

CHARIS and Ecumenism

From its beginning the Catholic Charismatic Renewal has been part of an ecumenical current of grace. CHARIS is therefore, according to its Statutes, “an instrument to promote and work for unity in the body of Christ, as expressed in the prayer of Jesus Christ (Jn 17)” (Preamble). One of its most important objectives is “to promote the ecumenical dimension of Catholic Charismatic Renewal and foster the commitment to serving the unity of all Christians” (art. 3f).

What is Ecumenism?

Ecumenism is seeking unity among all Christians of different churches and ecclesial communities. The foundation is our common faith in Christ and our baptism, in which sin is washed away, we become sons and daughters of the Father, brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, part of the great family of faith of all Christians, and coworkers with Christ in his kingdom.

Vatican Council II called all Catholics to engage in ecumenism: “This sacred Synod exhorts all the Catholic faithful to recognize the signs of the times and to participate actively in the work of ecumenism.”¹ Pope John Paul II taught that among Christians, “What unites us is much greater than what divides us.”²

Types of Ecumenism

There are four main kinds of ecumenism:

1. Theological ecumenism. This is the realm of Church leaders and theologians. It focuses primarily on doctrinal issues and on some pastoral practices. There are often joint statements on the progress or conclusion of these processes. The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification by Catholic and Lutheran leaders is one example.
2. Spiritual ecumenism. This involves common prayer and worship, examination of conscience, repentance for sins against unity, forgiveness, conversion of heart, and openness to the work of the Holy Spirit who alone can bring about the restoration of unity among Christians.
3. Relational ecumenism. This is also known as ecumenism of life or an ecumenism of love or charity. It involves Christians of different faith communions developing relationships with one another and seeing one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. As Pope Francis observes, “If we really believe in the abundantly free working of the Holy Spirit, we can learn so much from one another! It is not just about being better informed about others, but rather about reaping what the Spirit has sown in them, which is also meant to be a gift for us.”³

¹ *Decree on Ecumenism*, 4.

² *On Commitment to Ecumenism (Ut Unum Sint)*, 20.

³ Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel*, 246

4. Missionary ecumenism. This involves collaborating in evangelization and outreach to the poor and those in need. Recognizing that the divisions among Christians are a scandal to the world and a hindrance to the spread of the Gospel, we proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ with a united voice. "Relations between Christians are not aimed merely at mutual knowledge, common prayer and dialogue. They... call for every possible form of practical cooperation at all levels: pastoral, cultural and social, as well as that of witnessing to the Gospel message."⁴

CHARIS and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal are mainly called to the last three kinds of ecumenism.

The Goal of Ecumenism

The fundamental goal of ecumenism is that the body of Christ be united as one, as Jesus and the Father are one (Jn 17:21). Toward that end, we reach out beyond ourselves to our brothers and sisters in Christ, and by the work of the Holy Spirit we grow in understanding, in friendship with one another, and in deeper conversion to Jesus Christ. As Christians we announce Jesus together, adding the witness of our unity to the proclamation of the Gospel. The goal is not to persuade or win the other to our side or point of view.

Principles of Ecumenism

You cannot be fully ecumenical unless you are fully who you are. Catholics need to be authentically Catholic, and other Christians need to be authentic in their own faith traditions. This calls us to acknowledge and respect other Christians and their faith commitments.

While we may believe, worship, and live our Christian faith somewhat differently, we remain brothers and sisters in Christ, and we are called to treat one another with charity and respect. As Catholics we are obligated to respect the consciences and freedom of our brothers and sisters in Christ of other faith communions.

Ecumenism is a work of the Holy Spirit, not of our own endeavors. We must do our part and be faithful to what God calls us to, but finally it is Jesus Christ who saves us, and the Holy Spirit who transforms us individually and as a body, and who will bring about unity among all believers.

Evangelism and Ecumenism

Authentic evangelism is the proclamation of Jesus Christ and the Gospel, not proselytism, which seeks to impose rather than propose the Gospel to others. Ecumenism allows us to join with other Christians in evangelizing together. This living and realized witness powerfully enhances our evangelistic service. Ecumenism also recognizes the freedom of those evangelized to respond as the Holy Spirit leads them to their place in the body of Christ.⁵

Living out Ecumenism

⁴ Pope John Paul II, *On Commitment to Ecumenism*, 40.

⁵ Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, 206.

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal is called specially to develop bonds with Christians who are baptized in the Holy Spirit, taking part in the same current of grace. Some practical ways we can engage in ecumenism:

1. Educate yourself on what our own Church teaches about Christian unity, especially the *Decree on Ecumenism* of Vatican II and the encyclical of John Paul II, *On Commitment to Ecumenism*.
2. Pray for unity, for other Christians, and for guidance and wisdom from the Holy Spirit in reaching out to them.
3. Learn to appreciate the gifts we bring to one another from our respective faith communions.
4. Cultivate a profound respect for each other's conscience, freedom in Christ, points of view, and practices.
5. Pay attention to the small ways that our speech or actions may offend or annoy our Christian brothers and sisters and try to avoid doing so.
6. Make charity your aim in relating to other Christians. Love overcomes many things.
7. Once you have relationships with other Christians, look for ways you can pray together and serve those in need together, especially the poor, the sick, the lonely, the outcast, the suffering, and all on the margins of society.
8. Look for ways to evangelize and proclaim Christ and the Gospel together with other Christians.

Christian unity can only be achieved through a new Pentecost, both personal and in our faith communions. There will be no Christian unity without prayer, without conversion, without spiritual renewal, without reconciliation, and without working together.

We are celebrating “a flood of grace, the flood of grace of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. A work that was born... Catholic? No. It was born ecumenical! It was born ecumenical because it is the Holy Spirit who creates unity, and the same Spirit who granted the inspiration for this.” – Pope Francis, Pentecost Vigil, Circus Maximus, 3 June 2017