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Cardinal Maida on Vatican Document Regarding Church Doctrine

During the past four decades since the end of Vatican II, as a priest and bishop, I have encountered countless very good and faithful Catholics and well-intentioned non-Catholics alike who were confused, even uncertain, regarding the relationship between members of the Catholic Church and people from other Christian faith traditions. While ecumenical openness and shared dialogues, prayer services, and common social initiatives have been a great blessing for all parties, they have also generated questions which have needed a more clear response. Happily, the Congregation for Doctrine of the Faith has now provided some very straight-forward guidelines with their newly-released document arranged in the format of five questions and answers.

This new clarifying text builds on other previous statements of the same Congregation (1973, 1992 and 2000) and on writings of Paul VI and John Paul II. By issuing this new text, the Congregation was intending to strengthen the ecumenical movement by clarifying officially the position of the Roman Catholic Church on our relationship with other Christians.

The document affirms that Vatican II did not introduce a new teaching or approach regarding our relationship with other churches. Both before and after the Council, the Catholic Church has always understood itself as the Church of Christ. Secondly, when the Council Fathers said “*the Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church,*” they were affirming that here on earth, Christ established one Church and the Catholic Church throughout the centuries has preserved all elements of the Church instituted by Christ; we believe we are indeed the Church of Christ. Other Christian churches enjoy elements of the sanctification that is fully present in the Catholic Church.

Here in the Archdiocese of Detroit, we intend to maintain and strengthen our cordial and mutually respectful relationships and initiatives with all other Christian groups—at both Archdiocesan, local parish and vicariate levels. Monsignor Patrick Halfpenny, Archdiocesan Liaison for Ecumenical and Interfaith Matters, will continue to work closely with me, the auxiliary bishops and pastors, and our Central Service and Seminary personnel, ensuring full understanding of the Church’s teaching on these matters and pledging continued collaborative and good will as we work and pray to fulfill Christ’s own prayer the night before He died: “*That all might be one.*”

Cardinal Adam Maida
Archbishop of Detroit
July 10, 2007