



NEWS

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JOINT LUTHERAN-CATHOLIC OBSERVANCES ENCOURAGED BY BISHOPS' COMMITTEE

WASHINGTON--The Catholic bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (BCEIA) has encouraged well planned events to provide Lutherans and Catholics an opportunity to pray together and become better acquainted in 1980, the 450th anniversary year of the Augsburg Confession.

Besides being a basic document of the Lutheran Church, the Augsburg Confession has special significance for Lutheran-Catholic relations, said Bishop Ernest L. Unterkoefler of Charleston, S.C., BCEIA chairman, in a letter to the bishops.

Bishop Unterkoefler said the committee believes that it would be most appropriate for the bishops to discuss with Lutheran district and synod presidents in their states or regions the possibilities for events within their jurisdictions.

Stressing "the intent of the Augsburg Confession, its evident hope that unity be maintained among us," Bishop Unterkoefler wrote: "This is the principal lesson for today that it seems should be communicated by any joint observance of this anniversary."

"The content of the Confession can also be profitably studied by groups of clergy and people who are equipped for more

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sustained study. But specific theological and disciplinary questions raised by the content should not be presented first in a way that could distract us from the all important intent," he noted.

"The Augsburg Confession is recognized by all Lutherans as one of the foundational documents of their church life and is considered authoritative Lutheran teaching," Bishop Unterkoefler said.

"But the Confession also has a particular significance for Lutheran-Catholic relations, for it was the intent of the Reformers who drafted it to give expression to the fides catholica. Their hope was that thus the Lutheran reform movement would be seen and develop as a movement within the Church Catholic.

"Events at this time did not lead to the realization of their intent. Yet this hope still remains alive in the relations of our churches today. It finds its expression in the increasing efforts we make in common prayer, joint study, common witness and collaboration to further the mission of the Church.

"In all these ways we seek to find together that unity which we know is Christ's will for us. The anniversary of the Augsburg Confession can provide very suitable opportunities for more of our people to learn about and personally take part in this quest."

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