

Joint Statement to Encourage Study, Prayer and Service in Commemoration of the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation

October 31, 2016 begins a 500th anniversary year, commemorating the beginning of the Lutheran movement and the Protestant Reformation. Remarkably this commemoration has become an ecumenical observance, focusing on the continued pursuit of unity in Jesus Christ for which He himself prayed. Therefore, Pope Francis and global Lutheran leaders together will inaugurate the anniversary with a Common Prayer service in Lund, Sweden. This liturgy takes its shape from the work of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Lutheran World Federation in the document, *From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017*. It will involve moments of thanksgiving, repentance, and commitment, placing at the center the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This observance emerges from years of productive dialogue between our two churches. Through these discussions, we have come to appreciate that more unites us than divides us. Among the substantial results achieved, we acknowledge that we share a common faith in the Triune God and the revelation in Jesus Christ, as well as recognition of the basic truths of the doctrine of justification. In the U.S., the joint statement of our bishops, a *Declaration on the Way: Church, Ministry, and Eucharist* identifies substantial agreements on these crucial issues and seeks to open further dialogue on remaining differences.

Furthermore, we give thanks for the occasions when our communities have prayed together for Christian communion. Among them, we celebrate the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, and, this January, the theme will be “Reconciliation – The Love of Christ Compels Us.” This reference to 2 Corinthians 5:14, inspired by Pope Francis’s apostolic exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel* and chosen by ecumenical consultation in the land of Martin Luther, highlights the special opportunity for further reconciliation between our communities offered by this commemorative year.

As bishops of Lutheran and Catholic communities in Ohio, we share the longing to move forward “on the way” to the unity to which Christ calls us. Here also we want to respond to this anniversary with efforts that allow us to deepen our own local relationships through shared study, prayer and service to the world. Thus, we invite our people at all levels to sustained, imaginative and prayerful engagement with one another.

In the coming weeks, the faithful in both Lutheran and Catholic congregations will be given resources designed to foster meaningful discussion about the faith that we share and what areas for further dialogue remain.. We will promote opportunities for shared prayer for our unity in Christ. And, we will encourage joint engagement in Catholic and Lutheran ministries of charity and justice, as a common witness to the gospel that brings good news to a world in need.

These three things, study, prayer, and service, are important ways that the love of Christ can be shared among us and through us. We invite Lutherans and Catholics in our region to join in this year of commemoration, so that we may more effectively share the truth of the gospel with all.

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