

Welcome Address

by Diocesan Bishop Dr Bertram Meier at the Reception for the Members of the
European Regions' Meeting of the Lutheran World Federation

Augustanasaal, Augsburg, October 6, 2026

Dear Bishop Stubkjær,

Dear Bishop Kühnbaum-Schmidt,

Dear Bishop Kopp,

Dear Dr Burghardt,

Dear members of the European Regions' Meeting of the Lutheran World
Federation,

Dear brothers and sisters,

As the Roman Catholic Bishop of Augsburg, I would like to extend a warm welcome to you all. Augsburg is a city whose identity is closely associated with the message of peace and with ecumenical hope. We greatly need both today.

As representatives of the European Region of the Lutheran World Federation, you yourselves are well aware that the current atmosphere in Europe is far from joyful. Anxiety about the future of our continent is growing. Not only has Russia's war against Ukraine failed to come to an end after so many years, but the belligerent and unrepentant leaders who unleashed it continue to threaten its further escalation. The foundations of European coexistence — democracy, respect for human dignity, and solidarity — are once again being called into question, while extremist forces are gaining strength that recall the darkest periods of the last century. How can it be that some still wish today to replace the vital diversity of our societies with the darkness of totalitarianism and hatred?

Augsburg's High Festival of Peace (*Hohes Friedensfest*), which is celebrated every August, has deep historical roots. Yet the message of fraternity that it proclaims has lost none of its relevance.

Almost 500 years ago, during a challenging period for the Church, a significant effort was made here to preserve ecclesial unity. The *Confessio Augustana* was not intended to cause division, but rather to contribute to the reconciliation of Western Christianity. Many centuries later, in 1999, Augsburg became associated with one of the most important milestones in ecumenical dialogue. The signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in St. Anne's Church strengthened the hope that Christian unity might one day become a reality in the fullness for which we long.

It is this spirit of hope and ecumenical fraternity that inspires us on our journey towards the anniversary of the *Confessio Augustana*. May this jubilee become an opportunity to deepen our bonds and to accelerate our efforts to restore unity. It is a commitment that we share for the future of Christianity.

Just a few days ago, Pope Leo XIV said to a Delegation from the Lutheran World Federation: "Looking forward to 2030, it would be good if we could once again succeed in affirming together the pre-confessional ecumenical potential of the *Confessio Augustana*. I earnestly appeal to all believers, and especially theologians, to set their minds on Christ and his Gospel. Let us return, with deep devotion, to our common roots, to the faith of the early Church and the Church Fathers, in order to rediscover the apostolic and pre-confessional heritage which truly unites us as brothers and sisters, brothers and sisters in Christ."¹

Ecumenical dialogue is clearly not a luxury. Nor is it merely an option. It is both an act of obedience to the will of the Lord and an expression of our Christian responsibility towards a world which is becoming increasingly secularized, at least in Europe. It is no coincidence that, in his high-priestly prayer shortly before the beginning of his Passion, Christ links unity with the credibility of the Gospel:

"May they be one, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they be one with us, so that the world may believe that you sent me." (*John 17:21*)

¹ Address by His Holiness Pope Leo XIV to the Delegation of the Lutheran World Federation, Thursday, 1 October 2026: www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/speeches/2026/october/documents/20261001-federazione-luterana.html

My mother was Roman Catholic and my father was Lutheran. In the family in which I grew up, I had the blessing of experiencing the richness of difference and its complementary strength personally as well as the value of unity.

Dear brothers and sisters,

Over the coming days, you will have the opportunity to get to know our city better, to learn about the challenges facing Bavaria, and, of course, to reflect on the *Confessio Augustana*.

I am sure that many of you will visit Augsburg again in the future, and that we will all meet again here in 2030. On behalf of the Roman Catholic Church, I would like to express both the hope and the commitment that we will continue to move forward together so that this jubilee may become not merely a testimony to Christian fellowship but the beginning of a new ecumenical paradigm.

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” (*Ephesians 4:3*) – May these words of the Apostle Paul inspire every step we take.

I wish you a pleasant and fruitful stay in Augsburg, and may God bless you, your lives, and your work.