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## Dialogues

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Lutherans come to a consensus on some beliefs concerning the relationship of faith and good works.

July meetings among the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and leaders of a number of Pentecostal churches resulted in "Evangelization, Proselytism and Common Witness," a report calling both faith traditions to stop proselytizing each other's members and to avoid misrepresenting other church's teachings.

Brother Gros cited the agreement with the Lutherans as the more significant.

"The joint declaration is really a statement that will be authoritative for the church," he said.

Although Catholics and Lutherans still have a number of issues to be resolved, Brother Gros cautioned, the agreement is "a necessary stage before we can move forward to full Eucharistic communion."

The agreement deals with the doctrine of justification, which means that God forgives people and saves them by their faith. The issue was one of the key points that led Martin Luther to break with the Catholic Church in the 15th century.

Catholics emphasize that God's grace transforms a person so that he or she is able to do good works by the power of grace, Brother Gros noted. Baptism frees people from slavery to sin, and confers an assurance of salvation that grows as the baptized cooperate with God's grace through their response of faith and good works.

But Lutherans teach that human beings remain both sinful and saved after baptism, and that nothing they do can "earn" them God's grace, including good works. Thus they consider grace an outright gift.

In essence, Brother Gros said, "The emphasis on the Catholic part was good works. The emphasis on the Lutheran was on grace."

The new agreement says both faith communities "hold the conviction that justification is the work of the triune God."

"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," it says.

The statement says Catholics and Lutherans "share a consensus on basic truths of the doctrine of justification" and remaining differences "are no longer the occasion for doctrinal condemnations."

The Rev. Pamela Hunter, pastor of Rochester Lutheran Church of Peace, pastoral associate of the Lutheran Church of the Incarnate Word and ecumenical minister for the Rochester area synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, applauded the agreement, with some reservations.

She noted that the Vatican, while agreeing to the document in principle, had voiced concerns about passages in it concerning such issues as human beings' sinful condition and what produces good works.

Still, Rev. Hunter noted, the agreement and the needed follow-up work will benefit both Catholics and Lutherans.

"The very process of working things out ... leads to a deeper understanding, and I like that," she said.

Brother Gros predicted that the Catholic-Pentecostal report will likewise help to promote "mutual understanding."

"There have been historically, great tensions between Catholics and Pentecostals about proselytizing," Brother Gros noted.

In the report, Catholics and Pentecostals affirm "that there is only one Name whereby we can be saved." But they acknowledge that their churches "diverge over the existence and/or meaning of salvific elements found in non-Christian religions."

### Practical fruits

In *Ut Unum Sint*, Pope John Paul II expressed the desire that the coming millennium would help to spur even greater efforts to promote "full visible unity."

"As the church turns her gaze to the new

millennium, she asks the Spirit for the grace to strengthen her own unity and to make it grow toward full communion with other Christians," he wrote.

How soon such unity is possible remains to be seen. But the pope's encyclical did note that in the 30 years since Vatican II ecumenical efforts have proliferated in such areas as social ministry, shared prayer and ecumenical translations of the Bible.

The value of the recent agreements is that they help to draw attention to this ecumenical proliferation, Brother Gros said.

"So much ecumenical stuff is going on that it's almost taken for granted," Brother Gros commented.

Mickey Christiansen has seen the fruits of such cooperation in Penn Yan. A member of St. Michael's Church, she represents the Catholic Church on the Penn Yan Council of Churches, while her husband, Dave, represents area Lutherans. She is also a member of diocesan Commission for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs.

Christiansen noted that ecumenical efforts in her community include the Once Again Shop, which supplies used clothes and household goods for people in financial straits; transportation of seniors to church services on Sundays; and a cooperative jail-ministry program.

These efforts have prompted greater mutual acceptance, she said.

She noted, for example, a conversation she overheard taking place among a group of women from different denominations working together on a project.

"They never thought they'd see the day when they'd be sitting in a basement of a church doing a project with people from other churches, and actually enjoying it," she reported them saying.

### The future

Like the pope, Deacon McNulty is looking forward to some form of unity.

"We cannot predict what the church of 2050, 2075 is going to look like," he said. "One goal is of course, some kind of unity in Christ that we can accept together."

But, he cautioned, unity does not necessarily mean "uniformity in Christ."

Christiansen pointed out that "Unity does not necessarily mean being homogenized. Each of us could keep the important things of our own traditions, but work together in common areas."

Deacon McNulty said that the next hurdles are the natures of papal authority and authority in the church in general.

Talks about authority are already underway. The most recent manifestation of that discussion is "The Gift of Authority," a paper developed at an Aug. 25-Sept. 3 meeting of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission outside of Rome. The report — which is not expected to be released until 1999 — discusses basic ideas about authority, but did not address such related issues as the ordination of women.

In general, Deacon McNulty added, even the current dialogues are slowed by the issue of decision-making authority: The Catholic Church has a central authority in the Vatican, whereas the Protestant denominations must deal with a myriad of separate and national bodies.

As part of the quest to continue dialogue, Rochester will host the National Workshop for Christian Unity next May 3-6. The projected program includes discussion of such topics as full communion, repentance, religious diversity, racism and the global economy.

Although the workshops are intended for ecumenical officers, they are "open to anyone to raise awareness of ecumenical progress, ecumenical programs," Deacon McNulty emphasized.

Even if the various churches eventually resolve their differences and grow closer, Rev. Hunter said she would not like to see full "organic unity."

"I think it is a good thing that we have more than one Christian body talking about and discussing the Scriptures and finding ways to live out the Christian life," she said. "What happens is that we correct each other."

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