

Like a tree planted by streams of water
Greeting to the LWF Council meeting 2014 in Medan, Indonesia

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It is with pleasure that I greet warmly – also especially in the name of Cardinal Koch, the President of our Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity - all the participants and guests attending the “LWF Council meeting 2014 in Medan, Indonesia”.

Our gathering here in Medan, the central city of Northern Sumatra, offers a valuable opportunity to reflect on our shared ecumenical journey which has become an irreversible journey for both Catholics and Lutherans.

Any consideration of the journey of ecumenism begins with what we can joyfully affirm almost fifty years of astounding progress in ecumenical relations since Vatican II. It is sometimes forgotten what a sea-change has taken place in that time, and what tremendous fruits have been harvested.

Many prejudices and misunderstandings of the past have been overcome; bridges of new mutual understanding and practical co-operation have been built. In many cases convergences and consensus have been found, and old differences have been overcome or at least better identified.

The scene is transformed, as you will yourselves testify. From a situation of ignorance and prejudice, there is now a real sense of the Christian family, as the joint ecumenical journey of Lutherans and Catholics itself demonstrates. We clasp hands in warm friendship, and more than that, see in each other a kinship, a common origin and calling.

There is much that we profess together. Many disputes have been set in new contexts. Agreement and convergence have been achieved by approaching traditional problems in fresh ways. On themes such as justification, the relationship between Scripture and Tradition, the nature of the Church and the sacraments, the ability to overcome historic and painful disagreements has been remarkable. We share a range of doctrinal positions that no longer present themselves as church dividing issues, as last year’s document: *From Conflict to Communion* clearly demonstrates.

There are still remaining differences between us and some weariness to be felt, and much that we could still do together. It is the strongly held position of the Roman Catholic Church that, whatever obstacles to progress might occur, the goal of ecumenical dialogue is nothing less than full and visible communion. It is the goal which is described by the Second Vatican Council as “perfect ecclesiastical communion” when “all Christians will be gathered, in a common celebration of the Eucharist, into the unity of the one and only Church”.¹ We can also describe the goal as full visible communion in faith, sacramental life, apostolic ministry and mission. This affirmation must be underlined in all our ecumenical encounters.

¹ Unitatis Redintegratio 4

Let us not fall into the trap of assuming that ecumenism is something we have to construct ourselves. In its ecumenical document *Unitatis Redintegratio* which has been signed 50 years ago, on the 21 November 1964, The Second Vatican Council called insistently for ecumenism to begin with a change of heart, an interior conversion.² By this the Council Fathers meant not only a recognition of one's own but a change of direction, or seeing ecumenism not primarily as the product of human endeavour, but as the fruit of God's activity and will. Ecumenism is grounded first of all in divine imperative.

Furthermore, ecumenism is a sharing of gifts. "Dialogue is not simply an exchange of ideas. In some way it is always an exchange of gifts."³ The notion of an exchange of gifts' is an exciting one for ecumenists, for it enables previously intractable issues to take on a new and positive aspect. Elements traditionally seen as non-negotiable – for example Primacy, or the Magisterium – can be viewed as a gift to the Church, to be explained, offered, and shared.

Of course, our partners will want to know that the exchange is not seen as one way. Both of us, Catholics and Lutherans alike, are in need of constant renewal. The path to full communion is not a one-way movement. All parts must move. All parts are in need of repentance and renewal. From the Catholic Church's point of view, such repentance does not mean the denial of any of its truths, but a willingness to develop or re-emphasize essential and important elements. Gifts received from dialogue partners have assisted our own doctrinal development.

Finally, we need to remind ourselves too that at the heart of ecumenism must be 'spiritual ecumenism.' The Second Vatican Council stated that a "change of heart and holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians, should be the soul of the ecumenical movement, and merits the name 'spiritual ecumenism' "⁴, a call reiterated by Popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI as well as Pope Francis who met you, dear President Bishop Younan, together with other ecumenical representatives just a few days ago in the Holy Land and in Rome, when the Pope together with you strongly underlined today's necessary witness of Christians against war, poverty, hunger and persecution.

If we are to promote reception, it is important to stress what we have in common: a shared baptismal faith. Confessing the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church helps to deepen the common foundation of our real but still incomplete communion. Recognition of Baptism is linked with confessional statements, such as the Apostles' Creed – which we recall is a baptismal statement.

If spiritual ecumenism really is the soul of the ecumenical programme, its heart will be friendship. Friendship and bonds of affection allow us to consider everything – including our partners' motives – in the best possible light; it places problems in their context, and

² *Unitatis Redintegratio* 4

³ *Ut Unum Sint* 28

⁴ *Unitatis Redintegratio* 8

increases confidence in one's own identity. Church leaders have provided a significant example here. Friendship, too, needs to be growing at the parish and community level. It is friendship that is one of the greatest prerequisites, and fruits, of the ecumenical process.

Finally, unity is not the work of humans, but the gift of God. Therefore, we must not be discouraged, but filled with hope and excitement, as we seek to discern together the will of God for his Church.

Please allow me to extend to all of you my best wishes for a blessed and fruitful Council and for God's abundant guidance on our future ecumenical journey.