

## Good Steward Newsletter – March 2011

March 7, 2011 by [O'Meara Ferguson](#)



### **Unity Requires Fidelity to the Apostles' Teaching, Fellowship, Breaking of Bread and Prayer**

Last month, during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Pope Benedict XVI outlined what he called the four characteristics that made the early Church community in Jerusalem “a place of unity and love.” The Holy Father suggested that these four characteristics, which are drawn from the Acts of the Apostles, provide us with a framework for restoring unity among Christians and for attracting those who do not yet share our faith.

The first essential characteristic is that we remain faithful to the Gospel and to the teaching of the Apostles. Christianity has a core content, a body of beliefs, that defines who we are as Christians. This is the Creed that we profess each Sunday. The Creed summarizes who we are, the community of believers. To be united as Christians, it's essential that we understand and embrace this most basic formula of Gospel principles. How well do we understand what we recite each Sunday? How successfully have we integrated these core teachings into our daily lives?

The second essential characteristic of Christian unity is fellowship. Communion, solidarity and fraternity are also words used to describe this fundamental sign of Christian togetherness. Christians are people who care for one another. We are the family of God, the sisters and brothers of Jesus Christ. We collaborate with one another. We share what we have with one another—especially those who are most in need—and we commit our time, talent and treasure to the building up of the community. Have we embraced our responsibility to care for one another, or have we given in to the temptation to live as isolated, self-reliant individuals? Do we demonstrate our Christianity by our love for one another or do we hide behind the “rugged individualism” promoted by our secular culture?

“The history of the ecumenical movement is marked by difficulties and uncertainties,” Pope Benedict said. “But it is also a story of brotherhood and cooperation, of spiritual and human sharing, which has significantly changed relations between believers in the Lord Jesus. All of us are committed to continuing on this path.”

The third characteristic described by the Holy Father is the “breaking of bread.” The Holy Eucharist is the source of our communion with Christ, and with all other members of the Christian community, and it is our most sacred action, the most profound way that Christ makes himself present to us as individuals and as a community of believers. “Communion with God creates communion among us and must necessarily be expressed in concrete communion and sharing with one another,” the Holy Father said.

The Eucharist, which is the source of our unity, is also the unfortunate sign of division among Christians. As Pope Benedict says, “sharing the Eucharist is the sign of fully sharing faith.” That’s why the Church teaches that divided Christians cannot normally share Eucharistic communion. Especially during the week of prayer for Christian unity, the Holy Father said, all Christians should feel “regret for the impossibility” of sharing the Eucharist. As a result, we should work even harder to make full communion possible for our own sakes and for the sake of our witness to the world. What are we doing to promote full Eucharistic communion? Are we indifferent to the scandal of disunity or are committed to the restoration of Christian unity?

The final characteristic of a united Christian community is the commitment to prayer. In prayer, Pope Benedict says, we recognize ourselves as children of God and, therefore, as brothers and sisters to one another. Prayer establishes communication between us and God and among all Christians. Prayer dissolves all differences and brings us together in dialogue with God and one another.

Prayer for Christian unity should not be limited to one week of the year. Given the troubles we face as Christians trying to live our faith in an often hostile environment, we need each other. And the world needs a united Christian witness to the way of life Christ has given us.

Let’s pray for unity. Let’s work to better understand, and live, the teachings handed-on to us from the Apostles. Let’s celebrate the holy Eucharist with reverence, with joy and with a profound longing for the day when all Christians will be able to receive the Body and Blood of Christ as one family of faith. Finally, let’s accept our obligation to care for one another. “No one in the community should be hungry, should be poor,” Pope Benedict says.

Christian unity should not be a vague hope or an impossible dream. Too much is at stake. Let’s work at being good stewards of Christian unity.

*That in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:11)*