

A Roadmap for American Churches and People of Faith: W.W.J.D. (What Would Jesus Do?)



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Stewardship Calling

CHAPTER 17. The Reunification Of Christ's Original Church.

A Roadmap For Orthodox-Roman Catholic Unity.

I begin by acknowledging that what I will address next may be disconcerting to **Denominational Disciples** (“**DD**”) whose primary objective is to defend their Denomination and either ignore (in the best case) or vilify (in the worst case) all other denominations and faith traditions. I ask those of you who object to even a discussion of reunifying Christ's original church, which was one for the first over 1,000 years, to please first read (or re-read) Chapter 15 of my Roadmap that discusses the Holy Scripture and Christ-center focus on **Oneness in Christ** (“**OIC**”).

My purpose remains simple. If God, Moses, Christ, the Apostles, St. Paul, the rest of the Holy Scripture, and the Ecumenical Councils all mean what they said, then we must explore how to put aside our differences and reunify Christ's “**ONE** holy catholic and apostolic church.” I start with what should be easiest (not necessarily easy) by exploring a high-level roadmap for **Roman Catholic** (“**RC**”) **Orthodox** (“**O**”) **unity** (“**RCOU**”). Other Denominations can hopefully follow the same (or a similar) Roadmap if OIC is a priority.

Crosses Only Had One Purpose.

During Christ's time, the cross served only one purpose, namely, to crucify someone until they died. In those days, being a Christian meant the likelihood of death. The cross of those days signified division (of life vs death). Our Holy Apostles and the other disciples were such believers in the truth and divinity of Jesus Christ that they all suffered a martyr's death and experienced division. In contrast, in our free American society, we can advance a view of Oneness In Christ without such a consequence. For a moment, let us celebrate our freedom and rights and ask ourselves if we were willing to die for our beliefs as the early Christians were.

I have trouble imagining a II Corinthians 5:10 Moment of standing before the awesome judgment seat of Christ with my argument being, “I continued to advocate for division and the exclusion of people who said they believed in You but refused to adopt every practice and belief I insisted they adopt, and thus I called them heretics, schismatics, apostates, heterodox, evil, and other divisive names and advocated we purists have nothing to do with them.”

I do not wish to advance that argument in my II Corinthians 5:10 Moment as I believe it runs contrary to Christ's commandment in John 13:34-35 to love one another and the extensive and consistent OIC messages throughout the Holy Gospel (discussed in Chapter 15 of my Roadmap). And for those who want to crucify me (hopefully figuratively) for advocating for Oneness In Christ and RCOU, I believe this is a Christ-centered hill worth dying on, so do what you feel you need to do.

One Church And The UN-Great Schism.

Applying Stephen Covey's habit for highly effective people, I will begin with the end in mind (Covey, 1997). Christ's ONE holy catholic and apostolic church was divided officially in 1054 AD. More recently (in my lifetime), the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches have used religious dialogue to make decent (albeit extremely slow, in my opinion) strides for greater RCOU or at least acceptance. The leadership of the respective Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches have, for the most part, advocated for eventual unity after continued dialogue and consensus resolution of key differences.

Several theological differences remain, although there has been some unifying/softening of positions. There is a critical difference between "**Unity**" (**becoming one church**) and "**Acceptance**" (**respectful acquiescence of the beliefs of another church**). The former is the preferred path for OIC, and the latter may be an acceptable first step. Until unity OIC is fully achieved, perhaps greater recognition and Acceptance of each other's faithful and sacramental traditions and practices is more readily possible and a reasonable giant first step.

For example, at a recent church conference I attended, Greek Orthodox Archbishop Elpidophoros of America asked why a Roman Catholic spouse who was married in the Orthodox Church could not partake in the sacrament of Holy Communion without conversion. He makes a strong point about internal inconsistency regarding the acceptability of participating in one but not all sacraments.

As an oversimplification of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox divide that continues, aside from the inevitable plethora of hopefully less significant practice and ritual differences, the more significant stumbling blocks remain:

1. the Pope's primacy (he is the singular supreme church authority),
2. the Pope's infallibility (he has the power to speak with singular and full authority on faith and related matters),
3. the Roman Catholic addition of the Filioque to the previously agreed upon Nicene Creed that did not include the phrase (adding that the Holy Spirit also comes from the Son) and
4. how to handle the Uniates/Eastern Catholics (who embrace Orthodox service and rituals yet have loyalty to the Pope).

Some theologians and church scholars, and all DDs, will inevitably take issue with the above brief synopsis of those positions of significant difference and want to insert endless nuance and justifications. However, for most laity, the above list is both understandable and sufficiently accurate.

True scholars have written much about the early unified church and the UN-Great Schism of 1054 AD. (I have always found the words “Great Schism” to be an oxymoron as to how can a church division ever be great). I will not try and do this horrible event in history justice. Suffice it to say that the previously unified “ONE holy catholic and apostolic church” finally took the fatal blow in 1054 with the excommunications between Rome and Constantinople. Intervening wars, crusades, conquests, and countless man-made differences caused the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches to pursue separate paths while maintaining the most significant number of common and fundamental beliefs (the Divinity of Jesus Christ, the truth of the Holy Gospel, the seven sacraments, etc.).

Efforts to heal this division have occurred throughout history, including by Gennadius II, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople from 1454 to 1465, who worked with his mentor, Mark of Ephesus, in the Council of Florence which aimed to end the UN-Great Schism (Gennadius Scholarius, 2025). Fast-forwarding to 1965, Pope Paul VI and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I nullified the respective excommunications (anathemas) and shared a now famous “kiss of peace.” Since then, the question of RCOU has continued to be a topic of discussion and work between the leaders of the respective Orthodox Patriarchs and the Popes of Rome.

To be sure, theological, ecclesiological, and historical issues remain unresolved, but there have been important dialogues, joint statements, and symbolic gestures demonstrating a commitment to RCOU and OIC. Indeed, the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America (**ACOBUSA**) and Roman Catholic Bishops have been involved in a twice-a-year dialogue that is starting to produce more significant joint statements of understanding.

Ironically, the Roman Catholic and Orthodox lawyers are getting along very well, as my fellow Orthodox attorneys and I, who are involved in the ACOBUSA and other various Orthodox Jurisdictions, have joined with our Roman Catholic attorney brothers and sisters in Christ in filing multiple Amicus Briefs before the United States Supreme Court and other courts to fight for religious freedoms and matters of mutual interest (e.g., sanctity of the unborn, separation of church and state, etc.).

Positions Of Orthodox Patriarchs On Roman Catholic Orthodox Unity (RCOU).

The Ecumenical Patriarchs, especially in recent decades, have been supporters of dialogue with Rome. As mentioned, in 1965, Patriarch Athenagoras I (1948–1972) and Pope Paul VI mutually lifted the anathemas of 1054 and advocated for greater dialogue

and deeper reconciliation. Patriarch Athenagoras famously said: **“We shall meet in love and leave aside our differences for theologians to resolve.”**

More recently, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I (1991–present) has had multiple meetings and services with multiple Popes (John Paul II, Benedict XVI, Francis) to promote ecumenical efforts. The picture on the right from November 29, 2014, is another example of a blessing and loving kiss delivered from Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to his brother in Christ, Pope Francis. In addition, a historic 2014 Joint Prayer occurred in Jerusalem with Pope Francis and Patriarch Theophilos III of Jerusalem. The Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue has worked on doctrinal understanding and agreements. The import of Patriarch Bartholomew’s ministry has focused on **“a primacy of love” rather than ‘jurisdictional supremacy.’** Certainly, this righteous and positive position for OIC should be inspiring to my fellow Orthodox adherents.



Patriarch Kirill of Moscow (2009–present) has proceeded with greater caution because of historic differences, including the Uniates. Patriarch Kirill met Pope Francis in 2016 in Havana, which was the first time a Russian Orthodox Patriarch met with a Roman Catholic Pope. These two Hierarchs issued the Joint Declaration of Havana focusing on common Christian witness and the need to defend traditional Christian values. The Ukrainian conflict has strained the relationship due to the Vatican’s stance on Russia’s aggression.

Patriarchate of Alexandria, Theodoros II, has supported Roman Catholic dialogue and also met with Pope Francis. This dialogue has included peaceful relations and cooperation in Africa despite the tension caused by the Russian Orthodox Church establishing its own African jurisdiction. Patriarchate of Antioch, John X, has also been historically supportive of dialogue with Rome. The Patriarch of Antioch has called for unity and focused on the model of the early Church. Patriarch Theophilos III of Jerusalem has met and prayed with various Popes but remains more focused on defending Orthodox interests in the Holy Land.

Positions Of Roman Catholic Popes On RCOU.

Increasingly, the Popes of modernity have emphasized ecumenism and Orthodox reconciliation and unity as significant goals. As mentioned previously, Pope Paul VI (1963–1978) took the bold step to lift the mutual excommunications of 1054 and, in 1967, was the first Pope to visit the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Pope Paul VI officially stated: **“The Church must breathe with her two lungs, East and West.”** What a powerful metaphor.

In turn, Pope John Paul II (1978–2005) was a strong proponent of reconciliation and healing the schism. He visited Greece, Ukraine, and other Orthodox countries and issued an apology for the sacking of Constantinople (1204) during the Crusades. Pope

John Paul famously called for a “**shared vision of primacy**” that respects Orthodox concerns about papal authority. This is in keeping with the early church’s recognition of the primacy (but not infallibility) of Rome, by which the Pope could be declared “the first among equals.” (This is roughly analogous to how the Chairman of a Board of Directors has certain additional responsibilities while being the equal of other Board members for all other purposes. This role is currently served within Orthodoxy by the Ecumenical Patriarch.)

Of great significance was the 2004 delivery by Pope John Paul II of the relics of St. John Chrysostom and St. Gregory the Theologian to the Ecumenical Patriarch. This historic and highly theologically significant act of love was a great stride toward RCOU. Pope Benedict XVI (2005–2013) continued the ecumenical dialogue and frequently met with Orthodox leaders. He focused on specific theological issues, such as the role of the Pope in the first millennium.

Most recently, Pope Francis (2013–present) has met with multiple Orthodox Patriarchs, including Patriarch Bartholomew, Patriarch Kirill, and Patriarch Theophilos. Pope Francis signed joint declarations focused on emphasizing unity and significantly advocated for synodality. This synodical concept is foundationally important within Orthodoxy. Pope Francis specifically referred to the Patriarchs as “**brothers in Christ**” and stated: “**Unity will not be the result of human projects but of the Holy Spirit.**”

Now What?

Of course, I will always humbly defer to the Holy Spirit, as suggested above. To that end, there have been numerous visits, exchanges of kisses of peace, joint statements, actions with respect to returns of relics, forgiveness for past issues, and wonderful agreements in principle between Orthodox Patriarchs and Popes regarding the need for greater unity. All of that said, it is my fervent belief that the laity has a role to play in advancing unity or at least using their God-giving skills and gifts to offer frameworks or Roadmaps such as this humble offering.

At the core of this effort are incredible foundational sentiments such as those noted by Dr. Cyril Hovorun in his outstanding book Scaffolds of the Church Towards Poststructural Ecclesiology (Hovorun, 2017). For example, Metropolitan Filaret of Moscow (1782-1867) stated: “My justified respect for the teachings of the Eastern Church does not mean that I judge or accuse Western Christians and the Western Church.” You may recall the previous quote I cited in Chapter 16 of my Roadmap for Orthodox Unity, where Metropolitan Filaret said: “**I dare not to call as false any church which believes Jesus is Christ.**” I provide emphasis on this thoughtful and powerful sentiment about OIC. However, Metropolitan Filaret did not stop there and went on to add: “**An Orthodox Christian is supposed, in the spirit of love, joyfully to find a preserved grace outside the Orthodox Church.**” (again, emphasis added).

It is critical to remember there was essentially one Christian church for more than the first century after Christ’s resurrection. Thus, the concept of Roman Catholic and Orthodox unity is not a creation of something new but rather a return to the original state of the church. As such, a model of early consensus and conciliarity, properly updated to reflect changing times and circumstances, remains a useful approach. It is always more

difficult to create something out of whole cloth than to dust off an old model and adapt it to the present. This is why my Roadmap critically focuses on the past that is re-aligned with the present to reach a desired future destination.

A professor of theology at the University of Kyiv, Archpriest Pavel Svetlov (1861-1945), could find no proper and meaningful support for the separation of the Christian church (Hovorun, 2017). Furthermore, Dr. Hovorun specifically acknowledged Metropolitan Damaskinos Papandreou (1936-2011), who went on to urge Roman Catholic and Orthodox to recognize other Christian communities which would ultimately comprise the Church Christ formed in the fullest sense of the ONE holy catholic and apostolic church (Hovorun, 2017).

Theologian Gregory Baum concluded:

The time will come, and is already coming, when **all who are faithful to the gracious will of God shall transcend the divisions and enter into one community**. We believe that this community of Saints, established in glory on the last day, will be in continuity with the Catholic church...But this reunion will not be like the victory of one group over another; it will be the fulfillment of the hopes of us all (Baum, 1962, pp. 70-71). (emphasis added)

Pay attention to the words of Metropolitan Platon Gorodetsky of Kyiv (1803-1891), who famously proclaimed: **“Our earthly walls do not reach the sky”** in reference to Genesis 11:4. Perhaps there is no clearer, simpler, and more profound criticism of our human failings of division and animosity than this clear teaching. Based on the words of our Lord, we can be assured that OIC is achieved in His presence. How wonderfully righteous it would be if we could use our free will and prepare ourselves for OIC here on earth.

Following the original “kiss of peace” in 1964 between Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I and Pope Paul VI, repeated by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope Francis in 2014, the seminaries and theologians of the future should make more significant efforts to reunite Christ’s fragmented church. This is more in focus because 2025 will be the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea that gave Christians the Nicene Creed (Wooden, 2024).

“Christian faith is always just one generation away from extinction.”

RCOU presents the opportunity for Christians to address together the departure of the “NONES” (who now claim no religious affiliation) that comprise approximately 30% of American adults (Michel et al., 2024). This includes an increasing number of millennials and Gen Zers who abandoned the church of their youth (Michel et al., 2024). In addition, approximately 22% of Americans form a new fraternity of **“SBNRs”** or **“Spiritually But Not Religious,”** with varying definitions of what that means (Alper et al., 2023). The children of “NONES” now claiming no religion, unlike their parents, have lost a church connection, which will inevitably make reaching them more complicated.

Lord Carey, former Archbishop of Canterbury, provided the title for this section by warning: **“Christian faith is always just one generation away from extinction”** (Bingham, 2013). I refuse to be a part of that generation. Returning to my House

metaphor in Chapter 15 of my Roadmap, I submit true Orthodox Christians can also accept the style of house that has many attributes in common and yet shares some different traditions and practices. Yes, the issue of primacy and infallibility must be reconciled, likely back to the pre-UNGreat Schism role of the primacy of Rome and the conciliarity and consensus decision-making of the synod of all Bishops (Pope and Patriarchs, etc.).

For those who can accept the **Foundational Christian Truths** (as preliminarily outlined in Chapter 15 of my Roadmap), plus any additional or revised elements agreed to by consensus, we must declare our discipleship of Christ to be paramount and more critical than the denominational differences that have served to divide us. So, what Roadmap might take us there?

One OIC RCOU Roadmap To Return To Christ's Original Church In America.

I acknowledge ab initio that unique global differences may make OIC more challenging in different parts of the world. However, as with Orthodox unity, if the Roman Catholic and Orthodox church leaders can allow the United States to lead the way, a more palatable and proven Roadmap may be devised that can eventually be exported elsewhere. This approach continues the “you eat a massive beast one bite at a time” approach. Space does not permit the entire roadmap and plan I have devised for creating what I will call an **American Christian Church** (“**ACC**”) that includes in its title the obvious aspiration for even greater OIC in the fullness of time with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

In any complex combination, it is important to think creatively as to what an ACC could look like. Of course, ideally, it is one fully unified church with a completely common set of practices, beliefs, and services that is led and managed under a common structure and model. If the Mother Churches blessed such a merger under an autocephalous structure, this would accelerate ACC achievement and OIC in America. As with our version of a Constitutional Republic, this American model of autocephaly could be useful and adapted, exported, and applied in other geographic areas and be a catalyst for global OIC.

However, this is only one possible ACC reality. Creative and committed dealmakers never let the impossible achievement of perfection interfere with the consideration of alternatives to achieve the next best result. The earlier discussion of the substantial commitment to OIC from all the recent Popes and most Orthodox Patriarchs provided a nuanced alternative. “**Acceptance**,” in the fullest sense, is a viable giant first step toward OIC. The ways in which Acceptance can be defined and applied are quite varied. Let us return to my House United metaphor (as discussed in Chapter 15 of my Roadmap).

Can you accept that your house, with a strong foundation similar to my concrete foundation but with a different structure on top and even more diverse internal

configurations and appearance, is still a house? If so, we ought to agree that different appearances do not prevent something from being a house. Moreover, you ought to be able to acknowledge that the traditions, activities, and rituals practiced in your house, while different from mine, do not make them any less valued and do not convert your or my house into something that is not a house. You can accept our similar foundational desires, respect the wide variation of interiors and traditions, and still acknowledge we both have a valid house.

The above is a foundational precept of Acceptance that does not have you forcing me to adopt your house configuration. Indeed, if you carefully visited and inspected my house, you will likely find elements of my house you like better that perhaps you will introduce into your house. My wife and I celebrate when a neighbor or friend asks for her Greek recipes they tried at our house for use at a dinner party that they are planning at their house. In this way, our diversity makes us both stronger and appreciative of the differences we can experience but still live in a house. And I can feel comfortable visiting (and even staying for a time) in your house and vice reverse. This is exactly what families do and what I imagine Christ expected of the family of believers He created.

Acceptance, therefore, should be considered an equally agreeable outcome and perhaps a critical first step toward unity. To be sure, unity is the representation of OIC to which humanity should ascribe. However, Acceptance may be the condition precedent to overcome another century of Denominational Discipleship and continuous divisions that created animosity toward OIC. In short, as any good negotiator will tell you, we must keep all options on the table to see what we can do to achieve OIC.

Below, I briefly summarize my proposed five-step process that has proven successful in other extremely large and complex combinations I have been blessed to lead.

STEP 1 –OICD Transformational Leader Alignment (the “Relational Phase”).

Until U.S. Christian Denominational Transformational Leaders who embrace OIC (“**OICD Leaders**”) agree on the need for an ACC, unity will be difficult unless a grassroots parishioner-led effort motivates them. Committed followers oftentimes can help guide leaders to a better result the leaders themselves cannot or will not achieve for a variety of human reasons. (See the Unified Servant Leader/ Follower discussion in Chapter 5 of my Roadmap).

Christian leaders (whether clergy or laity) need not reinvent the wheel and can use the example of the Apostles who resolved early church differences/schisms. The Jerusalem Council and subsequent Ecumenical Councils provide examples of how today’s OICD Leaders can cooperate to achieve OIC. Since people always perform and respond better when a deadline is identified, a critical requirement is for the OICD Leaders to determine/announce a target date the new ACC will begin (i.e., the “**ACC OIC Unity Day**”).

The OICD Leaders would ideally be a mix of both laity and what I call **Practical Applied Theology** (“**PAT**”) clergy (including Bishops) without insisting that the group be composed of only Bishops, for reasons to be explained later. OICD Leaders are individuals who are sufficiently grounded in the Holy Gospel and their faith traditions but who are primarily focused on how their theology applies to the daily lives of the parishioners. With no disrespect intended, religious historians, theologians, and academic scholars can often argue extensively and wisely about ancient intent and theoretical principles that may not be tethered to the practical lives of the faithful in America. Thus, the focus must be on how people today can fulfill their calling to be disciples of Christ. I have met clergy and laity in the American Orthosphere and laity in the American Roman Catholic church (“**American RCsphere**”) who meet the PAT standard. I am confident there are sufficient numbers of PAT Roman Catholic clergy who can be identified and embrace their Pope’s push for OIC unity.

This combined group of PAT OICD Leaders from both jurisdictions need to gather together over a series of “**ACC Retreats**” to get to know each other more intimately and collegially and establish my Stewardship Calling Servant Leadership three foundational elements of trust, love, and humility. These ACC Retreats would be both facilitated using proven methods to accomplish interactive engagement and problem-solving, as well as establish rapport. The ACC Retreats must include planned times for communal worship followed by communal fellowship.

Ideally there would be at least quarterly ACC Retreats with a detailed agenda and course of study and engagement over one year. Importantly, however, all OICD Leaders would be invited to the annual larger Denominational gatherings of their counterpart Denominations to participate fully. Thus, for example, the Roman Catholic OICD Leaders would be invited not just to attend but actively participate and present at the National and Diocese Clergy Laity Gatherings (by whatever name they are called) of their Orthodox counterparts. The same would be true of the Orthodox OICD Leaders attending the National and Diocesan gatherings of their Roman Catholic brothers and sisters.

At these national and Diocese gatherings, the visiting OICD Leader counterparts will be given the opportunity to participate in everything fully and be featured in live and interactive ACC sessions. This is not just a token appearance and acknowledgment, but rather, a whole-hearted welcoming of brothers, sisters, cousins, aunts, uncles, etc., as you would your own family. And the real “secret sauce” always takes place at the local level, where people live and work and pray every day.

Thus, the OICD Leaders from cities or reasonably close geographies (e.g., Counties) should regularly (preferably no less frequently than monthly) gather together in prayer, worship, common community service, and fellowship. For example, a local InterOrthodox Parish Association (**IPA**) (previously discussed in Chapter 16 of my Roadmap) in a city or area would regularly intentionally welcome and engage their Roman Catholic local OICD Leader brothers and sisters every chance they can. Such activities have already begun in various places. Pre-Covid, the Patterson Family

Foundation funded such joint Orthodox/Roman Catholic gatherings in the Atlanta metro area that alternated between churches and included the choirs, chanters, devotionals, and speakers from both “East and West lungs” of Christ’s church to use Pope Paul VI’s wonderful metaphor.

A small national PAT OICD Leader joint steering committee can coordinate such activities and ensure that diocesan, regional, and parish leaders are apprised of creative and successful ideas being utilized in other areas. Best practices must be coordinated and shared for those in local areas to adapt to their unique circumstances.

In a complex merger or consolidation, there is always a small group from both sides who are committed to the combination and work on it as a priority and not an afterthought or at the end of the week. This must be the specific and primary responsibility of those executing the plan, or it will not be realized as the “tyranny of the urgent” daily pressures distract from bigger objectives. Hopefully what you see from Step One is a coordinated, calculated, and family-oriented process to build trust, love, and humility to establish a solid foundation plan for the team that will bring about the ACC process.

At this point I am confident the question of how this will be funded has come to mind. If this is an important objective as we each prepare for our own II Corinthians 5:10 Moment before Christ, then the national churches, Dioceses, and even local parishes and participants will make this wise investment. For example, I am already aware of billionaires/millionaires, family offices, trusts, and significant endowments who agree with the OIC concept. With assurances of a workable plan, I am confident they would be willing to invest the needed funds not provided by the OICD Leaders or their churches.

This is not a mere matter of faith but an absolute certainty that these people exist. I am equally confident (and faithfully trusting) that even greater numbers of such individuals and families whom I do not know are similarly committed to OIC and are willing to use Venture Philanthropy concepts (previously discussed in Chapter 16 of my Roadmap) to invest in an ACC. Moreover, as the OICD Leaders work toward the ACC, there will undoubtedly be many additional committed faithful who will gladly invest in such efforts. Finally, I am extremely confident that if this work is the will of the Lord, the Holy Spirit will intervene, as always, to ensure this effort is properly funded.

STEP 2 – Determine OIC ACC WHY and Core Values (the “Foundation Phase”).

Lack of patience is a common impediment for imperative people and deal-making negotiators like me. Yet, in church work I have come to understand that things happen on God’s time and schedule and not the human scale we call time. Thus, it is impossible to predict how long Step 1 will take before the Servant Leadership foundational sense of familial trust, love, and humility is established. If Step 1 is well coordinated and the serious objective of key OICD Leadership on both sides, it should be achievable within two to three years (and hopefully sooner).

Once the OICD Leadership Team feels called by God to take the next step, the focus shifts to the Foundation Phase. The work of previously identified Transformational Leadership scholars, along with Kouzes & Posner (2017) and Sinek (2011), underscore the criticality of understanding an organization's WHY and Core Values. For a successful ACC foundation to be established, a consensus agreement on the ACC's WHY is critical.

Throughout my Roadmap, I have used the proxy WHY Statement I helped the ACCOBUSA adopt, which is "to bring people closer to Christ and each other." This WHY Statement, or something better, could be suitable for the ACC. However, what is most critical is that the OICD Leadership reaches a consensus on the WHY that will point to the true north of the ACC and establish the fundamental purpose focused on OIC that the faithful can embrace.

Successful change efforts are often driven by the cultural Core Value of collaboration (clan culture) while at the same time encouraging autonomous and creative alternatives (adhocracy culture) (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). However, for the ACC to become a reality, the clan differences must be subordinated to the OIC focus on those critical Core Values Christ taught that all His disciples must embrace. A focused and facilitated effort to lead the OICD Leaders through a strategic planning process should be able to, in short order, help them reach a consensus on the foundational Core Values of any ACC.

The OICD Leaders should reach this consensus of WHY and Core Values on a mutually agreed upon schedule which should not take more than six months and several joint sessions (or ZOOMs). What is interesting is that Step 2 does not need to wait until all agree that Step 1 is fulfilled. Once enough progress has been made in the Relational Phase that the three Stewardship Calling Servant Leadership foundational basics of trust, love, and humility are sufficiently in place, work on developing the WHY and Core Values can begin. Regardless of the timeline, it remains essential that the OICD Leadership reach a consensus commitment to the new ACC WHY and Core Values.

STEP 3 – Differentiate Sacred Beliefs/Practices from Mere Traditional Rituals (the "Theological Accommodation Phase").

Different Denominational fundamental and sacred practices/beliefs cannot be reconciled quickly. However, tactical and operational practices and comfortable rituals can be harmonized more readily. Similarly, mostly aligned common beliefs and practices can also be reconciled easily. Examples of sacred beliefs would include the questions of infallibility and primacy of the Bishop of Rome, the Filioque addition to the Nicene Creed, the Uniates, and the loyalty and support of the Mother Churches to which the Denominations are aligned (e.g., Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Moscow, etc.).

Also included in the fundamental elements to be reconciled would be the sacred sacraments practiced. However, in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox cases, they share the same basic sacraments, with nuances of difference. These foundational sacraments include Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist (Holy Communion), Confession (Penance or reconciliation), Anointing of the Sick, Ordination (for clergy and Bishops), and, of course, Marriage. Variances exist as to when Confirmation takes place (right after infant baptism in the Orthodox tradition and between ages 7 - 16 for the Roman Catholics), the use of unleavened bread in communion in the Roman Catholic church, the celibacy of all clergy in the Roman Catholic Church versus the ability of clergy to be married in the Orthodox Church (except for Bishops), etc.

More nuanced distinctions might apply as to the objective of Holy Confessions and the penance given afterward, the process for divorce and remarrying, the timing of Holy Unction, etc. Interestingly the Roman Catholic Church has generally allowed Orthodox to partake of the Eucharist, something for which no reciprocity exists in the Orthodox church. Additionally, while the Roman Catholic Mass and hymns differ from the Orthodox Divine Liturgy, their directional focus on the sacred offering of the Eucharist remains common (even if the laity can administer this sacrament in the Roman Catholic church but not in the Orthodox church).

More adept and well-trained theologians have written extensively about all the nuanced differences and significant commonalities. Of course, the interior appearances of the churches (e.g., the use of statuary versus icons) remain different. However, I submit they are merely the distinct appearance of a house that is still a house. Nevertheless, subcommittees of OICD Leaders can work on harmonization, and where a consensus cannot be reached, Accommodation and Acceptance can be granted. (This resembles the Orthodox principle of οἰκονομία (pronounced ē-con-o-mia), which allows clergy to grant unique and one-off concessions from the desired behavior). Furthermore, subgroups of the OICD Leadership can begin to address and reconcile different Denominational practices that have been adapted over time.

To do this work, OICD Leaders should identify, recruit, and instruct:

- (a) non-DD Transformational Leadership theologians from their Denomination who are more committed to OIC to convene with each other in separate councils to prayerfully invoke the Holy Spirit and work toward a harmonization of the sacred beliefs and practices differences (e.g., within 3-5 years), and
- (b) non-DD tactical operational Denominational change agents to quickly combine the best rituals and practices into a cohesive yet diverse set of practices for the ACC (e.g., within 2 years). The historic Ecumenical Councils worked relatively quickly by convening and remaining together until a consensus could be reached.

To be sure, everything will not be identical or necessarily perfect at first. But neither was perfection achieved in the early church as observed by the commentary to the Orthodox Study Bible referenced previously. After all, humans, with all their prejudices and human frailties, are involved. Of course, there will be differences of opinion and interpretation. However, all the recent Popes and almost all recent Patriarchs have stressed the primacy of Christ and oneness rather than arguing about whose interpretation is more authentic or righteous.

OIC means Oneness in Christ, not Oneness in Conceit. It is the old arrogance we are attempting to overcome. Difficult differences are always reconciled in successful mergers, consolidation, and outsourcing business relationships. However, they might lack the most powerful differentiator that this OIC ACC task has, namely, the power of the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit can cause all the Apostles to immediately speak different languages and be understood by the diverse humanity, the Holy Spirit can guide diverse humanity back to Oneness In Christ.

STEP 4 – OIC Vision, OIC Strategic Goals, and Timelines (the “Vision and Planning Phase”).

Parallel with Step 3, trained Christian facilitators must lead the OICD Leaders and cross-denominational representatives/diverse teams through the remaining steps of a comprehensive vision and strategic planning process to reach a consensus on an overall Vision for the ACC, the most critical strategic objectives (that take years to achieve and address root cause issues) and “low hanging fruit” matters (that can be addressed in less than a year). A step-by-step action plan to achieve each strategic S.M.A.R.T. (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timebound) Goal must be established consisting of four elements: 1. the action to be taken, 2. who is responsible, 3. the deadline, 4. how to determine it is completed? A similar process should be used for low-hanging fruit initiatives.

I firmly believe this Vision and Planning is one of the most critical elements in determining if this ACC OIC effort will be successful or not. The ability of the OICD Leaders to embrace a common Vision and destination 3 to 5 years out can be the human difference between overall success and failure. My belief in its criticality is represented by the extensive materials described in my Vision and Planning process I outlined in excruciating detail in Section 7 of my Roadmap. My belief that without a Vision, people are lost (and can perish) is based on Proverbs 29:18. And my belief that without a Roadmap and plan, Visions are not achieved is based on the centuries of human experience.

STEP 5 – Leave It to the Experts (the “Implementation Phase”).

This step of trust may prove most difficult for some OICD Leaders. The experts to which I refer are many highly trained and talented, Denominationally diverse, faithful

Christian lay professionals (“**ACC Implementation Team**”) who commit to OIC and ACC and are fully charged with implementing and achieving the ACC Strategic Plan. Faithful OICD Leaders who are clergy or Bishops have been called by God and are well-trained theologically to serve Christ’s church and people. However, many OICD Leaders lack sufficient education, training, and experience in leading/managing successful merger/combination/outourcing activities. St. John Chrysostom admonished church leaders to “discern the spiritual gifts” of people and “encourage those gifts to be used to the full for the benefit of all” (Chrysostom, 1964, p. 44; Kostakis, 2018). If ever there was a group to which such instructions are relevant, it is this ACC Implementation Team.

There is much more that could be written about the step-by-step work of the ACC Implementation Team. However, if they are given a thoughtful Vision and Strategic Plan with step-by-step Action Plans for each Strategic Goal, by definition, this group of experts can capably execute the plan. And if they remain faithful to OIC and service to the Lord and their II Corinthians 5:10 Moment, then nothing more needs to be written. Trusting the experts (with proper verification and mediation) under the guidance of the Holy Spirit is all that is necessary to be able to celebrate the ACC OIC Unity Day established by the OICD Leaders. **Once the ACC OIC Unity Day arrives, the dark stain of the “UN-Great Schism” will be finally erased, and “the East and West lungs” will be reunited into the Body of Christ’s church to each perform their essential function of bringing people closer to Christ and each other.**