

Statement upon the Death of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI
The North American Lutheran Church
Bishop Daniel W. Selbo
December 31, 2022

“Rest eternal, grant him, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon him.”

The Bishop of the North American Lutheran Church, the Rev. Dr. Dan Selbo, NALC Bishop Emeritus, the Rev. John Bradosky, together with our pastors and people, express our deepest sorrow and condolences to our brothers and sisters in the Roman Catholic Church, upon the death of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. We offer our prayers for comfort, grace and healing for Pope Francis, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, all bishops, priests and religious, and the more than 1.3 billion Roman Catholic faithful throughout the world.

We were saddened to receive news of the end of Pope Benedict’s earthly pilgrimage, but joyful as he has now entered the Church Triumphant. We offer our sincere appreciation for his faithful preaching and teaching, especially with regard to the challenge of increasing secularism, his teaching against the “dictatorship of relativity,” the biblical institution of marriage and the sanctity of human life from birth to natural death. The whole Church of Jesus Christ in the world has benefited from Benedict’s commitment to a new form of ecumenism that is not based solely on theological similarities and differences, but founded on a mutual commitment to strengthen our witness to the world-- a world that is pulling our people away from the Church with an enticing array of false gospels. Thankfully, his public witness will continue through his writings as a theologian, biblical scholar and pope.

The meeting of leaders of the North American Lutheran Church with Pope Benedict XVI in September, 2011 was a significant occurrence in the life of the new North American Lutheran Church. NALC Bishop John Bradosky, Bishop Emeritus Paull Spring and ecumenical officer, Pastor David Wendel, had been invited to meet with the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, but were also given the opportunity to be received by the Pope at his weekly Wednesday audience. He had just returned from his pilgrimage to Germany, the Land of Luther and spoke freely about his visit during his address. Being a German and a theologian with a deep appreciation for Luther and his theological understanding, during his pilgrimage to Germany, Pope Benedict said,

“For Luther theology was not mere academic pursuit, but the struggle for oneself, which in turn was a struggle for and with God. How do I receive the grace of God? The fact that this question was the driving force of his whole life never ceases to make a deep impression on me. For who is actually concerned about this today — even among Christians.”

Benedict went on to point out that belief in a magnanimous God who cares nothing about sin and evil in our contemporary culture is working destruction in our world and watering down the faith of those



in the Church. *“Luther’s burning question must once more become our question too,”* said Pope Benedict.

We also express our deep appreciation for his support for the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. This Declaration, approved by the Vatican and the Lutheran World Federation, signed October 31, 1999, made a significant contribution toward resolving one of the most important issues between the Lutheran and Roman Catholic communities of faith. It is commonly understood that it was then Cardinal Ratzinger who was instrumental in completing the approval process for this joint document.

Though there are theological issues that continue to separate us, we are encouraged by the many ways in which we share in the creedal faith of the one holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

We will miss this pope who, more than any other, has been a friend of Luther and Lutherans. We will miss the scholarly, yet clearly stated teaching and leadership of this priest, theologian and pope. His ability to hold fast to the truth and to communicate that truth in simple teaching able to be grasped by all will be a part of the legacy of this humble man.

The words of St. Paul surely describe the life and manner of Benedict’s life and serve as a call to we who continue on:

“Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord...rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.”

Romans 12:9-15

For questions or comment, contact Pastor David Wendel, dwendel@thenalc.org