

Statement from the 35th Ecumenical Meeting of Bishops friends of the Focolare Movement

With a few days to go to the much-awaited meeting between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation in the presence of Pope Francis and the president Munib Younan we, the Bishop friends of the Focolare Movement send a greeting of solidarity and unity to all attending the Lund event.

During the past thirty years Bishops from more than 20 churches have walked together in the light of the „spirituality of communion“, living a deep experience of fraternity, one marked by unity in diversity, that has enabled us to say together: „What can separate us from the love of Christ?“ (cf Rom 8:35-39) and what can separate us from each other? Therefore we rejoice in this great event at Lund. We are delighted that a representative group of us, together with Cardinal Francis X. Kriengsak Kovithavanij, Archbishop of Bangkok and moderator of our Bishops' gathering, will be in attendance.

We send this message from *St. Anna's church* in Augsburg, where on October 31st of 1999 the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification was signed. In the course of our ecumenical ceremony, in recalling this Joint Declaration and the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, Bishop Christian Krause, former President of the Lutheran World Federation and a signatory of the Joint Declaration recalled how Pope John Paul II called the Declaration a „milestone on the difficult path to re-establishing full unity among Christians“ (John Paul II, Angelus, 31 October 1999). He also recalled the phrase spoken on that occasion: „Let us never again let go of each other's hands that are we joining together today“ (Christian Krause, Homily, 31 October 1999). We recognise with gratitude that the Joint Declaration has become an important point of reference, that in the years since has involved also the World Methodist Council and is being considered with interest now also by other Churches.

During our meeting in the Ecumenical Dialogue Center at Ottmaring we have noted a providential acceleration in the ecumenical journey. Many of us have been privileged witnesses of the signs of the Holy Spirit prompting us to move forward in events such as the „Together for Europe“ initiative bringing together over 200 prophetic movements and communities around Europe in Munich, Germany, with some 5000 mainly young people from different Churches gathering to bear witness to their desire for unity; the IARCCUM (International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission) initiative with the commissioning by Archbishop Welby and Pope Francis of pairs of bishops to go out in ecumenical mission; and now, the great event of Lund that many former generations would have found unimaginable!

We live in a new ecumenical season and so we make our own Pope Francis' recent words to a group of Lutherans and Catholics from Germany: „Who is better: Lutherans or Catholics? - It is better when they are together!“ Such a conviction could apply to all Christians.

Praying for all who will be present at Lund, we renew our commitment to give our lives as instruments of mutual love and mercy “so that all may be one” (John 17:21). We do so in the certainty that God has already granted us this unity in the “one baptism” (cf. Eph 4:5).

The ecumenical gathering in *St. Anna's church* approved with their spontaneous applause our intention to send a message from here where the Joint Declaration was signed to the Christians gathered at Lund.

Augsburg, St. Anna's church, 26. October 2016