

Disagreements cannot be ignored in ecumenical dialogue, pope says

VATICAN CITY – Fundamental differences, particularly over human sexuality and marriage, should not be ignored out of fear of damaging the progress that has been made in ecumenical dialogue, Pope Benedict XVI told Lutheran representatives.

“Ecumenical dialogue today cannot be separated from reality and life in the faith of our churches without causing damage to the churches,” he told a delegation from the German Evangelical (Lutheran) Church Jan. 24. The delegation was in Rome during the week of prayer for Christian unity.

The pope noted that Catholic bishops and Lutheran representatives in Germany are engaged in bilateral talks on the theme, “God and human dignity.”

“This theme also includes, in particular, problems which have recently arisen concerning the protection and dignity of human life, as well as urgent questions about the family, marriage and sexuality, which cannot be omitted or ignored just so the ecumenical agreements that have been made so far would not be threatened,” he said.

The blessing of same-sex unions is practiced in a number of constituent members of the Evangelical Church in Germany, a federation of Lutheran, Reformed and Protestant regional church bodies.

Pope Benedict said he hoped that “these important questions about life do not give rise to new differences between churches, but that together we can give witness to the world and all people.”

The pope also said he was looking forward to events in 2017, which will mark the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

“On that occasion, Lutherans and Catholics will have the opportunity to celebrate worldwide a common ecumenical commemoration and to fight on a global level for fundamental issues,” not with a “triumphalist” attitude, but joined by a common

profession of faith in the one and triune God, he said.