacrament of those who are in full communion with the Church”

“unity in Christ is unity both in truth and in love”

²¹⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1395.

²¹⁵ Pope John Paul II, Encyclical *Ut unum sint*, no. 46.

²¹⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1398.

other Christians and to some Catholics.²¹⁷ It is not, however, the Church's norms on sacramental sharing which cause division: those norms are simply a reflection and consequence of the painful division already present because of our Christian disunity. People often ask, 'What would Jesus do?', implying that he would offer the gift of himself to anyone who asked. Jesus himself was often the cause of division. His will was that all be one, but his teaching and actions led to people going away from him. This was even true of his 'hard saying' on the Bread of Life.²¹⁸ Unity in Christ is unity both in truth and in love.

120 We are fully committed to our common pilgrim path towards reconciliation and full visible unity as Christians. As stated in the *Swanwick Declaration* in 1987, our earnest desire is to become more fully, in God's own time, the one Church of Christ, 'united in faith, communion, pastoral care and mission.' We rejoice at the growth of understanding and deepening of communion between us. At the same time, however, no far-reaching progress will be made unless we recognise that serious matters still divide us and respect the sincerely held convictions of one another. We are deeply grateful to our friends in other Christian traditions who with great understanding and patience respect the disciplines of our Church.

“the link between the ‘Body of Christ’ which is the Eucharist and the ‘Body of Christ’ which is the Church is very profound”

121 These norms on sacramental sharing are a reflection in practice of the Catholic Church's self-understanding and Eucharistic faith presented in the earlier part of our document. They are intimately connected with our sense of identity as Catholics. The link between the 'Body of Christ' which is the Eucharist and the 'Body of Christ' which is the Church is very profound. We hope that common study of these difficult questions may lead

²¹⁷ Cf. Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, *Mixed Marriages: Revised Directory* (1990), p. 6.

²¹⁸ Cf. *John* 6.60f.

to a deeper understanding of the nature of the Church, and bring nearer the day when we can come together united in faith at one Eucharist. Let us walk together towards that day when we can truly say together one great 'Amen' to the whole mystery of the Eucharist, to the Body of Christ given for us and the Blood of the Lord poured out for us. Our prayer to the Father is the same today as that expressed in one of the very earliest Christian writings, the *Didache*:

*As this broken bread, once dispersed over the hills,
was brought together and became one loaf,
so may your Church be brought together
from the ends of the earth
into your Kingdom.*²¹⁹

²¹⁹ *Didache*, no. 9.4.

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