

**Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE)  
– Leuenberg Church Fellowship –**

# **The Shape and Shaping of Protestant Churches in a Changing Europe**

Project Study of the CPCE Study Group:  
“The Shape and Shaping of Protestant Churches  
in a Changing Europe”

2002 – 2004

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## **Introduction: The task of the doctrinal conversation group**

In the Leuenberg Agreement Protestant churches with different confessions have declared a church fellowship.\* They have revoked the reciprocal condemnations which have separated them since the time of the Reformation. They practise a fellowship of preaching and eucharist and are deepening the theological consensus in doctrinal conversations. They have already proved their fellowship through witness and service in the life of the churches and communities, in theological collaboration and in shared activities. But a task which this fellowship has posed itself is to develop further the fellowship that has already been achieved, to give it concrete shape and to demonstrate it in the ecumenical and the political context. It involves above all the *concrete shaping* of the church fellowship at a European, regional and local level and the binding character of the collaboration. As the Fifth General Assembly of the Leuenberg Fellowship stated in Belfast in June 2001, the churches united in it must face up to the challenges that the process of European unification has brought with it and still brings with it. The shared voice of Protestantism has to be articulated in an audible way in the process of transformation which is shaping Europe in order to humanize society and in this process to demonstrate its insights deriving from the Reformation. Progress in communication technology has also brought the churches closer to one another. That makes it all the more urgent now to take further steps to realize the fellowship that has been declared.

In order to further this task it was resolved in Belfast to make the question of the shape and shaping of Protestant churches the topic of doctrinal conversations and to appoint a doctrinal conversation group for this purpose. The relevant resolution runs:

‘The questions of the shape and shaping of Protestant churches are subordinate to the insight that the foundation of the church lies in God’s saving action in Jesus Christ. This distinction between the foundation of the church’s faith and the forms of the churches offers scope for shaping. At the same time, however, it also makes it necessary to reach theological agreement about the *criteria* for the shaping and to take questions about shaping more seriously for the realization and deepening of church fellowship. In particular because of the current processes of transformation in European society and the European churches, a thorough discussion of the questions of shape is necessary. The study must make clear what the specific features are of church fellowship in a Reformation perspective.’

To implement this resolution the executive committee formulated project guidelines. The results of this work are presented here.

They relate to four complexes of questions which were to be discussed on the basis of the commission from the General Assembly:

- 1) Criteria for understanding the shape and implementing the shaping of church and church fellowship.
- 2) The significance of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) in the framework of ecumenical relations in Europe.

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\* **Translator’s note:** English readers should note a problem in terminology. In German the Leuenberger Kirchengemeinschaft has become the Gemeinschaft Evangelischer Kirchen in Europa. However, the accepted English rendering of these names is the Leuenberg Church *Fellowship* and the *Community* of Protestant Churches in Europe, even though ‘fellowship’ and ‘community’ translate the same German word ‘Gemeinschaft’. In any case the word ‘Gemeinschaft’ is very flexible and throughout the paper is sometimes better translated ‘fellowship’ and sometimes ‘community’, while elsewhere the two English terms are often interchangeable. I have done my best to render the sense, but there is really no completely satisfactory way out of an impossible situation.

- 3) Europe as the place in which the Protestant church community lives and is shaped.
- 4) Ways towards the further development of communication and collaboration of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe.

## **1. Criteria for understanding the shape and implementing the shaping of church and church fellowship**

### **1.1. The basis and commission of the church as a criterion for the shaping of the church**

The Leuenberg Agreement and the 1994 study 'The Church of Jesus Christ' which is based on its statements give a clear and doubly weighted criterion for any human shaping of the church: it must accord with the *foundation* of the church, namely Jesus Christ, and with the *commission* of the church to bring its salvation near to the world in word and sacrament. Whatever obscures Christ as the foundation of the church and puts in question the commission of the church cannot be a right shape of the church. That does not exclude the possibility that there can be *different shapes* of the church: on the contrary, as the foundation of the church, Jesus Christ prompts many possibilities of shaping his church by human hands at different places, at different times and in different situations. Therefore no quite definite shape of the church, beyond time and history, follows from the foundation and commission of the church. It always takes shape in historically diverse forms. Churches with different shapes need not therefore be separated churches. They can have church fellowship with one another, in so far as each is ready to distinguish its own shape and also the shape of its church fellowship from its foundation and to measure these by it. That is the case with the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe – the Leuenberg Church Fellowship.

### **1.2. The spiritual reality of the church as a criterion for the shapes of the church**

So the *essence* of the church, i.e. what makes the church church, consists in its having roots *outside itself* in a foundation which is withdrawn from it, and therefore having a commission to fulfil in the world. It is a fellowship of men and women which does not constitute itself but is called together, bound together and commissioned by the activity of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. To this degree it is a *spiritual* fellowship, *hidden* from the world, which can only be verified in faith and which is not identical with any church that has come into being in history. But at the same time it is also a *bodily*, visible, social reality which occurs in the shapes of a diversity of churches which have come into being in history. As such it can become a false church which has moved away from its foundation and its commission and thus also from its spiritual reality, to the point of being unrecognizable. Any visible shape of the church must therefore examine itself and allow itself to be measured by the criterion of whether with its words, actions and shapes it *corresponds* to its spiritual reality constituted through Jesus Christ. The spiritual fellowship constituted in faith is in this respect a criterion for the shaping of church and church fellowship which belongs with the foundation of the church.

### **1.3. The marks of the church**

According to the understanding of the Reformation there are *marks (notae)* of the church which as fundamental expressions of the life of the church indicate that a visible shape of the church is true to its foundation and essence and thus is a true expression of the one church of

Jesus Christ. These marks are the pure preaching of the gospel and the celebration of the sacraments in accordance with their institution (CA VII; Institutio IV, 1,8f.). Through them the Holy Spirit creates faith in Jesus Christ and thus the fellowship of believers. A church which has these marks therefore signals to the world that it owes its existence to Jesus Christ and not to any religious or ethical qualities of its members. The outward performance of preaching and the administration of the sacraments therefore on the one hand points to the inner foundation of the church, but at the same time also makes it recognizable in the world *as church* of Jesus Christ.

All shaping of the visible church therefore takes place in a fellowship created by the pure preaching of the gospel and the offering of the sacraments in accordance with scripture, a sphere in which further marks of the church take shape. The Reformers included among such marks for example the office of the keys, the ordering of the office of preaching, prayer, suffering for the sake of the gospel, observing the second table of the Decalogue, church discipline and obedience in faith. But it is quite possible in a changed time for other marks of the church to develop which support its fundamental marks, make them concrete, and in the world point to the foundation and spiritual essence of the church to which they owe themselves.

#### **1.4. The essential attributes of the church**

In the question of the right empirical shape of the church, reflection on the spiritual nature of the church as it is expressed in its attributes is also helpful. According to the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed the church as a fellowship of faith is characterized by *unity, holiness, catholicity* and *apostolicity*. These ‘essential attributes’ may not be understood just as hidden, ‘transcendent’ characteristics of the church; they must also find expression in the visible shape of the church assailed by sin. That means that the visible shape of the church for which human beings are responsible must be shaped so that it *corresponds in a human way* to the ‘essential attributes’ of the church. That does not mean that a concrete shape can simply be deduced from these essential attributes. Rather, criteria for the shape and shaping of the church can be gained from the question of correspondences. Accordingly the visible church and thus also the fellowship of churches with different shapes has to clarify in structures and modes of action for which human beings are responsible that its characteristics in the world connected with the preaching of the gospel and celebration of the sacraments are unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity.

##### **1.4.1. Apostolicity**

In the Reformation understanding, apostolicity has the priority in these so-called ‘essential attributes’ of the church. For the two decisive marks of the church (proclamation and sacrament) owe themselves to the apostolic witness of scripture and to this degree have an ‘apostolic’ stamp. The ‘constant abiding in the teaching of the apostles’ (Acts 2.42) and being grounded on the ‘foundation of the apostles’ (Eph.2.2) are constitutive of the church and the condition of authentic, missionary attestation of the gospel. Only in a church which is ‘apostolic’ in accordance with scripture does the church come into being as a fellowship of faith brought about by the Spirit with the ‘essential attributes’ of unity, holiness and

catholicity. The apostolicity of the church is to this degree the bridge which links the Reformation marks of the church with the ‘essential attributes’ of the church brought about by the Spirit. It makes it the task of the church and any church fellowship to put the Bible at the centre of all its shaping and to be the *ecclesia semper reformanda* as it listens to scripture time and again.

#### **1.4.2. Unity**

The spiritual unity of the church which is believed in is a gift of the Holy Spirit who makes present the *one* Jesus Christ. It binds all Christian churches together. The depiction of this unity in the various visible shapes of churches is therefore urgently necessary in the spirit of the one foundation of the church. Thus the practice of eucharistic hospitality towards churches which do not belong to the church fellowship is an important sign of the spiritual unity with all churches of Jesus Christ.

In the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe such a visible depiction of the spiritual unity of different shapes of the church is already expressed by the agreements arrived at in the Leuenberg Agreement over the pure teaching of the gospel and the celebration of the sacraments in accordance with scripture, by fellowship in preaching and the eucharist (including intercelebration), and by the mutual recognition of ordination. That says all that is necessary for the study of the church and the agreement about the necessary foundation of church fellowship as being in accord with the existing spiritual unity of the church.

Nevertheless there is still no agreement on questions of the recognition of the equality and interchangeability of ministries. Some churches do not ordain women to the pastorate. There are also differences over the way in which *episkope* is practised and over the question of the relationship between ordination and commissioning to preach the word and administer the sacraments. More work must be done at these points on the depiction of the unity of the Protestant churches in Europe. Here the Protestant model of ‘unity in reconciled difference’ offers some help towards understanding and profiling the particular shape of the ministry in a church in openness to the shape of the ministry in other churches.

#### **1.4.3. Holiness**

The holiness of the church that is believed in consists in its freedom from sin. Sin is the destruction of the relationship between human beings and God and the ruination of all creaturely conditions. By being made free through Christ’s effective forgiveness of sin, the fellowship of believers is the holy church. But the visible church is *ecclesia sancta et peccatrix*, i.e. it has to preserve its holiness in the fight against the powers of sin which oppose it. That happens through the effort to proclaim the gospel, which makes the church free to confess its guilt. It also happens through a shaping of its *ordinances*, which are to ward off the destructive effects of sin on the visible community of believers. And that happens if its members *live* in obedience to God’s commandment in accordance with the gospel. Such a life implies the commitment of the church and the church fellowship to people whose right to life and whose human dignity is threatened. It raises the question whether and in what way the

churches should be politically active by cooperating with the state. It represents an obligation to adopt a clear standpoint in the burning ethical questions of our time as these have been thrown up e.g. by bioethics and medical ethics, in favour of the inalienable dignity of every human being who is accepted by God. Since the churches of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe sometimes arrive at different answers here as a result of their different contexts and traditions, it is necessary to intensify their dialogue on such questions. The life of the church and thus the church fellowship is always confronted by new challenges, in the face of which it is important to make space in its own action for the power of its healing through Jesus Christ.

#### **1.4.4. Catholicity**

Catholicity means that each individual community and church stands in an indissoluble inner connection with the one comprehensive church from its beginnings to its existence in different places in the present. The visible correspondence to this catholicity that is believed in – together with the unity that is believed in in the life of the ecumene – consists in the fellowship of Christians which is practised all over the world, extending beyond confessional boundaries and all boundaries of nation, race, society, culture and gender. Where full church fellowship has come into being on the basis of this common understanding of the gospel, a concern for the visible representation of catholicity must not paralyse it, even when confessional differences exist. The model of unity in reconciled difference may not be misunderstood as satisfaction with the status quo. Therefore it is important to take up elements of the model of “conciliar fellowship” developed in the earlier ecumenical discussion. They can be a stimulus towards arriving at a common decision and the obligation to mutual accountability as important elements in the shaping of church fellowship.

### **1.5. Shaping the church in the actual process of defining the church**

#### **1.5.1. Church fellowship as an opportunity for a wide perspective**

In accordance with its foundation and commission, and thus at the same time apostolic in unity, sanctification and catholicity, the life of each individual church in the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe is shaped solely by focussing its attention on bearing witness to the gospel *today, in a way related to our time*. Because Jesus Christ is alive and the Holy Spirit is always at work in the present, in a living church the gospel may never become fossilized in a preached shape of yesterday. Where there are living churches – and thus also a living Protestant church fellowship – attention is directed forwards. Therefore the main question in Europe is how in a pluralistic age of religious individualization on the one hand and atheistic alienation from belief in God on the other, the gospel may be witnessed to in such a way that it may reach people in the world in which they live. Many churches in Europe suffer from being told that their message no longer speaks to people. Reports of diminishing numbers of church members lead outside observers to make gloomy prognoses about the future of the church in Europe. That challenges the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe and all the churches represented in it to give priority to a profile of their message that

relates to the time and situation. Here the *wealth of experiences* with the fortunes of the 'local' attestation of the gospel, brought together in the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, offers an excellent opportunity for *learning from one another* how the gospel must be orientated in our time so that it addresses people and reaches them.

For this reason agreement over the right proclamation of the gospel in the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe can become a powerful stimulus to the revival of the European churches in our time. That is true in various respects. This church fellowship has to provide stimuli for an *up-to-date way of confessing* which takes up the questions and needs of the people of our time. For the sake of the presence of the gospel in the everyday world it has to promote a *doctrine* of the churches which reinforces the responsibility of all Christians for the course of the gospel among their fellow men and women in the sense of the Reformation 'priesthood of all believers'. It has likewise to give clear recommendations for the *education* of those who want to put their lives at the service of Jesus Christ. It has to work out suggestions for the shaping of *worship* and the *celebration of the sacraments* which are involved with people's understanding of reality and sense of life in a pluralistic society orientated on experience, and yet at the same time interrupt it. It has to examine critically where the opportunities and limitations of a *legally fixed organization* of the churches in Europe lie, to express the gospel credibly, and to present it in the midst of society through the life of the churches. Church fellowship is always the opportunity for the sorely-trying church, fixated regionally on itself, to have a *wider perspective*. Powerful *martyria* (witness to the truth of the gospel for individuals and in today's society), lively *leiturgia* (enthusiasm for a living liturgical worship), committed *diaconia* (seeking the best in the world) and comprehensive *koinonia* (fellowship among all human beings and with God) are the key words by which all should be moved to come together in the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe.

As is well known, within this fellowship each church retains its 'competence for internal order' and its 'autonomy of reception' towards the resolutions of the church fellowship. The danger that here the particular vested interests may put a brake on the vigour of Reformation dynamics which the church fellowship is committed to develop is obvious. Therefore ways of minimizing this danger must be explored. It is important, for the sake of the truth of the gospel for the people of our time, in sisterly and brotherly consultation boldly to go beyond the bounds of our own ecclesiological customs. Often individual churches or many individual communities have already made far more progress towards a contemporary, up-to-date realization of their determination than the international bodies. That is no objection to the progressive nature of the CPCE, but a force to encourage it.

### **1.5.2. The leadership and order of the church against the background of church fellowship**

The leadership of each individual church bears special responsibility for the realization of a church fellowship which is orientated on the criteria that have been described and on the specific situation in which the fellowship exists. Church leadership in a Reformation sense is

the acceptance of theological responsibility for the service of a church as a whole. Although there is no institutionalized magisterium in a Protestant church, but doctrinal decisions are made in a process of arriving at a consensus, responsibility for *doctrine* is part of the activity of church leaders. In other words it ensures with respect to the whole church that witness and service take place everywhere in accordance with scripture and in accordance with the situation. It maintains a living and critical use of the confessions of the church and confessing today. And church leaders have the special duty of reinforcing the church fellowship with the other Protestant churches, attentively observing the developments which are taking place there, and encouraging as broad an exchange as possible of experiences at all levels of church service.

Here communication between church leaders is also very important. The way in which for example the office of supervision (*episkope*) is understood and practised is now the subject of lively discussion and needs further clarification. Every church government is obliged to defend itself against a practice of witness and service which distorts the gospel or makes it incredible in the world. It has to ensure that the *magnus consensus* of the teaching of the church is not arbitrarily constricted or transgressed with views and actions alien to the nature of the church. But that must happen in such a way that this office of supervision does not on the one hand become a legal instrument or on the other hand is neglected. Neither of these alternatives brings a church a blessing. Therefore it is necessary for church governments to learn from one another how to produce an atmosphere of *mutuum colloquium* of the sisters and brothers throughout the church *sine vi sed verbo* (CA XXVIII) and without violating the conscience, an atmosphere in which brotherly and sisterly admonition also has its natural place.

Exchanges over questions of order and the external legal shape of the churches and over the authorities for shaping, leading and decision-making that are bound up with them continue to be necessary. Starting from the criteria of shaping the church which have been mentioned, in this respect in principle it must be true that not only the ordinances of the ministries of the church governed by its commission but also church law have to correspond to the foundation, task and essence of the church. The church cannot avoid taking up elements of civil service law, legally regulating the ownership of buildings, land and financial matters, and paying salaries in accordance with 'worldly' criteria. However, such regulations are not an end in themselves but have the function of service (cf. Barmen IV: 'The various offices in the church establish no rule of one over the other but the exercise of the service entrusted and commanded to the whole community'). The relationship of all this to the foundation, the task and the essence of the church must remain clearly recognizable. It is therefore necessary to make the leadership, the unavoidable exercise of power and the 'personnel policy' in a church, as transparent as possible, to clarify their competence and extent and thus make them open to restriction and criticism in the light of the criteria for shaping the church. The tension between being dependent on external ordinances and legal regulations and yet at the same knowing of another, higher 'law of mercy' will never be completely done away with. For precisely that reason the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe offers an opportunity – which has yet to be taken - to discuss the way in which the church leaders deal with this

difficult problem openly and critically and to seek ways of depicting the church in this dimension more clearly.

### **1.5.3. 'Non-theological' factors in the shaping of churches**

The reference to the task of leading the church has already made it clear that beyond doubt other factors influence the concrete shaping of a church than those which are grounded in scripture and confession. The significance of political and regional contexts, of church and cultural traditions, of historical and church-historical contexts, is unmistakable in the shaping of a church. That also raises the question in connection with the task of the shaping of the CPCE how those factors are to be dealt with which in ecumenical discussion are called 'non-theological factors'. Theologically speaking that is not a precise term, because such factors are also due to the creative activity of God and are to be assessed in the light of the gospel. Nevertheless, sober account must be taken of the fact that these factors take on a weight of their own over against the ecclesiological criteria for the shaping of the church. The history of all the Protestant churches in Europe can be regarded as a history of the influence above all of political factors on their shape. All forms of church to the present day have been shaped more or less by the 'non-theological factors' which played a role at the time of their origin. That is also the case with the origin of new churches. The history of the origin of Methodism (see the article by Erich Geldbach, 'Nicht-theologische Faktoren bei der Kirchwerdung des Methodismus' in *Materialdienst des Konfessionskundlichen Instituts* 55, 2006, which was written in connection with this study) is an example of this, as is the process of the foundation of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PCN) on 1 May 2004 (more details in the article by Leo Koffeman 'Ekklesiologie und Kirchenrecht in einem Unionsprozess. Erfahrungen aus der Protestantischen Kirche in den Niederlanden', in: *Catholica. Vierteljahrschrift für ökumenische Theologie* 59, 2005, 108-127, (English in: [http://www.thwi.nl/data/61\\_UTRECHT\\_MEDEWERKERSDOCUMENTEN/downloads/Shape%20and%20Shaping.pdf](http://www.thwi.nl/data/61_UTRECHT_MEDEWERKERSDOCUMENTEN/downloads/Shape%20and%20Shaping.pdf)) which was likewise written in connection with this study).

In the theological assessment of this process of the concrete shaping of a church and a church fellowship *two perspectives* must always be noted in the light of the essence and commission of the church. 1. The visible church is a community of men and women in the world, but not of this world. These men and women bring their historical, social, political, economic and individual views of existence with them into the church and put them at the service of the worldly shaping of a church or a church fellowship. That is legitimate, because otherwise the visible church and church fellowship would be a completely abstract construction alongside the world. The incorporation of such worldly factors into the shaping of churches is part of the Protestant understanding of the church. 2. However, if such factors obscure the way in which the church lives by its essence and hinder the performance of its task, the church has the freedom to limit and even exclude their influence. That applies, for example, to the burden of tradition on the shape of many churches which imprisons them in structures of past times and makes their current contribution to church fellowship more difficult. If the churches of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe want to deepen their fellowship in a

concrete way, they also face the task of examining critically and self-critically where and how ‘non-theological’ factors are at work in them, what significance they have for church fellowship, and where they can be overcome if they prevent a deeper church fellowship.

### **1.6. The obligations on the church fellowship**

The criteria for the shape of the church necessarily apply first of all to the individual church and its tasks. For a church fellowship of the nature of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe they are likewise binding, in so far as all the churches gathered together in it recognize them. However, the specific field of tasks of a church fellowship is different from the wider field of tasks of a regional church. It is not responsible for the witness and service of the ‘local’ church and is not concerned to reduce the ‘living diversity’ of forms of the church in the sense of a ‘unification’. But its fellowship in the preaching of the gospel and at the Lord’s table, which according to the Protestant understanding of the church represents qualitatively the strongest shape of fellowship, contains the potential and the obligation to give its fellowship a profile or a face which is appearing increasingly clearly in the ecumenical context and the new European situation. Therefore the possibility of a binding common witness and service and a deeper organization and legal merger was kept in view in the composition of the Leuenberg Agreement from the start. Reflection on the criteria for the shape and shaping of the church gives powerful support to this intention. For ‘when the mark of the true church is made the measure, church fellowship is itself as much church as the independent communities and individual churches which belong to it’ (*‘Kirchengemeinschaft nach evangelischem Verständnis’*, votum der Kammer für Theologie der EKD, 2001, II, 1). Because the essential attributes of the true church as a criteria also apply to the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe it too is a shape of the church of Jesus Christ. So it cannot avoid the need to present itself ever more clearly as a shape of the church of Jesus Christ, if it reflects on its foundation, its task and its essence.

## **2. The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe in the context of ecumenical relations**

### **2.1. The basic model: unity in reconciled diversity**

The development of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) is closely bound up with the role of this community in collaboration with other ecumenical agents. For this community is convinced that the Leuenberg Agreement is a viable model of ecumenical development capable of promoting every endeavour towards visible unity and effective cooperation among churches in Europe and worldwide. It has already proved its openness beyond the area of the Reformation churches which participated in 1973, as is shown for example by the involvement of the Methodist churches in the CPCE and the intensive and fruitful talks with the European Baptists. The ministry of reconciliation that is practised by this community and its 105 member churches and is their contribution to the wider ecumenical movement and to society promotes a culture of unity in reconciled diversity. In it the differences between the shapes of the churches are respected, and at the same time the unity in Jesus Christ in faith and common confession is lived out.

### **2.2. The relationship with the Conference of European Churches (CEC)**

Almost all European churches which are signatories to the Leuenberg Agreement are members of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and are involved in various fields of work and in bodies within the CEC. The CEC was founded in 1959 in Nyborg, Denmark, as a sign of forgiveness and a new beginning to a ministry of reconciliation by way of cooperation between Anglican, Old Catholic, Orthodox and Reformation Churches in Europe.

By resolutions of their governing bodies, CEC and CPCE have declared that they will support and promote each other. At present this happens by way of joint consultations (on topics like ‘ecclesiology’ and ‘accountability’), joint meetings of the respective governing bodies, agreements between members of staff, and by delegating a minister on behalf of the CPCE to the staff of the Church and Society Commission of the CEC since 1 September 2004. The further shape of relations between CPCE and CEC is of vital importance for the delineation of a recognizable profile of Protestant churches in Europe, for the development of the ecumenical movement in Europe and for the participation of the churches in the process of European integration.

The CPCE member churches cooperate with Orthodox, Anglican, Old Catholic and Free Churches within the CEC. This cooperation is based on the understanding of reconciled diversity as an expression of Protestant witness. This witness includes the clarification by the CPCE member churches of their common goals and the strengthening of their recognizable Protestant profile (LA 36) also inside the CEC, and a presentation of the results of their cooperation. It is on this basis that the European churches can speak and act as one.

### **2.3. The Charta Oecumenica**

An even more comprehensive community of churches in Europe is expressed in the Charta Oecumenica; it was worked out and signed jointly by the CEC and the Council of European

(Roman Catholic) Bishops' Conferences (CCEE), and has since been signed by many churches, including those of the CPCE. Signing this declaration does not entail any legal obligation. With their signature, however, the churches have expressed their conviction that visible unity and 'common witness and service' in Europe are the concern of all Christian churches in Europe. They see as their most important tasks 'the common proclamation of the Gospel, in both word and deed, for the salvation of all' and representing the 'concerns and visions of the churches *vis-à-vis* the secular European institutions' in common social responsibility. Previous experiences in connection with the development of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, the European Constitution and the expansion of the European Union, and also with reference to developments of European law, such as the anti-discrimination guidelines, or the European Refugee and Asylum Law, confirm the necessity and effectiveness of joint action by the Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox and Catholic churches *vis-à-vis* the European institutions.

#### **2.4. The relationship to the confessional world federations**

The CPCE churches belong to different confessional world federations, such as the Lutheran World Federation, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the World Methodist Council. These world federations carry out work in Europe with ambitious programmes which are sometimes highly personnel- and cost-intensive. The Leuenberg Agreement encourages the churches, for the sake of a substantive connection between witness and order, to strengthen coordinated cooperation in European activities (cf. LA 45). This expectation includes the activities of the world federations (cf. LA 48). If the declared fellowship of the churches in the CPCE is taken seriously, it is appropriate for common witness and efficiency in exploiting available means that the agents should come to agreement about their roles at a European level and coordinate work in Europe as far as possible with that of the CPCE.

#### **2.5. The relationship to the Meissen, Porvoo, and Reuilly Agreements**

The Leuenberg churches are also connected with churches outside the CPCE in bilateral and multilateral relations. The relationships between a member church of the CPCE and a non-member church do not bind either the CPCE as a whole or its individual members. But they offer the opportunities for new reflection on the fellowship achieved with the Leuenberg Agreement.

The Church of England and the Evangelical Church in Germany (ECD) signed the Meissen Declaration in 1991. In this declaration they recognize one another as churches and seek to cultivate regular exchanges, inviting one another to share in the celebration of the eucharist and to preach. However, different views of the apostolic succession still stand in the way of full church fellowship and hence a full interchangeability of ministers.

In 1996, the Anglican Churches of Great Britain and Ireland and the Lutheran churches of the Nordic and Baltic states (with the exception of Denmark and Latvia) signed the Porvoo Declaration. This declaration goes beyond the Meissen Declaration in that it reaches agreement on the episcopate in the apostolic ministry of the church, thus paving the way for full interchangeability of ministers. Of the group of Porvoo churches, only the Norwegian

Lutheran Church, the Lutheran Church of Lithuania and the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church have so far signed the Leuenberg Agreement.

In the range of its content the 1999 Reuilly Declaration corresponds to the Meissen Declaration and relates to the fellowship between the four Anglican churches of Great Britain and Ireland and two Lutheran and two Reformed churches in France.

The Meissen, Porvoo and Reuilly Agreements are to be seen as questions to the Leuenberg model. The Porvoo Agreement in particular shows an understanding of church fellowship which has a different emphasis from that of the Leuenberg Agreement. That is evident in the insistence on the historic office of bishop as an indispensable element of *episkope*. This made it possible for the Lutheran churches involved, which also have this form of *episkope*, to take steps towards an intensive and dynamic realization of fellowship with the Anglican churches. The common emphasis on *episkope* for the unity and leadership of the church is important for a closer relationship between the churches of the Porvoo Agreement and the Leuenberg Agreement, even if there are different views and shapes of *episkope*.

## 2.6. Prospect

The CPCE understands itself as an ecumenical model which is effective and has a good theological foundation; it is thus a promising sign for the whole ecumenical movement within Christianity. By the way in which its member churches are interwoven with other ecumenical federations and church fellowships it has the opportunity to make a fruitful contribution with the dynamics of the Leuenberg model to the ecumenical movement as a whole and also in Europe. For through the increase in power and authority which it derives from the spiritual, theological and participatory communication of its member churches it can time and again introduce new impulses into the CEC, the ecumenical world federations and other church fellowships. Present in it are the experiences which the churches in Central and Eastern Europe are having today after decades of oppression and marginalization. It is facing the problems posed by religious pluralism, secularization and increasingly also the demographic developments of the churches in Western Europe.

All the CPCE churches want to put their claim to be a model for ecumenical unity and concrete cooperation to the test, even under more difficult conditions. Options for putting their claim to the test in a pan-European context would be:

- to expand theological work and to provide more information about its results;
- to take up the spiritual challenges arising from the changes in the churches and their social environment and to promote discourse with one another;
- to analyse and evaluate local experiences against the background of missionary initiatives;
- to clarify and give more concrete shape to relations among the CPCE member churches in a country or region;
- to root firmly in the ecumenical movement topics which are raised by the process of political, economic and social unification in Europe, by migration, by economic globalization, dangers to peace and problems over the validity of human rights.

When reflecting on new forms of structures in the CPCE structures, with a sober consideration of the financial situation of the churches it must be seen that no additional financial or personal burdens are imposed on particular churches in their ecumenical work.

The growing consolidation of cooperation among the CPCE churches must go hand in hand with a shedding of other ecumenical commitments. This gives further impetus to a restructuring of the work of the confessional world federations in the direction of division of work and co-operation related to particular themes.

### **3. Europe as a space for the life and shaping of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe – opportunities and challenges**

#### **3.1. Europe as a space for shaping the Community**

In the light of the foundation, task and essence of a church of Jesus Christ, the CPCE must relate in its words and actions to the geographical, political and social context in which it exists. If this context is called 'Europe', then it is necessary to understand what 'Europe' means. However, that is not so simple, because while Europe can be sketched out with some degree of clarity in geographical terms, as the subject of political or intellectual history it evades a clear definition. It has an open identity with a variety of traditions which do not come just from Christianity. The idea of Europe as a uniting and over-arching concept of nationalities arose in the time of Charlemagne and then developed, mostly under the pressure of external threat and internal splits, until in the twentieth century after the Second World War and the subsequent ideological division it took on a new quality. Today the concept of 'Europe' is associated above all with the EU and cooperation in the economic sphere. But Europe is more than the EU and cannot just be an economic community. The Europe of the Council of Europe and the Europe of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe are spheres of shaping which are important for the CPCE. Because of the special historical experiences, and the cultural, national and religious influences that are present in Europe, the different states introduce a diversity of perspectives into the shaping of this space which cannot be dominated by a single unified perspective.

But of course there are also historical events and experiences which are significant for Europe as a whole or at least for a very large part of it. The Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment movement, the French Revolution and the development of a programme of human rights, the totalitarian regimes and the two world wars of the twentieth century and the Shoah are examples of such important shared European experiences. However, they are not remembered by peoples in the same way. Therefore it is important to relate the different, indeed divisive, memories and perceptions, to reconcile them with one another, and to lay the foundation for a comprehensive European tradition which can live side by side with national, regional and local traditions. The process of European integration represents a great opportunity to heal the pain and grief of European history and to overcome totalitarianism and nationalism.

Into this context Protestants can introduce the way in which they deal with their own history and their specific perspectives and explore with others how they can contribute to the common memory and the European tradition. In this respect the process of formulating and signing the Leuenberg Agreement can be a model for the healing of memories and putting forward the model of unity in reconciled difference. The historical relationship between Protestantism and the Enlightenment further underlines the need for a dialogue of faith and reason and represents a continuing contribution by Protestantism to the whole of European culture. The emphasis on education and the critique of institutions which accompanied the Reformation remain elements in the European tradition. But the emphasis on a humanity of the freedom of the individual and the obligation to show solidarity towards others which is

also rooted in Protestant thought is a strong motive force for the readiness of churches to collaborate with the processes of change in Europe.

### **3.2. The challenges for the churches in Europe**

If the church of Christ fulfils its commission to proclaim the gospel and engage in mission in every place, it must necessarily take up the themes which move people and states in the face of the developments of the process of European integration.

#### **3.2.1. Political themes**

As far as political themes are concerned, Protestant churches can acknowledge that values or ethical principles are present in the principles of the process of European integration and the formation of a value community which owe themselves to the Christian shaping of Europe. That is true of the European Convention on Human Rights and the supervision of its observance in the individual states, which in this respect restricts the sovereignty of the individual states. It is true of the realization of an ever more intensive unity which finds expression in the common legislative processes of the member states of the European Union and seeks to bring about peace and solidarity in Europe.

Most Protestant churches in Europe therefore regard this process of integration with sympathy and follow it critically. For they support the principle of democracy and an open society. They therefore seek dialogue with the European institutions and show their resolution to engage in public life. They grapple with political currents which fight against European integration or argue for an aggressive nationalism, an attitude which is often combined with the rejection of migrants and asylum-seekers. They make clear the positive effects of the unity of the Protestant churches which has already been realized for the process of the formation of a European consciousness and the progress of the integration of the European population. They contribute experiences of the relations between majorities and minorities which have been gained in the relationship between majority and minority churches.

In this respect it is significant that article I-52 has been included in the draft of a EU constitution. It recognizes the far-reaching and specific role of the churches or 'religion' in public life and with its clause on dialogue with the churches and religious organizations opens the way to an open, transparent and regular exchange between the European institutions and churches. It will be important resolutely to cultivate this exchange.

#### **3.2.2. Economic themes**

Economic integration marked the beginning of the process of European political unity. The economic interests of the individual countries were to be interwoven in such a way that they could not longer give occasion for a war. Alongside this developed the recognition that economic policy must be accompanied by measures of solidarity and social justice both between countries and regions and within them. However, as the EU is part of a wider

European and global market focussed on competition and free trade, there is a risk that all parts of life will be made subject to the demands of the economic sphere. The churches are paying particular attention to this problem. For their calling implies that they stand for an individual and social way of life which is not dominated by economic factors alone. They are therefore anxious, for example, that the specifically Christian ministry of diaconia should not be subjected to the demands of competition and thus risk losing its special profile of providing unselfish help for people who cannot participate in the market. But quite apart from that, the Protestant churches insist that the market is shaped by human beings *for human beings* and not by impersonal powers. They therefore emphasize the importance of the individual responsibility of economic decision-makers in ever more abstract economic structures. They support a socially and ecologically responsible European society which stands for just structures of economic guidance. They are advocates of those whom the process of the economic integration of Europe is to benefit.

### **3.2.3. Culture and fundamental values**

The Europe of the Council of Europe is a community of values. This is expressed above all in the European Convention on Human Rights and the work of the European Court of Justice for Human Rights in Strasbourg. The EU draft constitution (Article I-2) also contains the obligation to ‘respect for human dignity, liberty, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights’. It is thus recognized that ‘these values are common to the Member States in a society of pluralism, tolerance, justice, solidarity and non-discrimination’. So the aim of the promotion of peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples is to be pursued. That corresponds in many ways to what the churches are striving for and is an expression of an affinity between these values and the ethos of Christian faith. Nevertheless, fundamental values are not to be identified with truths of faith, nor is the freedom of faith to be restricted by reference to political concepts.

The basic values must time and again be re-actualized, made concrete and received independently in the various regions of Europe. They are the basis of a European culture that is not homogeneous, one that is subject to constant change. The Protestant churches, too, are involved to a significant degree with this culture in that their faith in God is a living source of humane values, but at the same time creates an awareness of the limitation of all created human values.

That becomes particularly evident when ethical questions are included in the shaping of public policy. In some questions like those about the principles of dealing with migration and asylum-seeking, it is relatively easy to arrive at a common Protestant standpoint. But a Protestant dilemma is evident in the field of bioethics. There are divergences between the Protestant European churches and within them over the assessment of embryo research and the cloning of embryonic stem cells. This has meant that these churches have difficulties in speaking with one voice on questions of the beginning of human life, and on possible modes

of procedure in genetic research and medicine. For a long time they been able only to describe the existing range of views and the shared Christian convictions on which they base their standpoints, and to point to the questions which have to be evaluated in a particular field. Even such a differentiated standpoint is welcomed by the political decision-makers, because they themselves often have to seek a consensus in the disputed questions here. There is a need for a structured apparatus of decision-making which has still to be created.

#### **3.2.4. Secularization and pluralism**

As a result of the secularization which has taken place since the time of the Renaissance and the Reformation and in a heightened way since the Enlightenment, the economy and the state, culture, science and education are no longer subject to the supervision of the church. The use of autonomous reason is generally regarded as the way in which the solution of decisive questions and problems is to be striven for in society and politics. Most Protestant churches in Europe affirm this secularization in so far as it aims at shaping God's creation in what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called 'authentic worldliness'. Thus in the Protestant understanding a 're-Christianization' of Europe in the sense of a *corpus christianum* is not worth striving for. Nevertheless the history of Europe has been quite substantially shaped by Christianity. It has persistently contributed to European ways of thinking and living. The rising number of different forms of religious faith and the plurality of non-religious world-views make Christianity in Europe one form of faith alongside others. In the post-socialist countries – but not only there – we are experiencing how people have completely lost any access to religious questions or religious mouldings have been categorically rejected (the ideology of secularism).

In this situation the Christian churches are particularly challenged to express the wholesome and liberating power of the gospel. The Protestant proclamation of justification by grace alone, which bears witness to the unlimited dignity of every human being and issues in an attitude of solidarity, is to be set over against an ideology of achievement which measures the worth of a person by his or her capacity to achieve. It is important to proclaim the Christian faith accordingly and to live it out credibly. Fellowship and hope arise from this (cf. here in more detail the document "Evangelising", especially Chapter 3.1 and 3.14).

Religious pluralism challenges the churches to grapple with other religions and religious currents. The capacity for dialogue is practised here, but the understanding of one's own faith is also sharpened and knowledge of the truth deepened. In addition a clearer participation of the churches in the public discussion of questions which concern the European Community is needed. Precisely here the abiding relevance of the Christian faith for the future of Europe can also be demonstrated.

### **3.3 Conclusion**

The process of European union and integration faces difficult political, economic and ethical questions, a solution for which is being sought. The Protestant churches in Europe as they are united in the CPCE can make an important contribution to this in carrying out their mission. They argue for the humanization of Europe by bearing witness to God's love for all men and women. Moreover, they have experiences in balancing diversity and commitment, difference and community, which could also be important for a Europe of nations and regions. Therefore they must develop procedures to strengthen their common voice and their witness, in public and transparent dialogue and in common action.

## **4. Consequences for the CPCE: strengthening the bond of fellowship**

The reflections on the criteria for shaping the CPCE, its ecumenical dynamic and its significance in the process of European union and integration allow only one conclusion about its future work. It has to make greater and more convincing use of its possibilities in all these dimensions than it is doing at present. Hence the following recommendations for its future work.

### **4.1 Cooperation and communication**

#### **4.1.1 Exchange and consultation**

The basis for an effective fellowship in witness, service and public presentation must be a *structured and intensive exchange of information and regular consultation* between the member churches and the various levels of the CPCE, down to the level of local churches and parishes. In particular, churches could consult their neighbour churches in the church fellowship whenever they face important changes of direction on their own way. This consultation can take place informally. It can be brought about by invitations and visits, to the point of taking part in visitations.

#### **4.1.2. Forums and Consultations**

The instrument of regional *forums and consultations* introduced by the Belfast General Assembly should be used more intensively. The topics for these consultations must be above all questions for the churches and communities in Europe which transcend frontiers and which are of public importance for society.

These include, for example:

- Mission and spirituality
- Theological education in Europe
- Liturgy and liturgical life
- Europe and European integration
- Inter-religious coexistence
- European legislation and its effects on the churches
- Culture and education in Europe
- Protection of minorities (not only ethnic but also religious and national)
- Gender justice in church and society
- Forms of living
- Social questions
- Bioethics
- Sustainability
- Policies on asylum seekers and refugees
- Peace ethics

A beginning has already been made here with the consultations on theological education in Europe (in 2003 by the CPCE together with the ECD), bioethics (in 2003 by the CEC with the

support of the CPCE) and the challenges raised by migration and refugees (in 2004 by the Conference of the Upper Rhine Churches and the CPCE). These need to be continued. Cooperation with non-Protestant partners (as in the case of the Bioethics Consultation with the CEC) should be sought whenever the nature of the matter calls for this. This takes up the commitment of the Charta Oecumenica (II.4): ‘We commit ourselves to act together at all levels of church life wherever conditions permit and there are no reasons of faith or overriding expediency mitigating against this.’

#### **4.1.3. Doctrinal conversations**

Doctrinal conversations have proved themselves as a place of encounter, exchange and theological discussion. The results and their reception have deepened the fellowship and strengthened the common witness. The work of doctrinal conversations will also continue to be of great importance. While the classical themes of controversy as enumerated in LA 39 have been reflected on to a large extent as a first stage, along with new topics they must time and again become the subject of new reflection, above all in respect of questions raised from the perspective of the common exercise of witness and service.

Therefore new thought needs to be given to the composition and working method of the doctrinal conversation groups. For instance it is conceivable that smaller groups of experts could meet in conferences of longer duration instead of holding short conferences over several years with a considerable fluctuation in their membership. This continuous work could be very effective – though the form of doctrinal conversations adopted hitherto has its advantages. An evaluation of the doctrinal conversations so far and their reception would correspond to the importance of this work.

#### **4.1.4. Regional groups**

The *regional groups* are already a place in which a common bond is being experienced intensively, beyond national and confessional boundaries. They convey the discussions of the CPCE to the churches and conversely the positions of the churches to the CPCE. But their important role as forums for the shaping of opinion could be further strengthened. At present there are two regional groups of different, in part considerably different, extent. The North-West Group includes about 12 churches from 5 states, the South-Southeast Group about 25 churches from 14 states. In the Conference of the Churches on the Upper Rhine six CPCE churches from three states are working together closely without having so far clearly defined themselves as a CPCE regional group. At a national level there is the synod of five Leuenberg churches in the Czech Republic. There is also institutionalized cooperation of different CPCE churches in other countries, e.g. France and Poland. However, in many countries or regions there is no regular cooperation between the member churches. Whether regular meetings of the CPCE churches could be established in other regions too should be explored. A restructuring of the regional groups is also worth considering.

#### 4.1.5. Exchange programmes, meetings and European Kirchentage

The following occasions contribute even more strongly to communication among the churches:

- *Exchange programmes* for various target groups (lay members, pastors, church musicians, students) facilitate mutual acquaintance and serve as a market for exchanging ideas.
- *Meetings* like the Berlin Bible Weeks for lay members of the Leuenberg churches, organized by the Union of Evangelical Churches since 1990, serve the same purpose. Youth meetings would be particularly desirable for the future of the CPCE.
- A *European Kirchentag* could be a great experience and at the same time a prominent event which offered Christians from various churches and countries an open forum of dialogue, and made the fellowship a first-hand experience in celebration and listening to one another.

#### 4.1.6. Public relations

Various measures can contribute to making the CPCE better known in the communities. Here are some examples:

- Insertion of the Agreement as *a text* into *hymn books* would document the commitment of our church fellowship and serve to give basic information to church members.
- A '*Leuenberg Sunday*' could make the CPCE better known and increase the feeling of an international bond.
- The *presence* of the CPCE on the *internet* has to be developed further. The new area of 'Liturgy', in which orders of service and liturgical texts from various churches are documented, is a beginning, as is the collection of texts and documents in the area of 'Europe'. The area 'Network' will certainly be expanded.

### 4.2. Organizational and legal developments

#### 4.2.1. Legal commitment

By signing the Agreement, the signatory churches declare that there is church fellowship between them. The commitment to common witness and service and to the 'deepening and strengthening of the fellowship they have found together' (LA 35) has led the churches to develop institutional forms in the 33 years since the Agreement was approved and to expand them continually. Today there is a need to investigate whether the binding nature of its resolutions inwardly and a capacity for action outwardly could not be strengthened by a development of *legal forms*. This matches its commitment to service towards the ecumenical fellowship of all churches in the European sphere (cf. LA 46f.).

A new statute could clarify the basis of membership including the responsibilities and rights of members and possibly also regulations about 'associated membership', etc., and spell out the tasks and competences of organs (which already exist or are to be created).

One step along the way could be a covenant in which the member churches renew and make

concrete their obligation to a sustained realization and strengthening of fellowship in witness and service.

#### **4.2.2. The European Protestant Synod**

The creation of a European Protestant Synod would enliven the conciliar dimension of the CPCE and relativize the particularity of the individual churches. However there are great suspicions in some of the churches about the introduction of a synod, since they fear restriction of their own competences. To clarify this question it is helpful to distinguish the following models.

1. The European Protestant Synod is a representative meeting for common consultations and resolutions *which does not aim at binding decisions*. An example would be the Swiss Protestant Synod (SES) of the years 1983-1987. Over 200 delegates and observers from state and free churches, faculties, agencies and communities met together in it to debate the future of Swiss Protestantism. However, the statements and standpoints of this synod were only recommendations, and had no binding character.
2. The European Protestant Synod has *a limited competence*. A model for this is the Synod of the Leuenberg Churches in the Czech Republic; this can make resolutions, but the resolutions must be ratified by each signatory church.
3. The European Protestant Synod is *competent to govern the church*, an authority which has been transferred to it by the signatory churches. A model for this would be the division of tasks within a church or church alliance, where synod and council make the voice of the Protestant churches heard in society and represent the churches in the ecumenical movement, whereas the individual member churches remain independent and autonomous in reception.

In the view of most churches the third model is not to be pursued further, because the sovereignty of the individual churches should not be put in question. Whether the two other models would really lead to a strengthening of the commitment of the CPCE – quite apart from the presuppositions and consequences which need to be clarified - must be examined further. Here there is also a need for clarification of the questions how decisions are to be made legally binding, what means of financing are to be adopted and in what way delegation takes place in the relevant bodies.

#### **4.2.3. The idea of a church leaders' conference**

Because of the principle of a synodical constitution in almost all Protestant churches in Europe, which is based on the universal priesthood of all believers, the establishment of a 'church leaders' conference' as a decision-making body of the CPCE is not to be recommended. However, as a consultative instrument, assemblies of church leaders of member churches can strengthen the inner bond within the community and the public perception of Protestant positions.

#### 4.2.4. The General Assembly

Possibly the most promising starting point for further structural development remains the General Assembly. Various measures should be considered in order to bring together the voices of its member churches better and contribute more effectively to it.

- *More frequent meetings.* However, if the assembly is convened more often (currently every five to six years), the question arises how the extra financial expense can be covered. One possibility would be to reduce the size of the General Assembly.
- A reform of the *composition and mode of working* of the General Assembly in terms of representativeness and the mandate of delegates. Here a decisive question is whether the churches send different numbers of delegates – weighted in terms of the number of their members - or whether all the churches simply send one delegate each. In the former case it is easier to guarantee a balance of different groups. In the latter, reducing the size of the General Assembly promises greater effectiveness. Here the delegates could be given different weightings in their votes, depending on the size of their churches. The possibility of transferring a vote to other churches should also be examined.
- The size of the General Assembly could also be reduced by having the churches represented on the basis of a *regional structure* to be created instead of all the churches being represented. Such a structure could link up with the existing regional groups (see above 4.1.4), but would then have to be extended and reshaped. The advantage of this structure would be the establishment of a level of opinion-forming which transcended individual churches yet nevertheless was nearer to the shared experiences and challenges in the individual European regions. It has to be asked, however, whether this would really make communication and reception more effective and whether the very large regional groups would be entities with which it was possible to identify.

#### 4.2.5. ‘Council’ and Presidium

The current Executive Committee as a central organ between two General Assemblies should be renamed ‘*Council*’ and should be given more importance. At any rate it must continue to be elected by the General Assembly. Its precise composition, function and mode of work should be laid out in more detail in a statute. It will assume responsibility for the staffing and supervision of the office.

According to the CPCE order valid since 1994, the Executive Committee elects a *Presidium* from among its own members (up to four persons). Major importance is attached to the Presidium in the public recognition and outward representation of the CPCE to the outside world. Therefore it seems appropriate to give the Presidents greater authority. There are various arguments against a direct election by the General Assembly. Therefore it is proposed that the Council elects a Presidium from among its own members immediately after its own election by the General Assembly, and that this should then be ratified by the General Assembly.

#### 4.2.6. Financing

The question of *financing* plays an important role in any consideration of the restructuring of the work of the CPCE. The signatory churches assume responsibility for the CPCE budget. So

far the churches have made voluntary contributions of different amounts. The budget could be increased by obliging the churches to pay on the basis of a scale of contributions to be agreed. In view of what has been said in 2.4 and 2.6, here conversations are to be sought with the confessional world alliances and with the WCC and CEC. To complement this, other methods of financing should be promoted and secured, for instance through foundations or church institutions (fund-raising).

#### **4.2.7. Inter-church Aid**

Given the obligation to exercise common witness and service (LA 29 and 36), the question arises whether the CPCE should be strengthened in the future through mutual inter-church aid. This sphere of commitment should be agreed on by conversations with the confessional world federations by means of talks. This also includes binding cooperation with Protestant-orientated diaspora agencies, associations and ecumenical agencies of social work with a view to bringing about common action which deepens the fellowship within the CPCE. Another goal should be structured cooperation with the ecumenical bodies involved in inter-church aid at a European level such as CEC and WCC.

#### **4.3. Looking forward**

The consequences which arise for the future shape of the CPCE from the dynamic use of the specifically Reformation *criteria* for the shape of the church, in view of its *ecumenical tasks* and the acceptance of the *challenges* posed by the process of European integration and transformation, are far-reaching. The time is not ripe for all of them to be realized immediately. Many require a careful balancing between what is desirable and what is in fact possible, between the well-tried old and the necessary new. Others (like those mentioned in 4.1 above) can be implemented relatively easily. But whatever may be the case, there is no occasion for persisting in the fellowship in the CPCE which has already been realized – in particular out of gratitude for what has already been achieved. Protestant churches know that they remain true to their foundation and their commission when in the shaping of their fellowship they undergo historical changes. The shape of the Community of the Protestant Churches in Europe needs to be developed further for the sake of collaboration in witness and service, for the sake of God and humankind.

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