

Sweden Visit: Joint Statement on Catholic-Lutheran Commemoration of the Reformation

Pope Francis and Bishop Munib Younan

A joint statement signed in Lund, Sweden, by Pope Francis and Lutheran Bishop Munib Younan, president of the Lutheran World Federation, said, "Many members of our communities yearn to receive the Eucharist at one table as the concrete expression of full unity." The pope and Bishop Younan signed the agreement Oct. 31 at the end of an ecumenical prayer service at the Lutheran cathedral in Lund that launched a year of activities to mark the 500th anniversary in 2017 of the Reformation. The statement did not authorize further opportunities for shared Communion, but expressed longing "for this wound in the body of Christ to be healed. This is the goal of our ecumenical endeavors, which we wish to advance also by renewing our commitment to theological dialogue." Particularly referring to Catholic-Lutheran married couples, the two leaders' statement said, "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." The leaders said, "While we are profoundly thankful for the spiritual and theological gifts received through the Reformation, we also confess and lament before Christ that Lutherans and Catholics have wounded the visible unity of the church. Theological differences were accompanied by prejudice and conflicts, and religion was instrumentalized for political ends." The statement follows.

"Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me" (Jn 15:4).

With Thankful Hearts

With this joint statement, we express joyful gratitude to God for this moment of common prayer in the cathedral of Lund as we begin the year commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Fifty years of sustained and fruitful ecumenical dialogue between Catholics and Lutherans have helped us to overcome many differences and have deepened our mutual understanding and trust. At the same time, we have drawn closer to one another through joint service to our neighbors - often in circumstances of suffering and persecution. Through dialogue and shared witness we are no longer strangers. Rather, we have learned that what unites us is greater than what divides us.

Moving From Conflict to Communion

While we are profoundly thankful for the spiritual and theological gifts received through the Reformation, we also confess and lament before Christ that Lutherans and Catholics have wounded the visible unity of the church. Theological differences were accompanied by prejudice and conflicts, and religion was instrumentalized for political ends.

Our common faith in Jesus Christ and our baptism demand of us a daily conversion by which we cast off the historical disagreements and conflicts that impede the ministry of reconciliation. While the past cannot be changed, what is remembered and how it is remembered can be

transformed. We pray for the healing of our wounds and of the memories that cloud our view of one another.

We emphatically reject all hatred and violence, past and present, especially that expressed in the name of religion. Today we hear God's command to set aside all conflict. We recognize that we are freed by grace to move toward the communion to which God continually calls us.

Our Commitment to Common Witness

As we move beyond those episodes in history that burden us, we pledge to witness together to God's merciful grace, made visible in the crucified and risen Christ. 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. Christ desires that we be one, so that the world may believe (cf. Jn 17:21).

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 endeavors, 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. Today in particular we raise our voices for an end to the violence and extremism that affect so many countries and communities, and countless sisters and brothers in Christ. We urge Lutherans and Catholics to work together to welcome the stranger, to come to the aid of those forced to flee because of war and persecution, and to defend the rights of refugees and those who seek asylum.

More than ever before, we realize that our joint service in this world must extend to God's creation, which suffers exploitation and the effects of insatiable greed. We recognize the right of future generations to enjoy God's world in all its potential and beauty. We pray for a change of hearts and minds that leads to a loving and responsible way to care for creation.

One in Christ

On this auspicious occasion, we express our gratitude to our brothers and sisters representing the various Christian world communions and fellowships which are present and join us in prayer. As we recommit ourselves to move from conflict to communion, we do so as part of the one body of Christ, into which we are incorporated through baptism. We invite our ecumenical partners to remind us of our commitments and to encourage us. We ask them to continue to pray for us, to walk with us, to support us in living out the prayerful commitments we express today.

Calling Upon Catholics and Lutherans Worldwide

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.