KIRCHENGEMEINSCHAFT - CHURCH COMMUNION – COMMUNION ECCLESIALE

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1 See § 46.
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About this text

1) Over the past two decades, the concept of church communion, central to the Leuenberg Agreement, has received an increasing amount of attention. The interest in a deeper and more extensive clarification of what is being realised and experienced as church communion has conspicuously increased. The communion in which the member churches of the CPCE know themselves bound together and in which they perceive themselves as church inspires a growing sense of communion in the living out of church life and in witness and service in the world. In mutually recognising one another as church and declaring church fellowship with one another in the Leuenberg Agreement, the member churches of the CPCE have committed themselves to clear everything out of the way that might obscure the practical testimony to the unity of the church given in Christ that results from church communion. Behind the question about the forms church communion will assume in the future, a need emerges to clarify and ascertain the understanding of unity. This has been felt ever more clearly by the member churches of the CPCE on the way from Belfast (2001) to Budapest (2006) and then to Florence (2012).

2) This gives rise to two challenges. The first challenge arises from the world-wide ecumenical movement. Other churches ask again and again about the ecumenical meaning of church communion and how the member churches of the CPCE give it shape. They have the impression that the concept of church communion is only to a limited degree suitable as an ecumenical model, in that it models the diversity rather than the unity of the church, and so adds to the strengthening of the status quo. The second challenge comes from the CPCE member churches themselves. The Protestant churches in Europe have recognized that they must work together more closely if they wish their testimony to be heard in the public space of Europe. In the current situation of social and political transformation, the existing church communion between member churches of the CPCE cannot be restricted simply to its core, the worshipping community in Word and Sacrament, along with continuous doctrinal discussions. New fields of work need to be opened up and networks and organizational structures need to be developed and improved.

3) Both these challenges have persuaded the CPCE council and the 7th General Assembly in Florence (2012) to make the theme of church communion the topic of a doctrinal discussion. In this doctrinal discussion “particular attention” should be “paid to the positive potential and the visibility of the church communion” and “the theological clarification of the binding force and the legal implications of the church communion should also be addressed”.

The text that follows presents the fruits of this doctrinal discussion.
1 TAKING STOCK: CHURCH COMMUNION AS AN EXPERIENCE OF THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

1.1 Church communion in the perspective of the Leuenberg Agreement (1973)

4) With the Leuenberg Agreement, church communion became a leading concept for the ecclesiological and ecumenical self-understanding of the Protestant churches in Europe.

5) The Protestant churches of different confessional positions which are signatories to the Agreement have established “on the basis of their doctrinal discussions, a common understanding of the Gospel”, which is set out in the Agreement (LA 1). This has made it possible for them “to declare and to realize church fellowship” (ibid.).

6) The Agreement follows the criteria for church unity stated in the Augsburg Confession, VII. “Fellowship in Word and Sacrament” (LA 29) presupposes agreement in the understanding of the gospel and so clarification of what the churches can say together on Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Diversity in liturgy and forms of church government are no obstacle to unity, if this diversity stands the test of the common understanding of the Gospel.

7) The declaration of church communion adopted by churches, in their assent to the Agreement, consists of the following elements:

“a) that (the churches) are one in understanding the Gospel as set out in parts II and III (of the Agreement);

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

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

With these statements church fellowship is declared. The divisions which have barred the way to this fellowship since the sixteenth century are removed. The participating churches are convinced that together they participate in the one Church of Jesus Christ and that the Lord frees them for and calls them to common service” (LA 31-34).

In this way the recognition of ministries is grounded in the common understanding of Word and Sacrament and follows from it.
8) With the declaration of church communion comes the task of realizing church communion. This happens “in the life of the churches and congregations”: “Believing in the unifying power of the Holy Spirit, they bear their witness and perform their service together, and strive to deepen and strengthen the fellowship they have found together” (LA 35). Thus common witness to the gospel and common service arising from the gospel become crucial features of church communion as it is practised.

9) At the same time, continuing theological work in doctrinal discussions (and joint theological, ethical and liturgical projects) is a crucial element in practical church communion for the CPCE churches. On this matter, LA 38 expresses the view that “the common understanding of the Gospel on which the church fellowship is based must be further deepened, examined in the light of the witness of Holy Scripture, and continually made relevant to a contemporary context”.

10) Church communion expressed in practice has organizational implications, and implications for church law. In the Agreement, however, these are only hinted at and caution is advised (see LA 42-45).

11) Church communion expressed in practice looks beyond itself; its participating churches act “as part of their responsibility to promote the ecumenical fellowship of all Christian churches” (LA 46) in the hope that “the church fellowship will provide a fresh stimulus to encounter and collaboration with churches of other confessions” (LA 49).

1.2 The Church of Jesus Christ (1994)

12) With the study document, The Church of Jesus Christ (CJC; Leuenberg Documents 1, [1995] ©2012), the general assembly of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship in 1994 in Vienna set out the basic tenets of the Protestant understanding of the church and explained the ecclesiological principles which guide the signatory churches in ecumenical dialogue.

13) The study document distinguishes between the foundation, shape and mission of the church. “The foundation of the church is God’s action in Jesus Christ to save humankind. In this fundamental action God himself is the subject, and consequently the church is an object of faith. Since the church is a community of believers the shape of the church has taken various historical forms. The one church of faith (singular) is present in a hidden manner in churches (plural) shaped in different ways. The mission of the church is its task to witness to all humankind, in word and deed, to the gospel of the coming of the Kingdom of God” (CJC Introduction, 4).

14) The event that lets the church be church, and which precedes all human action and reaction, is the justifying, liberating act of God which is proclaimed in the preaching of the gospel and granted in the sacraments. As witness to the gospel in the world the church is called to be “an
instrument of God for the actualization of God’s universal will to salvation” (CJC I. 3.2). In this function it should not seek to usurp the place of Jesus Christ: “It will be faithful to this call, if it remains in Christ, the sole infallible instrument of salvation” (CJC I. 3.2).

15) The one, catholic, holy and apostolic church is experienced in the churches wherever Word and Sacrament are truly celebrated. That entails the ordered ministry which is constitutive of the church (CJC I. 2.5.1.2). Wherever Word and Sacrament are truly celebrated, different churches recognize one another mutually as the church of Jesus Christ and cannot deny one another their being as church. Understood in this way, the diversity of the churches is an enrichment.

16) According to the Leuenberg Agreement, the declaration of church communion arises out of agreement in the understanding of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments in accordance with the Lord’s commands. The realization of church communion is not however dependent on a central model of structural unity. The churches seek to conform to the standard of unity that can forever be experienced as God’s gift to the churches, in that they know themselves to be supported in common by God’s free grace, and just for that reason enquire anew again and after their common understanding of the gospel (cf. LA 38). They become one in that Christ takes shape in them and among them, and is able to be effective in shaping them.

17) The Leuenberg Agreement is a declaration by churches of the Reformation in Europe. It has become an exemplary model for the declaration and realization of church communion in other regions of the world (cf. also CJC III.3.1). Some churches have reached agreements comparable to the Leuenberg Agreement, for instance in 1998 the Lutheran, Reformed and United churches in the USA with the Formula of Agreement and in 2006 the Lutheran and Reformed churches in the Near East with the Amman Statement.

1.3 Church communion realized in life

18) The history of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship, from 2003 the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, is a history of the steady growing together of over 100 member churches. Church communion has been experienced as communion in worship (3.1), as communion in doctrine (3.2), as communion that is evolving in shape (3.3), and thereby as a communion of witness and service in the Europe of today (3.4).

1.3.1 In the CPCE, church communion has been and is experienced as communion in worship:

19) Church communion grows out of the encounter between the witness of the Gospel and human beings. For that reason, it comes to expression most profoundly in the common celebration
of worship. Thus, in the CPCE, Lutheran, Reformed, Methodist and United are joined with one another in worship, they have fellowship at the Lord’s Table, and their ministers exchange pulpits. The CPCE as a communion reconciled in Christ has lived from the outset in pulpit and table fellowship.

20) The maintenance and fostering of a common worship life in liturgy and hymnody is part of table and pulpit fellowship. In the past few years numerous such projects have been developed: the introduction of a Leuenberg Sunday, the work on liturgical material for shared services of worship, the development and introduction of the CPCE songbook *Colours of Grace* (2007), the interlinking of the liturgical work through the institution of a much used internet portal on liturgy and through consultations on worship.

1.3.2  In the CPCE, church communion has been and is experienced as a communion in doctrine:

21) Church communion is deepened by theological teaching and learning together. The Leuenberg Agreement commits the signatory churches to further theological work: in general, in the deepening, examination and constant updating of the common understanding of the Gospel in the light of the witness of Holy Scripture (cf. LA 38); and in particular, through doctrinal discussions or through theological work on the doctrinal differences “that persist within the participating churches and between them without being grounds for division” (LA 39).

22) To a considerable extent, a path and profile for church communion have been shaped by doctrinal discussions. They determine the rhythm of work between the general assemblies. Their results, arrived at by authorized project and working groups, are presented to the member churches for their comments prior to any resolution at the general assembly. The responses of member churches feed into the final shape of the text. In this way, a higher level of participation and a broad reception have been achieved.

23) Past doctrinal discussions have considered the themes which in LA 39 were identified for further work: the relationship of the two kingdoms doctrine to the doctrine of the sovereignty of Jesus Christ (1975-1981), the doctrine of Baptism and Communion (1981-1987), Ministry and Ordination (1976-1987, 2006-2012, with the explicit inclusion of episcopate), Law and Gospel (1994-2001), Scripture and Creed (2006-2012). In addition, studies have been produced whose composition has arisen from the life of the church communion, such as the ecclesiological study *The Church of Jesus Christ* (1987-1994), and the studies which built on it: *Church and Israel* (1994-2001), *The Shape and Shaping of Protestant Churches in Europe* (2001-2006) and *Evangelizing: Protestant Perspectives for the Churches in Europe* (2001-2006). These and numerous
other theological projects such as for example The Christian Witness to Freedom (1987-1994) further clarify the importance of theological work for the deepening of living church fellowship and the processes of learning that are associated with it.

1.3.3 In the CPCE, church communion has been and is experienced as a communion that is evolving in shape:

24) Church communion is dependent on reliable forms of communication and organization. In the 1990s it became increasingly clear that with the institutional weakness of the Leuenberg Fellowship, which had originally been deliberately intended, problems had surfaced for which an appropriate solution had to be found. Through the doctrinal discussions, areas of work were to be developed which would also require a stronger institutional structuring. These should take into account the evolving shape of the communion in worship, in doctrine and in witness and service.

25) The goal of a “further development of the structural and juridical shape of the CPCE” and the “raising of the transparency and efficiency of its decision-making” called for a series of measures which were proposed by the 2006 general assembly in Budapest (cf. Final Report ch. 4). These were realized through the preparatory work and implementation by the general assembly in Florence (2012). Clearer regulations were introduced for the sending and mandating of delegates and for a more binding structure for the participation of the churches. In Budapest a statute was adopted through which the communion was given the character of a separate juridical entity. The executive committee in 2006 became a council, whose praesidium of three people represents the CPCE externally.

26) Advisory groups were called into being, to support the council and the praesidium with their specialized competence and prepare opinion papers on current problems: the specialist group on ethics (from 2007) and the specialist group on ecumenism (from 2009). From 2007, members of a younger generation were more deeply involved in the work of the CPCE.

27) From the beginning the regional groups have seen themselves as having special responsibility for witness and service and have promoted the regional interlinking of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship in exemplary fashion. In this way cross-border forums and consultations on theology, social ethics and diaconal work have emerged. These have proved themselves to be an important nucleus for the growing together and intensification of church communion in particular European regions.

28) With the document Training for the Ordained Ministry in the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (2012) the CPCE churches have set out their common understanding of
good theological training and developed a concept of training for churches, as well as university
faculties and theological colleges, to use as guidelines, so as to make progress with the ex-
change of ministers in the CPCE — another way of deepening their togetherness and strength-
ening the church communion.

1.3.4 In the CPCE, church communion has been and is experienced as a communion
of witness and service in the Europe of today:

29) The unanimous testimony of the Gospel is an important concern of the Agreement. From
that grows the liberation of the churches and their common commitment to service. Service is
regarded as “service of love … which focuses on human distress and seeks to remove the
causes of that distress. The struggle for justice and peace in the world increasingly requires that
the churches accept a common responsibility” (cf. LA 36). Up to the fall of the Iron Curtain, the
Leuenberg Church Fellowship, as it was then called, was experienced as a communion in which
the opposed systems of a divided Europe could lose their significance in dividing people from
one another, and in which solidarity in the Gospel could be lived out across borders.

30) In the course of the 1990s the pan-European dimension and the task of becoming visible at
a European level became increasingly significant. The new political and social fields of action
which opened up following the surmounting of the division of Europe made Europe and Europe-
an questions a central theme. The European Protestant Assembly in Budapest (1992) called on
the Protestant churches in Europe to “fulfil together their responsibility for the future of Europe”
and in so doing drew attention particularly to the Leuenberg Church Fellowship. The demand of
the general assembly in Belfast (2001) to let “the voice of the Protestant Churches in Europe
become more audible” set the agenda. This demand has from then on governed the agenda of
the Leuenberg Church Fellowship.

31) Again and again in the past few years the CPCE has expressed an opinion on develop-
ments in Europe and its current problems, with, for instance, the statement from the praesidium
Meeting the Crisis on the EU summit in 2011 in Brussels, the statement from the assembly in
2012 on the current situation in Europe with the acute problems caused by the crisis in the fi-
nancial system, the economy and government debts, in 2014 with a statement on the European
elections, in 2015 with a statement on the refugee crisis Shelter and welcome refugees, in 2017
with a statement on the 60th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome. The CPCE churches con-
sciously participate in the socio-ethical questions which preoccupy Europe, for example with the
guidance on end-of-life decisions and care for the dying A time to live, and a time to die (2011)
or on questions of reproductive medicine “Before I formed you in the womb….” (2017).
32) In 2009, the CPCE embarked on a collaboration with the joint working group for Protestant diaspora work in Europe (AGDE). The AGDE provides a platform for the coordination of shared relief programmes. Its often long-standing partnerships, its experience of relief programmes, and its relationship with donors for congregation-building, training and diaconal work, offer a resource which should not be underestimated. It may also offer the basis for a possible enlargement of the agenda of the CPCE around the promotion of church work for solidarity, through which the character of the church communion as offering service as well as witness is strengthened and shaped.

1.4 Church communion and ecumenism

33) Ecumenical commitment is inseparable from church communion. In declaring and realizing church communion amongst themselves, the churches signatory to the Agreement “do so as part of their responsibility to promote the ecumenical fellowship of all Christian churches. They regard such a fellowship of churches in the region of Europe as a contribution to this end” (LA 46f.).

34) In connection with the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Leuenberg Agreement, other Protestant churches were also invited to sign the Agreement. In 1993 the Unitas Fratrum in the continent of Europe and the Czechoslovak Hussite Church joined the Church Fellowship. Of the Lutheran churches of Scandinavia who had already been involved in the work from the beginning, the Agreement was signed in 1999 by the Church of Norway, and in 2001 by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark. The Church of Norway particularly underlined the fact that they were led to this step by the ecclesiological statement in the study The Church of Jesus Christ. In 1997 the Methodist churches in Europe came into membership through a statement, annexed to the Agreement, in which particular Methodist concerns (eg. sanctification, community in service) were taken into account.

35) In other continents too, Lutheran and Reformed came to make declarations of church communion. They took this step with express reference to the Leuenberg Agreement. The Formula of Agreement and the Amman Declaration (see above §17), as statements of full mutual recognition, prove the significance of this model of unity beyond the European region. Previously churches of the La Plata states in Latin America had signed the Leuenberg Agreement. In addition, the world-wide international Lutheran-Reformed dialogue refers expressly to the church communion created by the Leuenberg Agreement. The first Budapest Report (1988) recommends that all churches examine the historic anathemas in the light of their significance today, declare church communion in Word and Sacrament and follow a common course of witness and
service. The most recent report of this dialogue *Communion: On Being the Church* (2014) deepens the common understanding of the Church. Here too the lines of connection with *The Church of Jesus Christ* should not be overlooked.

36) In Europe as well as in North America and Australia, there have been in recent years statements of church fellowship with Anglican churches. The *Meissen Agreement* (1991) and the *Reuilly Common Statement* (2001) declare church fellowship between Lutheran, Reformed and United churches which have signed the Leuenberg Agreement, and, respectively, the Church of England and the Anglican churches of Britain and Ireland. The understanding of unity upon which these are based and the model of unity which arises from it correspond to the Leuenberg approach. Even if this does not result in the common exercise of the office of bishop, the diverse ministries of the churches are mutually recognised as a consequence of the declared fellowship in Word and Sacrament. The dialogue between Lutherans and Anglicans resulted in 1994 in the *Porvoo Agreement* between the British Anglican churches and the Scandinavian and Baltic Lutheran churches, amongst them churches of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship. Although these, in distinction from the Leuenberg Agreement, took the step to a common exercise of the episcopal office and so to a more visible unity, here also the model of unity and its shaping is closely related to that which was realised in the Leuenberg Church Fellowship. This holds good for the Lutheran-Anglican statements in other continents which follow the Porvoo model such as the statement *Called to Common Mission* between the Lutheran and Episcopal churches in the USA (1999), the *Waterloo Statement* between the corresponding churches in Canada (2001) and the Australian process *A Common Ground*.

37) There have been clear rapprochements with other European churches which relate to the Reformation. The dialogue that began in 1993 with the European Baptist Federation led in 2005 to a conclusion which shows considerable steps forward in the understanding of Baptism and Church. In 2010 an agreement in cooperation was signed which provided for the extension of contacts made already and engagement in mutual work.

38) The relationship with other Christian confessions has also been stimulated. With the study *The Church of Jesus Christ* impetus was given to new ecumenical conversations. These are dedicated primarily to ecclesiology. From 2002 to 2008 there took place a corresponding dialogue with the Orthodox churches in the CEC. It led to the recommendation of agreements on the mutual recognition of Baptism. In 2013 the official conversations got under way with representatives of the Roman Catholic Church on questions on the understanding of church and church communion. These developments show that the Community of Protestant Churches in...
Europe, based on the Leuenberg Agreement, is perceived today as an independent ecumenical partner.

2 THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

2.1 The church as the body of Christ and the communion of saints

39) The church is in its essence the body of Christ (1 Cor.12:12f, 27). In the communion with Jesus Christ human beings obtain communion with God and with one another. The biblical discourse of the body of Christ makes it clear that the church only exists in communion with Christ as its head (e.g. Eph. 4,15 f; Col. 1,18) and that correspondingly it “does not have the ground for its unity in itself but in Christ as its Lord present and acting in the Spirit” (CJC I. 2.1).

40) Although the Leuenberg Agreement does not develop any teaching on the church, it marks out the foundation and the core idea of its implicit ecclesiology by emphasising: “The church is founded on Jesus Christ alone. Through the gift of his salvation in preaching and the sacraments, he gathers the Church and sends it out” (LA 2; cf. LA13). The communion of the church is established and lives in the proclamation of the Gospel and the celebration of the sacraments.

41) The study The Church of Jesus Christ develops what is outlined in the Leuenberg Agreement: the church is, in communion with Jesus Christ as the head of the church, a communion in the gifts of salvation (communio [rerum] sanctorum) and hence, the communion of saints (communio [hominum] sanctorum) (cf. CJC I. 1.3). This takes place in the power of the Spirit of God, who, as the Giver of life, does not isolate but unites human beings with God in Jesus Christ and with one another.

42) The church therefore owes its existence to the work of the triune God, who as Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit lovingly grants his creatures their being and preserves it, overcomes through his Word the alienation of humanity in the incarnation of the Son and the gathering of the church and so opens up new communion in the Spirit of freedom (cf. CJC I. 1.1 and I. 1.4). The CPCE shares this perspective with the world-wide oecumene: “This saving activity of the Holy Trinity is essential to an adequate understanding of the church” (The Church: Towards a Common Vision. Faith and Order paper no. 214, WCC: Geneva, 2013, § 3). In this sense, the church is a communion in Christ and the Spirit.

2.2 Fellowship in Word and Sacrament

43) In the gospel of Jesus Christ, God grants his unconditional grace and offers righteousness through faith alone. In this way he grants new communion with himself and frees humanity from
1 a situation of alienation and opposition to God into a new life and “sets in the midst of the world
2 the beginnings of a new humanity” (LA 10). In the Reformation understanding of the gospel as
3 justification through faith alone without works, the reconciling and liberating power of the gospel
4 received new recognition. This is the lasting consensus of the Reformers, endorsed by the
5 Leuenberg Agreement and forming the starting-point for surmounting church-dividing doctrinal
6 differences between the churches of the Reformation.

7 44) Through the right preaching of the gospel and the due celebration of the sacraments of Bap-
8 tism and the Eucharist, humanity is brought into communion with Christ and gathered in the
9 church as a communion of the saints/believers. The New Testament speaks here of the *koinonia*
10 of believers which is at the same time *koinonia* with their Lord (1 Cor. 10:6f; cf. Acts 2:42). Only
11 in the communion of these gifts of salvation bestowed in Christ is the church the *church of Jesus
12 Christ*. Accordingly, LA 2, picking up on CA VII, stresses that an agreement in the understanding
13 of the gospel and the celebration of the sacraments is the necessary but also sufficient condition
14 for the unity of the church.

15 45) The biblical term *koinonia* (communion, fellowship) has a central significance in the ecumen-
16 ical quest for a common understanding of the life and unity of the church (cf. Commission for
17 Faith and Order: *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, § 13). The church as the body of
18 Christ is a communion (*communio*) in and through its participation in the gifts of salvation, Bap-
19 tism and the Lord’s Supper. Through these, it is not just the individual who gains communion
20 with God in Christ. On the contrary, through the gifts of salvation, the participants are *at the
21 same time* bound with one another in communion. By faith in Christ the faithful do not just be-
22 lieve that Christ grants communion to each of them individually, they know at the same time that
23 the communion is valid also for all others who believe in Christ. Through faith in Christ, who died
24 for all, others are neighbours.

25 46) In the ecumenical movement, the German term “Kirchengemeinschaft” is established as a
26 rendering of the Latin word *communio*. It is so used in the Leuenberg Agreement which was
27 originally drawn up in German. One has to take account of the fact that the German language
28 only has the expression Gemeinschaft to translate *communio* as well as *communitas*. 
29 “Kirchengemeinschaft” emphasises *communio* and the ecclesial quality so expressed. The
30 French language distinguishes between *communauté* and *communion*, English between *fellow-
31 ship, community* and *ecclesial or church* *communion*. From the Leuenberg Agreement on-
32 wards, the French texts of the CPCE used the term “communion ecclésiale” as the equivalent of
33 “Kirchengemeinschaft” while in the English CPCE texts the term “church fellowship” was used
34 as the equivalent of “Kirchengemeinschaft”. So the Leuenberg “Kirchengemeinschaft” was de-
scribed as the Leuenberg Church Fellowship. In other ecumenical texts, both in inner-Protestant and in interconfessional dialogues, the term “communion” (sometimes “ecclesial communion”, sometimes “church communion”) prevails. In order to avoid misunderstandings and to bring it into line with international ecumenical usage, preference will from now on be given to the term "church communion".

47) Agreement in the understanding of the gospel is for a Protestant understanding constitutive both of the communion of the church and also of the communion of the churches (cf. LA 6-12). According to the insight of the Reformers, justification occurs *sola gratia, sola fide, solo Christo* and *solo verbo*. On the basis of the recognition of the common understanding of the gospel, church-dividing doctrinal differences in the understanding of the sacraments, in Christology and in the doctrine of predestination are overcome in the consensus statements of the Leuenberg Agreement (cf. LA 13-28). It is just so that the basic meaning of the doctrine of justification proves itself.

2.3 Confession, doctrine and life

48) The agreement in faith in the gospel is set out in the doctrine of justification (cf. LA 8). However, fellowship in faith arises not through doctrinal affirmations, but only through the proclamation of the gospel in worship, in Word and Sacrament, in which Jesus Christ makes himself present in the power of the Spirit of God. Even though agreement in the understanding of the gospel is not achieved through doctrinal formulations, it still requires doctrinal development and confirmation.

49) In the CPCE, the diversity of confessional traditions among the participating churches is understood as an enrichment. In the confessional documents of the period of the Reformation, the insights of the Reformers were articulated in concrete terms in their respective regional contexts and combinations of problems. They are part of the shaping of the Reformation churches which in turn recognise the providence of God in their individual histories. Reference to particular different confessions is recognised in the Leuenberg Agreement as a confession of the same faith and so is not seen as an obstacle to church communion. This is confirmed in the doctrinal conversations to date. It is not the subscription to individual confessional formulas that is constitutive of the fellowship in Word and Sacrament, but the agreement in the understanding of the gospel.

50) The special character of the CPCE as a communion of churches with different confessional positions is based in the first place on the understanding that the Reformation confessions agree in the understanding of the justification promised in the gospel through faith alone and express
this in a variety of ways in different places and times. Secondly, it is based on the Leuenberg Agreement’s overcoming of church-dividing doctrinal differences relating to the sacraments, Christology, and the doctrine of predestination. As long as individual differences in doctrinal statements do not bring the agreement in the understanding of the gospel into question, the variety of confessional positions in the churches is not an obstacle to communion, but only an expression of a legitimate diversity.

51) For the realization of church communion it is essential that the agreement in understanding of the gospel is constantly being deepened and secured in the context of contemporary challenges and in debate with the individual confessional traditions (cf. LA 37f.). The doctrinal discussions serve as part of the process in which church communion between churches with different confessional positions is realized.

52) The recognition of various confessional commitments and their diverse evaluation is associated in the CPCE with the recognition that there are different forms in all areas of church life. However, this presupposes that the structure and organization of a church correspond to its task of proclaiming the gospel in Word and Sacrament and so to the contents of the gospel itself (cf. LA 12). For that reason, exchanges of views about structures are called for and critical theological reflection on the realization and deepening of church communion.

2.4 Fellowship in the Lord’s Supper and church communion

53) In the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, the fellowship of believers with Christ and with one another is experienced in a concise way through the senses. In it the crucified and resurrected Christ himself makes himself present, gives himself, and assures the participants of his fellowship. The promise of the presence of Jesus Christ is effective for all who gather in faith round the Lord’s table in the most varied places. In each celebration of the Lord’s Supper those who participate are joined together with all other Christian communities to whom, in the feast, Jesus Christ has made himself present, is making himself present and will make himself present.

For the CPCE churches, that means that it is not the invitation of all who have been baptized to the common celebration that requires accounting for but rather the restriction and limiting of such fellowship before the Christ who extends an invitation as Lord of the church and before all to whom fellowship is refused.

54) The close connection with the whole of Christendom is fundamental for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper as a fellowship meal.

cf. the Commission for Faith and Order: The Church: Towards a Common Vision §22: “The Church is catholic because of the abundant goodness of God ‘who desires everyone to be saved and come to the
knowledge of the truth’ (1 Tim. 2, 4). Through the life-giving power of God, the Church’s mission transcends all barriers and proclaims the Gospel to all peoples. Where the whole mystery of Christ is present, there too is the Church catholic (cf. Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Smyrneans, 6), as in the celebration of the eucharist. The essential catholicity of the Church is undermined when cultural and other differences are allowed to develop into division. Christians are called to remove all obstacles to the embodiment of this fullness of truth and life bestowed upon the Church by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

In the celebration of the Lord’s Supper the catholicity and unity of the church are portrayed in a special way. Church communion and fellowship in the Lord’s Supper belong together.

55) The church of Jesus Christ exists in the communion of communions. The supra-regional attachment of the churches to one another in the communion of Christ which comes to expression in the Lord’s Supper, cannot be thought of as something additional to the local or regional communion of a church. In the communion with Christ which is mediated through the gospel in the power of the Spirit, not only are individuals joined in the local church communion, but churches are also joined with each other at regional and supra-regional levels.

56) In declaring communion with one another, the churches of the CPCE desire to give visible expression to the fact that they exist as churches of Jesus Christ in the communion of communions. Even if they are legally independent churches, they have a share in and are one form of the one church of Jesus Christ. Church communion is “practical testimony to the unity of the church believed in in Christ” (see the “Leuenberg report”: Church fellowship and church division. Report of the Lutheran-Reformed conversations in Leuenberg [Switzerland] 1969/70. In: E. Schieffer, Von Schauenburg nach Leuenberg, 1983, A61). In testifying to the unity of the churches as given in Christ, the CPCE manifests its character indirectly as a communion of communions united in and through Christ as head and is thereby a church (cf. §81f.).

57) Membership of the church of Jesus Christ is predicated on authentic preaching and the celebration of the sacraments in accordance with their foundation. By these marks it is recognised as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic and thereby the true church of Jesus Christ (cf. CJC I. 2.3). The leadership structures and forms of organization of church life must correspond to these marks and should not obscure them. For church communion as a communion of communions, it is of crucial significance to consider and test the shaping of the witness and service of the church, in exchange with one another. They should be able to give an account as to why particular structures and forms of organisation are able to serve the local and/or regional communion. The “spiritual fellowship presses for the greatest possible co-operation in internal church life and in witness to and service of the world. It obliges them to clear away everything that obscures the practical witness that results from church fellowship” (Leuenberg Report, in Schieffer, A61).
2.5 Church and church communion as an expression of the event of justification

58) God’s creative promise of justification through faith in Christ alone grounds and opens up the right relationship of human beings with God and at the same time the true communion of human beings with one another, in holy living. The church as the communion of saints is based on this justifying action of God and is at the same time part of it in that it is entrusted with the proclamation of the gospel in Word and Sacrament. Without justification by God, there is no salvation for human beings. For that reason, the church is one of the steps which God must take with humankind to realise salvation. From this stems the element of truth in the frequently misunderstood saying “extra ecclesiam nulla salus”.

59) According to Protestant understanding, the fundamental form in which the church is realized is the fellowship gathered for the worship of God. But just as each local church owes its existence to the justifying work of the triune God so also do churches in the communion of their local churches owe their existence to this saving event, and likewise communion between different church traditions.

60) Each local congregation, each church and church communion bears responsibility in its witness and service for the unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity of the church. According to the understanding of the reformers, such responsibility is not only a matter for the church leadership or ministers, but for the *tota ecclesia* and so for all members of the church, each in their own way. What goes for the local congregation or an institutionally structured church goes also for a church communion. The responsibility for unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity is a matter for all members and churches of the *communio* and it remains their constant task. Accordingly the study document on the church records in its statement of the characteristic attributes of the church of faith the tasks which ensue in each case from its confession (cf. CJC I. 2.3). In this way it makes it clear that it is intrinsic to the church’s mission to make the nature of the church, grounded in the action of the triune God, able to be experienced in the world.

61) To structure such responsibility in the service of the unity of the communion, it is important to have accepted methods for the exchange of opinions, decision-making and voting. This is the only way one can also make sure that agreement in the understanding of the gospel is proved secure when dealing with questions of governance and ethics, and is not broken up over these challenges.

Amongst the most controversial questions preoccupying churches and church communions world-wide and frequently testing them to breaking point, there are currently on the one hand the topic of the ordina-
tion of women, on the other the evaluation and legal position of same-sex relationships in general and of ministers in particular. The disagreements reveal how loyalty to the gospel is displayed in very different ways. These conceal differing assessments of the developments of modernity and differing biblical hermeneutics. Here too the decisive starting-point for common reflection must be the event of justification.

62) Justification through faith alone, grounded solely in the work of the triune God, gives insight into the love of God, opens up human beings for communion with Christ and so frees them for love of God and neighbour. Love enables the recognition of the other and living with differences. It is constitutive for being and remaining in communion with Christ to view the justifying action of God and the love manifest in it as the basis and standard for witness and service, and not to aim to set up other standards arbitrarily. What applies to the individual, applies also to the churches: standards for the shaping of church life together are to be examined as to whether they express the will of God for communion revealed in the gospel, and are guided by the will to maintain communion through trustworthiness and by dealing with differences creatively.

63) The church as communio sanctorum and therefore also the communion of churches within a church communion is grounded in the justifying, sanctifying and unifying action of the triune God. Therefore the strengthening and maintaining of the communion requires no defence, while withdrawal from it does. The insight that it is sufficient (satis est) to have agreement in the understanding of the gospel and the due celebration of the sacraments for the true unity of the church, entails the obligation to preserve and deepen the communion. This applies not only whenever conflicts arise in questions of interpretation, but also when it is unclear whether differences, for instance over ethical questions, jeopardize the agreement in the gospel or put it in question. The satis est is not to be read as a formula limiting discussion. On the contrary, it is precisely on the grounds of the fundamental significance of agreement in the gospel that everything must be done in the event of conflict to hold onto communion and to carry on working on the questions that emerge. It is in this and not in withdrawing from communion that the truth of the gospel is realized, and with it the apostolicity of the church.

64) In the study document The Church of Jesus Christ, the CPCE churches explain together their understanding of the church and the significance of the ordained ministry for the being of the church. The requirement to let the nature of the church be made concrete in witness and service points to the need for further development of the already existing structures for this task in the shape of the general assembly, the council, the advisory groups, the doctrinal discussions, and the contacts and joint work at congregational level.
3 CHALLENGES: Verbindlichkeit – Reception – Catholicity

The terms Verbindlichkeit, reception and catholicity sum up the challenges which confront the CPCE today. It is a question of strengthening and deepening the communion of the churches of the Reformation in Europe, of putting into practice the unity of the church of Jesus Christ declared, lived out and aspired to in the CPCE, and also of the credibility of this model of unity.

3.1 Verbindlichkeit

66) The claim that the Leuenberg Agreement is binding can only be truly understood if it is simultaneously explained how the Leuenberg Agreement has binding force. What is binding is the declaration of church communion between previously separated traditions, which now recognise themselves in their mutual otherness as a true expression of the one church of Jesus Christ and express this by granting one another pulpit and table fellowship, and in this way are church together 1.

67) This Verbindlichkeit is expounded in the Leuenberg Agreement itself. The Agreement does this by tying three stages closely together. The three elements are the following: a) the common understanding of the gospel, b) the decision that the historical condemnations do not apply to today’s conversation partners and c) mutual recognition as a true expression of the church of Jesus Christ. This is how the declaration of church communion is arrived at, which is expressed in the joint celebration of word and sacrament and the mutual recognition of ministries which arises from it. a), b), and c) are not binding as such. What is binding is the interplay of these three dimensions and their articulation as proposed in the Agreement. By their approval, each

1 Note regarding the notion of “Verbindlichkeit”: This German term conveys the obligatory character (the authority) of an agreement, of a mutual engagement, in this case of a declaration of communion. It is a matter of the new bond which now exists between the partners, a bond of trust which goes beyond the solely formal or juridical dimension. The Latin obligare – from the verb ligare (to bind) – and the derived noun obligation cannot be used in English or in French, where these expressions have another meaning today. The original meaning is only found in rare expressions, sometimes from another age, such as noblesse oblige. One could certainly talk of “authority” to express this new reality so long as we remember that the root of “authority” is on the one hand “author” but even more the Latin verb augere: to grow. One could speak of “mutual accountability”, but this does not express the full meaning of the term “Verbindlichkeit”. We use in consequence this German word and sometimes “authority” to take account of this reality. This is a provisional solution. It is preferable to find an adequate English term. Perhaps the phrase “loyalty obligation”, as described in John Kleinig’s book “On loyalty and loyalties: the contours of a problematic virtue” (OUP 2014), pp. 193 ff, may be applicable.
synod (or the corresponding governing body of the respective church) of the signatory churches has sanctioned the articulation of these three elements. It has declared the Agreement and the CPCE which emerged from it to be binding and consequently has committed itself to a special ecumenical model of unity. This model of unity, which today is often described as “unity in reconciled diversity,” has been taken up in a similar way in other ecumenical processes.

68) The same applies to the Verbindlichkeit of the other statements of church communion made by the signatory churches of the Leuenberg Agreement with the Methodists, or by individual churches of the CPCE with the Anglicans.

69) The particular Verbindlichkeit which the Leuenberg Agreement claims and which represented something new in 1973 is not always seen. Certainly today one would formulate certain points otherwise. The Leuenberg Agreement is also not a new confession of faith (cf. LA 37). The individual formulations are not as such absolutely binding. In addition, the Agreement by no means makes a claim to completeness. Even the right understanding of the gospel as set out only maintains its Verbindlichkeit in interplay with the other elements: the non-applicability of the anathemas and the recognition of the other tradition in its otherness as church. The articulation and interplay of the three named elements should still today be the central, authoritative focus.

It is a well-made point that “churches of different confessional positions” accord one another church communion (LA 29, 37). To put it pointedly: church communion, according to the understanding of the Reformers, is always also confessional communion, communion in profession of faith. But confessional communion is not the same as being bound by confessional documents that are identical word-for-word. That some participants are bound by certain confessional documents and others by others is no contradiction to the collective confessio in its full dimension as leiturgia, martyria and diakonia (see the study document Scripture, Confession, Church). The CPCE is a confessional communion in its relationship to different confessional positions, as consequence of the authority which is claimed by the Agreement.

70) The Verbindlichkeit of the Leuenberg Agreement is that “churches with different confessional positions accord each other fellowship in word and sacrament and strive for the fullest possible co-operation in witness and service to the world” (LA 29). There must then be some place where this Verbindlichkeit is verifiable. Otherwise, this communion would not be able to be experienced. The Agreement takes that into account. Starting from the Agreement, there have arisen five points of verification for the CPCE: a) communion in worship, b) communion in doctrine through further theological work, c) communion in growing structural evolution, d) communion in witness and service in the Europe of today, e) communion in ecumenical responsibility (see above 1.3). These five stand in service of the authority of the Agreement, and are the places
where this is expressed and can be verified. Other declarations of church communion put it in much the same way.

71) A particular weight is given in the Agreement to further theological work. Here we are not dealing with efforts to elaborate a common doctrinal statement, but with the constant verification of the fundamental Verbindlichkeit expressed in the common celebration of word and sacrament. Theological questions, old as well as new, about which the different traditions think differently must continually be worked over, so that none of them might become divisive and negate the Verbindlichkeit of the Agreement. Differences are part of church communion. It is not differences as such that must be overcome, but their potential to be church-divisive. The criterion for the legitimacy of differences is to establish whether or not these differences can dissolve the fellowship in word and sacrament. This applies in principle for each particular dogmatic or ethical question. These must be checked against the fundamental Verbindlichkeit of the Agreement. In this way the common understanding of the gospel is deepened further, examined in the light of the witness of Scripture, and continually made relevant (cf LA 38). If one suspects that consensus has here been reduced to a minimum, one overlooks the fact that the Verbindlichkeit of the declaration of church communion has consequences for every area of theology and of the life of the church. In addition, this model's capacity to be fruitful for the whole ecumenical movement is understood as a point of verification of its Verbindlichkeit.

72) This understanding of Verbindlichkeit is based on the adoption of fundamental decisions of the Reformation by the ecumenical movement.

73) This is clarified by the example of the reference to scripture. It is universally maintained that scripture is binding and has authority. The question of how and why it is binding is crucial, however. The classic reply of the Reformers states: it is binding in so far as and because it testifies to the gospel: the action of God pro nobis that has taken place in the Incarnation, Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is not the letter of scripture that is binding but the gospel proclaimed in it. Similar considerations apply to the confessional documents, which are not binding as juridical texts, but because as norma normata they provide the context within which the norma normans, the gospel, is to be applied without restriction in a new situation. It is thus that our individual churches are shaped and structured. The method of the Agreement and its claim to Verbindlichkeit is directly analogous to these fundamental decisions of our churches.

Numerous churches have problems with the authority of the texts of reference. The authority of scripture is of course generally emphasized. But it is widely disputed how this is to be expounded. This especially applies to the authority of the confessions and the confessional documents. These are often treated as historical texts whose authority has expired. Against this background many current difficulties may proba-
bly be explained, not least the difficulty of developing common authoritative doctrine. So the question of
the authority of the Leuenberg Agreement leads directly to unresolved questions within the individual
churches. Ecumenical work proves to be an authentic mirror of the internal problems of our individual
churches and acts as a strong stimulus to progress the discussion on the meaning and role of the
Verbindlichkeit of texts of reference.

74) Growth in Verbindlichkeit is the work of the Holy Spirit and at the same time an expression
of human will and work. It is not realized overnight. The history of the reception of the Leuenberg
Agreement in the individual churches is the best evidence for its growing Verbindlichkeit. A text
that was initially often disputed has over time acquired a Verbindlichkeit which to a large extent
is undisputed today. The communion bestowed and declared is a commitment. It has been con-
stituted in collaboration on the way. A binding tradition has emerged, which has led the churches
to a new awareness and from which the churches draw.

3.2 Reception

75) Reception is a process in which a church or a church tradition appropriates a truth that does
not derive from itself, but which it recognizes and receives as a formulation of faith. Reception is
distinguished from an act of obedience, in which a subordinate directs her will and her conduct
according to the legitimate instructions of a superior out of respect for her authority. Reception
presupposes the free judgment and assent of those of whom it is asked. The churches of the
CPCE find themselves in such a process.

76) Reception cannot be restricted to the formal act of assent. Only spiritual acceptance, the
taking over of what is to be received into the spiritual life of the communion, gives its true author-
ity to what is to be received. In ecumenical terms, it is not simply a question of information or of
the examination of the result of a dialogue. The reception, for example, of the results of a study
group cannot be restricted to the formal approval of the results by individual synods. In recep-
tion, the theologically binding consensus creates a new quality of communion between tradi-
tions, which, though they appealed simultaneously to the gospel, had separated from each other
or at least had become estranged. It is the work of the Holy Spirit that certain conclusions gain
acceptance over time, become texts of reference and thereby gain Verbindlichkeit (e.g. the
study document *The Church of Jesus Christ*).

77) Such an event of ecumenical reception is closely comparable with similar events in church
history, where local churches received the conclusions of supra-local synods and councils. Only
reception at the grassroots lends a conciliar decision its concrete authority. Besides, doctrinal
decisions – for example those of the first councils – have always had a dual role, both as the
starting-point and the end-point of reception. This applies also to the ecumenical movement, where what is to be received has often already been a reality on the ground for quite some time.

78) There are crucial differences between the reception of council resolutions by the local churches (for example in the case of the creeds of the first centuries) and the ecumenical reception which occurs in the CPCE. The churches of the CPCE receive the reciprocal recognition of another communion in its otherness. For a church tradition to be recognised in its otherness as an expression of the true church is an exceptional occurrence. For the churches, such a reception is nevertheless ecumenically decisive, and is the positive challenge which the churches of the CPCE confront. This challenge sets daily new tasks, which are not to be solved solely through recourse to analogous situations in history. It requires creativity and also needs time. In the area of the CPCE, many more steps have been taken on this way than is often supposed.

Such a conception embraces a reform of one’s own tradition, the checking if not the modifying of “my” convictions, as well as a reassessment of the “truth” of another tradition, which “my” church from now on understands as a legitimate expression of the one church of Jesus Christ.

79) In such an action there occurs true reconciliation. Mutual recognition opens the way to an actual life together – to a true communion of legitimately different churches in one place. So in the formula “unity in reconciled diversity,” special weight is placed on the aspect of reconciliation.

80) Reception requires a particular openness to conciliarity. In the CPCE it takes place in the interplay between decisions of the general assembly and the sensus fidelium of the participating churches. Here a particular responsibility rests with the individual synods and church leaderships. They have already, through the declaration of church communion, taken a decisive step. But that was only the beginning. Now the time has come to put this church communion into practice in the life of the individual churches and the work of their synods. The Leuenberg Agreement distinguishes consciously between declaration and realization; this distinction structures its text as a whole.

There has certainly never been a council of the CPCE. However, through the resolutions of the synods (or the corresponding bodies) to declare and realize church communion, the CPCE churches are no longer in a pre-conciliar situation, as is the case in most other ecumenical dialogues between churches. The situation of the CPCE is conciliar, but without a common synod.

3.3 Catholicy

81) Since God’s salvation is for the whole world, the church founded by him is an all-embracing (catholic) communion. The faithful have always shared in it on the grounds of their baptism.
Catholicity is, alongside unity, holiness, and apostolicity, a characteristic mark of the church of Jesus Christ. The one church is based on the promise of an all-embracing communion of all people. Catholicity means a border-crossing existence as church in common that transcends all confessional, ethnic, linguistic, and national boundaries (cf. Gal. 3:28). Only the awareness of catholicity lends meaning to every ecumenical endeavour.

(82) Catholicity is unity in extension. The Leuenberg Agreement is aware of this and expresses it by saying that the realized church communion seeks “to promote the ecumenical fellowship of all Christian churches” (LA 46). This commitment was recognized by the signatory churches and implemented in practice in the dialogue with the Methodist churches and the expansion of the communion from the Leuenberg Fellowship to the CPCE. A further step was the dialogue of many churches of the CPCE with Anglicans, which resulted in church communion in many places. The CPCE also strives to achieve this catholic understanding of unity in dialogue with the Baptist churches, with the Roman Catholic Church and with the Orthodox churches. The effort at catholicity is all the more urgent for the fact that in many countries new spiritual movements, for the most part with pentecostal or evangelical roots (neo-pentecostals and neo-evangelicals) have arisen and are arising and extend to the churches of the CPCE.

(83) Catholicity must also be discerned ad intra through the CPCE. Through the declaration of church communion important dimensions of catholicity are already given and realized. But it must be deepened and consolidated and further developed in the direction of a lived conciliarity. Unity is intense catholicity. Progress in the realization of church communion must be accompanied by a growing awareness of catholicity and its realization in each individual member church of the CPCE.

(84) Catholicity is a theological challenge for the CPCE churches. Their model of unity is an innovation not least in relation to the shaping of catholicity. Much has happened in the past decades. It needs however to be consolidated theologically.

a) Traditionally in many churches catholicity is guaranteed through the exercise of the office of bishop and the synods of bishops which result from it. The churches of the CPCE emphasise that church leadership is exercised in personal, collegial and communal ways (see CJC I. 2. 5.1.1). At the same time a special significance is attached to the leadership of synods, even in those churches that value the personal office of bishop. In this respect the question arises as to whether there should also be synodal structures at the level of the CPCE as a whole.

b) In order to preserve their unity, churches are endowed with a church order. This describes and orders primarily the mutual spiritual commitment in the diverse areas of local church life and is to be distinguished from mere administrative regulation. The development of a “discipline” in
the Reformed tradition from the beginning did in no way imply a bureaucratic administration, but a spiritual discipline, an ecclesiastical order, on the basis of which ministers accept obligations at their ordination in the same way as they do in relation to the confessions of faith. For the CPCE the question arises whether initiatives towards a common church order are not necessary to promote the catholicity of the CPCE \textit{ad intra}.

A church order does not pertain to the \textit{esse} but to the \textit{bene esse} of the church. It is therefore not necessary to the same degree as the celebration of Word and Sacrament in accordance with the gospel. But even the \textit{bene esse} needs careful attention by the churches. The lack of a constitution or discipline (in the Reformed sense of the word), that is a spiritual order, leads not infrequently to an excessive amount of bureaucratic regulation.

85) Catholicity within the CPCE also encounters concrete difficulties not related to doctrine, which are to be overcome:

a) A first difficulty results from the concern of individual churches that they might lose their independence. The Leuenberg Agreement stresses the legal independence of the individual churches and expressly resists any kind of uniformity that would be at the cost of the living diversity of the individual churches (cf. LA 43, 45). The other church has to be recognized in its otherness as a legitimate expression of the true church of Jesus Christ (see Reception). This does not however mean a self-regarding particularism, in which each individual church is self-sufficient, be it at the local, regional or national level. Communion imposes obligations, and changes the previous way of being a local church.

b) A second difficulty arises from the danger of fatigue and habituation. We tend to be satisfied with what we have already achieved. After centuries of antagonism we have come at last to live and work together in friendship, and there is a great temptation to rest content with that. This does not correspond to the CPCE understanding of church communion. However, the CPCE is reproached by other churches, not always without grounds, that its model results in standing still and maintaining the status quo.

c) A third difficulty for lived catholicity within the CPCE is inherent in the fact that synods and church leaders of many of its churches pay too little attention in their decisions to the communion of the CPCE as a whole and the binding obligations and commitment to conciliarity.

86) The capacity for a resolutely practised catholicity \textit{ad intra} is decisive for the ecumenical plausibility of the CPCE model of unity and for its ability to bring this model of unity into discussion with other Christian churches.
4 RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCRETE STEPS FORWARD

87) In parts 1 and 2 of this study, it was explained that the unity that is given and realized in the CPCE is lived and experienced by the worshipping community. The participating churches declare church fellowship and grant one another pulpit and table fellowship (LA 33f). Thereby, according to their conviction, the unity of the church of Jesus Christ has been created. It is a gift of God to previously separated churches which now bear witness together in the world and commit themselves to common service.

88) Part 3 of the document cites the current challenges and connects these with the present situation of the CPCE. Verbindlichkeit, reception and catholicity receive their true meaning if they contribute to the visibility of the declared and realized communion. This communion takes concrete shape here and now. Only as a visible ecclesial communion is the model of unity practiced in the CPCE credible in dialogue with other churches which do not belong to the CPCE.

89) As far as this concluding Part 4 is concerned, it must make concrete recommendations with which the CPCE can better discern its task in the service of the one church of Jesus Christ. This will take place through taking up anew the dimensions of church communion which are explained in part 1.

4.1 Church communion as a communion in worship

4.1.1 Communion in worship and catholicity

90) If communion in worship is an expression of realized visible unity in the CPCE, then it is necessary to strengthen the awareness that the churches of the CPCE are church together and to profess that faith clearly (see above § 56).

91) This awareness of being church together, and not merely a league or federation of churches, does not in the least mean uniformity. It cannot be a question of advocating a single way of being church, let alone a single national or international church structure. The CPCE churches are and remain churches with different confessional positions (LA 29). Each speaks its own language, has its historical shape, its special traditions and particular confessional character, its various theological emphases, its particular church structures. In some places this has certainly led to the result that some CPCE churches in recent years have come together to form a united church, in others this is not on the agenda. This can only be decided in the local context.

92) It cannot be the point to eliminate differences solely because there are differences. But it is the point to change the character of the differences. From church-dividing divergences they must become expressions of richness in legitimate diversity. The authors of the LA have
achieved this in respect of the historical anathemas. This must go further, so that no divergence may put communion in worship into question afresh.

93) As a communion in worship the CPCE is a confessional communion. That churches of different confessional positions declare themselves to be in church communion means on the one hand that the church communion is characterized by a variety of ethical, social and political stances. The one gospel leads in different situations to different positions. But it is not a question of diversity for the sake of diversity. “The Leuenberg Agreement intends … the obligation of the member churches to join together in a common way of confessing in spite of different confessional traditions. The Agreement is in this respect a ‘signpost’ to those churches of the CPCE to walk the way of contemporary confessing together” (Scripture, Confession, Church, end of para.7). Communion in worship cannot be separated from the common confession that remains the standard for legitimacy of diversity on this confessional path (see 3.1.4).

94) A communion in worship means that the CPCE is a catholic church. Where Word and Sacrament are truly celebrated, the one catholic church of Jesus Christ is present. Catholicity means that each congregation that celebrates divine worship is wholly church without claiming that it is the whole church. It is also a Reformation conviction that a worshipping congregation is a catholic church, if it is held together with the universal church beyond its individual boundaries in space and time. Even if they gave a greater autonomy to the local church than was the case in the Middle Ages, the church orders produced by the Reformers did not support a trend towards congregationalism. The congregation celebrating here and now is, of its nature, united with every other local congregation. Ethnic, national and other boundaries are transcended. The catholic church also reaches out beyond time, and ties the congregation celebrating here and now into the Christendom of all times, from the communion of the church of the first centuries onwards. In this way the Reformation too understands the catholic church not as an extra to the local congregation gathered for the service of worship, but as the una catholica ecclesia to be experienced in the individual congregations.

95) It remains the constant task of the CPCE to bring to expression the reality of being church that is shared by the local congregation and the wider church. Serving this end are the general assembly, the council and the office staff as well as all other areas of work in the CPCE. The representation of the shared reality of being church requires better visibility. In this way, new ground is broken, although in church history in other contexts there are some pointers to the solidarity of independent churches, as for example the autocephalous tradition which may be traced back to early church tradition.
96) In this sense the understanding of unity as a worshipping community is the hermeneutical principle of all the work of the CPCE. This gives rise to and is decisive for communion in doctrine, communion in witness and service, communion in growing formation and communion in the world-wide oecumene. As it realises communion in worship, the CPCE is one church in reconciled diversity. It is crucial and should be a matter of course that the CPCE churches understand themselves collectively as one church and express this view clearly.

4.1.2 The common celebration of word and sacrament

97) The declaration of pulpit and table fellowship has as its objective that there should be actual shared services of worship. Shared services of worship have for years been a matter of course at national and international meetings of CPCE churches (Assemblies, international consultations, meetings of regional groups etc.). It is crucial that this happens also in provinces or regions where various CPCE churches co-exist in one locality. The declaration of church communion allows for the particularity of each individual church. However, it must go beyond peaceful local co-existence.

98) A shared worship life requires the fostering and promotion of liturgy and hymnody. Much has been achieved in past years (see 1.3.1). The achievement is worth cultivating and building upon.

In the consultation process for this study document various suggestions were made:

On special occasions, there should be shared services of Word and Sacrament between CPCE churches. The “Leuenberg Sunday” in the middle of March and its design should be given greater attention, for instance through pulpit exchange, the invitation of preachers from other CPCE churches, meeting with neighbouring CPCE congregations.

New forms of worship, which appeal to the younger generation, should be included or developed. The CPCE should be open to new worship songs and new liturgical elements, which attract people who are outside the circle of traditional churchgoers.

The CPCE should have a stronger focus on church music and make contact with the European Conference for Protestant Church Music.

99) The experience of communion in worship implies something more than existing church communion. It implies that new challenges are to be recognized and confronted. In more and more countries in Europe, new congregations are arising, which are often closely related to the Lutheran, Reformed, United and Methodist traditions, and consciously appeal to these traditions, but have scarcely any contact with CPCE churches. These are often new ethnic congregations, usually of migrants, or (neo)Pentecostal groups. Diversity here is experienced particularly in spirituality and in the forms of piety and worship, but can also rest on theological decisions.
100) Since, according to the understanding of the CPCE, church communion is based on communion in worship, it is also part of the ecumenical task of the CPCE to encourage the celebration of common worship with churches outside the CPCE as well, for instance in the tradition of the ecumenical “Prayers for a city”. From the experience of such services there can come a new impetus to the opening of theological dialogue, which ultimately could lead to an extension of the church communion.

101) From encounters for example with churches of a Pentecostal character and congregations of migrants stimuli for spirituality could be derived. At the same time, the helpful role of institutional forms and opportunities for theological reflection could become more accessible to these churches.

102) Communion in worship includes the mutual recognition of ministries, especially the ordination to the particular ministry of Word and Sacrament (cf. LA 33). The recognition of ordination however does not imply the possibility of employment in any given church. In each church, “the rules in force for induction to a pastoral charge, the exercise of pastoral ministry, or the ordering of congregational life” are not affected (LA 43). Efforts at mutual recognition of training, especially for pastoral ministry, are in progress.

In the consultation process for this study document the following suggestions were made:

The CPCE themes and documents must play a stronger role in ministerial education. Students should be encouraged to complete parts of their studies (eg. a semester spent in a foreign country) in training institutions of other CPCE churches. Parts of the service of a trainee minister should also be able to be completed abroad in other CPCE churches. The CPCE church communion should also be referred to in formulas of ordination; ministers from other CPCE churches should take part in ordinations, if possible.

Furthermore these were proposed: common European seminars for further ministerial education, support for fixed-term exchanges of ministers between CPCE churches in Europe, ecumenical visits with CPCE partner churches for gaining new insights.

4.2 Church communion as a communion in doctrine

103) With the Leuenberg Agreement the signatory churches entered into a commitment to further theological work with one another and have thereby taken a fruitful path which is one of the distinctive characteristics of their church communion. This path must be tenaciously pursued.

104) The programme of work followed up to now has proved its worth: project and working groups authorized by the CPCE council work up a first draft for consultation, based on the doctrinal discussion initiated by them. The council then sends it to the member churches for their opinions. Based on these opinions the project or working group in each case then reworks the
text, which is presented to the general assembly for final discussion and resolution. With the acceptance of the final text by the general assembly the result of the doctrinal discussion is sent to the individual churches for reception and, if applicable, realization.

105) In the past the reception of the texts agreed by the General Assembly has been very variable. There have been texts which achieved a considerable breadth and depth of impact. But there have also been texts which in spite of their considerable relevance had no impact beyond the specialist committees. In many instances there have been underlying communication problems: often not enough time had been provided for the notification and circulation of the conclusions of the discussion. The CPCE member churches should commit themselves to suitable lines of communication for the conclusions of doctrinal discussion more than they have done up until now. In theological education too these must be taken into account more vigorously than in the past.

106) The conclusions of doctrinal discussion reflect in each case a definite position in the theological debate. In not a few cases this debate has developed further and new insights and new formulations of the questions have arisen. It is an obvious step to then update earlier conclusions, to rewrite them in the context of the development of theological understanding and new problems, or to produce a complete remake.

107) In future the themes for the doctrinal study groups should be able to be proposed to a greater extent by the CPCE member churches; they can then be commissioned through the CPCE council. Apart from the doctrinal discussions there should also be, if required, the possibility of giving expert opinions through project groups especially convened for that purpose.

108) The following themes require special attention in the coming years:

- Church and politics (continuing the discussions on the kingship of Christ, the two kingdoms doctrine and “church and society” cf. LA 39) taking into account current problems in Europe (eg. populism, nationalism, xenophobia).

- Ethical differences and church communion (legitimate diversity or divergence sufficient to separate churches).

- Christian faith and Islam in the context of the Europe of today as well as other challenges in the encounter with other religions.

- Community building and new forms of being church.

- Religious socialization and catechesis in the family.
- Baptism and Baptismal Practice (in continuation of the discussions on the practice of Baptism (cf. LA 39) and in reception of the talks with churches of the Baptist tradition).

- Preconditions for participation in the Lord’s Supper.

- The ordination of women (in continuation of the study document Ministry, Ordination, Episcope, §§ 58-60).

- Confirmation and the Act of Confirming.

The two first themes should have priority.

### 4.3 Church communion as a communion evolving in shape

109) For the CPCE church communion it is fundamental that the communion be realized in worship, in doctrine, in witness and service and in ecumenical responsibility, and that the cohesion of the churches be strengthened. To this end, it is important also to strengthen the structures in which the church communion lives and is shaped in mutual commitment.

110) As a result of the signing of the Leuenberg Agreement and the development of the CPCE, many churches have attained a new shaping of their life as churches of the Reformation. In some countries (eg. the Netherlands, Germany and France), church unions or at least church federations have been formed, in which churches with different confessional positions fulfil their mission together. In many regions notable models of cross-border co-operation have emerged, as for example in the upper Rhine.

111) In order to strengthen the church communion of the CPCE in its entirety, new ways and forms must be considered which contribute both to furthering the Verbindlichkeit of the church communion and the life of individual churches as member churches of the CPCE in their different contexts, without restricting the independence (autonomy of reception) of the participating churches.

112) For the CPCE it is desirable that there should be, in addition to its statutes, a Charta of church communion, yet to be developed. In this would be worked out what follows from what was established on the basis of the Leuenberg Agreement: agreement in the gospel and the reciprocal recognition of churches as churches for the worshipping, spiritual, theological and diaconal common life of the churches in the church communion. The Charta should describe the mutual spiritual commitments of the churches in the five forms of experience of church communion in the CPCE that have already been identified.

113) Church communion lives on the readiness for conciliarity (cf. § 80). So the general assembly stimulates conciliar processes which have central significance for the realization of church
communion. These include in particular the doctrinal discussions and theological study projects, which serve the deepening of communion. Discussion takes place on the basis of the documents, and they are finally accepted by the general assembly. Even if this does not happen through a vote by synod representatives the documents serve nevertheless to clarify the position of the CPCE and its orientation in mutual commitment, both within the CPCE and with external bodies.

114) The role of the general assembly could be strengthened further in two ways: first, by recording in the constitutions or rules of the churches the significance for the deepening of church communion of the reception of the conciliar decisions.

115) The other way of strengthening its role would be for the churches to come to an agreement to link the sending of delegates to the general assembly to a synodal decision, or in other appropriate ways to anchor the mandating of their representatives publicly in connection with the fulfilment of church leadership functions.

116) In order to strengthen the reception of the conciliar processes in questions of doctrine and ecclesial practice in the CPCE, it would be helpful to describe in the charta of the communion not only the processes of decision making but also the reception pathways in the churches.

117) In any change in the ordering of churches, express account should be taken of the Leuenberg Agreement and the existing church communion in the CPCE. Churches which have until now contented themselves with some administrative regulations, should consider the introduction of a church order in which the mutual spiritual commitments in the various areas of church life are described and ordered.

118) On the initiative of CPCE member churches, from 2012 onwards, there took place a number of conferences of Protestant synod members in Europe. The aim was to deepen the church communion of the CPCE at synod level and to strengthen the opportunities of working together. The meetings proved to be an important and promising instrument for strengthening church communion. They enabled an internal exchange about areas and themes which are decisive for the future of European societies and thereby present further challenges for the churches. Meetings of Protestant synod members should be continued. The general assembly should receive a report of the work on the themes.

119) Parallel with the meetings of the Protestant synod members the structural networking in the CPCE would be strengthened both through encounters at the level of the congregation and through regular meetings of the church leaders of the member churches.
4.4 Church communion as a communion of witness and service in the Europe of today

120) The Leuenberg Agreement is a document of the “Reformation churches in Europe”. Therefore it is a matter of course that these churches also relate their common witness and their common service to the particular situation of Europe. Europe is their geographical, cultural and political context. So Europe, and questions about Europe after its division was overcome in 1989, and the new fields of political and social action opened up as a result, have become a central theme.

121) Great hopes in the opportunities of Europe on the one hand and a considerable scepticism on the other about the high expectations regarding the collaboration of the peoples of Europe are characteristic states of mind among people in today’s Europe. That is a tension which is also reflected in the churches of the CPCE. The tension between hope and scepticism has grown considerably through the crises of recent years. The programmatic demand of the Belfast General Assembly (2001), to let “the voice of the Protestant churches in Europe” be “clearly audible”, represents the perspective characterized by confidence. Concern for the future of Europe was manifest in the report of the General Assembly in Florence (2012) on the current situation in Europe with the acute problems of the crisis of finance, economy and national debt in the states of the continent. Against the voices of resignation, the CPCE member churches will have to set the encouragement of cross-border collaboration and the solidarity of the European states and speak out against the obsession with national egoisms. To hold on to the idea of European rapprochement and solidarity and to the principles of liberal democracy is an important test of church communion.

122) The Europe of today is struggling with a large number of difficult problems which seemed inconceivable in the euphoria of awakening after 1989. The warlike conflicts following the collapse of Yugoslavia in the 1990s and the war in eastern Ukraine show how costly peace is and how very much one must struggle to achieve it. The crisis of finance, economy and national debt has emphasised a marked difference between the north and south of Europe. The enormous migration of refugees, most recently from the civil war in Syria, is a dramatic challenge to European society.

123) The CPCE member churches cannot ignore the fact that they give witness and service in the midst of these critical developments: the witness of the gospel calls and commits us to service for justice, peace and the integrity of creation. Christians and churches in Europe should build a network of reconciliation and commitment to the deprived and needy. They will do everything in their power to create and reinforce signs of reconciliation and help in need. Only in this
way can they encourage among politicians responsible action in crisis and solidarity with those
who are affected by flight, migration and impoverishment.

124) There are ethical problems on which the churches cannot speak with one voice, and do not
need to do so. The assessment of some ethical questions is strongly contextual; because of
this, plurality, and decisions that differ from one’s own point of view should be accepted among
Protestant churches. The standard of legitimacy of an ethical difference is its compatibility with
the worshipping community (see 3.1.6). In standing up for peace and reconciliation, as well as
for justice and the overcoming of poverty, and against the destruction of nature, the Protestant
churches must proceed together, even if in the assessment of crises and their resolutions differ-
ent points of view can be absolutely legitimate. If we expect the member churches of the CPCE
to speak with one voice, we must endeavour to ensure that the voice of the gospel is heard in
Europe.

125) The cooperation that has existed since 2009 with the Consortium of Protestant Diaspora
Work in Europe (AGDE) has been an important step towards the coordinating of common relief
work; this social and diaconal task must be carried further, and the activities involved intensified
and extended. In the same way the projects of interchurch aid promoted by individual member
churches must be promoted single-mindedly. Diaconal work is essential for the churches.

5 CHURCH COMMUNION AS A COMMON ECUMENICAL OBLIGA-
TION

126) The CPCE regards its understanding of unity and its realization as a service to the general
ecumenical movement (cf. LA 46f.). As demonstrated in section 1.4, the communion achieved
by it has in many places resulted in substantial progress towards unity. This process, however,
as is made clear in section 3.3, is not to be regarded as complete. The model of church com-
munion that is experienced in the CPCE has, to a greater extent than many other ecumenical
models, already brought about visible results and appears for that reason to be particularly fruit-
ful. The Leuenberg Agreement commits the CPCE to go further and introduce its understanding
of the unity of the church into the worldwide ecumenical conversation. The interconfessional
work of the CPCE will also be defined by this in future, particularly in respect of the longstanding
contacts with the Anglican and Orthodox churches, as well as the European Baptist Federation.
The series of consultations begun in 2013 with the Roman Catholic Church has special signifi-
cance, since the focus of interest here is on the effectiveness and loadbearing capacity of the
church communion model.
127) The ecumenical obligation resulting from the understanding of church communion in the LA must be assumed not least in relation to new church movements like neo-pentecostalism and neo-evangelicalism inside and outside the churches of the CPCE. The encounter with such currents shows that ecumenical and ethical challenges are similar for many churches. The response to such challenges is proof of the capacity for ecumenical action in the conditions of the 21st century.

128) The understanding of unity in the CPCE proves itself in relation to other churches locally. It is a general experience that basic principles show their significance only in real encounter with others. The ecumenical process is not restricted to the exchange of documents, but develops in the encounter with people, on whom God bestows a new quality of community. Specific problems emerge here, for majority churches, which easily overlook other member churches in their own area, as much as for minority churches, which in some cases tend to cut themselves off. Where there are functioning ecumenical structures in a place (local study groups, Councils of Churches, etc.), the congregations of CPCE churches should always be involved. Here the question invariably arises, as to how they can contribute together to the conversation with other local churches. In the preservation of unity at local level, unity is experienced as a gift of God.

129) Several churches of the CPCE have communion with other churches that do not belong to the CPCE. For example, some churches are members of the CPCE as well as of the Porvoo Communion. Others have individual agreements with Anglican churches. Others again have no kind of agreement. The resulting variations in the extent of church communion within the CPCE pose the question of the compatibility of the different agreements. On the road to unity the fact that at first sight there is some tension cannot be avoided. A closer look shows that there is no question of mutually exclusive models. For example, since the model of the Porvoo Common Statement is a variant of the unity model of church communion, membership in the Porvoo Communion and in the CPCE are not in competition. So long as it does not bring the results achieved in the CPCE into question, the double membership of many churches serves to widen and deepen ecumenical fellowship. The unity model of the CPCE is not aimed at preserving the status quo, but at the fellowship of all Christians.

130) The same is true for the world communions. Some churches are members of both the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). Others are members of only one of these two world communions, or of the World Methodist Council (WMC). Others again belong to none of them. The loyalties of individual member churches to such world communions should not be played off against each other. The ecumenical model of the CPCE could well enrich the cooperation of the LWF, the WCRC, the WMC and
other world communions on the basis of the church communion already practised in the CPCE. The ways found in the CPCE to attain church communion in different contexts and between different confessional formularies can also give promise on a global level. The member churches of the CPCE can bring their experiences to the dialogue between the world federations, so that the theological results already achieved may bear further fruit.

An example is the recently published report of the Lutheran-Reformed Commission of the LWF and the WCRC, *Communion: On Being the Church*, which establishes a common understanding of the Gospel between the Lutheran and Reformed churches, as well as the actual reconciliation of their confessional identities. The closeness to the understanding of Church and unity in the CPCE is obvious.

131) Since the signing of the Leuenberg Agreement the church communion of the CPCE has developed abundantly. An aim achieved, however, must be always renewing its usefulness to remain alive. The history of the CPCE can encourage us to deepen what has already been achieved.

“Changes in society or in the forms of life and order of the church do not have to result in a loss of identity; on the contrary: they offer opportunities for new spiritual experiences when the churches live with commitment on this basis.” (CJC I. 1.4)

Appendix: Participants in the study process

**A) Members of the initial working group (2013/14)**

- Prof. Dr. Michael Beintker, Münster (Co-chair)
- Prof. Dr. André Birmelé, Strasbourg (Co-chair)
- Dr. Pawel Gajewski, Florence
- Prof. Dr. Bo Kristian Holm, Aarhus
- Prof. Dr. Leo Koffeman, Amsterdam
- Prof. Dr. Friederike Nüssel, Heidelberg
- Dr. Szilárd Wagner, Sopron
- Staff member: Prof. Dr. Martin Friedrich, Vienna

**B) Participants in the consultation in Elspeet, 5th – 8th February 2015**
Superintendent Dr. Rainer Bath, United Methodist Church, Germany
Prof. Dr. Michael Beintker, Initial working group
Prof. Dr. André Birmelé, Initial working group
Revd Jana Daneckova, United Methodist Church of South – Central Europe
Revd Dr. Jan-Dirk Döhling, Evangelical Church of Westphalia
Prof. Dr. Martin Friedrich, CPCE
Revd Dr. Pawel Gajewski, Waldensian Church
Jan Gross, CPCE
Prof. Dr. Bo Kristian Holm, Initial working group
Revd Fleur Houston, United Reformed Church
Provost Kirsten Jørgensen, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark
Vice President Christian Krieger, UEPAL
Revd Dr Tomi Karttunen, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland
Prof. Dr. Leo Koffeman, Protestant Church in the Netherlands
Revd Steffie Langenau, Church of Lippe
Revd Dr. Christopher Meakin, Church of Sweden
Prof. Dr. Michael Nausner, Evangelical Methodist Church of South – Central Europe
Prof. Dr. Friederike Nüssel, Initial working group
General Secretary Dr. Arjan Plaisier, Protestant Church in the Netherlands
Revd Dr. Thomas-Andreas Pöder, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Estonia
Dr. Thomas Schaack, Ev.-Luth. Church in North Germany
Revd Dr. Otto Schäfer, Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches
Revd Dr. Susanne Schenk, Ev.-Luth. Church in Württemberg
Revd Laurent Schlumberger, United Protestant Church of France
Anikó Schütz Bradwell, Church of Scotland
Revd Dirk Stelter, Ev.-luth. Church in Hannover
Revd Dr. Christoph Theilemann, Ev. Church of Berlin-Brandenburg-Schlesische Oberlausitz
1  Revd Einar Tjelle, Church of Norway
2  Prof. Dr. Stefan Tobler, Ev. Luth. Church in Romania
3  Revd Dr. Eckhard Zemmrich, Ev. Church of Berlin-Brandenburg-Schlesische Oberlausitz
4  C) Members of the editorial group (2015-2018)
5  Prof. Dr. Michael Beintker, Münster (Co-chair)
6  Prof. Dr. André Birmelé, Strasbourg (Co-chair)
7  Prof. Dr. Pawel Gajewski, Terni/Rome
8  Prof. Dr. Bo Kristian Holm, Aarhus
9  Revd Fleur Houston, Macclesfield
10 Prof. Dr. Leo Koffeman, Amsterdam
11 OKR Dr. Mareile Lasogga, Hannover/Bensheim
12 Prof. Dr. Friederike Nüssel, Heidelberg
13 Prof. Dr. Michael Nausner, Reutlingen/Uppsala
14 Prof. Dr Thomas-Andreas Pöder, Tallinn
15 Revd Dr. Susanne Schenk, Ulm/Tübingen
16 Revd Anikó Schütz Bradwell, Edinburgh
17 Staff member: Prof. Dr. Martin Friedrich, Vienna