



# Bulletin from the Diocese of Santa Rosa



October 2007

My Dear People,

On June 29, 2007, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a document entitled “Responses to Some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine on the Church.” This was reported in the media and has caused some confusion among our people.

The purpose of this document was to clarify what the Church believes concerning her nature. This document has its historic roots in the Second Vatican Council’s Dogmatic Constitution: “Lumen Gentium” –which explained the nature of the Church; the Decrees of Ecumenism (Unitatis redintegratio) and the Oriental Churches (Orientalium Ecclesiarum).

The Vatican Council’s teachings have been explained since by Pope Paul VI in his Encyclical Letter “Ecclesiam suam” (1964) and Pope John Paul II in his Encyclical Letter “Ut unum sint” (1995). Also the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has issued clarifications on the nature of the Church in its declarations, “Mysterium Ecclesiae” (1973), “Communio notio” (1992), and “Dominus Jesus” (2000). All these documents serve to reveal what the Church understands as her very nature. The most recent clarifications by the Congregation draws from this body of documents to insure that all understand the nature of the Church as founded by Jesus Christ.

Basically the document states that we as Catholics believe that Jesus established here on earth only one Church and instituted it as a visible and spiritual community. We accept that from its beginning and throughout the centuries that all the elements instituted by Christ in that Church are found in the Catholic Church. In other words, we believe that the Catholic Church was founded by Christ and has all the essential elements that Christ gave it from the very beginning. Our Creed states: ‘We believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.’ And that Church is the Roman Catholic Church.

Other Churches and communities of faith presently separated from the Catholic Church are deprived neither of significance nor importance in the mystery of salvation. In fact the Spirit of Christ has used them as instruments of salvation. There are numerous elements of sanctification and of truth which are found outside the Catholic Church. But the full and whole truth is found in the Catholic Church.

The Orthodox Churches are seen as sister Churches having apostolic succession, the priesthood and the Eucharist. But since they do not accept the role of the Petrine ministry (the role of the Pope) in the Church, they lack something in their life. Pope John Paul II called upon these Churches to reflect with the Catholic Church on the role and ministry of Peter in the Church and how it should be exercised. Christian communities born out of the Reformation of the sixteenth century do not enjoy apostolic succession in the sacrament of Orders and are therefore deprived of a constitutive element of the Church.

In short, the Roman Catholic Church believes that it is the one true Church established by Christ. It always has and always will. Other churches are respected and revered. The prayer of all disciples of Christ is that of Jesus at the last supper: “That they all might be one.” Ecumenism is the dialogue between our faith communities in which we tell that truth about ourselves to the other. This is the rationale behind this recent document. I hope that this clarifies what the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith was about in this matter.

Assuring you of my prayers, I am

Your Brother and Servant in the Lord,

Most Reverend Daniel F. Walsh  
Bishop of Santa Rosa