

**Statement by Archbishop Wilton Gregory
to the Churchwide Assembly
of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

August 23, 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the ELCA,

I greet all of you in attendance at the 2009 Churchwide Assembly, as you prepare to make decisions of great import for your community. As Chairman of the Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, I want to assure you of the prayerful support of your Catholic brothers and sisters throughout this land.

Together we are on a journey of hope toward the unity for which Christ prayed on the night before his life-giving Passion. “Father, may they be one as we are one, so that the world might believe,” Jesus prayed in the seventeenth chapter of John’s Gospel. Since the time of the Second Vatican Council, convoked fifty years ago, we Catholics have worked with Lutherans and other Christians to heal the wounds of division within the Body of Christ that resulted from the disputes of the 16th century. Through national and international dialogues, scholars from both our churches have wrestled together with the core issues of how Christ brings about our salvation. Thanks to the historic Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, signed ten years ago this October 31 in Augsburg, Germany, we Catholics and Lutherans can profess together our faith in the blood of the cross, which is Christ’s work of grace that alone justifies us, even as it equips us and calls us to the good works of justice and love. Why have we worked so hard this past half century to overcome our historic differences in doctrine? *So that the world might believe.*

Our unity in our beloved Savior, Jesus Christ, has grown through the encounters of our people in their day to day Christian lives. God has blessed our local communities with inter-church marriages that enrich family life and congregational life with one another's spiritual treasures. Together our congregations have gathered volunteers to staff shelters for the homeless. Together our pastoral workers have extended the compassionate care of Jesus to persons with HIV. Together our relief workers have come to the aid of victims of hurricanes, earthquakes and famine throughout the globe. Why have we so often come together, Catholics and Lutherans, to advocate for justice, to witness for peace, and to be the healing hands of Christ, especially for the poor? *So that the world might believe.*

Our unity in Christ is always a gift before it is our shared task. But this unity is fragile, much like the infant Christ who is cradled in the arms of his holy Mother. This week the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America faces a set of decisions that may have weighty consequences for the unity of your own church and for its relationships with the Catholic Church and other Christian bodies. At stake are the teachings of Scripture and Tradition that safeguard the noble purposes of human sexuality and the fundamental meaning of marriage, which is a reflection of God's covenant with us in Christ. Our prayer for you, as brothers and sisters who journey with you in hope, is that you remain open to the Holy Spirit who binds our consciences to truth, biblical truth that echoes through the ages. At the ecumenical service in New York City on April 18, 2008, Pope Benedict XVI asserted that without this adherence to Holy Scripture, "our communion with the Church in every age is lost—just at the time when the world is losing its bearings and needs a persuasive common witness to the saving power of the Gospel (cf. *Rom 1:18-23*)."

My brothers and sisters, let us profess the biblical truth in love. Why? *So that the world might believe.*