

**CHRISTIAN SERVICE**

# Dr. Steven Harmon Meets Pope Francis During Baptist-Catholic Dialogue

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## Meeting in Rome to Discuss Unity in Christ, Baptist World Alliance Presents Pope with Copy of Harmon's Book

Dr. Steven Harmon, professor of historical theology in the School of Divinity at Gardner-Webb University, serves as co-secretary for the joint commission to the international dialogue between the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) and the Catholic Church, which met Dec. 12-16, 2022, in Rome, Italy. Through these meetings, the BWA (<https://baptistworld.org/dialogues/>) seeks to “promote understanding and cooperation among Baptist bodies and with other Christian groups, in keeping with our unity in Christ.”

A highlight of the week was a private audience with Pope Francis, who was also presented a copy of Harmon's book, *Baptists, Catholics, and the Whole Church: Partners in the Pilgrimage to Unity* (<https://www.amazon.com/Baptists-Catholics-Whole-Church-Pilgrimage/dp/1565484975/>).



- ▲ Pope Francis receives a copy of Dr. Steven Harmon's book.

“We were blessed by our time with a faithful pastor who happens also to be Pope,” Harmon said. “He spoke to us at length about things on his mind and in his heart—Ukraine, ecumenical challenges and opportunities, how Baptists might help Catholics guard against the ‘dangers of clericalism,’ and again Ukraine. It was especially moving to pray the Lord’s Prayer together with Pope Francis, each of us in our own language, united by our common devotion to our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Baptist World Alliance president Tomás Mackey, who like Pope Francis is from Argentina, delivered greetings to him in Spanish and presented him the copy of Harmon’s book which is rooted in the work of the ongoing Baptist-Catholic dialogue. It was signed by all the members of the commission.

The dialogue between the Baptist group and the Catholic Church is currently wrapping up Phase III of its work, which began in 2017 and has as its theme “The Dynamic of the Gospel and the Witness of the Church.” Harmon also served as a member of the joint commission during the second phase of meetings from 2006 through 2010 and gave attention to “The Word of God in the Life of the Church.” Harmon reflected on these meetings with Pope Benedict XVI in a column published by Baptist News Global (<https://baptistnews.com/article/remembering-the-theologian-who-became-pope/>) to remember the life of Benedict, who died Dec. 31, 2022. The first phase of international Baptist-Catholic dialogue met from 1984 through 1988 and issued a “Summons to Witness to Christ in Today’s World.”

While in Rome, Harmon also delivered a lecture for the Waldensian Faculty of Theology, where many Italian Baptist candidates for the ministry receive theological education, and another lecture for the Association of Baptist Churches of Lazio in Italy.



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