

Fellowship of Grace

Report from the Conversations between Church of Norway and the United Methodist Church in Norway

Preface

During recent year many ecumenical dialogue commissions and groups have been engaged in interdenominational conversations. These conversations represent an intertwined network of ecumenical communication. Our discussions represent a national undertaking in this international endeavor

Minutes from most of the conversations have been recorded, with varying character. This report must be considered in light of our objective which has been defined as:

“The group will evaluate the degree of consensus between our churches, and the practical consequences thereof.”

We have questioned the degree of agreement and disagreement between our churches' essential doctrines. We have been concerned about the consequences and affects the agreements and disagreements have on the relationship and fellowship between our churches. In conclusion we have evaluated how our churches can appropriately express the degree of mutual fellowship between us.

It is also important that our work and the document we now present be considered in context of the ecumenical dialogue between our churches and other ecumenical theological conversations in general. This is thoroughly discussed in the opening chapter. We have not found it necessary to reopen questions considered adequately discussed. We call your attention to the fact that the enclosed texts from the international Methodist – Lutheran conversations and from the conversations between the Church of Sweden and The United Methodist Church in Sweden are supplemental to our report. (In the Norwegian edition) See paragraph 9 for a closer description.

We thank the church authorities who gave us this assignment. We also wish to thank Steinar Moe who unfortunately withdrew from the group due to an overseas assignment.

This work has been mutually beneficial. We are glad to have found common foundation to recommend expanded church fellowship. Our hope is that our work is a step further toward making visible our given unity in Christ. It is now up to others to implement further actions. Christ has given us, and the entire christian church, the responsibility of working toward church unity.

This document has been sent to our respective churches for study, evaluation and decision making in the appropriate assemblies.

Oslo, in Lent 1994

Lars-Erik Nordby, Chair
Geir Hellemo, Chair
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This text has been translated by Richard Blücher and Ken Phillips.

I.

INTRODUCTION

A. The group and its mandate

1. The Administrative Board of The United Methodist Church in Norway and Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations appointed in Spring 1991 a Methodist-Lutheran bilateral discussion group comprised of the following members:

From The United Methodist Church in Norway:
Lars-Erik Nordby
Juel Nordby
Øystein Brinch
Helle Maria Lund, Secretary

From Church of Norway:
Geir Hellemo
Steinar Moe (1991-1992)
Anne Grete Spæren Rørvik
Halvor Nordhaug, Secretary until June 1991
Olav Fykse Tveit, Secretary from December 1991

Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations has, in point 29/91, stated that "We recommend that the group discuss what form of cooperation and which common ventures between our two churches can in the most advantageous manner proclaim our unity in Christ".

At its first meeting, 14 June 1991, the group elected Lars-Erik Nordby and Steinar Moe as co-chairs. Geir Hellemo replaced Steinar Moe as co-chair from Autumn 1992, due to Moes' foreign assignment.

2. At that same meeting the group decided on its task:

"The discussion group will determine to what extent there prevails consensus between the churches, and what practical consequences can be deduced from that background".

When we, based on this mandate, have conducted ecumenical conversations between our two churches and confessions, we have as a fundament the assumption that church unity is necessarily a part of its nature. This unity, we find, is contained in the New Testament: 'There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:4-6, RSV). We also consider it our responsibility to give reasons for and suggest

suitable expression of the unity given us in Christ.

B. Other conversations between our churches

A wider cooperation

3. Our churches already have many contacts and an extensive collaboration with each other in various areas, both nationally and internationally.

On a national basis it is natural to mention, for example, the Christian Council of Norway, and its numerous related committees and forums, as well as the predecessors to the Council such as the Council for Evangelical Churches. Further initiatives such as The Norwegian Bible Society, Norwegian Church Aid, and the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Through ecumenical worship services, common endeavors and meetings on national, regional, or local level representatives from our churches have come to know each other and further develop extensive mutual respect and recognition. In addition, many of our members have participated in congregational activities in each others churches for shorter and longer periods of time.

The United Methodist Church in Norway belongs to the Northern European Central Conference and shares a bishop with Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Estonia and Latvia. Church of Norway is a national folk-church comprised of 11 dioceses. Church of Norway is a member of the Lutheran World Federation; The United Methodist Church is a member of the World Methodist Council. Through these international confessional organizations our churches have cooperation in various areas.

Both The United Methodist Church and Church of Norway are members of the World Council of Churches. Our churches have participated in the processes associated with Faith and Orders studies of baptism, eucharist and ministry. The final report from this study project, "Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry", Geneva, 1982, (with a Norwegian translation "Dåp, nattverd og embete", Oslo 1983), also called the "Lima-document", should be mentioned.

In many countries, the USA, Germany and Sweden for example, there have been official doctrinal conversations between Methodists and Lutherans. The Swedish dialogue has been of special importance for discussions in Norway since The United Methodist Church in both Sweden and Norway belong to the same bishops jurisdiction. Further Church of Norway and the Church of Sweden have communion with each other. This implies recognition of ministry, fellowship of communion and extended collaboration in various areas.

The International Joint Commission - and the reception of the report

4. The conversation between The United Methodist Church in Norway and Church of Norway is based on and supplements other confessional dialogues between our churches. Important theological work has resulted from these dialogues, and a valuable and wide foundation for further cooperation has been established.

Lars Østnor meant there was insufficient theological basis for making such extensive recommendations.

Parallel with the international dialogue, a Norwegian discussion group functioned as a reference group for the two commission members from Norway. This group made no official report.

5. The United Methodist Church in Norway dealt with this document at its Annual Conference in the summer of 1986, and acknowledged it with the following recommendations:

The United Methodist Church in Norway acknowledges the recommendations presented in the dialogue between Lutherans and Methodists as contained in the document *The Church - Community of Grace*, which imply:

- increased exchange of ministers between our churches
- an extended and mutual communion fellowship
- a stronger involvement so that all churches shall be independent of and equal in parity before the state.

This statement will be sent to Church of Norway and the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church.

6. Church of Norway concluded its dealings with the document at its Church Synod in 1986. There it was decided that a resolution by the Council of Bishops would be sent to The Lutheran World Federation as Church of Norway's official position on the document. In addition, the Church Synod voted to encourage increased cooperation and fellowship between the two churches on the local level in Norway, in accordance with the directives the Council of Bishops had recommended.

The comments from Church of Norway are extensive, seven pages long. They note, already at an early stage, the fact that the document "shows what progress can be accomplished-through the help of ecumenical doctrinal dialogue". There was considerable agreement on the evaluation of unity between the churches as contained in the document. The evaluation can be summarized as follows:

a. There exists a great degree of unity between the churches in basic concerns and for fellowship between them. It applies to:

- views on the authority of the Scriptures
- understanding of justification by faith alone as the work of God in Christ.
- understanding of sanctification as a completed and anticipated act when God justifies and reconciles human beings, and a continuous act of the Holy Spirit.

b. It was noted that in the deliberations of the report concerning baptism and the Eucharist a considerable agreement was shown in the churches view on many points. There was a common emphasis on Christocentric perspective on the Eucharist, as well as a common understanding of the Eucharist as a sacramental act, an expression of fellowship and praise.

A deeper discussion of anthropology, especially in light of baptism was requested, as was further discussion on the churches' view of soteriology, the understanding of grace, the connection between baptism and church membership. A further clarification of the relationship between a Methodist and a Calvinistic understanding of the Eucharist was desired.

c. As for the understanding of the church, its mission and ministry, significant agreement was shown.

d. Some points were regarded as insufficiently discussed. This applied to ethical questions as, for example, the teaching of God's two kingdoms. There were also questions to the method of discussion, and whether too much emphasis was placed upon showing similarities between the two churches.

e. Approval was given for the view that fellowship and cooperation between the churches should be extended and developed further, especially on the local level. The dialogue between our churches should continue, and communicants are encouraged to receive communion in each others churches when appropriate

In conclusion it was decided that it was too early to establish "full fellowship in Word and sacrament". The reason being "that the remaining theological differences are of such significance that there is not yet the doctrinal consensus we deem necessary for the establishment of full church fellowship".

On the other hand Church Synod hope that "the dialogue that has now begun, must continue both internationally and locally, so that in the future we can attain more insight and knowledge, and with it more ecumenical awareness in the relationship between our churches. This can result in increasingly stronger and more developed fellowship between Methodists and Lutherans."

The dialog between The United Methodist Church in Sweden and Church of Sweden

7. In Sweden there have been two rounds of dialogues, 1979-1985 and 1990-1991. Reactions after the first round were positive, but the authorities in Church of Sweden requested a further discussion of baptism, the relationship between justification and sanctification, church and ministry. The final round took these comments into consideration which resulted in the final version of the joint report (Church of Sweden/The United Methodist Church in Sweden: Rapport från den andra samtalsdelegationen 1991, Uppsala 1991). It recommends to the decision making authorities of each church:

That based on the doctrinal unity shown herein
- offer each other full fellowship of Word and sacrament
- recognize each others' ordained ministry

The consequences of this decision are:

That: Common worship and administration of the sacraments can be conducted under the leadership of ordained elders in The United Methodist Church in Sweden or ministers in the Church of Sweden.

That: A minister should not be re-ordained when transferring to the other church.

That: It is possible for the other churches' ministers/bishops to assist with ordination/consecration of ministers/bishops.

That: Both churches retain their organizational independence

That: The possibility is opened for an organizational fellowship in the form of a co-operating church

That: Ordained ministers when applying for appointment in the other church must be checked for suitability and give ministerial vows to the bishop or respectively the vows of loyalty.

The United Methodist Church in Sweden recommended that this be effectuated. Church of Sweden's Church Synod in 1993 received this matter from its Central Committee, and decided that the intentions should be followed. It was pointed out that the phrase "the fellowship in Word and sacrament" should be used instead of the phrase "full fellowship in Word and sacrament". The last phrase was considered as too comprehensive.

Some revision of church ordinance for Church of Sweden was adopted in accordance with this.

Other dialogues

8. In Germany other similar dialogues have resulted in agreements on fellowship of Word and sacrament between The United Methodist Church and the German Lutheran Churches organized in Vereinigte evangelisch-lutherische Kirche Deutschlands (VELKD), and the united and reformed churches organized in Arnoldsheiner Konferenz.

Under the direction of Leuenberger Lehrgespräche there have been dialogues with The United Methodist Church where, among others, Bishop Hans Växby of The United Methodist Church in Northern Europe has participated. This has resulted in a recommendation to the General Assembly of Leuenberger Lehrgespräche to enter into an agreement on fellowship of Word and Sacrament on behalf of "the participating churches". No Nordic Lutheran church has signed the Leuenberg-concordance, and are therefore not bound by these dialogues.

Similar dialogues have been conducted in the U. S. A. They have resulted in an acknowledgement of mutual recognition of each others' baptism, and in a joint statement on the ministry of bishops.

C. Choice of topics for this dialogue group

9. Our dialogue is, as mentioned, a national continuation of the international Methodist-Lutheran dialogue. We refer here to the document "The Church: Community of Grace". It is important to note that those questions both churches consider adequately treated in this document, have not been subjected to further discussion. This applies to the following paragraphs:

Chapter I. The Authority of the Scriptures

Chapter II. Salvation by Grace Through Faith, §§ 23, 24, 26, and 27

Chapter III. The Church, § § 28-36, and

Chapter V. The Mission of the Church.

The second Swedish dialogue report (1991-1992) has discussed similar questions in the paragraph on "God, The Church, and The Word". Our group approve its content. The question of church membership that is discussed in the Swedish report in the paragraph about the church, point 4, is discussed in light of the Norwegian circumstances in our report (§ 19).

Both of these documents comprise a part of the totality of our document. The paragraphs specially mentioned are to be considered as a direct supplement to our document.

10. The groups discussions have been concentrated around topics considered decisive for mutual recognition and expanded co-operation. The group started its work by discussing these questions in light of the liturgies of our churches.

The first topic we concentrated on was the understanding of baptism in both churches. Through this approach subjects such as anthropology, soteriology, and sanctification came early into the discussion. Baptism served as a central point throughout all these conversations, so the group decided it feasible to let the treatment of these subjects be parts of the chapter on baptism in the final document. This method is to be found in other ecumenical documents, such as the Lima-document. Here many questions concerning the christian life are treated in light of baptism. The group has spent most of its time together discussing these subjects.

In addition to baptism, special attention has been given to the Eucharist. Traditionally this subject has been a problem in the relationship between the churches. Church fellowship is closely related to the understanding and practice of the Eucharist.

Finally, the group worked with the views on ministry in the church. In our opinion the churches must have an understanding of each others ministries in order to make a decision on reordination, ministry at joint worship services and of service in each others' churches.

11. The group has not discussed ethical issues. This is not due to the fact that this is unimportant for church fellowship. In the traditions of our two churches, we discover different viewpoints on how to approach work on ethical questions. As far as we can see, it is difficult to uncover significant confessionally oriented differences in between Methodists and Lutherans in relation to current ethical questions. The differences we can find are often unrelated to the confessional positions. The ethical challenges we face should preferably be met together. Our group has not seen it fit to pursue this particular point further. See reference to this in "The Church: Community of Grace", §§ 67-68 and 73 and following.

12. In our conversations the respective churches' foundational documents such as confessional documents and church discipline, played of course an important role. The group would especially stress that our churches' liturgies have played an active role in our work. Both churches have the last decades revised their liturgies. The study document "By Water and The Spirit. A Study of the Proposed United Methodist Understanding of Baptism", written by representative Methodist theologians, has been to great advantage. This document was presented at The United Methodist General Conference in May 1992, and is now distributed for study in its Annual Conferences. It will be considered for ratification in 1996. The group has also come to realize through this document that liturgical reforms can inspire theological reflection and ecumenical convergence.

In addition to documents from discussions between Methodists and Lutherans, other ecumenical discussion documents have been of value for our work. Especially important was the "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" and the document from the dialogue between Lutheran churches in the Nordic and Baltic countries and the British and Irish Anglican churches: "The Porvoo Common Statement with Porvoo-declaration". Norwegian translation, Oslo, 1993 (also called "The Porvoo-document").

13. Finally, the group finds it useful to call attention to some attitudes and methodical assessments that have been of importance in the results reached.

a. Differences between our churches have quite naturally been central during our discussions. This has not hindered us in emphasizing the importance of finding similarity in the diversities. By allowing time for in depth reflections on the intentions behind the more immediate indications of dissent, we have often objectively come closer.

b. The group has experienced that the theology of creation, which otherwise has characterized a number of important contributions to the ecumenical debates during the past decades, has had a constructive influence on the conversations. This emphasis on creation theology has in our

opinion not weakened a Christological orientation, but has rather contributed to putting the basic Christological concepts into wider perspective.

c. We have already mentioned liturgies as a source of contribution utilized by the group. Let us also mention that through the shaping of new liturgies, using early Christian liturgies as basic sources, the churches have been drawn closer together.

d. The group has reflected on what connotation different social-historical contexts have had for the construction of, for example, the theology of baptism within our churches. Further, the awareness of the long history of both churches has enabled us to understand that the churches do not just change through the ages, but are also accustomed to internal, and to some degree, extensive diversity. The acknowledgement of these facts has been important in our work.

e. The group has been convinced that our discussions were primarily held "So that the world may believe" (John 17:21, RSV). The group is of the opinion that the enormous challenge that the modern secularized society creates for the church of Christ, make it imperative as far as possible, that we stand united in faith and work and find appropriate forms of cooperation.

II.

SOME IMPORTANT DOCTRINAL ISSUES

A. Baptism

14. Baptism is a fundamental bond of unity in the Church of Jesus Christ. It has also been dealt with in a number of discussions between our two church families. On the basis of our discussions, we wish to affirm the following concerning our understanding of baptism:

15. Baptism conveys God's grace to human beings. It has its basis in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In baptism the one who is baptized dies to sin, is united with Christ, receives the Holy Spirit and is incorporated into the one holy, catholic and apostolic Church. Baptism with water in the name of the triune God has been practiced ever since the time of the apostolic Church.

16. Baptism is an act with the character of a sign. It is more than a visible sign which simply points to God's presence in the world. This ritual act includes and gives actual participation in this presence. Therefore, baptism is an efficacious sign.

There is a fundamental connection between creation and baptism as sign-act. Because all of creation is the work of God, it carries the stamp of God and can be a bearer of God's presence. The elements in the sacraments of baptism and communion are part of the created world, and they become in a special way mediators of God's presence. Therefore, the triune God gives us his grace through outer means such as water, bread and wine. The infinite God has chosen this way in which to communicate with his creation (see *finitum capax infiniti*: "the finite contains the infinite"). The decisive precondition making possible the mediation between God and human beings in this way, is that God became a human being in Jesus Christ.

17. Humankind was created in the image of God, and humankind was good. Our original human nature was corrupted in the Fall, and the relationship with God was broken. In our pride we place our own will first and rebel against God.

Humankind lives in a broken relationship to God, to creation, to neighbor and to self, and sin is part of the human condition. We are dominated by an inner disposition to sin. This is original sin, which affects all human beings. All of creation is marked by the reality of sin and awaits redemption.

18. Baptism gives a new relationship to the triune God, because God gives us the forgiveness of sin in baptism (see: The Nicene Creed), unites us with Christ in his death and resurrection, gives us the Holy Spirit and incorporates us into the Body of Christ, which is the Church.

19. Baptism is the sacrament which marks the entrance into the Christian life, and therefore is not to be repeated. There are no means of grace which can take baptism's place in the life of the Church. Baptism is a sign and a seal, and it conveys the life of grace into the Christian fellowship. God's promises are confirmed by God in baptism.

Both Churches reject rebaptism.

Concerning the relationship between baptism, confirmation and church membership, Methodists and Lutherans have the same view in principle about the understanding of baptism as incorporation into the Body of Jesus Christ, which is the universal Church. In both church families baptism is necessary for church membership. Confirmation is in both The United Methodist Church in Norway and in Church of Norway an act of intercessory prayer which concludes a period of instruction in the Christian faith and the Christian life. In The United Methodist Church full rights and responsibilities as members of this church are given through "the reception into the church", a solemn confirmation of the faith into which one has been baptized. Church of Norway does not have a corresponding act. These differences in church organization are related to the history of these two churches in Norway as a free church and a national folk church.

20. Our churches view themselves as bound to the divinely instituted means of grace, but God is not bound by them. What God does before and outside of baptism for the salvation of human beings, and the nature of the relationship between baptism and conversion, has been discussed in our meetings.

Methodists teach that God's grace has a prior, universal effect which makes conversion possible, and that God's gracious act of salvation cannot be limited to baptism. This has been expressed in the idea of God's prevenient grace (*gratia praeveniens*).

As a result of this, Methodists teach that human beings are surrounded by God's grace from the moment of conception. This is not a rejection of the basic understanding of baptism as a decisive change in human beings' relationship to God, as it is presented above. Neither does this way of understanding God's prevenient grace mean that Methodists teach that human beings are free from sin before baptism.

Lutherans also believe that God's gracious action precedes baptism. By grace and fatherly goodness God sustains the whole of creation and protects it against all evil. This does not prevent Lutherans from placing particular emphasis on the necessity of baptism for salvation, because baptism is the fundamental means by which God's act of salvation in Christ is conveyed to the individual person. Even though Lutherans emphasize the necessity of baptism, this does not mean that they hold the view that the unbaptized is outside of God's grace and love.

Within Church of Norway there have also been times when conversion has been emphasized more strongly than the importance of baptism. Even though the context of such preaching has been somewhat different from the Methodist context, the preaching of the revival movements has neither been officially rejected as conflicting with the Lutheran confession of faith, nor has it resulted in schism within the church.

On this basis we find it unreasonable to regard these questions as a reason for division between our two churches.

Even though the two church families do not find infant baptism problematic in itself, we wish to draw attention to the fact that the large number of unbaptized persons in modern, secularized society creates new challenges for thinking about God's activity in the world. The sharing of experiences from church traditions representing different historical approaches to the problem will create a fruitful dynamic in further work with such questions.

21. When the risen Lord gave the disciples the great commission to go out and make disciples of all nations, he commanded that this should happen through baptism and teaching. Baptism must therefore be prepared for and be followed up by teaching and Christian upbringing. The individual who is baptized is to be led to a confirmation of the baptismal covenant.

The situation in today's society also sharpens the commitment we have to further develop our plans and programs for baptismal instruction, which presupposes that baptism is prepared for and followed up by teaching and Christian upbringing. Joint baptismal instruction is a relevant cooperative project of current interest between our two churches.

22. The one who is baptized belongs to the people of God, in which she or he is to live as a disciple of Jesus Christ. A responsibility accompanies baptism to continue to live in God's grace, seek the help of the Spirit for the growth of faith and to live as a disciple of Christ.

23. It is essential to see sanctification in the light of baptism. The image of God which has been destroyed in us God has through baptism recreated. Baptism is the entrance into the Christian life, and as death and resurrection with Christ it is the model for the Christian life in conversion and faith. The use of water in baptism shows in a metaphorical way that baptism cleanses us from sin, makes us a new creature and leads us into a holy life. The Church must therefore guide the baptized into Christian faith and Christian life. Lutherans and Methodists express themselves somewhat differently concerning how this happens.

Methodists teach that human beings have a constant need of God's grace. They emphasize that sanctification is a work of God's grace. Sanctification involves a daily struggle against sin. At the same time sanctification also involves a genuine transformation by the Holy Spirit. Methodists stress that sanctification must be understood as a process which continues throughout the believer's entire life. This involves a growth in grace and holiness which brings a person's life ever more closely in tune with God's will. The process is finally completed when the believer and the Church are brought into full conformity with Christ. This does not mean that Methodists preach that human beings can become free from sin in this life. Hope about the transformation of human beings which is contained in the Methodist understanding of sanctification, is not tied to human ability, but to God's creative grace.

Lutherans stress that the restoration of the image of God occurs fully in baptism and that human beings cannot achieve any other status in relation to God than that which is given in and with baptism, namely, justified and sinner at the same time. At the same time, Lutherans maintain that faith must bear good fruit and that the believer must do good deeds. Lutherans place special emphasis on the point that the Christian life is a life of daily conversion. Within Church of Norway however, sanctification has been understood in different ways. In this connection it is relevant to mention that a process oriented thinking which is familiar to Methodist thinking has from time to time been strongly emphasized in parts of Lutheran Christendom.

Both church families maintain that sanctification is fundamentally a work of God's grace and that human beings will always need God's grace in this life. The differences in teaching about

sanctification which we have referred to, are therefore not to be considered as divisive in relation to our two churches.

24. Both churches acknowledge the validity of each other's baptism. Baptism is valid and efficacious when it is practiced by sprinkling or immersion in water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

B. The Eucharist

25. The Eucharist is one of the fundamental means of grace. Christ himself instituted this meal, and commanded us to continue to celebrate it until he comes again. He himself promised to be present in this meal.

26. The Eucharist, in the same manner as baptism, is an act which is an efficacious sign (see §§ 15-16). This means that the Holy Communion is not only a visible sign which points to God's presence in the world, but it includes and gives real participation in Christ. In communion Christ offers his life-giving body and blood through bread and wine to all who take part in the celebration of this meal.

The presence of Christ is without doubt at the center of the Eucharist, and the promise which is contained in the words of institution is of fundamental importance.

The real presence of Christ in the Eucharist is expressed in the celebration as a whole. Nevertheless, the real presence is expressed in a special way through the anamnestic character of the meal. Anamnesis as the remembrance of God's saving act in the death and resurrection of Christ refers to the continual efficaciousness of Christ's saving work. The real presence of Christ is also expressed through the emphasis on the Spirit's activity for us through the communion meal. It is by the living word of Christ and by the Holy Spirit's power that the bread and wine become the sacramental signs of Christ's body and blood.

Methodists have placed special emphasis on the point that Christ's presence in communion is conveyed by the Holy Spirit. For Lutherans also it is essential that the Spirit is given through the sacraments. Lutherans, however, have placed particular emphasis on the point that Christ's body and blood are received in the elements of communion. Both church families agree that Christ is really present, that he is shared and received in the form of bread and wine of the Eucharist.

27. In the celebration of the Eucharist, believers receive the benefits of Christ's perfect sacrifice. This means that in communion we receive the forgiveness of sins and all the other blessings which Christ has brought us, such as life and immortality. Strengthened by this meal in faith, hope and love, we are sent out into the world to be the messengers of peace, justice and reconciliation.

28. Both of our churches stress in a clearer way than before that it is through communion that the fellowship of the people of God is fully expressed. Communion expresses and realizes in a special way fellowship with Christ and with each other (*koinonia*). We view communion as an anticipation of the kingdom of God and the celebration of communion as a challenge to all injustice in the world. We look forward to a world where people truly are reconciled with each other and share God's gifts justly.

29. Both churches also emphasize in their liturgies more strongly than before the dimension of worship and thanksgiving in communion (*eucharisti*). In communion we bring our thanks before God for everything we have received in creation, in redemption and in God's action in relation to his people from the time of the old covenant until the day when God will create a new heaven and a new earth. As an extension of this emphasis on communion as thanksgiving to the Father, it is

natural to understand the entire act as a sacrifice of praise in which bread and wine, fruits of the earth and the work of human hands, through Christ-are brought to the Father in faith and thanksgiving.

30. We regard the worship service with word and sacrament to be the central act in the Christian fellowship. In accordance with the common church tradition, both churches ordain /consecrate those who are given the responsibility to administrate the sacraments.

C. The Ordained Ministry

31. We believe that the understanding of the Church's ordained ministry is closely tied to the understanding of the nature of the Church. Both Methodists and Lutherans regard their churches as a part of the Church of Jesus Christ. The Church is a fellowship of believers in which God's word is preached purely and the sacraments are administered in accordance with God's word.

32. In the Church all who believe in Jesus Christ are called through their baptism to be a holy priesthood. The gift and mission of Christ belongs to the entire Church, to communicate the gospel to the world through witness, prayer and service.

33. Even though the types of service are manifold, there are some who are especially called to preach the word and administer the sacraments. This ministry is instituted by God and given to the Church. In both of our churches this is an ordained ministry which is practiced in and for the Church.

34. Neither Methodists nor Lutherans maintain that the New Testament contains a clear and unambiguous model for ministry which can be directly adopted as the structure of the ministerial office today. Nevertheless, there are a number of tasks which are normative for the service of ministry: the preaching of God's word, the administration of the sacraments, and the practice of shepherding which includes leadership, pastoral counseling and hearing confessions, giving guidance and admonition.

35. The different kinds of service which are tied to the ministerial office in our churches, are already described in the New Testament. Both The United Methodist Church and Church of Norway consecrate/ordain some ministers to perform a special service of oversight (episkopé) as bishops. This service is carried out in addition to the services they are ordained to perform as ministers. It is a sign of the Church's apostolic character and unity. The bishops are not alone in taking care of these tasks in the Church.

36. God's call to the ordained ministry is both an inner call to the individual and an outer call through the testing and confirmation of the church, which is expressed in the ordination.

Ordination occurs in both churches through the laying on of hands and prayer, and is an act which is not repeated. Normally, a theological education from a university or theological seminary is required in order to be ordained. In both churches the ordained ministry is open to both women and men.

37. Both of our churches have a diaconal ministry which is to make visible the diaconal responsibility of the whole church. The place of this ministry in the life of the church has been discussed in both of our churches. We recommend that our churches cooperate on the shaping and development of this ministry.

III.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Conclusion and recommendation

38. Visible church unity is not the same as complete conformity. Neither does our given unity in Christ stand in principle opposition to diversity, but is to be found in diversity. Since this diversity is in accordance with the many gifts of the Holy Spirit to the Church, it is of fundamental ecclesial importance. This relationship between unity and diversity is attested to already in the New Testament.

Our two churches, their church organizations and doctrinal traditions, have been formed in different historical circumstances. This has created differences between us which express legitimate diversity, but between our churches disparity have also existed which it has been our goal to overcome. Our discussions may be understood as a step in that direction.

Essential questions pertaining to the relationship between our churches are discussed in this report. We refer also to the report from the international Methodist-Lutheran Commission entitled "The Church - The Community of Grace", and to the report from the conversations between Church of Sweden and The United Methodist Church in Sweden, enclosures I and 11 in the Norwegian edition. We have found a fundamental consensus between us in many important questions; in other questions we have experienced through detailed study and conversations that our viewpoints converge. This should be made visible.

According to our evaluation a congruity between our churches' doctrine and life has been proven, which makes it possible for us to recommend that our churches sign an agreement of broadened church fellowship. "Broadened church fellowship" means a fellowship which is expressed in a clearer and more binding manner than is the case in the relationship between our churches today. What this could mean in detail is listed below. An agreement between our churches ought to contain a mutual recognition of each other as churches and a commitment to such an expanded church fellowship.

B. The Agreement between the Churches

(Signed in the Cathedral of Fredrikstad and the Methodist Church in Sarpsborg 25–26 January 1997.)

39. We therefore recommend the following:

**THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH IN NORWAY
AND
CHURCH OF NORWAY
ENTER INTO THIS AGREEMENT:**

Recognition

We:

1) recognize each others' churches as belonging to the one holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Jesus Christ, and as possessing the mission which belong to the whole people of God,

- 2) acknowledge that both of our churches are united in confessing the apostolic faith, as it is given to us in the Holy Scripture and expressed in the early church creeds,
- 3) recognize each others' baptism and administration of the sacrament of communion,
- 4) recognize each others' ordained ministry,
- 5) acknowledge that we are still two different churches, each with its own tradition, documents of doctrine and church organization, established according to the respective church's own regulations.

Commitment

We commit ourselves to an expanded church fellowship, which is expressed in following ways:

- 1) We worship and celebrate communion together, where those bearing the office of ordained ministry from both churches participate together, or where those bearing the office of ordained ministry from one church occasionally officiate in the other's church.
- 2) We welcome the members of each others' churches as our own members to participate in worship services, to receive communion and other pastoral services.
- 3) We stand together in carrying out the Church's mission and service in our country, in prayer and work, and therefore seek forms of cooperation where it is natural.
- 4) The way is now open for representatives from each others' churches to be invited to participate in the consecration of bishops and the ordination of ministers or consecration to other forms of ecclesial service, and in the installation to ecclesial service in the local church.
- 5) We admit ministers or others who are consecrated to ecclesial service, by invitation and agreement between the churches and in accordance with the existing church legislations, to perform the same ministry in the other church, without new ordination or consecration; in the case of permanent arrangements the churches will have to follow the same requirements for education, suitability and loyalty which otherwise pertain.
- 6) The way is now open for various types of organized fellowship to be established on the local level.
- 7) We continue with conversations and common study of important questions for faith and life, when and in the manner which is natural.
- 8) We will continue to discuss the efforts that can be initiated and the agreements that can be reached in order to make visible the fellowship which exists between our churches.

Celebration of the Agreement

This agreement is confirmed by joint worship services in Methodist and Lutheran churches. These occasions will show that we mutually acknowledge one another and that we commit ourselves to the common service in God's kingdom and for our people.

These worship services include a declaration of our broadened church fellowship, mutual intercessory prayer, the sharing of the peace and the joint celebration of communion.

