



NEWS

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BISHOPS' COMMITTEE CITES POPE'S STRONG COMMITMENT TO ECUMENISM

WASHINGTON--The Chairman of the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (BCEIA) said the exchange of letters between Pope John Paul and the President of the Lutheran Church in America underscores the Pope's deep personal commitment to the ecumenical cause.

In a statement reflecting the views of the BCEIA, Bishop William H. Keeler of Harrisburg noted that Pope John Paul had warmly endorsed the progress of Lutheran-Catholic relations in the United States during the past 20 years, and had hailed it as a model for such dialogue in other parts of the world.

The exchange of letters between Bishop James R. Crumley, Jr. and Pope John Paul II was made public (September 27) at the Vatican at a press conference whose participants included a group of Lutheran bishops and members of the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. Bishop Keeler and Bishop James W. Malone of Youngstown, Ohio, President of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, participated in a similar press conference held the same day in New York City.

In his letter, dated May 22, Bishop Crumley spoke of the

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2/Commitment

collaboration in prayer and good work which has grown enormously among U.S. Lutherans and Catholics in the past two decades.

In response, Pope John Paul, in a letter dated July 22, said many Catholic bishops from the United States had told him about the progress of the ecumenical movement in this country.

"This development is important for Catholics because the Second Vatican Council had as one of its principal concerns 'the restoration of unity among all Christians,'" the Pope said.

"This task continues as a priority in the Catholic Church today," the Pope continued. "It is a primary concern of mine, especially since being called to the See of Peter, which by its very nature exists to serve the unity of Christ's Church."

(Copies of the letters of Pope John Paul II and Bishop Crumley which were disseminated today are also available from the NCCB Office of Public Affairs.)

This is the text of Bishop Keeler's statement:

"This exchange of letters does several things at once. First, it represents a warm endorsement on the part of the Holy Father of the ecumenical movement and especially of the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue in the United States over the two decades since the Second Vatican Council. In fact, Pope John Paul says that the American dialogue, with particular reference to the statement on justification by faith, can be of service to Catholic-Lutheran dialogue in other parts of the world.

"Second, we welcome the attention given by both Bishop Crumley and the Holy Father to a variety of Lutheran-Catholic efforts extending beyond dialogue to parish level efforts in some parts of the country. This would include, for example, joint observances of the 450th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession in 1980, the 800th anniversary of the birth of St. Francis of Assisi in 1981, and the 500th anniversary of the birth of Martin Luther in 1983, as well as the annual national meetings between the presidents of the three

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3/Commitment

Lutheran churches, which are now uniting, and members of the BCEIA.

"The third point is that the message of Pope John Paul dramatizes for us in the United States his deep personal commitment to the ecumenical cause, a commitment which he has addressed in his trips to Canterbury and Geneva, for example, where he underscored multiple ecumenical endeavors at the world level.

"More recently, in an address to the entire staff of the Roman Curia, including the Cardinals, bishops and others who assist him in the leadership of the Church, Pope John Paul celebrated the 25 years of work of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and outlined an impressive ecumenical agenda which the Church is seeking to implement. It was here that the Pope said the Catholic Church is irrevocably committed to the ecumenical movement because the search for Christian unity is "a matter of Christ's will" and ecumenism is "a necessary dimension of the whole of the Church's life."

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