

A Covenant between The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (Northeastern Ohio Synod) and The Roman Catholic Church (Diocese of Youngstown)

NOTE: The document below is the full text of the covenant signed Oct. 29 in St. Columba Cathedral by Bishop Thomas Tobin and Bishop Marcus Miller of the Northeastern Ohio Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)..

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit . . .

PREAMBLE

In His great prayer on the eve of His crucifixion, Our Lord Jesus Christ prayed, on behalf of those who believe in Him on the basis of the apostolic word, "That they may all be one" (John 17:20-21). As Our Lord is one with the Father, He wills to be in His disciples "that they may be completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (John 17:23). The apostolic word proclaimed Christ Jesus as "our peace" who by His saving death upon the cross had already "broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us_ that He might create in Himself one new humanity" (Ephesians 2:14-15). On the basis of this great saving fact, the apostolic word enjoins and entreats us "to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:1-6).

Mindful of the prayer of Our Lord, seeking to be obedient to the apostolic word, and moved by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the faithful, we, Bishop Thomas J. Tobin of the Diocese of Youngstown and Bishop Marcus J. Miller of the Northeastern Ohio Synod, in the name of the members of our respective communions, solemnly and joyfully enter into this Covenant.

THE CONFESSION WE SHARE

1. We confess together in the catholic creeds of the church the one and only Triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
2. We confess together that Our Lord Jesus Christ was "handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification" (Romans 4:25).
3. We confess together that in His resurrection Our Lord Jesus Christ has triumphed over death, that "death no longer has dominion over Him" (Romans 6:9), that He has become "the first fruits of those who have died" (I Corinthians 15:20), that He is the living center of our faith and the savior of the world.
4. We confess together that in the name of the Triune God we are baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:3-4), and we are therefore "dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:11).
5. We celebrate together the signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification on Oct. 31, 1999 in Augusburg, Germany, by representatives of the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation, in which we confess together: "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 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" (JDDJ, Paragraph 15).

6. We acknowledge the need to remain faithful to our tradition and respectful of each other's traditions in dialogue and in practice.
7. We confess together that the church is "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic" (Nicene Creed), and we celebrate together the richness of our Catholic and Lutheran traditions.
8. We confess together that through the power of the Holy Spirit the Scriptures of Israel and the apostolic Scriptures are authoritative for our common faith and life in this world.
9. We confess together that the church is called to be a witness to the Kingdom of God, and that the church is called to serve the Kingdom of God in word and deed.

THE COVENANT WE ENTER

With confidence in the power of the Holy Spirit and the Coming of the Kingdom of God, we dedicate ourselves to prayer, study and action

I. United in Prayer We Will:

Pray for each other as we celebrate the Eucharist in our respective communions and, in anticipation of the time when we might celebrate the Eucharist together, ask God to hasten our complete reconciliation;

Sponsor regular diocesan/synodical joint prayer services (e.g. Oct. 31);

Encourage annual parish common prayer services to commemorate occasions such as Reformation/All Saints Day or the celebration of Mary Mother of our Lord;

Continue to encourage joint observances such as Thanksgiving, Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the World Day of Prayer, Lenten Devotions, Martin Luther King Jr. activities;

Assist and enable parishes to adopt local covenants.

II. United in Study We Will:

At least on a periodic basis invite diocesan/synodical official observers to diocesan/synodical councils, assemblies (e.g., Priest Council; Diocesan Pastoral council, Synod council, Synod Assembly);

Appoint liaisons, where appropriate and for special purposes, between diocesan/synodical ministries, institutions, agencies, committees, task forces, religious orders, camps and retreat centers that share similar concerns, and, where appropriate, share facilities and other resources.

Encourage reflection on the Word of God in shared programs for the study of the Scriptures and basic Christian theology and ethics.

Establish ecumenical study circles in our parishes to reflect prayerfully on the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification and other issues of dialogue;

Collaborate actively, where appropriate, at the diocesan/synodical level in planning and conducting training programs, including courses on ecumenism,

for more effective ministry.

III. United in Action We Will:

- Encourage communication and cooperation at the parish level on matters of common concern; Continue and expand close working relationships and exchange of information between the bishops and their staffs;
- Cooperate in social service, advocacy, community development, community organizing, and social justice programs for bringing Christian principles to bear on local, state, national and world problems in order to strengthen families, build neighborhoods, fight poverty, eliminate oppression and respect life;
- Continue sponsoring and supporting New Hope Academy and consider other joint initiatives;
- Establish a Covenant Commission of Roman Catholic and Lutheran clergy and lay that will oversee the implementation of this Covenant;
- Develop information to share this Covenant and its process for implementation with ecumenical and interfaith bodies, the religious and secular press, and other judicatories.

To further the implementation and actualization of this Covenant, we hereby agree to strive toward the removal of impediments to the cause of unity, and place no impediment in the way of reunion.

Thomas J. Tobin
Bishop of Youngstown, OH

Marcus J. Miller
Bishop, Northeastern Ohio Synod

On this date of 29 October 2000.