

A View of the “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification” in Arizona

By all accounts October 31, 1999 was a joyous Sunday. The Roman Catholic bishop of Phoenix and the Lutheran bishop of the Grand Canyon Synod, ELCA, together attended services in which the signing of the *Joint Declaration* was announced and celebrated. They started at the cathedral for a mid-morning mass and then proceeded to a local Lutheran parish where they did more than shake hands—they hugged each other. There was a palpable spirit of disbelief and joy that we had come this far. To be sure, these two men had participated in several ecumenical activities together, and would call each other “friend”, but this public display of respect and affection made visible the possibility that people from our two traditions could live into the Christian unity we profess.

In the five years since, our two church bodies have participated in various activities that strive for unity, but they have been limited to those organized by a statewide council of churches to which they both belong. There has been little energy or perceived need for Lutherans and Catholics to work together on their own without the help of the larger Christian community. Even though there are several people who know the basic accomplishments of the *Joint Declaration*, the document and its implications are an unknown. More recently, other documents penned by the Vatican have given the perception that the lines between Roman Catholics and other traditions are being clearly drawn. Reactions have ranged from puzzlement to anger.

At present, for Lutherans and Roman Catholics in Arizona, it may be that a more successful document to encourage good ecumenical relations is “*Ut Unum Sint*,” which continues the bold ecumenical challenges that were declared in Vatican II. Even so, we continue to pray that the *Joint Declaration* might lead to deeper relations among Christians here and in the whole Church.

*The Rev. Jan Flaaten
President of the Arizona Ecumenical Council
Ecumenical Representative, Grand Canyon Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*