

# United in Christ International

## Joint Declaration

*On the Doctrine of Justification*

*By Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church (abv. JDDJ)*

We confess together that persons are justified by faith in the gospel "apart from works prescribed by the law" (Rom 3:28). Christ has fulfilled the law and by his death and resurrection has overcome it as a way to salvation. JDDJ(11 31)

On October 31st, 1999 representatives of the Catholic and Lutheran churches gathered in Augsburg, Germany and signed a Joint Declaration on the subject of Justification. And so 500 years of arguments, misunderstandings and yes, sometimes wars began to give way to reconciliation and recognition of the gifts the Holy Spirit has placed within the Body of Christ.

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 (111 15) (ph. 2:8 & Titus 3:5)

Beginning in Germany in the 1950s and bolstered by the Second Vatican Council in 1983 the United States Lutheran-Catholic Dialog (1978-1983) published an important statement concluding with "a fundamental consensus on the gospel" that only God's grace can bring salvation and that the old differences of emphasis need not be "church-dividing." In 1985 an ecumenical group of Protestant and Catholic theologians in Germany addressed the condemnations issued by both sides at the time of the Council of Trent (1547). They proposed that "the condemnations of the Reformation era pertaining to justification could be declared inapplicable to the partner churches today" Cardinal Avery Dulles, S.J.,

Following are a number of paragraphs from JDDJ (providing a very brief overview [underlining added])

5. The present Joint Declaration has this intention: namely, to show that on the basis of their dialogue the subscribing Lutheran churches and the Roman Catholic Church are now able to articulate a common understanding of our justification by God's grace through faith in Christ. It does not cover all that either church teaches about justification; it does encompass a consensus on basic truths of the doctrine of justification and shows that the remaining differences in its explication are no longer the occasion for doctrinal condemnations.

8. Together we hear the gospel that "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (Jn 3:16).

15. 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.

18. Therefore the doctrine of justification, which takes up this message and explicates it, is more than just one part of Christian doctrine. It stands in an essential relation to all truths of faith, which are to be seen as internally related to each other... Lutherans and Catholics share the

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goal of confessing Christ in all things, who alone is to be trusted above all things as the One Mediator (1 Tim 2:5) through whom God in the Holy Spirit gives himself and pours out his renewing gifts.

34. We confess together that the faithful can rely on the mercy and promises of God. In spite of their own weakness and the manifold threats to their faith, on the strength of Christ's death and resurrection they can build on the effective promise of God's grace in Word and Sacrament and so be sure of this grace.

35. This was emphasized in a particular way by the Reformers: in the midst temptation, believers should not look to themselves but look solely to Christ and trust only him. In trust in God's promise they are assured of their salvation, but are never secure looking at themselves.

43. Our consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification must come to influence the life and teachings of our churches. Here it must prove itself... there are still questions of varying importance which need further clarification. . . . We are convinced that the consensus we have reached offers a solid basis for this clarification.

The final paragraph of the Joint Declaration acknowledges that this can only be the work of the Holy Spirit.

44. We give thanks to the Lord for this decisive step forward on the way to overcoming the division of the church. We ask the Holy Spirit to lead us further toward that visible unity which is Christ's will.

The success or failure of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification will not depend upon theology or carefully crafted statements but upon a willingness of both sides to recognize the different gifts and expressions The Holy Spirit has placed within His Church. A Unity In Reconciled Diversity.

Much has been accomplished but there are still questions. It would be a misrepresentation to say that JDDJ has settled all questions of doctrine. Far from it! We believe its purpose and principal accomplishment has been to remove the condemnation between brothers and to officially build a bridge of dialog and understanding starting with the key doctrine of justification.

*"Christians who are afraid to build bridges and prefer to build walls are Christians who are not sure of their faith, not sure of Jesus Christ."* The Pope exhorted Christians to do as Paul did and begin to *"build bridges and to move forward."*

## **May 13, 2013, Pope Francis**

Diversity does not threaten the core gospel message

Diversity in itself is not a goal, but it is a natural part of being different churches, in different contexts, with different forms of ecclesial identity. It's a reconciled diversity as though it in itself does not threaten the fundamental unity achieved on core issues.

## **European Unity as a Challenge to Religious Communities The Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters 2007**

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## Unquestionably the work of The Holy Spirit

A unity negotiated by men, could only be a matter of human right... consequently it could not be a testimony to the mystery of Jesus Christ but would merely speak in favor of the diplomatic skill and willingness to compromise of those who conducted the negotiations. Joseph Ratzinger - Pope Benedict 2010

*"In the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body. Let us then pursue all that makes for peace and builds up our common life,"* proclaimed Catholic Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy, Pope John Paul II's emissary, as he signed the Augsburg accord on behalf of more than a billion Roman Catholics worldwide. All but 3 million of the world's 61.5 million Lutherans were represented by Bishop Christian Krause, president of the Lutheran World Federation, and by the Rev. Ishmael Noko, the federation's general secretary.

*"This is a critical breakthrough; it's the first major step toward reconciliation between the two churches since the Reformation,"* said the Rev. H. George Anderson, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and one of the negotiators and signers of the agreement.

*"Now we understand we have creeds in common, and that removes the taint of heresy from both sides,"* Anderson said. *"It's the difference between handling each other as if we were prickly sea urchins and being able to shake hands."*

### What Can You do?

- Pray the Good News of Jesus and the Joy of His Gospel will not be hindered but shared with everyone, everywhere.
- Pray the Christian church throughout the world be built up and strengthened;
- That understanding, compassion, forgiveness, and consideration be foremost.
- Pray that Unity in Reconciled Diversity be better understood as a work of the Holy Spirit.
- Pray for and consider financial support for United in Christ International
- Pray that the Grace of The Father, the Authority of Jesus and the Work of The Holy Spirit reign above all.

Thank You!

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