



## **Recommendation: Declaration on the Way: Church, Ministry and Eucharist**

### **Background**

The Vatican created a Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity in 1960 to invite observers to the Second Vatican Council, which began in October 1962. When the ecumenical council concluded in December 1965, it had made the secretariat permanent. The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity launched dialogues with other Christian bodies, including The Lutheran World Federation and its member churches.

The Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue began in the United States while the Second Vatican Council was still in progress. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, through its Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, engaged predecessor church bodies of the ELCA in talks that for many years included also representatives of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

The 1989 Churchwide Assembly adopted [CA89.3.15] “Ecumenism: The Vision of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America” as a working document, and the 1991 Churchwide Assembly adopted [CA91.3.7] its second part, “A Declaration of Ecumenical Commitment: A Policy Statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.” The 25th anniversary of Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue in the United States was commemorated in 1991, and the Church Council authorized [CC91.4.20] a study of its most recent report, “Justification by Faith.”

Several dialogues in the United States and internationally focused on reaching “a common understanding of our justification by God’s grace through faith in Christ,” as stated in the “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification” by The Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church. The declaration, signed on October 31, 1999, encompasses “a consensus on basic truths of the doctrine of justification and shows that the remaining differences in its explication are no longer the occasion for doctrinal condemnations.”

With an eye on 2017, dialogues continued to work toward a common commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation and a celebration of the 50th anniversary of international talks between The Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church. The international Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity used the anniversaries to challenge Catholics and Lutherans “to discuss in dialogue the issues and consequences of the Wittenberg Reformation, which centered on the person and thought of Martin Luther, and to develop perspectives for the remembrance and appropriation of the Reformation today. Luther’s reforming agenda poses a spiritual and theological challenge for both contemporary Catholics and Lutherans.” In 2013, the commission published “From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017” to describe theological issues of the Reformation, to trace their ecumenical progress and to identify “five ecumenical imperatives” for moving forward in dialogue and joint witness. Drawing on this text, “Common Prayer” is a liturgy to be celebrated by Pope Francis and Lutheran leaders in Lund, Sweden, on October 31, 2016.

At its April 2015 meeting, the Church Council affirmed [CC15.04.22] the work of an ecumenical team drafting a document titled “Declaration on the Way: Church, Ministry and Eucharist.” The document compiles 32 Statements of Agreement drawn from the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogues, international and regional, of the past 50 years. The declaration also identifies 15 topics of varying degrees of doctrinal difference still remaining to be resolved.

During fall 2015, the Conference of Bishops voted to affirm the Statements of Agreement, as did the Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

In November 2015, the Church Council voted [CC15.11.48]:

To receive with gratitude “Declaration on the Way: Church, Ministry and Eucharist” as another sign of the ELCA’s commitment to making visible the unity that is God’s gift in Christ (“Ecumenism: The Vision of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,” 1991); and

To accept the thirty-two Statements of Agreement.

## **Recommended for Assembly Action**

To express profound gratitude for “Declaration on the Way: Church, Ministry and Eucharist” as another sign of the ELCA’s commitment to making visible the unity that is God’s gift in Christ (“Ecumenism: The Vision of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,” 1991);

To receive the thirty-two Statements of Agreement, acknowledging that “receiving these agreements recognizes that there are no longer church dividing issues with respect to these Statements...” (“Declaration on the Way”); and

To commend to the ELCA the “Declaration on the Way,” “From Conflict to Communion” and the “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification” as resources for the common life of the church as we approach 2017 and beyond.