

Uniting in Heart: Being the people of God

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One way to look at the Uniting in Heart 2030 Pastoral Plan (hereafter UiH) is to consider the 2,000 year arc of Christian history. In this country, much of our worship and teaching reflect the last 474 years, back to the start of the Council of Trent.

That may appear to be a bit egg headed, but our faith family tree did not start in 1990. The Catholic Church has developed its mission in ways that help us contextualize our present moment. Let me illustrate a key aspect of my thinking.

I had already studied John W. O'Malley's magisterial books on three church councils when I bought this year's *When Bishops Meet: An Essay Comparing Trent, Vatican I, and Vatican II*, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. This short book frames historic changes that enhance living our true identity. Our core mission is to preach and imitate Christ, to announce the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins, and to celebrate the Eucharist with moral integrity. These help us to live as good neighbors to all people rather than existing as an isolated sect.

Father O'Malley's synthesis of his previous studies also repeats three hallmarks of the Second Vatican Council. These dynamics are still playing out.

First, unlike many previous councils, this one issued no "anathemas," that is, condemnations of persons or teachings. Second, its major decrees portrayed the church as "the People of God." Sometimes this title extends to all baptized persons. Baptism, not priestly ordination, is our main identifier. Third, and most noticeably, the call to holiness is underlined the single most pronounced feature of our church's vision and mission.

UiH is especially attentive to the second and third dynamics. These are intentional themes at our meetings, in articles appearing in *The Catholic Moment* and on our website.

It is important for clergy and laity to know my mind about the second dynamic. I intend that the "the People of God" culture comes to life in our process. It is my privilege and responsibility to treat you as what you are. Some questions arise because the clergy (me included) are not appointed the lone gatekeepers of UiH 2030. We all have a role, beginning with a prayerful obedience to the Holy Spirit.

UiH has largely been received positively as a way to get a handle on our many opportunities. It is creating the tools for successful missionary discipleship – a way of life, not a one-and-done program.

Over the past several years, lay people have had and will continue to contribute actively to diocesan and parish vitality. It is not my invitation but their right and responsibility to participate. Vatican II and Canon Law clearly advocate and mandate such activity. Such includes both employed staff and other involved Catholics. These people model for us the co-responsibility about which Pope Benedict XVI wrote, and the mission discipleship that Pope Francis promotes. This has been modeled in a steady evolution of 'synodality' since Pope Paul VI distinguished it from the work of the international councils.

It must be said, in order to acknowledge that some anxieties are real and not imagined, that changing structure and culture at the same time can seem “too much.” And yet one will not change without the other. Or more accurately, we await the continued promptings of the Spirit. If we ourselves initiate changes, we call that a program. When we respond to the promptings of the Spirit, we call this conversion. Isn't this what we really seek, in our heart of hearts?

Come Holy Spirit, fill our hearts, and help us to join hands with each other in prayerfully sharing the work that you illuminated for us in that first Pentecost. Amen.