

International Movement ‘We Are Church’ (IMWAC) ***Movimento Internazionale ‘Noi siamo Chiesa’ (IMWAC)***

European Network Church ‘On The Move’ (EN/RE) ***Rete Europea ‘Chiesa per la Riforma’ (EN/RE)***

Rome, October 9th, 2012

„Witnesses of a renewed Church for the times to come“

On the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Opening of the Second Vatican Council, the *International Movement We Are Church (IMWAC)* and the *European Network Church on the Move (EN/RE)*, Witness to and Hope for a Church Ever More Free and Human, Built on Communities of Baptized Christians Deeply Committed to Ministry in the Church and Justice in the World

- 1. The Second Vatican Council endorsed a profound renovation of the Catholic Church, both in its own structures and in its relationship to the world.** The transformation in the liturgy was one of the central and most visible fruits of the Council, especially in its use of vernacular languages and its celebration based on the local community. The constitutions “Lumen Gentium” and “Gaudium et Spes” contain definitions of the Church itself (now seen as the People of God) and of the value of the secular world and how we might minister to it.
- 2. The encyclical “Pacem in Terris”, written by John XXIII while the Council was in session and, indeed, while he was dying, must be considered a part of the whole conciliar experience. Other very important questions were proposed with new perspectives: ecumenism, inter-religious dialogue, liberty of freedom and of conscience.** These documents most especially generated the progressive movement that exists in the Church today and invited a dialogue with the Magisterium on all issues that are part of Catholic life.
- 3. During the last fifty years a tension has developed concerning the proper interpretation of the Council and its application to contemporary concerns.** This tension was already present in the documents of the Council itself: for some, the Council called for significant change; for others, continuity was paramount.
- 4. In reality, change and continuity are not mutually exclusive. During the Council a “Pact of the Catacombs” was signed by forty bishops under the leadership of Bishop Helder Camara (Brazil) and Cardinal Lercaro (Bologna) in Santa Domitila Catacomb in Rome** calling for a Church focused on service and on the poor. These ideas were later developed, particularly in South America, as a preferential option for the poor.

5. **As the official Church became more resistant to the spirit of Vatican II, many Catholics found a way to work within the Church in fidelity to a change they believe Vatican II intended:** a collegial and democratic Church; pluralism and dialogue within the Church; gender equality and the acceptance of diverse sexual orientations; the ordination of women and married people for the service of the People of God but not to enhance a new clericalism; a separation between religion and state, allowing for the appropriate autonomy of both but, at the same time, a strong engagement of believers for justice and peace. This progressive movement derived these changes from the Council itself, indeed from the Gospel and the best of Church tradition, and the pastoral needs of God's People.

6. **A number of pastoral initiatives followed:** base communities; the celebration of Eucharist in the absence of a priest; conscience decisions about birth control and sexual morality; support as well as critique of the Vatican and the episcopate; a demand for justice for the victims of sexual abuse, and punishment for the perpetrators and those who enabled them.

7. In the secular world at large, and in the Vatican II Church, people have a right to freedom of speech. Thus, **groups of priests and laity have organized to express their experience of what it means to be a Catholic in today's world.** Freedom of speech derives from the belief that if all are heard, there is a better chance that we will heed the voice of the Spirit and hear the echo of the Gospel. To silence peremptorily, and it seems, arbitrarily, the voices of theologians, women religious, and responsible people at large is to suffocate the breath of life in the Church itself.

8. Thus, when **Austrians proclaim a Pfarrer Initiative**, or **South Americans develop Liberation Theology**, or **women religious determine to speak** not deductively from doctrine, but inductively from their experience, or an **American Catholic Council develops a Catholic Bill of Rights and Responsibilities**, or **Asians and Africans speak of the need to define God and Christ differently**, the first response should be to listen and the second should be to dialogue. Only concerned and committed Catholics would develop such initiatives. Our response should be gratitude rather than dismissal, enlightenment rather than censure, discernment in all cases, but not deafness.

9. The *International Movement We Are Church (IMWAC)*, national progressive groups around the world, and the *European Network Church on the Move (EN/RE)* decry the persecution of our colleagues when they raise questions respectfully, questions millions of other Catholics share. **We welcome instead an emerging Spring, and awakening dawn inside the Church and await the life and the light they bring with them.** When we engage in dissent and "civil disobedience" it is not because we are self-indulgent, but because we are deeply concerned.

10. In 2012, clergy and lay people are still defined in terms of hierarchical priorities rather than as partners, members and colleagues. There is no warrant for this in the Gospel. Indeed, **St. Paul**

reminds us that unless there are different members, all of whom are necessary, there is no Body of Christ.

11. The institutional Church has developed a non-democratic structure reflecting the Roman Empire rather than the Kingdom of God. It is sad to note that the world at large has seen more clearly the need for democracy and equality than the Church that derives from the message of Jesus. In the secular world, non-democratic decisions have no credibility and indeed, are far less stable. **Democracy is not against the nature of the Church, since the Spirit has been given to everyone** and since democracy does not mean an unrestrained majority voice as much as it means respectful dialogue.

12. In all democracies there are different levels of responsibility; **respect for human rights and of all minorities is the very DNA of a true democracy.**

13. This is very different from monarchical absoluteness. In a truly collegial Church, conscience is no less sacred than the Magisterium. Monarchy conflicts with both the Church's Gospel tradition and the pastoral requirements of the contemporary age. John XXIII once reminded us that we have nothing to fear from the secular world and that we have no right to become prophets of doom. Monarchy has no principled or intrinsic right within the Church. Collegiality has biblical, conciliar and pastoral authority in the Church. **IMWAC and the *European Network Church on the Move* insist that the Church must be plural and inclusive in its structures and internal policies as well as in its relationship to the world.**

14. **We address a word to our brother bishops attending the Synod in Rome (October 7 to 28) to consider dialogue with Catholics who long to be part of the Church even when they differ on some issues.** This is in accord not only with Vatican II and Canon Law, but with the Spirit and the Gospel. *IMWAC* and the *European Network Church on the Move* will meet in Rome in December, 2015, to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of Vatican II and to witness to the life it has given to the Church and the light it offers to guide us into the future. Our intention is not division or dissent, but peace for the Church at large. "See how these Christian love one another" was once seen as the best sign that we are a community of Christ. If we lose this, all the other signs we devise are misdirections. **Without love we perish; we lose Jesus Christ; and we distance ourselves from God. No one of us in the Church wants that to happen.**