



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE REPRESENTATIVES
OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA**

Thursday, 12 January 1989

Dear Friends,

“Grace to you and peace” (1Thess. 1, 1).

I am happy to welcome you, distinguished representatives of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, during your visit to the city of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul. Their witness in Rome – preaching the word of God and shedding their blood here – is the common heritage of all Christians and, despite the divisions which we continue to experience, it speaks to us of our common faith in Christ.

I would ask you to convey my heartfelt greetings to Bishop Chilstrom, whom I had the pleasure of meeting last January. I am grateful for his letter which you kindly brought on his behalf, together with the draft document on Ecumenism now being prepared for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. I appreciate the commitment to seeking Christian unity which has been expressed once more.

Jesus called his followers to the task of evangelization, telling them to make disciples of all nations, to baptize and to teach in his name (Cfr. *Matth.* 28, 19-20). In the light of this responsibility, the question of Christian unity becomes a clear and pressing ecclesial priority. The world hungers for spiritual food; men and women need to hear the Gospel message. “Blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it!”, said the Lord (*Luc.* 11, 28). Unhappily, divisions among Christians place obstacles in the way of evangelization, and often distract from the message of reconciliation which is at the heart of the Gospel.

We must heed Saint Paul’s powerful plea to the faithful at Ephesus: “I... beg you to lead a life

worthy of the calling to which you have been called... eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (*Eph.* 4, 1-3). Lutherans and Catholics, indeed all Christians, have a responsibility before God to continue to seek full communion and to encourage one another in that effort, for the sake of the Gospel.

I am happy therefore to hear what has been said about improving relations between Lutherans and Catholics in the United States during the past year. Your visit here is a further sign of encouragement for us, and I pray for you too.

“May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord” (*2Petr.* 1, 2). God bless your ecumenical pilgrimage.

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