

Questions and answers about the Joint Declaration

Your Guide to

The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification

Does the Joint Declaration mean that we are in full communion with the Catholic church?

No. What it means is that the Catholic church, the ELCIC, and other subscribing Lutheran churches are able to share a common understanding of justification by God's grace through faith in Christ.

Does the Joint Declaration wipe out the differences between Catholics and Lutherans?

No. The Joint Declaration refers to justification only, stating that the condemnations on this doctrine from the 16th century do not apply today. Because the nature of justification has been debated, this agreement paves the way for more dialogue on what Lutherans and Catholics share.

Does the declaration compromise Lutheran doctrine?

No. Through this agreement both Lutherans and Catholics have gained new insights as to their common understanding of faith in Christ, while acknowledging that each tradition has its own history on the topic.

How can my congregation start a relationship with our local Catholic parish?

Approach a neighbouring parish and ask their priest that question. One helpful resource is "Justification by Faith Through Grace—Study Resources for Congregations and Parishes," published by the ELCIC and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. Available through Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops Publications Service. Phone 1.800.769.1147 Web site www.cccb.ca

How to use this bulletin insert

- *Include it in your weekly bulletin*
- *Reproduce it in your church newsletter*
- *Distribute and discuss it during an adult education session*
- *Share it with other pastors and priests during an ecumenical meeting.*

"The mutual condemnations of former times do not apply to the Catholic and Lutheran doctrines of justification as they are presented in the *Joint Declaration*."



30 years in the making—

Joint Declaration of Justification affirms common mission of Lutherans, Catholics

“The Joint Declaration paves the way for Lutherans and Roman Catholics to work together in greater harmony.”

That was one response from Lutherans and Catholics who met for a series of six Bible studies across Winnipeg. Together, pastor, priest, and members of Lutheran and Roman Catholic congregations probed basic questions of theology and identity that have often divided them since Martin Luther’s bold proclamations in 1517.

A new era in Lutheran-Catholic relations

Ever since the Reformation, relationships between Lutherans and Catholics have often been characterized by conflict, anger, and suspicion.

The 1999 Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) is replacing mutual condemnation with mutual reconciliation. Signed by leading Catholics and Lutherans, including former Evangelical Lutheran Church in America bishop H. George Anderson who signed on behalf of North American Lutherans, the Joint Declaration is the culmination of 30 years of dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

LWF member churches, including the ELCIC, affirmed the JDDJ in a unanimous resolution in 1998.

Why justification matters

Justification by faith through God’s grace, a cornerstone of Lutheran theology, no longer divides Protestants and Catholics.

The Joint Declaration affirms what both churches believe about the doctrine of justification: that God reaches out in love to human beings and justifies them by grace alone. We can only receive God’s loving-kindness through faith. The power lies within God. We cannot earn God’s favor with our actions, even though good works are an important part of a life in Christ.

“Together we confess: By grace alone, in faith in Christ’s saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works.”

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Opening the door to common witness

Within the ELCIC, the JDDJ has prompted Lutheran and Catholic congregations to join together in worship, Bible study, and service projects.

In Guelph, Ontario, St. Paul’s Lutheran Church and St. John’s Roman Catholic Church have been in a covenant relationship for nearly a decade. An ecumenical committee from both congregations meets regularly to plan common activities. They have done such things as exchange lay readers for worship services and share social events. They worship together at the beginning of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and on Reformation Sunday.

The agreement’s strong focus on faith in Christ opens the door to additional cooperative ministry. Together, Lutherans and Catholics can provide a common witness within a community—ever more important as Christianity in North America and Europe declines. Through common ministry, Lutherans and Catholics can come closer to realizing Jesus’s goal: “I pray that they all may be one...that the world might believe.” (John 17:22-23)

The Lutheran World Federation: speaking for Lutherans worldwide

Founded in 1947, the Lutheran World Federation is a communion of 60.5 million Lutherans from 73 countries. Through the LWF, the ELCIC and other member Lutheran churches can speak as one on the significant issues of our day.