



Images shown above: Polish National Catholic Church leaders present Cardinal John O'Connor with an icon on the day he was made a cardinal by Pope John Paul II, May 25, 1985. | Clergy from Polish National Catholic and Roman Catholic Churches pray Stations of the Cross at Cathedral of Saint Peter, 1993. | Representatives of various Christian faith traditions at an Ecumenical Celebration of God's Word at the Cathedral of Saint Peter held annually during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, 2014. | Abington Ecumenical Ministerium presents a Holy Hootenanny concert at Saint Benedict Church in Clarks Summit, featuring combined choirs and voices of 15 area churches, 2018.

Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

PROMOTING SOCIAL JUSTICE, MORAL VALUES AND PEACE FOR ALL

Cardinal Walter Kasper, writing in "Martin Luther, An Ecumenical Perspective," has stated: "Christian ecumenism is concerned with the unity of the church in service to the unity and peace of the world."

Ecumenism and concern for inter-religious dialogue and cooperation is promoted by the Vatican II documents *Nostra Aetate*, the Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions; *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church; *Dignitatis Humanae*, the Declaration on Religious Liberty; and *Ad Gentes*, the Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church.

Shortly after he became Bishop of Scranton on March 4, 1966, Bishop J. Carroll McCormick started working on the establishment of a Commission that would implement the vital work of the Second Vatican Council regarding ecumenism. On June 30, 1966, he named Monsignor Eugene J. Clark to the position of Diocesan Director of Ecumenism and Human Affairs and the new Commission was formed on September 15, 1966.

From the very inception of this Commission, historic barriers began to dissolve and a climate of understanding and cooperation developed. On several occasions, such as the *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*, communal prayer services were organized,

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congregations worshiped together and preaching duties were exchanged.

In those early days, the Commission took an active role in social service ministry. Priests, ministers and rabbis learned that their religious differences did not preclude jointly sponsored programs aimed at improving human conditions.

Because of a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit following the Second Vatican Council and a similar renewal within the Polish National Catholic Church, faithful in both churches started rediscovering one another increasingly as brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Calls for a dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and Polish National Catholic Church go

back as far as 1966, when the Most Reverend Leon Grochowski, Prime Bishop of the PNCC, proposed such a dialogue to Bishop McCormick. Later, in 1980, Pope John Paul II expressed his desire that the National Conference of Catholic Bishops formally advance the relationship that exists with the PNCC and explore the possibility of further dialogue. This resulted in an exchange of correspondence between the leaders of both churches that would culminate in the first meeting for an official dialogue in Passaic, New Jersey, on October 23, 1984.

Monsignor Clark served as Director of Ecumenism until 1970 when Bishop McCormick appointed Monsignor Constantine V. Siconolfi as the new director. Following Monsignor Siconolfi, Father Leo J. McKernan served as Director of Ecumenism from 1987 to 1993. He was followed by then-Father Joseph C. Bambera who assumed the role as Director in 1993 and continued in that role for three years.

Following his appointment as Bishop of Scranton in 1983, Bishop John J. O'Connor played a major role in promoting the continuation of talks between the Roman Catholic and the Polish National Catholic Church. His involvement encouraged a re-awakening of the dialogue between the two churches.

Following Bishop James C. Timlin's installation



Dinner meeting with Orthodox, Eastern Rite and Latin Rite clergy on January 22, 2018.

as the eighth Bishop of Scranton on June 7, 1984, a number of significant gestures of reconciliation took place between the Roman Catholic and Polish National Catholic Churches, including the Service of Healing held in Saint Stanislaus Polish National Catholic Cathedral in Scranton, on February 15, 1992. Leaders of both churches asked publicly for forgiveness, and pledged to overcome their historic divisions.

In 1997 Bishop Timlin, then the Roman Catholic Co-Chairman of the dialogue, reiterated this request for forgiveness in a letter he issued on the centenary of the organization of the Polish National Catholic Church.

In response to Pope John Paul II's call to prepare for the Great Jubilee Year 2000, and in particular, to focus on deepening ecumenical relationships on

the local level, a new ecumenical endeavor was launched – the *Christian Communities Gathering of Northeastern Pennsylvania*. Under the guidance of Monsignor Vincent J. Grimalia, current Diocesan Coordinator for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, members of the *Christian Communities Gathering* meet several times a year for dialogue, fellowship and prayer that includes the annual Ecumenical Celebration of God's Word held at the Cathedral of Saint Peter.

The Diocese has also participated in and hosted interfaith prayer services at various times, and there are a variety of interfaith activities in which Catholics participate. Some ministerial groups in our area are not only ecumenical but also inter-religious. One example is the *Wyoming Valley Inter-Faith Council*.

FAITH FACTS:

In his encyclical, *Ut Unum Sint*, issued May 25, 1995, Saint John Paul II stated "...promoting Christian unity, is not just some sort of 'appendix' which is added to the Church's traditional activity. Rather, ecumenism is an organic part of her life and work, and consequently must pervade all that she is and does; it must be like the fruit borne by a healthy and flourishing tree which grows to its full stature."

In addition to its work regarding relations between Christian and other faiths, in 1967, the inaugural Diocesan Commission on Ecumenism and Human Affairs addressed a range of issues including racial discrimination and ministry to migrant workers.

In 2008, a monument bearing God's Ten Commandments was installed on the grounds of Holy Cross High School in Dunmore. The monument, part of the national Project Moses initiative, was acquired through the generosity of Alan Goldstein, a member of Temple Israel in Scranton, and in cooperation with the Jewish Federation of Northeastern Pennsylvania.



In 2017, Bishop Bambera was named national chair of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Committee on Ecumenical and Inter-religious Affairs. It promotes dialogue between religions as well as dialogue between Christians and it is the U.S. Bishops' liaison with the Holy See for ecumenical matters. He also co-chairs the annual meeting of the Roman Catholic – Polish National Catholic Church dialogue, which was first established in 1984.

1967

Bishop McCormick was the first Scranton prelate to address a congregation at a synagogue, pictured here at Madison Avenue Temple in Scranton.



1993

Bishop James C. Timlin greets Bishop Anthony M. Rysz, head of the Central Diocese of the Polish National Catholic Church.



2017

Faith representatives at the annual Ascension Day of Prayer and Praise, organized by the Christian Communities Gathering of Northeastern Pennsylvania.



2018

Dinner meeting with members of the local Polish National Catholic Church



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