

BUILDING A CHURCH OF COMMUNION THE PASTORAL VISION OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF WINNIPEG

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This year we are celebrating the 90th anniversary of the creation of our Archdiocese. We are truly a people *summoned by God...rich in diversity* and we give thanks to God for the gift of our local church. One of the tasks of our anniversary year is to set priorities for the next ten years so that we can celebrate our Centennial with minds and hearts renewed. This year also marks the 40th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council and is a time to rediscover the Council's teaching. The documents of Vatican II remain the prism through which we see ourselves and discover who we are called to be as church.

One of the principal teachings of Vatican II is church as communion. Understanding the Church as communion means that we are called to reflect the life of the Trinity. The persons of the trinity - Father, Son and Spirit - are integral to one another and exist in self-giving love. If we are to live church as communion we are called to reflect the life of the Trinity; each of us is called to live in relationship, not only with God, but also with one another. Images such as the Body of Christ and Christ as vine and we as branches illustrate that the baptised are not only related to God in Christ, but are also related to each other in radical new ways. Here in Winnipeg we experience this communion with the 155,000 Catholics who gather for worship in our 94 parishes and missions and who continue to spread the Good News in our schools, hospitals, institutions and many other good works. Together we are called to continue to build a church of communion.

In its document on the Church, the Vatican Council spoke of the Church as a pilgrim people...a people moving through history and being shaped by this journey. This means that the Church, while at its heart one and the same, is always a project under construction. It is never finished and will only be complete when the Lord returns in glory.

God is continually shaping and reshaping us so that we will always be a clearer sign and a bolder sacrament of God's saving will for all people. In a church of communion, each and every baptised member of the Church is a sharer in this great mystery. Each of the baptised is anointed with the Spirit and made one with Christ, who leads us to the Father. In baptism all are equal in dignity. To quote St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians "*there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female.*" Nor would I add is there any distinction between clergy and lay. We are all one in Christ. The divine Trinity is present in the heart of each believer: loving, leading and drawing us deeply into relationship. Every baptised person is endowed with indispensable gifts for the service of the Church and the world. Each one of us has a right to contribute and everyone has a responsibility to contribute.

We are also a hierarchical church precisely because of the diversity, the richness and the indispensability of the gifts which the spirit bestows. While we share equality in baptism, there are a variety of tasks which call for different forms of leadership. To preserve and

order the gifts to the common good, the Lord established shepherds with authority to ensure that this gifted community would remain united in faith and love. Clearly the role of the leader is not to extinguish the gifts or try to manipulate or control, but rather to empower the gifts of others so that the Church and the world may flourish.

As Pope John Paul II reminded us in his letter for the new millennium, all of this is gift, but then the gift becomes a task. We, the baptised, are challenged to grow and mature in faith, hope and love. Through baptism and ordination we have been made holy and now we must allow this holiness to transform our lives. The teaching of the Second Vatican Council calls each of us to a recognition of our dignity and to a discernment of our gifts.

How can this vision of Vatican II take root in the Archdiocese of Winnipeg today? First of all we must recognise that this is a new time. As church we have never been here before; we are breaking new ground. In the Gospel, Jesus warned us about the temptation of putting new wine into old wineskins. Receiving the teaching of the Council, implementing a new vision and building new ways of working together create challenging times. But this is also time for great creativity, risk taking, a time of victories and disappointments, a time for understanding, compassion and forgiveness. A truly wonderful time!

Since the Second Vatican Council we have grown accustomed to the concept of Parish Councils. Over the past three years we have been developing an Archdiocesan Pastoral Council and Deanery Pastoral Councils to set the priorities that will help us build a church of communion. During the coming years we are going to renew our Parish Councils to reflect this image of church by proposing that council members focus on pastoral issues which will enable this church of communion to take deep root in our Archdiocese.

There is a balance which we must strive for in the work of our Councils. In Canada we live in a democracy which serves us well. We are accustomed to the idea that majority rules; one person, one vote. But we know that the Church is not a democracy. The Church is a gift from God and the teaching and witness of Jesus Christ is central to all we do. That being said, many important aspects of democracy are not only compatible with, but also essential to the life of the Church. We will only become a church of communion when we: recognise the dignity and gifts of every person, believe in the fundamental equality of each person, are open to transparency and accountability and understand the value of listening to each other and discerning where the spirit is leading.

The building of a church of communion will, at times, be frustrating and in some places uneven. Yet it can and must work. It means that we must have a deep confidence born out of the dignity of baptism which inspires an awareness of our gifts and a willingness to use them for the good of the Church. It is the Spirit who builds up the Church, enabling us to contribute and collaborate. "Sitting on the fence", "shooting from the bushes" and cynically standing by are not options for Christians. If we are to build a church of communion, fear and cynicism must give way to trust. Generous collaboration is called for from all.

All of this will be accomplished if we pursue a life of holiness. Holiness is not just a matter of piety, but holiness means becoming who we are, who we have been made through baptism. Holiness requires an openness to others, a confident trust in others and a passionate desire to include all gifts in the building up of a church of communion. Holiness is incompatible with any sort of fear or manipulation. A communion based on holiness is a demanding vision and we need to recognise that the Cross always stands at the centre of such a vision. Creating communion demands trust in the Lord and trust in one another; it demands courage, patience, forgiveness and hope.

Building a church of communion will be our task over the next ten years. To this end for the next decade we will focus on four priorities as an archdiocesan church. These priorities, discerned through consultation, will be: **liturgy, education, community building** and **stewardship**. Over the coming months and years we will elaborate upon, explore and define these priorities. Through workshops and seminars, information sessions and faith sharing we will give concrete form to our priorities. However starting today they will become the ways through which we will build a church of communion.

History tells us that it takes about 100 years for the Church to receive the teaching of a council. We are still very much in the early days of the Second Vatican Council. Much has been done, much remains to be done. We need to continue to strive with great energy to implement the vision of the Church given to us by Vatican II. The gifts, energy and good will of all members of our community are needed. As we journey toward our 100th anniversary as an Archdiocese, together, with the prayers of our patron St. Joseph, we can build a Church of communion.

Sincerely in Christ,

+ V. James Weisgerber
Archbishop of Winnipeg

Dated October 15, 2005 at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council meeting in Gimli,
Manitoba.