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Letter of the Holy Father Francis to the President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity for the 25th Anniversary of the Encyclical Letter *Ut unum sint*

The following is the letter sent by the Holy Father Francis to the president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, His Eminence Cardinal Kurt Koch, on the occasion of the 25 th anniversary of the Encyclical Letter of Saint John Paul II, *Ut unum sint*.

Letter of the Holy Father

To my dear Brother

Cardinal Kurt Koch

President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity

Tomorrow marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of Saint John Paul II's Encyclical Letter *Ut Unum Sint*. With his gaze fixed on the horizon of the Jubilee of 2000, Pope John Paul II desired that the Church, on her journey towards the third millennium, should be ever mindful of the heartfelt prayer of her Teacher and Lord "that all may be one" (cf. *Jn 17:21*). For this reason he issued the Encyclical that confirmed "irrevocably" (*UUS*, 3) the ecumenical commitment of the Catholic Church. He published it on the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord, placing it under the sign of the Holy Spirit, the creator of unity in diversity. In that same liturgical and spiritual context, we now commemorate it, and propose it once more to the People of God.

The Second Vatican Council recognised that the movement for the restoration of unity among all Christians "arose by the grace of the Holy Spirit" (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 1). The Council also taught that the Spirit, while "distributing various kinds of spiritual gifts and ministries", is "the principle of the Church's unity" (*ibid.*, 2). *Ut Unum Sint* reaffirmed that "legitimate diversity is in no way opposed to the Church's unity, but rather enhances her splendour and contributes greatly to the fulfilment of her mission" (no. 50). Indeed, "only the Holy Spirit is

able to kindle diversity, multiplicity and, at the same time, bring about unity... It is he who brings harmony to the Church", because, as Saint Basil the Great said, "He himself is harmony" (*Homily in the Catholic Cathedral of the Holy Spirit*, Istanbul, 29 November 2014).

On this anniversary, I give thanks to the Lord for the journey he has allowed us to travel as Christians in quest of full communion. I too share the healthy impatience of those who sometimes think that we can and should do more. Yet we should not be lacking in faith and gratitude: many steps have been taken in these decades to heal the wounds of centuries and millennia. Mutual knowledge and esteem have grown and helped to overcome deeply rooted prejudices. Theological dialogue and the dialogue of charity have developed, as well as various forms of cooperation in the dialogue of life, at both the pastoral and cultural level. At this moment, my thoughts turn to my beloved Brothers, the heads of the different Churches and Christian communities, and to all our brothers and sisters of every Christian tradition who are our companions on this journey. Like the disciples of Emmaus, may we experience the presence of the risen Christ who walks at our side and explains the Scriptures to us. May we recognise him in the breaking of the bread, as we await the day when we shall share the Eucharistic table together.

I renew my gratitude to all who have worked and continue to work in the Dicastery to keep the awareness of this irrevocable goal alive in the Church. I am especially pleased to recognise two recent initiatives. The first is an Ecumenical *Vademecum* for Bishops that will be published this autumn, as an encouragement and guide for the exercise of their ecumenical responsibilities. Indeed, the service of unity is an essential aspect of the mission of every Bishop, who is "the visible source and foundation of unity" in his own Particular Church (*Lumen Gentium*, 23; cf. CIC 383 §3; CCEO 902-908). The second initiative is the launch of the journal *Acta OEcumenica* which, by renewing the Dicastery's Information Service, is meant to assist all who work in the service of unity.

On the path that leads to full communion it is important to keep in mind the progress already made, but equally important to scan the horizon and ask, with the Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*, "Quanta est nobis via?" (no. 77). One thing is certain: unity is not chiefly the result of our activity, but a gift of the Holy Spirit. Yet "unity will not come about as a miracle at the very end. Rather, unity comes about in journeying; the Holy Spirit does this on the journey" (*Homily at the Celebration of Vespers*, Saint Paul Outside the Walls, 25 January 2014). With confidence, then, let us ask the Holy Spirit to guide our steps and to enable everyone to hear the call to work for the cause of ecumenism with renewed vigour. May the Spirit inspire new prophetic gestures and strengthen fraternal charity among all Christ's disciples, "that the world may believe" (*Jn* 17:21), to the ever greater praise of our Father in heaven.

From the Vatican, 24 May 2020

FRANCIS