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BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

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Audience with a delegation of the World Lutheran Federation

This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience a delegation of the World Lutheran Federation, to whom he delivered the following address:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear sisters, dear brothers!

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope” (*Rm* 15:13).

I extend my welcome to you all, regional delegates of the World Lutheran Federation. In particular, I thank the new President, Bishop Henrik Stubkjær, for his kind words and the gift offered to me, and I also greet the Reverend Anne Burghardt, who has carried out the role of secretary general for several years.

I thank you for this visit of yours, which I consider an important gesture of ecumenical fraternity. Therefore, in my initial greeting, I chose the words of the Apostle Paul, from the Letter to the Romans, words that have accompanied your recent consultations. May the “God of hope” now also bless our meeting. Indeed, we are all pilgrims of hope, as the motto of the Holy Year 2025 says.

Three years ago, when another delegation of the World Lutheran Federation came here to Rome, we reflected together on the imminent anniversary of the First Council of Nicaea as an ecumenical event. And last year, on the occasion of your Federation’s General Assembly in Krakow, you, Reverend Burghardt, together with my dear brother Cardinal Koch, emphasized in a joint Declaration that “the ancient Christian Creed of Nicaea, whose 1700th anniversary we will celebrate in 2025, creates an ecumenical bond that has its centre in Christ” (19 September 2023). In this context, you justly recalled a beautiful sign of hope, that has a special place in the history of reconciliation between Catholics and Lutherans. Indeed, already before the end of Vatican Council II, Catholic and Lutheran Christians of the United States of America gave this witness together in Baltimore: “The

confession that Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Son, God of God, continues to assure us that we are in fact redeemed, for only He who is God can redeem us" (*The Status of the Nicene Creed as Dogma of the Church*, 7 July 1965).

Jesus Christ is the heart of ecumenism. He is divine mercy incarnate, and our ecumenical mission is to bear witness to this. In the "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification", Lutherans and Catholics formulated as a common aim that of "confessing Christ in all things, who alone is to be trusted above all things as the one Mediator (1 Tim 2:5f) through whom God in the Holy Spirit gives himself and pours out his renewing gifts" (no. 18).

Dear sisters and dear brothers, twenty-five years have passed since the signing of that official Joint Declaration. What happened on 31 October 1999 in Augusta is another sign of hope in our history of reconciliation. Let us conserve it in our memory as something always living. May the twenty-fifth anniversary be celebrated in our communities as a feast of hope. Let us remember that our common spiritual origin is "one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins" (Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed) and continue with confidence as "pilgrims of hope". May the God of hope be with us and continue to accompany our dialogue of truth and charity with his blessing.

In this journey of ecumenism, something beautiful from dear Bishop Zizioulas comes to my mind. This Orthodox bishop, a pioneer of ecumenism, used to say that he knew the date of Christian union: the day of the final judgment. But in the meantime, he said, we must walk together: walk together, pray together and do works of charity together, on the way to that "hyper-ecumenical" day that will be the final judgment, as he used to say. Zizioulas had a good sense of humour!

I thank you once again from my heart for your visit; and I would now like to invite you to pray the Lord's Prayer together, everyone in their own language. Thank you.
