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## TOWARDS CHRISTIAN UNITY

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January 18 to 25 will mark the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Inaugurated in North America in 1909 by Father Paul James Francis Watson, founder of the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement ("Graymoor Friars"), and in France by Abbé Couturier some seventy years ago, this week of prayer indicates the deep desire that all the baptised become one, as Jesus prayed for the night before he died.

### FUNDAMENTAL RESEARCH

In his intervention at the Synod of Bishops for the Americas, Bishop Anthony Tonnos of Hamilton, Ontario described the quest for unity as fundamental for all Christians; he listed three elements needed for promoting ecumenism: spiritual means, practical cooperation, and theological dialogue. In this light, Christians in Canada are taking part more and more in different forms of common prayer, during Lent, on Good Friday, at civil ceremonies, and to support one another in tragic times. Regarding collaboration, Bishop Tonnos pointed out that areas of practical collaboration among Christians include a wide range of concerns, like poverty, human rights, life issues, aboriginal rights, corporate responsibility, and refugees. In the area of research, the bishop noted that ecumenical dialogue, both formal and informal, is taking place with individual faith groups as well as through the Canadian Council of Churches which provides opportunities for inter-Christian and interfaith discussions.

### BENEFICIAL RELATIONS

I am glad to note that in our diocese of Edmundston interchurch relations are harmonious, respectful, and promising. A consequence of this is that in Southern Victoria Deanery, for example, the Good Samaritan Food Bank has become an ecumenical project in which seven Christian churches cooperate: 200 families have already benefited from this fine initiative, with repercussions all the way to New Denmark. I rejoice that the priests and pastoral agents of Southern Victoria also join together for prayer and reflection. During my visitation last year at Plaster Rock, I attended an unforgettable interconfessional meal. It is comforting to know that for three years now ministers and members of other Churches join in our walk of solidarity with the suffering, on Good Friday, in a common Way of the Cross along the streets of Edmundston and Grand Falls. On January 25, 1995, feast of St. Paul, the different confessional leaders and I joined in the blessing and dedication of an interfaith chapel at the Edmundston Regional Hospital.

### AT THE COMING OF THE YEAR 2000

In his apostolic letter on preparing for the year 2000, Pope John Paul II states: « *The approaching end of the second millennium demands of everyone an examination of conscience and the promotion of fitting ecumenical initiatives, so that we can celebrate the Great Jubilee, if not completely united, at least much closer to overcoming the divisions of the second millennium. As everyone recognises, an enormous effort is needed in this regard. It is essential not only to continue along the path of dialogue on doctrinal matters, but above all to be more committed to prayer for Christian unity.* » As the Jubilee year is meant to be signed with conversion and mutual forgiveness, the Pope writes: « *Among the sins which require a greater commitment to repentance and*

*conversion should certainly be counted those which have been detrimental to the unity willed by God for his People. In the course of the thousand years now drawing to a close, even more than in the first millennium, ecclesial communion has been painfully wounded, a fact for which, at times, men of both sides were to blame. Such wounds openly contradict the will of Christ and are a cause of scandal to the world. These sins of the past unfortunately still burden us and remain ever present temptations. It is necessary to make amends for them, and earnestly to beseech Christ's forgiveness. »*

#### **LIVING IN DEEP FAITH AND CHARITY**

I invite to really celebrate the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, whether it be at home, in church, at the hospital, where you work, or at school. I call on all in the diocese to truly and deeply live the faith and charity of Christ. It is by the love we have for one another that we shall be recognised as disciples of Jesus. I endorse the wish that the Diocesan Commission on Ecumenism be revived and help us carefully prepare for the Jubilee of the Year 2000. May Abbé Couturier's prayer be our guide all through the week: *Lord Jesus, the night before you died you prayed so that your disciples would perfectly remain one, as you are in the Father and the Father is in you. Make us feel the real pain caused by the infidelity of our disunity. Grant us honesty to recognise and the courage to reject what there is in us of mutual indifference, suspiciousness, and even hostility. Grant us to meet in you so that from our hearts may flow the prayer for Christian unity as you will it, and by the means you will. Help us find in you, the perfection of charity, and in obedience to your Love and your Truth, the road that leads to unity.*

I hope you have a good week of prayer.



+ François Thibodeau

Bishop of Edmundston

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