

Dear brothers and sisters,

Welcome this morning, and thank you for listening to my address. May I first introduce myself: My name is Jörg Schneider. I am head of the department of theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg, and I am speaking to you from Tübingen. Perhaps you have heard of the university here, or of Hans Küng or Eberhard Jüngel, who were professors in this city. Our department of theology includes a section for interior questions such as liturgy, one for ecumenical relations—headed by Dr. Christine Keim—a section for innovation in congregations and new forms of evangelization, and finally, a section for music.

Today, on the last day of our pastoral conference, our focus is on UNITY, following the previous days' themes of faith and mission.

The Nicene Creed is a text that unites us with many Christian denominations and churches. The Nicene Creed connects Orthodox Christians, Protestants, and Catholics alike, and

even many that do not fit into such traditional classifications. And it unites us with all generations before us, reaching back 1,700 years to the origins of the Creed. Both aspects – the transdenominational one and the historical one are reasons for joy, for gratefulness towards God and for hope that this kind of unity will lead to strong signs towards a secular world of mistrust, conflict and brokenness.

I would like to share a few more thoughts about unity in the light of the Nicene Creed. The Nicene formula presents us with a concept of God's oneness. We owe the belief in the oneness of God to the Old Testament: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord *is* one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength." But for us Christians, this oneness is a differentiated one. Seen from the parts, they unite to the oneness. In Christian theology, God can only be thought of as one—and as a united one, too. The three persons of the Trinity unite to the oneness. Or, the other way round: the

oneness is not monolithic, but living in distinct aspects of the Godhead.

For the Church, this means that it is one, too. There is only one Church of God. However, it is differentiated in churches. They only exist as real churches as long as they see themselves as part of the one Church. There may be many traditions, many convictions, many histories—all meet in the words of the Nicene Creed: “We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible. ... And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father ... And the Holy Spirit.” All particular churches who regard these words as fundamental are part of this unity. Even if some churches do not use the creed liturgically, they refer to it voluntarily or involuntarily because of their significance.

In everyday practice, when reciting the Nicene Creed, it might occur to us that we speak not only for ourselves but in unity with our Christian brothers and sisters around the world.

How can churches today work towards unity? This conference itself is an expression of our unity: we gather from many countries, from different churches and partner organizations. Together, we can work so that our witness in the world bears fruit—in the spirit of John 17:20-21: “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”

Unity does not happen when everyone remains on their own, but when we bear witness together—in liturgy, martyria, and diakonia. And we might add a fourth key word: koinonia.

I hope you will benefit from today’s formats. I wish you all an inspiring day and, amid all the brokenness and division of this world, the experience of the unity given by Christ. May you receive the blessings of our Lord.