

Statement by Cardinal Keeler on Relations between Russian Orthodox and Catholic Charities

As a member of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, I welcome the reports from Moscow about the conversations that have taken place over the past few days between Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, and Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. I note with particular satisfaction the establishment of a joint Russian Orthodox-Roman Catholic working group that will examine the questions that have prevented the development of normal fraternal relations. Even though the journey will undoubtedly be a long one, I rejoice that this new effort to resolve the outstanding problems has begun.

Here in the United States, we have been blessed with positive and constructive relations between the Catholic and Orthodox churches in recent decades. A theological consultation that has been meeting regularly since 1965 has issued twenty-two agreed statements on various theological questions, and a Joint Committee of Orthodox and Catholic Bishops has met annually since 1981. When addressing the fundamental moral questions that have arisen in American society, our churches have given a witness that is congruent and mutually supportive. Our experience in this country has given me confidence that relations between our churches in other parts of the world can be warm and beneficial to both sides.

In its 2000 statement on the Orthodox-Catholic Dialogue and the Ecumenical Movement, the North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation noted that, "Just as our alienation took place over the course of time, so also our reconciliation, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is taking place gradually. In order to be faithful to Our Lord, this process must be rooted in the Gospel and nurtured by prayer for unity. It must be fostered by theological dialogue, and

expressed in acts of love and mutual forgiveness.” Please God, the new Joint Commission between the Roman Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church will provide an example of this commitment, and contribute to the eventual restoration of full communion between our churches.