

JOY *in our common faith*

by ELIZABETH DELANEY

As part of the lead-up to the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017, an ecumenical working party of Lutherans and Catholics has been planning a program of projects and events to jointly commemorate the occasion. One is a series of articles, written by Lutheran and Catholic authors from around Australia, to be published in both Lutheran and Catholic publications. The fourth piece in our series of six is by Sister Elizabeth Delaney, a Sister of the Good Samaritan of the Order of St Benedict and General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA).



Why do I find joy in our shared faith?

It is not so much the statement of faith but the journey to this day that encourages and gives me hope. Glimpses of the way ahead for our churches deepen this hope.

'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.' So begins the 1998 document

Justification, A Common Statement of the Australian Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue. The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, signed on 29 October 1999, echoed this. These documents illustrate the journey our churches have travelled.

The way we have travelled so far gives me joy in the belief God's Holy Spirit is guiding our churches.

I am an enthusiast rather than a scholar of ecumenism, and so it is the ecumenical statements in these documents which cause my spirit to leap.

The quote often attributed to Spanish poet, Antonio Machado that 'We make the path by walking' comes to mind. The Joint Declaration exemplifies this principle. For while the participants understood they had taken some steps, they knew more were to come: '[The Declaration] does not cover all that either church teaches about justification'.

The Australian statement also recognises the need for further discussion and elucidation, reminding us this growth is the work of the

Spirit: 'It is our prayer that the Holy Spirit will continue to lead and guide us into an ever fuller understanding of this central truth of the gospel'.

I frequently look back, recognising new learning, often from mistakes. I love to see a similar learning in theological understanding – not just for myself, but for my church and all our churches. The participants in the international dialogue affirmed the Declaration was 'shaped by the conviction that in their respective histories our churches have come to new insights'.

Receptive ecumenism provides a wonderful framework for our churches to continue to discover new insights.

Following the signing of the Joint Declaration in 1999, on 23 July 2006 the Methodist World Council affirmed the Declaration with a *Statement of Association*. At the NCCA Forum in Brisbane in 2007, one of the church leaders commented, 'Perhaps our church might consider associating with the Declaration'.

May many church leaders take such steps!

We offer together..., we have been able to do behind this apparent difference ... we have come to see ... we recognise How frequently the pronoun 'we' is used in the Common Statement. And each use is deliberate.

May we, urged on by God's Holy Spirit, broaden its use.

The way we have travelled so far gives me joy in the belief God's Holy Spirit is guiding our churches together along a wonderful path!



Elizabeth Delaney