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## Ministry - Ordination - Episkopé

### Sammendrag

Et av de åpne lærespørsmålene i Leuenbergfelleskapet har fra begynnelsen av vært knyttet til embetet. Medlemskirkene har også tolket og ordnet den kirkelige tjeneste på forskjellige måter. Den største forskjellen mellom medlemskirkene har vært knyttet til hvordan en forstår og praktiserer bispeembetet, og i hvilken grad dette er viktig for kirkens apostolisitet.

Med utgangspunkt i dokumentet "The Church of Jesus Christ" fra 1994 har emnet vært studert i flere sammenhenger. Men i de senere år har The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) funnet det nødvendig å foreta en dypere studieprosess rundt emnet - i den hensikt å kunne presentere et helhetlig dokument for CPCEs generalforsamling i 2012. Der er det ønskelig at dokumentet vedtas av medlemskirkene.

På vegne av Den norske kirke og Folkekirken i Danmark har Sven Oppegaard deltatt i arbeidsgruppen som har forfattet dokumentet. På tross av forskjeller i kirkenes ordninger og ulike syn på embetet, leverte arbeidsgruppen et forslag som har vært behandlet på to konsultasjoner, og som CPCEs råd nå har sendt ut på høring til medlemskirkene. Frist for høringssvar er 1. juni 2011.

### Forslag til vedtak

På bakgrunn av innkomne innspill under møtet, ber MKR Teologisk nemnd utarbeide utkast til høringssvar som oversendes MKR/AU. MKR ber MKR/AU om at endelig høringssvar ferdigstilles innen 1. juni 2011.

## **Saksorientering**

Resultatet av en læresamtale i CPCE har resultert i dokumentet "Ministry – Ordination – Episcopé", som nå er sendt ut på høring blant medlemskirkene. Teksten består av tre deler. Første del er en innledning om den nåværende situasjon og tidligere hermeneutiske refleksjoner rundt emnet. Andre del er selve uttalelsen som forsøker å formulere et felles ståsted for CPCEs medlemskirker. Tredje del forsøker å trekke noen konklusjoner og presentere noen anbefalinger for videre konsolidering av CPCEs syn på embetet.

Det er særlig andre og tredje del det bes om respons på. Meningen er at disse delene skal bearbeides i henhold til høringssvarene, og at det ferdige dokumentet skal presenteres for generalforsamlingen i 2012. Generalforsamlingen vil, så langt som mulig, vedta dokumentet som en beskrivelse av CPCE-kirkenes felles syn på embetet.

### **Retningslinjer for høringssvar:**

Med høringen følger retningslinjer for utarbeidelse av høringssvar. I forhold til lærespørsmål er følgende retningsgivende spørsmål stilt:

- Harmonerer uttalelsen med hva som bekjennes og læres i deres kirke om embete, ordinasjon og bispeembete?
- Gir dokumentet en basis for å presentere en felles protestantisk forståelse av embetet/tjenesten til kirker av andre konfesjoner?
- Hvilke andre elementer som er nevnt, er særlig viktige for din kirke, og hvilke bør arbeides videre med?

Læresamtalen søker også å styrke det levende fellesskapet innenfor CPCE, noe som får praktiske konsekvenser. Med hensyn til praktiske implikasjoner bes det om respons på følgende spørsmål:

- Finner dere den nåværende situasjon rundt embetet/tjenestene, ordinasjon og bispeembete riktig beskrevet, særlig i forhold til egen kirke?
- Ville dere legge til synspunkter som forklarer deres egen forståelse og praksis?
- Finner dere at beskrivelser og anbefalinger (særlig rundt status 'gitt tjenesten med ord og sakrament' eller forholdet mellom ordinasjon og utsendelse eller spørsmålet om ordinasjon av kvinner) som stiller spørsmål ved deres egen praksis?
- Hvordan ønsker dere å forholde dere til slike spørsmålsstillinger (rundt egen praksis)?
- Ser dere muligheter for å nå en større enhet i praksis innenfor CPCE?

### **Økonomiske/administrative konsekvenser**

Ingen større administrative eller økonomiske konsekvenser er påregnet.



Gemeinschaft Evangelischer Kirchen in Europa (GEKE)  
Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE)  
Communauté d'Églises Protestantes en Europe (CEPE)

## **Ministry – Ordination – Episkopé**

Provisional result of a doctrinal discussion of the  
Community of Protestant Churches in Europe

*Released from the Council of the CPCE on June 8th 2010  
for further comments and discussion*

# MINISTRY – ORDINATION – EPISKOPÉ

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# I. INTRODUCTION

1  
2 1. The understanding of ministry and ordination, combined with the question of  
3 episkopé, is one of the core issues in ecumenical conversations. There is an urgent need for  
4 further work on this topic, not only to deepen church fellowship within the Community of  
5 Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE), but also in connection with its dialogues with other  
6 churches and confessions, above all with those Lutheran churches which so far have not  
7 signed the Leuenberg Agreement, and with the Anglican Communion, the Roman Catholic  
8 Church and the Orthodox churches.

## 9 **1. The Problem**

10 2. In 1994, the Fourth General Assembly of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship (LCF,  
11 now CPCE) adopted the document "The Church of Jesus Christ" (CJC) which for the first  
12 time formulated a common basic understanding of the church and its unity among the Protes-  
13 tant churches. Investigating the question of ministry and ministries in the church (Chapter  
14 I.2.5), the document had to state that no consensus has yet been reached among the churches  
15 of the LCF, but that the Fellowship is "on the way towards consensus". The so-called Tam-  
16 pere Theses are quoted as "a helpful stimulus for further work on a shared contribution [...] in  
17 ecumenical conversation" (p. 97). CJC draws the following consequences from them: "These  
18 important theses document both the fundamental consensus and the different interpretations  
19 concerning the ministry as well as the diversity of forms in shaping the ministry. It is, how-  
20 ever, decisive that these differences do not call church fellowship in word and sacrament into  
21 question, since these *differences* do not refer to the *foundation* but to the *shape of the church*"  
22 (p. 99).

23 3. Among other things, conflicts over the ordination of women and of homosexuals in  
24 various member churches show that there is need for further conversation within CPCE. The  
25 understanding of ordination varies among Protestant churches. The discussion which the  
26 Bishops' Conference of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany (VELKD)  
27 sparked off with its recent papers on ordination and commissioning<sup>1</sup> makes clear how impor-  
28 tant further work is on this topic. This is all the more true, as the "further development of the  
29 structural and legal shape" for the sake of "strengthening commitment" is on the agenda of  
30 CPCE.<sup>2</sup>

31 4. In addition to the need for internal clarification, the ecumenical context also challenges  
32 the Protestant churches of Europe to articulate jointly the basic convictions which unite them  
33 over the question of ministry and episkopé and to put these convictions forward confidently.  
34 In this connection they ought to pay special attention to the new models of ecclesial commun-  
35 ion between Anglican churches and churches of CPCE, such as the Meissen, Porvoo and  
36 Reuilly Declarations.

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<sup>1</sup> *Allgemeines Priestertum, Ordination und Beauftragung nach evangelischem Verständnis* ('The Protestant Understanding of Universal Priesthood, Ordination and Commissioning'), Texte aus der VELKD 130/2004, and „*Ordnungsgemäß berufen*“. Eine Empfehlung der Bischofskonferenz der VELKD zur Berufung zu Wortverkündigung und Sakramentsverwaltung nach evangelischem Verständnis ('Orderly called. A Recommendation of the Bishops' Conference of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany regarding the Protestant Understanding of Proclamation of the Word and Administration of the Sacraments'), Texte aus der VELKD 136/2006.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Freedom is binding*. Final Report of the 6th General Assembly of CPCE 2006, no. 4.1 (German original in: *Gemeinschaft gestalten – Evangelisches Profil in Europa. Texte der 6. Vollversammlung der Gemeinschaft Evangelischer Kirchen in Europa - Leuenberger Kirchengemeinschaft - in Budapest, 12.-18. September 2006*, ed. W. Hüffmeier, M. Friedrich, Frankfurt am Main 2007, p. 317).

1    **2.    *The State of the Discussion within CPCE***

2    5.    The *Leuenberg Agreement* identified the question of ministry and ordination among  
3 the differences of doctrine “which while they do not have divisive force still persist within  
4 and between the participating churches” (LA 39).

5    6.    The *Neuendettelsau Theses* on the consensus about the question of “Ministry and Or-  
6 dination” (1982/1986) made the first step in further work. Building on the basic doctrines of  
7 the Lutheran and the Calvinist Reformation, they identified a wide range of agreement among  
8 the Protestant churches regarding the understanding and the structure of ministries, the under-  
9 standing and practice of ordination and also the ‘service of episkopé’ (cf. the quotes below,  
10 nos. 39, 53, 56 and fn. 26 and 61). But the statements were rather general, and the specific  
11 significance of this agreement is not always clear. The 4<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the LCF in  
12 1987 accepted the Neuendettelsau Theses as “a basic guideline for future ecumenical conver-  
13 sations”.

14   7.    The *Tampere Theses* (1986), which were also received by the General Assembly in  
15 1987 and partially incorporated into the document “The Church of Jesus Christ”,<sup>3</sup> were a fur-  
16 ther step. In the first thesis, with reference to Barmen III and CA V, it is stated that “a minis-  
17 try pertaining to word and sacrament, the *ministerium verbi* [...] belongs to the being of the  
18 church”, but that “the whole congregation and not just the ordained ministry have the respon-  
19 sibility for the proclamation of the word and for the right use of the sacraments” (p. 114).

20   8.    The second thesis deals with the connection between the general priesthood and the  
21 ordained ministry. But, amongst other things, it does not decide if the ordained ministry is to  
22 be derived directly from the priesthood of all believers or if it has a further root in a special  
23 commission of Christ. Here there is a need for clarification, since this is also a matter of con-  
24 troversy in scholarly theological discussions.

25   9.    Regarding the “service of leadership” (episkopé), the third Tampere thesis states “that  
26 the leadership of the congregation is also exercised through other ‘ministries’ [*Dienste*] and  
27 does not only fall to the ordained ministry” (p. 115). Notwithstanding the remaining differ-  
28 ences, the LCF churches “are nevertheless agreed that such differences in church structure do  
29 not impede a ‘church fellowship’ in the sense of pulpit and table fellowship. The reciprocal  
30 acknowledgement of ministry and ordination is not impeded so long as the question of church  
31 leadership remains subordinate to the sovereignty of the word” (p. 116). Even if it is recog-  
32 nised that in ecumenical dialogue the Protestant churches can and should “learn from other,  
33 non-Reformation churches”, “no single historically-derived form of church leadership and  
34 ministerial structure should or can be laid down as a prior condition for fellowship and for  
35 mutual recognition” (p. 99).

36   10.   The 1994 study “*The Church of Jesus Christ*” summarised the fundamental agree-  
37 ment between the LCF churches in the following way:

- 38       1.    “that all Christians participate through faith and baptism in the offices of Christ as prophet,  
39       priest and king and all are called to witness and to hand on the gospel and to intercede before  
40       God for one another (priesthood of all believers)”;
- 41       2.    “that the ministry of the public proclamation of the gospel and of the administration of the sac-  
42       raments is fundamental and necessary for the church. Where the church exists it needs an ‘or-  
43       dered ministry’ of the public proclamation of the gospel and of the administration of the sacra-  
44       ments. There is diversity in the ways in which this ministry is perceived and shaped. This diver-  
45       sity is shaped by historical experiences and determined by the different interpretations of the

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<sup>3</sup> Full text in: *Sacraments, Ministry, Ordination*, pp. 113-121; Theses 1-3 in CJC, pp. 97-99.

1 task of the ministry. We can accept the different forms of the ministries in our churches as spiri-  
2 tual wealth and as a gift of God. In this sense the historical episcopate and the structured minis-  
3 try in a synodical and presbyteral form of church order can both be appreciated as serving the  
4 unity of the church. The criterion for perceiving ministries and services is the fundamental  
5 commission of the church”<sup>4</sup>;

6 3. “that the ministry of public proclamation is conferred through ordination (the ‘ordained minis-  
7 try’ in the terminology of the Lima documents). It is rooted in a special commission of Christ  
8 but it is always dependent on the priesthood of all believers (Neuendettelsau-Theses 3 A).<sup>5</sup> The  
9 Word of God constitutes this ministry which serves the justification of the sinner. It has a serv-  
10 ing function for Word and faith”;

11 4. “that the expression ‘ordered ministry’ refers to the totality of all ministries and services in the  
12 church in the sense of thesis 3 of the Tampere Theses. The ministry conferred [!] through ordina-  
13 tion is part of this ministry” (pp. 99-100).

14 11. In 1998, the Executive Committee of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship published a  
15 statement about the recent declarations between Anglican churches and the EKD or the Nor-  
16 dic and Baltic Lutheran churches.<sup>6</sup> While appreciating what is aimed at and gained in these  
17 documents, it held fast to the Leuenberg model as “a model of church unity which is based on  
18 the Reformation understanding of the unity of the Church as a community of churches” (no.  
19 2.3). Thus, the stimuli for further talks about the apostolic succession are received rather re-  
20 luctantly (cf. the quote in Report, fn. 53). In contrast, the document “The Shape and Shaping  
21 of Protestant Churches in a Changing Europe”, received by the CPCE Assembly 2006, ex-  
22 presses itself in a more open way: “The common emphasis on *episkope* for the unity and lead-  
23 ership of the church is important for a closer relationship between the churches of the Porvoo  
24 Agreement and the Leuenberg Agreement, even if there are different views and shapes of  
25 *episkope*.”<sup>7</sup>

### 26 3. *The Aim and the Structure of the present Document*

27 12. The document presented here has the aim of deepening and developing further the  
28 basic consensus formulated in the earlier CPCE documents. This is especially true of the  
29 “Statement” (part II) which presents a common position of the Protestant churches on minis-  
30 try, ordination and episkopé. Since a number of differences still remain, the “Report” which  
31 accompanies the document will analyse some of the problems, taking note of the most recent  
32 developments and the processes of reform which are now taking place in the Protestant  
33 churches of Europe in reaction to far-reaching demographic changes and a new religious  
34 situation. The first part of the “Report” is an account of the historical development of the un-  
35 derstanding and shaping of ministry/ministries. A number of recommendations (part III), re-

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<sup>4</sup> The English translation of CJC is here somewhat misleading. The original German text (p. 34) is rendered better as: The mission of the church is the criterion for practicing and shaping the ministries and services in the church.

<sup>5</sup> Again, the translation is misleading. The German text states that the ministry of word and sacraments is “ange-wiesen auf” the general priesthood, which rather means that it needs the general priesthood. The reference is strange as well. Tampere Theses 2 is much more relevant than Neuendettelsau Theses 3.A.

<sup>6</sup> „Leuenberg – Meissen – Porvoo. Models of Church Unity from the perspective of the Leuenberg Agreement“ (German original in: *Versöhnte Verschiedenheit – der Auftrag der evangelischen Kirchen in Europa. Texte der 5. Vollversammlung der Leuenberger Kirchengemeinschaft in Belfast, 19.-25. Juni 2001*, ed. W. Hüffmeier, Ch.-R. Müller, Frankfurt am Main 2003, pp. 258-267), for download in <http://www.leuenberg.eu/daten/File/Upload/doc-7057-1.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> No. 2.5, for download in: <http://www.leuenberg.eu/daten/File/Upload/doc-7163-2.pdf> (German original in: *Gemeinschaft gestalten* [fn. 2], pp. 43-75, here p. 60).

1 sulting from the most basic findings of the work, conclude the document. (These will be re-  
2 worked in the revision to be done on the basis of the comments eventually received from the  
3 churches of CPCE.)

#### 4 **4. Common Understanding and Limits of Diversity within CPCE**

##### 5 **4.1. The Foundation, the Shape and the Mission of the Church**

6 13. The distinction between the foundation, the shape and the mission of the church,  
7 originating in Reformation theology, is an essential presupposition of the “Leuenberg model”.  
8 The document “The Church of Jesus Christ” explains: “The *foundation* of the church is God's  
9 action to save humankind first in the people of Israel, then in Jesus Christ. In this fundamental  
10 action God himself is the subject, and consequently the church is an object of faith. Since the  
11 church is a community of believers the *shape* of the church has taken various historical forms.  
12 The one church of faith (singular) is present in a hidden manner in churches (plural) shaped in  
13 different ways. The *mission* of the church is its task to witness before all humankind to the  
14 gospel of the coming of the Kingdom of God in word and action. In order to achieve unity of  
15 the church in the diversity of these shapes it is sufficient ‘that the Gospel be preached in con-  
16 formity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance  
17 with the divine Word’ (Augsburg Confession VII).”<sup>8</sup>

18 14. According to Protestant understanding, the church is created and sustained by the  
19 word of God. It is *creatura Evangelii* or *creatura verbi divini*. Ministry, ordination and  
20 episkopé are indispensable; however, they do not form the foundation but belong to the shape  
21 of the church. However, they must be shaped in such a way so that they correspond to the  
22 foundation and the mission of the church. Also, ministry, ordination and episkopé do not form  
23 the foundation of the unity for the church; instead they serve it by performing their specific  
24 tasks in the framework of the proclamation of the gospel in word and sacrament. Neither the  
25 ministry of word and sacraments nor the various forms of episkopé by themselves or in them-  
26 selves guarantee the true being of the church, but they serve the proclamation of the word of  
27 God.

##### 28 **4.2. Limits of Diversity**

29 15. According to “The Church of Jesus Christ”, existing differences in the understanding  
30 of ministry and in the diverse shapes of ministry and service of episkopé “do not refer to the  
31 *foundation* but to the *shape of the church*” (see above no. 2). Along the lines of the Tampere  
32 Theses, differences in the structure of the church and its government are not necessarily an  
33 obstacle to church fellowship or to the reciprocal recognition of ministry and ordination, as  
34 long as the question of church governance remains subordinate to the sovereignty of the gos-  
35 pel.<sup>9</sup>

36 16. However, the diversity of structures and ministries of the church and their specific  
37 shaping is not without limit. Consequently, a question arises about the criteria for the limits to  
38 diversity and their theological foundation. The member churches of CPCE have to examine  
39 self-critically where any hard-line practice, e.g. the refusal to ordain women, represents an  
40 obstacle to church fellowship or has the potential to damage it. An amicable conversation  
41 needs to take place to explore how such obstacles and damage might be removed, with the  
42 aim of deepening church fellowship.

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<sup>8</sup> CJC, p. 85 (Introduction 1.4).

<sup>9</sup> Tampere Theses 3; cf. the quotes above, no. 9.



## 1    **5.    *The Hermeneutical Foundations for the Doctrinal Conversation***

### 2    **5.1.    *Unity in Reconciled Diversity***

3    17.    A systematic Protestant exposition on ministry, ordination and episkopé cannot limit  
4    itself to restating the confessional writings of the Reformation or to the historical beginnings  
5    of a Protestant doctrine of ministry. The models found in the Scriptures and in confessional  
6    writings on the subject of church order are not binding for present-day church constitutions.  
7    There have been many diverse developments in the Protestant ordering of ministries from the  
8    time of the Reformation to the present day (cf. Report ch. 1). The dialectic between church  
9    tradition and present day requirements involves hermeneutical processes that are open and  
10   communal in the search for the most beneficial structures in every generation. Immutable  
11   ministerial structures would be detrimental to the mission of the church. However, there has  
12   been a considerable continuity in the understanding and ordering of ministries through the  
13   centuries. Functional equivalents and parallels can also be discovered in differing structures  
14   and terminologies. The primary aim of hermeneutic efforts is not to unify structures and des-  
15   ignations for ministry, but to come to a deeper ecumenical understanding of the spiritual reali-  
16   ties which are held in common, and to identify the limits of diversity (see above nos. 15-16).

17   18.    The Leuenberg Agreement bears witness to the unity given in Christ, which allows the  
18   signatory churches to live in reconciled diversity and to grow in unity and shared mission in  
19   the world. It should be demonstrated that fundamental agreement in the understanding of min-  
20   istry, ordination and episkopé is not only asserted, but is also based on a sure theological  
21   foundation. An ecumenical hermeneutics of reconciled diversity founded in God as the full-  
22   ness of life can contribute towards deepening the common understanding of ministry, ordina-  
23   tion and episkopé, as it has done already among Protestant churches. This can in turn contrib-  
24   ute to the ecumenical dialogues with other churches and the broader search for visible unity  
25   within the ecumenical movement. An important contribution from the Protestant churches in  
26   this area is the conviction that the visible unity of the church worldwide will be a differenti-  
27   ated unity. This is also true for the structures of ministry. The hermeneutic task does not,  
28   therefore, aim at comprehensive ecclesial uniformity, but at an overcoming of divisive differ-  
29   ences, thereby contributing towards greater visibility in church unity.

30   19.    A hermeneutics of reconciled diversity is not of course sufficient in itself to overcome  
31   church divisions which are evident in an ecumenical context, particularly over the question of  
32   ministries. Church divisions are not simply the result of historical developments but are also  
33   the consequence of decisions taken by the churches and their leadership. It is an open question  
34   whether or not the differences in the understanding of church and ministry (which still exist  
35   between the churches of CPCE and other churches) are insuperable. A dynamic view of con-  
36   fessional identity reckons with the activity of the Holy Spirit, and that also means accepting  
37   the historical mutability of identities.

### 38   **5.2.    *Criteria for the Protestant Understanding of Ministry, Ordination and Episkopé***

39   20.    Various denominational and confessional traditions and experiences encounter each  
40   other in the conversation among Protestant churches about ministry, ordination and episkopé.  
41   These different traditions and experiences cannot easily be integrated. Therefore it is helpful  
42   to distinguish between the hermeneutic *criteria* and the *sources* from which the different un-  
43   derstandings of ministry are drawn. Scripture, tradition, reason and experience are sources  
44   from which the different forms of ministry, ordination and episkopé (along with their theo-  
45   logical foundations) arise. Christian life has been confronted throughout history with the ten-  
46   sion between the claim of Scripture and of present-day reality. For that reason the hermeneu-

1 tic criteria are conformity with Scripture and with reality. In the Lutheran tradition the criteria  
2 also include conformity with the confession, but this is connected with conformity with Scrip-  
3 ture.<sup>10</sup>

4 21. Tradition, as one of the sources of Protestant theology includes not only the confes-  
5 sional writings of the Reformation and Protestant confessions from a later time, but also pre-  
6 Reformation traditions and liturgy. It embraces the various orders for ordination, vocation,  
7 commissioning or appointment (installation) to an office of leadership in the church, along  
8 with ecumenical texts and commitments, especially earlier documents of CPCE.

#### 9 5.2.1. *The Criterion of Conformity with Scripture*

10 22. The criterion of conformity with Scripture is not to be confused with a formalistic use  
11 of the Bible, for which a strict identification of the canonical biblical text with the Word of  
12 God is fundamental. A theological and hermeneutic distinction needs to be made between  
13 Scripture and Word of God. The biblical writings are the written deposit of the voice of God,  
14 formulated and witnessed by human beings. These Scriptures are called 'holy' because, and in  
15 so far as (in the view of Christian believers), they foundationally and sufficiently bear witness  
16 to the living Word of God, which is Jesus Christ. It is the work of God's Spirit that this wit-  
17 ness of the Holy Scripture is given new life, as the Word is publicly proclaimed and where  
18 people read, meditate and interpret Scripture for one another and celebrate the sacraments.  
19 Thus the Word of God, attested in Holy Scripture (that God has spoken in history in a living  
20 and saving way), becomes a living reality in the present.

21 23. Only in the hermeneutic circle between Scripture and situation does the significance of  
22 the so-called Reformation principle of Scripture disclose itself. It is not focused on the formal  
23 priority of the Bible over against church tradition or other sources of theological knowledge,  
24 but on the prior place of the gospel as the message of Jesus Christ, the salvation of the world.  
25 The Reformers expressed the right understanding of this in the doctrine of justification (cf.  
26 LA 7 and 8). The authority of Scripture is grounded in and also limited by the gospel, which  
27 bears witness to the saving action of God. Time and again, Scripture needs to be interpreted  
28 by the church and its confessions, through theological scholarship and through the Bible read-  
29 ing of individual Christians.

30 24. The criterion of evangelical, Protestant, theology (i.e. theology in accordance with the  
31 gospel) is how far the present church life and faith's existence is determined by Scripture ap-  
32 plied to the time and not, say, conversely that the interpretation of Scripture is determined by  
33 the general religious or political spirit of the time. That also applies in particular to the under-  
34 standing of ministry, ordination and episkopé.

#### 35 5.2.2. *The Criterion of Conformity with Reality*

36 25. In Scripture, Christians encounter experiences of people with God. In their own life  
37 they gain experiences with reality which they correlate to the experiences of people in Scrip-  
38 ture. The criterion of conformity with reality relates to human experience in various ways.  
39 The churches of CPCE have gained different experiences throughout the history which have  
40 found expression in their different traditions and confessions. Theological insights and devel-  
41 opments and the different forms of the church and its ministries are embedded in different  
42 socio-cultural and political contexts. Moreover, the shaping of church structures and minis-  
43 tries in history and the present has to be directed towards the practical possibilities given for

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<sup>10</sup> A much more detailed consideration of the hermeneutics of Scripture and Confessions, including the relation between Scripture and tradition, is given in the doctrinal study "Scripture, Confession, Church" which was submitted to the Churches of CPCE late in 2009.

1 the witness and service of the church in a particular historical situation. Here, however, a dis-  
2 tinction must always be made between facticity and validity. The validity of a current state  
3 cannot be deduced from the mere fact that something exists or does not exist. Conformity  
4 with reality does not mean unquestioning adaptation to existing circumstances, though these  
5 can certainly be changed and have to be shaped by one's own responsibility.

6 26. The Tampere Theses already say: "The outer shape of the congregation and its ser-  
7 vices have always been characterized to a certain extent by the surrounding society. This was  
8 also the case with the early Church. The Church must always maintain the freedom to resist  
9 society for the sake of her service to the word. It is of particular importance to see to it that  
10 neither an inherited form of the church's ministry, which mirrors a bygone social structure,  
11 nor an uncritical adaptation to the surrounding society become the standard for the structure  
12 and the exercise of the functions of the church's ministry" (Thesis 6).

13 27. The shape of the church and its ministries is to be understood as a constant task of  
14 shaping for which all members of the church bear responsibility in the sense of the priesthood  
15 of all believers. But the foundation of the church and its mission (see above, no. 13) are the  
16 criteria for the actual shaping of church structures and ministries. On this basis, the shape of  
17 the church has to be determined time and again within a hermeneutical circle. This circle  
18 brings together the interpretation of Scripture with a true and honest acceptance of reality.  
19 (This may include the recognition that our confessions serve as guiding principles in the in-  
20 terpretation of Scripture).

21

## II. STATEMENT

### **1. The Mission of the Church**

28. All churches of CPCE have a common understanding of the mission of the church: “The church has been called to be an instrument of God for the actualisation of God’s universal will to salvation. It will fulfil this task if it remains in Christ, the infallible sole instrument of salvation. The certainty that this promise of God is reliable liberates and enables Christians and churches to witness to the world and for the world”.<sup>11</sup> With the Meissen and the Reuilly Common Statement, churches within and beyond CPCE can assert: “The Church, the body of Christ, must always be seen in this perspective as instrumental to God’s ultimate purpose. The Church exists for the glory of God, and to serve, in obedience to the mission of Christ, the reconciliation of humankind and of all creation.”<sup>12</sup>

29. According to the concept of God’s mission to the world (*missio Dei*), the church follows God’s movement out towards creation, in love through the Son, through the transforming power of the Spirit – contributing to the building up of the Kingdom of God. All Christians take part in the mission of the church.

30. In defining the realisation of church fellowship, the Leuenberg Agreement saw *witness and service* as essential to the mission of the church. Both witness and service point the church to the whole of humankind and have an individual as well as a social dimension. “Being the service of love, it [i.e. the common service] turns to man in his distress and seeks to remove the causes of that distress. The struggle for justice and peace in the world increasingly demands of the churches the acceptance of a common responsibility” (LA 36). “It is in keeping with the Holy Spirit’s nature for it [i.e. the church of Jesus Christ] to communicate in convincing fashion God’s love for people in their social contexts and in their concrete life-situations.”<sup>13</sup>

31. Consequently, all issues connected with ministry, ordination and episkopé in our churches must be organised in order to empower the churches for their common witness and service to the whole of humankind. This will imply that the ministry of the church will need to face up to the challenges of contemporary society, such as gender justice, the rights of minorities and the integrity of creation as well as the marginalisation of faith and church.

32. As it is the matter of a *common* bearing and performing of witness and services, the member churches of CPCE must do all in their power to deepen the community which already exists between them, but also constantly seek links and connections with other churches that are not in full fellowship with CPCE.

33. It is a basic insight of the Reformation that God’s mission is fulfilled through God’s word. The church is characterised as a creature of the word (*creatura verbi*). This implies that structures in the church should ensure that decisions are made “*sine vi, sed verbo*” (not with external force, but through the power of the word) as far as possible.

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<sup>11</sup> CJC, p. 103 (I.3.2).

<sup>12</sup> Meissen no. 3 = Reuilly no. 18. Nearly the same formulations also in the Porvoo Common Statement no. 18.

<sup>13</sup> *Evangelising: Protestant Perspectives for the Churches in Europe*, Vienna 2007, p. 11 (no. 2.1).

## 1    2.    *Ministry in the Church*

### 2    2.1.    *The Ministry of the Whole People of God and the Order of Ministries*

3    34.    There is broad agreement among Christian churches that the whole People of God  
4    participate in God's mission. All baptised Christians are called to a life of witness and ser-  
5    vice.<sup>14</sup> With reference to 1 Peter 2:9, ecumenical documents often describe this calling as par-  
6    ticipation in a "royal priesthood".<sup>15</sup> All members of the body of Christ have received certain  
7    complementary gifts (*charismata*) for their service.<sup>16</sup>

8    35.    The ministries in the church are rooted in the ministry of Christ. The church – gath-  
9    ered under the word and called to service – receives in its midst various charisms. The minis-  
10    tries are renewed out of these charisms, and the charisms in turn are sustained by the minis-  
11    tries.<sup>17</sup> It is God's will that certain persons with special functions "equip the saints for the  
12    work of ministry" and that this building up of the church is carried on in an orderly way (cf.  
13    Eph. 4:11-12; 1. Cor. 14:12, 26, 40). Consequently an order of ministries arises under the  
14    guidance of the Gospel and the Holy Spirit.<sup>18</sup>

15    36.    There are certain ministries which are indispensable for the life and order of the  
16    church as will be shown further: These are the ministry of word and sacraments, the ministry  
17    of *diakonia* and the ministry of episkopé. In addition there are in the churches patterns of  
18    other services and ministries that enrich the church's life.

### 19    2.2.    *The Ministry of Word and Sacraments (ministerium verbi)*

20    37.    The first of these indispensable ministries is the ministry of word and sacraments  
21    which is highlighted in all the churches of CPCE.<sup>19</sup> This is a consensus which is ecumenically  
22    significant both within and beyond CPCE. The Confessio Augustana (CA V and XXVIII)  
23    speaks of the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the Sacraments (*ministerium*  
24    *docendi evangelii et porrigendi sacramenta*), which is instituted in order that we may obtain  
25    faith in God's justifying grace (CA IV).<sup>20</sup> The significance of this particular ministry has also  
26    been highlighted by the Confessio Helvetica Posterior (XVIII), which states that God has al-  
27    ways used ministers in the service of the church and will continue to use them. Their main  
28    duties are the teaching of the gospel of Christ and the proper administration of the sacraments.  
29    Accordingly, Tampere Thesis 1 states: "In conformity with Christ's institution there is a min-

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<sup>14</sup> "The proclamation of the gospel and the offer of saving fellowship are entrusted to the congregation as a whole and to its members who through baptism are called to witness Christ and to serve each other and the world and who through faith have a share in Christ's priestly office of intercession" (Tampere Theses 2).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. BEM, Ministry, no.17; *Nature and Mission of the Church*, nos. 19, 84; God's Reign and our Unity, no. 60 (*Growth in Agreement II*, p. 131). Cf. also Second Vatican Council, Lumen Gentium, no. 10. – The terminological and theological problems with this concept are discussed in the Report, nos. 29 seq.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. BEM, Ministry, nos. 5, 32; *Nature and Mission of the Church*, no. 83.

<sup>17</sup> See 1. Cor. 12+13; Rom 12:1-8; 1Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6. Cf. Report, nos. 2-3.

<sup>18</sup> The term "order of ministries", introduced by the "The Church of Jesus Christ" (cf. Report, fn. 14), does not mean a divinely instituted and normative structure such as the "threefold ministry" according to Roman Catholic and Orthodox understanding (cf. Report, nos. 42, 50), but only a changeable order which secures that the three basic ministries are fulfilled.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Neuendettelsau Theses I.3 C.

<sup>20</sup> We leave aside the dispute within Lutheranism as to whether the "*ministerium*" (German: "Predigtamt") according to CA V is a service of preaching in the church which pertains to all Christians (thus VELKD, *Ordnungsgemäss berufen*, ch. 2, n. 11; ch. 3.4), or whether it is to be identified with the ministry of *public* preaching and the administration of the sacraments according to CA XIV (thus Lund Statement, no.18). In any case, the particular ministry of word and sacraments is highlighted in Lutheranism.

1 istry pertaining to word and sacrament, the *ministerium verbi* (Augsburg Confession V),  
2 which ‘proclaims the gospel and dispenses the sacraments’ [...] The churches from both tradi-  
3 tions<sup>21</sup> which have signed or are participating in the Leuenberg Agreement concur that the  
4 ‘ordained ministry’<sup>22</sup> belongs to the being of the church”.

5 38. The particularity of the ministry of word and sacraments is not a matter of ranking  
6 within the order of ministries or among the wider services in the church. It lies in the specific  
7 purpose to which this ministry is assigned within the church as a collective body created by  
8 the gospel (*creatura verbi*). The church is entirely dependent on God’s grace, which is con-  
9 veyed specifically by the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments.  
10 In the Reformation view these two functions represent together the necessary, divinely insti-  
11 tuted, marks of the true church (*notae ecclesiae*).<sup>23</sup>

12 39. The community of believers is given responsibility, in a wide sense, for maintaining  
13 proclamation, baptism and Holy Communion as means of grace in the church.<sup>24</sup> However, the  
14 reference to the priesthood of the baptised does not aim to reduce the importance of the par-  
15 ticular ministry of word and sacraments in the regular life of the church. According to the  
16 Lutheran confessions, only ordained ministers should be allowed to carry out the “public”  
17 service of the means of grace (cf. CA XIV). The Reformed Reformation did not use this cate-  
18 gory of publicity, but ensured as well that the ministry of word and sacraments was formally  
19 maintained. Only under exceptional circumstances, such as in times of persecution, non-  
20 ordained believers may rightly be called to serve as preachers. In personal counselling any  
21 Christian has the authority to state God’s forgiveness to a person who shows repentance. “The  
22 particular ministry [...] consists in the public proclamation of the word and in the dispensation  
23 of the sacraments before the congregation and yet within the congregation, who exercise their  
24 functions of priesthood of all believers in prayer, personal witness and service.”<sup>25</sup>

25 40. The ministers of word and sacraments have to exercise their ministry in communion  
26 with the worldwide Christian church on the basis of a clear calling (*vocatio interna* as well as  
27 *vocatio externa*). This means that they should perform their service on the basis of a recog-  
28 nised mandate. This mandate is given through ordination according to the order of each  
29 church. It does not, however, give ordained ministers a humanly based authority over the con-  
30 gregation. Their authority for this is derived from God’s word proclaimed through the means  
31 of grace.<sup>26</sup> Rather, as it is the ordained ministers’ task to “confront and comfort the congrega-  
32 tion with the word of God”<sup>27</sup>, they have a prophetic ministry.

33 41. The term “ministry of word and sacraments” denotes that the preaching of the word  
34 and the administration of the sacraments cannot be separated from each other. This is also

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<sup>21</sup> When the Tampere Theses were formulated, only the Lutheran and the Reformed traditions belonged to the CPCE. But the statement is also valid for the Methodist tradition.

<sup>22</sup> In using this term, the Tampere Theses follow the use suggested by the Lima document. Irrespective of the difficulty of this term, the statement is in any case valid for the ministry of word and sacraments, which is conferred by ordination in all churches of CPCE.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. CA VII; Genevan Confession 1536, no. 18; Anglican Thirty-Nine Articles, Art. 19; John Wesley, Methodist Articles of Faith, Art. 13; LA 2.

<sup>24</sup> As stated by Tampere Thesis 1, “the whole congregation and not just the ordained ministry have the responsibility for the proclamation of the word and for the right use of the sacraments. The ordained ministry in itself alone does not guarantee the true being of the church but remains subordinate to the word of God.” (cf. Neuendettelsau Theses I.3.C).

<sup>25</sup> Neuendettelsau Theses I.3.C.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Neuendettelsau Theses I.3.C: “– The word constitutes the ministry, not vice versa. – The ministry serves word and faith. – It is there to serve the justification of sinners, not the justification of the church nor the status quo. – The ministry is connected with the apostolic continuity and unity of the church, its freedom and its love.”

<sup>27</sup> Tampere Theses 2.

1 presupposed in the traditional terminology of *ministerium verbi*. Proclamation and sacraments  
2 are in the view of the Reformation the two forms of the gospel (*verbum audibile* and *verbum*  
3 *visibile*) by which the church is constituted.<sup>28</sup> The preaching of God's word necessarily leads  
4 to the building up of a community that is served by the sacraments. And such a community  
5 cannot exist without being guided and judged by God's word.

### 6 2.3. *Diverse Structures of Ministries in the Churches*

7 42. Christian churches are generally agreed that the church has been guided through its  
8 history by the Holy Spirit. In the view of Protestant churches this has not happened in such a  
9 way that any current structure of ministry can be regarded as unchangeable. And yet, the pat-  
10 terns of ministry are not an arbitrary matter. The shape and order of the church must always  
11 be measured against the biblical witness and the theological understanding of the church and  
12 its mission.<sup>29</sup>

13 43. As the churches of CPCE seek "to promote the ecumenical fellowship of all Christian  
14 churches" (LA 46), they are challenged by existing differences regarding their ministries. In  
15 order to realise church fellowship in witness and service (LA 35-36), they will strive towards  
16 the greatest possible correspondence among each other and with other traditions in their un-  
17 derstanding and patterns of ministry.

18 44. A particular ecumenical issue is how the ministry of word and sacraments is under-  
19 stood and ordered in its relation to other services. Whereas the existence of a ministry serving  
20 word and sacraments is not an issue of choice for the churches, this ministry may be struc-  
21 tured and exercised in diverse forms. There is broad agreement that no uniform church order  
22 and structure of ministry can be compellingly derived from the earliest Christian tradition.<sup>30</sup>  
23 In general, Protestant churches maintain the legitimacy of diversity in questions of church  
24 order.

25 45. In the Protestant churches the ministry of word and sacraments has been traditionally  
26 exercised by full-time parish / circuit ministers. This has had, and still retains, its value in se-  
27 curing ministers who are well trained for their task and can apply themselves fully to their  
28 task. But traditional, and historically contingent forms of parish ministry ("Pfarramt") are not  
29 the only possible forms of securing the divinely instituted ministry of word and sacraments.  
30 This ministry can be exercised in different terms of employment and scopes of functions.

31 46. Through time, increasingly during the last decades, the churches developed particular  
32 forms of ministry in order to include persons (mostly on a part-time basis) in the responsibil-  
33 ity of preaching the gospel. This has often solved urgent needs and enriched the life of the  
34 church. However it has also raised the question of how to define their service with reference  
35 to the ministry of word and sacraments.<sup>31</sup> In this document, neither the whole range of practi-  
36 cal issues (e.g. designations and special tasks of the offices, payment etc.) nor the question of

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Tampere Theses 4: "The service of the word embraces also the service of the sacraments. The sacraments make visible the same gospel through which, as in the preaching of the living word of God, Christ himself is present in the church and the world. In preaching the word and administering the sacraments which together constitute the ministry, the reality of the Church as Christ's body is renewed, her shared life fortified and her apostolic mission perceived." Cf. also Lund Statement, no. 22.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. CJC, ch. I.2.5.4 (p. 101).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Neuendettelsau Theses I.2; *Nature and Mission of the Church*, no. 87. Further explanation is given in the Report nos. 2-16.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. the discussion sparked off by the VELKD (fn. 1).

1 the adequate training can be covered.<sup>32</sup> Of special importance, however, is the issue of ordina-  
2 tion / commissioning for these ministries (see Report, ch. 2.5).

3 47. No ministerial structure can be directly derived from the New Testament. Even “the  
4 threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon”, recommended by BEM “as an expression  
5 of the unity we seek and also as a means for achieving it” (no. 22) has undergone various his-  
6 torical changes.<sup>33</sup> Therefore the Protestant churches consider that there can be legitimate di-  
7 versity among the churches on this issue. The Calvinist Reformation introduced a fourfold  
8 structure of ministry (pastors, teachers, elders and deacons) which is still valid in many Re-  
9 formed churches in a modified form.<sup>34</sup> The Nordic and Baltic Lutheran churches, which (ex-  
10 cept for Latvia) have joined the Porvoo Communion, have moved towards a positive appraisal  
11 of the threefold ministry, affirming the statement of BEM (Ministry 22) that “the threefold  
12 ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon may serve today as an expression of the unity we  
13 seek and also as a means for achieving it”. Even if the majority of these churches have not  
14 stated for themselves a threefold ministry, they consider the services of bishop, pastor and  
15 deacon as central, or indispensable, ministries in the church.

16 48. The Nordic Lutheran churches have maintained and strengthened the diaconal minis-  
17 try. Also the United Methodist Church has introduced an “order of deacons” parallel to the  
18 “order of elders” (i.e. ministers of word and sacraments). Likewise, the Methodist Church in  
19 Britain ordains both deacons and presbyters. But in all these Protestant churches that have an  
20 ordained ministry of deacons, these generally do not administer the sacraments, except in spe-  
21 cial diaconal contexts, such as communion to the sick. They may, however, play a prominent  
22 assisting role in the church’s worship life. In Central and Eastern Europe, by contrast, deacons  
23 and deaconesses are generally not ordained, and their tasks refer more to social care, youth  
24 work and work for older people. But sometimes they are commissioned to minister and even  
25 to administer the sacraments.

26 49. This issue raises other questions among the Protestant churches regarding the relation  
27 of ordination to certain ministries, and the understanding of the unity of the order of minis-  
28 tries. This diversity does not, however, break church fellowship among the churches of CPCE.  
29 It does however make it difficult to draw practical consequences from the mutual recognition  
30 of ordinations as proclaimed in Leuenberg Agreement no. 33. Obviously, an interchangeabil-  
31 ity of ministers requires that they are comparable in terms of theological understanding, train-  
32 ing and commissioning. This means that mutual recognition of ordinations according to LA  
33 33 refers only to that ministry which is conferred by ordination in all churches of CPCE,  
34 which is the ministry of word and sacraments. The churches which practise ordination of eld-  
35 ers for a ministry other than the ministry of word and sacraments should be encouraged to  
36 consider whether commissioning would be a more suitable practice in order to safeguard the  
37 meaning of ordination as related to the *ministerium verbi*, which all other churches of CPCE  
38 (and others far beyond) recognise.

39 50. In addition to the ministry of word and sacraments the church has the ministry of *dia-*  
40 *konia*, i.e. the commission to serve and to seek the best for the world. Even if both ministries  
41 belong closely together (cf. Acts 6:1 seq; Rom. 12:1-21; Gal. 6:2-10) the service “at the table”  
42 is a service with its own dignity. “In being directed not only to members of the church but to

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<sup>32</sup> The latter question is dealt with in the current project “Training for the pastoral ministry in the Churches of CPCE”.

<sup>33</sup> BEM, Ministry, no. 19 already conceded the “considerable changes” that this order underwent.

<sup>34</sup> For the fourfold order cf. the Genevan Ordonnances Ecclésiastiques 1541/61 (*Reformierte Bekenntnisschriften* vol. 1.2, Neukirchen-Vluyn 2006, p. 246). Following Calvin, *Institutio* IV.3.4 and Confessio Gallicana XXIX, pastors and teachers are mostly seen as equivalent, so that a threefold structure is the consequence.



1 all people in need, the diaconate of Christians corresponds to the universality of salvation.”<sup>35</sup>  
2 Basically it is a commission of all Christians, but there can be good reasons to entrust indi-  
3 viduals with the responsibility of exercising and leading specific services of the church’s *dia-*  
4 *konía*. In this way the diaconate is a part of the order of ministries in the church. The question  
5 of whether to ordain deacons or to commission them in a different way is a matter where di-  
6 versity is possible.<sup>36</sup> The same is true for the ministry of “elders” in the sense of the Calvinist  
7 church order. They share in the service of episkopé and their office may also be regarded as  
8 belonging to the order of ministries.

9 51. The Protestant churches emphasise that the order of ministries should not be under-  
10 stood hierarchically as divinely instituted levels of authority. Although levels of responsibility  
11 in the church are an important issue even for the Protestant churches, the different ministries  
12 should be ordered and practiced as service, in terms of mutuality, and not as exclusive rights  
13 or domination.<sup>37</sup>

#### 14 2.4. *Access to the Ministries*

15 52. An issue of great importance is the need for “a deeper understanding of the compre-  
16 hensiveness of ministry which reflects the interdependence of men and women”<sup>38</sup>. With few  
17 exceptions<sup>39</sup> – the churches of CPCE practice the ordination of women to their ordained min-  
18 istries. This decision has been highlighted by all confessional families within CPCE.<sup>40</sup>

19 53. There is a broad consensus among churches of CPCE that the ministry of women and  
20 men is a gift of God. The churches of CPCE have already emphasised their common con-  
21 viction in the Neuendettelsau Theses (1982/86) and expressed the expectation that a broader  
22 convergence might be achieved among the churches of the world at this point: “Neither race  
23 nor gender can have decisive significance for the call to the service of public proclamation  
24 and administration of sacraments (Galatians 3:27f). Churches in which women are not yet  
25 ordained and in which women ministers are not allowed must ask themselves whether this  
26 historically conditioned practice corresponds to contemporary Reformation understanding of  
27 ministry and congregation.”<sup>41</sup>

28 54. Although this is a non-negotiable principle, the churches of CPCE do not reject coop-  
29 eration with other churches which so far do not ordain women. All ministries can be recog-  
30 nised as authentic even if – in the CPCE view wrongly – they are limited to men.<sup>42</sup>

31 55. Among the questions concerning access to the ministries in the church, one of the  
32 most debated issues today is the question whether living in a homosexual relationship or hav-  
33 ing a stated homosexual orientation should be regarded as an obstacle for ordination and the  
34 conduct of the ministry of word and sacraments, or other services in the church. Among the

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<sup>35</sup> CJC, ch. I.3.3.3 (p. 106).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Lund Statement, no. 39; FSPC, *Ordination*, ch. 5.3.3.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Report, no. 51.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. BEM, Ministry, no. 18.

<sup>39</sup> The Lutheran churches in Poland and Latvia and the Brethren Church in the Czech Republic.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Report, no. 55.

<sup>41</sup> Neuendettelsau Theses II.5.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. the result of the dialogue between the CPCE and the European Baptist Federation: “The Beginning of Christian Life and the Nature of the Church,” IV.8: “The acknowledgement of each other’s integrity self-evidently also includes the question of ordained ministers. For as long as we do not have a full recognition of ministry in a doctrinal sense, we nevertheless encourage the ensuring, the enabling and the widening of a reciprocal acceptance of ministry in practical and pastoral ways at local, national or trans-national levels” (Leuenberg Documents 9, Frankfurt am Main 2005, pp. 27-28). This declaration could be made although a large part of the Baptist federations of Europe do not practice the ordination of women.

1 churches of CPCE the differing positions adopted include open acceptance of homosexual  
2 ministers, an expectation of a celibate life for homosexuals, and a more or less explicit con-  
3 demnation of homosexuality.<sup>43</sup> All churches are convinced that their diverging positions are  
4 founded on faithfulness to the Gospel. At the same time, the churches of CPCE agree that this  
5 issue may not become divisive for their church fellowship. Since, however, they are as far  
6 away from a consensus on this issue as is the case, there is a great need for further study and  
7 further prayer for guidance by the Holy Spirit.

### 8 **3. Ordination and the Ministry of Word and Sacraments**

#### 9 **3.1. The Meaning of Ordination**

10 56. Ordination is an official action by the church, which recognises a person's call to a  
11 specific ministry and confirms it with prayer within the assembled congregation.<sup>44</sup> The full  
12 understanding of what ordination means varies among the churches, even within CPCE. There  
13 are different views as to whether commissioning is the core of ordination or only one element  
14 of it. Also, there are differences about the relation of ordination to other forms of calling and  
15 installation. There is broad agreement, however, upon some basic lines regarding ordination  
16 that were already stated in the Neuendettelsau Theses (1982/86). They include the conviction  
17 that a ministry in the church which involves proclamation of the gospel and administration of  
18 sacraments in any case has to be conferred through ordination.<sup>45</sup> For other ministries, by con-  
19 trast, ordination is not necessary, but a special form of commissioning is.

20 57. Ordination includes the laying on of hands and the prayer for the gift of the Holy  
21 Spirit upon the ordinand with a view to the ministry being entered into. This liturgical act is  
22 an important part of the ordination ritual, and reflects the dependence of any minister on  
23 God's strength and guidance, as well as the prayer of the congregation that God will actually  
24 accompany the ordinand with the Holy Spirit in the service which lies ahead. There is no dis-  
25 tinction between ordained and non-ordained persons within the whole people of God either in  
26 essence or in degree.

27 58. Ordination takes place through the congregation in God's name.<sup>46</sup> Public proclamation  
28 and the administration of the sacraments are connected and presuppose an orderly calling,  
29 which consists in a *vocatio interna* and a *vocatio externa*. Together, these are expressed and  
30 take effect in the act of ordination. The readiness of the ordinand to be ordained is an indis-  
31 pensable part of the ordination liturgy. It is maintained in different ways in our churches, very  
32 often through an affirmative response by the ordinand to a question raised by the ordaining  
33 minister.

34 59. There is consensus that the service of public preaching and the administration of the  
35 sacraments belong together<sup>47</sup>. This nexus is broadly affirmed in the theology of ordination. It  
36 therefore raises serious problems for mutual recognition if a church entrusts the ministry of  
37 public preaching and administration of the sacraments to persons without ordaining them.

38 60. Notwithstanding the "ordination" of elders and deacons in some churches of CPCE  
39 (see below no. 62 and Report, no. 68), it is reasonable to understand ordination in a basic  
40 sense (cf. LA 33) as referring to the commissioning for the ministry of word and sacraments.  
41 In claiming a specific access for this ministry, the church as *creatura verbi* shows that it is

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. Report, ch. 2.4, esp. no. 60.

<sup>44</sup> "Congregation" refers to the worshipping community as well as to the local assembly.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Neuendettelsau Theses II.9.

<sup>46</sup> Neuendettelsau Theses II.4.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Tampere Theses 4: "The service of the word embraces also the service of the sacraments."

1 aware of the indispensable nature of this ministry for its existence. Through this ministry, “the  
2 congregation can time and again be impacted (touched) with the word of God [...] in a critical  
3 and liberating manner” and the church reveals “the point where it is particularly dependent on  
4 God’s help and mercy”.<sup>48</sup>

### 5 3.2. *Differences in Terminology and Practice of Ordination*

6 61. In principle the churches agree that ordination is once for all and should not be re-  
7 peated. However, there are different ways of practicing the ordination to lifelong service.<sup>49</sup>  
8 Some churches which have a threefold ministry<sup>50</sup> perform an act of ordination for each form  
9 of this ministry. As an alternative, this model need not divide the churches, provided it does  
10 not imply a gradation in the theological fullness of the ministry.<sup>51</sup>

11 62. Deacons are ordained in some churches and not in others. Both have a valid place in  
12 the Christian tradition and among Protestant churches, as long as the necessity of the ministry  
13 of *diakonia* in the church is maintained. Attention must be paid to how the reciprocal recogni-  
14 tion of ministries between the churches which ordain deacons and those which do not ordain  
15 to this service can be safeguarded. This is not just a matter of the nature of the commissioning  
16 and the understanding of ministry but also of the comparability of the tasks<sup>52</sup> and the training.

17 63. The question of whether a person shall serve in ministry full-time, part time or in an  
18 honorary capacity, cannot determine if he/she should be ordained or commissioned. The deci-  
19 sive factor must be whether or not the service in question is a ministry of word and sacra-  
20 ments. If it is, the person to serve should be ordained, regardless of the time frame and geo-  
21 graphical limitations that have been set for the particular service. The spiritual meaning of the  
22 means of grace and the reality of communicating God’s saving action in Christ is the same  
23 whether the ministry is exercised full time or part time, with or without a salary. The churches  
24 must not establish practices that could be perceived as a gradation in the ministry related to  
25 those elements that constitute the church. Arrangements for limited forms of service can be  
26 both legitimate and helpful under given circumstances. But the limiting factors must be estab-  
27 lished through the terms of employment and not through adaptations in the understanding of  
28 ordination.<sup>53</sup> It is recognised that some churches have dispensations for the purpose of train-  
29 ing or probation.

30 64. It is important that those who are to serve in ordained ministry should be sufficiently  
31 trained. Ordination of persons who do not have the necessary theological training runs the risk  
32 of not safeguarding the faithfulness to the apostolic tradition, the unity of the church and the  
33 interconnectedness of word and sacrament. This does not mean, however, that ordination

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. FSPC, *Ordination*, pp. 57/58.

<sup>49</sup> In the Église Réformée de France the practice of “ordination” is abandoned in favour of a “reconnaissance du ministère” with assuming a variety of ministries within the one ministry of word and sacraments. This acknowledgement of ministry takes place for each type of ministry (pastoral work, hospital chaplaincy, adult education etc.).

<sup>50</sup> In the sense of BEM, see above no. 47.

<sup>51</sup> As supposed in *Lumen Gentium*, no. 21.

<sup>52</sup> There is a range of variation in the understanding of the relationship between the diaconate and the celebration of the sacraments. The Methodist Diaconal Order in the British Methodist Church is an example.

<sup>53</sup> The VELKD has, in its 2006 document “*Ordnungsgemäß berufen*” (see fn. 1), introduced a terminological distinction between ordination (for full-time ministry) and commissioning (for honorary ministry). However, the understanding is that “Beauftragung” is to be considered as ordination in a proper theological sense. It is important that this is always made clear, and that reordination is not required should a person who is commissioned later be qualified for, and appointed to, full-time ministry. Churches of CPCE should be asked not to introduce a similar terminological distinction in their church orders.

1 should be limited only to theologians who have undergone a full course of study. In any case,  
2 biblical and theological training and spiritual maturity are important and need to be consid-  
3 ered seriously, e.g. in the case of limited forms of employment. If an ordained person serving,  
4 or having served, in a limited employment acquires full theological training, then he or she  
5 should be eligible for full time ministry without being reordained.

6 65. Since ordination is in principle conferred only once in a lifetime it should normally be  
7 a requirement that the ordinand be ready for a lifelong ministry, even if such a development is  
8 not arranged or envisaged at the time of ordination.<sup>54</sup>

9 66. It is a broadly agreed practice among the churches, both in CPCE and in the world-  
10 wide *oikoumene*, that ordination shall be conducted only by persons who are themselves or-  
11 dained.<sup>55</sup> They exercise their task on behalf of the whole congregation which calls the ordi-  
12 nand into the service of the whole people of God. Since ordination also includes the recogni-  
13 tion of ministers beyond the confines of the individual congregation and church, the ordina-  
14 tions are normally performed by persons entrusted with the ministry of episkopé. Ordinations  
15 commonly take place in the churches (e.g. cathedrals) where the ordaining ministers serve, or  
16 in the churches where those to be ordained shall work.<sup>56</sup> In both cases the interrelation be-  
17 tween both levels, the world-wide church and the local congregation, should be expressly  
18 stated.

#### 19 4. *Ministry and Exercise of Episkopé*

##### 20 4.1. *Meaning and Function of Episkopé*

21 67. The term “episkopé” as a key word in ecumenical discussions during the last two dec-  
22 ades, can be applied in two different lines of argumentation. The BEM document understands  
23 episkopé as a function of episcopal ministry and identifies it with “pastoral oversight” (cf.  
24 nos. 21, 23, 29). Although the following discussion led to a more differentiated discernment,  
25 the understanding of episkopé has been determined, to a large extent, by the function of spiri-  
26 tual oversight by bishops or superintendents. “Episkopé” is often identified with the “ministry  
27 of oversight”. In line with the former documents of CPCE, however, the mandate for this doc-  
28 trinal discussion understands episkopé as the task of (spiritual) leadership within the church.<sup>57</sup>

29 68. There are differences among the churches of CPCE. In some of them the function of  
30 episkopé is more closely connected to personal ministries of oversight than in others. How-  
31 ever, in all churches of CPCE leadership is, in a broad sense, carried out by governing bodies,  
32 notably by synods and synod-appointed bodies, with interaction of both ordained and non-  
33 ordained persons.<sup>58</sup> This reflects the fact that the “order of ministries” instituted to serve the  
34 ministry of all Christians is broader than the ministry of word and sacraments. Episkopé and

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. the relevant argument in: The Faith and Order Advisory Group of the Church of England: *The Mission and Ministry of the Whole Church. Biblical, Theological and Contemporary Perspectives*, 2007, p. 67 (seq).

<sup>55</sup> Ordination by ordained persons corresponds to the Reformation tradition and ensures ecumenical compatibility (cf. FSPC, *Ordination*, p. 70).

<sup>56</sup> In the Methodist tradition ordinations take place at the Annual Conference which represents both the local and the world-wide church.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. the first sentence of the chapter on “The Service of Leadership (episkopé)” in Tampere Theses 3: “The task of leadership of the community also belongs to the service of the word.”; *Freedom is binding* (fn. 2), no. 2.2.1.1: “The understanding of ministry, ordination and spiritual leadership of the church (episkopé) is one of the core questions in ecumenical conversation.”

<sup>58</sup> When we speak of “non-ordained persons” in this document, we apply a narrower understanding of ordination referring only to the ministry of word and sacraments, thus counting the ordained elders in some Reformed churches as non-ordained.

1 leadership belong together and include oversight over doctrine, worship as well as pastoral  
2 practices and management of institutions, finances and personnel regulations.

3 69. Episkopé has been exercised from the earliest times of the church. Its institutional and  
4 ministerial forms evolved gradually in the early church, as congregations grew and became  
5 more numerous. The tasks of episkopé are “to hold the local congregations in communion, to  
6 safeguard and hand on apostolic truth, to give mutual support and to lead in witnessing to the  
7 Gospel”.<sup>59</sup> Thus it is a service both in the unity and in the apostolicity of the church.<sup>60</sup>

8 70. Episkopé is necessary for the sake of the gospel and the unity of the church, not for its  
9 own sake. The service of episkopé is a service in and for the church, not an exercise of domi-  
10 nation over it.<sup>61</sup> For the Reformation it was important to limit the power of the bishops, separ-  
11 ating their spiritual task, which is essentially the same as that of the ministry of word and  
12 sacraments, from the exercise of worldly power (CA XXVIII).

13 71. From a Protestant perspective, episkopé is carried out primarily for each individual  
14 church. At the same time, each church belongs, also in the Protestant view, to the one church  
15 of Jesus Christ. Episkopé is therefore a service also for the unity of the whole church and can-  
16 not be considered properly without this ecumenical perspective.

17 72. Traditionally, one important task of episkopé has been exercised in the form of *visita-*  
18 *tions*. Here the focus is on congregations within an individual church. But there is also an  
19 ecumenical dimension of episkopé in this, since in examining the preaching in the congrega-  
20 tion the visitation exercises responsibility for the gospel as core to the apostolicity and the  
21 unity of the church.

#### 22 4.2. *Episkopé as Shared Responsibility in the Church*

23 73. There is broad agreement among Christian churches that episkopé has to be exercised  
24 in personal, collegial and communal ways.<sup>62</sup> However, the ways in which these three dimen-  
25 sions are interrelated vary. Most Protestant church orders keep a balance between the personal  
26 and the communal element of episkopé by combining an episcopal component with a synodical  
27 element. This synodical element is maintained by representative bodies such as parish  
28 councils, presbyteries and synods on different levels, in which ordained and non-ordained  
29 persons work together. The element of personal oversight is maintained by local ministers,  
30 superintendents, bishops or church presidents. Thus the episcopal ministry (and its functional  
31 equivalents) is one element of the whole of episkopé. Within the full framework of episkopé  
32 the overseeing task of the ordained ministers is to bear continuous witness to the fact that the  
33 church, also institutionally, has the gospel as its determining criterion. As members of the  
34 body of Christ and sharing in the ministry of the whole people of God, ordained and non-  
35 ordained baptised persons are enabled to take part together in the whole sphere of episkopé.

36 74. The models of interrelating personal and synodical elements and of distributing au-  
37 thority between them vary considerably among the churches of CPCE. Some churches have

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<sup>59</sup> *Nature and Mission of the Church*, no. 91.

<sup>60</sup> In their dialogue with Anglican churches, the Lutheran and Reformed churches of France state together in the Reilly Common Statement: “We believe that a ministry of oversight (episkope), exercised in personal, collegial and communal ways, at all levels of the church’s life, is necessary to witness and to safeguard the unity and apostolicity of the church.” (no. 31.i; cf. Meissen A 4).

<sup>61</sup> The Neuendettelsau Theses put it this way: “The churches of the Reformation (...) understand the ‘service of episkopé’ exclusively as a service to the unity of the church, not as an office [Amt] over the church, but as a service [Dienst] in the church.” (I.1.D).

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Porvoo no. 32.k; Reilly no. 31.i (see above fn. 60); *Nature and Mission of the Church*, no. 94.

1 the office of bishop, others the office of church president or similar offices. But in all cases,  
2 the personal ministry of episkopé represents only one element in exercising the leadership of  
3 the church. It must also be noted that bishops and presidents are normally selected in some  
4 cases by the synods, conferences or church councils, in other cases by the ministers in their  
5 dioceses, together with a representative number of church council members. Thus the elector-  
6 ate always includes a large number of non-ordained persons.<sup>63</sup> Nowhere is the bishop or  
7 president appointed only by ordained ministers or by other bishops alone; nowhere he or she  
8 exercises his/her episkopé independently of synods or conferences. Thus the models converge  
9 as they emphasise the shared responsibility of ordained and non-ordained persons in the  
10 episkopé.

11 75. This convergence is especially important regarding the questions emerging from the  
12 existing agreements with Anglican churches (such as Meissen, Porvoo and Reuilly) concern-  
13 ing the understanding of episkopé (cf. Report, ch. 2.7). The Reformation understanding of  
14 church unity, which is basic for all churches of CPCE, maintains that the witness of the gospel  
15 in word and sacraments is entrusted to the whole people of God, and is upheld in the congrega-  
16 tion by a specially called ministry. The order of ministries in the church includes the service  
17 of episkopé. This ministry is not a guarantee for the church's unity, but serves the church in  
18 its calling to adhere to the apostolic truth and remain united with Christ in faith.

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<sup>63</sup> In the Lutheran Church of Slovakia even all baptised and confirmed members of the church elect the bishop.

### III. RECOMMENDATIONS

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1. We recommend that the churches of CPCE and all Christian traditions have a new critical look at their ministries and reflect on the role of their ministries in their ongoing church divisions and separations, so as to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
2. We recommend that the churches of CPCE work further on a common understanding of the concept of an order of ministries to which first of all the ministry of word and sacraments, and then the ministries of diakonia and episkopé, indispensably belong.
3. We recommend that the churches of CPCE respect the correlation of the service of public preaching and the administration of the sacraments broadly affirmed in the theology of ordination, and ordain the persons entrusted with preaching and administering the sacraments.
4. We recommend that the churches of CPCE consider their doctrine and practice of ordination regarding the question of which ministry shall be ordained and which commissioned, in order to ensure the mutual recognition of ministries, and to strengthen the commitment with CPCE as a whole, and with the wider ecumenical movement in general.
5. We recommend further study on the diaconate, given the fact that the diaconal ministry is understood and ordered in several different ways within churches of CPCE. One particular aim should be to clarify its position in relation to ordination.
6. We recommend that the churches of CPCE present the understanding of episkopé in the ecumenical discussion neither as an exclusive task of bishops nor of the ministers of word and sacrament but as a shared responsibility, in which church councils, synods and conferences participate. We recommend that they consider the communal, collegial, and personal elements of episkopé.
7. We recommend to those churches of CPCE which do not yet ordain women that they reconsider their practice.
8. We recommend further study on the question how the CPCE model of unity in reconciled diversity can be developed in the light of Christ's calling for the unity of the church, in order to deepen the communion which already exists between the member churches of CPCE and in order to find links and connections with other churches.

1 ABBREVIATIONS OF BASIC SOURCES

BEM	WCC, Commission on Faith and Order: Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, 1982 (the “Lima Text”), in: <i>Growth in Agreement I</i> , 465-503
CA	Confessio Augustana = Augsburg Confession
Calvin, Institutio	John Calvin, <i>Institutio Religionis Christianae</i> , 1559, in: Ioannis Calvini Opera Selecta, ed. P. Barth, W. Niesel, vol. 3-5, Munich: Kaiser, 1926–36 (English: <i>Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion</i> , ed. John T. McNeill, transl. by Ford Lewis Battles, London and Philadelphia 1960)
CJC	<i>The Church of Jesus Christ. The Contribution of the Reformation towards Ecumenical Dialogue on Church Unity</i> , ed. W. Hüffmeier, Leuenberg Documents 1, Frankfurt am Main 1995
FSPC, Ordination	<i>Ordination from the perspective of the Reformed Church</i> , FSPC Position 10, Bern 2009
Growth in Agreement I	<i>Growth in Agreement: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level</i> , ed. H. Meyer, L. Vischer, New York/ Geneva 1984
Growth in Agreement II	<i>Growth in Agreement II. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level, 1982-1998</i> , ed. J. Gros, H. Meyer, W. G. Rusch, Geneva 2000
LA	Leuenberg Agreement 1973
Lund Statement	<i>The Episcopal Ministry within the Apostolicity of the Church. The Lund Statement by the Lutheran World Federation – A Communion of Churches</i> , 2007 (quadrilingual publication, ed. LWF 2008)
Meissen	<i>On the Way to Visible Unity. A Common Statement</i> , 18 March, 1988 (Meissen Agreement), ed. Council for Christian Unity of the General Synod of the Church of England (CCU Occasional Paper 2), London, 1992
Nature and Mission of the Church	WCC, Commission on Faith and Order: <i>The Nature and Mission of the Church</i> , Faith and Order Paper 198, Geneva 2005
Neuendettelsau Theses	Ministry – Ministries – Services – Ordination. Theses on the Consensus on the Question ‘Ministry and Ordination’ between the Churches Participating in the Leuenberg Agreement (Neuendettelsau Theses 1982/1986), in: <i>Sacraments, Ministry, Ordination</i> , Leuenberg Documents 2, Frankfurt am Main 1995, pp. 95-101
Porvoo	<i>Porvoo Common Statement</i> . Text agreed by the fourth plenary meeting held at Järvenpää, Finland, 9-13 October 1992, ed. Council for Christian Unity of the General Synod of the Church of England, London 1993
Reuilly	Conversations between the British and Irish Anglican Churches and the French Lutheran and Reformed Churches: <i>The Reuilly Common Statement</i> , in: “ <i>Called to Witness and Service</i> ”. The Reuilly Common Statement with Essays on Church, Eucharist and Ministry, London: Church House Publishing, 1999
Tampere Theses	Theses on the Current Discussion about Ministry (Tampere Theses 1986), in: <i>Sacraments, Ministry, Ordination</i> , Leuenberg Documents 2, Frankfurt am Main 1995, pp. 113-122

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