

ADDRESS TO THE DELEGATION TO THE HOLY LAND OF THE CATHOLIC GERMAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCE & THE COUNCIL OF THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH IN GERMANY

Address to the Delegation to the Holy Land of the Catholic
German Bishops' Conference and the Council of the Evangelical
Church in Germany

at a Reception at the festival Hall Augusta Victoria Hospital

His Beatitude Theophilus III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

21 October 2016

Your Eminence Cardinal Marx,

Your Grace Bishop Bedford-Strohm,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Dear Fathers,

Christ is in our midst!

We welcome you, dear friends, to the Holy Land on this

historic pilgrimage of members of the German Bishop's Conference and the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany. Your pilgrimage takes place as the Christian world prepares to commemorate the beginning of the Reformation in Europe next year, and for which both Roman Catholics and Lutherans have been making important plans together.

Your joint pilgrimage is a sign to the world of this new relationship between Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church, and this is a development that all who look to the unity of all Christians welcome warmly. You are here to recall together the common roots of our shared Christian faith, roots that are set deeply and firmly in this Holy Land and in the Church of Jerusalem, the Mother of all Churches and the cradle of Christianity.

More than this, your pilgrimage is a sign to the world of our awareness for the healing of the divisions of the entire Christian world. The Christian awareness must always be one of unity; a unity that we believe is the will of our Lord Jesus Christ for the Church. Every step in overcoming prejudice, every effort in creating mutual understanding, every opportunity for joint witness is a step towards that fuller unity that is our universal vocation.

Your pilgrimage comes not long after the Great and Holy Council of the Orthodox Church in Crete last June. This Council was also an important sign of the unity of the Church for a world that looks to Church for light and hope in a time of darkness, confusion and despair. We must always remember that our unity is not for ourselves, but for the purpose of the effective witness and service – *martyria and diakonia* – of the Gospel.

The Church of Jerusalem, the Mother Church of all the cradle of Christianity, takes great joy in hosting such a pilgrimage as yours to the Holy Land City, and we are realizing among ourselves the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, who said:

“How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings.” (Mt 23:37)

Such great events like your pilgrimage and the Council, signal a new future for reconciliation. Furthermore, such events at this time in the current difficulties of the persecution of Christians and others in the Middle East sends a particular message of resolve and hope.

Your pilgrimage is living witness of the mission of the church in the Middle East and in the world of our common martyrria of the crucified love of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is this message of reconciliation, so eloquently lived out in your pilgrimage that is the only way for the future of our unity in Christ and the only way for the unity of the human family in our common human destiny.

May God richly bless your pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and in your journey to the common witness of the Gospel of love of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Thank You.