

Pope says dialogue should lead to concrete activities

VATICAN CITY - Meeting members of a Lutheran-Catholic pilgrimage from Finland on the first day of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Pope Benedict XVI said the theological agreements reached in ecumenical dialogue should lead to concrete joint activities.

"May the ongoing dialogue lead to practical results in actions which express and build up our unity in Christ and therefore strengthen relationships between Christians," he said Jan. 18 to the pilgrimage sponsored by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland.

"In the new and challenging circumstances of today, and within your own country, there is much that Lutherans and Catholics can do together in the service of the Gospel and the advancement of the kingdom of God," the pope said.

Pope Benedict said that prayers for Christian unity reinforce the bonds of communion already existing among Christians and enable them "to face courageously the painful memories, social burdens and human weaknesses that are so much a part of our divisions."

The pope also mentioned the 450th anniversary of the death of Mikael Agricola, a leader of the Protestant Reformation in Finland who is regarded as "the father of the Finnish language," due in large part to the fact that he translated the Bible into Finnish.

"Encountering the word of God, especially as it resounds in the church and her liturgy, is also important for our ecumenical journey," the pope said.

Lutheran Archbishop Kari Mäkinen of Turku, the leader of the delegation, told the pope Agricola wanted to translate the Bible "because he considered it important that every Christian live in a personal dialogue with the word of God."

However, he said, "in an age which idolizes individuality it is important to remember

that the word of God in the Bible is not meant only to be read in the solitude of one's room," but must be shared in the church's liturgy and understood in the context of the church's tradition.