

Swiss Letter to Cardinal Kasper

Interchurch Families Association of Switzerland (AFI-CH)

Meeting of the West Switzerland group

Lutry, Geneva, Fribourg
8 October 2005

To: His Eminence Cardinal Walter Kasper
President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU)
Your Eminence

During a retreat at the house of the sisters of Saint-Maurice at La Pelouse in Bex, our group reflected on the **message** you sent to the **Second World Gathering of Interchurch Families** in Rome on 24-28 July 2003. Some of us were directly addressed by this letter since they were among the 300 participants or even among those who organised the Gathering in Rome; some were indirect addressees since they were not able to go to Rome in 2003. But all felt concerned and touched by your message, to the point that they were eager to respond to it when they were invited by the PCPCU as delegates of groups and associations of interchurch families to participate in an informal meeting on 12 October. Hoping to contribute, however modestly, to the cause of Christian unity, we are pleased to present to your Eminence the results of our discussions and reflections.

The 2003 Rome Gathering, and your letter in particular had a great impact on the interchurch families' movement. Celebrations, prayer times, round tables, visits and meals turned these five days into a blessed time, when the Holy Spirit blew its gentle and comforting warmth in the midst of a torrid summer which could have turned the event into an unbearable meteorological ordeal. If the 'miracle' of the Rome Gathering had to be summed up in one sentence, we would word it as follows: in 2003, interchurch families went from a spirit of suffering to one of praise, considering their experience as a stroke of good fortune instead of a problem. This the reason why your letter was received, both in Rome in 2003 and here in Western Switzerland in 2005, with much gratitude, especially as you address us in your own name, using 'I' (like the apostle Paul), and consider us, your addressees, not as a problem, but as brothers and sisters living a positive experience 'in the midst of the serious problem of Christian divisions.' Hearing you say that we have a 'unique

place' in the ecumenical concert and that you would have 'much to learn from our experience' continues to give us courage and moves us to elaborate on our reflections below.

Together with the fraternal warm tone of your message, the new and unusual words you used encouraged us in our particular situation, words such as 'experience', 'exchanging our gifts', 'creative', 'liberating' or 'to be ourselves'. However, we still sense some ambiguity between the words that encourage us to pursue our prophetic mission and those that relate to suffering. Within our small 'domestic churches', we feel that the suffering that remains comes not only from the separation of Christians, but also from the directives. To us, the latter do not appear to be necessary. Right where the directives try to explain that complete unity has not been accomplished yet, one of the participants expressed his uneasiness in these terms: 'the directives cement the divisions between Christians'. On this subject, we get the painful impression that while we, the couples, love each other, the Churches we belong to do not like each other. In our situation, we are obliged to note that it is the Churches that remain divided, whereas Christians are less and so. In order to express what we experience and hope for, the more scientifically-minded among us used the poetry of algebra to propose the following evolution of the formula involving Catholics (A), Protestants (B) and Christ Himself (X):

XA + XB becomes X (A+B), and Christ could even become more and more important as our unique link, as expressed in X(A+B).

To be even more precise in our response to your letter, we are anxious to insist that the subject and experience of the suffering caused by the division between Christians not be trivialised or relativised. If we as families must go beyond it in our spiritual everyday lives (where we sometimes feel we are only 'surviving'), we are aware of the fact that, for the time being, we are doing this only marginally, outside the recognised model, and this is sometimes uncomfortable. This uncomfortable aspect of our situation comes mainly from the fact that we are asked by our Churches to be prophets and at the same time criticised for being so in a disobedient way in relation to the institution, especially when it comes to Eucharistic sharing. For each one of our couples, progressing towards unity is received together, as a day-by-day gift, with neither of the spouses having a preconceived definition of what Unity is. Should not what is true among our couples also be true between our Churches?

We look forward to being recognised as having a role to play within the ecumenical movement, but it has to be realised that we cannot play that role without disturbing the institutions to which we belong. This is why, among other things, we are waiting, somewhat impatiently, for a clearer position concerning the possibility for our families to receive the Eucharist together. Indeed, we will not let directives separate us where God united us. We hope that the Church will take a clear position, thus not forcing priests to face alone a dilemma between pastoral concern and ecclesial loyalty alone.

We also dare to dream that an ecumenical catechesis will continue to spread further and further. We dream that an ecumenical spirit, expressed in the training of the clergy in

particular, not be found only in areas where people from a variety of church traditions live side by side, but also in the 'domain' of one church or the other. In those regions, as the European Charta Oecumenica clearly states, confessional minorities must be protected by the majority church.

We are grateful for the ground already covered but quite aware of what lies ahead of us. We hope that the contacts made by the PCPCU for an informal meeting with the delegates of the international network of interchurch families will be a step in the right direction ... followed by many others.

In the hope that this will come to pass, we remain

Respectfully yours

For the interchurch families of Western Switzerland

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