



New England Synod  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
God's work. Our hands.



Roman Catholic Archdiocese  
Of Boston

November 1, 2015  
All Saints Day

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

It is with joy and gratitude that together we greet you in the name of the One who is our life and our salvation, Jesus Christ. In 1979, our predecessors sent a Pastoral Letter to all our parishes encouraging a joint observance of the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Augsburg Confession, the basic theological document of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century reform movement. In our own day, Roman Catholic and Lutheran descendants of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Church together have continued to be moved by the Holy Spirit, including through the witness of the Second Vatican Council, to recognize the Lord's desire that both communions affirm the apostolic faith and seek the healing of the separation that resulted from the Reformation.

Our common ground lies in the life-giving Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We share one baptism into Jesus Christ Our Lord and Savior. The Reformation was concerned with what matters most to each of us today, our relationship with God and our eternal destiny. After four decades of Lutheran/Roman Catholic dialogue, in the United States and globally, on October 31, 1999, the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation signed a *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, agreeing to a consensus on the central dividing issue of the Reformation. "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."

Building on this common ground, we seek to witness together to the world. One aspect of this witness is in caring for God's good creation. Pope Francis' encyclical *On Care for Our Common Home* provides a timely opportunity for Lutherans, Roman Catholics, and all our ecumenical partners to gather in small groups to read and discuss it together in an atmosphere of prayer and common faith. We encourage all to do so. Such a time of study, prayer, and ecumenical fellowship will serve as a worthy preparation for our mutual observance of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation in 2017.

Plans are in process for other ways to commemorate the many gifts in the churches of the Reformation as well as opportunities for mutual repentance in order to reconcile our division. A joint Liturgy of Word and Prayer will be celebrated at a time and venue to be announced. A list of service projects, study guides, and events in the arts and academia will provide opportunities to participate in the worldwide observance.

As we proceed toward this observance, we give thanks for our mutual baptism into Christ Jesus and our irrevocable commitment to full visible unity. For this we must all work and pray.

May the reconciling grace that is God's gift to us in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit be reflected in our common life together as we proclaim Christ crucified and risen for the life of the world!

Cardinal Sean O'Malley

Bishop James Hazelwood