



NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JOINT STATEMENT MARKS WEEK OF PRAYER FOR UNITY

WASHINGTON--The National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (BCEIA) and the Episcopal Church's Standing Committee on Ecumenical Relations have released a joint statement marking the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (January 18-25).

The statement, entitled "Toward Fuller Communion in Christ," was two years in preparation. It was issued by Archbishop Rembert Weakland of Milwaukee, Chairman of the BCEIA, and Bishop Theodore Eastman, Episcopal Bishop of Baltimore and Chairman of the Standing Committee on Ecumenical Relations.

The statement noted that the 25-year-old dialogue between the two churches has borne fruit in "mutual collaboration in mission and witness, cooperation in education and social action, the testimony and nurture of interchurch families, and covenants in many dioceses and parishes that give concrete local form to this commitment to full communion."

But a quarter century of dialogue is not sufficient to overcome completely the effects of four hundred years of separation, the bishops observed.

"Indeed, as we hope for more signs of institutional unity we also pray that the opportunity to know one another and appreciate the gifts we have to receive from one another may become the experience of all of our people," they continued. "Both of our

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Churches experience the wounds of separation, though many of our members have become complacent in their divisions."

"We recognize that, in our division, we continue to act in our internal life and in our separate understandings of what the Christian faith demands of us in society, in ways that continue to cause pain. We recognize that this is a common pain, the healing of which is a common task," they said.

"Not only are the fostering of unity and the fostering of plurality not opposed to each other, they also enrich each other to the extent that they both aim at building up the one Body of Christ which is the Church through love, which is the bond of perfection," the statement declared. "We have not yet developed a full appreciation of those elements of diversity that will enrich our lives when full communion is restored. However, it is this plurality that is the concrete testimony to the catholicity of the Church we confess together in the creed."

NOTE: The full text of the statement, "Toward Fuller Communion in Christ," is available on request.

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