

Celebration of Ecumenism in Northampton

The 50th anniversary of the Vatican II decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio* – the Restoration of Unity – was celebrated in an inspiring service at Northampton Cathedral during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

Bishop Peter Doyle had invited church leaders from across the four counties of the diocese and from Churches Together in England to take part in this unique event. The congregation that filled the cathedral were delighted to see the diversity of clergy gathered from a variety of traditions, seated in a semicircle around the altar. Greek Ecumenical Patriarch Archbishop Gregorius read the Gospel and the Catholic Archbishop of Birmingham Bernard Longley was the preacher.

In his homily, Archbishop Longley recalled that the promulgation of *Unitatis Redintegratio* 50 years ago was the first time that the Catholic Church had reflected theologically on the life and witness of other Churches and ecclesial communities and begun to appreciate the work of the Holy Spirit in all who are called to form the Body of Christ in the world. "From then onwards our prayer and work for Christian unity was to be understood as integral to the life and mission of Catholics everywhere." However, this decree was only the beginning of our ecumenical pilgrimage towards the goal of full visible unity of the Church. Despite discouragements and challenges it remains the goal of our dialogue and work together. "Through our baptism the Lord challenges each successive generation to contribute to the fulfilment of his prayer that *they may all be one*." His final words were "Only by allowing ourselves to be transformed together can we hope to give a more credible witness to the Christ who sends us into the world and longs to walk beside us there."

Seated beside Bishop Peter was the Methodist District Chair Rev Anne Brown, who led the Bidding Prayers, Bishop Donald Allister of Peterborough Diocese, who read from the New Testament, and three more Anglican bishops, as well as Baptist, URC and Pentecostal leaders. Representatives of Churches Together in England were present and the recently appointed Catholic National Ecumenical Officer Canon John O'Toole read a prayer. Moments of silent reflection during the service were powerful, and a symbolic action involved everyone being invited to dip their hand into a bowl of water as a sign of our shared baptism, while the Choir led the singing of a Taizé chant, There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism. The Choir itself was ecumenical, as Cathedral Director of Music Teresa Brown had gathered 50 singers from 23 different churches, representing five denominations. As the service drew to a close, they sang the Hallelujah Chorus – an uplifting and joyful response to all that had taken place.

Bishop Peter thanked his ecumenical guests and the congregation for joining him in this special service of prayer for Christian unity. After the resounding refrain of One Church, one Faith, one Lord, the joyful spirit of the evening continued in the cathedral as people chatted to fellow pilgrims on the journey. Hallelujah indeed!

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