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UDIENZA AL PRESIDENTE DELLA FEDERAZIONE LUTERANA MONDIALE

Alle ore 12.15 di questa mattina, il Santo Padre Benedetto XVI riceve in Udienza il Rev.do Munib A. Younan, Presidente della Federazione Luterana Mondiale, accompagnato da una Delegazione, e rivolge loro il saluto che riportiamo di seguito:

• SALUTO DEL SANTO PADRE

Dear Bishop Younan, dear Lutheran Friends,

I am happy to greet the representatives of the Lutheran World Federation on the occasion of your official visit to Rome. I offer my cordial best wishes to Bishop Munib Younan and the Reverend Martin Junge on their respective elections as President and General Secretary, together with my prayers for their term of service.

Five years ago, at the beginning of my pontificate, I had the joy of receiving your predecessors and expressing my hope that the close contacts and intensive dialogue which have characterized ecumenical relations between Catholics and Lutherans would continue to bear rich fruit. With gratitude we can take stock of the many significant fruits produced by these decades of bilateral discussions. 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.

Last year marked the tenth anniversary of the signing of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, which has proved a significant step along the difficult path towards re-establishing full unity among Christians and a stimulus to further ecumenical discussion. In these years leading up to the five-hundredth anniversary of the events of fifteen seventeen, 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. I am pleased to note that, for the occasion, 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. In order to clarify further the understanding of the Church, which is the main focus of ecumenical dialogue today, the Commission is studying the theme: *Baptism and Growing Church Communion*. It is my 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.

In these days of joyful preparation for the celebration of Christmas, let us entrust one another, and our common quest for Christian unity to the Lord, who is himself the genuine newness which surpasses all our human expectations (cf. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, IV, 34, 1).

May the peace and joy of this Christmas season be with you all!

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