

"Our Father." This prayer is now ours to recite with the same gratitude, the same fervor and the same humility as was that of Our Lord. Prayer is just as imperative for us now as it was for Jesus.

Prayer will give us the strength and the courage to embark on the heavy seas of the world we live in despite the fact we find it hazardous, feverous and rough. Despite the high winds, the Lord summons us to "cast the nets." Prayer will stir up our faith and enlighten our hope that, with the help of the Spirit, we may never surrender to despair but always rely on his grace to help our brothers and sisters find happiness and a true meaning to their life in the message of Christ.

Prayer will brighten and support our missionary work. It will guide us toward the fringes of the church where our brothers and sisters await to hear words that ring true and help them regain the fervor of their faith. It will lead us to the fringes of society where our fellow citizens long for truth, hope and happiness, where they will only find a satisfying answer in a message that they understand and that gives meaning to their life.

We will find the courage to go to the fringes of the world and obey the last will of our Lord: "Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19).

The church needs the dedication and the participation of all its members for new evangelization to happen in our multicultural and secularized world. And it needs to happen now. We've done enough talking, reflecting and strategic studies. It's time we become even more committed in our daily lives to sharing our faith through witness, through our actions and words. We have nothing to impose on anyone, whether they be Catholics, Christians, Jews, Muslims, of other faiths or without faith. But we have someone wonderful to present to our brothers and sisters, someone who can change their lives and give them abundant life and eternal life: Jesus Christ.

You, members of communities of consecrated life, religious men who belong to a great variety of orders, are key players in this great mission. The charisms and mission of your commu-

nities are a gift to the church to better accomplish its mission in the midst of the world. May the Lord give you the perseverance and the courage to continue responding with generosity and faithfulness to your call to holiness.

I would like to close with these words from the first encyclical of Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei*:

"If truth is a truth of love, if it is a truth disclosed in personal encounter with the Other and with others, then it can be set free from its enclosure in individuals and become part of the common good. As a truth of love, it is not one that can be imposed by force; it is not a truth that stifles the individual. Since it is born of love, it can penetrate to the heart, to the personal core of each man and woman. Clearly, then, faith is not intransigent but grows in respectful coexistence with others. Far from making us inflexible, the security of faith sets us on a journey; it enables witness and dialogue with all" (No. 34).

Thank you very much for inviting me to share these thoughts with you. ■

## Speech at Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Assembly Bishop Madden

*Citing the words of Pope Francis, the chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs called for a "culture of encounter" among Catholics and Lutherans during the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's churchwide assembly in Pittsburgh. Auxiliary Bishop Denis J. Madden of Baltimore told the assembly Aug. 13 that the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017 offers an opportunity to "point the way toward Christian unity" rather than focusing on what keeps the two faith communities divided. "Let the 500th anniversary of the Reformation be not a celebration of our historical and doctrinal divisions but a celebration of our dialogue even within our differences, of our unity, our mutual*

*respect and love for each other," Bishop Madden said. The bishop pointed to the positive relations and greater understanding that have resulted from the ongoing dialogue between U.S. Catholic and Lutheran leaders that began in 1965. "This has allowed us to see more clearly that what we have in common vastly outweighs our differences," he said. While the differences are important to acknowledge, the bishop continued, it is through discussion and working together that Catholics and Lutherans "are able to begin that blessed journey of mutual discovery, leading to greater respect and love." He noted, "We experience as new, debates around ethics or human sexuality, which emerge on the global stage and within our own congregations. At times our interpretations of these themes, using the same Scriptures, can be quite diverse," he explained. "But we cannot let our differences win the day," the bishop added. "We must push forward, even when the course ahead presents itself as more rocky than we had first imagined." During the assembly, the ELCA elected its first woman to be presiding bishop. Women's ordination is a practice that all three of the churches that formed the ELCA in 1988 had adopted in the 1970s. In 2009, the ELCA approved a resolution to allow those in "publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous same-gender relationships" to serve as clergy. The same year it also said pastors may preside over same-sex marriages where they are not prohibited by civil law. Bishop Madden's speech follows.*

Let me say how delighted and honored I am to be with you this day. I currently serve as an auxiliary bishop to the Archdiocese of Baltimore and as the chairman for the U.S. bishops' Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, a responsibility which I value and enjoy greatly.

The theme of your churchwide assembly this week, "Always Being Made New," is indeed a fitting theme under which I have been invited to offer greetings. Your theme speaks to the creative and renewing power of the Holy Spirit, alive and active in our communities, drawing all things toward him and his divine plan for the salvation of all and "working," as St. Paul says, "all things toward the good of those who love God."

Today I bring with me a deep desire



for unity and for more communication so that all might know and be encouraged by our basic agreements and the unity we already share.

My own experience of unity with the Lutheran Church goes back to my early days growing up in Bronx, New York, where I was active in the local Lutheran church youth group near our house and had a great love and respect for the pastor of that church — which I have to say was at times worrisome to my own Catholic pastor. During the nine years I worked in the Holy Land I worked very closely with the Lutheran World Federation at Augusta Victoria Hospital on the Mount of Olives and with Bishop Yunan, that great pastor to the whole Palestinian community.

More recently it has been a distinct blessing to enjoy the friendship with Bishop Mark Hansen and with Bishop Wolfgang Hertz in Maryland.

On a national level, our two communities have been engaged in an official dialogue since 1965. Together we have explored such topics as interpretations of the Nicene Creed, the Reformation, baptism, the Eucharist, eternal life, ecclesial structure and ministry, the saints and Mary, the papacy, and Scripture and tradition.

Perhaps the most famous fruit of our ongoing dialogue was the historic Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, which was received officially by the Catholic Church and member churches of the Lutheran World Federation on Oct. 31, 1999, and received global attention. After years of working together, our two communities were able to come to a better understanding of one another's teachings surrounding the question of faith and works, and what in those teachings we hold in common, thus beginning to heal a centuries-old division over interpretations of this tenet of our Christian belief.

Most recently, our two communities published a common statement titled "The Hope of Eternal Life,"<sup>1</sup> under the leadership of Rev. Lowell G. Almen and Bishop Richard Sklba, in which we explored our common understanding of the promise of eternal life won for us through the sacrifice and merit of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In the preface, summarizing the success of 50 years of dialogue between our communities it is stated that "the agreements emerg-

ing (from) the U.S. Lutheran-Catholic dialogue contribute to the ongoing ecumenical journey of our churches. This dialogue has been described by Pope Benedict XVI and others as a very productive one. Indeed, the U.S. dialogue has produced substantive results since it was inaugurated on March 16, 1965, less than four months after the publication of the Decree on Ecumenism during Vatican II."<sup>2</sup>

### **The Culture of Encounter and the Fruits of Charity**

Beyond the mutual exploration of theological topics important to both of our communities, the half-century of dialogue has produced, perhaps in some ways even more important, bonds of genuine friendship, admiration, esteem and respect. We have come to understand one another in "new ways" and have learned not to view one another through the lens of what divides but through a far better one of what we share in common.

This has allowed us to see more clearly that what we have in common vastly outweighs our differences. We share a common faith in the triune God, a common hope in his living grace in our lives and his promise of eternal life, and a common call to Christian charity giving us that blessed opportunity to manifest in the world God's immeasurable goodness.<sup>3</sup>

This is not to say that our differences do not matter. They do. In ecumenical and interreligious dialogue we are never called to give up who we are. We do not come to the table to make our interlocutor more like ourselves as though winning a debate. This is not dialogue. Nor are we called to come to the table and only acknowledge what we have in common while ignoring our differences or trying to make them silently disappear. Were we to do this we would be untrue to ourselves.

In dialogue we encounter one another exactly as we are and in this way are able to begin that blessed journey of mutual discovery leading to greater respect and love. To come to understand the other as they understand themselves, to set aside our prejudices, to value virtue wherever it finds its home, to recognize good in all its forms: This is the work and the fruit of dialogue. Yes and to peacefully acknowledge our dif-

ferences as well.

Our Lord Jesus Christ pleaded to his Father, "Father, let them be one as you and I are one." This prayer and desire of our Lord is our joint desire and responsibility. This kind of unity can always begin from a foundation of mutual respect and fraternal charity even when we do not possess a unity of dogmas.

Dialogue is essentially built on love. Love of Christ and all he said, and love of one another. Both loves are not always easy. Love, while it is the most powerful force in the universe and contagious, is surely not for the fainthearted.

Dialogue demands a mindfulness of our past history in the light of the present while looking toward the future. There is much that can be learned from the past, but our gaze cannot be so fixed on the past that it paralyzes us here and now. In dialogue we learn how to ask forgiveness, how to forgive and how to receive forgiveness.

Often I have found that the relationships that required years of work, patience and perseverance in order to rebuild genuine trust after difficult histories can blossom into the closest and most valued of all relationships, precisely because of the mutual ability to forgive and receive forgiveness.

Having made great strides forward in our relationship it's not surprising to experience new bumps along the path of our mutual encounter which bring unexpected challenges. We experience as new, debates around ethics or human sexuality, which emerge on the global stage and within our own congregations. At times our interpretations of these themes, using the very same Scriptures, can be quite diverse. And we can sense the temptation to distance ourselves once again from the "other" who sees the world from a lens different than our own while proclaiming faith in the same God.

But we cannot let our differences win the day. We must push forward even when the course ahead presents itself as more rocky than we had first imagined. We owe it to one another and to our love for the Lord to go out and meet the other on the path and to continue to reinforce our commonalities while accepting our disagreements.

One of the major themes that has already emerged from the young papacy of Pope Francis is the theme of a



"culture of encounter." From the ecumenical and interreligious tone of his inaugural address and installation Mass to his regular Wednesday audiences, his impromptu statements on atheists, homosexuality and women, his approach to confronting global poverty and constructing social justice, Pope Francis is continually calling us to take up this task of building a "culture of encounter."

In his homily during a Mass on May 22, which attracted international attention, the pope affirmed:

"The Lord has redeemed all of us, all of us, with the blood of Christ: all of us, not just Catholics. Everyone! ... Even atheists. ... And this blood makes us children of God of the first class! And we all have a duty to do good. And this commandment for everyone to do good, I think, is a beautiful path toward peace. If we, each doing our own part, if we do good to others, if we meet there, doing good, and we go slowly, gently, little by little, we will develop that culture of encounter that we need so much. We need to meet one another doing good."<sup>4</sup>

And just a few weeks ago while addressing 3.7 million young people at the final Mass of World Youth Day on Copacabana beach the pope motivated them in their interactions with other Christian churches and religions to "foster a culture of encounter throughout the world."<sup>5</sup>

A culture in which we take the Gospel out onto the street, not with the arrogance of coming first to convert the other, but coming first to encounter the

other. To meet them along the path of life which we share in common. To alleviate their suffering, to serve them, to listen and learn, to discuss and reflect, to share without expecting anything for ourselves in return.<sup>6</sup> This is the path of true Christian love. For Pope Francis this culture of encounter seems to embody what our two communities have been engaged in together for the last 50 years.

#### How Do We Walk Together Toward the Reformation Anniversary?

2017 is the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. How do we walk toward this historical landmark together? Should we not be doing something to mark this important occasion and to point the way toward Christian unity, which Our Lord prayed that we might have?

My suggestion would be for our two communities to approach this anniversary in a way that would be the most pleasing to the Lord. Perhaps we could do this by both of us committing ourselves unreservedly to building together a culture of encounter. We might begin this building by considering the ecumenical imperatives of the June 2013 Lutheran World Federation/Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity document "From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017."

Let the 500th anniversary of the Reformation be not a celebration of our historical and doctrinal divisions but a celebration of our dialogue even within

our differences, of our unity, our mutual respect and love for each other. In this way we can say we are collaborators in the work of the Lord, who is always and ever "making all things new."

Let me thank you for your kind hospitality today. It is wonderful to be with you. Let me encourage you in your work and ministry, which is truly a work aimed at "making all things new" (Rv 21:5). We know that Christ has sent the Holy Spirit to guide us. We all need to rely on this guidance always. Despite our difficulties and occasional discouragements, let us continue in faith to work that "all may be one" (Jn 17:21).

#### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2011.
- <sup>2</sup> Page 7.
- <sup>3</sup> Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).
- <sup>4</sup> [www.theatlantic.com/international/print/2013/05/no-the-pope-didnt-just-say-all-atheists-go-to-heaven](http://www.theatlantic.com/international/print/2013/05/no-the-pope-didnt-just-say-all-atheists-go-to-heaven).
- <sup>5</sup> [www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/pope-francis-calls-faithful-to-deeper-encounters-with-others](http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/pope-francis-calls-faithful-to-deeper-encounters-with-others).
- <sup>6</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, address to the youth, World Youth Day, Brazil 2013. ■

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