

**Movimiento internacional  
Somos-Iglesia**

**Movimento Internazionale  
Nós somos Igreja**

**Movimento Internazionale  
Noi siamo Chiesa**

**Mouvement international  
Nous sommes Eglise**

**Internationale Bewegung  
Wir sind Kirche**

# **International Movement We are Church**

[www.we-are-church.org](http://www.we-are-church.org)

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## **Appeal of International Movement We Are Church (IMWAC) to the Synod of Bishops on Eucharist of Roman Catholic Church**

As members of "We Are Church" we have always tried to strongly live the centrality of Eucharist in the life of our Christian community. We joyfully greeted the decision of John Paul II and the confirmation by Benedict XVI, to the summons of a synod of bishops dedicated to the Eucharist. Moreover, we studied the official texts related to this topic: first, the encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, then the *Lineamenta* and the *Instrumentum laboris* issued preliminary to the Synod.

From this standpoint we express our disappointment about the doctrinal rigidity and lack of pastoral discretion incorporated in the promulgated texts. The prevailing line of thought points to an emphasis upon form and order (along the lines of the Council of Trent rather than Vatican II) rather than to knowing, understanding and encouraging. We are perplexed and greatly disappointed by the documents and fear the possibility that a great opportunity will be squandered.

The *Instrumentum laboris* itself, while taking note of the shortage of priests and of embarrassments and troubles, which greatly affects the community life of the world's Catholics, tends to point toward already prescribed nostrums and ritual concerning the celebration of Eucharist. We also are bound in conscience to complain that the observations we sent to Rome, at the express invitation of the Secretariat of the Synod, were not considered, despite the statement contained in the preface of the Vatican document, which claims to have drawn a "faithful summary of the information which arrived".

Our Church—despite the issuance of many influential documents, Eucharistic conferences, meetings and consideration at every level in the whole world—once again runs the risk of remaining at the starting gate. Yes, surely there is a larger devotion to the Eucharist, but the documents so far fail to disclose how the Eucharist truly can become the central moment in the life of Christian communities and a locus for further evangelization.

Now the Synod begins. We hope this great opportunity will not be lost. Thus, with broken hearts we ask the Synodal fathers that they not regard this as just as a solemn, perhaps emphatic, confirmation of a foregone conclusion. Even if most people consider the present Synod of Bishops unable to do so, those of you who participate in it should seize this

opportunity to express your determination to face facts, with your hearts and minds well-embedded in the Gospel.

To this end we—speaking from the base of God’s people and in tune with many of their expectations, and aware of the objective needs of the Roman Catholic Church—hereby summarize our chief concerns.

### **Sacrifice or Christ's Memory, Which Creates Community and Needs Testimony?**

Insisting - as the *Instrumentum laboris* does - upon the "Sacrifice of the Cross", "Sacrifice of the Altar" or "Sacrifice of the Mass" actually conveys to many believers the concept of a hurt, angry God, who requires reparations for offenses committed against him. In order to placate God’s wrath, God desires Jesus' death on the cross.

In concert with many theologians, we think this "sacrificial" idea should be abandoned. The Eucharistic celebration should instead be presented — as suggested by a careful interpretation of Scripture — as done in memory of the whole of Jesus' life, a life offered as a gift for all people to the end of time, a life marked by welcoming sinners and preaching of God’s Kingdom, a life ended by a crucifixion that was plotted and executed by political and religious powers; a life that is, finally, mysteriously crowned by the Father, who has raised from the dead his faithful Son.

The Eucharistic celebration, moreover, dramatically reminds us of the apostles’ abandonment of Jesus (John excluded) and, above all, the betrayal he suffered first from Judas and then, Peter; a betrayal repeated in our history and in the present, and which should then recommend not triumphalist tones but greater humility on our part.

We desire moreover that the Synod underline as key points of Eucharist: convivial life, fellowship, meditation on the Word, announcement of salvation which comes from God, sharing of Christ’s body broken for us in the broken bread, and, consistent with that, committing ourselves to justice in the world.

We equally hope that, while professing the mystery of Eucharist and believing the risen Christ is truly present in it, there should be full freedom in philosophical and theological discussions of this mystery, precisely because Scriptures do not explain the "way" of this "presence". This convergence in claiming the "presence" and maintaining freedom in the explanation of its possible "how" is what was envisaged by the ecumenical agreement achieved in Lima in 1981 in the document "Baptism, Eucharist, Ministries", which was also signed by Catholic theologians.

The contrary persistence of insisting upon “transubstantiation" dogma to explain Christ's presence in the Eucharist, as *Instrumentum laboris* does, triggers and strengthens a magical, materialistic, and legalistic mentality, in which Jesus is seen descending on the altar at the time the priest pronounces the words "This is my body, this is my blood...". That happens at the expense of the invocation of the Holy Spirit, of other holy moments of Eucharist and, obviously, of "convivial" or communal facets.

Furthermore, we are more than puzzled by every form of devotion, which is usual in the Eucharistic cult (for example, Eucharistic adoration, processions, etc.) in which the sacralization of Eucharist has a plain role, making an idol of the Eucharist. Many theologians and ministers share this discomfort, but *Instrumentum laboris* ignores this sensibility.

## **Banquet and Assembly or Hierarchical and Sacralized Rite?**

Eucharist does really exist if there's a true community that is gathered in Christ's name, if it does not exclude, if it proposes brotherhood and sisterhood among those who take part to it, and if it entails testimony in life for peace and justice. Ritually "true" Eucharistic celebrations can be spiritually "false" (let us remember Paul's words to the Corinthians). Therefore we can claim—if we accept today's official position about the primacy of Eucharist (sacrament of Order, imposition of hands, Apostolic succession)—that our Church can hardly ignore Karl Rahner's words:

"This right (to God's word and sacraments, CIC § 213) is a divine right since it enrolls in the nature of the Eucharist itself, and in case of conflict, it overcomes the rightful solicitude of Church for a celibate clergy for the care of souls."

We then think that because of the lack of priests caused by the law of celibacy presently in force, of necessity we shall resort to the care of married priests and *viri probati*, and women presiders. The exclusion of women is based upon untenable grounds from every viewpoint—on biblical, historical, ecumenical and most recent theological studies, as the practice of some Christian churches have emphasized.

Besides the primacy of the Eucharist, one question unavoidably stands out: Why should we delay again because of a misunderstood sense of respect towards tradition, decisions which already are pressing but which our Church, under the inspiration of the Spirit's call, cannot avoid in the not distant future?

In addition to the primacy of the Eucharist, we see the contradictions of exclusions in the Eucharistic assembly. These exclusions, which are enforced by the hierarchy, are less and less understood. We refer above all to a piercing contradiction: Those official documents that stress that divorced and or remarried people are fully a part of the Church community, but deny them Eucharistic fellowship. During the first centuries of the Church, our practice was truly different, as the current practices of the Orthodox Churches attest.

Moreover the community must take again possession of meditation on God's Word, which cannot be exclusively a priestly duty. This is already done quite widely, despite prohibitions, but it should become a general practice. Properly carried out, it would enhance both the priest's meditations and those of the community. Why did the *Instrumentum laboris* not investigate this key part of Eucharist?

Individual members and the entire Eucharistic assembly should have the right to share with the community—even through a prearranged approach—their own sufferings, joys, their everyday life, their aims, doubts, and anxieties. Thus, all, including children, will comprehend the symbols and signs.

In short, every Eucharistic celebration should be "bathed" in time and space and should not be strictly codified in every slightest detail; diocesan authorities, individual priests and communities should thus be kept free to make the Eucharist more shared and abounding. In a word, the Eucharistic assembly should be an opportunity to "love one to another, since by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples" (John 13:35), to "admonish one another" (Rom. 15:14) and to "salute one another with an holy kiss" (Rom. 16:16).

## **Eucharistic hospitality as base of oecumenical road or as an ostacle ?**

The movement toward ecumenism, which had taken steps forward after Vatican Council II, has stopped. One of key hindrances depends on the "impossibility" of celebrating

together the Eucharist (i.e., intercommunion). The official Catholic position claims that the celebration of Eucharist will be possible only after we have reached a consensus about doctrinal and church questions. We believe that ecumenical Eucharistic celebrations can help build Christian bonds, despite unresolved confessional divergences. Such celebrations do not affect Jesus' admonition that believers "do this in remembrance of me."

Why can we not carry out straightaway at least Eucharistic hospitality, as a fortifying medication that will at last drive our Churches to admit one another and to meet? In the end, it is not the churches that call the faithful to Eucharist, but Christ himself who invites us His table. He has come to heal the sick, not the healthy, and to call to the feast the maimed and the lame. He calls all Christian people and Churches to His table giving on only two conditions: our awareness of being sinners, and our wish to be faithful to his will. Why then should the Church impose conditions for celebrating Eucharist that Jesus himself did not lay down?

We are not alone in wanting to go this way. In 2003 the ecumenical institutes of Bensheim, Strasburg, and Tubingen cited reasons for which mutual Eucharistic hospitality (between Catholics and Lutherans, for example) are theologically sound and, in many cases, pastorally required, notwithstanding differences in theological comprehension and in church practices.

### **Does Our Eucharist Share in Jesus' Liberating Perspective?**

We think fundamental to verifying the actual consistency of the high number of Eucharistic assemblies that are given every week throughout the world, should be consideration of whether they try to bring to completion the history of salvation, through reversal of "world" rules. The world envisages feasts for the wealthy, while the poor must be satisfied with leftovers (Lk. 16:19-31). We Catholics, at the beginning of the third millennium, cannot but wonder whether and how much "slaves and masters...male and female" join in the Eucharistic assembly as equals. Do we celebrate with Mary, in the song of Magnificat, the feast of the poor and hopeless? Do we welcome the loving presence of a God who helps to change our pyramid of powers to build a new domestic, social, economical and political order, based on nonviolence, on trusting dialogue with our enemy, and on our forbearance despite provocation?

On this we agree with the Apostolic Letter *Mane nobiscum Domine*, in which Pope Wojtyla proclaimed the Year of the Eucharist. This text, at paragraph 28, lists the many lacks of our world that "diocesan and parish communities" should try to mitigate:

"The tragedy of hunger which plagues hundreds of millions of human beings, the diseases which afflict developing countries, the loneliness of the elderly, the hardships faced by the unemployed, the struggles of immigrants. These are evils that are present—albeit to different degrees—even in areas of immense wealth. We cannot delude ourselves. It is only by our mutual love and, in particular, by our concern for those in need that we will be recognized as true followers of Christ (cf. Jn. 13:35; Mt. 25:31-46). This will be the criterion by which the authenticity of our Eucharistic celebrations is "judged."

### **International Movement We Are Church-IMWAC**

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