Lutheran leader seeks Holy Communion agreement with Pope

by Luigi Sandri
December 16, 2010

Rome, December 16 (ENInews)--The president of the Lutheran World Federation, Bishop Munib Younan has said before meeting Pope Benedict XVI that their churches should issue a common statement on Holy Communion to mark the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation that Martin Luther began in 1517.

"Our [the Lutheran federation's] intention is to arrive at 2017 with a common Roman Catholic-Lutheran declaration on eucharistic hospitality," Younan told the Italian Protestant news agency NEV the day before his 16 December audience with the Pope.

In a speech at his meeting with Younan, Pope Benedict praised the progress that he said had taken place in Catholic-Lutheran dialogue but did not make any reference to the bishop's Eucharist proposal.

"Eucharistic hospitality" means that Catholics would be able to receive Communion at a Lutheran celebration of the Lord's Supper, and Lutherans would be able to do the same at a Catholic Mass.

Catholic doctrine currently forbids such bilateral 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".

On 31 October 1517, Martin Luther published 95 theses critical of the papacy, which set in train the Lutheran Reformation.

In 1999, the Catholic Church and the LWF signed a joint declaration on the doctrine of justification (how a person is saved), which was one of the main points of contention between Catholics and Lutherans in the 16th century.

At the audience with Bishop Younan, Pope Benedict described the 1999 declaration as, "a significant step along the difficult path towards re-establishing full unity among Christians and a stimulus to further ecumenical discussion".

The Pope added, "In these years leading up to the 500th anniversary of the events of 1517, Catholics and Lutherans are called to reflect anew on where our journey towards unity has led us and to implore the Lord’s guidance and help for the future."

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