

A Protestant Understanding of Ecclesial Communion and Kundgebung (Announcement)

Translator's Note: On November 9, 2000 the Synod of Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD) adopted an official statement entitled "*One in Christ – Churches on the way to fuller communion.*" Representing 27 million Protestants, 14 million of them Lutherans, the document is based on Article 7 of the Augsburg Confession. On September 29, 2001 the EKD's Advisory Commission for Theology followed that statement up by issuing the ecumenical document "*Kirchengemeinschaft nach evangelischem Verstaendnis,*" ("A Protestant Understanding of Ecclesial Communion"), also known as "KneV." This document was officially adopted by the EKD on October 30, 2001.

Although it is referred to in one or two places as "A Protestant Understanding of Church Fellowship," the correct name of the document is "A Protestant Understanding of Ecclesial Communion." Four high level meetings were required, following the Meissen Agreement (1999) with the Church of England to clarify for the Anglican Church that the German Protestants were not speaking about "fellowship," but "full communion." -- KB

"Kundgebung" was translated by Pastor Kris Baudler, New York (ELCA)

"KneV" was translated by Oberkirchenrat Paul Oppenheim, Hannover (EKD)

Both translations to date remain "unofficial." 3/16/02

The ordering of the translations below (KneV and then the Kundgabung) is given in reverse chronological order which corresponds to the current combined presentation of these two documents by the Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD).

A Protestant Understanding of Ecclesial Communion

A statement on the ordered relations between churches of different confessions from the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany

Preface

Considerable progress has been made in ecumenical dialogues over the past few decades, especially with the Roman Catholic Church. The statement adopted by the Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany on 9 November 2000, entitled „One in Christ – Churches on the way to fuller communion“, therefore also begins with the sentence, „Thanks be to God. After centuries of hostility and parallel existence, of suffering and guilt, in the 20th century the churches have taken steps towards one another and established mutual relations.“ Protestant churches recognise that God is also at work in other churches. They acknowledge a communion in faith which transcends all confessional differences and divisions. Baptism in the name of the Trinity makes us all members of the one Church.

In the encounter between the churches and in their joint theological work, there is naturally also still evidence of divisions, disagreements and contradictions. For this reason, after looking back in gratitude for what has been achieved, the synod's statement continues, „But we are still far from having achieved the communion which God wills for all Christians on earth. We are convinced that the time has come for more ecumenical fellowship.“

The question is in which way and by which means greater ecumenical fellowship can be established. In the past, the focus has been on efforts to deal successively with individual items of controversy and on using the method of a „consensus with nuances“ to broaden the agreement on fundamental and essential issues. This procedure is still important. But increasingly the question has rightly been raised whether the source of all the differences and conflicts over individual questions may not lie in a different conception of the ecumenical goal. What kind of unity of the Church of Jesus Christ are we seeking? What do we mean by the „visible unity“ of the Church? To answer these questions in the context of the Reformation churches, the theological conception of ecclesial communion as practised in the Leuenberg Church Fellowship is of central importance.

Therefore the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany commissioned its Advisory Commission for Theology (*Kammer für Theologie*) to start from the Protestant understanding of the Church and examine the theological conception of ecclesial communion as practised in the Leuenberg Fellowship as a contribution to the current debates. At its meeting on 7-8 September 2001, the Council adopted the document submitted by the Advisory Commission and is now making it available to the public. At the same time, I wish to thank the members of the Commission who prepared the document under its chairpersons, Prof. Eberhard Jüngel and Prof. Dorothea Wendebourg.

The document is intended, as the subtitle states, to be a „Statement on the ordered relations between churches of different confessions“. That is relevant not only to ecumenical dialogues and the deepening of communion within the Church of Jesus Christ world wide; it will also assist in understanding and in appropriately developing further the communion already existing between the member churches of the Evangelical Church in Germany, if it is their common will.

Hanover, 29 September 2001

President Manfred Kock
Chairman of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany

A Protestant Understanding of Ecclesial Communion

A statement on the ordered relations between churches of different confessions

A number of developments in the contemporary ecumenical debate make it necessary to clarify the Protestant understanding of ecclesial communion¹. On the one hand, there are processes which mainly affect the relationship between the Protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church. The controversial debate about the „Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification“ between the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity showed that there are certainly different views of such ecclesial communion on the Protestant side as well. And the Roman Catholic Church’s understanding of itself set out in the statement „Dominus Iesus“ issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith also calls for mutual communication on the kind of ecclesial communion the Protestant churches see as their aim in ecumenical conversations and agreements. On the other hand, the dialogue between the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) and the Church of England in the context of the agreements reached in the Meissen Declaration calls for similar clarification. And the rest of the conversations between the Evangelical Church and other confessions cannot do without such clarification either.

Greater understanding is all the more urgent because the recent discussion on the relation between the EKD and its member churches, and also on that between the Lutheran World Federation and its member churches, has made clear how necessary theological reflection on the Protestant understanding of the Church is for all the questions concerning Communion between Christian churches.

I. The Protestant Understanding of the Church

1. The foundation of the Church

„There can be no other foundation beyond that which is already laid, namely Jesus Christ“ (1 Cor.3,11). The Church built on this foundation has a firm basis. It is the „gathering of believers in which the gospel is purely preached and the sacraments are administered according to the gospel“ (CA VII)². This event, which creates faith according to CA V, also creates the community of faith, the congregation „in which Jesus Christ acts presently as the Lord in Word and sacrament through the Holy Spirit“

¹ In earlier English translations of German ecumenical texts the word *Kirchengemeinschaft* was inadequately translated with “church fellowship” (as in *Leuenberg Church Fellowship*), although, as the many ecumenical dialogues and conferences since 1973 have shown, the word should have been rendered by “ecclesial communion” (as in French: *Communion Ecclésiiale de Leuenberg*). In this EKD document “ecclesial communion” always refers to the German term “Kirchengemeinschaft”.

² CA = The Augsburg Confession (1530)

(Barmen III)³. Both of these, faith and the community of faith, are the product of the word of God which manifests itself in preaching and in the sacraments. As the Gospel, the word is God's power (cf. Rom.1,16) which wishes to reach all people and bring them to the faith and which therefore makes the believers whom it has already reached into messengers of the Gospel (cf. Matt.28,18-20). In the Gospel there is a present realisation of the grace and truth of the triune God manifested in Christ, who creates faith through the Holy Spirit in order to justify and sanctify sinful human beings. By this free action of the triune God human beings are given the assurance in faith of the Gospel's grace and truth. They experience the transforming power of the Gospel in their lives which can then be lived in new relationships. Having been brought into communion with the triune God, they become members of the body of Christ and as such constitute his congregation. In this sense, believing in the triune God implies believing in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.

Those who believe will, at the same time, be aware that by the same divine action they are commissioned and committed to give this community of faith which is derived from the Gospel a form in accordance with its origin and specificity.

2. The form and order of the Church

According to the Reformation understanding, the Church as *congregatio sanctorum*⁴ is hidden from worldly sight. Martin Luther wrote *abscondita est Ecclesia, latent sancti* (the Church is hidden, the saints are hidden. De servo arbitrio, 1525, WA 18,652). This hiddenness does not simply imply invisibility. After all, the proclamation of the gospel in word and sacrament in the gathering of the congregation is perceptible for everyone. But the reality of the body of Christ as the communion of believers is *God's work* brought about by God himself through the word and sacraments and, as such, accessible to faith only. Faith recognises the presence of the body of Christ wherever, in the authentic preaching of the gospel and in the corresponding administration of the sacraments (cf. CA VII), it discovers the „external word“. They are both covered by God's promise, that his word will not return to him empty without accomplishing the purpose for which it was sent (Is.55,11).

The community of faith which remains hidden in the world still needs an *outward order* visible to everyone and for which human beings are responsible. The heart of this responsibility is the church's concern for the right teaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the sacraments. The conduct of services of worship and of the proclamation to the world should be so ordered that no human licence will obscure the Gospel or divide the congregation. Human beings have the responsibility of presenting

³ Barmen = The Theological Declaration of Barmen (1934) English translation in: The Ministry of the Whole Church of Jesus Christ and the Problem of Sovereignty, Barmen IV, Statement of the Theological Committee of the Evangelical Church of the Union, edited by Wilhelm Hüffmeier, Berlin 2001, ISBN 3-579-03498-7, page 116.

⁴ „Versammlung der Gläubigen“ in the German version of CA VII and „gathering of believers“ in the English translation of the Augsburg Confession.

the good news to the world as unequivocally as possible. In this sense, the outward form of the Church does not exist in separation from the hiddenness of the community of faith or alongside it. On the contrary, the distinction between the hidden and the visible church should be understood to mean that the present embodiment of the triune God in the community of faith requires an adequate outward form with its own unmistakable visible characteristics in the midst of other social structures in this world. According to Barmen III, the Christian Church as the „community of brothers“ and sisters must witness not only „with its message“ but also „with its ordinances in the midst the world of sin as the Church of forgiven sinners that it is his [God’s] alone, and lives and wishes to live only by his comfort and his counsel in expectation of his return“. It may not leave „the form of its message and ordinances to a whim or to some dominant ideological and political conviction“.

2.1. The marks of the true Church

The right proclamation of the Gospel and the celebration of the sacraments corresponding to the Gospel are understood by the Reformation as the „marks of the true Church“ (*signa ecclesiae verae*). It is through them that the body of Christ is constituted. They alone, among all the historical changes, are the unchanging, visible features of a Christian Church (cf. CA VII). Without them, no church order can be appropriate. With them comes the commission which the Church has to carry out, namely „to extend ... the message of the free grace of God to all people“ (Barmen VI).

In order for this task to be carried out, God instituted the Ministry of the Word (cf. CA V) which is entrusted to human beings as the public ministry of preaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments and which, as such, needs to be ordered (cf. CA XIV). However, the form which this ministry may take is variable. The same applies to all aspects of an order of the Church of Jesus Christ which it uses so as to carry out its task in different historical situations and to give the community of believers in a particular place and at a particular time its distinct form. This comprises, e.g. the difference and relation between the various ministries of the church, the forms these take and the outward organisation of the church.

2.2. Individual churches and the Church

The one, holy, apostolic and catholic Church exists historically in space and time. As the universal communion of all the believers, it will always be the church of particular people in particular countries and areas. It necessarily takes the form of individual congregations which are the primary expression of the universal Church. As such, they are spiritually linked with all Christian congregations. But in most cases the individual congregations are linked to one another in a larger ordered entity – an ecclesial structure which in the following will be referred to as „individual church“. Each individual church can be assured that all the other individual churches which display the marks of the true

Church belong to the communion of the body of Christ and are thus spiritually linked with one another.

The individual churches must ensure that their relations with other individual churches are so ordered that the spiritual bond between all churches in Christ is expressed in an appropriate way. According to the Protestant understanding, this concern is at the heart of all ecumenical endeavours. It is essential to bear witness to the unity of the body of Christ which is hidden to the world through the outward form of the churches. Each church has many possibilities for doing this. By promoting an ecumenical spirit in its congregations, a church can institutionalise encounter and exchange with Christians of other churches. It can conduct regular doctrinal conversations with other churches. It can declare its willingness to jointly listen to the word of God and to celebrate the Eucharist together. It can consult other churches on important issues relating to its own life and activities and can co-operate with them in matters of the Churches' global responsibility. All this and more will serve to express and demonstrate what links one church with others in the faith.

Ecumenical discussions frequently refer to striving for „full visible unity“. When Protestant theology uses this expression, it is understood to mean *witnessing* to the unity of the body of Christ already given by God. It is not a matter of „an attempt to add something to the visible unity that Christ has already given in Word and Sacraments“ but of „the endeavour ... to witness to this unity more comprehensively and to respond more faithfully to what it promises“ (Third Theological Conference held under the Meissen Agreement, March 1999). The shaping of church order must also contribute to this endeavour. The humanly attainable aim which can be pursued in this respect is the declaration and practise of full ecclesial communion. It is in this way, that witnessing to the unity of the body of Christ receives a visible form.

II. The Protestant understanding of witnessing to the unity of the body of Christ as an expression of ecclesial communion

1. What does ecclesial communion mean?

The expression „ecclesial communion“ has many meanings. The *Protestant* understanding of ecclesial communion implies that autonomous congregations and individual churches grant one another fellowship in word and sacrament and – in line with the „marks“ of the Church – recognise one another as „true Church“. This means that they publicly declare the communion in which they stand by virtue of their belonging to the body of Christ. They order this communion together and practise it comprehensively. They can also declare, order and practise such communion with other communions of churches. They understand such human action as the achievement of the duty to which they are called by God's Church founding Word and which is to serve the unity of the body of Christ.

An ecclesial communion can comprise churches with the same confessional basis (as is the case of the VELKD⁵ and churches with different confessional bases (as in the case of the EKU⁶ or the EKD). If the marks of the true church are taken as the standard, an ecclesial communion is just as much a Church as the autonomous congregations and individual Churches which belong to it. Yet in legal terms, as long as the individual churches forming an ecclesial communion maintain their autonomy, there will remain a difference with respect to their competence to act and their capacity for autonomous reception.

An ecclesial communion is in conformity with its origin in the event of the Word of God when the Churches within it

- *acknowledge* their common understanding of the gospel of justification and of the sacraments and
- thus *recognise* Jesus Christ who imparts himself in word and sacrament as the only basis for their communion and
- hence recognise one another mutually and put into *practise* their fellowship in word and sacrament.

Ecclesial communion, in this sense, can only be expressed responsibly if the Churches also present and develop their common understanding of the Gospel in their doctrinal teaching. Thus they render account about the basis of their communion in the Gospel and contribute through their doctrinal conversations to the necessary development of doctrine in the participating churches.

Another consequence of ecclesial communion is that the communion practised must be so ordered that, it enables to take initiatives in relation to the individual churches belonging to it, while preserving their independence. The transfer of functions to an ecclesial communion, and hence the limitations on the independence of the churches belonging to it, can vary in extent; this can be seen e.g. when comparing the Constitutions of the VELKD, the EKU and the EKD. The process by which independent churches join together in an ecclesial communion and order this communion is similar to the fundamental relationship that exists between individual congregations and the communion of their own Church. Their authority to order the church which they are is not relinquished, but rather brought into the whole Church. The order of the Church in which they participate does not make them subservient parts of that Church but rather responsible contributors to the ordering of the whole Church to which they belong and of the local congregation.

2. The Leuenberg Agreement as a model –

⁵ Translator's note: VELKD = United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany which is the Communion of Lutheran Churches within the EKD.

⁶ Translator's note: EKU = Evangelical Church of the Union which is the Communion of the United Churches of the former Prussian State within the EKD.

Declaration and implementation of ecclesial communion

In the Leuenberg Agreement of 1973, individual churches of different confessions have declared that they stand in ecclesial communion with each other. This declaration became possible because the churches consenting to the Agreement recognised that they had a common understanding of the Gospel. This „common understanding of the Gospel“ is the message of Justification in the sense of the Reformation. The Gospel creates faith and renews sinful human beings by imparting itself to them through the preaching of the word and the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

On the basis of their common understanding of the Gospel, the churches which have signed the Leuenberg Agreement grant one another communion in word and sacrament. This includes „the mutual recognition of ordination and the freedom to provide for intercelebration“. Thus, pulpit and altar fellowship constitute ecclesial communion in the sense of the Leuenberg Agreement. The Agreement itself is binding on the signatory churches.

The ecclesial communion pronounced by the Leuenberg Agreement becomes a reality in the churches and congregations through their common witness and service. This occurs among the individual churches in the various countries and regions but also – transcending political borders – at the European level. So at this level also there is a commitment to common witness and service to the world and to deepening the existing communion by means of theological conversations. The organs of the „Leuenberg Church Fellowship“ (LCF) are the General Assembly, the Doctrinal Conversation Groups and the Executive Committee with the Secretariat. Statements by the Executive Committee represent the LCF-Communion to those outside and serve as recommendations to those inside.

III. From a fellowship of Christian churches to an ecclesial communion

1. Forms of fellowship already existing between Christian churches

The way Christian churches relate to one another at present is expressed in different kinds of fellowship.

Churches of the same confession have joined to form world confessional families (Lutheran World Federation, World Alliance of Reformed Churches). Churches of different confessions have joined in many places, regions and countries, and also on the European and world level, to form national or ecumenical councils of churches; this is exemplified by the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC). These are not expressions of ecclesial communion in the sense set out above. But an ecumenical working group or national council can serve as an instrument on the way to such a Communion of churches.

Even within the national ecumenical body in Germany “Arbeitsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen” (ACK), the relationships between the churches cooperating are of varied intensity. Between some, e.g. the Methodist Church and the regional member Churches of the EKD (*Landeskirchen*), there is pulpit and altar fellowship. Others, such as the Old Catholics and the member Churches of the EKD, have agreed on mutual eucharistic hospitality although no altar and pulpit fellowship exists between them in the sense of the ecclesial communion described above. Still others, e.g. Baptists and certain member Churches of the EKD, practise eucharistic hospitality without there being any agreement on this. In the relationships between still other churches, e.g. between member Churches of the EKD and the Roman Catholic Church, there is no mutual eucharistic hospitality. It was declared unilaterally by the Protestant side.

From a Protestant point of view, although ecclesial communion has not yet been pronounced, the conditions have been met in the case of a number of churches within this ecumenical body (ACK). The member Churches of the EKD therefore have the desire to move on to declaring ecclesial communion with these ecumenical partners within the ACK and, as long as this has not been achieved, to practise mutual eucharistic hospitality with them.

Various forms of fellowship also exist between German and other churches beyond the borders of Germany. Thus, for example, the Church of England and the member churches of the EKD evidenced in the „Meissen Declaration“ of 1988/1991 that they recognise „one another’s churches as churches belonging to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ and truly participating in the apostolic mission of the whole people of God“. They have established a „eucharistic fellowship“ „which advances beyond mutual eucharistic hospitality but which falls short of the full interchangeability of ministers“.

Otherwise, the majority of the Protestant churches in Europe are in full communion (altar and pulpit fellowship) as a consequence of the Leuenberg Agreement. This includes the inter-changeability of ministries.

2. Ecumenical dialogue

The ecclesial communion with other churches which the Protestant churches strive for cannot be achieved without a more intensive development of mutual relations. The dialogues required to this end between the individual churches will necessarily focus on different issues corresponding to the particular profile of the partners involved, as the on-going dialogues clearly demonstrate.

2.1. The relationship with the Anglican churches

The continuing dialogue with the Anglican churches includes conversations on „visible unity“, the episcopal ministry and the historic apostolic succession in the ministry. The

decisive question here is not whether but rather to what end and in which form the ministry of *episcopus* should exist. So it is a matter of the function of episcopacy and its ecclesiological foundation. Progress in this field, e.g. the gradual interchangeability of ministries, according to the Protestant understanding can, only improve the structure of ecclesial communion but not be the basis for it. In this perspective, a greater uniformity in the doctrine of the ministry cannot be the prerequisite for such communion.

2.2. The relationship with the Baptists

Links with the Baptists need to be developed further to find forms of cooperation and perhaps also intermediate steps on the way to ecclesial communion. In this context, the central issue will be the understanding and practice of baptism. The practice of adult baptism in the Baptist congregations is based on an understanding of the relation between faith and baptism which is only partly shared by the churches of the Reformation. It is essential to clarify how the Baptists understand baptism because their practice of re-baptism contradicts the understanding of baptism in the Protestant churches.

2.3. The relationship with the Roman Catholic Church

Obviously, the Roman Catholic concept of the full, visible unity of the churches is not compatible with the understanding of ecclesial communion as it is presented here. Nevertheless, it can be stated that both sides see the unity of the body of Christ and the communion between the churches as rooted in an understanding of the foundation of faith, the force of which goes beyond past and future doctrine. The first thing to be clarified must be how the Protestant and Roman Catholic views of the foundation of faith and of the self-revelation of the triune God are related to one another through the witness of the Church. Only then will it be possible finally to ascertain whether the views of the unity of the body of Christ and of the communion of churches within this body are compatible with one another. An agreement is to be sought that no one particular form of the Church's ministry which has evolved in the course of history can be set up as a condition for the communion between churches but that different forms of the ministry are possible. In this connection it must also be stated that the necessity and structure of the „Petrine Office“ and thus of the Primacy of the Pope, the understanding of apostolic succession, the non-admission of women to the ordained ministry and, not least, the significance of canon law in the Roman Catholic Church are positions which from a Protestant perspective must be contradicted.

2.4. The relationship with the Orthodox churches

The Protestant churches work together with the Orthodox churches in ecumenical councils of churches. And like most of the Orthodox churches in Europe they are also members of the Conference of European Churches (CEC). So far, in these relationships the issue of ecclesial communion in the sense described here was seldom raised. A quite

considerable obstacle in this connection is that the Orthodox churches do not recognise baptism in the Western churches, according to the basic principles of their teaching. In addition, conceptions of national churchhood and church unity on the Orthodox side are clearly in tension with the Leuenberg Agreement. Therefore, to date, the relationship between the Protestant and Orthodox churches has only been concerned with improving their mutual perception and with overcoming prejudices or misunderstandings and making church coexistence and co-operation possible.

On the other hand, as Orthodoxy is certainly familiar with ecclesial communion between autocephalous churches, one can ask whether this might not provide a basis for developing ecclesial communion with the Protestant churches. The recognition of the Nicene creed by the Orthodox and Reformation churches also offers a considerable potential for agreement. This is reason enough to encourage further the bilateral dialogues, even if at present they are not yet being conducted with the aim of reaching an agreement on church communion.

IV. The Evangelical Church in Germany as a church fellowship

In the „Basic Principles“ of its Constitution, the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) is defined as follows. It „is the communion (*Gemeinschaft*) of its Lutheran, Reformed and United member churches. It understands itself to be part of the one Church of Jesus Christ“. Thus, the EKD is an ecclesial communion in the sense described above. Its understanding of itself set out in this way in the Constitution expresses that the EKD is the declared and appropriately ordered communion of Protestant churches of different confessions in the Federal Republic of Germany. The EKD does not have certain sovereign rights which belong to its member churches, e.g. in matters of education and doctrine. Therefore the EKD is not *a church in the terms of church law* in the same sense as its member churches are (cf. I.2.2.).

Between these member churches in the communion of the EKD there is altar and pulpit fellowship as well as the mutual recognition of ministries. In addition, the polity of the EKD comprises common provisions and procedures of co-ordination for a number of other realms of work of the member churches. This form of communion was worked out and declared jointly by the churches involved; it is also practised by them. As a consequence, the EKD is also entitled to take initiatives of its own in relation to its member churches without this affecting their autonomy.

No additional measures are needed in order for the EKD to become a *church*; as it already is a church in *theological* terms, since an ecclesial communion is a church (II.1.). Nevertheless, one could conceive of measures which would change the relation between the EKD and its member churches and the relation between the member churches and the EKD, and this would also affect the polity of the churches involved. Such changes would have an influence on the relation between the EKD and its member churches internally, but would also have external significance for the relationship with churches which do not yet belong to it and with the ecumenical movement world wide.

V. The ecumenical goal

The declaration and implementation of ecclesial communion is the goal of ecumenical activity from the Protestant point of view. In this respect, the various expressions of communion between churches, and the different social conditions to which they relate, show that there are various stages in the process of reaching this ecumenical goal. These should be encouraged because they contribute to the development of ecclesial communion which, in the sense of witnessing to the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, is the realisation of full mutual recognition by the churches.

Kundgebung of the 9th Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany at its 5th Assembly

Addressing the Central Theme

“One in Christ – Churches on the way to fuller Communion”

Thanks be to God: After centuries of working against each other and next to each other, in suffering and blame, the churches of the 20th c. have begun a process of reconciliation and have begun to find their way toward one another. And yet, the communion which God desires for all of Christendom on earth, has not yet been attained by far. We are convinced: it is time for fuller ecumenical communion.

We experience communion as a widely cast net of relationships with other churches. The goal is to witness the Gospel together to the whole world in Word and deed. We need ecumenism in order to live as the church in our particular localities and in the one world. The search for visible communion in faith and worship, cooperation in mission and in joint efforts for justice, peace, and the preservation of creation are the central tasks of ecumenism.

I. We believe in one, holy, catholic (universal) and apostolic church.

On Solid Ground

“For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” (1 Cor. 3:11). The church that is built on this foundation is well established. Its house is not built on sand, but on a rock (Matt. 7: 24-27). It cannot build itself. Christ builds and carries her: as His community in which the Triune God speaks and works. She answers Him in praise and service.

“The church is founded on Jesus Christ alone, who through His saving love in the proclamation of the Word and sacraments, gathers her together and sends her forth. According to Reformation understanding, true unity of the church through agreement in a right teaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the sacraments is necessary and sufficient.” Such is the statement of agreement of the churches of the Reformation according to the *Leuenberg Concordat*.

Protestant and Ecumenical

“Christ is the head, from whom the whole body is knit together.” (Eph. 4:15 ff). Just as a body has only one head, so Christ through the Holy Spirit alone is the head of the church. But just as a body has many members and all together form one body, so the church is recognized through the power of the Holy Spirit in its various living expressions. There are found in her many gifts, many traditions, many experiences and characteristics. Under the one head they belong together.

As such, the Protestant churches are the church of Jesus Christ. We experience in our Protestant churches communion with God and communion with one another. Not only in

our church! We also recognize God's working in other churches. We recognize the communion in faith above all confessional differences and divisions. On the basis of our baptism in the name of the Triune God we are all members of the one church.

In our encounters as the churches, certainly we become aware of divisions, disunity, and contradictions. That runs contrary to the head of Christendom and the various expressions of His body. Given these differences, we can only trust again and again in the one through whom "the whole body is knit together." We already are one in Christ, even if we are not yet of one mind concerning the ecclesial shape of this oneness. Because we are one in Christ, we seek fuller communion of the churches. This is ecumenism. We can only then be Protestants if we are ecumenical at the same time. Confessional self-satisfaction impoverishes us.

Joint worship services, prayer for and with one another and joint Bible studies are the lifeblood of ecumenism. Common prayers, hymns, and liturgical texts nurture our ecumenical spirituality. The Women's World Day of Prayer is both impressive and encouraging evidence. Because it is Christ who invites us to His Supper, members of other churches are also welcome at Holy Communion, in spite of outstanding differences in doctrine. We see in the mutual celebration of Holy Communion that the Lord's Supper takes precedence in the Kingdom of God.

We wish to intensively support the already existing forms of the communion of the Christian churches and to use them as instruments for a common witness and service in the world: the Joint Working Group of the Christian Churches in Germany (ACK), the Conference of European Churches (KEK), and on the world stage the World Council of Churches (WCC).

We declare our readiness, insofar as there are no deep differences in the faith, to move forward.

Ecclesial Communion in Word and Sacrament

In the diverse historical churches we experience both painful coexistence as well as mutual enrichment. It is not the diversity that needs to be overcome, but the separation. Only by overcoming separation will the richness of diversity as a blessing to all the churches become apparent.

We strongly support the Protestant understanding of the unity of the churches, as it is expressed in the *Leuenberg Concordat* of 1973 which has been signed by more than 100 Protestant churches. In this ecclesial communion churches live in "reconciled diversity" and in this way witness to the unity of the church which is the gift of the Holy Spirit.

We also wish to form a basic consensus with other churches in the understanding of the Gospel, which clarifies what is fundamental to the church and what can be structured to varying degrees. This accomplishes the ability of the churches to recognize one another

and to grant one another (full) communion in Word and Sacrament. This includes the recognition of one another's ordinations.

Such communion on the one hand testifies to the independence of the united churches. On the other hand, structures are necessary for the witness of the Gospel and service in the world, which brings a mutually binding responsibility to full expression. To that end in church history, the synod/council principal has been tried and proven.

II. Greater Communion among Protestant Churches

The EKD as an Ecclesial Communion

The Evangelical Church in Germany is the ecclesial communion of Lutheran, Reformed, and United Churches (Landeskirchen) and is itself a model for church unity. She remains open to admitting more Protestant churches.

Ecumenism is a task of unity of the Evangelical Church in Germany. It occurs in cooperation with the ecumenical relationships and activities of the local congregations, the member churches, and the missions and organizations. The EKD needs the strong backing of its member churches in order to fulfill its mandate to carry out ecumenism in Word and deed. The interconfessional and international ecumenical work of the EKD still needs to be better coordinated and be made more effective.

Many German speaking evangelical congregations in foreign lands are tied to the Evangelical Church in Germany. They are important ecumenical bridge builders, often integrated in the evangelical churches of the respective countries. Ecumenical partnerships have been forged from previously German churches.

Our worldwide unity with evangelical minorities and churches in the diaspora have enriched us. Clerical exchanges, partnerships, and financial commitments are included, be it through individuals, congregations, member churches, or ecclesial projects.

The Protestant Voice in Europe

The historically established evangelical church structures based on geographical and national barriers are today being challenged by European and global developments. The Leuenberg ecclesial communion must be strengthened for its mission in witness and service. We ask (its member churches) to regularly issue invitations for consultation in order to clarify fundamental theological questions, in order to formulate Protestant positions to European questions. In this way the Protestants can have a more discernible public voice in Europe as well as in our cooperative ecumenical work.

At the same time, cooperation with the Conference of European Churches needs to be intensified, so that Protestant positions can be recognized, also in relation to social and political institutions in Europe.

Above and beyond the European level we ask the Lutheran World Federation, the Reformed World Federation, and the World Council of Methodist Churches, to initiate efforts to expedite ecclesial communion on a global level and to coordinate theological dialogues with other confessions.

Communion with the Free Churches

The existing ecclesial communion with the United Brethren and the Methodist Church in Germany can be given more life than exists at present.

We want to continue to develop communion with other Free Churches in Germany, through bilateral dialogues, to achieve closer working relationships and to arrive at intermediate levels of ecclesial communion. The agreement with the Mennonites for each to invite the other to Holy Communion is a model for this. We wish to discuss with the League of Protestant Free Churches of Germany (Baptists), and in the framework of the Leuenberg ecclesial communion with the European Baptist Federation, if a reconciled difference is possible in our understanding and practice of baptism. Dialogue must be sought with the Pentecostal communions.

We are grateful for the close and sisterly connections which have developed between the regional churches (Landeskirchen) and the Free Churches through our joint venture in the Syndicate of the Christian Churches, the Protestant Alliance, the Syndicate of Protestant youth, the Diaconal Works and the Evangelical Missions.

Full Communion with the Anglican Church

From our interpretation, the mutual recognition of the Evangelical Church in Germany and the Church of England through the *Meissen Declaration (1988)* already makes full communion possible. From the Anglican perspective, on the other hand, agreement as to the office of bishop in apostolic succession is still outstanding. Still needing to be clarified in the continuing dialogue with the Church of England, is how the differing offices of supervision can have reconcilable differences, so that full communion can be realized. Our hope and expectation is that the mutual recognition made possible in the *Meissen Declaration* can be further extended for full communion with other Anglican Churches.

II. Fuller Communion with Catholic and Orthodox Churches

1. Protestant – Catholic Communion

Consensus in Basic Statements

On Reformation Day 1999 the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation signed the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ)*. With it an important step was taken toward fuller communion between the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant churches.

Together we can now declare: “Alone by grace through faith in the saving act of Christ, and not by reason of our works, we are made acceptable to God, who renews our hearts and equips us for and calls us to do good works.”

We see that through the Joint Declaration no communion has yet been achieved. A further understanding of the doctrine of God’s Word, the Sacraments, the church, and the office of ministry, is desperately required. It needs to be thereby established what are legitimate and mutually enriching expressions of diversity and what church dividing differences still exist. We are, however, convinced that the communion in faith is stronger than what divides us.

Different Understanding of the Unity of the Church

The Protestant understanding of ecclesial communion as the goal of ecumenism and the Roman Catholic concept of the unity of the church of Christ as a communion with and under the pope, are still at odds. The Vatican announcement of September 2000 (*Dominus Jesus*) with regard to the supremacy of the Roman Catholic Church, as well as the refusal to recognize the Protestant churches as “sister churches,” is seen by us as a clear setback to the efforts towards fuller ecumenical communion. We regard the claims made therein to be “Roman,” but not “catholic” in the Biblical sense, and in the common tradition of the confessional witness of the ancient church. We wish to work with the WCC towards “a truly universal council which will again speak for all Christians and will show the way into the future.” (Vollversammlung, Uppsala 1968).

Ecumenism from the Bottom Up

We draw attention to the document “Judging Doctrine – Church Dividing?” from 1986. According to the German Catholic Bishops Conference, the consequences for ecumenical fellowship of families and congregations is to be discussed. What has been achieved to date, in our estimation, already makes it possible for the Protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church to invite one another to (the Sacrament of) Holy Communion. The Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany reemphasizes this invitation and hopes that ecumenical signs can be established with regard to this at the ecumenical Kirchentag in Berlin in the year 2003. Many confessionally diverse families and ecumenical circles rightly expect, now that a fundamental consensus of faith has been established, that they not be turned away from the Table of the Lord in one church or another.

Confessionally diverse families work in confessionally uniting ways. There is often more ecumenical fellowship practiced here than elsewhere in the church. We make a plea that all churches seize hold of this reality as an ecumenical opportunity, and that all church regulations be lifted which restrict the spiritual welfare of Protestant and Catholic marriages and families. We require that Protestant weddings for Protestant – Catholic couples in future be recognized by the Catholic Church as valid without requiring any further dispensations. The visit to a Protestant or ecumenical worship service should be regarded by the Catholic Church as fulfilling Sunday (worship) requirements, at least in individual cases.

Protestant – Catholic communion occurs on many levels in the life of the church and society, in worship services, common words and actions, education, common work in church projects and organizations, including joint management of social institutions. Ecumenical education has also made inroads into the Kindertagesstätten as well as many school programs and other educational forums. Student communities and youth organizations have become areas of exploration for creative arrangements for ecumenical partnerships. We encourage the congregations and churches in the EKD to become ecumenically open in evangelical freedom, and to find out together with their Catholic partners in their particular situation, which organizational form of ecumenical communion for the proclamation of the Gospel serves them best, and where the confessional parallel structures are required. Eucharistic compatibility with the Catholic Bishopric of the Old Catholics in Germany, was made possible by the EKD in 1985. We are grateful for the communion thus far accomplished and practiced and hope for an increase of it.

2. Protestant – Orthodox Communion

Approaches to Orthodoxy

The Protestant churches have been working together with the Orthodox churches in ecumenical committees since the beginning of the ecumenical movement. The large number of Orthodox immigrants to Germany and our immediate neighbors, have led to a mutual appreciation for the individual development of theology and spirituality and to a deeper communion. There is, however, a greater awareness of cultural and spiritual estrangement, which must be overcome through increased, encounters, visitation programs, stipend exchanges, congregational partnerships, etc. In spite of existing differences, e.g., in an understanding of what is the church, the issue of proselytes, ethical questions, and the role of women, especially as it relates to ordination – we encourage our congregations to engage our Orthodox brothers and sisters to foster ecumenical communion with them.

The Protestant - Orthodox dialogues of the last few decades have established a great deal of convergence and consensus. The mutual acceptance of the Confession of Nicaea – Constantinople of 381 is the foundation for greater Protestant – Orthodox communion. Often the same things are believed under different theological ways of thinking and speaking, so that the dialogue

participants much in common ecumenically. The churches must receive the results of the dialogue. With the Orthodox churches in Germany which do not yet recognize the baptisms of the other churches, a solution still needs to be found in discussions with the Working Group of Christian Churches in Germany.

Solidarity and Partnership

The Orthodox churches in eastern and southeastern Europe experienced great oppression in the years of Communist rule, and in some parts the pain of martyrdom. The worldwide ecumenical communion often expressed little or only quiet sympathy. In coming to terms with its own history, and in being confronted with western culture and spirituality, these churches are now experiencing a religious and cultural identity crisis, which has also had negative ramifications for Protestant – Orthodox communion. Yet at the same time they offer new possibilities for great undertakings in state and society, in the renewal of the church, and in the mission proclamation of the Gospel. We wish to seek communion with these churches through understanding openness, and solidarity, And offer our help wherever it may prove useful, e.g. in diaconal work.

The Evangelical Church in Germany must take pains to continue the decades long dialogues with the ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople and the patriarchs of Moscow, Bucharest, and Sofia. Further, she must push for the appropriate participation and constructive collaboration of the Orthodox churches in the Conference of European Churches and the World Council of Churches. We hope for a renewed ecumenical openness of the Orthodox with the goal toward communion with reconciled diversities.

[Translator's note: Section IV of the Kundgebung, while translated, is not included here. It deals with two themes, World Peace and the Environment, and asks the question of how greater ecumenical cooperation can further both causes. Much of it deals with interrelated German and European agencies that are not germane to KneV and "full communion" per se. – KB]

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