



UNITED STATES CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

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NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LUTHERAN-CATHOLIC DIALOGUE SEES 'NEW POSSIBILITIES OF CONCORD'

MINNEAPOLIS--It is possible for both loyal Lutherans and loyal Catholics to envision "new possibilities of concord" even on such controversial issues as papal primacy.

This hopeful outlook was expressed in a statement issued by Auxiliary Bishop T. Austin Murphy of Baltimore and Dr. Paul C. Empie, former general secretary of the U.S.A. National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation, at the conclusion of a meeting between Roman Catholic and Lutheran theologians held here.

The meeting was the 15th in a series of doctrinal discussions, dating back over the past eight years, under the sponsorship of the U.S.A. National Committee and the Catholic Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs.

The American members of the Lutheran World Federation are the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church in America. By special invitation, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, which is not a member of the Lutheran World Federation, has also been represented in the talks.

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Participating in the talks are from seven to 12 representatives from each communion, including theologians, church officials and consultants.

The discussion at the meeting centered on the first draft of a common statement on universal ministry and papal primacy which, it is hoped, will be completed next year. Separate papers dealing with Lutheran and Catholic "reflections" on the subject will also be prepared.

Also received at the meeting was the first report of an exhaustive study by a dozen U.S. biblical scholars on "Peter in the New Testament," including representatives of the Anglican and Presbyterian Reformed communions. A similar study on primacy in the ancient church is being prepared by a group of patristic scholars.

"The unity and universality of the church have been of great concern to many Christians for they recognize how essential these characteristics are for the work of the church in the world," the post-meeting statement said.

While specific forms of ministry have arisen to nurture the church's unity in Christ, the statement observed, the role of the papacy within this ministry has been a subject of controversy between Roman Catholics and Lutherans.

"In these sessions," the statement continued, "we have once again found common ground in the discussion of positions which have in the past been strongly contested. The Lutherans have become more aware of the need for a ministry serving the church's

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unity and mission, while Catholics increasingly see the necessity of a more nuanced understanding of the role of the papacy. We find ourselves persuaded that barriers are not as insuperable as they were previously considered."

"God is calling our churches to draw closer together," the statement concluded, "and it is our hope and prayer that our joint statement on universal ministry and papal primacy may make some contribution to that end."

The press statement recalled that past sessions of the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue have found the participants in fundamental accord on such matters as the Nicene Creed and the Christological center of the faith, as well as on Baptism, the Eucharist and the eucharistic ministry. It noted that in discussing the papacy as a form of ministry to the universal church, the participants had chosen to limit themselves at this time to the question of primacy, and that no attempt has yet been made to enter into the matter of papal infallibility.

Next year's meetings of the Lutheran and Catholic theologians will be held February 16-19 at Assumption Seminary in San Antonio, Texas, and at the Lake Shore Club in Chicago from September 21 to 24.

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