

Why Did Copeland, Robison Meet With Pope Francis?

Two prominent Fort Worth-based Christian ministers led a delegation of Evangelical Christian leaders to Rome to meet privately with Pope Francis.

James and Betty Robison, co-hosts of the *Life Today* television program, and Kenneth Copeland, co-host of *Believer's Voice of Victory*, met the Roman Pontiff at the Vatican on Tuesday. The meeting lasted almost three hours and included a private luncheon with Pope Francis.

Mr. Robison told the Fort Worth Star Telegram, "This meeting was a miracle.... This is something God has done. God wants his arms around the world. And he wants Christians to put his arms around the world by working together."

Mr. Robison said he was impressed by Pope Francis' humility and courtesy to the visiting delegation of Evangelical Protestant Christian leaders.

In a written statement, Mr. Robison said he believes "the prayers of earnest Christians helped lead to the choice of Pope Francis." He described Jorge Mario Bergoglio, the Argentine Archbishop chosen as Pope, as "a humble with such love for the poor, downtrodden..."

In addition to Mrs. Betty Robison, the high-profile Protestant delegation included Kenneth Copeland, co-founder of Kenneth Copeland Ministries in Newark, TX; Reverend Geoff Tunnicliff, CEO of the World Evangelical Alliance; Rev. Brian Stiller and Rev. Thomas Schirmacher, also from the World Evangelical Alliance; and Rev. John Arnott and his wife, Carol, co-founders of Partners for Harvest ministries in Toronto, Canada. Gloria Copeland did not travel to Rome because of a previously scheduled commitment.

The ecumenical meeting in Rome was organized by Episcopal Bishop Tony Palmer. Rev. Palmer is an ordained bishop in the Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches, a break-away alliance of charismatic Anglican-Episcopal churches. Bishop Palmer is also the Director of The Ark Community, an international interdenominational Convergent Church online community, and is a member of the Roman Catholic Ecumenical Delegation for Christian Unity and Reconciliation.

Bishop Palmer developed a friendship with Pope Francis when the future Roman Pontiff was a Catholic official in Argentina. Prior to becoming a CEEC bishop, Rev. Palmer was the director of the Kenneth Copeland Ministries' office in South Africa. He is married to an Italian Roman Catholic woman. He later moved to Italy and began working to reconcile Roman Catholics and Protestants. Kenneth Copeland Ministries was one of Mr. Palmer's first financial contributors over 10 years ago in support of his ecumenical work in Italy.

Earlier this year, Pope Francis called Bishop Palmer to invite him to his residence in Vatican City. During the meeting, Bishop Palmer suggested that the Pope record a personal greeting on Mr. Palmer's iPhone to be delivered to Kenneth Copeland. Mr. Copeland showed the Papal video greeting to a conference of Protestant ministers who were meeting at Mr. Copeland's Eagle Mountain International Church near Fort Worth, Texas. In the video, Pope Francis expressed his desire for Christian unity with Protestants.

Later, James Robison telecasted the video on his daily TV program, *Life Today*. "The pope, in the video, expressed a desire for Protestants and Catholics to become what Jesus prayed for – that Christians would become family and not be divided," Mr. Robison said the response to the video was very positive, and that Pope Francis asked Bishop Palmer whether a meeting could be arranged with Evangelical Protestants seeking Christian unity in the world.

In his written statement released after the Papal meeting, Mr. Robison said he was “blessed to be part of perhaps an unprecedented moment between evangelicals and the Catholic Pope.” He described the Protestant delegation’s private meeting with the leader of the Roman Catholic Church as “an intimate circle of prayerful discussion and lunch to discuss not only seeing Jesus’ prayer answered, but that every believer would become a bold, joy-filled witnesses for Christ.

In describing the ecumenical gathering as a miracle, Mr. Robison said, “This is something God has done. God wants his arms around the world. And he wants Christians to put his arms around the world by working together.”

During the luncheon on Tuesday, Mr. Robison got a high-five from Pope Francis after the Pope and Protestant guests talked about the need for all people to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. According to the *Life Today* host, the Roman Pontiff did not know what a high-five was until Bishop Palmer explained it to him in Italian. Mr. Robison said, “The Pope made it very clear that he wanted every believer to become Spirit-filled, joy-filled witnesses.”

Mr. Robison said Pope Francis had written recently, “Too many Catholics look like they’ve been to Lent with no Easter. It’s a mistake for them to look like they’ve been to a funeral” as he challenged Catholics to witness and never try to control the Holy Spirit, but yield to Him.

Mr. Robison said he received a divine call from God to seek Christian unity while he was hospitalized several years ago with a serious staph infection following hip surgery. Robison recalled, “[I] was so weak I could not lift a cup of water to my got my full spoke to me through Isaiah 58:6-12 and I saw the importance of living in freedom, touching the suffering, the hungry, poor, and downtrodden. I recognized the promise that our prayers would be answered quickly and we would become a free-flowing stream and a well-watered garden, restoring the

foundations upon which we must build. During that time God instructed me to focus my attention on Jesus' prayer and encouraging others to begin fulfilling it through us in our day."

During that time, he said, he was impressed by a prayer of Jesus in John 17:21, pleading that all Christian believers be one. "We've tried to focus on being an answer to Jesus' prayer," Robison said. "We want to see Jesus' prayer for unity answered in our day."

Aware that the meeting with the Pope will be troublesome among staunch Protestants, Mr. Robison said he and the other visiting Evangelical Christian leaders talked about diversity and their belief that Roman Catholics and Protestants could work together without compromising their beliefs.

"The world is suffering," said Robison. "We as Christians have too much love to share without fighting one another."

Mr. Robison said he and other "respected Evangelical leaders and Spirit-filled Catholics began meeting together to pray for God's will to be done and to bring true believers together in supernatural have been commanded to love God with all of our heart and our neighbors as ourselves. The enemy has kept many Christians from loving one another as Christ loves us and have failed to recognize the importance of supernatural unity even with all of the unique diversity."

Mr. Robison, whose ministry digs water wells and supplies food for impoverished people in third-world nations, recounted that he was christened as a fatherless boy in an Episcopal Church. As an adult, he joined the Southern Baptist Church. In the 1980s, he became one of the first prominent Southern Baptist ministers to openly proclaim he had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

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