



The Ecumenical Catholic Communion
From the Office of the Presiding Bishop, Peter E. Hickman

July 1, 2011

Greetings to All the Sisters and Brothers of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion!

I remain grateful to our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have each received the gift of the Holy Spirit and I remain grateful to all of you who have responded to the call of the Spirit to dedicate yourselves to the noble endeavor of building up our beloved communion in both love and wisdom.

For the past seven years I have been blessed and privileged to serve as the Presiding Bishop of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion. I have watched the growth of our Beloved Communion in terms of numbers, but also in terms of the discovery of a sense of identity among our member communities and the people of those communities. I have seen people come to the ECC with both a sense of great hope and deep enthusiasm, but also with a sense of intense anxiety and the disquiet of confusion. We are never simple in terms of our emotions. We find ourselves embracing joy and frustration at the same time. Therefore, we ought often to ask God to purify us, remembering a verse from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the single-hearted, for they shall see God." (Matthew 5:8)

Nonetheless, I have observed a growing maturity and wisdom among us. Maturity and wisdom are the gifts of the Spirit that transform our weakness into strength. Again, the words of the Apostle Paul remind us: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:9) I have witnessed the anguish of the first years of the ECC, when our Synods were marked by struggle. Though many felt dismayed by this struggle of our early years, hope continued to move us forward, and maintained our unity. We were finally blessed by our persistent faith in the wonderful unity and progress of the 2010 Synod. At that time we affirmed new bishops: Bishop Rick Hollingsworth, Bishop Steve Rosczewski, and Bishop-elect Armando Leyva. We worked together to develop additional canons of the ECC Constitution, and elected new leadership within the House of Pastors and the House of Laity.

Since then, I have been blessed even more by witnessing the maturation of our ECC leadership among both our clergy and laity. On July 16 – the eve of the consecration of Father Armando Leyva as bishop - the Episcopal Council will hold its first face-to-face meeting. The bishops will gather to discuss the continued development of diocesan and national administration. It is my joy to witness the fruition of this stage of the full polity of the ECC in action. Our bishops will take their rightful place within the leadership of our synodal structure.

I have also seen a maturation in the Leadership Council of the Synod. They are in a wonderful dialogue with me over the development of the 2012 national synodal agenda of the ECC. It is marvelous to participate in lively discussions with those whom you have elected to represent their respective houses of governance. Even our differences of opinion become valuable tools to discern the mind of the Holy Spirit in the formation of policy and in discovering our path for the future. Your leaders, Carla Altepeter, Sarah Ball, Kedda Keough, and Frank Krebs, along with our chancellor, George Von Stamwitz, have labored to develop the internal workings of each house, to improve communication among the members, and to encourage participation in the further development of the education and the financial growth of the ECC. For this we must remain truly grateful.

So where are we going from here? This is a valuable question because it is a necessary enquiry in the process of discernment of the Spirit's lead for the ECC. The Synod of the Communion will soon be asked to make such discernment in electing the Presiding Bishop for the term of 2012-2016. It may also be asked to affirm additional dioceses and bishops. It is becoming apparent that the ECC will need to stretch its vision beyond the limits of America, as others seek inclusion in the Ecumenical Catholic Communion.

Already, my administration has experienced a call from Europe for such inclusion. I have received such requests from communities and individuals in Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland and Lithuania. Many of you met Brother Johannes Maertens at the 2010 Holy Synod in Saint Louis. He reported the Synod proceedings back to his European confreres, and they felt prompted in their discernment to join the ECC. Therefore, I will formally receive them into our beloved communion in September of this year, when I travel to Europe with Father Zilvinas Jakstas. I am also pleased that a new mission will be shortly planted in Mexico by the newly ordained Deacon Pamela Bachand-Yanez and her husband, Tirzo Yanez. (Pam was ordained at Saint Matthew Church this past Pentecost the first woman within our Hispanic community.)

I believe that this growth will continue. However, it is also my belief that the Holy Spirit will ask us to cooperate and contribute to that growth in four ways:

1. I will ask the Episcopal Council and the Leadership Council, to establish a committee to develop our educational resources. This committee will be comprised of qualified laity and clergy from across the ECC, and will create programs that will aid our local communities. We need to share who we are, both within the ECC and beyond. What is the meaning of "Catholic?" What is "Ecumenical?" Just how are we Catholic and what makes us distinct? What also unites us as one Catholic ecclesial body?
2. I will also ask the bishops, at the July meeting, to create a standing liturgical commission, again comprised of qualified clergy and laity with a background in liturgy and liturgical music. So often our communities do not know where to turn for continuous resources that reflect our Ecumenical spirit, while maintaining our Catholic tradition. This commission will draw from the experience and resources of all the communities of the ECC and will endeavor to create the books, musical aids and worship

aids drawing from the variety and richness of our collective worship experiences that will allow us to pray as one, yet maintain our diversity. Hopefully, they will also develop regional liturgical conferences to help our parishes in their ongoing formation and outreach to others.

3. I will ask the Episcopal Council and the House of Pastors to collaborate on the development of competent formation programs for the training and continued education of the ECC clergy. I have seen notable efforts in this area in the creation of the Saint Bonaventure Virtual House of Studies by Father Gregory Singleton, and the efforts of Father Jim Lehman to develop a deacon training program at Holy Family Parish in Las Cruces, New Mexico. Such efforts are, hopefully, only the beginning of such programs throughout the ECC.
4. Finally, I will ask the House of Laity to mobilize the people of our communion in efforts to develop an effective stewardship ministry among us in the sharing of all of our collective gifts both in the material and spiritual resources that God has graciously given to each of us. It will be the collective gifts of our laity that move all of us – bishops, clergy and laity – to find creative ways of financially aiding our communities and programs. We can thrive if we believe in our mission and let our time, talents, and treasure be in the same place as our belief and trust. Others will support such a mission, if we are clear about our identity and invite them to share our dream. We are sorely in need of stewardship development because the times call for us to dream bigger dreams. I believe with all my heart that others will join us, and contribute to our efforts, if we are accountable and organized in these efforts. There is nothing wrong in seeking financial contributions for our growth. Money is a wonderful servant, but in either abundance or scarcity it can become a terrible master. The Church needs to set the example of good stewardship by using its material resources to further its mission. I believe if that mission is worthwhile, many will joyfully support it. God will open both hearts and purses if we are clear about our dream, and accountable about our efforts. As the Apostle has written, “Consider this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do as already determined, without sadness or compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. Through this evidence of your service you are glorifying God in your profession of the Gospel of Christ and the generosity of your contribution for the sake of all others (2 Cor. 9:6,13).

The Grace and Peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be yours in all things!

+Peter Elder Hickman

Presiding Bishop of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion