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In its last plenary session, held from 19 to 22 February 2018, the German Episcopal Conference considered pastoral guidelines entitled “To Walk with Christ – in the footsteps of unity. Mixed marriage and joint participation in the Eucharist”. More than three quarters of the Members of the Episcopal Conference approved the text. A not insignificant number of Pastors – including seven diocesan bishops – did not feel able, for various reasons, to give their assent. These seven bishops appealed to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts. In accordance with the wishes of Pope Francis, a meeting was therefore agreed between some bishops and head officials of the Holy See.

This meeting, which took place on 3 May 2018 in the offices of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, was attended by the following German bishops: Cardinal Reinhard Marx, archbishop of München und Freising and president of the German Episcopal Conference; Cardinal Rainer Maria Woelki, archbishop of Cologne; Msgr. Felix Genn, bishop of Münster; Msgr. Karl-Heinz Wiesemann, bishop of Speyer and president of the Doctrinal Commission of the German Episcopal Conference; Msgr. Rudolf Voderholzer, bishop of Regensburg and vice-president of the Doctrinal Commission of the German Episcopal Conference; Msgr. Gerhard Feige, bishop of Magdeburg and president of the Commission for Ecumenism of the German Episcopal Conference; Fr. Hans Langendörfer, S.J., secretary of the German Episcopal Conference. On behalf of the Holy See, it was attended by: Archbishop Luis F. Ladaria, S.J., prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith; Cardinal Kurt Koch, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity; Msgr. Markus Graulich, S.D.B., under-secretary of the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts; Fr. Hermann Geissler, F.S.O., head official at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

During the discussion, which took place in German, Archbishop Ladaria illustrated that Pope Francis appreciates the ecumenical commitment of German bishops and asks them to find, in a spirit of ecclesial communion, a possibly unanimous result. In the meeting, various points of view were discussed: for example, the relationship of the issue with faith and pastoral care, and its relevance for the universal Church and its juridical dimension. Archbishop Ladaria will inform the Holy Father of the content of the discussion. The meeting took place in a cordial and fraternal atmosphere.

