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Audience with the Delegation from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, on the Feast of Saint Henrik

At 11.10 today, the Holy Father Francis received in audience a delegation from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, on the occasion of the annual ecumenical pilgrimage to Rome, to celebrate the Feast of Saint Henrik, patron of the country.

The following is the Pope's address to those present at the meeting:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I offer you a cordial greeting as we gather during your pilgrimage to Rome, which is by now an annual event on the feast of Saint Henrik. I thank the Lutheran Bishop of Espoo for his kind greeting. As the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity draws to an end, we think back with joy on this past year's joint commemoration of the Reformation, which strengthened and deepened, in our Lord Jesus Christ, the communion between Lutherans and Catholics and their ecumenical partners throughout the world. This joint commemoration remains a fruitful opportunity for ecumenism, for it marked not a goal but rather a point of departure in the ecumenical quest for full and visible unity between Christians, under the threefold sign of gratitude, repentance and hope, all three of which are indispensable if we truly desire to heal our memory. It is not by chance that our efforts are moving towards the study of a major ecumenical question that we intend to discuss in the future, namely, the nature of the Church.

An essential part of the joint commemoration of the Reformation worldwide has been the ecumenical aspect of our prayer and our meetings, no longer marked by the disputes and conflicts of the past. Our commemoration took place in a quite different spirit, for we understood the event of the Reformation as a summons to confront together Christianity's loss of credibility, and to renew and strengthen our common confession of the Triune God. The year just ended reminded us of a time when Christian unity was not yet sundered. Consequently, there was

only one way for Lutherans and Catholics to commemorate 2017: in ecumenical communion.

Today I receive from you with joy and gratitude the document recently issued by the Lutheran Catholic Dialogue Commission for Finland, entitled: "Communion in Growth. Declaration on the Church, Eucharist and Ministry". Its title reflects the decisive issues to which ecumenical dialogue can and must now turn its attention. After the consensus reached between Lutherans and Catholics on fundamental questions regarding the doctrine of justification, the ecclesiological implications of that agreement must necessarily be part of the agenda of ecumenical dialogues.

At a time when societies are increasingly secularized, our service to ecumenism consists in bearing witness to the presence of the living God. The greatest ecumenical challenge we face is that of reaffirming the centrality of the God question, which has to do not with any God, but of the God Who revealed His face to us in the man Jesus of Nazareth. Since Lutherans and Catholics can now acknowledge together the centrality of the God question, it has been possible to join in an ecumenical commemoration of the Reformation, not as a mere pragmatic gesture but with a deep sense of faith in Christ crucified and risen, a faith to which we can now testify together. By so doing, we are shouldering the great ecumenical responsibility to which last year's commemoration of the Reformation called us.

Your pilgrimage coincides each year with the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, whose theme this year – "Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power" (cf. *Ex 15:6*) – reminds us of the situation of dire need in which countless people live in many parts of our world. It is our duty to come to their aid, united by our shared ecumenical commitment. In complete humility, then, let us ask our Lord Jesus Christ that by His grace we Christians throughout the world may be instruments of His peace. May He help us always, amid divisions between peoples, to work together as witnesses and servants of His healing and reconciling love, and in this way to sanctify and glorify His name. Let us constantly implore the support of God's grace and the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, Who guides us to the fullness of truth.

Once again, I offer you my warm welcome. Upon you and upon all Christians in Finland I cordially invoke God's blessings.
