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Audience with a Delegation of the German Evangelical Lutheran Church

At 10.50 this morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience a delegation from the German Evangelical Lutheran Church.

The following is the Pope's address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear Bishop Ulrich,

Dear friends,

I offer you my warm welcome, and am glad at your presence. I sincerely thank you, Bishop Ulrich, for the words addressed to me, and which testify to your ecumenical commitment. I also cordially greet the other representatives of the German National Committee of the World Lutheran Federation and of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany, together with their guests.

With joy I remember the moments shared last year on the occasion of the Common Commemoration of the Reformation. Previously on 31 October 2016 we had met in Lund to identify in a spirit of fraternal communion what, for the wounds of the past, could instead have provoked controversy and hatred. Grateful to God, we have seen that the five hundred years of history – sometimes very painful – in which we have been opposed and often in conflict, have left space, in the last fifty years, to a growing communion. Thanks to the work of the Spirit, fraternal meetings, gestures based on the logic of the Gospel rather than human strategies, and through official Lutheran-Catholic dialogue, it has been possible to overcome old prejudices on both sides. With the help of God, we hope for a future in which we strive to overcome completely our divergences. We must move ahead.

The Common Commemoration of the Reformation has confirmed to us that ecumenism will continue to mark our

path. It is increasingly becoming a necessity and a desire, as shown by the various joint prayers and the many ecumenical meetings that took place last year around the world. Let us not forget to start from prayer, so that it is not human plans that indicate the way, but the Holy Spirit: He alone opens the way and enlightens the steps to be taken. The Spirit of love cannot but drive us on the paths of charity. As Christians, we Catholics and Lutherans are called above all to “love one another deeply, from the heart” since we “have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God” (1 Pt 1: 22-23). But we are also called to alleviate together the miseries of the needy and the persecuted. The sufferings of many brothers oppressed because of their faith in Jesus are also a pressing invitation to reach an ever more concrete and visible unity among us. The ecumenism of blood.

Let us support one another in the journey, also by carrying forward theological dialogue. No ecumenical dialogue can advance if we remain still. We must journey and continue: not with the enthusiasm of running ahead to reach coveted goals, but walking patiently together, under the gaze of God. Some themes – I think of the Church, the Eucharist and the ecclesial ministry – merit precise and well shared reflections. Ecumenism also asks not to be elitist, but to involve as many brothers and sisters as possible in the faith, growing as a community of disciples who pray, love and proclaim. It is on this basis that ecumenical dialogue will help us to progress, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in the common understanding of divine revelation, which is deepened by knowing and loving the Lord Jesus Christ together, “for in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (Col 2: 9) and “God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things” (Col 1: 19-20).

May the Lord accompany us, so that our Christian being may be more centred in Him and courageous in its mission; so that pastoral care may be enriched with service and, in its various dimensions, be more imbued with an ecumenical spirit. I invoke upon you all the blessing of the Lord: let the Holy Spirit descend and unite what is still divided.

It would be good, after these words, to pray together the Our Father: “*Vater Unser...*”.
