



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS TO THE PRESIDENT AND DELEGATION OF THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

Dear Lutheran brothers and sisters,

I warmly welcome you, the members of the Lutheran World Federation and the representatives of the Lutheran-Catholic Commission on Unity. This meeting follows upon my very cordial and pleasant meeting with you, dear Bishop Younan, and with the Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, the Reverend Junge, during the inaugural celebration of my ministry as the Bishop of Rome.

It is with a sense of profound gratitude to our Lord Jesus Christ that I think of the many advances made in relations between Lutherans and Catholics in these past decades, not only through theological dialogue, but also through fraternal cooperation in a variety of pastoral settings, and above all, in the commitment to progress in spiritual ecumenism. In a certain sense, this last area constitutes the soul of our journey towards full communion, and permits us even now a foretaste of its results, however imperfect. In the measure in which we draw closer to our Lord Jesus Christ in humility of spirit, we are certain to draw closer to one another. And, in the measure in which we ask the Lord for the gift of unity, we are sure that he will take us by the hand and be our guide.

This year, as a result of a now fifty year old theological dialogue and with a view to the commemoration of the five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, the text of the Lutheran-Catholic Commission on Unity was published, with the significant title: *From Conflict to Communion. Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017*. I believe that it is truly important for everyone to confront in dialogue the historical reality of the Reformation, its consequences and the responses it elicited. Catholics and Lutherans can ask forgiveness for the harm they have caused one another and for their offenses committed in the sight of God. Together we can rejoice in the longing for unity which the Lord has awakened in our hearts, and which makes us look with hope to the future.

In light of this decades-long journey and of the many examples of fraternal communion between Lutherans and Catholics which we have witnessed, and encouraged by faith in the grace given to us in the Lord Jesus Christ, I am certain that we will continue our journey of dialogue and of communion, addressing fundamental questions as well as differences in the fields of anthropology and ethics. Certainly, there are no lack of difficulties, and none will lack in the future. They will continue to require patience, dialogue and mutual understanding. But we must not be afraid! We know well – as Benedict XVI often reminded us – that unity is not primarily the fruit of our labours, but the working of the Holy Spirit, to whom we must open our hearts in faith, so that he will lead us along the paths of reconciliation and communion.

Blessed John Paul II asked: “How can we proclaim the Gospel of reconciliation without at the same time being committed to working for reconciliation between Christians?” (*Ut Unum Sint*, 98). May the faithful and constant prayer of our communities sustain theological dialogue, the renewal of life and the conversion of hearts, so that, with the Triune God, we will be able to journey together toward the fulfilment of Jesus’ desire that all may be one.