



# NEWS

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**LUTHERAN AND CATHOLIC BISHOPS  
ATTEND 13TH ANNUAL MEETING**

WASHINGTON--The thirteenth annual meeting of Lutheran and Catholic bishops held here October 27-28 was also the last in the series co-sponsored by Lutheran World Ministries (LWM) and the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (BCEIA).

With formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), LWM will end its service and plans call for future meetings of the bishops under a new configuration with the co-sponsorship of the BCEIA and the Office for Ecumenical Affairs of the ELCA.

Bishop William H. Keeler of Harrisburg, Pa., BCEIA Chairman, at the meeting expressed "special gratitude" to the LWM for "long and dedicated ecumenical partnership."

Speaking for the LWM, General Secretary Harold Hanson said: "At a last meeting co-sponsored by Lutheran World Ministries, we have cause for rejoicing. That cause is the unity we Lutheran partners have received by God's grace. Our churches'

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history of ecumenical dialogues, contacts, and conversations have helped us discern more fully our own basic unity."

He added that "we are especially grateful to our brothers and sisters in the Roman Catholic Church for the work we have accomplished together and assure you of our continuing ecumenical commitment in a united Evangelical Lutheran Church in America."

Under its earlier title, the U.S.A. National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation, the Lutheran World Ministries joined with the BCEIA in establishing the U.S. Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue, bringing together Catholics and other Christians in the U.S. for the first national dialogue. Since then, the dialogue has held 50 sessions and published seven pioneering reports that have gained international recognition for serious scholarship as well as for agreements they have advanced.

In 1975, the LWM and the BCEIA were also the first to establish a pattern of regular annual meetings between those with oversight responsibility along with theological consultants and staff representatives from the Lutheran and Roman Catholic Churches in the U.S.

Present at last month's meeting were national bishops of member churches of the LWM, including Bishop David Preus, of the American Lutheran Church, who co-chaired the meeting with Bishop Keeler. Also taking part was Bishop James R. Crumley, Jr., of the Lutheran Church in America.

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Present at the meeting for the first time was Bishop Herbert Chilstrom, of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

The new ELCA will assume full operation as the successor to the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, the American Lutheran Church, and the Lutheran Church in America at the beginning of 1988.

Also present for the first time at last month's meeting was Dr. Samuel Nafger, representing Dr. Ralph Bohlman, president of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

The meeting focused on reports on the many dialogues Lutherans and Catholics are conducting, not only with one another, but with other Christian bodies. Among reports reviewed were the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church report on "Faith, Sacraments and the Unity of the Church" and the final text of the response from Rome to the World Council of Churches' Faith and Order Commission report on "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry."

Also reviewed was the report of German Roman Catholic Lutheran and Reformed representatives proposing the lifting of the condemnations the churches directed toward one another in the 16th century. Interest was expressed in examining the report, including its research papers, before studying further its full implications, which was proposed as a possible future agenda

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item.

Attention was directed to a response of the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church of America to a report of the International Roman Catholic-Lutheran Joint Commission on "Facing Unity: Models, Forms and Phases of Lutheran-Roman Catholic Church Fellowship." The ALC and the LCA are not in complete accord in responding to "Facing Unity" proposals that Lutherans and Catholics seek a "structured fellowship." Other questions raised by "Facing Unity" include the difference between the churches on the acceptance of women as persons who do or do not meet the criteria for ordination to the ministry.

In their response, the Lutheran churches encouraged a similar response from the Catholic Church. Upon receipt of these responses, it was suggested that further effort should be undertaken to deal together with the concerns raised in the proposals and directions of "Facing Unity."

During a discussion of the need of Lutheran and Catholic churches to bear witness through evangelization, a concern was raised by the Roman Catholics over the impact of the evangelism efforts of other churches on the American Hispanic community with its Catholic background and over a potential split among members of Hispanic families into religiously opposed groups. While the Catholic bishops did not see the Lutheran churches doing this, they still wished to share this concern, given the stated

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commitments of Lutherans to extend their witness and see that the Lutheran community becomes more inclusive. In this respect, it was suggested contacts be made to see what can be done in the area of more shared and mutually supportive evangelical outreach.

Also discussed was a report from the U.S. Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue, which engages theologians from the churches twice a year and has held eight sessions on "Mary and the Saints," the subject matter of its anticipated eighth report. Practical piety as well as doctrinal stands with respect to veneration and invocation of the saints can be seen as a hard testing area of the earlier levels of agreement the dialogue had found with respect to the teaching of justification by faith, a central issue for Lutherans and Roman Catholics.

The dialogue is proceeding on this difficult question with increasing confidence, but the outcome cannot yet be foreseen. The Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue is co-chaired by Dr. H. George Anderson, President of Luther College, and Archbishop J. Francis Stafford of Denver. Both were present at this annual bishops' meeting, along with four other participants in the dialogue, Dr. Joseph Burgess, of the Lutheran Council in the U.S.A., and Fathers Avery Dulles, S.J., and Carl J. Peter, of Catholic University, and John F. Hotchkin, BCEIA Executive Director.

Assessment of the recent visit of Pope John Paul II to the U.S. and particularly the events shared with other Christians

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in Columbia, S.C. on September 11 was discussed. Notably unique features of these events included leading representatives from such a wide spectrum of Christian churches and communities gathering under Christian religious auspices. The service of prayer and worship also seemed unique in character, drawing together the Protestant and Catholic spirit of worship in a distinct way.

Never before in history had the Bishop of Rome been invited to lead and to preach at a Christian worship service at which the largest majority of Christians participating were not Roman Catholics. Catholics were appreciative of the reception extended to the pope by other Christians and to the Lutherans who contributed to the success of these events.

Special acknowledgement was expressed by Bishop Keeler for the participation of Bishops Crumley, Preus, and Chilstrom, and Doctor Bohlman, and the key role played by Dr. William Rusch, of the LCA, chaired the committee in charge of drafting the statement presented to the pope by the other Christian leaders.

Lutherans expressed their appreciation for the warm outreach of the pope to the wider church, and his identification with other Christian brothers and sisters. At the same time it was noted some Protestants detected in other aspects of the pope's pastoral visit an articulation of more rigid pre-Vatican II attitudes on some matters.

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In discussing possible follow-up steps to the Columbia events, it was considered important to look at the area highlighted by the papal homily in Columbia: What can be done together to support and strengthen family life, especially through local parishes and congregations?

A large portion of the second day of the meeting was devoted to an open forum for the bishops to bring up and share their pastoral concerns.

Other Lutheran participants were Bishop Howard McCarney, Lutheran Church in America, and Bishop E. Harold Jansen, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Other Roman Catholic participants were Archbishop John F. Whealon of Hartford, Bishop Raphael M. Fliss of Superior, and Auxiliary Bishop Edward J. O'Donnell of St. Louis.

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