



# THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY

## PRESENTATION

### History

The origin of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity is closely linked with the Second Vatican Council. It was Pope John XXIII's desire that the Catholic Church's involvement in the ecumenical movement be one of the Council's chief concerns. Thus, on 5 June 1960, he established a "Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity" as one of the preparatory commissions for the Council, and appointed Cardinal Augustin Bea as its first President. This was the beginning of the Catholic Church's formal commitment to the ecumenical movement.

At first, the main function of the Secretariat was to invite the other Churches and World Communions to send observers to the Second Vatican Council. Then, during the first weeks of the Council, Pope John XXIII placed the Secretariat on an equal footing with other conciliar commissions. The Secretariat thus prepared and presented to the Council documents on ecumenism (*Unitatis redintegratio*), on non-Christian religions (*Nostra aetate*), on religious liberty (*Dignitatis humanae*) and, together with the doctrinal commission, the dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*).

In 1963, the Holy Father specified that the Secretariat would be made up of two sections dealing respectively with the Orthodox Churches and ancient Oriental Churches on the one hand and with the Western Churches and Ecclesial Communities on the other.

In 1966, after the Council had ended, Pope Paul VI confirmed the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity as a permanent dicastery of the Holy See. Cardinal Bea continued in office as President until his death in 1968. In 1969, Cardinal Johannes Willebrands was named President to succeed him. Twenty years later, he retired and became President Emeritus. Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy was then named President of this Pontifical Council. In 2001 Cardinal Walter Kasper became President, and he was succeeded in 2010 by Cardinal Kurt Koch.

In the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus* (28 June 1988), Pope John Paul II changed the Secretariat into the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU).

### Purpose

The Council exercises a double role. First of all, it is entrusted with the promotion, within the Catholic Church, of an authentic ecumenical spirit according to the conciliar decree *Unitatis redintegratio*. For this purpose an Ecumenical Directory was published in 1967-1970 and a revised edition issued in 1993 entitled *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*.

At the same time, the Pontifical Council is active in all areas that can contribute to promoting Christian unity by strengthening relationships with other Churches and Ecclesial Communities. It organizes and oversees dialogue and collaboration with the other Churches and World Communions. Since its creation, it has also cooperated closely with the World Council of Churches (WCC) based in Geneva. From 1968, Catholic theologians have been full members of the "Faith and Order" Commission, the theological department of the WCC.

Similarly, it is the task of the PCPCU to name Catholic observers at various ecumenical gatherings and in turn to invite observers or 'fraternal delegates' of other Churches or Ecclesial Communities to major events of the Catholic Church.

At present, the PCPCU is engaged in an international theological dialogue with each of the following Churches and World Communions:

- The Orthodox Church as a whole
- The Oriental Orthodox Churches
- The Orthodox Syrian Church of Malankara
- The Syrian Orthodox Church of Malankara
- The Assyrian Church of the East
- Old Catholic Bishops' Conference Union of Utrecht
- The Anglican Communion
- The Lutheran World Federation
- The World Communion of Reformed Churches
- The World Methodist Council
- The Baptist World Alliance
- The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
- The Mennonite World Conference
- Some Pentecostal groups

-The World Evangelical Alliance

In 2009, Cardinal Walter Kasper published *Harvesting the Fruits*, a synthesis of the achievements and challenges of forty years of dialogue between Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans, Reformed and Methodists. In order to make known as widely as possible the result of its work for Christian unity, the PCPCU publishes on the Vatican website a bulletin called *Information Service*, in English and French.

Structure

The Pontifical Council is under the direction of the Cardinal President. He is assisted by a Secretary and an Under-Secretary. Relations with other Churches and Ecclesial Communities are divided into two sections:

- the Eastern section deals with Orthodox Churches of Byzantine tradition and the Oriental Orthodox Churches (Coptic, Syrian, Armenian, Ethiopian and Malankara), as well as the Assyrian Church of the East;
- the Western section is responsible for relations with the different Churches and Ecclesial Communities of the West.