

On Eucharistic Sharing:

A Statement of the International Ecumenical Fellowship (IEF)

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(Edited by NAGYPÁL Szabolcs and Rudolf WETH)

I. Steps towards the Visible Unity of the Church

1. The International Ecumenical Fellowship (IEF) was founded through the powerful mission and vision of the *Fribourg Statement* (1967): “By prayer, study and action, the International Ecumenical Fellowship (IEF) seeks to serve the movement towards the *visible unity of the Church* according to the expressed will of Jesus Christ by the means He wills.”

2. We, as members of IEF, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of our foundation, remain very grateful for the enriching and blessed decades of special experiences of unity in the Spirit. Step by step, IEF has developed from an ecumenical movement into an ecumenical fellowship, recognising each other as sisters and brothers in the Body of Jesus Christ, on the basis of one baptism.

3. Since its conception, by discovering and practising oneness in Jesus Christ, we as Christians from different denominations have striven to live today the Church of tomorrow with joy, hope and love.

4. We live this unity in IEF by means of the annual international conferences, in meetings of the national regions and smaller local



groups, through ecumenical contacts and activity between laity and clergy, in cooperation with national ecumenical structures and other ecumenical organisations, and particularly through common prayer and worship. All of these events are opportunities to show true Christian love for each other.

5. *Common prayer and worship together* is at the core of IEF: this is where we become one with God and with each other, experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit in healing and liberating actions, and in community building.

6. Beside these positive aspects, we also share the pain that the full communion of churches and worship is not yet given, because human sin and limitations in our churches hinder the converting and transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

7. Cheap ecumenism is not for us; neither is cheap common faith, which costs nothing. On the contrary, we believe in and live out a *costly ecumenism*, where – true to the words of Jesus Christ to His Father, “that they all may be one” (John 17,21) – we risk challenging and being challenged.

8. In common prayer and worship together, we enjoy the rich diversity of liturgical traditions of other denominations and of the Church as a whole, in the unity that exists already among us. But it

is precisely through this experience that we come to recognize our division, specifically when invited to the Lord's Table.

9. The *Eucharist*, instituted by Jesus Christ Himself, is the most powerful expression of unity in the Body of Christ, and the source and summit of all Christian life. Division is most painful at this point, where we have to feel and recognize the scandal of fragmented Christianity and our failure to live out fully the words of Jesus Christ: "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the Covenant, which is poured out for many" (Matthew 26,28).

10. Therefore, searching, finding and developing new solutions to overcome the scandal of division at the Eucharist has to be a clear priority for the mission and vision of IEF, in order to witness authentically as a movement towards the visible unity of the Church.

II. Spiritual and Pastoral Recommendations on Eucharistic Sharing

A. Spiritual and Pastoral Recommendations

11. The churches we belong to take different positions with respect to Eucharistic sharing, which are based on various theological approaches (see paras. 26–36). Taking these denominational stances into consideration, we are aware that a responsible approach of Eucharistic Sharing requires a clearer understanding of the core of our faith, not leaving aside the questions of ministry, ordination, episcopal and synodal structure, apostolic tradition and succession.

12. Considering all these, our spiritual and pastoral recommendation concerning *Eucharistic Sharing* is the following:

Whether one accepts the invitation of Jesus Christ to share in His Body and Blood in a given celebration is principally a responsible and personal decision of conscience, to be taken in respect of the disciplines and regulations of one's own church and those of the others.

B. Tradition, Communion and Decision of Conscience

13. We stand in the *Tradition* and *Communion* of our respective churches. We are faithful to their current regulations, which we are called to respect, consider and follow.

14. Among the main Protestant and Anglican denominations there are important agreements concerning Eucharistic celebrations, with recommendations for intercommunion and Eucharistic hospitality. These are open to all baptised members who are entitled to take part in the Eucharist in their own churches.

15. These Eucharistic celebrations at international conferences are not only an expression of the faith and liturgy of different churches, but they are also a mirror of the evolving gifts of unity, love, joy and communion in the Holy Spirit.

16. Eucharistic Sharing always requires a *responsible and personal decision of conscience*, since the voice of our conscience must be followed by each of us. In this case our conscience must be *well informed*, taking into account the rules and regulations of our own church.

17. At international conferences, apart from the denominational Eucharistic services, it is suggested to have a Eucharistic celebration according to the ecumenical *Lima Liturgy*.

C. Spiritual and Pastoral Care

18. The responsible and personal decision of conscience must be respected. Furthermore, we, whether laity or clergy, must be provided, if wished, with the *spiritual and pastoral care* and support of the community, following our decision of conscience.

19. We are called to use our *wisdom, discernment and sense of faith* in all cases, regarding whether there is a serious spiritual and ecumenical need to share the Eucharist. When the decision of conscience results in following the discipline of our own church, we should never be labelled unecumenical. On the other hand, when it results in following the invitation of Eucharistic hospitality, we should never be considered as less faithful towards our own church.

D. Eucharistic Hospitality

20. In the Roman Catholic Eucharist at IEF international conferences, as a principle, there is no open invitation expressed for non-Catholic participants to receive the Eucharist, unless the local bishop decides otherwise. Neither, however, is there a prohibition expressed; but rather *permission* should be practised, based on the rules of the *Ecumenical Directory* (ED, 1993). This is the usual practice of many Roman Catholic dioceses and communities.

21. According to the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), there are different intermediate degrees of (partial) church communion, between full church separation and full church communion. This gives rise to the question whether intermediate forms between refusal of the Eucharist and full Eucharist communion might be possible, advisable, and even necessary, in accordance with the agreements in the understanding of the Eucharist reached in the official church dialogues and corresponding to the already existing rapprochement of the churches.

22. The expression *Eucharistic hospitality* conveys the view that, although full church communion has not yet been reached, such a degree of agreement in faith has been obtained that an admission to the Eucharist can be justified.

23. When the Second Vatican Council affirms that “worship in common (*communicatio in sacris*) is not to be considered as a means to be used indiscriminately for the restoration of Christian unity”, it recognises that at least in certain circumstances it might be properly used as a means for the restoration of Christian unity. It even states that “with due regard to all the circumstances of time, place, and persons, it is to be decided prudently by local episcopal authority” (*Unitatis Redintegratio* 8.). Hence we humbly wish that the local Roman Catholic bishop makes use of his power to *decide with prudence* whether the circumstances are appropriate to consider the Roman Catholic Eucharist, celebrated on the exceptional occasion of an IEF Conference, as a means for the restoration of Christian unity, inviting our sisters and brothers from other churches to the Eucharistic table.

III. The Prophetic Responsibility of IEF

24. Many of us come from interdenominational and interchurch families, which try to live their vocation in a consciously ecumenical way. We share with other ecumenical organisations a deep social and spiritual commitment.

25. As an ecumenical movement, the International Ecumenical Fellowship (IEF) has a special prophetic responsibility in reminding, calling on and even challenging our churches to work more effectively for the visible unity of the Church, and to live already today the Church of tomorrow, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

IV. Summary of Current Denominational Stances and Ecumenical Agreements

26. Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, there have been many bilateral and multilateral dialogues between churches and denominations, which resulted in, among other things, an epoch-making turn from closed Communion towards open or partially open Communion. Let us look at the related developments in the three main branches of Christianity.

A. Intercommunion and Intercelebration: Protestant, Anglican and Old Catholic Churches

27. Among major Protestant denominations (Lutheran, Reformed, and United), full altar and pulpit fellowship was established in Europe by the *Leuenberg Concord* (1973), overcoming and transcending previous separations.

28. A similarly important achievement is the *Meissen Declaration* (1988), and above all the *Porvoo Agreement* (1994), between many Anglican and Lutheran churches.

29. There has been an opening up in the field of *intercommunion*, by allowing members of other churches, who are baptised and entitled to take part in the Eucharist in their own church, to participate in each other's celebration of the Eucharist.

30. Together with this, there has been a continuous opening up of the Eucharistic Communion by *intercelebration*, by welcoming ministers of other churches to lead the Eucharistic celebration. This has existed between Anglicans and the Old Catholics since the *Bonn Agreement* (1931).

31. Following the *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM) document (Lima, 1982) of the World Council of Churches (WCC), there have been various bilateral and multilateral dialogues and documents between Old Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists, Lutherans, Reformed and others, resulting in a gradual opening up of intercommunion.

B. The Blessed Bread of Friendship: Orthodox Churches

32. In most of the Orthodox traditions the participation of non-Orthodox in the Eucharist is not allowed in principle, because the Eucharist normally implies full ecclesial communion. Everyone is invited, however, to take part in the Divine Liturgy, and at the end of

the celebration to receive the blessed bread of friendship (*antidoron*) from the hands of the priest.

C. Worship in Common (*communicatio in sacris*):

Roman Catholic Church

33. The Roman Catholic church shares with other churches the basic notion that Eucharistic Communion requires full Church communion. With the Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 1964) of the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Catholic church opened herself up more than ever before for communion with Christians of other churches, and the desire, hope and prospect of Eucharistic Communion has been awakened. The argumentation of the document is the following:

34. Persons “who believe in Jesus Christ and have been truly baptized, are in communion with the Roman Catholic church, even though this communion is imperfect” (UR 3).

35. “Baptism establishes a sacramental bond of unity which links all who have been reborn by it. But of itself baptism is only a beginning, an inauguration wholly directed toward the fullness of life in Jesus Christ. Baptism, therefore, envisages a complete profession of faith, a complete incorporation in the system of salvation such as Jesus Christ willed it to be, and finally a complete engrafting in eucharistic communion” (UR 22).

36. The principles of the UR are developed further in the *Ecumenical Directory* (1993) in the following way: “The sharing of spiritual activities and resources must reflect the double fact: first, the real communion in the life of the Holy Spirit, which already exists among Christians and is expressed in their prayer and liturgical worship; and second, the incomplete character of this communion because of differences of faith and understanding, which are incompatible with an unrestricted mutual sharing of spiritual endowments. Fidelity to this complex reality makes it necessary to establish norms for spiritual sharing, which take into account the diverse ecclesial situations of the churches and ecclesial communities involved, so that, as Christians esteem and rejoice in the spiritual riches they have in common, they are also made more aware of the necessity of overcoming and transcending the separations, which still exist” (ED 104).