



<b>WORKSHOPS – B1.1 &amp; D1.1</b> <b>TITLE : FOSTERING SPIRITUAL ECUMENISM</b>	<b>SPEAKER : CHARLES WHITEHEAD</b>
<b>LANGUAGE : ENGLISH – Video (En / Sp / Fr)</b>	<b>COUNTRY : UK</b>

*“I, the prisoner in the Lord, implore you therefore to lead a life worthy of your vocation. Bear with one another charitably, in complete selflessness, gentleness and patience. Do all you can to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds you together. There is one Body, one Spirit, just as you were all called into one and the same hope when you were called. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God who is Father of all, over all, through all and within all” (Ephesians 4:1-6)*

## Introduction

Divisions in the body of Christ restrict our effectiveness in building the Kingdom and undermine our witness to the world. In looking at the progress that has been made in building unity we will consider the challenges that still lie ahead, and look at the special role of the **Charismatic Renewal** in this vital work. The Catholic Church looks upon ecumenism as essential to her life today. This means that **Spiritual Ecumenism** should be essential to you and to me.

## What does this mean in practice?

**Spiritual Ecumenism** is a phrase taken from **the Second Vatican Council 1962-1965**, and its basic meaning is to build good relationships with members of other churches and Christian communities, to get to know and love one another, to pray together, and to do together as much as we can. If this is to happen, we all have an important part to play, especially those of us who are involved in the **Charismatic Renewal**, for as Pope Francis has reminded us: *“the Renewal is by its very nature ecumenical.”* We must joyfully celebrate that grace, and release the fire of the Holy Spirit, so that individuals and organisations can be transformed and equipped to face the challenges of the future.

## Our history

The teaching of the Catholic Church under Pope Pius XI in 1928 stated that it was completely wrong to pray with other Christians (**Mortalium Animos**) so prayer together was absolutely forbidden. Seventy years ago, when I started school in 1947, I went to a local Anglican primary school and had to leave the Morning Assembly when they had a short prayer time to dedicate the work of the day to God and invoke the help of the Holy Spirit. But in 1949

everything changed when a Vatican statement was issued which said: *“the growing desire for unity is under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit”*. Prayer together was immediately encouraged, and I was told by our parish priest to stay and join in the prayers in the Morning Assembly at school.



## The Second Vatican Council – “Unitatis Redintegratio” 1964

Pope Saint John XXIII said he was determined to put Christian unity firmly on the map and the first sentence of the Council’s document on Christian unity, **Unitatis Redintegratio**, begins with the words: ***“The restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council”***. Section 3 stated: ***“All who have been justified by faith in baptism are members of Christ’s body and have a right to be called Christian, and so are correctly accepted as brothers (and sisters) by the children of the Catholic Church”***. For the first time the Council Fathers formally recognised authentic faith in Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the other churches too, accepting that divisions in the church contradicted the will of Christ and scandalised the world. So the Council voted overwhelmingly for positive relationships with other Christians, drawing on Scripture and Tradition to set out a positive and theologically grounded vision of other churches so that Ecumenical dialogue, which sought to establish ever fuller communion, really did become central to the mission and identity of the Catholic Church.

## The Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity

When this Council was formally established shortly after Vatican II, on-going dialogues quickly began with the Orthodox, mainline Protestant and some Pentecostal churches. These continue today and have born very good fruit for all the various expressions of the body of Christ, and in recent years the first steps have been taken in conversations with the new Independent Churches as well. A high point in the work of the Council was the publication in 1999 of the joint agreement reached with the Lutheran Church about the doctrine of justification by faith alone, which caused some to say that the protest which triggered Martin Luther’s Reformation was now over.

## Our recent Popes

When writing ***“Ut Unum Sint”*** Pope St. John Paul II clearly stated that in doing this ***“I am obeying the Lord”***, and Pope Benedict reminded us that ***“for Catholics ecumenism is absolutely central to Christian life”***. In his encyclical ***“Evangelii Gaudium”***, Pope Francis has moved ecumenism forward dramatically, particularly in sections 244-246, which include the words: ***“If we really believe in the abundantly free working of the Holy Spirit, we can learn so much from one another! Not just to be better informed about them, but rather about reaping what the Spirit has sown in them which is also meant to be a gift for us”***.



## Some Personal Thoughts

Sometimes we may have to accept circumstances that exist - this is the case with the current lack of unity in the Christian world. But we always have a choice how we want to behave within these circumstances; to do nothing is not acceptable. Sitting back and pretending we cannot see a situation that is wrong will never lead us forward. In order to heal the pain of division we must not only accept that there is division, we must also feel the pain ourselves. Only then will we begin to move forward and to build good relationships with all our Christian Brothers and sisters. We must be pro-active – **Spiritual Ecumenism** calls for this. As the **Catholic Catechism** tells us in section 821, we need the Holy Spirit to be at work in us bringing about conversion of heart. Then we need prayer in common – the heart of **Spiritual Ecumenism**. This will lead to a desire for fraternal knowledge of each other, involving dialogue and regular meetings which will in turn lead to collaboration in our human service. We all need to be the best we can be in whatever situation God has put us, and for most of us this means beginning with the other local Christian churches where we live.

## What More Can We Do Today?

I have taken some time to explain the background and the changes in our approach as a Church to ecumenism because this helps us to understand why it is so important to move forward in this area today. Pope Francis has reminded us that ***“the Renewal is by its very nature ecumenical”*** and has pointed out that ***“the Catholic Renewal rejoices over what the Spirit is doing in other churches today”***. We know from our own experience ***“How good and pleasant it is when brothers (and sisters) live together in unity.....for there the Lord bestows his blessing”*** Psalm 133. When it comes to our personal part, we are not responsible for the actions and re-actions of other people but we are responsible for our own actions and re-actions. So we must do everything we can to build unity, following the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and above all this means making contacts and building good personal relationships with other Christians. As Pope Francis writes in ***Evangelii Gaudium: “Through an exchange of gifts the Spirit can lead us ever more fully into truth and goodness.....We must never forget that we are pilgrims journeying alongside one another. This means that we must have sincere trust in our fellow pilgrims, putting aside all suspicions or mistrust and turn our gaze to what we are all seeking: the radiant peace of God’s face”***. We do this by building trust, respect, understanding and love for each other. All of this takes time and commitment.



## Conclusion

I want to finish with some important principles we can adopt to guide our ecumenical work.

1. We must recognise one another as brothers and sisters in Christ through our shared commitment to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour.
2. We should remain absolutely faithful to who we are – committed charismatic members of the Catholic Church.
3. We acknowledge that there are important differences between us but that more unites us than divides us.
4. We need to grow in love for each other – love is the true sign of the presence of Jesus Christ.
5. We are asked to listen to each other and grow in our mutual understanding and respect.
6. We all bear some responsibility for the scandal of division – we must repent together for this. Many of us have been hurt by the attitudes of some Christians from other traditions and churches, but we may without knowing it have also caused them problems.
7. We should always do together whatever we can, recognising that there may be a price to pay for this but never forgetting that Jesus and his Father want unity among us and that it's a work of the Holy Spirit.
8. Finally, we need to pray as if it all depends on God, whilst working hard as if it all depends on us.

In all this let us be guided by the Spirit even when it means dying to ourselves. St. Paul writes: ***“I do appeal to you, brothers, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, to make up the differences between you, and instead of disagreeing among yourselves, to be united again in your belief and practice” (1 Corinthians 1:10).*** When it comes to **Spiritual Ecumenism** each of us needs to ask what the Lord is saying to us, to listen to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, and then to do what he is asking.

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