

How Santa Claus Helped Bring Church Unity During Charismatic Revival

Yes, there really is a Saint Nicholas. He was a fourth-century bishop in Myra, in Asia Minor. And he really was famous for his gift giving and his concern for the poor and for children. His feast day is Dec. 6.

In the Middle Ages, some enterprising citizens of the Italian city of Bari stole his remains and built a cathedral in his honor in Bari. Because of the importance of Saint Nicholas to both the Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox Church, the cathedral is one of the few places in the world where Catholic and Orthodox minister under the same roof. Pilgrims of both denominations are welcome there.

When the charismatic renewal swept through the Catholic Church, one of the leaders in Bari, Matteo Calisi, wondered if the tolerance expressed at the Saint Nicholas Cathedral could grow into real reconciliation. He and Italian evangelical pastor Giovanni Traettino reached across the divide and began a movement that has brought Catholics and Protestants together throughout Italy. Over the years, the reconciliation movement has reached out from Bari to Protestants in North and South America, Africa, Europe and Asia. In addition, the Orthodox and Messianic Jewish churches have also become involved.

One of Calisi's major impacts was in Buenos Aires, where Cardinal Bergoglio opened the Catholic Church there to reconciliation with the Protestant leaders. We now know Cardinal Bergoglio as Pope Francis, and he has continued his historic outreach to other Christian traditions. In 2014, the pope sent a historic video to Kenneth Copeland at a pastor's meeting, which can be seen on YouTube under Since then, many

church leaders have met with the pope to heal the divisions between Christians.

During 2017, the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, many meetings were held around the world to promote the reconciliation of Christians. In October, Matteo Calisi organized a meeting with Kenneth Copeland and Cardinal DiNardo, president of U.S. bishops and about 40 other Christian leaders including Lou Engle, Mike Bickle and John Arnott in a visible show of unity at the Kairos 2017 Conference in Kansas City. A similar meeting is planned for Dallas, Texas, on Oct. 3-5, 2019.

The reconciliation movement born in Bari seeks to bring Christians into genuine unity in our diversity. God realizes that we have different practices and beliefs, and we're told to tolerate our brothers (see Rom. 14:1-4 and Rom. 15:1-7). Our real unity is through Christ, for if we are each in Christ then we are also united in Christ (see John 17:20-23).

So let us all join Christ in His prayer that we may be brought into complete unity (John 17:23).

And we need to thank Him for the gift of the reconciliation movement that was started in the spirit of Saint Nicholas.
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