

HOMILY BY LANDESBISCHOF DR. CHRISTIAN KRAUSE
PRESIDENT, THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

APOSTOLIC GREETING

Grace be with you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! Amen.

NOW WE ARE AT THE CRUCIAL POINT.

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,
We are witnessing a significant day in the history of our churches. For the first time in centuries we are again setting foot on common ground. With the festive signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification and the Official Common Statement we confirm agreements in within an area where four hundred and sixty-nine years ago a breach in relations had occurred, namely on the question of how God is related to humanity and humanity to God.

INTEGRATION IN THE ECUMENICAL PROCESS:

In the last few decades countless meetings between Roman Catholic and Lutheran Christians have already taken place. We have approached each other, listened to each other and prayed with each other. Trust and hope have increased. We have learned that what binds us together is stronger than what distinguishes or separates us from each other.

Also rooted in these experiences is the theological discussion which has reached a stage in the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification and the Official Common Statement that points to the future. Further steps should and must follow, for many problems still await careful examination and require prudent clarification. But the direction that points the way to the future has been clearly and plainly defined: Toward each other!

THANKS AND GREETINGS TO THE WORLDWIDE COMMUNITY

At this time it is proper to give thanks to those who in long negotiations have patiently striven for agreement, to those who have contributed to improvements through constructive criticism, to the countless people in our churches who are genuinely concerned that we come closer to each other and who are praying for this.

We greet them as our sisters and brothers and address them in the words of the Apostle Paul, “We thank our God because of your sharing in the gospel” (Philippians 1:3).

BACK TO THE *ECCLESIA INVISIBILIS*:

Certainly, men and women in our churches have brought this day about. Nevertheless, as Christians we know that (as Martin Luther put it) “we are nevertheless not the ones who could uphold the church. Nor were our forebears. Nor will our descendants be. Rather it is he who is and was and will be the One and who says ‘I am with you always, to the end of the world’”.

THE ASSUMED PERSPECTIVE: *THEOLOGIA CRUCIS* AND THE CONFESSION OF GUILT

Together we turn our eyes to the Cross. There we grasp the saving message for each of us. The God of mercy stretches out arms above the Cross of Jesus Christ who was plunged into the profoundest depths of suffering. Confronted with such great love we confess that as individuals and as churches we have sinned against each other and have become guilty towards others?

Antagonism and frequently even enmity between our churches have been the source of conflicts, distress and suffering for many people, in many countries on this earth. We pray for God’s gracious forgiveness. May God give us new strength for reconciliation and the courage to seek peace!

ECUMENICAL DIACONIA

No power in the world can separate us from God’s love. No one can merit it or obtain it by force. God gives it freely, but not in vain. God’s love continues in the paths of goodness, justice and truth. It is the invisible power in the ministry and sacrifice of all who in faithfulness do good. The consensus in words becomes credible in doing things together and in the joint efforts of our churches, where we meet and help human beings in physical and spiritual need. Together under the cross!

BAPTISM AND THE HISTORIC CHURCHES’ *OIKOUMENE*:

Children are marked with the sign of the Cross at Baptism. We too have received this sign; we are incorporated in

Christ's death and resurrection. The bond of baptism unites Christians everywhere on earth. "One Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians 4:5). The great church families are also linked together in baptism. Hence the truth of what Pope John Paul II stated in 1980, on the 450th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession: "The will of Christ and the signs of the times urge us to witness together in the growing fulness of truth and love".

THE UNIVERSAL NATURE OF THE MESSAGE OF PEACE FROM BETHLEHEM

Belonging to a universal, worldwide community with mutual responsibility for each other throughout the world is a treasure of our discipleship as followers of Jesus. This is particularly true for the weak, who can no longer cope and who are in danger of perishing - in their own setting as well as in the large context which we nowadays call globalization. The message of peace from Bethlehem needs people to pass it on. How is this to happen if we do not begin with this ourselves? Thus the Joint Declaration seeks also to open up the way to hospitality in the sharing in God's gifts for all human beings.

CONCLUSION - AND BACK ONCE AGAIN TO THE CRUCIAL POINT:

We hope that one day our children will look back and say, "Reformation Day in Augsburg 1999 was an important step towards our churches' common witness. Ever since that day our fellowship has further deepened and strengthened". We must not again let go of the hands we extend to each other. We give thanks as we pray to God that God will bless this day and guide us in God's truth.

And may the peace of God which passes all our understanding keep our hearts and minds in Jesus Christ. Amen.
