

STRUCTURE AND FUTURE WORK OF THE LEUENBERG CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

Resolution:

The church fellowship declared by the Leuenberg Agreement (LA) requires continual deepening and widening: it must, as the Agreement states, be put into practice (LA 29ff). There are four areas in which this realisation is especially to be advanced: 1. Witness and Service, 2. Further theological work, 3. Ecumenical aspects, 4. Organisational and structural consequences. In acceptance of the decisions taken at the 3rd General Assembly of Strasbourg, what has been proved of value in these directions, as already indicated by the Agreement itself, has to be continued and new steps should be taken.

1. WITNESS AND SERVICE

In this area urgent concrete steps are required to fulfil the mandate of the Agreement. This is a matter of decisive significance for our church fellowship. The following aspects need attention:

1.1 The link with existing regional and European institutions must be significantly strengthened. There are various organisations which are active at a Europe-wide level in missionary, charitable, diaconal and social welfare work. The churches of the LCF are linked to these existing European networks (Eurodiakonia, Cimade, Gustav Adolf Werk, Martin Luther Bund etc.) through their work and orientation. The link with these networks have to be built up. These links and possibilities are to be understood as part of the commitment of the LCF to witness and service.

In the political area of the process of uniting and changing Europe, there are already some church ministries in existence (at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg as well as at the European Union in Brussels, Luxembourg and Strasbourg). Here also the LCF ought to develop a joint presence.

1.2 The LCF must be able to give a clear witness on important current questions (The responsibility rests with the Executive Committee [EC] and its presidents.)

1.3 This witness and this service on a Europe-wide level will be truly relevant only when the LCF is discovered and experienced in the regions and congregations as an opportunity for common witness and service. This requires the development of an awareness and of actual cooperation across national, linguistic and other boundaries. The LCF desires to further local initiatives and links with regional church organisations. For this reason its joint work can be made effective not only in Europe-wide project groups but also followed up in regional groups.

Experiences of individual churches should benefit all. Models already available (e.g. the Berlin Bible Weeks of the Evangelical Church of the Union, encounter conferences for members of congregations of the Leuenberg churches) can be copied in other places, so that meetings are

not limited to gatherings in General Assembly. Contacts between local congregations and reciprocal visits can also be developed.

- 1.4. Church fellowship can only be inclusive fellowship, a fellowship of women and men from the most-varied backgrounds. The LCF, therefore, intends that all Christian people and groups in our churches take part in it and that future work with the LA is not limited to church functionaries and theologians.
- 1.5. Minorities are especially important as a symbol of witness and service. The majority of churches participating in the LA are minority churches, which often fulfil their mission in difficult situations. In the present re-structuring of the continent and of the various individual countries these minorities are often overlooked and their voices are scarcely heard in international activity. In this respect the LCF is called to active solidarity.
- 1.6. To fulfil these responsibilities, an active mutual exchange of information and an intensive network of communication has to be brought into being. These are very important means of witness and service in the LCF. Better communication plays an important role within the fellowship itself and contribute to the visibility of the living fellowship. Present-day means of communication and new technical possibilities can serve the mutual exchange of experiences. Within this framework the possibility of a regular publication organ has to be investigated.
- 1.7. In order to promote the coordination of all these efforts, the LCF must endeavour to set up the following resources for its work:
 - Inventory of the activities of European churches as well as diaconal and social problem areas on the basis of the materials available;
 - Evaluation of the relationship of witness and service as depicted in various church studies, especially in the LCF document "The Church of Jesus Christ";
 - Guidelines for common witness and service in the LCF.

2. CONTINUATION OF THEOLOGICAL WORK

The commitment to common theological work should remain the core task of LCF, so that the common understanding of the Gospel may be deepened, examined in light of the Holy Bible and thus actualised (LA 38).

- 2.1. The subjects of these conversations must be up to date and relevant for all participating churches and be closely related to the LA and the growing community.
- 2.2. Dogmatic as well as ethical questions should be selected as themes and worked on either in Europe-wide project groups or in regional groups. In doing so an appropriate representation of women and men, lay-members and theologians must be guaranteed. In project groups various regions (North-South, East-West) must be represented in reasonable proportion.
- 2.3. In choosing these themes a certain priority must be kept. Decisive criterion for that is that themes that have not been dealt with up to now stemming from the LA itself have to be chosen. Duplication of projects carried out in other ecumenical organisations must be avoided. Never-

theless such themes as would make a special contribution to Reformation theology on ecumenical discussions must be dealt with.

For these reasons the following themes have priority:

- Law and Gospel, especially in regard to resolving ethical questions; in doing so the two studies on "Christian Witness of Freedom" must be taken into account.
- Church, state and nation; this theme is also important as a contribution to the Second European Ecumenical Assembly (1997).
- Church and Israel

At the same time the LA will endeavour that important current theological and social questions (relationship to other religions, partnership between women and men etc.) be dealt with in appropriate contexts (international ecumenical organisations, individual churches etc.)

- 2.4. Furthermore, the General Assembly confirms the procedure of the further theological work agreed upon in Strasbourg (passage V, 4.1 to 5.3).

3. ECUMENICAL ASPECTS

The LCF is acting out of its responsibility to promote the ecumenical fellowship of all Christian churches. It places its work within this wider context (LA 46ff).

- 3.1A first task emerges from the relationships with the churches of the Reformed and Lutheran traditions, which have not fully entered into the LCF. Here especially conversations with the Nordic Lutheran Churches shall be conducted and continued, so that these churches, which have intensively contributed to the work of the LCF from the very beginning but have not signed the Agreement yet, can also agree formally to the LA.

Also developments in other continents in which a Lutheran Reformed Church Fellowship is coming into being (as, for instance, in the USA) should be followed, so that the LCF may also be enriched by their experiences and that the fellowship shall be expanded beyond its existing boundaries.

The LCF thus follows the recommendations of the international dialogue conducted between the Lutheran World Federation and the Reformed World Federation ("On the Way to Church Fellowship", 1990) and contributes to the process of its reception.

- 3.2. The declaration and realisation of church fellowship with some Christian churches of related traditions has been enabled by agreements achieved in international and national dialogues. In this area where the decisions are in the hands of the individual signatory churches, the LCF has a coordinating function. The LCF commits itself to the following concrete steps:

- to complete the process of drawing near to the Methodist churches, to encourage the individual churches to declare and realise church fellowship and to offer them help in case of need,
- to look for ways to extend the church fellowship with the fellowship among the Anglican churches already achieved by some signatory churches in some regions to all the churches participating in the LA and to work on the still pending questions to deepen the fellowship. In this context such initiatives as the planned meeting in September 1995 shall be supported (cf. Report of the Presidents)

3.3 The churches participating in the LA are collaborating with other churches in various European and international structures, such as the Conference of European Churches (CEC) or in regional alliances and also in national church councils. The LCF will contribute to this important task which has to be pursued as a community whenever possible.

Even if it has unfortunately not been possible to realise a full church fellowship with many of these churches yet, a lot can still be done together in these more multilateral relationships (as, for instance, the talks of November 1993 between Baptist theologians and those from the Leuenberg churches). In this area any existing opportunity for collaboration should be used and not repeated at the level of the LCF.

The LCF will try to do its utmost to deepen and widen the existing fellowship with these partners in order to enable a full church fellowship and mutual acceptance.

4. ORGANISATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

The LA itself holds back from spelling out organisational consequences and leaves the matter to individual signatory churches (LA 42ff).

In this area there are new initiatives to be noted, for example in the Netherlands (the "Samen op Weg" process) and in France. The LA is playing a crucial role in these developments. This is another area where improved mutual communication must take place.

The General Assembly at Sigtuna put some instruments for developing church fellowship in place as early as 1976 and these were confirmed and expanded by the General Assemblies at Driebergen (1981) and Strasbourg (1987): a General Assembly, an Executive Committee and a Secretariat. The Vienna General Assembly confirms this structure, and decides upon the following procedures for communication so that the tasks already mentioned may be undertaken. This is done in the awareness that institutionalisation is only desirable to the extent that the future effectiveness of the church fellowship requires it.

4.1. The General Assembly meets at least every six years. Each participating church may send up to two authorised representatives. The Executive Committee may invite up to ten additional representatives in consultation with their respective churches, and also advisers and guests. The General Assembly determines the basic directions of the work, consults on the state of the church fellowship and takes initiatives for future work. It elects the "Leuenberg Executive Committee" (EA).

- 4.2. The EA consults of up to twelve persons, each with a deputy. It elects from its membership up to four presidents who together form a presidium. In doing so it must be borne in mind that there is desire, particularly on the part of several minority churches, to be represented by them at the international European level.

The presidents represent the LCF externally, they are responsible to the EA. They may issue public statements representing common attitudes of the churches of the Reformation on important questions of witness and service. If need be, the EC may appoint persons who are not actually its members to represent it in particular occasions.

The EA replaces by cooption any members who leave office. It draws in by appropriate methods representatives of churches newly joining the fellowship. When suitable occasion arises it invites the Ecumenical Institutes and representatives of ecumenical study commissions or expert advisers to collaborate. The EA shall provide itself with rules of procedure.

- 4.3. The EA is responsible for the work between General Assemblies, it prepares and presides over General Assemblies. It shall promote fellowship between the participating churches. It has the following commission:

- to support and encourage common efforts for witness and service,
- to develop an appropriate strategy for information and communication,
- to coordinate theological project work, to set time limits for it, to define the subjects to be discussed, to receive the results and to pass them on to the churches, to assess the responses of the churches to them and to lay the final outcome before the General Assembly for decision.
- when appropriate, to work out a joint statement on important current issues and to undertake short-term studies, especially in connection with the changed situation in Europe and with European union,
- to promote joint ecumenical work, to evaluate it and to lay the findings before the churches,
- to promote local initiatives within the LCF in regions and congregations and to give advice as necessary,
- to be aware of existing regional associations and arrangements among the churches participating in the LA and to keep in touch with them,
- to strengthen links with Europe-wide organisations and thereby to demonstrate the involvement of the LCF as a fellowship,
- to involve in its work to an appropriate extent those churches which sign the LA between General Assemblies and those which agree upon some form of qualified church fellowship with the churches of the LCF,
- to seek a systematic connection with KEK and EECCS,
- to promote links with the WCC and the world-wide Christian fellowships.

- 4.4. Every church in the LCF shall participate in it financially so as to cover the costs incurred. The General Assembly calls upon the churches to commit themselves to regular contributions and also to contribute to carrying out special projects, if necessary.

4.5. The Secretariat is responsible to the EC and works in accordance with its direction. The EC provides for a Secretariat capable of the necessary functions. It appoints the leader of the Secretariat and such additional staff members as may be required.

General Assembly, 9 May 1994