



THE ASSEMBLY OF CATHOLIC ORDINARIES OF THE HOLY LAND  
*Latins, Melkites, Maronites, Syrians, Armenians, Chaldeans, Custody of the Holy Land*

## **PASTORAL ECUMENICAL GUIDELINES**

### **FOR THE CATHOLIC CHURCHES**

### **IN THE HOLY LAND**

#### INTRODUCTION

##### **Aim and Meaning of these Pastoral Ecumenical Guidelines**

1. These *Guidelines* intend to enlighten, motivate and guide the ecumenical relations of the Catholic Church in the Holy Land, as well as to give directives, some of them being binding in particular cases, in accordance with the teachings and norms of the Catholic Church worldwide. They intend not to replace them but to adapt the application of these teachings to the local ecclesial context. In fact, the *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* (DA), published by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in 1993, is the main source of these *Guidelines*. In many cases, it will be necessary to refer back to this *Directory* for more ample explanation.

It is also hoped that these guidelines may promote a common identical practice among the Catholic Churches and among their priests.

These *Pastoral Ecumenical Guidelines for the Catholic Churches in the Holy Land* (PEG) have been approved by the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land (AOCHL) and apply to all Catholic Churches in the Holy Land (Palestine, Israel, Jordan and Cyprus). When the local circumstances in the various regions require more specific guidelines, these will be elaborated under the authority of the local Ordinaries.

At present, these *Guidelines* regard mainly the sharing in sacramental life, a question that requires special attention. At a later stage, they may be completed in other fields of ecumenical relations and collaboration, such as ecumenical formation, schools, charitable institutions, youth apostolate, etc.



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PART I  
**CHURCHES AND ECUMENICAL RELATIONS IN THE HOLY LAND**

**A. Diversity of Traditions and Divisions in the Holy Land**

2. In the Holy Land, because of its unique significance for Christians all over the world, almost all Christian Traditions and Churches are present side by side. Thus Jerusalem is like a living image, a microcosm of the Church worldwide with her rich diversities of languages, cultures and traditions. According to the categories of four families of Churches, adopted by the Middle East Council of Churches, we can distinguish the following Traditions:

- *The Oriental Orthodox Churches:* Armenian Orthodox Apostolic Patriarchate, Syrian Orthodox Church, Coptic Orthodox Church and Ethiopian Orthodox Church.
- *The Eastern Orthodox Churches:* Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Orthodox Church of Cyprus.
- *The Catholic Churches:* Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Greek Melkite Catholic Church, Maronite Church, Syrian Catholic Church, Armenian Catholic Church, Chaldean Church.
- *The Anglican and Evangelical Churches and Ecclesial Communities:* Anglican Episcopal Church, Lutheran Evangelical Church, and various Reformed, Presbyterian, Evangelical and Pentecostal Communities.

This diversity represents a real richness for the Churches, since every Tradition approaches the inexhaustible mystery of God revealed in Christ according to its own culture, language and genius and thus develops a specific way of accepting the Gospel, of meditating on it, of celebrating it in Liturgy and of living it in its own spirituality. When we bring together these different approaches in unity we can hope to come to a deeper knowledge and a fuller celebration of God's eternal plan of salvation.

3. Unfortunately, this diversity has been confronted with important divisions in the course of history: the Christological controversies in the 5th century; the great schism between the Churches of the East and of the West in the 11th century; the Reformation movements in the 16th century. The various Churches and communities brought these divisions with them to the Holy Land at various times.

**B. The Search for Christian Unity in the Holy Land**

4. In the Holy Land, and in particular in Jerusalem, ecumenical relations have inherited two major negative burdens from past history: the centuries long tensions around the Holy Places, and the missionary activity by Western Churches, mainly from the 19<sup>th</sup> century on. In both fields some notable progress has been made during recent decades.

The collaboration of the different Churches in the restoration works of the Basilica of the Holy Sepulcher (Anastasis), although complex and difficult at some times, contributed in creating a

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better mutual understanding and trust. This positive climate is confirmed by the recent common restoration in the Basilica of the Nativity and inside the Holy Sepulcher. However closer coordination remains desirable in several fields, for instance for welcoming pilgrims and maintaining discipline in the Holy Places.

The pilgrimage of Pope Paul VI in 1964, and his meetings with the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras and the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem Benedictos, have inaugurated a new atmosphere in the relations among the Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem. Another stage in the improvement of relations was the beginning of coordination among them in the midst of the difficult political and social situation following the first Palestinian Intifada. These relations then developed step by step. The Heads started meeting, publishing common statements and memoranda, as well as regular common messages for Christmas and Easter every year. At present they are united by a common concern for the future of the Christian presence and the defense of the historical rights of the Churches in the Holy Land. Many, however, still desire a closer collaboration in the pastoral field, for instance for schools, charitable institutions and youth apostolate.

The relations at the level of the faithful are of a quite different nature. Christians are well aware, given their small numbers in the wider society, that only together can they have a future in this region and offer a credible witness and meaningful service to their people. They live side by side and collaborate spontaneously. Mixed marriages are part and parcel of their family life. They might even say quite often that they are already united and that division constitutes a problem only for the various clergies. At the same time, at the parish level in towns and villages the relations among the pastors of the various communities will differ from place to place, but are often more open and trustful.

5. As a consequence of this living reality at the grassroots level, the faithful tend to cross easily the denominational boundaries in church life and activities, even in liturgical and sacramental life. They identify spontaneously as Christians, while the clergy has the tendency to identify according to denominational lines. Do they act this way out of ignorance, because of lack of Christian education? Or is it possible to discern in this attitude an expression of the *sensus fidei fidelium*, "an instinct of faith – *sensus fidei* – which helps them to discern what is truly of God", as Pope Francis writes in *Evangelii Gaudium* (n. 119)? This awareness of belonging to the same community may also have a theological meaning and deserves to be taken into consideration.

However, at the same time, one can also note, in certain places, a tendency to a renewed affirmation of denominational identity, an exclusive withdrawal into one's own group over and against the others, a form of fundamentalism.

The present *Pastoral Ecumenical Guidelines* intend precisely to contribute to a sound discernment by offering to pastors and faithful some orientations and directives, inspired by and based upon the official teachings of the Catholic Church.



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PART II  
**TEACHINGS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH ON ECUMENISM**

**A. Official Texts of the Catholic Church on Ecumenism**

6. The basic references for the ecumenical principles and orientations are expressed in three documents of the Second Vatican Council:

- The Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (LG);
- The Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio* (UR);
- The Decree on Eastern Catholic Churches *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* (OE).

These teachings have been explained and applied in later official documents:

- The Latin Code of Canon Law *Codex Iuris Canonici* (1983) (CIC) and the Code of Canons of the Eastern Catholic Churches *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* (1990) (CCEO).
- The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992) (CCC), mainly n. 813-822.
- The *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* (DA), published by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (1993).
- The Encyclical of Pope John Paul II *Ut Unum Sint* (1995) (UUS).
- *The Ecumenical Dimension in the Formation of Those Engaged in Pastoral Work*, published by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (1997).
- Assembly of the Catholic Churches of the Holy Land: Diocesan Synod of the Catholic Churches, *The General Pastoral Plan: Believing in Christ, Participation in the Church, Witnessing in Society*, Jerusalem, 2000: Part II, ch. 8 (Striving for Christian Unity: The Ecumenical Movement), p. 133-141.
- Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *The Bishop and Christian Unity: an Ecumenical Vademecum*, Rome, 2020.

The present Pastoral Ecumenical Guidelines are based on these official texts, but since they cannot summarize neither all the theological and ecclesiological reflections nor all the canonical norms, it will be helpful to consult these documents on certain important issues.

**B. Theological and Ecclesiological Principles of Ecumenism**

7. It is important that all bishops and priests, as well as all religious and laypersons engaged in pastoral activity have a good knowledge of the theological and ecclesiological principles that are the foundations of the pastoral guidelines. Such knowledge will help them to understand that these guidelines are not purely practical directives that are established in an arbitrary way and could be changed at will. Then they will also be personally motivated to

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follow the orientations faithfully and be able to apply them also in some new circumstances not foreseen in the present document.

The official Ecumenical *Directory* offers an easily accessible synthesis of the main principles that inspire the ecumenical relations of the Catholic Church in its Chapter I: "The Search for Christian Unity". The study of this chapter is strongly recommended, beginning with the first two paragraphs: The Church and its Unity in the Plan of God (n. 11-12); The Church as Communion (n. 13-17).

a) *The Church and its Unity in the Plan of God*: In the mystery of his eternal plan of salvation God wants to draw the whole human family and indeed the whole of creation in unity with himself. To this end, at the fullness of time, God sent into the world His Only Son, who was raised up on the cross, entered into glory and poured out the Holy Spirit through whom he calls and draws into unity of faith, hope and charity the people of the new covenant. The Church "is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race" (*Lumen Gentium* 1). As a consequence all division within the Church, which happened because of "human folly or human sinfulness", is contrary to her being and mission and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit every effort should be made in the search for Christian Unity.

b) *The Church as Communion*: The ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental idea of the teaching of Vatican II on the Church. In its deepest reality, it is the unity of all with the Father through Christ in the Spirit. The Trinitarian communion is the source and model of the communion of the Church. This communion is realized concretely in the particular Churches, each of which is gathered together around its Bishop. Communion between the Churches is maintained and manifested in a special way through the communion between their bishops. Together they form a college that succeeds the apostolic college, and this college has as its head the Bishop of Rome. Communion is built up on the local, regional and universal level.

Full visible unity of all Christians at all levels of the Church is the ultimate goal of the ecumenical movement. On the way to this full unity, the ecclesiology of communion allows the Catholic Church to recognize that "a real, even if imperfect, communion" exists with other Churches and some Ecclesial communities according to the degree of communion in faith, sacramental life and visible unity in Christ. Searching for full unity will be to work for bringing this real although imperfect communion to its fullness.

### C. Sharing spiritual activities and resources: Theological principles

8. a) In spite of the many differences and the serious difficulties which prevent full ecclesial communion, "it is clear that all those who by baptism are incorporated into Christ share many elements of the Christian life. There thus exists a real, even if imperfect, communion among Christians which can be expressed in many ways, including sharing in prayer and liturgical worship" (DA 104).

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b) The degree of possibilities of such sharing will depend on the degree of the existing imperfect communion in faith and sacramental life. Regarding ecumenical relations, especially in the liturgical life, it is very important to make a clear distinction between relations with the Orthodox Churches (Byzantine Orthodox or Oriental Orthodox), on the one hand, and relations with the Churches and Ecclesial Communities that resulted from the Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, on the other hand.

"Between the Catholic Church and the Eastern Churches not in full communion with it, there is still a very close communion in matters of faith. Moreover, 'through the celebration of the Eucharist of the Lord in each of these Churches, the Church of God is built up and grows in stature' and 'although separated from us, these Churches still possess true sacraments, above all—by apostolic succession—the priesthood and the Eucharist...'" According to the understanding of the Catholic Church, these ecclesiological and sacramental principles allow and even encourage some sharing in liturgical worship, even in the Eucharist, with these Churches, "given suitable circumstances and the approval of church authorities" (DA 122; cf. UR 14-15).

With the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, even when in most cases the Catholic Church recognizes the baptism conferred in these traditions as being valid, there is no general recognition of the validity of the sacraments and particularly of the ordained ministry through apostolic succession. This has significant consequences on the possibility or impossibility of sharing in spiritual and liturgical resources.

c) In any case, *Eucharistic concelebration*, which is the visible sacramental expression of full communion in faith, worship and community life, is not permitted with ministers of Churches or Ecclesial Communities that are not in full communion with the Catholic Church (DA 104.e; cf. CIC cn. 908, CCEO cn. 702).

d) We have always to show understanding and sincere respect for the liturgical and sacramental discipline of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, as we have the right to expect the same respect from the others for the Catholic discipline (DA 107). Concretely, it is well known that the Orthodox Churches are notably more reticent concerning sacramental sharing with other Churches.

In principle it is recommended that consultations on sharing take place between the appropriate church authorities, if possible, seeking some lawful reciprocity according to the doctrine and traditions of different Communities (DA 106)

e) We should always show respect for the Church to which the faithful belong and be aware that receiving Eucharist or communion is never a purely personal act, but signifies a certain real communion existing among the churches or communities of those persons who take part in the same Eucharist.

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PART III  
**PASTORAL ECUMENICAL RELATIONS**

**A. Pastoral principles**

9. We should always encourage the faithful to practice their faith and sacramental life in their own Church and avoid carefully all what could be misunderstood as proselytism. At the same time, every Christian has the right for conscientious religious reasons to decide freely on his or her ecclesial membership.

It is important to make always a clear distinction between sharing in (1) Non-sacramental liturgical worship, and (2) Sacramental life, mainly the Eucharist. The present guidelines are mainly concerned with sacramental sharing.

**B. Sharing in Sacramental Life with members of Eastern or Oriental Orthodox Churches**

*In the Catholic Church:*

10. a) "Catholic ministers may lawfully administer the **sacraments of Penance, Eucharist and the Anointing of the Sick** to members of Eastern Churches, who ask for these sacraments of their own free will and are properly disposed" (DA 125).

However, in all these cases, "due consideration should be given to the discipline of the Eastern Churches for their own faithful and any suggestion of proselytism should be avoided" (DA 125). Similarly, Orthodox Christians are supposed to respect the discipline of the Catholic Church. For instance, in the Latin Church, a Latin Catholic priest should not give communion to little Orthodox children, just as communion is not given to little Catholic children in the Latin Church

b) "An Eastern Christian may be invited to **read lessons** at a sacramental liturgical celebration in Catholic Churches" (DA 126). The official documents do not mention the Gospel, but since the reading of the Gospel is reserved to a deacon or a priest, inviting a non-Catholic minister would be some kind of concelebration, at least in the Eucharist, and concelebration is not permitted in principle (cf. above, n. 8). This is equally true for the homily during a Eucharistic celebration.

c) "It is permissible for a just cause for an Eastern faithful to act as godparent, together with a Catholic godparent, at the **baptism** of a Catholic infant or adult, so long as there is provision for the Catholic education of the person being baptized" (DA 98.b)

d) "A member of an Eastern Church may act as bridesmaid or best man at a **wedding** in a Catholic Church" (DA 128).

*In the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches:*

11. a) "Whenever necessity requires or a genuine spiritual advantage suggests and provided the danger of error or indifferentism is avoided, it is lawful for any Catholic for whom it is physically or morally impossible to approach a Catholic minister, to receive the

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sacraments of **Penance, Eucharist and Anointing of the sick** from a minister of an Eastern Church" (DA 123).

At the same time, "a Catholic who legitimately wishes to communicate with Eastern Christians must respect the Eastern discipline as much as possible and refrain from communicating if that Church restricts sacramental communion to its own members to the exclusion of others" (DA 124).

**b)** "Catholics may **read lessons** at a sacramental liturgical celebration in the Eastern Churches if they are invited to do so" (DA 126).

**c)** "A Catholic minister may be present and take part in the **celebration of a marriage** being properly celebrated between Eastern Christians or between a Catholic and an Eastern Christian in the Eastern Church, if invited to do so by the Eastern Church authority" (DA 127). "A Catholic also may be bridesmaid or best man at a **marriage** properly celebrated in an Eastern Church" (DA 128).

### C. Sharing Sacramental Life with Christians of Other Churches and Ecclesial Communities

*In the Catholic Churches:*

**12. a)** In case of danger of death, Catholic ministers may administer the **sacraments of Penance, Eucharist and Anointing of the sick** to members of other Churches or Ecclesial Communities, on the conditions that the person is unable to have recourse for the sacrament desired to a minister of his or her own Church or Ecclesial Community, asks for the sacrament of his or her initiative, manifests Catholic faith in this sacrament and is properly disposed (DA 130 and 131).

"In other cases, it is strongly recommended that the diocesan Bishop, taking into account any norms which may have been established for this matter by the Episcopal Conference or the Synod of Eastern Churches, establish general norms for judging of grave and pressing need and for verifying the conditions mentioned above." According to Canon law, general norms on this issue should be established only after consultation with at least the local competent authority of the interested Church or Ecclesial Community (DA 130; CIC 844,5; CCEO 671,5).

**b)** "The **reading of Scripture** during a Eucharistic celebration in the Catholic Church is to be done by members of that Church. On exceptional occasions and for a just case, the bishop of the diocese may permit a member of another Church or Ecclesial Community to take on the task of the reader" (DA 133). During the Eucharistic liturgy, the **homily**, as well as the Gospel, which form part of the liturgy itself are reserved to the priest or deacon; as a consequence excluded for a minister of other Churches (DA 134).

During **other than Eucharistic celebrations**, the reading of Scripture or preaching by Christians of other Churches or Communities are permitted (DA 135 and 118).



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c) At a Catholic **baptism**, a baptized person who belongs to another ecclesial Community [non-Eastern] may be admitted as a witness, but only with a Catholic godparent” (DA 98.a).

d) Members of other Churches or Ecclesial communities may be witnesses at the celebration of **marriage** in a Catholic church (DA 136).

*In other Churches and Ecclesial communities*

13. a) “On the basis of the Catholic doctrine concerning the sacraments and their validity, a Catholic who finds himself or herself in the danger of death or in extreme need may ask for these sacraments [=Penance, Eucharist, Anointing of the Sick] only from a minister in whose Church these sacraments are valid or from one who is known to be validly ordained according to the Catholic teaching on ordination” (DA 132). — These conditions are almost never fulfilled in the Holy Land.

b) A Catholic may be a witness for a **person being baptized** in another ecclesial community (DA 98.a).

c) Catholics may be witnesses at **marriages** that are celebrated in other Churches or Ecclesial Communities (DA 136).

**D. Mixed Marriages**

14. a) Given the frequency of mixed marriages in the Holy Land and their multiple pastoral implications, the question of mixed marriages requires special attention. The Ecumenical *Directory* devotes a separate paragraph to this question (DA 143-160). However, it “does not attempt to give an extended treatment of all the pastoral and canonical questions connected [...] since such questions form part of the general pastoral care of every bishop or regional conference of bishops” (DA 143).

b) **Definition:** “The term ‘mixed marriage’ refers to any marriage between a Catholic and a baptized Christian who is not in full communion with the Catholic Church” (DA 143; cf. CIC 1124; CCEO 813).

A clear distinction needs to be made between “mixed marriages” between baptized persons belonging to different confessions, and marriages of “disparity of worship”, namely a marriage between a baptized Catholic and a non-baptized person. Marriages of disparity of worship are subject to specific canonical provisions and disparity of worship is a diriment impediment.

c) **Pastoral recommendations:** (1) “Marriage between persons of the same ecclesial Community remains the objective to be recommended and encouraged” (DA 144). At the same time, mixed marriages between Christians belonging to different confessions can make a contribution to the ecumenical movement, particularly when both parties are faithful to their religious duties (DA 145).

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(2) Special pastoral care should be offered to the mixed married couple and their families (DA 145-149).

**d) Canonical provisions:**

- "Marriage between two baptized persons, one of whom is Catholic and the other of whom is non-Catholic, is prohibited without the prior permission of the competent authority" (CCEO 813; CCC 1124). Thus this permission is required for the lawfulness or liceity, not for the validity.
- The local hierarch can give this permission for a just reason, under the following conditions: (1) the Catholic partner declares that he or she will remain faithful to the Catholic faith and do all that is in his or her power to have the children baptized and brought up in the Catholic Church. (2) The other partner is to be informed of these promises. (3) Both parties have to be instructed about the purposes and essential properties of marriage (CCEO 814; CCC 1125).
- It is for the Bishops' Conference or to the particular law of each Church *sui iuris* to prescribe the manner in which these declarations and promises have to be made and how the non-Catholic party is to be informed of them (CCC 1126; CCEO 815).
- "A marriage between a Catholic and a member of an Eastern Church is valid if it has taken place with the celebration of a religious rite by a priest only, as long as any other requirements for validity have been observed. For lawfulness in these cases, the canonical form is to be observed" (DA 153; CIC 1127,1; 1108; CCEO 834,2; 828). In this case, thus, the canonical form is only required for liceity.
- "Canonical form is required for the validity of marriages between Catholics and Christians of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities" (DA 153; CIC 1127,1; CCEO 834,1). A dispensation from the canonical form can be granted, given by the Ordinary, (CCEO 814; CIC 1127 &2).

**e) Celebration of the sacrament:**

- There can be only one presiding minister who receives the consent and gives the marital blessing (DA 157).
- "It is not permitted to have two separate religious services in which the exchange of consent would be expressed. Likewise it is not allowed to have two exchanges of consent in the same service" (CIC 1127, 3; CCEO 839).
- At a Catholic celebration of a mixed marriage, the Catholic priest may invite the minister of the party of the other Church or ecclesial Community to participate in the celebration, to read from the Scripture, except for the Gospel, give a brief exhortation and bless the couple (DA 157).



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- At a non-Catholic celebration, at the invitation of the presiding celebrant, the Catholic priest or deacon may offer appropriate prayers, read from the Scripture, give a brief exhortation and bless the couple (DA 157).
- "A member of an Eastern Church may act as bridesmaid or best man at a wedding in a Catholic Church" (DA 128).
- "A Catholic also may be bridesmaid or best man at a marriage properly celebrated in an Eastern Church" (DA 128).
- Members of other Churches or Ecclesial communities may be witnesses at the celebration of marriage in a Catholic Church (DA 136).
- Catholics may be witnesses at marriages that are celebrated in other Churches or Ecclesial Communities (DA 136).
- Because of problems concerning Eucharistic sharing, a mixed marriage celebrated according to the Catholic canonical form ordinarily takes place outside the Eucharistic liturgy. For a just cause, however, the diocesan bishop may permit the celebration of the Eucharist. Similarly, Eucharistic sharing by the spouses of a mixed marriage can only be exceptional. In both cases norms concerning sharing in the Eucharist mentioned above should be observed (DA 159-160).
- A Catholic who became Orthodox in order to obtain a divorce and remarried in the Orthodox Church will not be allowed to receive communion in the Catholic Church. However, the children of such marriage will be accepted in Catholic schools and for Catholic education.

**f) Pastoral agreements**

- In the Holy land it is agreed among the Churches that the marriage is celebrated in Church of the husband.
- This is officially confirmed in the Pastoral Agreement concluded at Charfeh, 14 October 1996: (1) Freedom of the wife to remain member of her Church if she wants it; (2) The celebration of the marriage in the Church of the husband, and the presiding priest may invite the priest of the other party to recite some prayers; (3) The children will be baptized in the Church of their father. — This agreement is signed by the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch, but, in principle, does not concern the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

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## CONCLUSION


15. The Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land approves and publishes these *Pastoral Ecumenical Guidelines* and invites Catholic priests, religious and faithful – particularly those engaged in pastoral activity – to study them carefully and to apply them conscientiously.

The present guidelines are part and parcel of the living reality that is the search for Christian Unity, a reality that faces continuously new developments and, as a consequence, may require periodic revisions of these guidelines. All help and complementary contributions will be gratefully welcomed by the Secretariat of the AOCHL and the Episcopal Commission for Ecumenical Relations.

*After having obtained the previous agreement from the Pontifical Council for promoting Christian unity, the Assembly of the Catholic Ordinaries in the Holy Land has approved this Decree unanimity.*



The President

  
+ Pierbattista Pizzaballa, OFM  
Patriarch of Jerusalem for Latins

The secretary general

  
Pietro Felet scj

Jerusalem, 5<sup>th</sup> October 2021