Why Be Ecumenical?

We are brothers and sisters in Christ. To achieve unity, it's "all hands on deck." We respect the bonds between us—forged in baptism—are stronger than all the good consciences of our brothers and sisters.

Our road to unity is through prayer, work and life together. Disunity is sabotaging our mission. The scandal of disunity compels us to work for a united future.

In Christ, our future is together. Why Be Ecumenical?
Why Be Ecumenical?

by Sean Connolly

This issue of Vine & Branches emerged out of the sense of wonder and amazement at our ecumenism that so many participants experienced at the Pastoral Training Institute (PTI) in March. At the PTI, we experienced a profound sense of brotherly connection that transcended time and theology—with John Wesley and his Methodist followers, with the one-eyed preacher William Seymour who helped launch the worldwide Pentecostal explosion at Azusa Street, with the Catholic bishops who gathered for the Second Vatican Council, and especially with one another. And right along with this experience of union came a renewed commitment to our ecumenical calling in the People of Praise.

There are many thematic overlaps between this issue and the talks from the PTI, now available on the People of Praise web site. Readers may find them mutually illuminating.

Twenty-nine people made the covenant of the People of Praise on October 15, 1971. Twenty-eight Catholics and a Presbyterian named Bob Oleson.

How did it come about that we were ecumenical from the very start? I always thought it was because the charismatic prayer meetings that preceded the community were also ecumenical. If God was pouring out his Spirit on Catholics and Protestants alike, and if his Spirit was creating a new harmony in their relating, who were we to put up a dividing wall when it came time to form a community?

The Spirit moves in an ecumenical way; and so we follow by starting an ecumenical community. It's basic logic, as it was in the beginning. (See, for example, Acts 10:47.)

While not denying this logic, Paul DeCelles (South Bend) offered a deeper explanation in his PTI talk: “We who were trained in the Cursillo movement and the liturgical movement and philosophy were Catholics who started an ecumenical community because we were ecumenical Catholics.” Ecumenical Catholics, as Paul explained, are Catholics who are animated by the ecumenical spirit of the Second Vatican Council.

A little bit of background: the ecumenical movement began in the late 19th century among members of Protestant churches, but the Catholic Church didn’t formally participate until the early 1960s. (There were some informal ecumenical stirrings in the Catholic Church during the first part of the 20th century). In 1961, when Catholic Cardinal Augustin Bea visited Lambeth Palace, the official residence of the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, he was the first Catholic cardinal to do so in 400 years! There simply weren’t many ecumenical Catholics during the first part of the 20th century, but Vatican II changed that.

In 1964, when the council fathers ratified the Decree on Ecumenism by a nearly unanimous vote, Cardinal Bea noted that the Catholic Church was pledging itself to the ecumenical cause “with all the means at its disposal.” In the Decree on Ecumenism and elsewhere, the council fathers articulated a number of themes—themes that other ecumenical Christians from different traditions had already begun to rally around: the experience of brotherhood and sisterhood across denominational lines, the centrality of baptism, a sense of horror at our present divisions, a sense that our future will be a united future, the rejection of coercion in matters of faith, and the active role of the Holy Spirit in uniting Christians. There was a new spirit in the air.

Kevin and Dorothy Ranaghan were moving in this spirit when, in 1967, just two years after the close of the council, they overcame their initial skepticism about reports that some of their Catholic friends in Pittsburgh had been baptized in the Spirit. (Kevin characterized their initial reaction as, “nothing useful could come from Pentecostals.”) But, after turning to Scripture, the early church Fathers and, crucially, to the documents of Vatican II, the Ranaghans decided they would be open to a surprising idea: that a Pentecostal baptism in the Holy Spirit experienced by Catholic friends at a prayer meeting composed of Presbyterians and Episcopalians just might have its root in God. (Kevin has the details in his PTI talk on Catholic Pentecostalism.)

The Ranaghans were moving again in that spirit in 1967 when they turned to Pentecostal brothers and sisters for advice on exercising the spiritual gifts.

And the founding members of the community were moving in that spirit on October 15, 1971, when they chose not to form an exclusively Catholic community in spite of their huge Catholic majority, for Presbyterian Bob Oleson was a brother in Christ.

As I listened to the talks that Overall Coordinator Craig Lent arranged for the PTI, I began to
sense this ecumenical spirit—and the various themes I mentioned above—everywhere, not only in the Vatican II documents but in statements of other Protestant and Catholic leaders cited at the PTI. At times, it seemed like these leaders were all drawing from the same set of note cards.

After the PTI, I decided to do a rapid read-through of ecumenical statements and documents from a variety of different Christian churches to see if I could find more evidence of the themes. This issue is the result.

It features 10 sections, each highlighting one theme. Each section includes examples of the ways the theme has been articulated and expressed by Christians from a variety of backgrounds: Anglicans, Lutherans, Methodists, Orthodox Christians, Pentecostals, Roman Catholics and others.

In each section, we have printed these statements two times: once in plain text, and once in a colorful poster that makes some of the interesting patterns and similarities in the statements more apparent.

Taken together, these 10 themes capture some of the gut-level insights and inspirations that led our founders to create an ecumenical community in 1971, insights that can still move us to strengthen our ecumenical identity today.

Why be ecumenical? I hope that reading this issue will aid your own reflection on that question, and on the “reason for the hope that is in you”—that all Christians will one day be one (1 Pt. 3:15).

A Call for Your Participation:

Why be ecumenical? This issue features answers in the words of popes and patriarchs, pastors and lay people, from Scripture and from our own founding documents. But there is a crucial element missing: your words. Many of us have stories about the blessings of living in an ecumenical community, and we are hoping that some of these stories and experiences will pop into your mind as you read through these pages.

We want to publish those stories. Our plan is to launch a group blog as part of the People of Praise web site, a place where we can all read one another’s stories and add our own comments and reflections. This is a first for us—an interactive Vine & Branches issue with an online component. To get your storytelling juices flowing, each section of this issue ends with an open-ended question. To make it very easy for you to submit a story, we’ve set up a special text message number: 574-208-3726. You can use this number to contact us while you’re reading the issue, as soon as you have an idea. If you get an idea for a story while you’re reading this, send us a text message, and we’ll follow up by phone at your convenience, listen to your story and then write it up for you so that it can be included on the blog. The blog is open now at www.peopleofpraise.org/ecumenism.

Of course, you can also email your stories directly to thevine@peopleofpraise.org, or call us at the same number, 574-208-3726.

Thank you for participating!
We are brothers and sisters in Christ.
In Scripture:

“If any one says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen” (1 Jn. 4:20, RSV).

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28, ESV).

In the statements of Christian churches and church leaders:

“The most significant results of ecumenism in the last decades—and also the most gratifying—are not the various documents, but rediscovered fraternity: the fact that we have rediscovered one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, that we have learned to appreciate one another and together we have taken up the journey towards full unity” (Reflection by Cardinal Walter Kasper, head of the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity, November 23, 2007).

On the evening before the Second Vatican Council began, Cardinal Augustin Bea, the first head of the Vatican’s Secretariat for Christian Unity, welcomed 53 Protestant and Orthodox guests to observe the council. “My dear brothers in Christ,” Bea greeted them. “Instead of a long enumeration of your titles, which I obviously respect, allow me to address you with the simple but very profound words: ‘My brothers in Christ’” (Council Daybook, Vatican II Sessions 1 and 2, p. 39. This passage was also quoted in the talk by Paul DeCelles on Vatican II at the 2011 PTI.).

The world-traveling evangelist Rev. Billy Graham had never met a pope until 1981, when he went to the Vatican to visit John Paul II. “[Graham] and the pope chatted like long-lost friends for half an hour, swapping photos, gifts, and travel stories. Before Graham left, John Paul II reached over, clutched Graham’s thumb, and told him, ‘We are brothers’” (Christianity Today editorial after Pope John Paul II’s death in 2005).

“But now I have reconciled in my mind that God has his people in all kinds of places and all kinds of churches and groups. I have found many people in the Roman Catholic Church, both clergy and laity, who I believe are born-again Christians. They may hold different theological views than I hold, but I believe they are in the body of Christ. So I consider them brothers and sisters in Christ” (Rev. Billy Graham, interview with David Aikman, Time, May 28, 1990).

“All who accept Christ as Lord and Savior are brothers and sisters in Christ. Evangelicals and Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ. We have not chosen one another, just as we have not chosen Christ. He has chosen us, and he has chosen us to be his together” (Evangelicals & Catholics Together, The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium, 1994).

“Methodists and Anglicans already meet and recognize Christ in each other” (Sharing in the Apostolic Communion, a statement of the Anglican-Methodist dialogue, 1986).

In 1964, Pope Paul VI and Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras agreed to lift the mutual excommunications, dating from 1054, that had created the Great Schism between the churches of the East and the West. The pope and the patriarch exchanged a “kiss of peace.” Photo courtesy of Catholic News Service.
What difference has this reality of our brotherhood and sisterhood in Christ across denominational lines made for you?

In *The Spirit and Purpose* “Out of love for our Lord and for all our brothers and sisters in Christ, we are dedicated to unity in the body of Christ, and we share our common life and ministry as baptized brothers and sisters in our respective churches and denominations” (#1).

Left: In Allendale, Peter and Sheila Timler (South Bend) chatted with Patti Deakin (Allendale) in summer, 2011. Right: Keith and Stephanie Justen (at the head and foot of the table) hosted a seder in their Portland home in 2010. The Justens now live in northern Virginia.

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But now I have reconciled in my mind that God has his people in all kinds of places and all kinds of churches and groups. I have found many people in the Roman Catholic Church, both clergy and laity, who I believe are born-again Christians. They may hold different theological views than I hold, but I believe they are in the body of Christ. So I consider them brothers and sisters in Christ. And Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ. We have not chosen one another, just as we have not chosen Christ. He has chosen us, and he has chosen us to be his together.

But now I have reconciled in my mind that God has his people in all kinds of places and all kinds of churches and groups. I have found many people in the Roman Catholic Church, both clergy and laity, who I believe are born-again Christians. They may hold different theological views than I hold, but I believe they are in the body of Christ. So I consider them brothers and sisters in Christ. And Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ. We have not chosen one another, just as we have not chosen Christ. He has chosen us, and he has chosen us to be his together.

Instead of a long enumeration of your titles, which I obviously respect, allow me to address you with the simple but very profound words: “My brothers in Christ.”

The most significant results of ecumenism in the last decades—and also the most gratifying—are not the various documents, but rediscovered fraternity:

the fact that we have rediscovered one another as brothers and sisters in Christ . . .

Cardinal Walter Kasper

Rev. Billy Graham Evangelicals & Catholics Together

[Evangelicals and Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ. We have not chosen one another, just as we have not chosen Christ. He has chosen us, and he has chosen us to be his together. Evangelicals & Catholics Together]
The bonds between us—forged at baptism—are stronger than all that divides us.
In Scripture:

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:4-6, NRSV).

“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:12-13, RSV).

In the statements of Christian churches and church leaders:

“‘My Brothers in Christ.’ This title immediately plunges us into a deep awareness of the incomparable grace of baptism, which has established indestructible bonds that are stronger than all that divides us” (Cardinal Augustin Bea, speaking to Protestant and Orthodox observers at the opening of the Second Vatican Council, from the Council Daybook, Vatican II Sessions 1 and 2, p. 39).

“We acknowledge all those who believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, and have been baptized into the name of the Holy Trinity, as sharing with us membership in the universal Church of Christ which is His Body. We believe that the Holy Spirit has called us in a very solemn and special manner to associate ourselves in penitence and prayer with all those who deplore the divisions of Christian people” (The Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Communion, 1920).

“All who have been justified by faith in Baptism are incorporated into Christ; they therefore have a right to be called Christians, and with good reason are accepted as brothers in the Lord by the children of the Catholic Church” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1997, # 818, quoting Decree on Ecumenism, #3, 1964).

“[O]ur brotherhood is not the consequence of a large-hearted philanthropy or a vague family spirit. It is rooted in recognition of the oneness of Baptism” (Pope John Paul II, Ut Unum Sint, #42, 1995).

“It is a fundamental conviction that, in Jesus Christ, the church is already one. This forms the basis for ecumenical endeavors: to seek to make visible this Christ-given unity” (The Ecumenical Stance of the Presbyterian Church USA, 2008).

“The unity of the Church of God is a perpetual fact; our task is not to create it, but to exhibit it” (Archbishop of Canterbury William Temple, sermon at the opening service of the Second World Conference on Faith and Order, Edinburgh, 1937).

“How is it possible to remain divided, if we have been ‘buried’ through Baptism in the Lord’s death, in the very act by which God, through the death of his Son, has broken down the walls of division? Division ‘openly contradicts the will of Christ, provides a stumbling block to the world, and inflicts damage on the most holy cause of proclaiming the Good News to every creature’” (Pope John Paul II, Ut Unum Sint, #6, quoting Decree on Ecumenism, #1, 1964).
When have you seen the strength of our common bonds overcome an obstacle to unity in our life?

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In The Spirit and Purpose

It is rooted in recognition of the oneness of Baptism. We acknowledge all those who believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, and have been baptized into the name of the Holy Trinity as sharing with us membership in the universal Church of Christ, which is His Body.

All who have been justified by faith in Baptism are incorporated into Christ; therefore have a right to be called Christians and with good reason are accepted as brothers in Christ.”

“My grace which has established indelible bonds of baptism, plunges us into a deep awareness of the incomparable grace of Baptism, that we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. We were all baptized into Christ, and by one Spirit we were all put into our Lord Jesus Christ; and all were made to drink of one Spirit, Jews or Greeks, slaves or free.”

It is a fundamental conviction that in Jesus Christ, the church is already one. This forms the basis for ecumenical endeavors; to seek to make visible Christ-given unity.

Pope John Paul II, Ut Unum Sint, #42

Pope John Paul II, Ut Unum Sint, #42
Jesus’ prayer and our prayer is the same:
“that they may all be one.”
In Scripture:

“I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me, and I am in you, may they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (Jn. 17:20-21).

In the statements of Christian churches and church leaders:

“We must take seriously our Lord’s prayer in John 17... I have no problems working with anyone, under any label, as long as he knows the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior and is living the life of a Christian disciple” (Rev. Billy Graham, 1981 interview in Christianity Today).

“Christian believers must take seriously the prayer of Jesus in John 17... While the goodness of God has enabled different forms of Christianity to emerge and flourish in adaptation to different times and cultures, this is the same God who revealed himself once for all humanity in Jesus Christ and who calls all believers to fellowship in this one Redeemer; Lord, light, and master of all” (Mark A. Noll and Carolyn Nystrom, Is the Reformation Over?: An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism, 2005, p. 247).

“Jesus himself, at the hour of his Passion, prayed ‘that they may all be one’ (Jn. 17:21). This unity, which the Lord has bestowed on his Church and in which he wishes to embrace all people, is not something added on, but stands at the very heart of Christ’s mission” (Pope John Paul II, Ut Unum Sint, #9, 1995).

“We together pray for the fulfillment of the prayer of our Lord: ‘May they all be one; as you, Father, are in me, and I in you...’ We together, Evangelicals and Catholics, confess our sins against the unity that Christ intends for all his disciples” (Evangelicals and Catholics Together, 1994).

“As understood in Christ’s prayer, unity is given to the church, not for the sake of the church, but that the church might give itself in mission to the world for the sake of the Gospel” (Ecumenism: The Vision of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1991).

In 1977, the People of Praise organized an ecumenical conference in Kansas City which 45,000 people attended. The conference was the first occasion when classical Pentecostals, neo-Pentecostals and Catholic Pentecostals (known as the “three streams” of Pentecostalism) gathered en masse. In this photo, conference attendees raise their hands in prayer. Photo courtesy of the People of Praise archives.
Left: The Indianapolis Christians in Mission team held a tent meeting to celebrate Pentecost in spring, 2011. Right: A prayer meeting during a women’s retreat for the Corvallis, Vancouver-Portland and Yakima branches in April, 2009.

In The Spirit and Purpose

“Our Lord’s prayer for us is cause for hope, ‘that they may all be one. . . .’ In our time, we see the stirrings of this hope in the hearts of Christians everywhere” (#16).

When do you experience a longing for Christian unity?

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We must take seriously our Lord’s prayer in John 17 . . . .

I have no problems working with anyone, under any label, as long as he knows the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior and is living the life of a Christian disciple. 

Rev. Billy Graham, 1981 interview in Christianity Today

Jesus himself, at the hour of his Passion, prayed “that they may all be one.”

This unity, which the Lord has bestowed on his Church and in which he wishes to embrace all people, is not something added on, but stands at the very heart of Christ’s mission.

As understood in Christ’s prayer, unity is given to the church, not for the sake of the church, but that the church might give itself in mission to the world for the sake of the Gospel.

Pope John Paul II, Ut Unum Sint, #9

The Vision of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
Disunity is **sabotaging** our mission.
In Scripture:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you . . .” (Mt. 28:19-20, RSV).

“Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pt. 5:8, RSV).

In the statements of Christian churches and church leaders:

“(O)ur disunity undermines our gospel of reconciliation” (Lausanne Covenant, #7, 1974. The Lausanne Covenant was signed by 2,300 evangelical Christians from 150 countries).

“The fact that the Good News of reconciliation is preached by Christians who are divided among themselves weakens their witness. It is thus urgent to work for the unity of Christians, so that missionary activity can be more effective” (Pope John Paul II, Redemptoris Missio, #50, 1990).

“A Church divided . . . cannot render its due service to God or to man, and for the impotence which our sin has brought upon the Church through its divisions in its outward aspect we should be covered with shame and driven to repentance” (Archbishop of Canterbury William Temple, sermon at the opening service of the Second World Conference on Faith and Order, Edinburgh, 1937).

“One of the great hindrances to evangelism worldwide is the lack of unity among Christ’s people, a condition made worse when Christians compete and fight with one another rather than seeking together the mind of Christ” (The Amsterdam Declaration, #14, 2000. The Amsterdam Declaration was a statement that emerged from a gathering of 10,287 Protestant evangelists from 209 nations and territories.).

“The Faith cannot be adequately apprehended and the battle of the Kingdom cannot be worthily fought while the body is divided, and is thus unable to grow up into the fullness of the life of Christ” (The Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Communion, Resolution 9, 1920).

 “[T]he shameful reality is that, in many places around the world, the scandal of conflict between Christians obscures the scandal of the cross, thus crippling the one mission of the one Christ” (Evangelicals and Catholics Together, 1994).
Our missionaries say that the community’s ecumenism is an asset when they are knocking on doors. “I am a Catholic and he is a Presbyterian, but we are here together to talk to you about Jesus.”

When has our ecumenism allowed you to be a witness to the new reality of unity that is possible in our life?

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In The Spirit and Purpose
“We oppose in earnest the activities of Satan, who is the enemy of God and of mankind, and we especially oppose his continuing efforts to keep Christians divided from one another” (#1).
The Faith cannot be adequately apprehended and the battle of the Kingdom cannot be worthily fought while the body is divided, and is thus unable to grow up into the fullness of the life of Christ. The Lambeth Conference

One of the great hindrances to evangelism worldwide is the lack of unity among Christ's people, a condition made worse when Christians compete and fight with one another rather than seeking together the mind of Christ.

Archbishop William Temple

A Church divided... cannot render its service to God or to man, and for the impotence which our sin has brought upon the Church through its divisions in its outward aspect we should be covered with shame and driven to repentance.
The scandal of disunity compels us to work for a united future.
In Scripture:

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility, . . . that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility” (Eph. 2:13-15, ESV).

“[L]ead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:1-3, NRSV).

In the statements of Christian churches and church leaders:

“But amongst the chief evils of the age must be reckoned the marked division between the different churches. . . . As far as I am concerned I shall not shun any effort to redress this situation and if I am needed I am prepared to cross ten seas” (John Calvin, in a letter to Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer, 1552).

“The current Successor of Peter . . . is prepared to do everything in his power to promote the fundamental cause of ecumenism” (Pope Benedict XVI, from his first message after his election as pope, April 20, 2005).

“Orthodoxy understands that . . . dialogue exists only to reach the goal of communion and that there should be no deviation from this task until the goal is reached” (Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, in a letter to the Lutheran World Federation, 2010).

“We each recognize that the restoration of unity, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is an urgent imperative laid upon us to bring us into greater conformity with Christ’s will for his church” (Sharing in the Apostolic Communion, a statement of the Anglican-Methodist dialogue, 1986).

“The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is an active participant in the ecumenical movement, because of its desire for Christian unity. It seeks full communion as its goal, i.e., the fullest or most complete actualization of unity possible before the parousia with all those churches that confess the Triune God” (Ecumenism: The Vision of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1991).

“The restoration of unity is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council” (Vatican II, Decree on Ecumenism, #1, 1964).

“Such unanimity clearly shows that the Catholic Church, through its highest representatives, was now pledging itself to promote with all the means at its disposal the unity of all those who believe in Christ and who have been baptized in his name” (Cardinal Augustin Bea, commenting on the nearly unanimous vote by which the Second Vatican Council approved the Decree on Ecumenism).
Are there some circumstances that have triggered in you a strong sense of urgency about Christian unity?

What happened?

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Tim Dusenbury and Jenny (Nolan) Dusenbury (both northern Virginia) married in July, 2011. Also in the photo are, from left, Catholic priest Rev. Denis Donahue, Rev. Julian Dusenbury, a presbyterian minister and Tim’s father, and Mike Coney (New Orleans), a Catholic deacon. Right, from left: Suzanne Thomas, Larry Day, Anne Varevice (all South Bend), and Michelle Walker (Muncie) at the South Bend branch’s camp in summer, 2011.

In The Spirit and Purpose

“The establishment of a new people of God was an essential part of the saving work of Jesus Christ. . . . God’s plan is that all Christians should be united to him and thus be united with one another as his people—this is the secret of Christian unity” (#13).
Orthodoxy understands that . . . dialogue exists only to reach the goal of communion and that there should be no deviation from this task until the goal is reached. 

Patriarch Bartholomew

As far as I am concerned I shall not shun any effort to redress this situation and if I am needed I am prepared to cross ten seas. 

John Calvin
In Christ, our future is together.
In Scripture:

“For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph. 1:9-10, RSV).

In the statements of Christian churches and church leaders:

In December of 1960 the Archbishop of Canterbury (Geoffrey Fisher) and Pope John XXIII met in Rome in what was considered, even at the time, an epoch-making event. Fisher recorded the event: “The Pope read in English, a passage [from an address of his], which included a reference to ‘the time when our Separated Brethren should return to the Mother Church.’ I at once said: ‘Your Holiness, not return.’ He looked puzzled and said ‘not return? Why not?’ I said, ‘none of us can go backwards. We are now running on parallel courses; we are looking forward until, in God’s good time, our two courses approximate and meet.’ He said, after a moment’s pause, ‘You are right’” (Archbishop of Canterbury Geoffrey Fisher, from Augustin Bea: the Cardinal of Unity, by Stephan Schmidt, S.J., pp. 480-81. This passage was quoted by Paul DeCelles in his talk on Vatican II at the 2011 PTI.).

“And now let us ask ourselves: what does it mean to reestablish the unity of all Christians? Do we all know there are numerous models of unity and you know that the Catholic Church also has as her goal the full visible unity of the disciples of Christ, as defined by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council in its various documents... [T]his unity does not mean what could be called ecumenism of return: that is, to deny and to reject one’s own faith history. Absolutely not! It does not mean uniformity in all expression of theology and spirituality, in liturgical forms and in discipline. Unity in multiplicity, and multiplicity in unity” (Pope Benedict XVI, Address to non-Catholic Christians, Cologne, Germany, August, 2005).

“I find that in the Old Testament, God had one nation, Israel, for a witness, but he kept them twelve tribes forever. Only when they worshipped were they one nation; otherwise, in culture, in social life, they were, and are, twelve tribes to this day. If God was satisfied with that arrangement in the Old Testament, I think He will be quite happy to have all these denominational tribes, but when we worship, we must be one in the Spirit” (Pentecostal minister David du Plessis, quoted in Like a Mighty River, by David Manuel, 1977, p. 154).

“Several aspects of being Church are realized better in other churches. Therefore ecumenism is no one-way street, but a reciprocal learning process or—as stated in the encyclical Ut Unum Sint—an exchange of gifts. The way to it is therefore not a simple return of the others into the fold of the Catholic Church” (Cardinal Walter Kasper, head of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, That They May All Be One, 2004, p. 17).

“Yet asking whether the Reformation is over may not even be the most pertinent question. It may be more to the point to ask other questions: Is God truly going to draw people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation—and major Christian tradition—to worship together the Lamb who was slain? Can he really make of them—all these tongues and peoples and traditions—a single kingdom united in the body of his Son Jesus Christ? Should believers in an all-powerful, all-merciful God doubt that such signs and wonders might still take place?” (Mark A. Noll and Carolyn Nystrom, Is the Reformation Over?: An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism, 2005, p. 251).

“Jesus Christ is Lord. That is the first and final affirmation that Christians make about all of reality” (Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium, 1994).
In *The Spirit and Purpose*

“We realize that our communion will grow as our churches themselves achieve a proper form of unity” (#16).

**When have you experienced great hope for the united future of all Christians?**

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Several aspects of being Church and the reciprocal learning process or— as some say— not return. He looked puzzled and wondered whether the other party was being sincere.

In December 1960 the Archbishop of Canterbury (Geoffrey Fisher) and Pope John XXIII met in Rome in what was considered an epoch-making event. Fisher recorded the event, which included a reference to the time when our Separated Brethren should return to the Mother Church. He once said, 'Your Holiness, not return. He looked puzzled and wondered whether the other party was being sincere.'
To achieve unity, it’s “all hands on deck.”
In Scripture:

“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor 12:8, ESV).

In the statements of Christian churches and church leaders:

“Today, in many parts of the world, under the influence of the grace of the Holy Spirit, many efforts are being made in prayer, word and action to attain the fullness of unity which Jesus Christ desires. This sacred Synod exhorts all the Catholic faithful to recognize the signs of the times and to participate actively in the work of ecumenism” (Vatican II, Decree on Ecumenism, #4, 1964).

“Methodists gladly affirm their commitment to the ecumenical movement, and are invited to commit themselves afresh to work and pray for the visible unity of the one Church. This invitation summons the family of Methodists around the globe to prayer, that what happened in Jerusalem and Aldersgate through the moving power of the Holy Spirit will happen again in us” (Saved by Grace, #10, World Methodist Council, 1986).

“[T]hrough prayer the quest for unity, far from being limited to a group of specialists, comes to be shared by all the baptized. Everyone, regardless of their role in the Church or level of education, can make a valuable contribution, in a hidden and profound way” (Pope John Paul II, Ut Unum Sint, #70, 1995).

“Ecumenism must permeate, inform, and vitalize every aspect of this church’s faith and life, because it is bound to the Gospel and mission in our world” (Ecumenism: The Vision of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1991).

“[I]t is absolutely clear that ecumenism, the movement promoting Christian unity, is not just some sort of ‘appendix’ which is added to the Church’s traditional activity. Rather, ecumenism is an organic part of her life and work, and consequently must pervade all that she is and does” (Pope John Paul II, Ut Unum Sint, #20, 1995).

“For Christian unity is not something remote and far away. The local church brings together in one corporate fellowship different members with a variety of gifts and in so doing it experiences the joys and satisfactions as well as the tensions and frustrations which are the growing pains of the Church realizing its unity ‘as the whole body nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments grows with a growth that is from God’” (Pentecostal minister David du Plessis, quoting Col. 2:19, in The Spirit Bade Me Go, p. 91, 1962).

“Ecumenical dialogue is perhaps in danger of becoming a matter for specialists and thus of moving away from the grass roots. But our theological dialogues will bear fruit only if they are undertaken in a wider church context. They must be supported by the faithful, for it is only in this way that these fruits can sustain and inspire the dialogues themselves” (Cardinal Walter Kasper, in a February, 2010, speech at a symposium to consider the fruits of 40 years of ecumenical dialogues with Roman Catholic participation. During the same speech, Cardinal Kasper suggested that, because of the success of past dialogues, it might be possible to write an “ecumenical catechism,” a cooperative venture between the Catholic Church and some of its partners in dialogue).
Left: Orest Holovaty (South Bend) patched a wall. Center: Vancouver-Portland principal branch coordinator Charlie Fraga (left) directed Peter, Sara, and Stephen as they loaded up the truck during the April, 2011, move of Greg and Liz Cole. Right: In Indianapolis, Action volunteers pulled a large concrete chunk from the ground in summer, 2011.

In *The Spirit and Purpose* 
“As a way of participating in this new covenant in Christ, the covenant of the People of Praise establishes a Christian community. This is the specific means by which we live out the new covenant in the blood of Christ” (#2).

How have you seen our grass-roots ecumenism make a difference?

email thevine@peopleofpraise.org
call/text 574-208-3726
Today, in many parts of the world, under the influence of the grace of the Holy Spirit, many efforts are being made in prayer, word and action to attain the fullness of unity which Jesus Christ desires. Ecumenism: The Vision of the ELCA

This sacred Synod exhorts all the Catholic faithful to recognize the signs of the time and to participate actively in the work of ecumenism.

Pope John Paul II, Ut Unum Sint #70

It is absolutely clear that ecumenism, the movement promoting Christian unity, is not just some sort of “appendix” which is added to the Church’s traditional activity. Rather, ecumenism is an organic part of her life and work, and consequently must pervade all that she is and does. Pope John Paul II, Ut Unum Sint #20

The church urges its members to pray for the unity of the Church. Ecumenism must permeate every aspect of the church’s faith and life. Decree on Ecumenism

Ecumenical dialogue is perhaps in danger of becoming a matter for specialists and thus of moving away from the grass roots. But our theological dialogues will bear fruit only if they are undertaken in a wider church context. They must be supported by the faithful, for it is only in this way that these fruits can sustain and inspire the dialogues themselves. Cardinal Walter Kasper

Through prayer the quest for unity, far from being limited to a group of specialists, comes to be shared by all the baptized. Everyone regardless of their role in the Church or level of education, can make a valuable contribution, in a hidden and profound way. Pope John Paul II, Ut Unum Sint #70
Our road to unity is through prayer, work and life together.
In Scripture:

“[A]gree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you” (2 Cor. 13:11, ESV).

“And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:44-47, RSV).

In the statements of Christian churches and church leaders:

“The churches did not only diverge through discussion, they diverged through the way they lived, through alienation and estrangement. Therefore, they need to come closer to each other again in their lives; they must get accustomed to each other, pray together, work together, live together” (Cardinal Walter Kasper, Present Situation and Future of the Ecumenical Movement, 2001).

“When Christians pray together, the goal of unity seems closer” (Pope John Paul II, Ut Unum Sint, #22, 1995).

“Hence, it is important to grow each day in mutual love, committing ourselves to overcome those barriers that still exist among Christians; to feel that a true interior unity exists among all those who follow the Lord; to collaborate as much as possible, working together on the questions that are still open; and above all, to be conscious that in this itinerary the Lord must assist us” (Pope Benedict XVI, Address during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, January 19, 2011).

“Reestablishing communion is urgent today; it cannot continually be put off until later, until the end of time. Will we do all we can for Christians to wake up to the spirit of communion? There are Christians who, without waiting, are already in communion with one another in the places where they live, quite humbly, quite simply. Through their own life, they would like to make Christ present for many others. They know that the Church does not exist for itself but for the world” (Brother Roger Schutz, A Future of Peace, 2005).

“Those groups which live an ecumenical spirituality of communion anticipate a church lifestyle which should become the paradigm for the whole Church” (Cardinal Walter Kasper, That They May All Be One, 2004, p. 167).

On July 22, 2010, the Lutheran World Federation formally asked forgiveness in the presence of representatives of the Mennonite World Conference for Lutheran persecutions of Anabaptist Christians in the 16th century. The two groups issued this statement: “Reconciliation does not only look back into the past; rather it looks into a common future. We are grateful that in many places where Mennonites and Lutherans live together, cooperation as brothers and sisters in Christ has already been occurring for many years. Mennonites and Lutherans recognize each other as brothers and sisters in Christ” (Healing Memories: Reconciling in Christ: Report of the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission, 2010, pp. 108-9).

“Not only does nothing forbid us to love and accept one another, we are commanded to do so. This is the only debt we have toward one another and it is a debt we have to pay immediately, ‘Owe no one anything except to love one another’ (Rom. 13:8). We can accept and love one another despite the differences” (Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, Brighton, England, 1991).

In *The Spirit and Purpose*

“Therefore, we pray that any barriers erected by Satan among Christian churches be brought down. Meanwhile, we will live our lives together as fully as our churches permit, with hope that we may soon attain a unity of faith in the fullness of Christ our Lord” (#16).

What experiences have you had of our life together leading to an increase in unity?

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Reconciliation does not only look back into the past; rather it looks into a common future. We are grateful that in many places where Mennonites and Lutherans live together, cooperation as brothers and sisters in Christ has already been occurring for many years. Mennonites and Lutherans recognize each other as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Those groups which live an ecumenical spirituality of communion anticipate a church lifestyle which should become a paradigm for the whole Church.

Reestablishing communion is urgent today; it cannot continually be put off until later, until the end of time.

Will we do all we can for Christians to wake up to the spirit of communion? There are Christians who, without waiting, are already in communion with one another.

The churches did not only diverge through discussion, they diverged through the way they lived, through alienation and estrangement. Therefore, they need to come closer to each other again in their lives; they must get accustomed to each other, pray together, work together, live together.

in the places where they live, quite humbly, quite simply. Through their own life, they would like to make Christ present for many others.

They know that the Church does not exist for itself but for the world.
We respect the good consciences of our brothers and sisters.
In Scripture:

“I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment” (1 Cor 1:10, ESV).

In the statements of Christian churches and church leaders:

“Ecumenical dialogue does not aim to convert others to our side. Naturally, individual conversions cannot and must not be excluded; one has to treat them with great respect for the underlying decisions of conscience” (Cardinal Walter Kasper, *That They May All Be One*, 2004, p. 170).

“[I]n view of the large number of non-Christians in the world and the enormous challenge of our common evangelistic task, it is neither theologically legitimate nor a prudent use of resources for one Christian community to proselytize among active adherents of another Christian community” (*Evangelicals and Catholics Together*, 1994).

“[O]ne cannot charge with the sin of the separation those who at present are born into these communities [that resulted from such separation] and in them are brought up in the faith of Christ, and the Catholic Church accepts them with respect and affection as brothers” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1997, #818).

“When comparing doctrines with one another, [Catholic theologians] should remember that in Catholic doctrine there exists an order or ‘hierarchy’ of truths, since they vary in their relation to the foundations of the Christian faith. Thus the way will be opened whereby this kind of ‘fraternal rivalry’ will incite all to a deeper realization and a clearer expression of the unfathomable riches of Christ (Vatican II, *Decree on Ecumenism*, 1964, #11).

“How can Protestants with their faith anchored in the New Testament have unity with Catholics, whose official teachings include doctrines they cannot accept? The question is reciprocated from the Catholic side. . . . There is, I believe, a way through this dilemma. The Second Vatican Council, in fact, opened new possibilities through a statement in the Decree on Ecumenism. The decree suggested that closer agreement among Christians is possible if we think in terms of a hierarchy of truths. What the decree is getting at is this: unity is often barred by the attention given to our differences, but not all doctrines have the same importance for faith. Could we arrive at an understanding of the common core of the faith we share while allowing freedom with respect to other teachings less essential? This looks like a promising way forward” (Rev. George Carey, written before he became Archbishop of Canterbury, *A Tale of Two Churches, Can Protestants and Catholics Get Together?*, 1985).

“We have never found it disturbing when people have come to us representing convictions that differ from ours. On the contrary, that is more fruitful than if we had no chance to hear opposing ideas. Each one will bring from the storehouse of his earlier convictions those elements that are true, and he will find these again. The more varied our different backgrounds are, the richer the fruits of this diversity will be. But a united conviction can never be produced by forcing anyone to comply. Only the inner persuasion of the Holy Spirit can lead people to true unity” (From a 1933 address by Eberhard Arnold, founder of the Bruderhof community, quoted in *Eberhard Arnold: Writings Selected*, p. 208, copyright 2007 by Plough Publishing House. Used with permission.).

“Could it not be that these divisions have been a path continually leading the Church to discover the untold wealth contained in Christ’s Gospel and in the redemption accomplished by Christ? Perhaps all this wealth would not have come to light otherwise” (Pope John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 1994, p. 153).
Two ecumenical marriages: left: Luke and Lena Glover (nondenominational and Roman Catholic, Vancouver-Portland); right: J-T and Hannah Kelly (Roman Catholic and Methodist, Indianapolis).

In The Spirit and Purpose
“The community is an environment in which all members, according to their consciences, may maintain the church affiliation they had when they joined. . . . We respect one another’s good consciences and points of view while maintaining the integrity of our personal convictions regarding the truths of our own faith” (16).

In our experience:
“Our focus in the People of Praise on shared life and love and friendship among Catholics and Protestants, as opposed to doctrinal debates, is a fruit of Vatican II. How can we share life with one another in spite of the fact that we disagree on so many things? The idea of a hierarchy of truths opened the way for us. It’s true that we have to agree about some things. We say that someone has to assent to the Nicene Creed to join the community, for instance. But most differences don’t need to divide us. It used to be that religious people felt duty-bound to correct one another about points of doctrine. We have become increasingly conscious of the fact that each person has a right to his opinion, and the fact that we disagree doesn’t have to affect our relationship. The indestructible bonds of our baptism are stronger than all that divides us” (Paul DeCelles, talk on Vatican II from the 2011 PTI).

When have you seen this respect for conscience played out in our life?
email thevine@peopleofpraise.org
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How can Protestants with their faith anchored in the New Testament have unity with Catholics, whose official teachings they cannot accept? The question is reciprocal from the Catholic side.

There is the dilemma. The Second Vatican Council, in fact, opened new possibilities through a statement in the decree on Ecumenism. The decree suggested that closer agreement among Christians is possible if we think in terms of a hierarchy of truths. Could it not be that these doctrines have the same importance, but not all of them are given to our differences, but not all the same, but that the Church is leading the path continually to discover the untold wealth contained in Christ's Gospel and in the redemption accomplished by Christ?

Perhaps, if we think of the church as a community of faith we share while allowing freedom with respect to other teachings, this looks like a promising way forward.
The movement for Christian unity is a sign of the Holy Spirit’s work in our time.
In Scripture:

“When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. . . . And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. And they were amazed and wondered, saying ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians, we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God!’” (Acts 2:1-2; 4-11, RSV).

In the statements of Christian churches and church leaders:

“The ecumenical movement needs to be seen as the stirring of Christians under the Spirit’s prompting to disclose to those around them God’s call for the church to be one. This movement is, therefore, much more than conferences and meetings. . . .” (Ecumenism: The Vision of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1991).

“The spiritual renewal of our communities, their missionary activity, their service to society, and their quest for visible unity are, we are confident, indivisible aspects of the Holy Spirit’s work in our day” (The Call to Holiness: A Statement of Evangelicals and Catholics Together, 2005).

“The Holy Spirit seems to be impressing men everywhere with deeper convictions of the claims of our Lord Jesus Christ to our undivided loyalty, of the sin and weakness of schism, and of the necessity for union to enable the Church to fulfill her mission, and do her work both at home and abroad” (World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh, 1910, Report of Commission VII on Cooperation and the Promotion of Unity).

“The Lord of the Ages wisely and patiently follows out the plan of his grace on behalf of us sinners. In recent times he has begun to bestow more generously upon divided Christians remorse over their divisions and a longing for unity. Everywhere, large numbers have felt the impulse of this grace, and among our separated brethren also there increases from day to day a movement, fostered by the grace of the Holy Spirit, for the restoration of unity among all Christians” (Vatican II, Decree on Ecumenism, #1, 1964).

“To be ecumenical means to be committed to the oneness to which God calls the world in the saving gift of Jesus Christ. It also means to recognize the brokenness of the Church in history and the call of God, especially in this century, to heal this disunity of Christ’s people. By the Holy Spirit, God enlivens the Church to this ministry” (Ecumenism: The Vision of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1991).

“We rejoice at the prompting of God’s Spirit within the many expressions of ecumenicity among Christians, for the new forms of Christian communal life springing up and for Christian witness on behalf of world peace and the affirmation of freedom and human dignity” (Resolution on the Holy Spirit and the Church, The Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Communion, 1978).

“Only a renewed Pentecost, a renewed outpouring of the Holy Spirit, can bestow on us the unity of the disciples of Christ for which Jesus prayed” (Cardinal Walter Kasper, That They May All Be One, 2004, p. 156).
In May, 2011, the Kingston branch held a banquet to honor Vince Keaveny, who led the branch for many years, and to celebrate David and Sharon Sklorenko’s 24 years of travel and tireless service to the branch.

In The Spirit and Purpose

“In our time, we see the stirrings of this hope in the hearts of Christians everywhere—a sign of our times, another evidence of the Holy Spirit. Centuries-old divisions in the body of Christ are narrowing” (#16).

What evidence do you see of the Holy Spirit’s work for unity in our time?

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The ecumenical movement needs to be seen as the stirring of Christians under the Spirit’s prompting to disclose to those around them God’s call for the church to be one. This movement is, therefore, much more than conferences and meetings of councils of churches, although such events serve as landmarks for the ecumenical movement.

To be ecumenical means to be committed to the oneness to which God calls the world in the saving gift of Jesus Christ. It also means to recognize the brokenness of the Church in history and the call of God, especially in this century, to heal this disunity of Christ’s people.

The spiritual renewal of our communities, their missionary activity, their service to society, and their quest for visible unity are, we are confident, indivisible aspects of the Holy Spirit’s work in our day.

Only a renewed Pentecost, a renewed outpouring of the Holy Spirit, can bestow on us the unity of the disciples of Christ for which Jesus prayed. Cardinal Walter Kasper

The Vision of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Evangelicals and Catholics Together
“[W]e are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love” (Eph. 4:15-16, RSV).