

Joint Statement

On the Occasion of the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation

At the Joint Meeting of
The Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
and
The Committee for Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Conference of Bishops
The Lutheran Center, Chicago, Illinois
March 2, 2017

In joyful gratitude to God, we are gathered today to encourage one another in the ministry of reconciliation to which Christ has called us. Recalling the wisdom of the international Lutheran-Catholic dialogue report, “From Conflict to Communion,” we affirm that “while the past itself is unalterable, the presence of the past in the present is alterable. In view of 2017, the point is not to tell a different history, but to tell that history differently.” So, while the past cannot be changed, we rejoice in the healing of memories we have already seen, and we ask God’s guidance toward a transformed future, renewed in our relations to one another and in our witness to the world.

We join our work, our prayers and our commitments to the efforts of Christians around the world who this year are commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. To our sisters and brothers representing other ecumenical partners, we extend a special welcome as you join us in prayer. We Catholics and Lutherans understand that our work together toward reconciliation between us is for the sake of healing in the whole body of Christ, into which all of us are incorporated through baptism. We ask you to help hold our commitments before us, to encourage and admonish us, to walk with us in living out the prayerful commitments we express today.

In this service, we make our own the words of thanksgiving, repentance and commitment from Lund Cathedral last October 31. On that occasion, Pope Francis and Lutheran World Federation President Bishop Munib Younan signed a joint statement that speaks directly to us:

We call upon all Lutheran and Catholic parishes and communities to be bold and creative, joyful and hopeful in their commitment to continue the great journey ahead of us. Rather than conflicts of the past, God’s gift of unity among us shall guide cooperation and deepen our solidarity. By drawing close in faith to Christ, by praying together, by listening to one another, by living Christ’s love in our relationships, we, Catholics and Lutherans, open ourselves to the power of the Triune God. Rooted in Christ and witnessing to him, we renew our determination to be faithful heralds of God’s boundless love for all humanity.

Our presence together here is one response to that call. Lutherans and Catholics in this country have long affirmed the ecumenical principle that “what unites us is greater than what divides us.” For more than 50 years we have contributed to the theological dialogues that have helped move us “from conflict to communion.” We see ourselves already “on the way” together, even in the complex and unfinished areas such as church, ministry and eucharist. We continue to grow in the relationships of friendship and trust, which, as Bishop Younan exhorts us, are as essential to growth toward unity as is theological dialogue. We ask that God strengthen us to respond to the call from Lund:

Aware that the way we relate to one another shapes our witness to the Gospel, we commit ourselves to further growth in communion rooted in Baptism, as we seek to remove the remaining obstacles that hinder us from attaining full unity.

Many members of our communities yearn to receive the Eucharist at one table, as the concrete expression of full unity. We experience the pain of those who share their whole lives, but cannot share God's redeeming presence at the Eucharistic table. We acknowledge our joint pastoral responsibility to respond to the spiritual thirst and hunger of our people to be one in Christ. We long for this wound in the Body of Christ to be healed. This is the goal of our ecumenical endeavours, which we wish to advance, also by renewing our commitment to theological dialogue.

We pray to God that Catholics and Lutherans will be able to witness together to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, inviting humanity to hear and receive the good news of God's redeeming action. We pray to God for inspiration, encouragement and strength so that we may stand together in service, upholding human dignity and rights, especially for the poor, working for justice, and rejecting all forms of violence. God summons us to be close to all those who yearn for dignity, justice, peace and reconciliation.

As Americans, we pray especially at this moment for wisdom and courage to welcome the stranger seeking refuge in our country. As Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton recently reminded us, we know that in these acts we welcome Jesus. Of course, there are many Lutherans and Catholics in this country whose families lived here before the United States or who were forced to come here through slavery or other forms of human trafficking. Yet there are also many who have been shaped by immigrants' memories of the hopes and struggles of coming to a new land as strangers, uncertain of their welcome. This experience, so important in the North American history of both our communities, has helped move both of us toward advocacy and action on behalf of refugees and other newcomers in our midst.

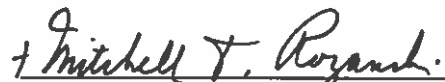
As we pray for the strength to persevere, we recall the words of Pope Francis to our nation, echoed by Cardinal Blase Cupich, Archbishop of Chicago: "Let us treat others with the same passion and compassion with which we want to be treated. Let us help others to grow, as we would like to be helped ourselves. In a word, if we want security, let us give security; if we want life, let us give life; if we want opportunities, let us provide opportunities."

May God's Holy Spirit so strengthen us to be bold and creative, filled with joy and hope, that we may look toward one another and say, "Can we not walk together another stretch of the way?"

Signed on this second day of March 2017



Bishop Donald P. Kreiss
Chair, Committee for Ecumenical and Inter-
Religious Relations
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Bishop Mitchell T. Rozanski
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