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A stained-glass window depicting the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Mary and the apostles is

A stained-glass window depicting the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Mary and the apostles is seen during a confirmation Mass May 5, 2022, at Holy Family Church in Queens, N.Y. (CNS photo/Gregory A. Shemitz)



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Christians must welcome the Holy Spirit as the guide leading the whole Christian community toward unity, Pope Francis said.

Speaking to members of the International Commission for Dialogue between the Disciples of Christ and the Catholic Church at the Vatican June 28, the pope said that Christian unity comes from "walking together" while remaining open to the Spirit's role in creating harmony amid the differences between Christians.

Francis recalled how on the morning of Pentecost the Spirit created harmony from the "great 'division' of many charisms" among the apostles. Yet, he said, harmony in the Spirit is more than a "negotiation" between different sides; it opens "new and unforeseen paths" of unity that formerly seemed closed off.

"Let us not be afraid therefore of walking the paths of concord that the Spirit points out, not those of spiritual worldliness -- which want to conform us to the needs and trends of the time -- but the paths of communion and mission," he said.

The international dialogue commission chose as the theme for its 2020-2025 dialogue phase, "The Ministry of the Holy Spirit" with the aim of identifying common theological foundations regarding the Holy Spirit's guidance in the ministry of the two churches.

The pope said that while the Spirit "gives the church the memory to remain in apostolic tradition," it is also the forward-looking guide that "keeps the Christian community young."

The Spirit, he said, gives Christians "the strength to go forth in praise of (Jesus') name, glorifying him."

"In that way, the Holy Spirit keeps our spirit from the temptation of sadness and being self-referential," the pope said.

Francis also shared a joke he said Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I told St. Paul VI about working toward Christian unity: "Let's send all the theologians to an island, and we'll walk together."

"Theologians are necessary, certainly, that they study, talk, argue, but in the meantime let us walk, pray together with works of charity," said the pope. "For me, this is the path that does not disappoint."

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