

## Westminster Diocese's Renewal Programme and its Ecumenical Faith-Sharing Communities

A presentation to the Annual General Meeting, June 2005

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There seems to be a renewed enthusiasm for Christian Unity among Catholics of the Diocese of Westminster, arising out of the *At Your Word, Lord* programme of spiritual and discipleship renewal at the heart of which are parish core communities of prayer, Bible study and faith sharing.

During the course of AYWL's third year, the communities had been encouraged to embrace friends in other church traditions to enrich the process of faith sharing, not as a means to enlist people to Roman Catholicism, but to promote the exchange the spiritual riches between Christians in the hope of closer collaboration in mission, the service of the world, the worship of God and the movement to Unity.

A significant element in promoting this had been the Handbook (previously circulated among members) and the training sessions for parish communities which had stressed that, in terms of both Catholic teaching and history, ecumenism was not an 'add on' to Church life and faith, but of the very nature of Catholicism and its experience of itself as *communio*.

It was noted how the instinct of the lay people for unity with other Christians had always in the past become enmeshed with the structures, which had had the effect of halting it. Yet AYWL had shown the official, ecumenical structures in all churches, originally conceived to facilitate greater Unity, were proving to be impediments, possibly because some were moribund, others had a vested

interest in perpetuating the separations to justify their continued existence as 'border crossings', and others because they were deliberately seeking to ensure that Unity could only be taken forward in the interest of one tradition over and against another.

Yet AYWL's emphasis had been on making the regulations, and all the many possibilities they allow, work positively, with hundreds of examples for simple activities - social, educational, cultural, spiritual and liturgical - by which churches can maximise and make visible the Unity the Church already has and which its members, despite their separations, can already enjoy.