

Statement by Archbishop Wilton D. Gregory to the Press, regarding the Common Agreement on Mutual Recognition of Baptism

November 16, 2010

In this afternoon's session of the USCCB's plenary meeting, the bishops approved Action Item #5, the Common Agreement on Mutual Recognition of Baptism offered by Round 7 of the Catholic-Reformed Dialogue in the United States.

This vote of our bishops' conference is milestone on the ecumenical journey. Together with our Reformed brothers and sisters from the Christian Reformed Church in North America, the Presbyterian Church-USA, the Reformed Church in America and the United Church of Christ, we Catholic bishops can once again affirm baptism as the basis of the real, even if incomplete, unity we share in Christ.

Our conference looks forward to seeing all four of the authoritative bodies of the Reformed communities approve the Common Agreement as we have today. Further study by Catholic and Reformed scholars is needed in our dialogue to arrive at deeper mutual understanding of the nature and effects of sacramental baptism, which the Second Vatican Council called—the gateway to eternal life.

Once approved by all four of the Reformed denominations, the Agreement will allow Catholic ministers to presume that baptisms performed in these communities are—true Baptism as understood in Catholic doctrine and law. The presentation of a baptismal certificate by Reformed Christians who wish to come into full communion with the Catholic Church, or to marry a Catholic, assures Catholic ministers that the baptism performed by a Reformed minister involved the use of flowing water and the biblical invocation of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Catholics and Reformed Christians have moved one step closer to that fullness of communion which will be realized, in obedience to the Lord's prayer—Father, may they be one (John 17:21)—on that day when together we can celebrate in oneness of faith and ministry at the one holy Table of the Eucharist.

I am especially grateful to Bishop Patrick Cooney, Bishop Emeritus of Gaylord, who served as Catholic Co-chair of Round 7 of the Catholic Reformed Dialogue, and to Dr. Richard Mouw, President of Fuller Seminary who served as Reformed Co-chair. Many thanks also to the many dedicated Catholic and Reformed scholars whose untiring efforts have brought Round 7 of the dialogue to a successful conclusion.

Most Rev. Wilton D. Gregory

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