



INTERNATIONALE ALTKATHOLISCHE BISCHOFSKONFERENZ  
DER UTRECHTER UNION

INTERNATIONAL OLD CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE  
OF THE UNION OF UTRECHT

Präsident: Der Erzbischof von Utrecht  
President: The Archbishop of Utrecht

Mgr. B.Th. Wallet MA

College of Cardinals  
His Eminence Giovanni Battista Cardinal Re  
Palazzo Apostolico Vaticano  
00120 Citta del Vaticano  
[decanato.collegiocardinalizio@org.va](mailto:decanato.collegiocardinalizio@org.va)  
**by email**

Subject: Condolence on the death of Pope Francis

Utrecht, 25 April 2024,

Your Eminence,

On behalf of the International Bishops' Conference (IBC) of the Union of Utrecht of Old Catholic Churches, I would like to express our heartfelt condolences on the passing of Pope Francis. Together with our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters, as well as with believers from other Christian denominations, religions, and worldviews, we remember with deep gratitude his life and witness and mourn his death.

Pope Francis was a true *pontifex*—a builder of bridges—who sought to lead the Church into the future in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council. Inspired by the Canticle of the Sun by his namesake, the humble Brother Francis of Assisi, he called in his encyclical *Laudato Si'* for a spirit of gratitude toward all of God's creation. His appeal for a responsible and caring stewardship of the world entrusted to us resonated across the globe and continues to shape fundamental conversations about the future of our planet.

Rooted in a deep faith in God's boundless goodness, Pope Francis opened himself generously to the task of overcoming divisions between people. Marked by God's mercy, his care extended especially to the poor and the vulnerable, and he sought to create space for the blessing of same-sex relationships. Until the very end, he remained a tireless advocate for peace, calling for ceasefires both in Russia's war against Ukraine and in the conflict between Israel and Hamas.

In 2014, shortly after his election, Pope Francis invited Archbishop Joris Vercammen and all bishops of the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht for a private audience. For the first time in history, such a welcome was extended to them—and it was done with heartfelt warmth. The official dialogue commission between the Roman Catholic and Old Catholic Churches had just presented its first joint report. This report focused first on what unites us in faith, and then explored whether existing differences truly stand in the way of ecclesial communion. The continuation of this bilateral dialogue remains open.



We have been following the synodal process strongly promoted by Pope Francis with great interest from an ecumenical perspective. We were happy to have been invited to make a contribution to the 'Listening to the West' symposium. A particularly joyful sign was the ecumenical prayer service on St. Peter's Square in 2023, before the opening of the Synod on Synodality, where I had the privilege to participate as one of the ecumenical guests invited by Pope Francis to gather with thousands of young people and the Taizé Community for the international youth meeting *Together*.

Pope Francis brought light into the dark shadows that the abuse scandals had cast over all churches. He did not hesitate to criticize cardinals and bishops who acted unworthily of their high calling, or those who clung to rigid interpretations of church doctrine when what was truly needed was the space of the Gospel. His experiences from South America were never hidden behind the frescoed walls of the Vatican palaces—he remained a pope of the people and for the people. Perhaps this is the greatest honor that can be given to a church leader.

Pope Francis died on Easter Monday, having blessed the city and the world with his final breath. May this blessing empower us, by God's grace, to become instruments of His peace—in memory of Pope Francis, for the further building up of the Church, and for the salvation of the world.

United in the life of our Risen Lord,

+ Saren Utrecht

✠ Bernd Wallet

*Archbishop of Utrecht*

*President of the International Bishops' Conference  
of the Union of Utrecht of Old Catholic Churches*

