

Justification



A Small Group Study Resource on
A Common Statement of the Australian Lutheran-Roman Catholic
Dialogue

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PLEASE NOTE:

Justification: A Common Statement of the Australian Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue

National Library of South Australia card no. ISBN 0 646 36777 3

The full text of the international ***Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*** between the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church is available at:

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_31101999_cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html

Editor's Notes

On 31 October 1999 in Augsburg, Germany, Bishop Christian Krause, President of the Lutheran World Federation, and Edward Idris Cardinal Cassidy, Australian-born President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity signed the ***Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*** on behalf of their respective communions. This was a moment of major ecumenical significance as, of course, the doctrine of justification was of central importance to the Lutheran Reformation of the sixteenth century.

As the Official Common Statement following the Joint Declaration notes:

On the basis of the agreements reached in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JD)*, the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church declare together: "The understanding of the doctrine of justification set forth in this Declaration shows that a consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification exists between Lutherans and Catholics" (JD 40). On the basis of this consensus the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church declare together: "The teaching of the Lutheran Churches presented in the Declaration does not fall under the condemnations from the Council of Trent. The condemnations in the Lutheran Confessions do not apply to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church presented in this Declaration" (JD 41).

Adding to this, on 23 July 2006, the World Methodist Council, at its meeting in Seoul, South Korea declared:

that the common understanding of justification as it is outlined in the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ 15-17) corresponds to Methodist doctrine.

With the 10th Anniversary of the original signing rapidly approaching, an ideal opportunity has arisen for Christians from across the traditions to come together in small groups to meet, pray together, re-examine the doctrine of justification and explore ways in which it helps them to work together in the future to bring about the unity of the Body of Christ.

The Australian Lutheran Roman Catholic Dialogue had also produced a Common Statement on Justification, with discussion questions in 1998. That body has generously given permission for that document to be reformatted into a three week study program for use by small ecumenical groups. The text remains unchanged apart from some slight modifications to some of the questions to allow for participation by members of a broader range of Christian traditions. Copyright for the material remains with the Dialogue but permission has been granted to reproduce this material for the use of small groups.

The work of reformatting has been done by the Brisbane Roman Catholic Commission for Ecumenism and Inter-religious Relations. Sincere thanks go to my colleagues, Allie Ernst, for her invaluable assistance in preparing the devotional material and Mary Anne Cullen for her expert typing and formatting.

Please note that the use of this material is intended to be flexible. It is not essential to answer all of the questions nor is it necessary to cover all the material at a particular session. Some groups may wish to spend more time on a particular section and hold over a section until the following week. While discussing the material is important, of equal value is the opportunity for Christians from a range of traditions to interact and develop understanding and friendship.

We hope you enjoy these studies and through them experience the Spirit of Unity in one another.

Margaret Naylor

**Executive Officer, Brisbane Roman Catholic Commission for Ecumenism and Inter-religious Relations
Easter 2009**

Leader's Guide

1. Gathering

People coming to a group for the first time will often have some anxiety –

- ◆ Will I know anyone?
- ◆ What will be expected of me?
- ◆ Did I switch off the oven?
- ◆ It is important to help them through this first awkward stage. Have all your preparations done well beforehand so that you are able to greet each person warmly on arrival, introducing them to one another, and perhaps having tea and coffee available.

2. Beginning

A. When all have arrived get the session started by giving them a clear statement of what the group is about -

Welcome the group

- ◆ who we are;
- ◆ why we're here;
- ◆ when we will finish.

It might go like this: "Welcome to my place, and I'm delighted that each of you has been able to make it. We are a group of people from Churches gathered together to reflect and share our ideas on Justification. Tonight we will be looking at Study One....."

B. Then invite the members to introduce themselves saying:

- ◆ who I am;
- ◆ why I'm here;
- ◆ what I hope to get out of the program.

Lead yourself by giving a short response to each of the three areas. Then invite each of the others to do likewise. Don't worry if some respond to only one or two of the areas.

C. Then distribute copies of the program.

Encourage participants to listen to one another's ideas with respect.

3. Opening Devotion

A. You may wish to play some music quietly in the background and give the group a few moments to reflect on the opening devotion. Then call for volunteers to lead it.

4. Reflection on the Topic

Invite a couple of people to read the teaching. Encourage the readers to pause between each section.

5. Discussion

Allow a few minutes of quiet time to reflect on the questions. Encourage participants to share responses to each question but there is to be no pressure put on anyone to speak. Be sure to make some response to each speaker if only to say e.g. "Thank you John". This makes sure the participant feels that he / she has been heard.

6. Closure

Thank the participants for their participation. Check to ensure venue is right for next session.

Closing Devotion

Note that each session should take approximately 90 minutes

Cuppa

Foreword

The report presented in these pages is the outcome of a study of the doctrine of justification undertaken by the Australian Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue over the past three years. The impetus for this study came largely from the dialogues that preceded it, in particular *Sacrament and Sacrifice* (1985), *Pastor and Priest* (1989), and *Communion and Mission* (1995). In each of these dialogues it became increasingly clear that serious discussion of the doctrine of justification could not be delayed much longer. So it was with a certain amount of courage that this current dialogue began in 1995.

In presenting this Statement to our respective churches and to the wider ecumenical community we invite people to enter into the dialogue process in which we have been privileged to participate. Ecumenical dialogue is ultimately a dialogue of conversion: that is, dialogue is possible when people listen to each other, when they seek to understand each other, and when their aim is to build up bonds of communion between each other; dialogue leads not only to new insights into the teaching, life and witness of the other, but also into one's own teaching, life and witness.

The process of the dialogue is evident in the structure of this Statement where, under each heading, the Lutheran position is stated and then the Roman Catholic before a final paragraph distils the fruits of the dialogue and indicates what we are now able to say together.

A further opportunity to participate in the dialogue process is provided by a series of questions that appear at the end of the Statement. These refer to each of the sections of the text. While they can be studied by individuals or groups in our churches, there is an obvious advantage in Lutherans and Roman Catholics meeting together to study this Statement and work with the questions.

There is always a certain degree of excitement when a common statement is finalised. It represents one step further on the road to that unity for which Christ prayed. The members of the dialogue team hope that those who study this text may experience some of the hope that is has generated among the dialogue partners.

Adelaide

November 1998.

APPENDIX 1

Questions For Reflection and Study

The following questions are provided as a guide for Lutheran and Roman Catholic groups to reflect together or separately on *Justification: A Common statement of the Australian Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue*. It is assumed that group members have read the document prior to discussion. Because the questions are extensive, your group may decide to hold one study on a particular section of the document or a series of studies on the whole document. The questions are designed to help group members reflect on and share their faith, promote an understanding of justification, and lead to an expression of faith in action. Members of the Australian Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue strongly encourage pastors, priests and other parish leaders to share this document with their communities. The dialogue members are particularly interested in hearing your response to the questions on section eleven. Please send your group's response to:

Rev James McEvoy
Secretary
Australian Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue
Catholic Theological College
34 Lipsett Terrace
BROOKLYN PARK SA 5032.

APPENDIX 2

Discussion on the topic of Justification began at the 87th meeting the Australian Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue on October 20, 1995 and concluded at the 99th meeting on October 23, 1998.

Roman Catholic Participants

The Most Rev Leonard Faulkner, Archbishop of Adelaide
The Rev Michael Rodger
The Rev Kevin O'Loughlin
The Rev Denis Edwards (co-chair)
Sr Mary Cresp RSJ
The Rev John Thornhill SM (October 1995 - October 1996)
The Rev Greg Brett CM (March 1997 -)
Sr Bernadette Kiley OP
The Rev Laurence McNamara CM (October 1995 - October 1996)
The Rev Gerard Kelly (June 1997 -)
The Rev James McEvoy,

Lutheran Participants

The Rev Lance Steicke, President General, Lutheran Church of Australia
(October 1996, March 1998-)
The Rev Les Grope (October 1995 - August 1998)
The Rev J T Erich Renner (October 1995 – October 1997)
The Rev Maurice Schild (March 1998 -)
The Rev Noel Weiss
The Rev John Strelan (October 1995 – October 1997)
The Rev Brian Schwarz (October 1995)
The Rev Jeff Silcock (June 1996)
Mr Mervyn Wagner
The Rev Michael Hassold (co-chair)
The Rev Graham Harms (March 1997 – October 1997)
The Rev Stephen Haar
Ms Wendy Mayer
The Rev Joseph Kirchner (October 1995 – March 1998)
The Rev Mark Worthing
The Rev Dean Zweck (March 1998 -)
Mrs Margaret Hunt (May 1998 -)

Sources:

Unless otherwise stated biblical citations are from *The New Revised Standard Version* (1989).

The Small Catechism and *The Apology to the Augsburg Confession* are both found in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, translated and edited by Theodore Tappert. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959).

The Regensburg Book is found in the *Corpus Reformatorum* IV, 190ff.

Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent – Original text with English Translation, by Rev H.J. Schroeder O.P. (St Louis & London: B Herder Book Co., 1941).

Study One

Opening Devotion

(A candle may be lit and an appropriate hymn chosen to begin the devotion.)

Prayer of Invocation

Leader: Blessed are you, God of all creation,
and blessed is the communion
into which you gather us.

You promised through your beloved Son
that when two or three gather together in his name,
you will be there in the midst of them.

**All: Send your Holy Spirit
to call us by name and lead us home.**

(Nathan Nettleton, 2000. Laughing Bird Liturgical Resources
<http://www.laughingbird.net/html/home.php>)

Scripture Reading

Romans 5:1- 5 (NRSV)

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

Pause for silent prayer and reflection

Leader: With faith we pray to God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit

All: Lord, hear our prayer

Reader 1: Let us pray for our local Christian communities, our churches & ecumenical groups; for those here present, and those who are absent from our assembly today.

Reader 2: Gracious God, forgive us when we are indifferent to each other, and bring your healing to the wounds and divisions that keep us apart.

Reader 1: Let us pray for a deeper appreciation of our common baptism into the one body of Christ.

Reader 2: Loving God, sustain each of us and our communities as we continue on the path towards the unity you desire for all your disciples.

All: Lord, hear our prayer

(Source: http://www.ncca.org.au/departments/faith_and_unity/weekofprayer)

Study materials

1. Introduction

When the Western church divided at the time of the Protestant Reformation the understanding of the doctrine of justification was at the heart of the separation. Many of the most significant condemnations in the Lutheran confessional writings and the anathemas from the Roman Catholic Council of Trent concerned this doctrine. In 1541 one of the first dialogues between Roman Catholics and Lutherans occurred when Luther's colleague Philip Melancthon and the Roman Catholic theologians Johannes Eck and Gasparo Contarini, among others, engaged in a series of theological discussions in Regensburg. They surprised those assembled by reaching an agreement on the doctrine of justification. In what was the only joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic statement on justification until our own century the two parties succinctly confessed: "It is known by all Christians and is without any doubt to be believed and confessed that human beings cannot reconcile themselves with God nor free themselves from the bondage to sin. It is only through Jesus Christ, the only mediator between God and humanity, and his grace, that we, as the Apostle declares in his letter to the Romans, are not only reconciled with God and set free from the bondage to sin but also participate in the divine nature and become children of God." (Article 5, *The Regensburg Book*). Other theologians on both sides, however, felt the problems went much deeper, and a series of mutual condemnations followed.

In the period following the Second Vatican Council a new era of conversation was entered into with important national dialogues between Lutherans and Roman Catholics being organised in North America, Europe and in many other regions, including Australia. A number of these dialogues took up the question of justification. While not finding agreement as easy or straight forward as the Regensburg dialogue, each team found a surprising level of agreement on this important doctrine. As a result of these dialogues the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church through the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity asked an international Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue team to determine to what extent the two traditions agreed on the doctrine of justification. The product of this effort has been the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, which claims sufficient agreement exists that the Reformation era condemnations on both sides can be said no longer to apply to the dialogue partners as expressed in the *Joint Declaration*. This document is now before both churches.

At the same time as the *Joint Declaration* was being forged the Australia Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue team took up the question of the doctrine of justification. We took into account the work of other national dialogues as well as preliminary drafts of the *Joint Declaration*. We sought to approach the question as independently and freshly as possible, especially in light of the fact that our own previous dialogues have led us to the issue of justification. We also recognised the importance of developing an Australian statement on justification that our two churches could own in a unique way. It was with great joy that the dialogue members discovered that there existed also among us substantial agreement on this doctrine. Both sides were challenged to restate and clarify long held positions in language that could be understood by those within both traditions. As a result of nearly three years of Australian Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue on the doctrine of justification we offer together with thanksgiving the following statement on justification.

2. The Biblical Context

The scripture of both the Old Testament and the New use many images to express the fullness of what our gracious God has done and continues to do 'for us and for our salvation.' They speak of rescue from danger; victory over powers which oppress us; being brought to a place of safety and security; redemption from slavery to sin and death; forgiveness of sins; being transferred out of darkness into light; reconciliation with God; the establishment of *shalom*; recreation; being made

alive; rebirth; freedom and liberation; removal of the barriers which separate us from God and each other; healing and wholeness; and many other images.

One important image, favoured especially by the apostle Paul, is that of justification – an image taken from the courtroom. Paul's usage is rooted in the Old Testament tradition which speaks of God's righteousness in terms of God's covenantal loyalty, God's saving relationship with human beings, God's victories, and God's right judgements. For Paul, the definitive locus of God's righteousness and God's work of justification is Jesus Christ, who has become 'for us the wisdom of God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption' (1 Corinthians 1:30). The good news that Christ was 'handed over to death for our trespasses was raised for our justification' (Romans 4:25) is the epitome of the gospel which Paul proclaimed. It is the 'power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith ... For in it the righteousness of God is revealed' (Romans 1:16,17a).

Discussion Questions - Section Two: The Biblical Context

- This section contains several images which the Bible uses to express what God has done for us. Which of these images would you use to explain God's presence was important to you?
- How would you say in today's language the good news that Christ was 'handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification' (Rom 4.25)?

3. Justification: The Concept

Lutherans place great emphasis on justification, holding it to be the 'chief article' of the Christian faith and the 'article upon which the church stands or falls.' They use the word 'justification' to refer to God's free and gracious action by which sinful human beings are declared to be righteous before God and by which their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. God declares us to be righteous not because of anything we have done, but on account of the righteousness of Christ that is credited to us by God's grace and received by us through faith in Christ. The person who is justified receives a new and purified heart (Acts 15:9). Lutherans insist on the sanctification and regeneration that follow justification. They do not separate justification and sanctification, but they do distinguish between them in order to make it clear that justification comes entirely from God and not from what we do.

Apart from technical theology, the word 'justification' is rarely used among Roman Catholics. In ordinary preaching and teaching they speak of 'grace,' 'forgiveness,' 'redemption,' or 'salvation'. The Council of Trent saw justification as 'not only a remission of sins but also the sanctification and renewal of the inward human being, through the voluntary reception of grace and gifts whereby an unjust person becomes just and from being an enemy becomes a friend.' Recent Roman Catholic theology has tended to understand God's justifying grace in interpersonal terms as God's self-communication in forgiving love (Romans 5:5). Justification occurs, by grace, through faith, in the person's free acceptance of this divine forgiving self-communication. Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit we are caught up in a living relationship with the Trinitarian God (Romans 8:14-17). This relationship changes us and we become a new creation in Christ.

Lutherans and Roman Catholics together see justification as God's free and saving action in Christ whereby our sin is forgiven and we are both declared and made righteous. Together we confess that it is solely by grace and through faith that we are justified and not through our own merits. Together we say that justification cannot be separated from regeneration, sanctification, and the renewal of our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Together we affirm that justification, or salvation in Christ, is central and normative to our Christian faith.

Discussion Questions - Section Three: Justification: The Concept.

- This section reminds us that justification is an utterly free gift of God. No amount of struggling on our part to earn God's love makes any difference – God loves us freely. Have there been moments in your life when this insight has struck you? Would you like to share one of those moments with the group?
- How obvious is it to non-Christians and ordinary Australians that for Lutherans, Roman Catholics and Christians of many traditions 'justification or salvation in Christ is central and normative to our Christian faith'? Could you explain why this is so?
- What church and family rituals in our respective denominations celebrate the change that accompanies God's gift to the justified of grace, of a new and purified heart, of God's friendship, of a new creation?
- Lutherans and Roman Catholics have different approaches to the event of justification. What do you see is common to these approaches?

4. The Human Condition

While Lutherans affirm the goodness of God's creation they also affirm the reality of original sin. They teach that all human beings, after the Fall, are innately sinful, and centred-upon-self. This sinful condition, which is inherited as part of the human condition, separates us from God and draws upon us God's condemnation: 'since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23). We are not able to earn justification before God, but are completely dependent upon God's grace for our salvation. Lutherans believe that after justification the struggle with sin is an ongoing reality for Christians. In this struggle with sin the Christian stands in continuing need of forgiveness, but also stands continually forgiven.

For Roman Catholics, the doctrine of original sin means that for all human beings there is a sinful condition which precedes their own free acts. It impacts on all people in an interior way. Because of original sin, human beings who are not justified are without sanctifying grace and the divine indwelling. It is this sanctifying grace which leads to our eternal life in God. Because of original sin we are cut off from what God desires for us; we all stand radically and absolutely in need of the forgiving and elevating grace of Jesus Christ. Following Aquinas, Roman Catholics see human beings as being wounded by original sin. They believe that since all sin is forgiven in baptism, the concupiscence that persists after justification is not itself sin. They see this concupiscence as the inclination to sin, but not as sin itself.

Lutherans and Roman Catholics have different emphases in their views of the effect of original sin on human nature: Lutherans see human beings as spiritually dead because of this sin while Roman Catholics see them as wounded; Lutherans call that inclination that continues within us after justification 'sin,' whereas Roman Catholics call it 'concupiscence.' But Roman Catholics and Lutherans affirm together that: 1. original sin is an inner reality for every human being; 2. the inclination towards sin remains even after justification; 3. as human beings we stand in absolute need of God's forgiveness and regeneration; 4. we cannot earn our own justification but remain completely dependent upon God's grace; and 5. sin is not only personal, but also affects social and political structures and creation itself.

Discussion Questions - Section Four: The Human Condition.

- How real is the concept of original sin to people today?
- Roman Catholics speak of people as being wounded by original sin whereas Lutherans speak of us as spiritually dead because of original sin. Does it really matter which image is used? Which image best expresses your understanding of original sin?
- This section says that sin affects our social and political structures and even creation itself. Do you agree? Where do you see these sorts of effects of sin? What response can Christians make?

Closing Devotion

Members of the group are invited to share briefly one thing they will take away from this gathering.

Leader: We pray to God our Father using the prayer that Jesus gave us. The form we will use is that used in the Lutheran tradition.

All: **Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
Forgive us our trespassers as we forgive those who trespass against us and lead
us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen**

Leader: Using the words of Martin Luther's evening prayer, let us pray:

**I thank you, my heavenly Father, through your dear Son, Jesus Christ, that you
have graciously kept me this day; and I pray that you would forgive me all my
sins where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into your
hands, I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let your holy angel
be with me, that the evil one may have no power over me. Amen.**

(From the Small Catechism of Martin Luther)

(Alternative prayer)

**Lord God, take our minds and think through them. Take our lips and speak with
them. Take our hearts and set them aflame with the desire to do your holy will;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

(From *Everyday Prayer*, a resource produced by the Lutheran Church of Australia)

Study Two

Opening Devotion

(A candle may be lit and an appropriate hymn chosen to begin the devotion.)

Prayer of Invocation

Leader: Blessed are you, God of all creation,
and blessed is the communion
into which you gather us.

You meet us on the road with hands still pierced
but breath warm and conversation engaging.
And though you go on ahead
you promise a companion to show us the way.

**All: Send your Holy Spirit
to call us by name and lead us home.**

(Adapted from Nathan Nettleton, 2000. Laughing Bird Liturgical Resources
<http://www.laughingbird.net/html/home.php>)

Scripture Reading

Colossians 1:15-20 (NRSV)

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers-- all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

Pause for silent prayer and reflection

Leader: With faith we pray to God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit

All: Lord, hear our prayer

Reader 1: Let us pray for our local Christian communities, our churches & ecumenical groups;
for those here present, and those who are absent from our assembly today.

Reader 2: Gracious God, forgive us when we are indifferent to each other,
and bring your healing to the wounds and divisions that keep us apart.

Reader 1: Let us pray for a deeper appreciation of our common baptism into
the one body of Christ.

Reader 2: Loving God, sustain each of us and our communities
as we continue on the path towards the unity you desire for all your disciples.

All: Lord, hear our prayer

(Source: http://www.ncca.org.au/departments/faith_and_unity/weekofprayer/)

Study materials

5. Justification as the Forgiveness of Sins and Participation in the Divine Life

For Lutherans the forgiveness of sins is the central reality of justification. God's forgiveness is on account of Christ, and God's forgiveness means that we are declared and made righteous and our sins are no longer imputed to us, that is to say, they are no longer debited against us. This does not mean that we no longer commit actual sins, nor that we no longer struggle with sin in our lives. God's forgiveness means that, rather than the condemnation that our sins deserve, the righteousness of Christ is credited to us. As Luther wrote in his Small Catechism, 'where there is forgiveness of sins, there also are life and salvation,' that is, participation in the divine trinitarian life.

Roman Catholics understand justification to have two inseparable dimensions. The first is the forgiveness of sins, God's free action in which sins are truly taken away. The second is the inner renewal and participation in divine Trinitarian life which forgiveness makes possible (Galatians 4:4-6; John 14:20-23).

Both Lutherans and Roman Catholics believe that the forgiveness of sins as God's free act is central to an understanding of justification. We believe that when God forgives us, our sins are truly taken away. We believe, too, in regeneration and participation in the divine life which takes place when our sins are forgiven. Lutherans distinguish between justification and that which flows from it, namely sanctification and participation in the divine life. Lutherans make this distinction in order to affirm that justification is entirely the work of God, whereas sanctification involves human cooperation. But in making this distinction they do not deny the inseparable relationship between justification and its fruits. Hence Lutherans also speak of justification as embracing sanctification. Roman Catholics emphasise regeneration and participation in the divine life as an integral part of justification. They do not thereby necessarily deny the Lutheran theological distinction between justification and sanctification. Both traditions look to baptism as the visible sign and realisation of God's promise of forgiveness in a person's life and of our regeneration and incorporation into Christ.

Discussion Questions - Section Five: Justification as the Forgiveness of Sins and Participation in the Divine Life.

- How can our emphasis on participation in the divine life and on forgiveness of sin be used to speak to unbelievers in Australia?
- If as Lutherans, Roman Catholics and Christians of other traditions we share an understanding of the forgiveness of sin by God, how can we publicly express God's forgiveness of our communal sin over the past centuries in relation to one another?
- Lutherans and Roman Catholics emphasise different things when speaking about justification and forgiveness. What are the strengths of these emphases?

6. Christ as the Basis of our Justification

Lutherans stress that justification exists only in and through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Christ becomes 'sin for us' and gives us in exchange his righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21, NIV). This Christ-centredness of justification is understood within the context of the Trinity. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus for us – to which we are joined in our baptism – expresses the saving will of the Father, and occurs through the proclamation of the Word by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Roman Catholics, too, affirm the centrality of Christ in the whole order of creation and redemption, and see salvation in Christ in trinitarian terms (Colossians 1:15-20). The salvific will of the triune God finds efficacious, final and unsurpassable expression in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. This saving love of God, poured out in Christ the eternal Word, is at work in the world through the grace of the Holy Spirit who is present to human beings throughout the whole of human history.

It is clear that Lutherans and Roman Catholics together believe in the absolute centrality of Jesus Christ in the work of justification, that is, our redemption and salvation. The different expressions of this conviction can be traced to the different emphases within each tradition since the Reformation. Both Lutherans and Roman Catholics see the centrality of Christ within the framework of a trinitarian theology. Both believe too, that in the Holy Spirit the saving presence of the triune God is manifested in and to the world.

Discussion Questions - Section Six: Christ as the Basis of our Justification.

- What does Jesus' life tell us about the Father and the Holy Spirit?
- What are some of the ways in which Lutherans, Roman Catholics and other Christians can communicate our focus on Jesus 'in the work of justification' in an increasingly diverse Australia?
- Our Churches have fostered deep devotion to Jesus Christ but the perspective of the Trinity has often been missing. How can parents, catechists, priests, and pastors promote a personal relationship with Jesus Christ within a Trinitarian framework?
- The life, death and resurrection of Jesus is central to our justification. What aspect of his life do you often draw inspiration from?

7. The Justified as Sinner

Lutherans emphasise that the Christian is *simul iustus et peccator*, that is, at the same time justified and sinner. They teach that justification effects genuine inner renewal, that is, that Christ has made us holy and sin is forgiven and its power broken. At the same time, Lutherans also hold that those who are justified are not immune to temptation and sin, but remain constantly in need of God's justifying grace. The sin that continues to affect us in our lives is held to be real sin and is in need of continuing forgiveness.

Roman Catholics have been cautious about the formulation that the justified person is at the same time a sinner for fear it would imply a denial of the reality of the transformation that occurs in justification. Yet Roman Catholics affirm that: 1. we live in a world contaminated by the cumulative effects of sin; 2. concupiscence, which springs from sin and leads to sin, remains in us; 3. after justification we retain patterns and attitudes from our sinful past; 4. we are always subject to temptation; and 5. we fall into at least venial sins. Vatican II says that the church 'is at the same time holy and always in need of purification, and incessantly pursues the path of penance and renewal' (*Lumen Gentium*, 8).

There is an apparent difference between Lutherans and Roman Catholics over the important Lutheran teaching that the Christian is both justified and sinner at the same time. Through our dialogue we have been able to go behind this apparent difference. We have come to see that, in substance, we hold a common faith on this issue. Roman Catholics and Lutherans both believe that justification brings genuine inner renewal, including sanctification and good works (Romans 6:4; 2 Corinthians 5:14; Galatians 2:19-20). Together, we affirm that the new identity of those who are justified in Christ involves a lifelong struggle against temptation and sin. Together, we believe that God's justifying act disempowers the sin it exposes, so that original sin and its effects can no longer rule in those who hear and trust the gospel (Romans 6:11-13). However, while Lutherans speak of 'sin' remaining after justification, Roman Catholics speak of 'concupiscence' remaining. While we use different language, we are convinced that we hold substantially the same doctrine. Both traditions are talking about the same reality – the inclination to sin. We both believe that our sins are completely forgiven in justification and we both believe that the inclination to sin remains even after justification. Together we confess that we stand in need of God's ongoing forgiveness just as we believe that God has indeed justified us and made us holy.

Discussion Questions - Section Seven: The Justified as Sinner.

- What rituals and practices in your tradition confront the ongoing effects of sin?
- How can pastoral practice encourage the avoidance of unnecessary anxiety while forming healthy ways to deal with temptation?
- In Roman Catholic theology, concupiscence springs from sin and leads to sin but is not sin. Is that what the word normally means to you? How do you understand the power of sin in your life after baptism?

8. Good Works and the Justified

Lutherans believe that good works, that is, a Christian life lived in faith, hope and love, are the necessary fruit produced by all those who are justified. Those who have been justified are freed to cooperate with God's Holy Spirit to produce good works and grow in God's grace. In this context Lutherans also use the language of reward with regard to good works. These good works, however, which are also always a gift of God, play no role in meriting for us God's grace or justification. The *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* states: 'Good works are meritorious – not for the forgiveness of sins, grace, or justification (for we obtain these only by faith) but for other physical and spiritual rewards in this life and in that which is to come' (4.194).

Roman Catholics, like Lutherans, affirm the absolute priority of grace. They see grace operative in human beings in the preparation for justification, in human cooperation with justifying grace, and in the deepening of communion with Christ after justification. Roman Catholics view good works as the fruit of justification, as borne by grace and as contributing to growth in grace. They affirm that good works are meritorious, and so affirm human responsibility. But they recognise that good works are also always a gift and that justification is always the unmerited gift of grace.

Together, Roman Catholics and Lutherans confess that those who are justified live and act in the grace they receive – in biblical terms, they do good works (Ephesians 2:10) and bear fruit (John 15:8). All who have been justified are freed to cooperate with God's Holy Spirit to produce good works and to grow in God's grace. The act of justification is always unmerited grace of God. Although the Christian life is a life under the cross in which good works do not mean we will never struggle or suffer, we affirm that the good works of the Christian life that follow justification do merit reward in this life and in the life that is to come (Matthew 5:3-12; 6:18; Mark 10:30; Revelation 2:10).

Discussion Questions - Section Eight: Good works and the Justified.

- What is the connection between justification and working for justice?
How do you as a Christian understand the place of good works in your life?
- In what way do you as a Christian believe that you are regarded for the good works you do?

Closing Devotion

Members of the group are invited to share briefly on one thing they will take away from this gathering.

Leader: We pray to God our Father using the prayer that Jesus gave us according to the Roman Catholic tradition.

All: **Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
Forgive us our trespassers as we forgive those who trespass against us and lead
us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. Amen**

Leader: Using the words of St Richard, let us pray:

All: **Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ for all the benefits and blessings which you
have borne for me.
O most merciful Friend, Brother and Redeemer,
may I know you more clearly, love you more dearly
and follow you more nearly, day by day.**

(Alternative prayer)

**Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit
As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen**

Study Three

Opening Devotion

(A candle may be lit and an appropriate hymn chosen to begin the devotion.)

Prayer of Invocation

Leader: Blessed are you, God of all creation,
and blessed is the communion
into which you gather us.

Like a blazing fire, melt the stubborn grip of fear.
Like a wild wind, dispel the dust of complacency.
Like a kookaburra's call, pierce pride with joy.

**All: Send your Holy Spirit
to call us by name and lead us home.**

(Nathan Nettleton, 2000. Laughing Bird Liturgical Resources
<http://www.laughingbird.net/html/home.php>)

Scripture Reading

Ephesians 2:8-10 (NRSV)

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God-- not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Pause for silent prayer and reflection

Leader: With faith we pray to God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit

All: Lord, hear our prayer

Reader 1: Let us pray for our local Christian communities, our churches & ecumenical groups;
for those here present, and those who are absent from our assembly today.

Reader 2: Gracious God, forgive us when we are indifferent to each other,
and bring your healing to the wounds and divisions that keep us apart.

Reader 1: Let us pray for a deeper appreciation of our common baptism into
the one body of Christ.

Reader 2: Loving God, sustain each of us and our communities
as we continue on the path towards the unity you desire for all your disciples.

All: Lord, hear our prayer

(Source: http://www.ncca.org.au/departments/faith_and_unity/weekofprayer)

Study material

9. Justification by Grace Alone, through Faith Alone.

For Lutherans the concept of grace alone underscores the fact that God justifies us not on the basis of anything we have done or will do, but God's declaring and making us righteous is pure gift. God, in divine freedom, chooses to give us the forgiveness of sins. Likewise, Lutherans hold that 'faith alone' means that human beings contribute nothing to their coming to faith and in no way can they be said to cooperate with God's grace while still in an unregenerate state. While Lutherans believe it is necessary that the unregenerate sinner not resist the work of the Holy Spirit in the work of conversion, they would not traditionally describe this absence of resistance as 'cooperation'. It is alone through faith, understood as trust in Jesus Christ, that we receive the forgiveness of sins. And this faith, too, is held to be a gift of God, made possible only by the grace of God (Ephesians 2:8, 9). This faith, however, is never alone, for it is a faith working in love (Galatians 5:6) and a faith that necessarily produces good works (James 2:24-26).

Roman Catholics have traditionally held, as stated at the Council of Trent, that we are not justified by anything we do, but only by God's grace. Trent affirmed the role of the human person in preparing for justification and in accepting the grace offered and living out what is given in that grace. Yet the Council insisted that all of this is grace and none of it happens except through grace. Therefore Roman Catholics, too, affirm that justification is by grace alone. With regard to faith, Roman Catholics view faith as one of the three theological virtues of faith, hope and love. When faith is understood merely as intellectual assent, it can exist without love and can coexist with sinful rejection of God. Clearly, however, faith understood in this sense is not enough for justification. Saving faith, which is always a gift of God, must involve love and hope. When faith is understood as faith informed by love and involving hope, then Roman Catholics, too, can affirm the principle of faith alone.

Lutherans and Roman Catholics agree that apart from God's grace there is no justification of the sinner. We confess together that the sinner is justified on the basis of God's grace alone through faith in the saving act of God in Jesus Christ. The faith through which the grace of God works justification in the sinner can never be a mere intellectual assent. Justifying faith always includes trust in God's promise and is informed by love of God.

Discussion Questions - Section Nine: Justification by Grace Alone, through Faith Alone.

- In the past Lutherans and Roman Catholics have appeared to have different definitions of faith. How do you understand faith? How do you understand the relationship between faith and love? How do you understand the relationship between faith and grace?
- Some practices like meditative prayer promote a consciousness of God's work in us rather than the 'works' that we might do. How can local groups of Christians promote an openness to God's action in their lives?
- If Roman Catholics and Lutherans say that God's grace is freely given, why do they require thorough instruction in preparing for such events as Confirmation and Marriage?
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10. The Assurance of Salvation

Lutherans, while recognising the possibility that some may resist God's grace in their lives and turn away from Christ, emphasise assurance of salvation. Moreover, they have sometimes thought Roman Catholics have no emphasis on the assurance of salvation and abandon the individual believer to doubt.

Roman Catholics have been concerned to avoid the sin of presumption. At the same time they believe that we can trust fully in God's promise of salvation. Moreover, they have sometimes thought Lutherans emphasised certainty to the point of presumption on the part of the individual.

Although Roman Catholics and Lutherans have sometimes thought themselves to be in disagreement on the matter of the assurance of salvation, in humility they have come to see that long held perceptions about one another have been incorrect. Therefore it is with joy and thanksgiving that Roman Catholics and Lutherans confess together that we place our confidence in the divine promises and in the mercy and grace of God revealed and present to us in Jesus Christ. We believe that no one should doubt the saving work of Christ nor the efficacy of the sacraments. Through recalling our baptism and making proper use of absolution (or the Sacrament of Reconciliation) and Holy Communion, our faith is strengthened and we are able, by looking solely to Christ, to live in the assurance of our salvation. Both traditions, however, also recognise that it is possible for human beings to resist the Spirit and turn away from Christ through sin. Hence we cannot presume certainty about our own salvation. But when we consider our salvation from the perspective of what God does for us in Christ, we can trust absolutely in God's saving promises.

Discussion Questions - Section Ten: The Assurance of Salvation.

- What moments in your life lead to trust in the assurance of salvation?
- What might the sin of presumption look like in today's world?
- In an age when many young people are taking their own lives, how can Christians respond?
- The document states: 'we place our confidence in the divine promises and in the mercy and grace of God revealed and present to us in Jesus Christ'. Do the activities and priorities of our respective traditions reflect this trust and confidence?

11. Conclusion

The members of this dialogue consider that the understanding of the doctrine of justification set forth in this common statement demonstrates substantial agreement on the central points of the doctrine of justification between Lutherans and Roman Catholics. In the light of this substantial agreement the remaining differences of language, theological expression, and emphasis in the understanding of justification need no longer be Church divisive in themselves.

We have just observed the 450th anniversary of the Roman Catholic condemnations on justification issued by the Council of Trent. After careful biblical and theological investigation both Lutherans and Roman Catholics believe that the status of these condemnations needs to be re-evaluated. The condemnations in the Roman Catholic Council of Trent do not apply to the teaching of the Lutheran Church presented in this common statement. The belief and agreement of this dialogue is therefore that the mutual condemnations no longer apply.

We recognise that there are still issues in the teaching on justification which need further discussion and elucidation. It is our prayer that the Holy Spirit will continue to lead and guide us into an ever fuller understanding and confession of this central truth of the gospel.

With joy and gratitude to God, however, we recognise that in substance we do share a common faith in the doctrine of justification and that this dialogue has strengthened the bonds between us. Our agreement on justification must inevitably form the basis for all further dialogue between Lutherans and Roman Catholics. This opens the way to exploring the possibility of a more visible unity – as Jesus prayer, 'that they may all be one' (John 17:21).

Discussion Questions - Section Eleven: Conclusion

- To what action does this substantial agreement call you and your Church?
- What are the implications of this substantial agreement for further relations between the two churches? What practical steps could we take?
- How can you communicate the excitement about this substantial agreement to the wider Australian community?

Closing Devotion

Members of the group are invited to share briefly on one thing they will take away from this gathering.

Leader: We pray to God our Father using the prayer that Jesus gave us using the ecumenical version:

All: **Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen**

Leader: Using the words of St Augustine of Hippo, let us pray:

All: **Watch, dear Lord, with those who wake or watch or weep tonight, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend your sick ones, O Lord Jesus Christ, rest your weary ones, bless your dying ones, soothe your suffering ones, shield your joyous ones, and all for your love's sake. Amen.**

(Alternative prayer)

Leader: Across all our barriers of language, race and nationality,
All: **Unite us, Jesus.**

Leader: Across all our mutual ignorance, prejudice and hostility,
All: **Unite us, Jesus.**

Leader: Across all our differences of thought, outlook and religious allegiance,
All: **Unite us, Jesus.**

Leader: O God for your greater glory,
All: **Gather together the separated Christians.**

Leader: O God for the triumph of goodness and truth,
All: **Gather together the separated Christians.**

Leader: O God that there may be one flock and one Shepherd,
All: **Gather together the separated Christians.**

Leader: O God to confound the pride of Satan and his assaults,
All: **Gather together the separated Christians.**

Leader: O God that peace may reign in the world at last,
All: **Gather together the separated Christians.**

Leader: O God, for the greater joy of the heart of your Son,
All: **Gather together the separated Christians.**

(Source: A Prayer for Christian Unity, Paul Couturier, Week of Prayer for Christian Unity)