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PONTIFF LOOKS FOR MORE FRUITS IN UNITY DIALOGUE

Catholics, Lutherans Mark a 10th Anniversary, Look to a 500th

VATICAN CITY, DEC. 16, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Benedict XVI is expressing thankfulness for progress made in ecumenical dialogue between Catholics and Lutherans, which he says has borne fruit particularly at the level of local communities.

The Pope said this today when he greeted representatives of the Lutheran World Federation on the occasion of their official visit to Rome. The delegation was led by the new president of the federation, Reverend Munib Younan.

"With gratitude we can take stock of the many significant fruits produced by these decades of bilateral discussions," the Holy Father told them. "With God's help it has been possible slowly and patiently to remove barriers and to foster visible bonds of unity by means of theological dialogue and practical cooperation, especially at the level of local communities."

Benedict XVI noted that last year was the 10th anniversary of the signing of the landmark Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification.

He said this accord "has proved a significant step along the difficult path towards re-establishing full unity among Christians and a stimulus to further ecumenical discussion."

Regarding that further discussion, the Holy Father spoke of the next seven years leading up to the 500th anniversary of the 1517 "events," when Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of All Saints Church, and thus sparked the Protestant Reformation.

"Catholics and Lutherans are called to reflect anew on where our journey towards unity has led us and to implore the Lord's guidance and help for the future," the Pontiff said.

He noted that for the occasion of the anniversary, the International Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity is preparing a joint text which will "document what Lutherans and Catholics are able to say together at this point regarding our closer relations after almost five centuries of separation."

The Commission is currently studying the theme "Baptism and Growing Church Communion."

The Pope concluded by expressing his hope that "these ecumenical activities will provide fresh opportunities for Catholics and Lutherans to grow closer in their lives, their witness to the Gospel, and their efforts to bring the light of Christ to all dimensions of society."

Developments

For his part, Bishop Younan, who was elected as president of the federation in July, noted the "remarkable developments between our churches during recent years," and said that it was "a sign of our hope for what lies ahead."

"Within our own lifetimes, the climate of relations between Lutherans and Catholics has warmed dramatically -- and this climate change has been for the good!" the bishop affirmed. "Around the world our churches live in a new ecology of relationship. We too celebrated last month, when the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity observed its 15th anniversary. Today we want to assure you of the strength of our commitment to continue deepening our life together."

The bishop acknowledged the importance of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, calling it a "landmark ecumenical accomplishment," and added two more areas in which the Catholic Church and the Lutheran Federation could work together: addressing the moral issues involved with the financial crisis, and working toward a solution for peace in the Holy Land.

Finally, Bishop Younan recalled that in 2017, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation movement will be observed.

He said the federation recognizes that "this will be a test case for ecumenical relations," but added: "We intend our anniversary to be ecumenically accountable: to recognize both damaging aspects of the Reformation and ecumenical progress since the last major Reformation anniversary."

"We cannot achieve this ecumenical accountability on our own, without your help," the bishop continued.

"We are called, both Lutherans and Catholics, to our common vocation of witnessing to the world for the sake of Christ's kingdom.

"Thus we invite you to work together with us in preparing this anniversary, so that in 2017 we are closer to sharing in the Bread of Life than we are today."

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On ZENIT's Web page:

Full text of Pope's letter: www.zenit.org/article-31258?l=english