



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS
TO DELEGATES OF THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION**

Thursday, 20 June 2024

[[Multimedia](#)]

Dear brothers and sisters,

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope” (*Rom 15:13*).

I extend a warm welcome to all of you, the regional delegates of the Lutheran World Federation. I am especially grateful for the kind words and the gift presented to me by the new President, Bishop Henrik Stubkjær. I also greet the Reverend Anne Burghardt, who has served as General Secretary for a number of years.

Thank you for your visit, which I consider an important gesture of ecumenical fraternity. For this reason, in my initial greeting I chose the words of the Apostle Paul from the Letter to the Romans, words that have accompanied your recent consultations. May the “God of hope” now also bless our meeting today. For all of us are pilgrims of hope, as we are reminded by the motto chosen for the Holy Year of 2025.

Three years ago, when another delegation of the Lutheran World Federation came here to Rome, we reflected together on celebrating the approaching anniversary of the First Council of Nicaea as an ecumenical event. Last year, at the General Assembly of your Federation in Krakow, you, Dr Burghardt, together with my dear brother, Cardinal Koch, emphasized in a joint statement that, “the ancient Christian Creed of Nicaea, whose 1700th anniversary we will celebrate in 2025, creates an ecumenical bond that has its center in Christ.” (*Common Word of the Lutheran World Federation and the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity*, 19 September 2023). In this context,

you rightly pointed to a fine sign of hope that holds a special place in the history of reconciliation between Catholics and Lutherans. Even before the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, Catholics and Lutherans in the United States of America bore witness together that: “The confession that our Lord Jesus Christ is the Son, God of God, continues to assure us that we are in fact redeemed, for only he who is God can redeem us.” (*The Status of the Nicene Creed as Dogma of the Church*, Baltimore, 7 July 1965).

Jesus Christ is the heart of ecumenism. He is divine mercy incarnate, and our ecumenical mission is to bear witness to him. In the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, Lutherans and Catholics formulated the common goal of “confessing Christ in all things, who alone is to be trusted above all things as the one Mediator (cf. *1 Tim 2:5f*) through whom God in the Holy Spirit gives himself and pours out his renewing gifts” (No. 18).

Dear brothers and sisters, twenty-five years have passed since the signing of the Official Common Statement confirming that Declaration. That event, which took place on 31 October 1999 in Augsburg, represented yet another sign of hope in our history of reconciliation. Let us cherish its memory as something ever alive. May this twenty-fifth anniversary be observed in our communities as a celebration of hope. Let us remember that our shared spiritual roots are found in the “one baptism for the forgiveness of sins” (*Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed*) and thus move forward with confidence as “pilgrims of hope”. May the God of hope be with us and continue to accompany our dialogue of truth and charity with his blessing.

On this journey of ecumenism, I am reminded of a beautiful comment made by Bishop Zizioulas. This Orthodox Bishop, a pioneer of ecumenism, used to say that he knew the date of when Christians would unite: the day of the final judgment! But in the meantime, he said that we must walk together, pray together and do charitable work together, as we head toward that “hyper-ecumenical” day of the final judgment. He really said that; Zizioulas had a good sense of humor!

Once again, I thank you most heartily for your visit. Now I would invite you to join in praying the Our Father, each of you in his or her own language. Thank you.