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Lutheran leader seeks Communion agreement with pope

by Luigi Sandri by Religion News Service

ROME -- The president of the Lutheran World Federation is calling on Lutherans and Catholics to issue a common statement on Holy Communion to mark the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation in 2017.

“Our intention is to arrive at 2017 with a common Roman Catholic-Lutheran declaration on Eucharistic hospitality,” Bishop Munib Younan told the Italian Protestant news agency NEV before meeting with Pope Benedict XVI on Dec. 16.

“Eucharistic hospitality,” means that Catholics would be able to receive Communion at Lutheran worship services, and Lutherans would be able to do the same at a Catholic Mass.

In a speech during his meeting with Younan, Benedict praised progress in Catholic-Lutheran dialogue but did not make any reference to the bishop’s Eucharist proposal.

“It is my hope that these ecumenical activities will provide fresh opportunities for Catholics and Lutherans to grow closer in their lives, their witness to the gospel, and their efforts to bring the light of Christ to all dimensions of society,” the pope said.

Catholic doctrine forbids such bilateral Communion acceptance. The Second Vatican Council, held from 1962 to 1965, said that Protestants “did not keep the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic mystery.”

In 1517, Martin Luther published 95 theses critical of the Roman Catholic Church, setting the Protestant Reformation in motion.

In 1999, the Catholic Church and the LWF signed a joint declaration on the doctrine of justification (how

a person is saved), one of the main points of contention between Catholics and Lutherans in the 16th century.

At the meeting with Younan, Benedict called the 1999 declaration "a significant step along the difficult path towards re-establishing full unity among Christians."

Younan is bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, based in Jerusalem.

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