

Welcome for Monday, May 8, 2006  
Bp Patrick McGrath  
National Workshop of Christian Unity  
Fairmont Hotel, San Jose  
May 8-11, 2006

Welcome. I am delighted that you are meeting in San Jose, and my welcome is heartfelt. Your ministry is essential to the life of the Church, and it is deeply appreciated.

I welcome you to the Santa Clara Valley. The Franciscans named our valley for Saint Claire. The Jesuits also named their university, which is so important in the life of our Church, for Saint Claire. But more recently, our valley has been unofficially but effectively renamed. Our new patron is Saint Silicon. You are at ground zero of the information, economic, and social revolution overtaking our time.

I use the word revolution advisedly. There is a consensus that we are in the midst of a transition similar to the industrial revolution. We all know enough history to recognize that our churches have not done well during revolutionary transitions. I think it fair to say that the churches' tardy and ineffective response to the human cost of industrialization was a factor in the decline of European Christianity and the unhappy history of Europe in the XIX century. And we have yet to come to terms with the intellectual upheavals of historical consciousness and the scientific revolution.

Perhaps this time the community which claims Christ can bring his vision for humanity to the social, political and economic transformations already underway. If the Church is to have a voice, if the spirit of Christ is to have some influence on the new world presently being shaped here, we need your ministry. We can no longer speak as individual ecclesial communities; we need to be united. I am grateful the theme of your workshop this year is "Where two or three are gathered in my name there am I in their midst." It seems to me that we

need to do just that: gather in his name so that he can be in our midst as together we face the challenging and uncharted circumstances of our world today. The work of ecumenism is essential for the Church, and so I repeat, “We are delighted to have you with us.”

Your program evidences a breadth of topics and includes cultural perspectives. You are not afraid to take up the issues pressing upon our society and our Churches—the role of Mary, human sexuality, interreligious dialogue, science and religion, abortion and end of life issues, ethnicity and culture. What and how can the Church speak to these complex questions? No one has the certain compass for navigating the new sea on which we find ourselves. Discerning what is good, true and just is no easy matter. We must proceed as did our predecessors in the faith—by honest discourse, through troubling differences, making advances and yes, missteps.

As is the case in so many parts of our country, Santa Clara County is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural community. One might think of us as a rather privileged microcosm of the emerging world church. Can we attain an authentic unity that embraces rather than erases our diversity?

I want to underscore another essential contribution of your workshop to the local and universal Church. You meet in civil discourse. You are friends who trust and enjoy one another. You do not agree about everything. Facile consensus is not your job. Your program manifests the diversity of issues which our Church faces today. The fact that you meet to discuss these troublesome and sometimes volatile topics is, itself, a ministry to our society and Church. Our civil and ecclesial discourse is too often marred by acrimony, recrimination, and mistrust. Your meeting, your conversations rooted in good faith and trust, model what our Church and society must be. For this, too, we are grateful.

I want you to know that my welcome is heartfelt for all of the reasons I have mentioned,

and more. Yours is an essential ministry within the Church, even if, at times, your efforts are not universally appreciated. I am not alone in my gratitude for this workshop where faithful Christians with various, sometimes competing traditions and perspectives, can converse about the difficult issues and new opportunities facing Church and society. We never know the shape of things to come, and this is especially true in turbulent times like ours. What we do know is that the Spirit is with us in our efforts, the Spirit of truth and of charity. The Spirit lives within the entire community, the one Spirit which calls us to be one. My hope and my prayer is that through this workshop, the Church will move forward to that unity for which Christ prayed. Welcome, and thank you.