

PRESS INFORMATION
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Archbishop Dr Rainer Maria Woelki

Archbishop of Berlin

**Welcome address to the Celebration of Holy Mass
in the Berlin Olympic stadium on 22 September 2011**

Holy Father,
dear Brothers in Christ,
distinguished representatives from the world of politics and public life,
esteemed sisters and brothers from the ecumenical movement,
dear sisters and brothers in the faith,

As the Archbishop of Berlin I am delighted to extend a warm welcome to you all. I would especially like to welcome those for whom no distance was too great, and who have spared no effort to profess and celebrate our faith in Christ together with the successor of the Apostle Peter.

Holy Father, by visiting Berlin you are doing a great honour to our country, the Church in Germany and the entire Archdiocese of Berlin, which stretches from the Baltic Sea to the Fläming region.

A German Pope in the German capital: this is an event of the millennium that people – not just the Church in Berlin – have long awaited. Today, we also look back with huge gratitude on the visit made by your blessed predecessor Pope John Paul II, who will always remain alive in our memories.

Holy Father, today you are coming to a city where only one in three people is a member of a Christian church. You are coming to a city where God has been forgotten and atheism has taken hold. Yet you are also coming to a city where many people are seeking and enquiring about God. Berlin also has strong Jewish and Muslim communities, with which we as a Church are in dialogue.

Thirty member churches have joined forces in the Ecumenical Council for Berlin and Brandenburg in order to try and jointly live and bear witness to the Christian faith. This means that for us, ecumenism is not about exchanging formal pleasantries. It is on the contrary a vital matter, indeed it

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remains crucial to the survival of our Christian way of life and the authenticity of our witness. So this is not a Godless city. It is even a city of martyrs. In no city did more Christians die as witnesses to Christ and His message in the 20th century than in Berlin. And as a small flock with a huge promise, Catholics in the diaspora of Berlin, Brandenburg and Western Pomerania have always remained true to their faith in Christ throughout all the difficult times, and we will continue to live that faith, bear witness to it and make it relevant in our society. Our links with the Bishop of Rome as head of the Catholic Universal Church have always been, and continue to be, a pillar of strength and support for us.

Just as we can only lead our lives as Christians through our bond with Christ the true vine, we as the Catholic Church of Berlin can only maintain our vitality through our bond with Peter's successor and with the worldwide Church that he heads in Christ's name and on His behalf.

And if almost one in five Catholics in Berlin is now of non-German origin, then this too demonstrates our bond with the Universal Church and our vibrant catholicity.

Holy Father, you have come to us as a good shepherd, as a witness of God's love, and as a messenger of the truth that is Christ Himself. What Jesus once said to Peter, we ask of you today: 'Strengthen your brothers' (and sisters); because the only future we have is the one where God is.