

JUSTIFICATION: THE JOINT DECLARATION

You've probably seen the initials WWJD (What Would Jesus Do?), but may not be as acquainted with another set of 4 initials that have grown in importance this year: JDDJ. The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification has been around for awhile, but is gaining new significance with the approaching 500th Anniversary of the Reformation.

The JDDJ resulted from dialogues between the Roman Catholic Church and Lutheran churches in the USA and Europe during the 1970s, '80s, and '90s. It was signed by representatives of these churches on Oct. 31, 1999. The Joint Declaration articulates "a common understanding of our justification by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ."

The doctrine of justification was of central importance to the 16th Century Reformers. Differences between their assertions and those of the Roman Church resulted in mutual condemnations by the Lutheran Confessions and the Council of Trent. The present Joint Declaration reflects new insights and developments that have led to a consensus on the basic truths about justification and the realization that the remaining differences are no longer the occasion for doctrinal condemnations.

The World Methodist Council adopted the JDDJ in 2006. In an ecumenical ceremony on July 5, 2017, in Wittenberg, Germany – the city where Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses in October 1517 – the World Communion of Reformed Churches signed the document in the presence of Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Methodist representatives. The Reformed Churches represent about 80 million Christians in Congregational, Presbyterian, Reformed, United, Uniting and Waldensian churches around the world. This October, the Anglican Church will adopt the document, bringing all of the main historical Christian Churches of the West into agreement on this doctrine.

Bishop Brian Farrell, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, stated, *"We now have a situation where on the fundamental question that separated us in the sixteenth century, which was Catholics insisted on good works as a sign of faith, as necessary for salvation, and Protestants said no, no, no, it's only the grace of Christ. We have the same substantial understanding of what it is that happens when Christ saves the sinner. This is the whole point. ... It means we can no longer think of each other as separated and distant. We are now in a position to work together and work more closely and to help each other to preach the Gospel because we have so much in common that we didn't realize before that we had so much."*

In a statement about the July 5 signing, the Pontifical Council said, "The event must be seen as another important milestone on the journey towards the full visible unity of Christians; not yet the end of the road but a significant stage on the way."