



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE JOINT WORKING GROUP
BETWEEN THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES
AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**

*Hall of Popes
Friday, 25 January 2008*

Dear Friends,

I am pleased to welcome you, the members of the Joint Working Group between the World Council of Churches and the Catholic Church, as you gather in Rome to begin a new phase of your work. Your meeting takes place in this City where the Apostles Peter and Paul bore supreme witness to Christ and shed their blood in his name. I greet you warmly in the words which Paul himself addressed to the first Christians in Rome: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (*Rom 1:7*).

The World Council of Churches and the Catholic Church have enjoyed a fruitful ecumenical relationship dating back to the time of the Second Vatican Council. The Joint Working Group, which began in 1965, has worked assiduously to strengthen the “dialogue of life” which my predecessor, Pope John Paul II, called the “dialogue of charity” (*Ut Unum Sint*, 17). This cooperation has given vivid expression to the communion already existing between Christians and has advanced the cause of ecumenical dialogue and understanding.

The centenary of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity offers us an opportunity to thank Almighty God for the fruits of the ecumenical movement, in which we can discern the presence of the Holy Spirit fostering the growth of all Christ’s followers in unity of faith, hope and love. To pray for unity is itself “an effective means of obtaining the grace of unity” (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 8), since it is a participation in the prayer of Jesus himself. When Christians pray together, “the goal of unity seems closer” (*Ut Unum Sint*, 22), for the presence of Christ in our midst (cf. *Mt 18:20*) fosters a profound harmony of mind and heart: we are able to look at each other in a new way, and to strengthen our resolve to overcome whatever keeps us apart.

On this day, then, we think back with gratitude to the work of so many individuals who, over the years, have sought to spread the practice of spiritual ecumenism through common prayer, conversion of heart and growth in communion. We also give thanks for the ecumenical dialogues which have borne abundant fruit in the past century. The reception of those fruits is itself an important step in the process of promoting Christian unity, and the Joint Working Group is particularly suited to studying and encouraging that process.

Dear friends, I pray that the new Joint Working Group will be able to build on the commendable work already done, and thus open the way to ever greater cooperation, so that the Lord's prayer "that they all may be one" (*Jn 17:21*) will be ever more fully realized in our time.

With these sentiments, and with deep appreciation for your important service to the ecumenical movement, I cordially invoke upon you and your deliberations God's abundant blessings.