

Justified – Freed for Life

5th Anniversary of the Signing of the Joint Declaration
on the Doctrine of Justification

Geneva and Rome in July 2004

Dear Friends,

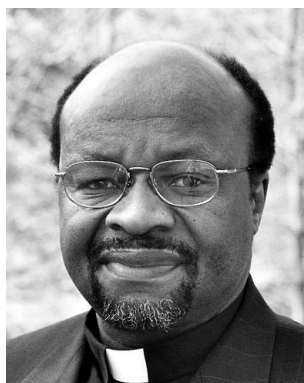
We send to you from Geneva and Rome our warm greetings and best wishes in our Lord Jesus Christ. This year we celebrate the Fifth Anniversary of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ), signed and celebrated on 31 October 1999 in Augsburg, Germany, by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church.

The signing of the JDDJ will rightly be remembered as the day when we as Lutherans and Catholics were able to state officially that there is a consensus between us on basic truths related to the doctrine of justification. And we not only stated it, we rejoiced and celebrated, because, with God's help, we could reach—not yet the final goal—but an important milestone on our common pilgrimage to full, visible unity. We extended our hands to each other and we are not willing to let them go again.

The Joint Declaration states in paragraph 15: "Together we confess: By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping us for and calling us to good works". This consensus enabled us at the same time to declare that the mutual condemnations of the 16th century in relation to justification do not apply to the Lutheran and Catholic understandings presented in the Joint Declaration. Thus our communion has become more deep and real, although it is still incomplete. Herein lies the historic ecclesiological consequence of the Joint Declaration.

As a result, we can give common witness to the Gospel. This is highly important in our present day world of growing secularization and loss of the meaning of life. In a world troubled by so many conflicts, Christians must be able to testify together to peace and reconciliation, which belong at the heart of the Christian message.

It is our heartfelt view that the Fifth Anniversary of the signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification calls



Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko
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for celebrations and for renewed study around the world. The anniversary day itself—October 31, 2004—is particularly appropriate for such ecumenical celebrations, locally as well as at the diocesan and/or national levels. We encourage you to mark this event in ways appropriate for and relevant to your particular regions.

We see the occasion of the Fifth Anniversary as an opportunity to draw on the ecumenical resource that the agreement represents. It is also an opportunity for churches and dioceses around the world to contribute to the ongoing discussion of the issues and challenges still remaining.

We thank you in advance for dedicating attention to this upcoming event, which we hope, by the guidance of God's Spirit, will contribute to the continued positive development of our ecumenical relations both locally and globally.

Sincerely yours,

Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko
General Secretary
The Lutheran World Federation

Walter Cardinal Kasper
President
Pontifical Council for Promoting
Christian Unity

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Excerpts from the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification¹

“In faith we together hold the conviction that justification is the work of the triune God. The Father sent his Son into the world to save sinners. The foundation and presupposition of justification is the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ. Justification thus means that Christ himself is our righteousness, in which we share through the Holy Spirit in accord with the will of the Father. Together we confess: By grace alone, in faith in Christ’s saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works.” (JDDJ 15)

Sin has an enslaving power over sinners but God through grace liberates human beings from this power by forgiving their sins and imparting new life in Christ:

- “(P)ersons are by faith united with Christ, who in his person is our righteousness (1 Cor 1:30): both the forgiveness of sin and the saving presence of God himself.” (JDDJ 22)
- This new life is to be characterized by faith, love, and hope: Christians “place their trust in God’s gracious promise by justifying faith, which includes hope in God and love for him.” (JDDJ 25)
- Thus, the assurance of salvation is also a mark of this new life. The faithful “can build on the effective promise of God’s grace in Word and Sacrament and so be sure of this grace” (JDDJ 34). “Catholics can share the concern of the Reformers to ground faith in the objective reality of Christ’s promise, to look away from one’s own experience, and to trust in Christ’s forgiving word alone (cf. Mt 16:19; 18:18).” (JDDJ 36)

Those who are justified bring forth the works of love: “We confess together that good works—a Christian life lived in faith, hope, and love—follow justification and are its fruits.” (JDDJ 37) Quoting the Formula of Concord, the

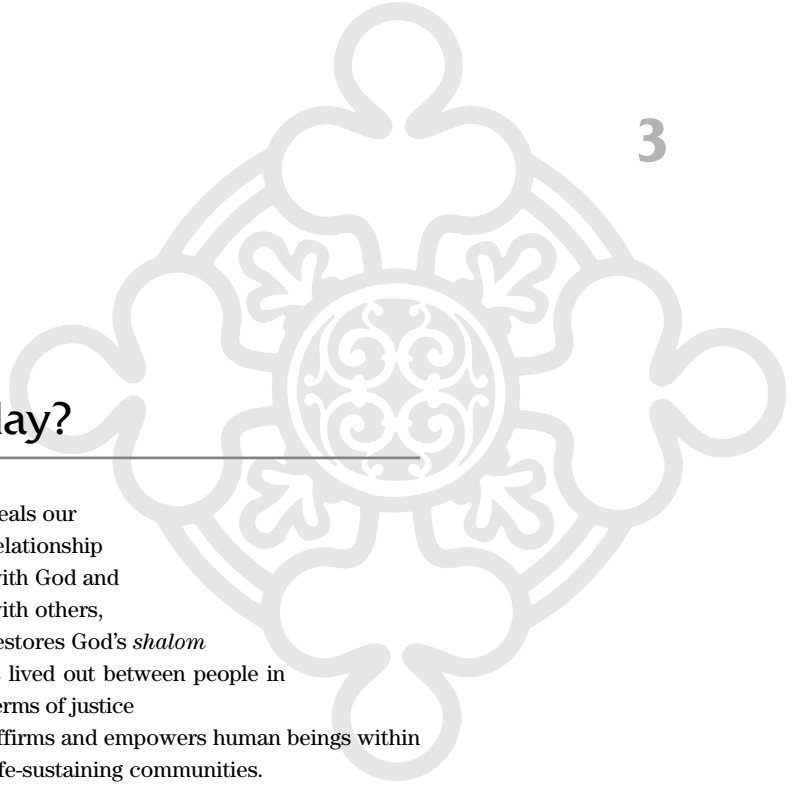
Annex to the Official Common Statement states: “As soon as the Holy Spirit has initiated his work of regeneration and renewal in us through the Word and the holy sacraments, it is certain that we can and must cooperate by the power of the Holy Spirit ...”.

There continues to be a struggle in every justified person: “We confess together that in baptism the Holy Spirit unites one with Christ, justifies, and truly renews the person. But the justified must all through life constantly look to God’s unconditional justifying grace. They also are continuously exposed to the power of sin still pressing its attacks (cf. Rom 6:12–14) and are not exempt from a lifelong struggle against the contradiction to God within the selfish desires of the old Adam (see Gal 5:16; Rom 7:7–10). The justified also must ask God daily for forgiveness, as in the Lord’s Prayer (Mt 6:12; 1 Jn 1:9), are ever again called to conversion and penance, and are ever again granted forgiveness.” (JDDJ 28)

The new life to which we have been freed by Christ has a scope which is not limited by death: The *Annex* states in para 2E: “By justification we are unconditionally brought into communion with God. This includes the promise of eternal life; ‘(I)f we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his’ (Rom 6:5; cf. Jn 3:36; Rom 8:17)’. And, again the *Annex* quotes the Book of Concord: “‘It is God’s will and express command that believers should do good works which the Holy Spirit works in them, and God is willing to be pleased with them for Christ’s sake and he promises to reward them gloriously in this and in the future life’. Any reward is a reward of grace, on which we have no claim.”²

¹ Quotes on this page are from the numbered paragraphs of *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ)* by The Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church (Grand Rapids, MI /Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2000).

² Annex 2E quoting, “Formula of Concord, Article IV. Good Works,” para. 38 in *ibid.*, 557.



For discussion: What Does This Mean Today?

In the *Official Common Statement* the signing partners of the Joint Declaration state together:

*Lutherans and Catholics will continue their efforts ecumenically in their common witness to interpret the message of justification in language relevant for human beings today, with reference both to individual and social concerns of our times.*¹

For some in today's world, the way the doctrine of justification was articulated in the sixteenth century continues to be meaningful, but many have raised doubts about its relevance in different contexts today. With its traditional focus on individual sin and guilt, how freeing or liberating is it for those who especially feel violated, "sinned against" or bound by powerful political, economic and cultural forces? For those who are excluded or stigmatized because of their race, ethnicity, gender or cultural practices? For those who become objects of unpredictable, uncontrollable evil and violence, and are held captive by fear? For those lacking a sense of dignity, self-esteem or worth? Or for those who feel driven by an all-consuming need to prove themselves, succeed or be better than others?

What are the forces that especially hold people captive in your context?

Central to the gospel is being freed for life—liberated from evil and destructive powers—so that we might love and serve others. Forgiveness implies a new way of relating to one another. How we see the world and our relationships are transformed. Rather than set in competition with others, and viewing one another as rivals, we are able to recognize our shared humanity.

At an ecumenical symposium sponsored by the LWF, responses such as the following were proposed:²

Justification

- needs to be communicated as a freeing message in relation to what people experience today
- implies liberation from all that enslaves human beings

- heals our relationship with God and with others,
- restores God's *shalom*
- is lived out between people in terms of justice
- affirms and empowers human beings within life-sustaining communities.

Which of the above emphases are especially relevant for you? What would you add? What is it about the gospel of God's grace that frees you for life?

We are freed from the bondage of being self-occupied, or from giving up in resignation. We realize we are not self-made persons who have to prove ourselves, but are dependent on God and interdependent with one another.

We are saved, made whole, not by what we do or by how righteous we are, but through God's free gift of grace. Therefore we are called to good works, to engage ourselves for justice, reconciliation and the kingdom of God in this world. Because all have sinned, all are in need of God's mercy and forgiveness. Injustice, ostracism and exclusion that cut persons off from the life God intends for all are opposed to the doctrine of justification. God continually builds communities of the faithful from the outside in, bringing in those who were seen as the least, the scorned, the neglected, and freeing us all for new life.

How can people see, feel and experience the difference that the message of justification makes in your setting?

¹ From the "Official Common Statement" of *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, The Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2000), 42.

² These and other themes are discussed more fully in Karen L. Bloomquist and Wolfgang Greive (eds), *The Doctrine of Justification: Its Reception and Meaning Today* (Geneva: LWF Studies, 2003/02).

Readings and Prayers

For a worship celebration you may wish to arrange for a joint ecumenical procession leading into the service as was done at the Signing Celebration of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in Augsburg, on Sunday, 31 October 1999. The liturgical pieces below are all taken from this Signing Celebration. On that occasion, thanks to God was given for the gift of baptism by affirming our baptism into Christ and by confessing our common Christian faith in the words of the Apostles' Creed.

Help us to affirm life in the midst of death, and bring light to people everywhere.

Hear our prayer, O Lord.

Gracious God, look favorably upon your Church. Grant your Church courage and wisdom so that it may bear witness to the Gospel among all nations. Send us out to preach good news to the poor, to announce release to the prisoners, to open the eyes of the blind, to let the oppressed go free. Help us to serve one another in humility, simplicity and joy.

Hear our prayer, O Lord.

Readings

Psalm	Psalm 96
First Reading	Ezekiel 11:17-20
Second Reading	1 Corinthians 3:10-11 Colossians 1:13-20
Gospel	John 3:16-18

God of justice and peace, grant your peace to our hearts and to our families, to the nations of the world and all humanity. We pray that justice and righteousness will govern the earth.

We call upon you for all people suffering because of injustice and war. Break down the walls that separate us and unite us. Grant us your peace in the midst of our everyday life so that we have the courage to follow Christ.

Hear our prayer, O Lord.

Prayer of Repentance

Holy and merciful God, you have joined us to Christ by his death and resurrection. You have united us with all those baptized in Christ's name. We confess that in our lives we have not always chosen the way of unity.

Kyrie eleison

Holy and merciful God, you have sent us to serve all for whom Christ died. Our Lord has set us an example of true love and humility. We confess that in our lives we have not always chosen the way of love.

Kyrie eleison

The Prayers

God of all salvation, you formed us in your own image, and called us to share in your own being. We give to you honor and glory, thanks and praise, worship and adoration. You sent your Son, Jesus Christ, among us to bring us light and salvation. We give you thanks for the victory he gained over the powers of darkness.

Living God, let us worship you with pure and joyful hearts. Let us reconcile what lies behind and strain forward to what lies ahead. Let us live and sing praise in your house forever. Let your mercy enlighten our hearts. Let us praise your mercy all the days of our life, through Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Hear our prayer, O Lord.

Amen.

Blessing

Holy God, you are the center of your whole church on earth and in heaven. In you is the source of all true life. Send us into the world enlightened by your truth, supported by your mercy, committed to your will, blessed by your promise. Show us new ways towards common witness. To this end give us the help of your Spirit and the diversity of your gifts.

The blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you, and remain with you always.

Amen.

Go in peace.

Thanks be to God.