

## **Toward Church Fellowship**

### **Report of the Lutheran-Reformed joint commission, 1989**

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### **Introduction**

The passion for renewal of the church in the light of the gospel which brought into being the Lutheran and Reformed churches four and a half centuries ago remains alive today among us, the heirs of the Reformation. Both of our traditions are deeply engaged in the ecumenical movement, seeking to renew our faithfulness of Christian witness and service and to make the unity of Christ's church visible.

Therefore it is with dismay that we must acknowledge the estrangement that we have so often experienced since the earliest years of our churches' existence, despite our common historical and theological roots in the sixteenth-century Reformation and despite the profound agreement we see also today in our teaching of the gospel and worshipping life.

Our estrangement can be seen in:

- the mutual condemnations by Lutheran and Reformed churches in the sixteenth century;
- the continuing failure of our churches in many parts of the world to declare pulpit and alter/table fellowship. As a result the Lord's Supper, an anticipation of our unity in God's final reign, becomes a sign of brokenness. Christ's intention that we should share the sacramental meal as brothers and sisters is contravened;.
- the unwillingness of some of our churches to accept fully each other's ordained ministries, as evidenced by the practice of re-ordaining those ministers who see
- the widespread failure to pursue the opportunities that exist for joint action of witness, service and mission, for expression of our common

faith.

We recognize that such separated existence is simply no longer acceptable. We are called so to live as churches that our life is in accord with the coming reign of God of which Jesus Christ is the harbinger and first fruits. Such a vision calls us to live in unity as brothers and sisters in Christ. Today we understand more clearly and more urgently the path toward unity which the message of Christ proclaims and which the reign of God requires. The grounds for our present clarity and sense of urgency can be noted:

- From our Reformation heritage, we have a common concern to bear witness to the unconditional character of the free gift of grace; God accepts us by grace alone. If we are to be faithful to this witness, we must accept one another as freely and unconditionally as God in Christ accepts us. God does not accept us because we offer Lutheran or Reformed worship. There is only one offering acceptable to God, that which has been provided for us by God in Christ. We have nothing to offer except in him. Continued estrangement in the life of word and sacrament, witness and service among those who see that their teaching of the gospel is substantially in unity is a denial of the very meaning of grace. In gratitude for Christ's free offer to us of reconciliation in his body, we believe that we must exhibit a reconciled style of life in our existence as churches.
- In the present world the call to mission urgently requires our fuller fellowship. To live otherwise than as reconciled sisters and brothers weakens our witness and our capacity to act effectively in mission. Already significant steps have been taken in several countries by our churches to unite more closely in view of the mission opportunities presented. Around the globe we sense this urgency whether the mission context is secularized indifference and opposition to relation, the vital presence of other religions, or great and desperate social need and suffering. We shall be found inadequate to our mission if we fail to respond together to today's pressing opportunities for witness.
- The persistent and impressive outcome of dialogues between our churches in the past twenty years has been the conclusion that no insuperable barrier to fuller fellowship exists. The sixteenth-century condemnations have been declared no longer applicable by many Lutheran and Reformed churches today. Remaining theological differences have been recognized as important, but not church-dividing. Full pulpit and altar/table fellowship or organic union already shapes the churchly life of several millions of our Lutheran and Reformed church members today.

We interpret these developments and deepened insights as urgings of God, and they can be obeyed only by resolute and energetic efforts to make our unity more visible and more deeply experienced. Conventional or lukewarm efforts at rapprochement will not suffice. We must move actively through the doors which God is opening for us today, seizing the opportunities that God places before us.

We rejoice in the progress of some of our churches toward fuller fellowship and common mission. We feel ourselves privileged on the one hand, to join and affirm their witness; and we seek on the other hand, to embolden those of our churches that find the way toward unity more difficult.

We recognize that Lutheran-Reformed unity will be pursued under the larger obedience to seek unity with all of our Christian sisters and brothers. Our churches are in dialogue and inter-communion with other partner churches, and we believe that our calling to unity as co-heirs of the

Reformation is consonant with the larger ecumenical movement of which we are a part. In fact, we believe that only as we take each step of obedience immediately visible to us will we be able to find our way through the complexities which lie ahead on the path to the full unity of the church.

In this report our goal is to make clear the distinctive nature of Lutheran-Reformed unity, to explore the diversities we experience which sometimes enrich and sometimes hinder our life together, and to make recommendations for full church fellowship among all our churches. We intend these recommendations to be compatible with the position each of us has taken with other partners in dialogue.

Our common concern in seeking unity in our two communions is to image that unity in diversity which is in God, that our churches might be a sign and witness to the world of that unity and communion which God wills for all.

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## **I. Our common faith**

We Lutheran and Reformed churches throughout the world profess that we are one in Jesus Christ, with a common heritage in the Reformation of the 16th century. Within the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, by the light of the gospel and the creeds of the undivided church, with the saints of all ages, we believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The world and the human family owe their existence to the grace of this triune God who created us in the divine image. We acknowledge that, despite our misuse of the creation and our disregard of human communion, the future of the world and our destiny as human beings are defined by the grace which surpasses all understanding and merit. God's purposes have been revealed and lived out as gracious promise in Jesus Christ our Lord. We believe that the Holy Spirit will empower the fulfilment of this promise in the coming kingdom of God of which the risen Christ is the first fruits.

Jesus Christ is the church's one foundation. He lived a life of healing and teaching, was crucified and rose again for us, reveals himself in the Holy Scriptures and is confessed in the creeds of the church. Together we share the evangelical concern of the Reformation to proclaim the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for us as the gospel, the centre of the Scriptures.

Our salvation is complete in Christ who has fulfilled the promises and the law for us, reconciled us to God and one another and made us one in his one body. Christ now calls us by the Holy Spirit, in union with himself, to participate in his communion with the Father, his intercessions for the world, his mission from the Father to the world, and his continuing ministry of service to the needs of all humanity.

We are justified by the grace of God and not by our own works, and are therefore called to communion with God and one another, not on the basis of our own achievement but on the strength of the divine gift. God accepts us into his fellowship, not because we are acceptable in terms of his norms of acceptance - God's law - but because in Christ by grace God has broken down the barriers which separate us from God. So we are called to accept one another in costly discipleship as freely and unconditionally as God in Christ has accepted us.

We live by faith alone, receiving God's forgiveness in daily repentance and the gift of new life in Christ, in the hope of the fulfilment of God's purposes for all creation in his kingdom.

Jesus Christ alone is the word of God. Christ gives himself to us to be known and loved in the prophetic and apostolic witness of the Old and New Testaments. Christ comes to us through the Holy Spirit in all ages in the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments, baptism and Lord's Supper.

In worship, in the richness and variety of our different traditions, we participate by the Spirit in the worship and intercessions of Christ who is the only priest in the church, by whose offering alone we are accepted, and through whom as members of one body we have access to the Father by the one Spirit. The proclamation of the gospel, together with baptism, eucharist and ministry are Christ's gifts to his one church. By these gifts through the Spirit Christ makes us participants of his one baptism, nourishes us at his table as members of his one body, and shares with us his ministry of reconciliation. These gifts are essential to our identity as the Christian church, for its continuity and constant renewal.

There is no area in life, indeed in all creation which does not belong to Jesus Christ who sends us into all the world to be a sign of God's kingdom to preach and live the gospel of reconciliation in a common concern for justice, freedom, peace and care for the creation.

Finally as Lutheran and Reformed churches we affirm that full agreement in the right teaching/preaching of the gospel and the right administration of the sacraments is necessary and sufficient for the true unity of the church.

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## **II: On the way to church fellowship**

Though some forms of Lutheran-Reformed church fellowship have existed since the 19th century, it is in recent decades that the basic agreement in our common faith has been discovered which motivates a new concern for the unity of the church and has furthered full communion among our two branches of the Reformation heritage. In some parts of the world Lutheran and Reformed churches exist side by side. In other parts one or the other confessional tradition is in the majority with the other as distinct minority. In still other parts only one partner is to be found. The history which has produced these varying situations and the attitudes they engender is not an insignificant factor on the way to church fellowship.

The present state of Lutheran-Reformed relations cannot, therefore, be described in a uniform manner. We must content ourselves with selected situational reports.

### **Concord at Leuenberg and church fellowship**

After long negotiations representatives of the Lutheran, Reformed and Union churches in Europe have formulated their common mind in the Leuenberg Agreement (1973) and proposed that on this basis these churches should declare themselves to be in full communion with one another. The Agreement has a very simple structure. It begins with the change in conditions since the Reformation, and then describes the common understanding of the gospel: God justifies in Jesus Christ all who

believe, and graciously gives himself through the Holy Spirit in the proclamation of the word and the celebration of the sacraments. Next the documents examines the doctrinal condemnations pronounced in the course of history and shows that they no longer apply to the partners in dialogue today. The themes addressed here are: the Lord's Supper, Christology and predestination. In a final section the churches declare:

- that they are one in their understanding of the gospel;
- that the condemnations expressed in the old confessional documents no longer apply to the contemporary doctrinal positions of the assenting churches;
- that they offer each other pulpit and table fellowship; this includes the mutual recognition of ordained ministries and the freedom to provide for inter-celebration of Holy Communion.

Now this fellowship has to be realized and strengthened in the life of the churches and congregations. The common understanding of the gospel on which church fellowship is based must be further deepened, tested in the light of the witness of Holy Scripture and its relevance continually shown on the contemporary scene. For this reason the Leuenberg churches are engaged in continuing theological dialogue and in a search for common witness and service in the world. Because they are done *within* a communion, these common efforts are arguably the most significant result of the Agreement.

The Leuenberg Agreement poses many questions about fellowship between the Lutheran and Reformed churches throughout the world. In the first place, of course, it must be seen as a positive advance: the Leuenberg discussions must be counted among the few bilateral dialogues which have produced a declaration of church fellowship. The European churches thereby took a step which no Lutheran or Reformed church in any other part of the world can simply ignore.

The Leuenberg Agreement, however, also poses difficult questions to the subscribing churches. In some places the declaration of church fellowship has had hardly any consequences in the life of local congregations, even after fifteen years. Theological agreement in itself is not enough; it must be translated into concrete situations, with its liturgical, spiritual, practical or organizational consequences. At the moment the Lutheran and Reformed churches in Europe find themselves on this difficult path from the mere declaration to the realization of church fellowship. Seventy-six European churches and four Latin American churches have signed the Agreement. Some of these include it in their constitutions. In the Netherlands, on the basis of the Leuenberg Agreement, the minority Lutheran Church has joined the two majority Reformed churches in a process toward church union.

### **Union churches**

In some places Reformed and Lutheran churches have come together in union churches. The oldest examples are churches in the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany. They reflect historical developments in Germany at the beginning of the 19th century and can only be properly understood against that political background. The formation of these churches, it should be noted, was a major factor in the emigration of Lutherans to North America and elsewhere and triggered in Germany a movement toward greater Lutheran self-consciousness.

Typical of the constitutions of these German union churches is their

reference to both Lutheran and Reformed confessions. Ordination to the ministry takes place on the basis of either confession according to the wish of the ordinand. In recent times this union model has scarcely found acceptance anywhere. A more homogeneous European model is the Church of Czech Brethren when both traditions are embraced. Still another model is found in Austria where Reformed and Lutheran congregations have an organizational union, but retain their separate confessional character.

Another type of church union took place in Ethiopia in 1973. During the period of mission preceding the Italian occupation, virtually total parity existed between "evangelical" groups which remained uninfluenced by particular confessional issues. This sense of unity increased during the occupation when missionaries left the country. After the occupation, efforts to achieve church unity were thwarted by the confessional sensitivities of the returned missionaries. The result was the formation of two churches: Bethel (Presbyterian) and Mekane Yesus (Lutheran). In 1973 Bethel became two synods among the autonomous Lutheran synods of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. Though Lutheran and Reformed congregations retain their distinctive flavours, they are one church.

### **Churches in dialogue**

A third group of Lutheran and Reformed churches is striving, through their common understanding of the gospel, toward future church fellowship. The two examples offered here indicate how geography and history are influential factors. They may stand for other similar situations.

*Indonesia* :The Protestant churches in Indonesia in general express not a confessional but an ethnic or regional character in their respective names. This is the result of the former colonial government policy to allow only one missionary society to work among people of one ethnic community. Because of this the self-understanding of the Indonesian churches in general has been as much ethnic or regional as confessional. It has also been determined, however, by the religious pluralism of the nation where in addition to Christianity (officially sub-divided as Catholic and Protestant religions), Islam (the majority religion), Buddhism and Hinduism are recognized religions.

In 1950 a Council of Churches was established to express and to further a movement toward one church. But a more decisive step occurred in 1984 with the establishment of the Communion of Churches based on a consensus documented in "Five Documents on Unity." The documents are:

1. guidelines on the common mission of the churches;
2. common apprehension of our universal Christian faith in Indonesia;
3. mutual recognition and acceptance of all member churches;
4. basic (church) order of the Communion of Churches;
5. self-reliance in theology, forces and funds.

The guidelines on common mission begin with the basic statement that each church is a manifestation of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, and as such is called upon in every place and throughout all ages:

- to proclaim the Good News to the whole creation (Mark 16.5);
- to manifest the unity of the body of Christ with a variety of gifts, but in the same Spirit (1. Cor 12.4);
- to render service in love to everybody and to implement justice for all (Mk 10.45; Lk 4.18, 10.25-37; Jn 15.16).

Based on that statement, the guidelines contain chapters on unity, on witness and proclamation, on participation and service in development, on relations and cooperation with the government, on relations with other communities, on ecumenical relations and on the implementation of the guidelines. In the section on mutual recognition and acceptance pulpit and table/altar fellowship is also officially acknowledged.

The starting point for the Communion of Churches was the need for a common mission in Indonesia. In part it parallels government efforts to form a cohesive nation from the variety of resident ethnic groups. The churches together face the challenge of being obedient to the missionary command in a religiously pluralistic society while still affirming the building of a cohesive society in the nation. The Communion of Churches is therefore engaged in an open-ended and ongoing process.

For Reformed and Lutheran churches in particular these developments have led to full communion, including the mutual recognition of ordained ministries. Through common programmes of education both for lay people and clergy, attempts are made to resolve such remaining differences as marriage discipline and other ethical-political issues.

*United States of America:* The first Lutheran-Reformed dialogue in the United States resulted in the document *Marburg Revisited* (1966).<sup>1</sup> Based on substantial theological research, this dialogue saw "no insuperable obstacles to pulpit and altar fellowship" and recommended to the North American bodies "that they encourage their constituent churches to enter into discussions looking forward to inter-communion and the fuller recognition of one another's ministries" (p. 52). No official decision to do so was taken by any of the participating churches which were members of the Caribbean and North American Area Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and of the USA National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation (p. 54: actions were taken, but not to enter discussions...). It should be noted, however, that "Marburg conversations" took place against the background of de facto church fellowship on several levels, and that these conditions still prevail.

A second round of conversations (1972-1974) was less productive. The participants studied the newly published Leuenberg Agreement (see above) and concluded that its approach, being so focused on classical sixteenth-century issues, was inappropriate to the very different American scene. They "observed that while the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church in America and the Reformed Churches adhere to the *doctrine* of the Lord's Supper expressed in their respective Confessions of faith, in *practice* they are saying that the confessional differences concerning the *mode* of Christ's presence ought not to be regarded as obstacles to pulpit and altar fellowship" (pp. 57f.). Expressing some frustration at their "inability to make theological headway" the participants recommended an approach to each other "at every level of life, through a fresh hearing of the gospel ..., as well as in terms of their confessional and ecclesiastical traditions." Any resultant declarations of altar fellowship were to be handled on "a church body to church body basis" (p. 58).

In the recent third round of dialogue (1981-1983), participants focused on the central issues of justification, the Lord's Supper and ministry. The latter had not been discussed previously in American dialogues. The group built on the previous theological work which in its judgement had prepared a sound foundation of agreement between the Reformed and Lutherans - an agreement so compelling that it mandated urgent action. There was

agreement that the old condemnations no longer applied to the current partners, but the group felt strongly that a declaration of fellowship would be, as such, insufficient. What was needed was new life in common worship, study and mission.

Recommendations sent to the churches in *An Invitation to Action* (1984) urged them to take action providing for:

- mutual recognition as churches;
- mutual recognition of their ordained ministries which are responsible for preaching and the sacraments;
- mutual recognition of their churches' celebrations of the Lord's Supper "as a means of grace in which Christ grants communion with himself, assures us of the forgiveness of sins, and pledges life eternal;"
- establishment of a process of reception of the report which would engage Lutherans and Reformed people in common study, worship (both joint celebrations of Holy Communion and the preaching and presiding of ministers of one tradition in congregations of the other are mentioned) and mission at every judicatory level, and which would refer unresolved theological issues to a subsequent dialogue in the context of the new relationship (pp. 4-6).

Participants from the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod submitted a minority report, declining to recommend full communion. In 1984 the Cumberland Presbyterian Church approved *An Invitation to Action* for study in the church but has not participated in further dialogue. In 1986 representatives of the Lutheran Church in America, the American Lutheran Church, the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, the Reformed Church in America, and the Presbyterian Church (USA), all of whose national assemblies were to meet the same summer, negotiated a common statement based on *An Invitation to Action* text, slightly modified with reference to the Lord's Supper: "...a means of grace in which Christ, truly present in the Sacrament, is given and received, forgiveness of sin is declared and experienced, and a foretaste of life eternal is granted." Through a related amendment, provision was made for "occasional joint services of the Lord's Supper" and for sharing of pastors "where appropriate and desirable, and in accordance with the disciplines of our several churches." All those churches except the Lutheran Church in America approved this common text. The Lutheran Church in America modified the recommendations still further, omitting recognition of the Lord's Supper but encouraging communion with members of the Reformed Church in America and the Presbyterian Church (USA) under present church disciplines, retaining provision for occasional joint services of the Lord's Supper "where appropriate and desirable, and in accord with the disciplines of our several churches," looking forward to establishment of "full communion" with those Reformed churches, and calling for further discussion of the Lord's Supper, Christology, and predestination.

The formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (1988) from the AELC, ALC and LCA created a new structure for Lutheran-Reformed relations in the United States. Currently discussions are being held between its representatives and those of the United Church of Christ, the Reformed Church in America and the Presbyterian Church (USA) to determine the extent and character of work required before fellowship between the two traditions can be declared.

### **Other patterns of relationship**



Many levels of Lutheran-Reformed relations exist which stop short of involving the churches themselves in dialogue. Yet these can be important stepping stones to unity. Examples are joint theological faculties or common social-service institutions. Through such cooperative efforts, churches which live side by side without much concern for or knowledge of each other may find ways of overcoming mistrust or difficult past histories so as to recognize ever more fully their baptismal bond of unity in Christ.

Some Reformed and Lutheran churches are geographically separate from each other and have few immediate possibilities to practise fellowship. That should not, however, mean that this document is irrelevant to them. For such separated churches the world Lutheran and Reformed bodies have a special function. They serve as instruments of contact worldwide, thus connecting all their member churches with issues of church fellowship, even churches far distant from those of the ecumenical partner.

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## Note

1. The documents referred to below are collected in *An Invitation to Action* (Philadelphia, 1984). Quotations are cited from that book.

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## III: Unity in diversity

Following the historical confessions, as Lutheran and Reformed churches we affirm that agreement in the right preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments in accordance with God's word is necessary and sufficient for the true unity of the church (cf. para. 26 above).

This understanding of the unity of the church makes clear that, rather than unity and diversity being opposites, diversity is part of the richness of our unity in Christ. One needs however to make a distinction where diversity is concerned. A difference which compromises full agreement in the right preaching of the gospel and the right administration of the sacraments makes church fellowship impossible and thus becomes a church-dividing difference, and an instance of illegitimate diversity.

The divisive nature of such differences must be surmounted if unity is to be achieved. When full agreement in word and sacrament is reached and no longer affected by the remaining differences, these differences lose their church-dividing character and become legitimate parts of the life of our churches. These differences are borne by the deeper agreement in word and sacrament and express our unity in diversity.

In the 16th century there was a sad collapse of fellowship between the churches. The differences had become church-dividing. Accordingly, the confessions of that period enshrine mutual condemnations. These condemnations dealt with the understanding of the Lord's Supper, which was closely linked to Christological issues and the doctrine of double predestination. In the past 40 years representatives of our two churches have examined these difficult issues in great depth in many national and international dialogues. Above all there were studies carried out in the Netherlands, France and West Germany, which made possible the dialogue in Europe, and also the Leuenberg Agreement, as well as the studies made in Indonesia and the USA (see paras. 27-50) above). The result was a far-reaching consensus on all these church-dividing issues.

## **Word and sacrament**

The fundamental agreement of the Lutheran and Reformed traditions concerning word and sacrament has been demonstrated in historical and theological studies produced in the United States and Europe, e.g. *Marburg Revisited* (1966), *Arnoldshainer Thesen* (1960), *Auf dem Weg* (1967) and *Auf dem Weg II* (1971). These studies have not examined areas of traditional condemnations, but have restated the fundamental consensus in the gospel of justification by faith expressed in a common understanding of word, baptism and eucharist.

This gospel is the good news that for us and for our salvation God's Son became human in Jesus the Christ, was crucified and raised from the dead. By his life, death and resurrection he took upon himself God's judgement on human sin and proved God's love for sinners, reconciling the entire world to God.

For Christ's sake we sinners have been reconciled to God, not because we earned God's acceptance but by an act of God's sheer mercy. The Holy Spirit calls and enables us to repent of our sin and accept God's gracious offer. Those trusting in this gospel, believing in Christ as Saviour and Lord, are justified in God's sight.

Both the Lutheran and Reformed traditions confess this gospel in the language of justification by grace through faith alone (p.9, cf. pp.67f.).

Baptism is administered in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit with water. In baptism, Jesus Christ irrevocably receives man, fallen prey to sin and death, into his fellowship of salvation so that he may become a new creature. In the power of his Holy Spirit, he calls him into his community and to a new life of faith, to daily repentance, and to discipleship (p. 68).

In the Lord's Supper the risen Christ imparts himself in his body and blood, given up for all, through his word of promise with bread and wine. He thereby grants us forgiveness of sins, and sets us free for a new life of faith. He enables us to experience anew that we are members of his body. He strengthens us for service to all men.

When we celebrate the Lord's Supper we proclaim the death of Christ through which God has reconciled the world with himself. We proclaim the presence of the risen Lord in our midst. Rejoicing that the Lord has come to us, we await his future coming in glory (p. 68). *Leuenberg Agreement*

These strong declarations of our common understanding of word and sacrament, based on prior studies, are sufficient testimony to justify our conviction that the agreement between the two traditions is not merely grounded in concurrence on certain points concerning word and sacrament, but represents an agreement in the gospel of Jesus Christ itself. While differences remain, on the basis of this consensus in the gospel nothing now stands in the way of church fellowship. In the light of this full agreement the condemnations previously expressed are no longer applicable to our partner churches.

## **Church and ministry**

Our agreement in word and sacrament implies a necessary consequence: accord in our view of the fundamental character of the church. The church

is the community of believers created by Jesus Christ through the gospel rightly preached and the sacraments rightly administered.

While concurring in this basic understanding of the church, we recognize that we have exhibited a number of varying ecclesiological practices as evidenced in the various understandings of polity, worship and mission. One may observe them in churches of the Lutheran and Reformed traditions.

Such differences, however, are appropriate expressions of our diversity and do not compromise our fundamental agreement in the gospel.

Is that true, however, concerning ministry? One of the points of discussion and concern arising between our two confessional traditions has been in this area. Recently, discussions of ministry as understood by Lutherans and Reformed have been undertaken. A number of foundational points of agreement has been identified:

- all ministry in the church derives from and expresses the ministry of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit;
- the ministry is given to the whole church, and its central mission is to preach the gospel to all the world;
- by baptism all believers are called to be priests and participate in the ministry of Jesus Christ;
- within the priesthood of all believers God has given a particular ministry of word and sacrament conferred on men and women by ordination which is expressed in the public preaching of the gospel, the administration of the sacraments and pastoral service; the priesthood of all believers cannot exist apart from the ministry of word and sacrament, but neither can there be a ministry of word and sacrament apart from the priesthood of all believers;
- ministry cannot exist without form, order, structure, office and oversight;
- all ministry participates in the ministry of the apostolic faith;
- ministry is a gift of God but not one form or structure is definitely established by the biblical testimony.

These points of fundamental agreement are expressed in a variety of ways in the churches of our traditions. Difference in emphasis has led to practices which may appear to be contradictory. For example, Lutherans have traditionally understood oversight (*episcopé*) in terms of a distinct office while the Reformed churches have invested this responsibility in an ecclesiastical body usually called presbytery or classis. Recent studies have demonstrated that such differences pertain both to form and structure and to legitimate differences in theological interpretation, but do not challenge our common understanding of the gospel.

This last observation should show us that despite the necessary distinction, no false separation should be made between the church constituting elements (word and sacrament) and the questions of structure and organization. It is imperative for the realization of church fellowship that in all areas we make sure that the existing church structures and traditions in no way jeopardize the consensus on word and sacrament nor obscure our unity in Christ. This can happen when these structures directly oppose the consensus or when human organization of the church is either over- or underestimated. Therefore constant vigilance is necessary in all local situations. It is important to continue theological study of these ecclesiological issues so that the legitimate diversity we have does not once more become divisive. In its present form the whole church has the duty so to structure its ministry, both corporate and personal, that the

transmission of the gospel of reconciliation and love may become known throughout the entire world.

### **Witness and service in this world**

Our common understanding of the gospel liberates and binds the churches to common service and common witness in the world. Our traditions emphasize the new obedience of faith active in love and the inseparability of justification and sanctification. The struggle for justice, human rights, peace and the care of creation demands of the church acceptance of a common responsibility.

In the 16th century this teaching was expressed by Lutherans in terms of two kingdoms and by Reformed in terms of Christ's sovereignty. Both of these forms of expression, however, were misunderstood when interpreted apart from the historical context in which they were formulated.

In today's church which is called to witness to Christ in a large variety of situations, 16th century formulations may not be directly applicable. What they were meant to affirm, however, is still utterly relevant. As Christians we are called to proclaim and live the love of God to humanity in its need, to remove the causes of human suffering, to defend justice and peace in the community and in the whole of creation. Failure to take up this duty, tolerance of injustice and all forms of suppression, become counter-witnesses which contradict our faith. This is a particular challenge for our churches today.

On ethical issues, too, there is legitimate diversity between churches, communities and individual Christians. The consensus in word and sacrament which binds us together can find expression in various ways both politically and socially. But here too diversity can become illegitimate; there are certain ethical beliefs which cease to express the agreement reached on the understanding of the gospel. This obstructs the path leading to the common table of the Lord and thereby breaks church fellowship, as illustrated by the actions of the Lutheran World Federation and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches suspending the rights of membership of those churches defending and practising apartheid. It is therefore important that, both within our churches and communities, as well as between our churches, we engage in a common search for common witness and service where the important issues of our day are concerned (peace, justice, race, gender, bio-ethics, etc.). Our church fellowship is a community which knows and accepts variety. But that does not imply undifferentiated acceptance of any or all attitudes or opinions.

### **Language, ethnicity and sectarianism**

The distinctiveness of each tradition cannot be measured through doctrine alone. It is important to note that factors such as politics, social order, economics, and ethos which have to a degree shaped the life and thought of the church, have themselves been shaped by theological assumptions, and that even today they may be nurtured by hidden religious roots. The tenacity with which we cling to our Lutheran and Reformed distinctiveness may well be more a matter of self-interest, nationalism or cultural chauvinism than faithfulness to the gospel.

Language itself, while a gift from God, is an imperfect vehicle for the communication of our understanding of the gospel and its implications. The meanings of words shift over the centuries, and the same terms used in one culture may have different connotations in another. Almost every word

we use in church and theology has at least one translation behind it, and theologians today are increasingly aware of the complexity of the metaphorical language used in our discourse concerning God. Language pertaining to faith, including that of the Bible itself, has been used to justify injustice and self-interest. We believe that the imperfection and misuse of language are in part responsible for our historic divisions and regret that we have not in the past duly recognized this. At the same time, as a gift of God language is an instrument of the Holy Spirit. Lutheran and Reformed Christians recognize in the words of their respective confessions the biblical truth which draws us together in the gospel. We affirm that Jesus Christ alone is the Word and that the confessions of the Lutheran and Reformed traditions point to him and him alone.

Ethnic and racial factors have also played a role in dividing our traditions. While race and ethnicity may draw people together and contribute to their sense of identity, they have also created suspicion in our churches and become instrumental in perpetuating divisions. Our common confession of the gospel challenges any separation based on race, gender, ethnicity or class. We affirm that the church's one foundation is Christ (cf. para. 19 above); that we are justified not by who or what we are in the world, but by God's grace in Christ (cf. para. 21 above); and that our whole life belongs to him alone (cf. para. 25 above). Thus our common confession calls in question all doctrines of racial superiority or ethnic domination. At the same time, we recognize that racial and ethnic identity are gifts of the Lord and rejoice in God's creation with its wonderful variety of races, peoples and nations. Moreover ethnicity may become a means through which the gospel is given witness, and through which culture serves Christ.

Unlike ethnicity which sometimes unites, sectarianism always divides. We become sectarian when we allow formulations made to express the gospel to stand as a barrier dividing us from those who formulate differently. Our common affirmation testifies that the wall separating us from the Father has been broken by Jesus, and therefore the walls dividing us from one another must also be destroyed (cf. para. 21 above). We therefore urge Lutheran and Reformed Christians throughout the world not only to pray that the Spirit guide them to recognize Christ and the gospel in one another's confessions, but also to search their hearts to determine if confessions and doctrines intended for reconciliation have degenerated into systems fortifying positions of power and privilege. While we affirm the rich diversity of our churches, we deplore the sectarian use of Scripture and confession to justify division. In Christ we are reconciled and called to be agents of reconciliation.

Our one Lord, by the gift of his one Spirit, can use our diversities to exercise Christ's ministry of reconciliation, build up Christ's one body, and use the church as a witness to all nations to bring to fulfilment God's purposes for all creation in the kingdom of God.

We believe that unity, diversity and harmony are all God's gifts to the church. Therefore diversity must not obscure unity, nor concern for unity deny diversity. Together we serve one Lord, through whom alone we have access by the one Spirit to the Father.

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#### **IV. Recommendations**

In the light of the discovery that nothing stands in the way of church fellowship, we urge Lutheran and Reformed churches throughout the world who are members of the Lutheran World Federation and the World Alliance

of Reformed Churches to declare full communion with one another. By this we mean:

- Acknowledging that the condemnations pronounced upon one another in former times are no longer to be regarded as applicable in today's situation.
- Establishing full pulpit and altar/table fellowship, with the necessary mutual recognition of ministers ordained for word and sacrament.
- Committing themselves to growth in unity through new steps in church life and mission together.

We have come to this recommendation on the basis of our belief that both Lutheran and Reformed churches agree on those matters which are necessary and sufficient for the true unity of the church: the right preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments in accordance with the word of God. Those differences in preaching and sacrament which remain among us should no longer be regarded as church-dividing.

We rejoice that some Lutheran and Reformed churches have already declared church fellowship with churches of the other tradition. Among these are the Lutheran and Reformed churches which have signed the Leuenberg Agreement (1973), the Lutheran and Reformed churches of Indonesia, and the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. Representatives of these churches participating in our dialogue witnessed to the meaning of this new relationship for their churches. We encourage other churches to confirm for themselves the reality of their unity in Christ through such a declaration of full communion.

We call upon all Lutheran and Reformed churches to make their unity more real and visible to their members and to the world. Whether a church is taking its first steps of rapprochement or has already declared church fellowship with the other tradition, continuing growth in unity will be a faithful response to Christ's will for unity.

As intentional continuing steps in realizing our unity, we encourage the churches:

- To take the initiative in reaching out to the other in any area where churches of both traditions are to be found.
- To engage in ongoing theological work and reflection together on the central doctrines of our faith, on the life of worship and our liturgical traditions, and on church structures, learning from one another, and familiarizing ourselves with the range of Lutheran-Reformed dialogue around the world.
- To develop a common witness and service to the world, involving both evangelism and practical response to the challenges of contemporary society.
- To incorporate learning about the fellowship between our churches into our total educational programme: theological education for the ministry, continuing education for pastors, lay education for children and adults. This should include re-examining old stereotypes of one another. It will become natural for such education to be increasingly done together.
- To work out whatever new common organizational structures may be necessary for the sake of witness to the new relationship.
- To carry out the actions mentioned above in ways that are consonant with our commitments to other churches in the larger ecumenical movement.

We propose that at every level of church life, member churches of the two traditions explore together what is needed in that particular situation for further growth in unity. Situations around the world are so diverse that new forms and styles of life together must be tailored to each context.

- In the local churches, emphasis must be placed on devising useful ways to encounter personally members of churches of the other tradition. The suggestions in the preceding list all lend themselves to local churches. But on special occasions common celebrations of worship may be developed. In some places, for example, an annual Sunday of ecumenical sharing might become a significant tradition, with exchanges of pastors and worshipers among the congregations.
- At the regional or national level, these suggestions would take different forms but remain equally important. Emphasis here might be placed on developing structures for regular exchange among the churches and developing common witness.
- At the international level, we call upon the Lutheran World Federation and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches to collaborate whenever possible in their work, studying what appropriate conclusions should be drawn for their life from the new relationship existing between Lutheran and Reformed member churches. We urge particularly that efforts be made in every ecumenical dialogue of either tradition to explore fully the implications for that dialogue of what has been said to other dialogue partners by both Lutheran and Reformed churches. In this way the churches can intentionally evaluate the consistency and compatibility of various relationships of ecumenical dialogue.

We request all Lutheran and Reformed churches to place this report on their agenda for study and to transmit their responses to the recommendations to the Lutheran World Federation or the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

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## **Appendix I**

### **Lutheran-Reformed Joint Commission**

#### **Lutheran Members**

The Rt Rev. Dr Gyula Nagy, Hungary (co-chair)

The Rev. Debela Birri, Ethiopia

Prof. Dr Philip Hefner, USA

Prof. Dr Ingetraut Ludolph<sup>2</sup>, FRG

The Rt Rev. Dr Soritua Nababan<sup>3</sup>, Indonesia

The Rev. Dr Björn Sandvik, Norway

The Rev. Dr Adelbert A. Sitompul<sup>3</sup>, Indonesia

#### **Reformed Members**

Prof. James B. Torrance, Scotland (co-chair)

Dr J.C. Adonis, South Africa<sup>1</sup>

The Rev. Dr Karel Blei, The Netherlands

Prof. Dr Jane D. Douglass, USA

Prof. Dr Paul R. Fries, USA

The Rev. Dr Nico Radjawane, Indonesia

#### **Lutheran Consultant**

Prof. Dr André Birmelé, France

### **Reformed Consultant**

Prof. Dr Lukas Vischer, Switzerland

### **LWF Staff**

The Rev. Dr Eugene L. Brand  
Ms Irmhild Reichen Young

### **Warc Staff**

Prof. Dr Alan P. F. Sell<sup>4</sup>  
Ms Regina Rueger

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### **Notes**

1. Unable to attend the four meetings of the Joint Commission.

2. "Since the common witness and service of various confessions presuppose that in inter-confessional documents respective identities are maintained, which can only take place if actual existing dogmatic differences have been sufficiently clarified, and moreover since in this paper despite my objection historical realities of the past and the present have not been quite correctly described, it is therefore not possible for me to concur."

Ingetraut Ludolphy, Budapest, 1 December 1988

3. Dr Nabadan served on the Joint Commission from 1985-1986. He was succeeded by Dr Sitompul.

4. Dr Sell left the staff of Warc at the end of 1987.

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## **Appendix 2**

### **Introduction to the Leuenberg Agreement**

The final text of the Leuenberg Agreement was adopted on March 16, 1973 at Leuenberg near Basel. It identifies itself a "consensus ... in their understanding of the gospel" among the signatories which then declare and establish "church fellowship."

This Agreement which has already been adopted by over 80 churches in Europe and Latin America is the result of a long process begun in the 1950s. Extensive conversations were held on the Lord's Supper, baptism, the word of God, law and the creeds both in various European countries and on a trans-European level. Regarding the history of relationships between Lutheran and Reformed churches while preparing the Agreement see:

Marc Lienhard: Lutherisch-reformierte Kirchengemeinschaft heute. ökumenische Perspektiven 2, 2. Auflage, Frankfurt 1973.

The preparatory papers and theological results which form the background of the Agreement, are published in:

- Auf dem Weg I. Lutherisch-reformierte Kirchengemeinschaft. Polis 33. Zürich 1967.
- Auf dem Weg II. Gemeinschaft der reformatorischen Kirchen. Polis



41. Zürich 1971.
- E. Schieffer: Von Schauenburg nach Leuenberg. Entstehung und Bedeutung der Konkordie reformatorischer Kirchen in Europa. Paderborn 1983.

Participation in this new fellowship cannot remain limited to the signing of an Agreement. The process which started must be continued and thus the Agreement itself already speaks of the "realization of church fellowship" which has taken place since 1973 and which must follow the "declaration". Various topics are mentioned by the Agreement in order to strengthen and deepen the fellowship (paragraphs 35ff.). Particularly the common theological studies have been further developed since 1973. These studies led to a series of common texts on "Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms and the Sovereignty of Jesus Christ", "Ministry - Ministries - Service - Ordination", "Baptism" and "The Relationship of Leuenberg to the Worldwide Ecumenical Movement" adopted by assemblies of those churches which have signed the Agreement during the last 15 years.

With regard to the Assembly in Sigtuna (1976):

Marc Lienhard (ed.), Zeugnis und Dienst reformatorischer Kirchen im Europa der Gegenwart, Ökumenische Perspektiven 8, Frankfurt 1977.

With regard to the Assembly in Driebergen (1981):

André Birmelé (ed.), Konkordie und Kirchengemeinschaft reformatorischer Kirchen im Europa der Gegenwart. Ökumenische Perspektiven 10. Frankfurt 1982.

With regard to the Assembly in Strasbourg (1987):

André Birmelé (ed.), Konkordie und Oikumene. Die Leuenberger Kirchengemeinschaft in der gegenwärtigen ökumenischen Situation. Frankfurt 1988.

The Strasbourg Assembly determined the following themes for the coming years: "Understanding of the Church" and "Liberty". The first theme is intended to continue the classical theological dialogue between the churches. The second is to deepen common witness and service.

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## **Appendix 3**

### **Leuenberg agreement<sup>1</sup>**

An Agreement, or Statement of Concord, between the Reformation churches of Europe was adopted by the Preparatory Assembly in completed form on March 16, 1973, in the Swiss conference centre of Leuenberg. Intended to foster fellowship between the "Lutheran and Reformed churches in Europe along with the Union churches that grew out of them, and the related pre-Reformation churches, the Waldensian church and the Church of the Czech Brethren" in terms of mutual recognition, the Leuenberg Agreement, as it has come to be called, has been transmitted to all involved European churches as well as to churches in other parts of the world.

Over the signatures of Dr André Appel (Lutheran World Federation), Dr Edmond Perret (World Alliance of Reformed Churches), and Dr Lukas Vischer (Faith and Order Secretariat, World Council of Churches), a covering letter (March 30, 1973) was sent to the churches participating in the Preparatory Assembly. Strongly supporting the request of the two Assembly chairmen, Professor Max Geiger (Reformed) and Professor Marc

Lienhard (Lutheran), the three staff officials expressed the conviction that "all further work must be undertaken in the closest possible contact with the churches themselves."

That the Leuenberg Agreement carries its message to churches in Asia, Africa, Australasia, and the Americas is readily evident. *Lutheran World* here brings two documents: under A. "To the Churches Participating in the Drafting of the Agreement" as to the next steps; and under B. the revised and received text of the Agreement.

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## Notes

1. *Lutheran World* 20 (1973): 347-53.

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### **To the churches participating in the drafting of the agreement**

On behalf of the "Preparatory Assembly for the Drafting of an Agreement between the Reformation Churches in Europe," and in accordance with its decision, we are sending you herewith the final text of the Agreement between the Reformation churches in Europe as revised at the Preparatory Assembly's second meeting from March 12-16, 1973, with the request that your church should take the necessary steps to reach a decision on the acceptance of the Agreement.

1. The European churches having noted the Schauenburg Theses (1967) and being largely in agreement with them, at their express wish and with their direct participation the so-called "Leuenberg Conversations" were held (1969-1970). The main theme of these conversations was the question of church fellowship. The churches' official representatives at these conversations recommended that work be begun on drafting an Agreement which could form the basis for achieving church fellowship. Having noted and approved this recommendation, the churches appointed their delegates for the drafting of the text of an Agreement. Meeting in Leuenberg from September 19-24, 1971, the official delegates of the churches produced the draft of an Agreement between the Reformation churches of Europe.

2. In September, 1971, the Preparatory Assembly set up a Continuation Committee which made preparations for the second meeting of the Preparatory Assembly in March, 1973. In accordance with its mandate, the Continuation Committee held several meetings to consider the replies received from the churches, and proposed a revised version of the text of the Agreement. In respect of the requests of a few churches, the Continuation Committee itself was unable to establish a final text of Agreement. At its second meeting, the Preparatory Assembly had before it a report from the Continuation Committee as well as the Committee's written proposals for changes in the text of the Agreement. It also received and considered a synopsis of the replies from the churches, together with a number of comments from church groups and individuals. Up to that time, replies had been received from 63 churches, and a further 9 churches were able to inform the Assembly about their preliminary discussions by means of detailed documents, even though their final answers were still not completed.

3. It was with thankfulness and joy that the Preparatory Assembly discovered that the churches represented in it were practically unanimous in their resolve to continue to seek church fellowship between the

Reformation churches of Europe on the basis of an agreement. This was all the more remarkable because many of the churches, in determining their official response, had not only taken into account the views of professional theologians and university faculties but had also to a large extent drawn their ordained ministers and congregations into the process of reaching a common mind.

4. In the light of its study of the comments received, the Preparatory Assembly decided to base all its further work and decisions on this unanimity of the churches in approving the choice of an Agreement as the goal and the method to be pursued. It became convinced that, once the text had been revised, what could be done had been done, and that its work had therefore come to its conclusion. It believes that the matter would not be furthered substantially were the churches invited to comment again, and it therefore now requests the participant churches to accept the Agreement.

5. Important changes suggested have been incorporated in this revised text, and as far as possible a number of basic questions have been clarified.

Wherever possible, the language of the draft text has been improved in response to the criticisms expressed in some of the replies. It should, of course, be borne in mind that the doctrinal differences, which it was the purpose of the Agreement to overcome, are formulated in the characteristic language of the confessions or traditions. In dealing with these verbal formulations of doctrine, therefore, it was necessary to employ a corresponding style. The Preparatory Assembly was fully aware that the task of finding a contemporary language still confronts the churches, and must be tackled in the continuing doctrinal discussions.

In revising the text, care was taken not to add any new propositions. The Agreement does not need to treat every subject dealt with in the confessions and traditions of the individual churches. But it was also essential not to tighten and abbreviate the text to the detriment of the common understanding of the gospel which is required as the basis of the church fellowship into which the churches are to enter. After full discussion the Preparatory Assembly decided that a short form of declaration, giving just a brief account of the consensus which exists between the churches, would not suffice for an affirmation of church fellowship.

6.

- a. The text of the Agreement between the Reformation churches of Europe adopted by the second Preparatory Assembly is attested by the signatures of the four chairmen of the Preparatory Assembly, namely, Dr Max Geiger of Basle, Dr Leonhard Goppelt of Munich, Dr Horst Lahr of Potsdam, and Dr Marc Lienhard of Strasbourg. The signed document is deposited with the World Council of Churches, and copies of it with the Lutheran World Federation and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.
- b. The participant churches are invited to indicate their assent in writing by September 30, 1974.
- c. The following declaration should be included in the written assent: "The ... (name of the church) ... assents to the version of the Agreement between the Reformation churches of Europe (the Leuenberg Agreement) adopted on March 16, 1973."
- d. Declarations of assent should be sent to the World Council of Churches (Faith and Order Commission, 150 route de Ferney, 1211 Geneva 20, Switzerland) where they will be deposited. Participant

churches will be informed of each declaration of assent received by the World Council of Churches.

- e. Church fellowship in the sense indicated in the Agreement will come into effect on October 1, 1974, between those churches whose declaration of assent has then been received by the World Council of Churches.
- f. 1>Churches whose declaration of assent reached the World Council of Churches after September 30, 1974, will be participants in church fellowship in the sense indicated in the Agreement from the date on which their declaration is received.

7. The Preparatory Assembly made the following proposals concerning the achievement of church fellowship.

- a. The participant churches are asked to send in suggestions and requests concerning the practical realization of church fellowship, together with subjects for the proposed continuing doctrinal conversations.
- b. If possible, these doctrinal conversations should be initiated still in 1974. Invitations to participate in them will be sent even to those churches which have not yet been able to reach a decision to assent to the Agreement by the time the doctrinal discussions are resumed. The Continuation Committee will discuss detailed arrangements with the Lutheran World Federation and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.
- c. The Preparatory Assembly came to the opinion that the calling of a "General Assembly" as envisaged in earlier letters can for the present be disregarded. This does not exclude the possibility of calling a General Assembly at a date to be specified later, if the participant churches consider this desirable. It could, for example, take place in conjunction with the beginning of the continuing doctrinal discussions.

8. The Continuation Committee appointed by the Preparatory Assembly consists of the following members: Professor Dr Andreas Aarflot (Professor Dr Holsten Faberberg); Bishop Helge Brattgård (Professor Dr Fredric Cleve); The Rev. Martin H. Cressey (Rev. Professor Allan D. Galloway); Professor Dr Wilhelm Dantine (Prelate Dr Albrecht Hege); Bishop Dr Emerich Varga (Pastor Johan A. Dvoracek); Professor Dr Max Geiger (Professor Dr Louis Rumpf); Professor Dr Leonhard Goppelt (Bishop Dr Friedrich Hübner); Oberkirchenrat (retired) Dr Karl Herberg (Prelate Dr Hans Bornhäuser); Pastor Attila Kovach (Pastor G. Gyula Röhrig); General Superintendent Dr Horst Lahr (Oberkirchenrat Dr Werner Tannert); Professor Dr Marc Lienhard (Pastor Alain Blancy); Oberkirchenrat Olav Lingner (Oberkirchenrat Dr Werner Hofmann); Professor Dr Wenzel Lohff (Dr Hans Martin Müller); Dr Remko J. Mooi (Professor Dr Daniel Vidal); Dr Paolo Ricca; President Hugo Schnell (Oberkirchenrat Hermann Greifenstein); Praeses Professor Dr Joachim Staedtke (Landessuperintendent Dr Gerhard Nordholt).

It is the responsibility of the Continuation Committee to carry out the tasks mentioned in paragraphs 6 and 7.

Signed on behalf of the Preparatory Assembly.

Professor Dr Max Geiger, Chairman

Professor Dr Marc Lienhard, Chairman

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## Note

1. Lutheran World 20 (1973), 347-53

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### **B. Agreement between Reformation churches in Europe**

(Leuenberg Agreement)

(1) On the basis of their doctrinal discussions, the churches assenting to this Agreement—namely, Lutheran and Reformed churches in Europe along with the Union churches which grew out of them, and the related pre-Reformation churches, the Waldensian Church and the Church of the Czech Brethren—affirm together the common understanding of the gospel elaborated below. This common understanding of the gospel enables them to declare and to realize church fellowship. Thankful that they have been led closer together, they confess at the same time that guilt and suffering have also accompanied and still accompany the struggle for truth and unity in the church.

(2) The church is founded upon Jesus Christ alone. It is he who gathers the church and sends it forth, by the bestowal of his salvation in preaching and the sacraments. In view of the Reformation, it follows that agreement in the right teaching of the gospel, and in the right administration of the sacraments, is the necessary and sufficient prerequisite for the true unity of the church. It is from these Reformation criteria that the participating churches derive their view of church fellowship as set out below.

#### **I. The road to fellowship**

(3) Faced with real differences in style of theological thinking and church practice, the fathers of the Reformation, despite much that they had in common, did not see themselves in a position, on grounds of faith and conscience, to avoid divisions. In this Agreement the participating churches acknowledge that their relationship to one another has changed since the time of the Reformation.

##### **1. Common aspects at the outset of the reformation**

(4) With the advantage of historical distance, it is easier today to discern the common elements in the witness of the churches of the Reformation, in spite of the differences between them: "Their starting point was a new experience of the power of the gospel to liberate and assure. In standing up for the truth which they saw, the Reformers found themselves drawn together in opposition to the church traditions of that time. They were, therefore, at one in confessing that the church's life and doctrine are to be gauged by the original and pure testimony to the gospel in Scripture. They were at one in bearing witness to God's free and unconditional grace in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for all those who believe this promise. They were at one in confessing that the practice and form of the church should be determined only by the commission to deliver this testimony to the world, and that the word of God remains sovereign over every human ordering of the Christian community. In so doing, they were at one with the whole of Christendom in receiving and renewing the confession of the triune God and the God-manhood of Jesus Christ as expressed in the ancient creeds of the church.

## ***2. Changed elements in the contemporary situation***

(5) In the course of 400 years of history, the churches of the Reformation have been led to new and similar ways of thinking and living: by theological wrestling with the questions of modern times, by advances in biblical research, by the movements of church renewal, and by the rediscovery of the ecumenical horizon. These developments certainly have also brought with them new differences cutting right across the confessions. But, time and again, there has also been an experience of brotherly fellowship, particularly in times of common suffering. The result of all these factors was a new concern on the part of the churches, especially since the revival movement, to achieve a contemporary expression both of the biblical witness and of the Reformation confessions of faith. In the process they have learned to distinguish between the fundamental witness of the Reformation confessions of faith and their historically-conditioned thought forms. Because these confessions of faith bear witness to the gospel as the living word of God in Jesus Christ, far from barring the way to continued responsible testimony to the Word, they open up this way with a summons to follow it in the freedom of faith.

## **II. The common understanding of the gospel**

(6) In what follow, the participating churches describe their common understanding of the gospel insofar as this is required for establishing church fellowship between them.

### ***1. The Message of Justification as the Message of the Free Grace of God***

(7) The gospel is the message of Jesus Christ, the salvation of the world, in fulfilment of the promise given to the people of the Old Covenant.

(8) a) The true understanding of the gospel was expressed by the fathers of the Reformation in the doctrine of justification.

(9) b) In this message, Jesus Christ is acknowledged as the one in whom God became man and bound himself to man; as the crucified and risen one who took God's judgement upon himself and, in so doing, demonstrated God's love to sinners; and as the coming one who, as Judge and Saviour, leads the world to its consummation.

(10) c) Through his word, God by his Holy Spirit calls all men to repent and believe, and assures the believing sinner of his righteousness in Jesus Christ. Whoever puts his trust in the gospel is justified in God's sight for the sake of Jesus Christ, and set free from the accusation of the law. In daily repentance and renewal, he lives within the fellowship in praise of God and in service to others, in the assurance that God will bring his kingdom in all its fullness. In this way God creates new life, and plants in the midst of the world the seed of a new humanity.

(11) d) This message sets Christians free for responsible service in the world and makes them ready to suffer in this service. They know that God's will, as demand and succour, embraces the whole world. They stand up for temporal justice and peace between individuals and nations. To do this they have to join with others in seeking rational and appropriate criteria, and play their part in applying these criteria. They do so in the confidence that God sustains the world and as those who are accountable

to him.

(12) e) In this understanding of the gospel, we take our stand on the basis of the ancient creeds of the church, and reaffirm the common conviction of the Reformation confessions that the unique mediation of Jesus Christ in salvation is the heart of the Scriptures, and that the message of justification as the message of God's free grace is the measure of all the church's preaching.

## ***2. Preaching, baptism, and the lord's supper***

(13) The fundamental witness to the gospel is the testimony of the apostles and prophets in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. It is the task of the church to spread this gospel by the spoken word in preaching, by individual counselling, and by baptism and the Lord's Supper. In preaching, baptism, and the Lord's Supper, Jesus Christ is present through the Holy Spirit. Justification in Christ is thus imparted to men, and in this way the Lord gathers his people. In doing so he employs various forms of ministry and service, as well as the witness of all those belonging to his people.

### Baptism

(14) Baptism is administered in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit with water. In baptism, Jesus Christ irrevocably receives man, fallen prey to sin and death, into his fellowship of salvation so that he may become a new creature. In the power of his Holy Spirit, he calls him into his community and to a new life of faith, to daily repentance, and to discipleship.

### The Lord's Supper

(15) In the Lord's Supper the risen Christ imparts himself in his body and blood, given up for all, through his word of promise with bread and wine. He thereby grants us forgiveness of sins, and sets us free for a new life of faith. He enables us to experience anew that we are members of his body. He strengthens us for service to all men.

(16) When we celebrate the Lord's Supper we proclaim the death of Christ through which God has reconciled the world with himself. We proclaim the presence of the risen Lord in our midst. Rejoicing that the Lord has come to us, we await his future coming in glory.

## **III. Accord in respect of the doctrinal condemnations of the Reformation era**

(17) The differences which from the time of the Reformation onwards have made church fellowship between Lutheran and Reformed churches impossible, and have led them to pronounce mutual condemnations, relate to the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, christology, and the doctrine of predestination. We take the decisions of the Reformation fathers seriously, but are today able to agree on the following statements in respect of these condemnations:

### ***1. The Lord's Supper***

(18) In the Lord's Supper the risen Jesus Christ imparts himself in his body and blood, given up for all, through his word of promise with bread and

wine. He thus gives himself unreservedly to all who receive the bread and wine; faith receives the Lord's Supper for salvation, unfaith for judgement.

(19) We cannot separate communion with Jesus Christ in his body and blood from the act of eating and drinking. To be concerned about the manner of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper in abstraction from this act is to run the risk of obscuring the meaning of the Lord's Supper.

(20) Where such a consensus exists between the churches, the condemnations pronounced by the Reformation confessions are inapplicable to the doctrinal position of these churches.

## **2. Christology**

(21) In the true man Jesus Christ, the eternal Son, and so God himself, has bestowed himself upon lost mankind for its salvation. In the word of the promise and in the sacraments, the Holy Spirit, and so God himself, makes the crucified and risen Jesus present to us.

(22) Believing in this self-bestowal of God in his Son, the task facing us, in view of the historically- conditioned character of traditional thought forms, is to give renewed and effective expression to the special insights of the Reformed tradition, with its concern to maintain unimpaired the divinity and humanity of Jesus, and to those of the Lutheran tradition, with its concern to maintain the unity of Jesus as a person.

(23) In these circumstances, it is impossible for us to reaffirm the former condemnations today.

## **3. Predestination**

(24) In the gospel we have the promise of God's unconditional acceptance of sinful man. Whoever puts his trust in the gospel can know that he is saved, and praise God for his election. For this reason we can speak of election only with respect to the call to salvation in Christ.

(25) Faith knows by experience that the message of salvation is not accepted by all; yet it respects the mystery of God's dealings with men. It bears witness to the seriousness of human decisions, and at the same time to the reality of God's universal purpose of salvation. The witness of the Scriptures to Christ forbids us to suppose that God has uttered an eternal decree for the final condemnation of specific individuals or of a particular people.

(26) When such a consensus exists between churches, the condemnations pronounced by the Reformation confessions of faith are inapplicable to the doctrinal position of these churches.

## **4. Conclusions**

(27) Wherever these statements are accepted, the condemnations of the Reformation confessions in respect of the Lord's Supper, Christology, and predestination are inapplicable to the doctrinal position. This does not mean that the condemnations pronounced by the Reformation fathers are irrelevant; but they are no longer an obstacle to church fellowship.

(28) There remain considerable differences between our churches in forms of worship, types of spirituality, and church order. These differences are



often more deeply felt in the congregations than the traditional doctrinal differences. Nevertheless, in fidelity to the New Testament and Reformation criteria for church fellowship, we cannot discern in these differences any factors which should divide the church.

#### **IV. The declaration and realization of church fellowship**

(29) In the sense intended in this Agreement, church fellowship means that, on the basis of the consensus they have reached in their understanding of the gospel, churches with different confessional positions accord each other fellowship in word and sacrament, and strive for the fullest cooperation in witness and service to the world.

##### **1. Declaration of Church Fellowship**

(30) In assenting to this Agreement the churches, in loyalty to the confessions of faith which bind them, or with due respect for their traditions, declare:

(31) a) that they are one in understanding the gospel as set out in Parts II and III;

(32) b) that, in accordance with what is said in Part III, the doctrinal condemnations expressed in the confessional documents no longer apply to the contemporary doctrinal position of the assenting churches;

(33) c) that they accord each other table and pulpit fellowship; this includes the mutual recognition of ordination and the freedom to provide for inter-celebration.

(34) With these statements, church fellowship is declared. The divisions which have barred the way to this fellowship since the 16th century are removed. The participating churches are convinced that they have been put together in the one church of Jesus Christ, and that the Lord liberates them from, and lays upon them the obligation of, common service.

##### **2. Realizing church fellowship**

(35) It is in the life of the churches and congregations that church fellowship becomes a reality. Believing in the unifying power of the Holy Spirit, they bear their witness and perform their service together, and strive to deepen and strengthen the fellowship they have found together.

a) Witness and service

(36) The preaching of the churches gains credibility in the world when they are at one in their witness to the gospel. The gospel liberates and binds together the churches to render common service. Being the service of love, it turns to man in his distress and seeks to remove the causes of that distress. The struggle for justice and peace in the world increasingly demands of the churches the acceptance of a common responsibility.

b) The continuing theological task

(37) the Agreement leaves intact the binding force of the confessions within the participating churches. It is not to be regarded as a new confession of faith. It sets forth a consensus reached about central matters; one which makes church fellowship possible between churches of different confessional positions. In accordance with this consensus, the

participating churches will seek to establish a common witness and service, and pledge themselves to their common doctrinal discussions.

(38) The common understanding of the gospel on which church fellowship is based must be further deepened, tested in the light of the witness of Holy Scripture, and continually made relevant in the contemporary scene.

(39) The churches have the task of studying further these differences of doctrine which, while they do not have divisive force, still persist within and between the participating churches. These include: hermeneutical questions concerning the understanding of Scripture, confession of faith, and church; the relation between law and gospel; baptismal practice; ministry and ordination; the "two kingdom" doctrine, and the doctrine of the sovereignty of Christ; and church and society. At the same time newly emerging problems relating to witness and service, order and practice, have to be considered.

(40) On the basis of their common heritage, the churches of the Reformation must determine their attitude to trends toward theological polarization increasingly in evidence today. To some extent the problems here go beyond the doctrinal differences which were once at the basis of the Lutheran-Reformed controversy.

(41) It will be the task of common theological study to testify to the truth of the gospel and to distinguish it from all distortions.

#### c) Organizational consequences

(42) This declaration of church fellowship does not anticipate provisions of church law on particular matters of inter-church relations, or within the churches. The churches will, however, take the Agreement into account considering such provisions.

(43) As a general rule, the affirmation of pulpit and table fellowship and the mutual recognition of ordination do not affect the rules in force in the participating churches for induction to a pastoral charge, the exercise of the pastoral ministry, or the ordering of congregational life.

(44) The question of organic union between particular participating churches can only be decided in the situation in which these churches live. In examining this question the following points should be kept in mind:

(45) Any union detrimental to the lively plurality in styles of preaching, ways of worship, church order, and in diaconal and social action, would contradict the very nature of the church fellowship inaugurated by this declaration. On the other hand, in certain situations, because of the intimate connection between witness and order, the church's service may call for formal legal unification. Where organizational consequences are drawn from this declaration, it should not be at the expense of freedom of decision in minority churches.

#### d) Ecumenical aspects

(46) In establishing and realizing church fellowship among themselves, the participating churches do so as part of their responsibility to promote the ecumenical fellowship of all Christian churches.

(47) They regard such a fellowship of churches in the European area as a contribution to this end. They hope that the ending of their previous separation will influence churches in Europe and elsewhere which are

related to them confessionally. They are ready to examine with them the possibilities of wider church fellowship.

(48) This hope applies equally to the relationship between the Lutheran World Federation and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

(49) They also hope that the achievement of church fellowship with each other will provide a fresh stimulus to conference and cooperation with churches of other confessions. They affirm their readiness to set their doctrinal discussions within this wider context.

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## **Appendix 4**

### **Introduction to "an invitation to action"**

A brief sketch of the historical context for *An Invitation to Action* will be found in paragraphs 43-48 of the Report of the Joint Commission. Participants in the third round of North American Lutheran-Reformed Dialogue (1981-83), after studying the documents produced by earlier conversations in the USA and Europe, concluded that the present barriers to the new steps towards unity called for in the 1960s were not primarily doctrinal. Previous dialogues on both sides of the Atlantic had firmly established the reality of fundamental agreement on issues considered primary for establishing inter-communion; and the new ecumenical climate world-wide had led both ecclesial traditions to new attitudes toward the remaining theological differences between them. But the second round of North American dialogue had made clear that mere appeal to the Leuenberg Agreement was insufficient.

What appeared to be needed, then, were: a) further treatment of the understanding of ministry, to supplement *Marburg Revisited*; b) increasing consciousness of the relationship between the mission and the unity of the Church; c) dissemination among clergy and laity in both traditions of the results of previous dialogues in Europe and North America to raise their awareness of the new situation in Lutheran-Reformed relations which already existed; d) creation of a study document which would permit clergy and lay people to enter into grass-roots experience of Lutheran-Reformed dialogue; and e) self-conscious construction of new programmes of common worship, mission, and study which would engage Lutheran and Reformed people in new patterns of cooperative work.

There was hope that significant collaboration in urgent tasks of ministry to the world as well as in the life of the Christian community would break down stereotypes and remove unjustified suspicions and might well produce some exciting and creative new forms of ministry. Honest theological conversation about issues where differences remained would continue, but in a new context of official "mutual recognition." *An Invitation to Action* issued by the third round of dialogue, then, was indeed an urgent call to the churches, on the basis of the existing solid theological preparation, to move boldly towards a new witness to unity in the gospel.

Only the text of *An Invitation to Action* is reproduced here. For the rather extensive notes the reader is referred to the American publication (Philadelphia, 1984).

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## **Appendix 5**

## **An invitation to action**

### **Introduction**

This common statement and urgent invitation for action is addressed to the Lutheran and Reformed churches of the United States which appointed us as official representatives for the third round of theological dialogue between our confessional families.

Our common statement is the product of two years of study and explicitly builds on the earlier work of the theologians of our churches. The first round of Lutheran-Reformed dialogue, which concluded in 1966, was also the first bilateral theological conversation authorized by our churches. Those Lutheran-Reformed conversations thus began a new era in ecumenism.

Both the first and second rounds of dialogue invited our respective churches to take specific positive actions to encourage our two traditions of the continental Reformation to recognize significant theological convergence and to participate in specific common activities. We regret that our respective churches did not do so as early as 1966.

We affirm that it is now an appropriate time for our churches to take positive action.

"For God so loved the world ..."

1.1 God enters history in the Son and the Spirit to save and liberate the world from the bondage of sin and death. Sin is evidenced in our alienation from God and from one another, in the misuse and scarring of the goodness of creation and in injustice all around us. "The whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now" (Rom 8..22). In Christ, God robs death of its power over creation. Through the resurrection God reverses the decay of all things. God's own mission in the world among all peoples goes on constantly. The existence of the ongoing people of God offers hope in our culture gripped alternately by arrogant self-sufficiency and despair.

1.2 This mission of God in such a world addresses churches of common faith. Today there is a new urgency to unite in common proclamation of the gospel, witnessing to the kingdom of God and its justice (Mt 6.33). Humankind seems bent upon bringing the end of the world upon itself and all creatures of God by nuclear holocaust. Our churches are already enlisted in a common mission: participation in God's preservation of the world, God's struggle for justice and peace, and evangelization.

1.3 The people of our churches live in the same communities, work in the same buildings, perform the same tasks, suffer the same pains, celebrate the same joys, and are sustained by the same gospel.

1.4 Each of our churches independently has addressed issues common to our local communities, our nation, and the world, such as: nuclear armament, peace, justice for the poor of our country and the world, prison reform, sex, marriage, and the family, economic justice, the yokes of race and class, ecology, and the advocacy of all persons denied their right to achieve their potential.

1.5 Our churches in varying degrees already cooperate with each other

locally, nationally, and internationally in addressing the urgent needs of our world and in confessing God's work among us.

1.6 Because our churches are engaged in a consideration of the document on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* developed within the World Council of Churches, we are obligated to explore again the heritage of ministry, sacraments, and mission we share as churches shaped by the Reformation of the sixteenth century.

1.7 Because we have commonality in our theological reflections and our social setting in spite of our separation, God's mission presses us on to a more visible unity rooted in God's word and sacraments.

1.8 Because God makes us all members of the holy catholic church by baptism, our churches are compelled to work together officially toward full communion in each other's baptism, Holy Communion, and ministry.

1.9 Our unity in word and sacraments will be one additional step for our churches as we pray for and accept the unity Christ has given us, so that the world might believe and be re-created.

2. Our unity in Christ compels us to claim our strong affinities in doctrine and practice. Both Lutheran and Reformed traditions:

- a. Affirm themselves a living part of the church catholic.
- b. Confess the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds.
- c. Affirm the doctrine of justification by faith as fundamental.
- d. Affirm the unique and final authority of Holy Scriptures in the church.
- e. Affirm the real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper.
- f. Affirm the priesthood of all believers and have interpreted this as our servant-hood to God and our service to the world.
- g. Affirm the vocation of all the baptized, which is service (ministry) in every aspect of their lives in their care of God's world.
- h. Affirm that they are in faithful succession in the apostolic Tradition and that faithful succession in this Tradition is all that is necessary for mutual recognition as part of the church catholic.
- i. Share a common definition of a church in the apostolic Tradition: a community where the word is rightly preached and the sacraments rightly administered.
- j. Identify a ministry of word and sacrament as instituted by God.
- k. Ordain once to a ministry of word and sacrament, and the functions of such persons are identical.
- l. Understand that ordination is to the ministry of the church catholic. Such ordinations in both traditions have usually been by presbyters.
- m. Have granted the appropriateness under some circumstances of one ordained person exercising episkopē, oversight (under a variety of titles including that of bishop), but both traditions have ordinarily exercised the function of episkopē collegially through such structures as presbyteries and synods.
- n. Affirm that the church always must be open to further growth and reformation. Both traditions have been willing to be self-critical. Both traditions have become increasingly open to a historical-critical understanding of the history of the church and of their respective traditions within the apostolic Tradition.

3. Shared appreciation for the gifts and unique heritage of each of our traditions drives us to affirmation of our unity in Christ.

3.1 Our traditions, both rooted in the same reforming movement of the sixteenth century, have been strongly confessional. Our Confessions were

often experienced and understood by our fathers and mothers in the faith as life-and-death testimonies on behalf of the gospel.

3.2 In that unique historic setting, such faith testimonies were often expressed in strong polemical language. Such polemic, we have all learned from our bilateral theological conversations among many traditions, often masked and distorted awareness of our common rootedness in the church catholic and its common faith.

3.3 Polemic often leads to caricature and polarization, rarely to careful appreciation of nuances. It is not strange that close cousins within the church catholic have been on occasion the objects of the sharpest polemic and the most unfair caricature. This has often been true for Reformed and Lutheran traditions.

3.4 Yet all of the churches represented in the present dialogue grew out of the same evangelical reform movement of the sixteenth century, and all addressed the same fundamental issues. Our theological reflections often have been expressed in different vocabularies and nuanced somewhat differently from place to place and from time to time in the past four and one-half centuries.

3.5 Our work together in this dialogue persuades us that such a basic consensus now exists among us to justify the conclusion that the condemnations pronounced by the Reformation Confessions are no longer appropriate.

3.6 We affirm that both of our traditions have done their theological reflection from the same foundations and used the same classical vocabulary: Christ alone, faith alone, grace alone, Scripture alone.

3.7 Such affirmation of our unity in Christ is not new among Lutheran and Reformed churches. There have long been examples in America of joint Lutheran-Reformed congregations. We celebrate and call attention to the full fellowship in sacraments and ministries already experienced in Europe for more than ten years under the Leuenberg Agreement.

4. From a common gospel, a common faith, a common theological conviction that Christ intends unity for the church as a faithful reflection of its essential nature, and in obedient response to our Lord's prayer "that they all may be one" (Jn 17.21);

From a common conviction of the urgency of God's mission confronting identical social, political and cultural problems which require the united proclamation, witness, and service of Christians;

We therefore request all the members of the Caribbean and North American Area Council (Canaac) of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (Warc) and the Lutheran Council in the U.S.A. to receive our report and study it so that there will be the fullest possible use of the document in their own churches. More particularly we call upon the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Reformed Church in America, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, the United Church of Christ, the American Lutheran Church, the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, the Lutheran Church in America, and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod to take action at their highest levels of authority in order to:

- a. Recognize one another as churches in which the gospel is proclaimed and the sacraments administered according to the ordinance of

- Christ.
- b. Recognize as both valid and effective one another's ordained ministries which announce the gospel of Christ and administer the sacraments of faith as their chief responsibility.
  - c. Recognize one another's celebrations of the Lord's Supper as a means of grace in which Christ grants communion with himself, assures us of the forgiveness of sins, and pledges life eternal.
  - d. Enter into a process of reception of this report so that it may become a part of the faith and life of each church at the deepest level, moving beyond purely administrative and intellectual action by taking such steps as:
    - i. praying with and for one another, supporting one another's ministry, and where appropriate establishing relationships among presbyteries, classes, conferences, synods, and districts;
    - ii. common study at each judicatory level of the Holy Scriptures, the histories and traditions of each church, and current theological and liturgical renewal;
    - iii. joint celebrations of the Lord's Supper among congregations, presbyteries, classes, conferences, districts, and synods;
    - iv. invitations to the ordained pastors of each tradition to preach in the congregations of the other tradition, and, where local conditions make it necessary or possible, to preside at the Holy Communion of the other tradition;
    - v. designation by each church, in cooperation with the others, of two or three geographical areas where Lutheran and Reformed judicatories serving the same territory might develop extended projects of cooperation, meeting together for joint study of common issues, mission planning, and common worship;
    - vi. designation by each regional judicatory of at least one congregation which may be linked in extended projects of cooperation with a congregation of the other tradition, meeting together for joint study of issues, mission planning, and common worship;
    - vii. requesting annual reports of such joint ministry, mission, and worship experiences to the national ecumenical offices of the judicatories;
    - viii. transmitting a copy of this report and its attached papers to all persons participating in the official response by church bodies to the Lima document on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*;
    - ix. requesting appointment of a small planning team representing these several ecumenical offices to assemble and evaluate such reports, to report annually to the several churches, and to have responsibility for recommendation of further action appropriate to facilitate this ongoing process of reception;
    - x. referring any unresolved theological issues, such as the relationship between faith and ethics, and church and world, to a subsequent dialogue in the context of these new relationships;
    - xi. informing the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Lutheran World Federation of activity and developments in this process of reception.

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**Minority report from Lutheran church-Missouri synod participants**

**October 1, 1983**

We, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod participants, wish to express our

gratitude and appreciation for having had the opportunity to participate in the Lutheran-Reformed Dialogue III. We commend the participants for their willingness to discuss some of the basic doctrines of the Holy Scripture for the purpose of reaching a better understanding of the faith professed by fellow Christians in other church bodies-with a view toward recognizing their baptism, Lord's Supper, and ministry. We thank God for the amount of agreement which was discovered on the basis of an exchange of views.

A number of substantial issues, however, remain unresolved. Since The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod establishes altar and pulpit fellowship with other church bodies only after substantial agreement has been reached in all of the doctrines of Scripture, the LCMS participants cannot at this time concur in the opinion that "... Lutheran churches should, at the earliest appropriate time and at the highest level, officially recognize the eucharists (Lord's Suppers) of those churches which affirm the Reformed Confessions and have them as a living part of their present witness and proclamation."

We do, however, recommend:

1. that the report of Lutheran-Reformed Dialogue III be forwarded to the president of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod with the suggestion that it be shared with the Synod for its information, edification, and mutually agreed-upon action;
2. that the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod continue to participate in discussions of this kind with a view toward reaching a more complete agreement on the important doctrines of the Scripture; and
3. that we continue fervently to ask God for his guidance and blessing upon our efforts and thus hasten the day when believers everywhere will agree on the truth of God's Holy Word and live together in unity and Christian love.

### **Joint statement on justification**

1. Both Lutheran and Reformed churches are evangelical. We are rooted in, live by, proclaim and confess the gospel of the saving act of God in Jesus Christ. We accept the Tradition of the catholic faith as expressed in the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds.
2. This gospel is the good news that for us and for our salvation God's Son became human in Jesus the Christ, was crucified and raised from the dead. By his life, death, and resurrection he took upon himself God's judgement on human sin and proved God's love for sinners, reconciling the entire world to God.
3. For Christ's sake we sinners have been reconciled to God, not because we earned God's acceptance but by an act of God's sheer mercy. The Holy Spirit calls and enables us to repent of our sin and accept God's gracious offer. Those trusting in this gospel, believing in Christ as Saviour and Lord, are justified in God's sight.
4. Both the Lutheran and Reformed traditions confess this gospel in the language of justification by grace through faith alone. This doctrine of justification was the central theological rediscovery of the Reformation; it was proclaimed by Martin Luther and John Calvin and their respective followers.
5. This doctrine of justification continues to be a message of hope and of



new life to persons alienated from our gracious God and from one another. Even though Christians who live by faith continue to sin, still in Christ our bondage to sin and death has been broken. By faith we already begin to participate in Christ's victory over evil, the Holy Spirit actively working to redirect our lives.

6. This gospel sets Christians free for good works and responsible service in the whole world. In daily repentance and renewal we praise God and serve others. As grateful servants of God we are enabled to do all those good works that God commands, yet without placing our trust in them. As a community of servants of God we are called and enabled to do works of mercy and to labour for justice and peace among individuals and nations.

## **Conclusion**

7. We agree that there are no substantive matters concerning justification that divide us. We recommend that Lutheran and Reformed churches which subscribe to the classic Confessions of their traditions should at this time officially recognize and declare one another as churches in which the gospel is preached and taught.

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## **Joint statement on the sacrament of the Lord's Supper**

### **Gospel**

1. We are Christians because of the presence of Jesus Christ in our lives. This good news of Jesus Christ is the gospel. It is from the gospel that we understand the Lord's Supper. The Supper is a unique way in which Christ shares himself with us and in which we share in Christ with one another. Thus the Supper is itself a particular form of the gospel. The same gift is offered in the preached word and in the administered sacrament.

1.1 The gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ, God's Son, who has been given to us because God loves the world and acts to reconcile the world to himself.

1.2 In Christ we are called, corporately and individually, to manifest the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ in our lives, witness, and service. It is this gospel which compels us to engage in God's mission in the world.

1.3 As churches we must see to it that the gospel we proclaim in word and action is indeed the true gospel of the Holy Scriptures and not a distortion or a substitute. This is why both of our communions regard fidelity to the gospel as the fundamental norm for church fellowship.

### **Greatness of the Supper**

2. Appreciating what we Reformed and Lutheran Christians already hold in common concerning the Lord's Supper, we nevertheless affirm that both of our communions need to keep on growing into an ever-deeper realization of the fullness and richness of the eucharistic mystery.

2.1 Both Lutheran and Reformed churches affirm that Christ himself is the host at his table. Both churches affirm that Christ himself is truly present and received in the Supper. Neither communion professes to explain how this is so.

2.2 The Lord's Supper is inexhaustibly profound and awesome. We concur with the 1982 Lima Faith and Order statement *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, which reminds all Christians that five features belong to the fullness of the Lord's Supper: The Eucharist is (1) thanksgiving to the Father; (2) *anamnesis* or memorial of Christ; (3) invocation of the Spirit; (4) communion of the faithful; and (5) meal of the kingdom.

2.3 While none of these features is alien to either of our traditions, both Reformed and Lutheran Christians need continually to grow in our understanding and experience of this joyful communion with Christ and with one another.

### **The new community**

3. By his real presence among us in word and sacrament and by the work of his Holy Spirit, Christ creates and nurtures a new community of faith, his holy church. Holy Communion richly nourishes us in our devotion to a life of faithful discipleship and calls us to grow in our understanding of what God intends the entire human family to become. Fed at Christ's table, we are drawn to care for one another in the fellowship of believers. Fed at Christ's table, we are called to become more sensitive to the needs of our sisters and brothers in the entire human family.

3.1 As we participate in Holy Communion we receive the benefit of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation through our trust in God's faithfulness.

3.2 As we participate in Holy Communion with our Lord we experience our oneness in Christ. We become more sensitive to the sufferings of our brothers and sisters in Christ, and we are moved to minister to one another as Christ did.

3.3 As we participate in Holy communion God commissions us to minister to the entire human family as Christ did. Christ summons us to share our bounty with all those whose physical and spiritual lives are burdened by poverty. He calls us to "... struggle with the oppressed towards that freedom and dignity promised with the coming of the Kingdom" (*BEM*, Ministry, 1.4). He challenges us to commit ourselves to the cause of justice and peace for all people.

3.4 As we participate in Holy Communion we are committed afresh to the ecumenical task, the effort to realize Christ's will that all his followers may be one, gathered around one table.

### **Doctrine**

4. We affirm that the Lutheran and Reformed families of churches have a fundamental consensus in the gospel and the sacraments, which not only allows but also demands common participation in the Lord's Supper.

4.1 In the past Christians of the Reformed and Lutheran traditions have been deeply divided by controversy over the understanding of the Lord's Supper although both have strongly affirmed the real presence of Christ in the Sacrament. Today we cherish a high regard for our ancestors in the faith who stalwartly proclaimed the gospel according to their respective convictions. At the same time, through long and careful discussion, responsible commissions of Lutheran and Reformed representatives have concluded that our two communions do fundamentally agree on the gospel

and on the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. We reaffirm these agreements, in particular the conclusions reached in *Marburg Revisited* in America (1966) and the Leuenberg Agreement in Europe (1973). We do not imagine that all differences in eucharistic doctrine between (and within) our two communions have thereby disappeared or become negligible, but we maintain that the remaining differences should be recognized as acceptable diversities within one Christian faith.

4.2 The Christian doctrine of the Lord's Supper needs to present the clearest and fullest possible witness to the profound meaning of the Supper. We maintain that traditional Lutheran and Reformed doctrinal concerns are still valuable to help the wider Christian community appreciate the full significance of our Lord's supper. We acknowledge meanwhile that our doctrinal formulations themselves cannot altogether grasp the fullness either of the mystery of Christ's gift of himself in the Supper or of our experience of communion with him.

### **Practice**

5. Mutual recognition of the Lord's Supper by our two communions also involves reconciliation in regard to our appreciation of each other's eucharistic practice.

5.1 As churches of the Reformation we share many important features in our respective practices of Holy Communion. Over the centuries of our separation, however, there have developed characteristic differences in practice, and these still tend to make us uncomfortable at each other's celebration of the Supper. These differences can be discerned in several areas, for example, in liturgical style and liturgical details, in our verbal interpretations of our practices, in the emotional patterns involved in our experience of the Lord's Supper, and in the implications we find in the Supper for the life and mission of the church and of its individual members.

5.2 We affirm our conviction, however, that these differences should be recognized as acceptable diversities within one Christian faith. Both of our communions, we maintain, need to grow in appreciation of our diverse eucharistic traditions, finding mutual enrichment in them. At the same time both need to grow toward a further deepening of our common experience and expression of the mystery of our Lord's Supper.

### **Ministry**

6. Reconciliation at the Lord's Table also involved mutual recognition of our public ministries, since each church is responsible for authorizing and public regulating the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

### **Conclusion**

7. We agree that there are no substantive matters concerning the Lord's Supper which should divide us. We urge Lutheran and Reformed churches to affirm and encourage the practice of eucharistic fellowship with one another.

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### **Joint statement on ministry and our common heritage**

1. The traditions we represent are *rooted in a common understanding* of the gospel which developed at the time of the Reformation.

1.1 What we hold in common is fundamental to both Reformation traditions. For both Lutheran and Reformed believers the cornerstone of faith is expressed in the Reformation's Confession of *salvation through Christ alone*. Standing alongside of it are those other great affirmations of the sixteenth century, namely, faith alone (*sola fide*), grace alone (*sola gratia*), and Scripture alone (*sola scriptura*). That which is the ground for salvation is also the foundation for ministry. Ministry in our heritage derives from and points to the Christ who alone is sufficient to save. Centred in the proclamation of the word and administration of the sacraments, it is built on the affirmation that the benefits of Christ are known only through faith, grace, and Scripture. Ministry in the Reformation perspective always draws attention away from itself to the Lord it serves and at the same time to those the Lord loves and seeks to redeem.

### **The servant ministry of Jesus and our ministry**

2. There is but *one ministry, that of Jesus Christ*. In all its aspects this was a *servant* ministry. All ministry in the church derives from the ministry of its Lord and is also characterized by service.

2.1 The relationship of the ministry of Jesus to ours has been well expressed by the dictum that speaks of the ministry of the church participating in the great ministry of its Lord. As he is the truth which frees men and women, so the church through its ministry by the power of the Holy Spirit proclaims this liberating truth in word and deed. As he is the sacrificial lamb offered for forgiveness and reconciliation, so the church announces this free gift of love and acts as an agent of healing and reconciliation. As he is the hidden ruler of the world, the church reveals to humankind its true Lord, calls all people to a life of worship, and participates in the divine acts of justice and mercy which witness to God's sovereign power and majesty.

2.2 The biblical term "servant" best captures the understanding of ministry we hold in common. To speak of a servant ministry is redundant, for the word "ministry" *means* service in its own right. At the same time, it is necessary to tolerate this redundancy and join the words, for the unhappy truth is that today the word "ministry" does not always connote service.

2.3 This is unfortunate, for the only way to participate in the ministry of the one who came not to be served but to serve is through engaging in a servant ministry. The writers of the New Testament saw Jesus as the servant par excellence. His life is presented as one of perfect obedience to God and consequently one of humble service to humanity. The Lord taught his disciples that greatness in his kingdom means becoming a servant of all (Mk 10.44). "Jesus made his own the nature, condition and cause of the whole human race, giving himself as a sacrifice for all. Jesus' life of service, his death and resurrection, are the foundation of a new community which is built up continually by the good news of the Gospel and the gifts of the sacraments" (*BEM*, Ministry I.1).

### **Ministry and the kingdom of God**

3. Christian ministry is oriented to the kingdom of God. In the power of the Spirit it serves Christ both in the church and the world by seeking to manifest signs of the salvation to come.

3.1 The Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies a people to serve the lordship of Christ (the *regnum Christi*), which will come in its

fullness only when Christ returns at the end of history. The kingdom of God is truly present here and now through signs created when the Spirit of Christ engages the people of God in the servant tasks of the Lord. By these signs the world is given testimony of the church's belief in the triumph of God's love and witness to its faith in the advent of a new age when all things shall be made new. These signs are established when the church, in obedience to its Lord and in the power of the Spirit, becomes an agent of justice, mercy, peace, healing, and reconciliation in this world. But the signs of the new age are also present when within the church lives are reborn, healed, reconciled, and sanctified; when in Christian community persons are knit in love, united in service, and joined in proclaiming the gospel; when God's people gather to acknowledge their dependence on grace, openly confess Christ, and publicly glorify the triune God.

### **The ministry of the entire people of God**

4. The entire baptized people of God, the body of Christ, is called to participate in Christ's servant ministry. The foundation for this vision of ministry is to be found in the Reformation doctrines of the universal priesthood of all believers and Christian vocation.

4.1 The servant ministry is the people of God engaged in God's mission (the *missio Dei*), the service of the kingdom. The call to this service is not limited to those who hold office in the church but is extended to all who are baptized. As stated above, the cornerstone for the Reformation doctrine of ministry is salvation through Christ alone. Union with Christ in baptism carries with it the call, power, authority and promise of gifts requisite for the participation in his servant ministry. For example, immediately following the imposition of water, according to the baptismal liturgy of the Reformed Church in America, the officiant declares: "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the only King and Head of his Church, I declare that this child is now received into the visible membership of the Holy Catholic Church, and is engaged to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and to be his faithful servant unto his/her life's end." Here all distinctions are rejected. Male and female, young and old, impaired and unimpaired, educated and uneducated, rich and poor, people of every colour, nation, and tongue—all who are baptized and confess Christ are also called to be part of the servant ministry. This ministry is the ministry of the entire people of God.

4.2 The Reformation spoke of this doctrine as the universal priesthood of all believers. Formulated by Martin Luther, the notion of the universal priesthood was recognized as profoundly biblical by Reformation theologians, and it consequently became critical for the development of ministry in both traditions. All Christians are called and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be priests to their neighbours. This means that worship, intercession, service, and witness are not reserved for the clergy but are the responsibility of all believers. The pastoral office is instituted to strengthen and support the community of believers.

4-3 The scope of the servant ministry of the entire people of God becomes apparent, however, only when the Reformation doctrine of vocation is also taken into consideration. Both the Lutheran and Reformed theologians of the Reformation rejected the medieval distinction between higher and lower occupations. God calls men and women to employment not only in the church but in the secular world as well. Any task that contributes to the preservation of the created order, the well-being of humankind, and the administration of justice is pleasing to God. Christians are called to engage their vocations honestly, justly, and as a service to God and neighbour.

Then even the most humble and mundane tasks are rightly viewed as service to God.

4.4 The implications for the mission of God of these two Reformation doctrines are far-reaching. The ministry of every baptized Christian is exercised through vocation in both church and world. Since the lordship of Christ is the priestly rule of the one who offers himself as the sacrificial lamb, the universal priesthood represents the self-offering of the people of God in the service of the kingdom. The Spirit bestows diverse gifts on God's people not only to build up the church but also to establish signs of the kingdom in the world. The church aids in the identification and development of these gifts both to strengthen the bond of love within its own fellowship and its witness in word and deed in the world. The church also learns from those who work in the secular order about pressing human needs and strategies to address them. Persons at work in the world are equipped by the church for their vocation in the larger society, but they in turn help to shape the church's understandings of its mission.

### **The pastoral office**

5. In the context of the ministry of the whole people of God, the pastoral office is accorded special servant responsibility.

5.1 To affirm the servant ministry of the entire people of God and the Reformation doctrines of the universal priesthood and Christian vocation does not mean that all are called to the same places and tasks in the church. Lutheran and Reformed Christians alike can agree with the Lima document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, when it states: "In order to fulfil its mission, the Church needs persons who are publicly and continually responsible for pointing to its fundamental dependence on Jesus Christ, and thereby provide, within a multiplicity of gifts, a focus of its unity" (*Ministry*, IIA. 8). For both the Lutheran and Reformed traditions the ordained office of pastor has borne much of the responsibility for this task.

5.2 To set the pastoral office (minister of the word) in the context of the servant ministry of the baptized people of God does not deny its special character. Our Confessions speak of this as a divinely appointed office. While we do not contend that one particular form of this office has divine sanction to the exclusion of others, we do hold the office itself to be an expression of the will of God for the church. Indeed, the Reformation understanding of word and sacraments as means of grace is very closely tied to the Lutheran and Reformed doctrines of the pastoral office. God deigns to use ordained ministers as instruments to mediate grace through the preaching of the word and the administration of sacraments.

### **The servant ministry of the pastoral office**

6. The pastoral office is exalted by the service that characterizes it; in its every aspect this office is expressive of the servant ministry.

6.1 The pastoral ministry has been termed a high calling, and rightly so, but only because it serves a Lord exalted through humiliation and raised gloriously from the shame and ignominy of crucifixion. The paradoxical character of Jesus' ministry shapes the pastoral office. Its power is manifested not in strength but weakness; its authority does not reside in itself but is derived from its Lord. In a world that extols autonomy, the pastoral ministry is openly dependent; in an age that insists on pursuing its self-centred interests, this office finds its meaning in serving others. The

exalted lowliness of the pastoral ministry is not only its glory but its freedom as well. Luther's dictum that the truly free person is one in servitude to Christ has special meaning in this connection.

6.2 As effected in the universal priesthood, every aspect of the pastoral office should be marked by its participation in the servant ministry of Christ. Standing under the authority of the word, this ministry is exercised in concern with the congregation in witness to the world. The shape of the pastoral office as our churches have experienced it since the Reformation has many commonalities. The styles of exercise of pastoral ministry have always been adapted to changing historical and cultural circumstances. This process of adaptation of style and form will continue though the fundamental purpose remains. The pastoral office with special responsibility for upbuilding the congregation is a servant ministry enabling the baptized to become a servant community in the world. Pastors use their gifts and training to assist all the members of the community to grow in faith, to minister to one another in love, to discern their special gifts, and to develop their knowledge and skills for ministry. In this way the community can become one prepared to serve the world. But it is also for the sake of the world, so that the people of God may truly serve the Lord who claims sovereignty over all of creation, working for the transformation of the whole created order according to the will of God.

### **Mission and order**

7. Structure serves the mission of the church.

7.1 One of the points at which the Lutheran and Reformed traditions have differed is church order. We are convinced that these differences are not church-dividing. Within each tradition, moreover, there is considerable diversity in order. Both our traditions have insisted that church order is not an end in itself and that no one order is biblically mandated to the exclusion of all others. Were one to speak of a biblical imperative on this matter, then it would be that structure must serve the mission of the church.

### **Ministry and ordinations**

8. Lutheran and Reformed Christians are in basic agreement concerning the nature and function of the ordained pastoral office. Churches of the Reformed tradition have also ordained elders and deacons.

8.1 The ordering of the serving community can be discussed under two headings: ordination and oversight. In regard to ordination to the pastoral office there are broad areas of agreement uniting Lutheran and Reformed Christians. Both traditions assert that men and women alike are eligible for this office but also must be called, examined for fitness, educated theologically, and approved by the appropriate judicatory. Both understand ordination to be the induction to an office in the church which carries with it certain necessary functions. For both Lutherans and Reformed ordination requires prayer and the laying on of hands and is viewed as a rite by which the candidate enters an office in the church universal. Re-ordination is rare in both traditions. The authority of the office is the word of God, and this is also its content. Both traditions have insisted that this apostolic office, which finds its centre in the preaching of the word and the administration of the sacraments, be anchored in the Confessions and creeds of the church.

8.2 At the same time the Reformed tradition has set the pastoral office in a

broader ministerium which includes ordained elders who share the government and oversight of the church and ordained deacons who are given responsibility for ministries of compassion and justice directed to those in need both in the church and in the world. While the Lutheran tradition has restricted ordination to the ministry of the word and sacraments, it commissions or sets apart lay persons for particular ministries of leadership and governance in the church and compassion and justice in both church and world.

### **Ministry and oversight**

9. Both the Lutheran and Reformed traditions agree that oversight is necessary for the well-being of the church and the prosperity of its ministry.

9.1 Our two traditions also agree in the understanding that appropriate structures are requisite for proper oversight to be given to the church of Jesus Christ. The nomenclature, organization, and mode of operation may differ, but the objective of strengthening the church and giving guidance to its servant ministry is identical.

9.2 Both the Lutheran and Reformed traditions have believed it important for congregations to be related to one another. Structures have been developed in both traditions by which this has been accomplished and the oversight of congregations corporately exercised. In neither case is governance limited to pastors. In the Reformed tradition elders share with ministers the task of exercising oversight; in the Lutheran tradition lay leaders elected by the congregations share with those holding the pastoral office the responsibility of overseeing congregations on the synodical or district levels.

9.3 The title "bishop" is rarely used in Reformed churches to refer to one who exercises oversight, while it has become common in the Lutheran tradition. It should be noted that Lutheran polity, like Reformed, is constitutional, establishing procedures for electing and removing bishops, defining their responsibilities and authority, and expressing the manner in which those holding this office shall be held accountable. All the functions of the Lutheran bishop in North America are carried out in relationship to a synod, district, or church body.

Reformed Christians have on occasion spoken of their presbyteries (or associations or classes) as corporate bishops. Presbyteries or classes, comprised of ministers of the word and elders who share equally in the work, exercise oversight over a limited number of congregations clustered in a specified region. This oversight includes the supervising and ordaining of candidates for ministry, approving the call of a congregation to a minister, examining its provisions to see that the pastor is properly cared for, determining that a congregation is being properly served by its pastor, disciplining ministers, and granting the right of a congregation to acquire and dispose of property.

The bishop, together with the synod or district in the Lutheran tradition and the presbytery in the Reformed, bears responsibility for the general well-being of the congregations to which he or she gives oversight and assures that the activities of the churches are undertaken in an orderly fashion.

9.4 Both our ecclesial families claim to stand in the historical and apostolic tradition by which the good news of the gospel is given witness generation



after generation. Both traditions assert that proper oversight is requisite to ensure that the word is truly preached and sacraments rightly administered.

### **Conclusion**

10. We agree that there are no substantive matters concerning ministry which should divide us. We urge Lutheran and Reformed churches to affirm and recognize the validity of one another's ministries.