

Pope: High level of agreement achieved

Geneva/Vatican City, 9 July 1998 (lwi)
— Pope John Paul II has described the Joint Declaration between the Roman Catholics and Lutherans . . . as progress and an important ecumenical outcome . . .

'At the conclusion of a thorough process of evaluation . . . we may now rejoice in an important ecumenical acquisition . . . Although the declaration does not resolve all questions relating to the teaching on the doctrine of justification, it does express consensus on the fundamental truth of this doctrine . . .

It is my hope that this progress in the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue . . . will encourage and strengthen the objective sought by both Lutherans and Catholics: the attainment of full visible unity. I extend my gratitude to all . . . who have contributed to this important outcome, and ask the Lord to continue to support us in our journey towards unity.'

The report in the August edition of *The Lutheran* should be read in conjunction with this statement by the pope.

Participants of the council meeting commended the work done on the JD by

the Ecumenical Institute at Strasbourg. Its commentary gives very clear and helpful guidance to understanding the JD and can be recommended to laypersons for reading.

The chairperson of the committee that brought the resolution to the council, Archbishop Hamar of Uppsala, gave wise leadership to the deliberations and helped member churches from developing countries, which felt their concerns were not fully met, to understand and accept the JD.

Clearly, the JD does not remove all differences with the Catholic church vis-a-vis justification, but it surely provides a sound road map for the route to be taken in further dialogue. Important now is that progress made so far is reflected in the churches, down to the congregational and interpersonal level. It should make a positive difference to how Lutherans and Catholics perceive and relate to each other, in communities and in the growing number of mixed-marriage families. It should influence how we can together witness as Christians in a world where religious tensions are generally increasing and are replacing ideologies as the cause of international tension and conflict.

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Report on the Symposium on the Ordination of Women

As most readers of the *LTJ* would be aware, Luther Seminary recently sponsored a major symposium on the ordination of women. A total of approximately two hundred participants, including a broad representation of men and women, lay and ordained, as well as the whole spectrum of viewpoints on the issue, converged on Luther Seminary on 24 and 25 July. Participants were welcomed by Dr John Koch, the principal of Luther Seminary, who challenged all

present to make use of the two days to genuinely listen to one another in a spirit of Christian humility. After an opening worship session, the hard work of listening to one another began in earnest with series of workshops, presentations and small group discussions. On the Friday evening the CTICR, represented by Dr Vic Pfitzner, Dr Peter Lockwood, and Pastor Peter Kriewaldt presented a summary of the cases for the ordination of women and for the male-only pastorate. Saturday was filled with more workshops and papers, concluding with

worship and afternoon tea and fellowship. In all, thirteen different papers were presented (not including the CTICR presentations) and two major workshops were held, one dealing with the interpretation of key scriptural texts and the other with the pastoral implications of the question. While the focus was quite rightly heavily upon the exegetical material, there were also contributions exploring the ecumenical implications of the debate, the historical background of the leadership role of women in the early church, the relevance of the Lutheran Confessions for the issue, as well as other theological perspectives.

In the end it was not the content or the quality of the papers or workshops that elicited the most comment but the spirit in which the discussions had taken place. With very few exceptions participants were most struck, and even pleasantly surprised, at the irenic spirit that pervaded the symposium. Most went away from the event feeling that they had

been listened to and that they in turn had come to appreciate more fully the concerns of those who held a point of view different from their own. The words of one participant captured the sentiment of many when he said, 'I doubt whether many people have changed their mind on this issue these past two days, but the spirit and respect I have observed among all involved have given me great hope for the future unity of our church'. Indeed, it is the fervent hope and prayer of the symposium organisers that in districts and congregations across Australia and New Zealand a similar spirit of respect and conciliation will be experienced as the LCA continues to grapple with the complex biblical and theological issues raised by the question of the ordination of women.

On behalf of the symposium organising committee,

DR MARK WORTHING

Lutheran Schools and Congregational Growth

Lutheran schools are growing rapidly. Student numbers are booming. But instead of growing, the Lutheran church is struggling. Budgets are tight, very tight. Membership seems to be declining. What is happening? Why are Lutheran schools growing so quickly, yet the Lutheran church is numerically in decline? Perhaps congregations which support schools are growing, but congregations that don't support schools are declining badly.

Some leaders of the Lutheran Church of Australia have been encouraging the establishment of new schools in home mission areas, using this as a springboard for establishing a church or helping a struggling congregation to grow. With it comes a major thrust towards 'school-church', as opposed to the old

idea of 'church-school'. Will this work? Has establishing and supporting a school helped congregations to grow? This is a major new direction for the LCA, yet there is virtually no empirical research base. My recent MEd research aimed to study congregational growth to find out if it is correlated with supporting a Lutheran school. Given practical constraints, the central research question became: *Is congregational growth in the LCA between 1966 and 1994 correlated with supporting a Lutheran primary school?*

The most difficult problem in developing a research strategy to investigate this question was to devise a suitable control group. Two different control groups were used:

1. Congregations before the establishment of primary schools (hence a 'before and after' study) and