



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

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# CHURCH COMMUNION<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In the Leuenberg Agreement the German term “Kirchengemeinschaft” was rendered in English by “church fellowship”, and this has been the norm in English texts published by the CPCE since then. Correspondingly the “Leuenberger Kirchengemeinschaft” (the official name until 2003) was styled “Leuenberg Church Fellowship” in English. In other ecumenical texts, however, both in inner-Protestant and in inter-confessional dialogues, the term “communion” (sometimes “ecclesial communion”, sometimes “church communion”) prevails. In keeping with this international usage, the term “church communion” will now be used as the equivalent of “Kirchengemeinschaft” (cf. no.46).

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## 45 **About this text**

- 46 1) Over the past two decades, the concept of church communion,  
47 central to the Leuenberg Agreement, has received an increasing  
48 amount of attention. The interest in a deeper and more extensive  
49 clarification of what is being realised and experienced as church  
50 communion has conspicuously increased. The communion in  
51 which the member churches of the CPCE know themselves  
52 bound together and in which they perceive themselves as church  
53 inspires a growing sense of communion in the living out of church  
54 life and in witness and service in the world. In mutually recognising  
55 one another as church and declaring church fellowship with  
56 one another in the Leuenberg Agreement, the member churches  
57 of the CPCE have committed themselves to clear all that out of  
58 the way which might obscure the practical testimony to the unity  
59 of the church given in Christ that results from church communion.  
60 Behind the question about the forms of concrete development of  
61 church communion, a need to clarify and ascertain the under-  
62 standing of unity emerges, which has been felt ever more clearly  
63 by the member churches of the CPCE on the way from Belfast  
64 (2001) to Budapest (2006) and then to Florence (2012).
- 65 2) This gives rise to two challenges. One challenge comes from the  
66 CPCE member churches themselves. The Protestant churches in  
67 Europe have recognized that they must work together more  
68 closely if they wish their testimony to be heard in the public space  
69 of Europe. In the current situation of social and political transfor-  
70 mation, the existing church communion between member church-  
71 es of the CPCE cannot be restricted simply to its core, the wor-  
72 shipping community in Word and Sacrament, along with continu-  
73 ous doctrinal discussions. New fields of work needed to be  
74 opened up and networks and organizational structures to be de-  
75 veloped and improved. The other challenge arises from the wider  
76 ecumenical movement. Other churches ask again and again  
77 about the ecumenical meaning of church communion and how the  
78 member churches of the CPCE might shape it. They have the im-  
79 pression that the concept of church communion is only to a lim-  
80 ited degree suitable as ecumenical model, in that it models the di-  
81 versity rather than the unity of the church, and so adds to the  
82 strengthening of the status quo.
- 83 3) Both these challenges have persuaded the CPCE council and the  
84 7<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in Florence (2012) to focus on the theme of  
85 church communion as topic of a doctrinal discussion. The text  
86 that follows presents the fruits of this doctrinal discussion.

87 **Part 1: Taking Stock: Church communion as an experience of**  
 88 **the unity of the church**

89 **1.1 Church communion in the perspective of the Leuenberg**  
 90 **Agreement (1973)**

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

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

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

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

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

111 b) that in accordance with what is said in part III the doctrinal  
 112 condemnations expressed in the confessional documents no  
 113 longer apply to the contemporary doctrinal position of the assent-  
 114 ing churches;

115 c) that they accord each other table and pulpit fellowship; this in-  
 116 cludes the mutual recognition of ordination and the freedom to  
 117 provide for intercelebration.

118 With these statements church fellowship is declared. The divi-  
 119 sions which have barred the way to this fellowship since the six-  
 120 teenth century are removed. The participating churches are con-  
 121 vinced that together they participate in the one Church of Jesus  
 122 Christ and that the Lord frees them for and calls them to common  
 123 service” (LA 31-34).

124 In this way the recognition of ministries is grounded in the com-  
 125 mon understanding of Word and Sacrament and follows from it.

- 126 8) With the declaration of church communion comes the task of real-  
 127 izing church communion. This happens “in the life of the churches  
 128 and congregations”: “Believing in the unifying power of the Holy  
 129 Spirit, they bear their witness and perform their service together,  
 130 and strive to deepen and strengthen the fellowship they have  
 131 found together” (LA 35). Thus common witness to the gospel and  
 132 common service arising from the gospel become crucial features  
 133 of church communion as it is practised.
- 134 9) At the same time, continuing theological work in doctrinal discus-  
 135 sions (and joint theological, ethical and liturgical projects) is a  
 136 crucial element in practical church communion for the CPCE  
 137 churches. On this matter, LA 38 expresses the view that “The  
 138 common understanding of the Gospel on which the church fellow-  
 139 ship is based must be further deepened, examined in the light of  
 140 the witness of Holy Scripture, and continually made relevant to a  
 141 contemporary context”.
- 142 10) Church communion expressed in practice has organizational im-  
 143 plications, and implications for church law. In the Agreement,  
 144 however, these are only hinted at and caution is advised (see LA  
 145 42-45).
- 146 11) Church communion looks beyond itself; its participating churches  
 147 act “as part of their responsibility to promote the ecumenical fel-  
 148 lowship of all Christian churches” (LA 46) in the hope that “the  
 149 church fellowship will provide a fresh stimulus to encounter and  
 150 collaboration with churches of other confessions” (LA 49).

## 151 **1.2. The Church of Jesus Christ (1994)**

- 152 12) With the study document *The Church of Jesus Christ* (CJC;  
 153 Leuenberg Documents 1, [1995] 42012), the General Assembly of  
 154 the Leuenberg Church Fellowship in 1994 in Vienna set out the  
 155 basic tenets of the Protestant understanding of the church and  
 156 explained the ecclesiological principles which guide the signatory  
 157 churches in ecumenical dialogue.
- 158 13) The study document distinguishes between the foundation, shape  
 159 and mission of the church. “The foundation of the church is God’s  
 160 action in Jesus Christ to save humankind. In this fundamental ac-  
 161 tion God himself is the subject, and consequently the church is an  
 162 object of faith. Since the church is a community of believers the  
 163 shape of the church has taken various historical forms. The one  
 164 church of faith (singular) is present in a hidden manner in church-  
 165 es (plural) shaped in different ways. The mission of the church is

166 its task to witness to all humankind, in word and deed, to the gos-  
167 pel of the coming of the Kingdom of God” (CJC Introduction, 4).

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

177 15) The one, catholic, holy and apostolic church exists in the church  
178 wherever Word and Sacrament are truly celebrated. Wherever  
179 this happens, different churches recognise one another mutually  
180 as the church of Jesus Christ and cannot deny one another their  
181 existence as church. Understood in this way, the diversity of the  
182 churches is an enrichment.

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

195 17) The Leuenberg Agreement is a declaration by churches of the  
196 Reformation in Europe. It has become an exemplary model for  
197 the declaration and realization of church communion in other re-  
198 gions of the world (cf. also CJC III.3.1). Some churches have  
199 reached agreements comparable to the Leuenberg Agreement,  
200 for instance in 1998 the Lutheran, Reformed and United churches  
201 in the USA with the *Formula of Agreement* and in 2006 the Lu-  
202 theran and Reformed churches in the Near East with the *Amman*  
203 *Statement*.

### 204 1.3. Church communion realized in life

205 18) The history of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship, from 2003 the  
206 Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, is a history of the

207 steady growing together of over 100 member churches. Church  
 208 communion has been experienced as communion in worship  
 209 (3.2), as communion in doctrine (3.3), as communion expressed  
 210 in growing formal structures (3.4), and thereby as a communion of  
 211 witness and service in the Europe of today (3.5).

212 **1.3.1. In the CPCE, church communion is to be experienced as**  
 213 **communion in worship:**

214 19) Church communion grows out of the encounter between the wit-  
 215 ness of the Gospel and human beings. For that reason it comes  
 216 to expression most profoundly in the common celebration of wor-  
 217 ship. Thus, in the CPCE, Lutheran, Reformed, Methodist and  
 218 United are joined with one another in worship, they have fellow-  
 219 ship at the Lord's Table, and their ministers exchange pulpits. The  
 220 CPCE as a communion reconciled in Christ has lived from the  
 221 outset in pulpit and table fellowship.

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

230 **1.3.2. In the CPCE, church communion is to be experienced as a**  
 231 **communion in doctrine:**

232 21) Church communion is deepened by theological teaching and  
 233 learning together. The Leuenberg Agreement commits the signa-  
 234 tory churches to further theological work, in general, on the deep-  
 235 ening, examination and constant updating of the common under-  
 236 standing of the Gospel in the light of the witness of Holy Scripture  
 237 (cf. LA 38); and in particular, through doctrinal discussions or  
 238 through theological work on the doctrinal differences "that persist  
 239 within the participating churches and between them without being  
 240 grounds for division" (LA 39).

241 22) To a considerable extent, a path and profile for church commun-  
 242 ion have been shaped by doctrinal discussions. They determine  
 243 the rhythm of work between the general assemblies. Their results,  
 244 compiled by authorized project and working groups, are present-  
 245 ed to the member churches for their comments prior to any reso-  
 246 lution at the general assembly. The remarks of member churches  
 247 feed into the final shape of the text. In this way, a higher level of  
 248 participation and a broad reception have been achieved.

249 23) Past doctrinal discussions have considered the themes which in  
 250 LA 39 were identified for further work: the relationship of the two  
 251 kingdoms doctrine to the doctrine of the sovereignty of Jesus  
 252 Christ (1975-1981), the doctrine of Baptism and Communion  
 253 (1981-1987), Ministry and Ordination (1976-1987, 2006-2012,  
 254 with the explicit inclusion of episcopate), Law and Gospel (1994-  
 255 2001), Scripture and Creed (2006-2012). In addition, studies have  
 256 been produced whose composition has arisen from the life of the  
 257 church communion, such as the ecclesiological study *The Church*  
 258 *of Jesus Christ* (1987-1994), and the studies which built on it:  
 259 *Church and Israel* (1994-2001), *The Shape and Shaping of*  
 260 *Protestant Churches in Europe* (2001-2006) and *Evangelizing:*  
 261 *Protestant Perspectives for the Churches in Europe* (2001-2006).  
 262 These and numerous other theological projects such as for ex-  
 263 ample *The Christian Witness to Freedom* (1987-1994) make clear  
 264 the importance of theological work for the deepening of living  
 265 church fellowship.

266 **1.3.3. In the CPCE, church communion is to be experienced as a**  
 267 **communion expressed in growing formal structures:**

268 24) Church communion is dependent on reliable forms of communica-  
 269 tion and organization. In the 1990s it became increasingly clear  
 270 that with the institutional weakness of the Leuenberg Fellowship,  
 271 which had been deliberately intended at first, problems had sur-  
 272 faced for which an appropriate solution had to be found. Beyond  
 273 the doctrinal discussions, areas of work were to be opened up  
 274 which would also make stronger institutional structures neces-  
 275 sary. These should take into account the developing shape of the  
 276 communion in worship, in doctrine and in witness and service.

277 25) The goal of a “further development of the structural and juridical  
 278 shape of the CPCE” and the “raising of the transparency and effi-  
 279 ciency of its decision-making” called for a series of measures  
 280 which were proposed by the 2006 general assembly in Budapest  
 281 (cf. *Final Report* ch. 4) and put into effect with the preparation and  
 282 holding of the General Assembly in Florence (2012). Clearer  
 283 regulations were introduced for the sending and mandating of  
 284 delegates and for a more binding structure for the participation of  
 285 the churches. In Budapest a statute was adopted through which  
 286 the communion was given the character of a separate juridical en-  
 287 tity. The executive committee in 2006 became a council, whose  
 288 praesidium of three people represents the CPCE externally.

289 26) Advisory groups were called into being, to support the council and  
 290 the praesidium with their specialized competence and prepare  
 291 opinion papers on current problems: the specialist group on ethics  
 292 (from 2007) and the specialist group on ecumenism (from 2009).



293 From 2007, members of a younger generation were more deeply  
294 involved in the work of the CPCE.

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

303 28) With the document *Training for the Ordained Ministry in the*  
304 *Community of Protestant Churches in Europe* (2012) the CPCE  
305 churches have set out their common understanding of good theo-  
306 logical training and developed a concept of training for churches,  
307 as well as university faculties and theological colleges, to use as  
308 guidelines, so as to make progress with the exchange of ministers  
309 in the CPCE — another way of deepening their togetherness and  
310 strengthening the church communion.

311 **1.3.4. In the CPCE, church communion is to be experienced as a**  
312 **communion of witness and service in the Europe of today:**

313 29) The Agreement is an important statement of the unanimous tes-  
314 timony of the Gospel. From that grows the liberation of the  
315 churches and their common commitment to service. Service is  
316 regarded as “service of love ... which focuses on human distress  
317 and seeks to remove the causes of that distress. The struggle for  
318 justice and peace in the world increasingly requires that the  
319 churches accept a common responsibility” (cf. LA 36). Up to the  
320 fall of the Iron Curtain, the Leuenberg Church Fellowship, as it  
321 was then called, was experienced as a communion in which the  
322 opposed systems of a divided Europe could lose their significance  
323 of dividing people, and in which solidarity in the Gospel could be  
324 lived out across borders.

325 30) In the course of the 1990s the pan-European dimension and the  
326 task of becoming visible at a European level became increasingly  
327 significant. The new political and social fields of action which  
328 opened up following the surmounting of the division of Europe  
329 made Europe and European questions a central theme. The Eu-  
330 ropean Protestant Assembly in Budapest (1992) called on the  
331 Protestant churches in Europe to “fulfil together their responsibility  
332 for the future of Europe” and in so doing drew attention particu-  
333 larly to the Leuenberg Church Fellowship. The demand of the gen-  
334 eral assembly in Belfast (2001) to let “the voice of the Protestant

335 Churches in Europe become more audible” set the agenda. This  
 336 demand has from then on governed the agenda of the Leuenberg  
 337 Church Fellowship.

338 31) Again and again in the past few years the CPCE has expressed  
 339 an opinion on developments in Europe and its current problems,  
 340 with, for instance, the statement from the praesidium *The crisis*  
 341 *ahead* to the EU summit in 2011 in Brussels, the statement from  
 342 the assembly in 2012 on the current situation in Europe with the  
 343 acute problems caused by the crisis in the financial system, the  
 344 economy and government debts, and in 2014 with a statement on  
 345 the European elections. The CPCE churches consciously partici-  
 346 pate in the socio-ethical questions which preoccupy Europe, for  
 347 example with the guidance on end-of-life decisions and care for  
 348 the dying, *A time to live, and a time to die* (2011).

349 32) In 2009, the CPCE embarked on a collaboration with the joint  
 350 working group for Protestant diaspora work in Europe (AGDE).  
 351 The AGDE provides a platform for the coordination of shared re-  
 352 lief programmes. Its often long-standing partnerships, its experi-  
 353 ence of relief programmes, and its relationship with donors for  
 354 congregation-building, training and diaconal work, offer a re-  
 355 source which should not be underestimated. It may also offer the  
 356 basis for a possible enlargement of the agenda of the CPCE  
 357 around the promotion of church solidarity work, through which the  
 358 character of the church communion as offering service as well as  
 359 witness can now be strengthened and shaped.

#### 360 1.4. Church communion and ecumenism

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

367 34) In connection with the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the  
 368 Leuenberg Agreement, other Protestant churches were also invit-  
 369 ed to sign the Agreement. In 1993 the *Unitas Fratrum* in the con-  
 370 tinent of Europe and the Czechoslovak Hussite Church joined the  
 371 Church Fellowship. Of the Lutheran churches of Scandinavia who  
 372 had already been involved in the work from the beginning, the  
 373 Agreement was signed in 1999 by the Church of Norway, and in  
 374 2001 by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark. The  
 375 Church of Norway particularly underlined the fact that they were  
 376 led to this step by the ecclesiological statement in the study *The*

377 *Church of Jesus Christ*. In 1997 the Methodist churches in Europe  
378 joined through a statement annexed to the Agreement.

379 35) In other continents too, Lutheran and Reformed came to make  
380 declarations of church communion. They took this step expressly  
381 referring to the Leuenberg Agreement. The *Formula of Agree-*  
382 *ment* and the *Amman Declaration* (see above §17), as statements  
383 of full mutual recognition, prove the significance of this model of  
384 unity beyond the European region. Previously churches of the La  
385 Plata states in Latin America had signed the Leuenberg Agree-  
386 ment. In addition the world-wide international Lutheran-Reformed  
387 dialogue refers expressly to the church communion originating  
388 with the Leuenberg Agreement. The first Budapest Report (1988)  
389 recommends all churches to examine the historic condemnations  
390 in the light of their significance today, to declare church commu-  
391 nion in Word and Sacrament and to follow a common course of  
392 witness and service. The most recent report of this dialogue  
393 *Communion: On Being the Church* (2014) deepens the common  
394 understanding of the Church. Here too the lines of connection  
395 with *The Church of Jesus Christ* should not be overlooked.

396 36) In Europe as well as in North America and Australia, there have  
397 been in recent years statements of church fellowship with Angli-  
398 can churches. The *Meissen Agreement* (1991) and the *Reuilly*  
399 *Common Statement* (2001) declare church fellowship between  
400 Lutheran, Reformed and United churches which have signed the  
401 Leuenberg Agreement, and, respectively, the Church of England  
402 and the Anglican churches of Britain and Ireland. The understand-  
403 ing of unity upon which these are based and the model of unity  
404 which arises from it correspond to the Leuenberg approach. Even  
405 though this does not result in a common office of bishop, the di-  
406 verse ministries of the churches are mutually recognised as a  
407 consequence of the declared fellowship in Word and Sacrament.  
408 The dialogue between Lutherans and Anglicans resulted in 1994  
409 in the *Porvoo Agreement* between the British Anglican churches  
410 and the Scandinavian and Baltic Lutheran churches, amongst  
411 them churches of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship. Although  
412 these, in distinction from the Leuenberg Agreement, took the step  
413 to a common exercise of the episcopal office and so to a more  
414 visible unity, here also the model of unity and its shaping is close-  
415 ly related to that which was realised in the Leuenberg Church Fel-  
416 lowship. Similar factors hold good for the Lutheran-Anglican  
417 statements which in other continents follow the Porvoo model  
418 such as the statement *Called to Common Mission* between the  
419 Lutheran and Episcopal churches in the USA (1999), the *Water-*

420 *loo Statement* between the corresponding churches in Canada  
421 (2001) and the Australian process *A Common Ground*.

422 37) There have been clear rapprochements with other European  
423 churches that relate to the Reformation. The dialogue that began  
424 in 1993 with the European Baptist Federation led in 2005 to a  
425 conclusion which shows considerable steps forward in the under-  
426 standing of Baptism and Church. In 2010 an agreement to co-  
427 operate was signed which provided for the extension of contacts  
428 made already and engagement in the mutual work.

429 38) The relationship with other Christian confessions has also been  
430 stimulated. With the study *The Church of Jesus Christ* impetus  
431 was given to new ecumenical conversations. These are dedicated  
432 primarily to ecclesiology. From 2002 to 2008 a relevant dialogue  
433 with the Orthodox churches was conducted in the CEC. It led to  
434 the recommendation of agreements on the mutual recognition of  
435 Baptism. In 2013 the official conversations got under way with  
436 representatives of the Roman Catholic Church on questions on  
437 the understanding of church and church communion. These de-  
438 velopments show that the Community of Protestant Churches in  
439 Europe, based on the Leuenberg Agreement, is perceived today  
440 as an independent ecumenical partner.

## 441 **Part 2: Theological Foundations**

### 442 **2.1. The church as the body of Christ and the communion of** 443 **saints**

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

452 40) Although the Leuenberg Agreement does not develop any teach-  
453 ing on the church, it marks out the ground and the core idea of its  
454 implicit ecclesiology by emphasising: “The church is founded on  
455 Jesus Christ alone. Through the gift of his salvation in preaching  
456 and the sacraments, he gathers the Church and sends it out” (LA  
457 2; cf. LA13). The communion of the church is established and  
458 lives in the proclamation of the Gospel and the celebration of the  
459 sacraments.

- 460 41) The study *The Church of Jesus Christ* develops what is hinted at  
 461 in the Leuenberg Agreement: the church is, in communion with  
 462 Jesus Christ as the head of the church, a communion in the gifts  
 463 of salvation (*communio [rerum] sanctorum*) and hence, the com-  
 464 munion of the saints (*communio [hominum] sanctorum*) (cf. CJC  
 465 1, 1.3). This takes place in the power of the Spirit of God, who, as  
 466 the Spirit that gives life, does not isolate but unites human beings  
 467 with God and one another in Jesus Christ.
- 468 42) The church therefore owes its existence to the work of the triune  
 469 God, who as Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit lovingly  
 470 grants his creatures their being and preserves it, overcomes  
 471 through his Word the alienation of humanity in the incarnation of  
 472 the Son and the gathering of the church and so opens up new  
 473 communion in the Spirit of freedom (cf. CJC I, 1.1 and I, 1.4). The  
 474 CPCE shares this perspective with the world-wide oecumene:  
 475 “This saving activity of the Holy Trinity is essential to an adequate  
 476 understanding of the church” (*The church: towards a common vi-*  
 477 *sion*. Faith and Order paper no. 214, WCC: Geneva, 2013, § 3).  
 478 In this sense, the church is a communion in Christ and the Spirit.

## 479 2.2. Fellowship in Word and Sacrament

- 480 43) In the gospel of Jesus Christ, God grants his unconditional grace  
 481 and offers righteousness through faith alone. In this way he  
 482 grants new communion with himself and frees humanity from a  
 483 situation of alienation and opposition to God into a new life and  
 484 “sets in the midst of the world the beginnings of a new humanity”  
 485 (LA 10). In the Reformation understanding of the gospel as justifi-  
 486 cation through faith alone without works, the reconciling and lib-  
 487 erating power of the gospel received new recognition. The lasting  
 488 agreement of the Reformers, endorsed by the Leuenberg Agree-  
 489 ment and forming the starting-point for surmounting church-  
 490 dividing doctrinal differences between the churches of the Refor-  
 491 mation, consists in this.
- 492 44) Through the right preaching of the gospel and the due celebration  
 493 of the sacraments, humanity is brought into communion with  
 494 Christ and gathered in the church as a communion of the  
 495 saints/believers. The New Testament speaks here of the *koinonia*  
 496 of believers which is at the same time *koinonia* with their Lord (1  
 497 Cor. 10:6f; cf. Acts 2:42). Only in the communion of these gifts of  
 498 salvation bestowed in Christ is the church the *church of Jesus*  
 499 *Christ*. Accordingly LA 2, picking up on CA VII, stresses that an  
 500 agreement in the understanding of the gospel and the celebration

501 of the sacraments is the necessary but also sufficient condition for  
502 the unity of the church.

503 45) The biblical term *koinonia* (communion, fellowship) has a central  
504 significance in the ecumenical quest for a common understanding  
505 of the life and unity of the church (cf. Commission for Faith and  
506 Order: *The church: towards a common vision*, § 13). The church  
507 as the body of Christ is a communion (*communio*) in and through  
508 its participation in the gifts of salvation, Baptism and the Lord's  
509 Supper. Through these, it is not just the individual who gains  
510 communion with God in Christ. On the contrary, through the gifts  
511 of salvation, the participants are *at the same time* bound with one  
512 another in communion. By faith in Christ the believers do not just  
513 believe that Christ grants communion to each of them individually,  
514 they know at the same time that the communion is also valid for  
515 all others, for whom Christ died. In faith in Christ others thereby  
516 become neighbours.

517 46) The origin of the concept "church communion" lies in the German  
518 term "*Kirchengemeinschaft*", which was already established in  
519 German-speaking ecclesiology and is therefore used in the  
520 Leuenberg Agreement. One has to take account of the fact that  
521 the German language only has the expression *Gemeinschaft* to  
522 translate *communio* as well as *communitas*. "*Kirchengemein-*  
523 *schaft*" emphasises *communio* and the ecclesial quality so ex-  
524 pressed. The English language distinguishes between *fellowship*,  
525 *community* and (*ecclesial or church*) *communion*, the French be-  
526 tween *communauté* and *communion (ecclésiale)*. From the  
527 Leuenberg Agreement onwards, the term "church fellowship" was  
528 used in the texts of the CPCE as the equivalent of "Kirchenge-  
529 meinschaft". In order to avoid misunderstandings and to bring it  
530 into line with international ecumenical usage, the term "church  
531 communion" should be favoured in future (cf. fn. 1).

532 47) Agreement in the understanding of the gospel is for a Protestant  
533 understanding constitutive both of the communion of the church  
534 and also of the communion of the churches (cf. LA 6-12). Accord-  
535 ing to the insight of the Reformers, justification occurs *sola gratia*,  
536 *sola fide*, *solo Christo* and *solo verbo*. On the basis of the recog-  
537 nition of the common understanding of the gospel, church-dividing  
538 doctrinal differences in the understanding of the sacraments, in  
539 Christology and in the doctrine of predestination are in the  
540 Leuenberg Agreement overcome in consensus statements (cf. LA  
541 13-28). In this, the basic meaning of the doctrine of justification is  
542 guaranteed.

### 543 **2.3. Confession, doctrine and life**

544 48) The agreement in faith in the gospel is set out in the doctrine of  
 545 justification (cf. LA 8). However, the fellowship in faith is not  
 546 formed through doctrinal affirmations, but only through the proc-  
 547 lamation of the gospel in worship, in Word and Sacrament, in  
 548 which Jesus Christ presents himself in the power of the Spirit of  
 549 God. Even though agreement in the understanding of the gospel  
 550 is not achieved through doctrinal formulations, it still requires doc-  
 551 trinal development and confirmation.

552 49) In the CPCE, the diversity of confessional traditions among the  
 553 participating churches is understood as an enrichment. In the  
 554 Reformation confessional documents, the insights of the Reform-  
 555 ers were articulated specifically in their respective regional con-  
 556 texts and difficulties. They are part of the shaping of the Refor-  
 557 mation churches which in turn recognise the providence of God in  
 558 their individual history. Reference to particular different confes-  
 559 sions is recognised in the Leuenberg Agreement as a confession  
 560 of the same faith and so is not seen as an obstacle to church  
 561 communion. For it is not the subscription to individual confessional  
 562 formulas that is constitutive of the fellowship in Word and Sac-  
 563 rament, but the agreement in the understanding of the gospel.

564 50) The special character of the CPCE as a communion of churches  
 565 with different confessional positions is based in the first place on  
 566 the understanding that the Reformation confessions agree in the  
 567 understanding of the justification promised in the gospel through  
 568 faith alone and express this in a variety of ways according to  
 569 place and time. Secondly, it is based on the Leuenberg Agree-  
 570 ment's overcoming of church-dividing doctrinal differences relat-  
 571 ing to the sacraments, Christology, and the doctrine of predesti-  
 572 nation. As long as individual differences in doctrinal statements  
 573 do not question the agreement in understanding of the gospel, the  
 574 variety of confessional positions in the churches is not an obsta-  
 575 cle to communion, but only an expression of a legitimate diversity.

576 51) For the realization of church communion it is essential that the  
 577 agreement in understanding of the gospel is constantly being  
 578 deepened and secured in the context of contemporary challenges  
 579 and in debate with the individual confessional traditions (cf. LA  
 580 37f.). The doctrinal discussions serve as part of the process in  
 581 which church communion between churches with different con-  
 582 fessional positions is realized.

583 52) The recognition of different confessional commitments in the  
 584 CPCE is associated with the further recognition of different struc-

585 tures in all areas of church life. However, this presupposes that  
 586 the structure and organization of a church correspond to its task  
 587 of proclaiming the gospel in Word and Sacrament and so to the  
 588 contents of the gospel itself (cf. LA 12). For that reason, ex-  
 589 changes about structures and critical theological reflection are  
 590 part of the realization and deepening of church communion.

#### 591 **2.4. Fellowship in the Lord's Supper and church communion**

592 53) In the celebration of the Lord's Supper, the fellowship of believers  
 593 with Christ and with one another is experienced in a concise way  
 594 through the senses. In it the crucified and resurrected Christ him-  
 595 self makes himself present, gives himself, and assures the partic-  
 596 ipants of his fellowship. The promise of the presence of Jesus  
 597 Christ is effective for all the baptized who gather in faith in the  
 598 most various places round the Lord's table. In each celebration of  
 599 the Lord's Supper those who participate are joined together with  
 600 all other Christian communities to whom, in the feast, Jesus  
 601 Christ has made himself present, is making himself present and  
 602 will make himself present.

603 For the CPCE churches, that means that it is not the invitation of all bap-  
 604 tized people to the common celebration, but rather the restriction and  
 605 limiting of such fellowship that requires accounting for before the Christ  
 606 who invites us as Lord of the church and before all to whom fellowship is  
 607 refused.

608 54) The close connection with the whole of Christendom is fundamen-  
 609 tal for the celebration of the Lord's Supper as a fellowship meal.

610 Cf. the Commission for Faith and Order: *The Church: Towards a Com-*  
 611 *mon Vision* §22: "The Church is catholic because of the abundant good-  
 612 ness of God 'who desires everyone to be saved and come to the  
 613 knowledge of the truth' (1 Tim. 2, 4). Through the life-giving power of  
 614 God, the Church's mission transcends all barriers and proclaims the  
 615 Gospel to all peoples. Where the whole mystery of Christ is present,  
 616 there too is the Church catholic (cf. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the*  
 617 *Smyrneans*, 6), as in the celebration of the eucharist. The essential  
 618 catholicity of the Church is undermined when cultural and other differ-  
 619 ences are allowed to develop into division. Christians are called to re-  
 620 move all obstacles to the embodiment of this fullness of truth and life  
 621 bestowed upon the Church by the power of the Holy Spirit."

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

625 55) The church of Jesus Christ exists in the communion of commun-  
 626 ions. The supra-regional attachment of the churches to one an-



627 other in the communion of Christ which comes to expression in  
 628 the Lord's Supper, cannot be thought of as something additional  
 629 to the local or regional communion of a church. In the communion  
 630 with Christ which is mediated through the gospel in the power of  
 631 the Spirit, not only are individuals joined in the local church com-  
 632 munion, but churches are also joined with each other at regional  
 633 and supra-regional levels.

634 56) In declaring communion with one another, the churches of the  
 635 CPCE desire to visibly express the fact that they exist as church-  
 636 es of Jesus Christ in the communion of communions. Even if they  
 637 are legally independent (that is in a certain sense "auto-  
 638 cephalous") churches, they have a share in the one church of Je-  
 639 sus Christ. Church communion is "practical testimony to the unity  
 640 of the church believed in in Christ" (see the "Leuenberg report":  
 641 *Church fellowship and church division. Report of the Lutheran-*  
 642 *Reformed conversations in Leuenberg [Switzerland] 1969/70.* In:  
 643 E. Schieffer, Von Schauenburg nach Leuenberg, 1983, A61). In  
 644 testifying to the unity of the churches as given in Christ, the CPCE  
 645 manifests its character indirectly as a communion of communion  
 646 united in and through Christ as head. In being guided by this in-  
 647 sight as a communion, it is in a spiritual sense one church.

648 57) Belonging to the church of Jesus Christ is predicated on authentic  
 649 preaching and the celebration of the sacraments in accordance  
 650 with their foundation. By these marks it is revealed as one, holy,  
 651 catholic, and apostolic and thereby the true church of Jesus  
 652 Christ (cf. CJC 1, 2.3). The leadership structures and forms of or-  
 653 ganization of church life must correspond to these marks and  
 654 should not obscure them. For church communion as a commun-  
 655 ion of communion, it is of crucial significance to consider and test  
 656 the shaping of the witness and service of the church, in exchange  
 657 with one another and to be accountable as to why their structures  
 658 and organisational shape are best able to serve the local and/or  
 659 regional communion. The "spiritual fellowship presses for the  
 660 greatest possible co-operation in internal church life and in wit-  
 661 ness to and service of the world. It obliges them to clear away  
 662 everything that obscures the practical witness that results from  
 663 church fellowship" (Leuenberg Report, in Schieffer, A61).

## 664 **2.5. Church and church communion as an expression of the** 665 **event of justification**

666 58) God's creative promise of justification through faith in Christ alone  
 667 grounds and reveals the right relationship of human beings with  
 668 God and at the same time the true communion of human beings

669 with one another. The church as the communion of saints is  
 670 based on this event of justification and is at the same time part of  
 671 it in that it is entrusted with the proclamation of the gospel in Word  
 672 and Sacrament. Without God's justification, there is no salvation  
 673 for human beings. In this sense there is also no salvation outside  
 674 the church. In this way, the Reformers have also resolutely held  
 675 on to the famous sentence of Cyprian "extra ecclesiam nulla sa-  
 676 lus."

677 59) According to Protestant understanding, the fundamental form in  
 678 which the church is realized is the communion gathered for the  
 679 worship of God. Just as each local church owes its existence to  
 680 the justifying work of the triune God so also do churches in the  
 681 communion of their local churches, and communions between dif-  
 682 ferent church traditions owe their existence to this work of salva-  
 683 tion.

684 60) Each local congregation, each church and church communion  
 685 bears responsibility in its witness and service for the unity, holi-  
 686 ness, catholicity, and apostolicity of the church. According to the  
 687 understanding of the reformers, such responsibility is not only a  
 688 matter for the church leadership or ministers, but for the *tota ec-*  
 689 *clesia* and so for all members of the church, each in their own  
 690 way. What goes for the local congregation or an institutionally  
 691 structured church applies also to a church communion. The re-  
 692 sponsibility for unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity is a  
 693 matter for all members and churches of the *communio* and it re-  
 694 mains their constant task. Accordingly the study document on the  
 695 church records in its statement of the characteristic attributes of  
 696 the church the tasks which ensue in each case from its confes-  
 697 sion (cf. CJC I, 2.3). In this way it makes clear that it is intrinsic  
 698 to the mission of the church to make it possible for its nature, which  
 699 is grounded in the action of the triune God, to be experienced in  
 700 the world.

701 61) To structure such responsibility in the service of the unity of the  
 702 communion, it is important to have accepted methods for the ex-  
 703 change of opinions, decision-making and voting. This is the only  
 704 way one can also make sure that agreement in the understanding  
 705 of the gospel is preserved when dealing with questions of gov-  
 706 ernance and ethics, and is not broken up over these challenges.

707 Amongst the most controversial questions preoccupying churches and  
 708 church communions world-wide and frequently testing them to breaking  
 709 point, there are currently on the one hand the topic of the ordination of  
 710 women, on the other the evaluation and legal position of same-sex rela-  
 711 tionships in general and of ministers in particular. The disagreements  
 712 reveal how loyalty to the gospel is displayed in very different ways, not

713 least caused by different assessments of the developments of modernity.  
 714 The decisive starting-point for common reflection also must be the  
 715 event of justification.

716 62) Justification through faith alone, grounded solely in the work of  
 717 the triune God, gives insight into the love of God, opens up hu-  
 718 man beings for communion with Christ and so frees them up for  
 719 love of God and neighbour. Love enables the recognition of the  
 720 other and living with differences. It is constitutive for being and  
 721 remaining in communion with Christ to view the justifying action of  
 722 God and the love manifest in it as the basis and standard for wit-  
 723 ness and service, and not to aim to set up other standards arbi-  
 724 trarily. What applies to the individual, applies also to the church-  
 725 es: standards for the shaping of church life together are to be ex-  
 726 amined as to whether they express the will of God for communion  
 727 revealed in the gospel, and are guided by the will to maintain  
 728 communion through trustworthiness and by dealing with differ-  
 729 ences creatively.

730 63) If the church as *communio sanctorum* and therefore also the  
 731 communion of churches within a church communion is grounded  
 732 in the justifying, unifying action of the triune God, the strengthen-  
 733 ing and maintaining of the communion requires no defence, while  
 734 withdrawal from it does. The insight that it is sufficient (*satis est*)  
 735 to have agreement in the understanding of the gospel and the  
 736 due celebration of the sacraments for the true unity of the church,  
 737 entails the obligation to preserve and deepen the communion.  
 738 This applies not only whenever conflicts arise in questions of in-  
 739 terpretation, but also when it is unclear whether differences, for  
 740 instance over ethical questions, jeopardize the agreement in the  
 741 gospel or put it in question. The *satis est* is not to be read as a  
 742 formula restricting discourse. On the contrary, it is precisely on  
 743 the grounds of the fundamental significance of agreement in the  
 744 gospel that everything must be done to find a way back to unani-  
 745 mity in the event of conflict. It is in this and not in withdrawing  
 746 from communion that the truth of the gospel is realized, and with it  
 747 the apostolicity of the church.

748 64) In the study document *The Church of Jesus Christ*, the CPCE  
 749 churches explain together their understanding of the church and  
 750 the significance of the ordained ministry for the being of the  
 751 church. The requirement to let the nature of the church be experi-  
 752 enced in witness and service points to the further deepening of  
 753 the already existing structures for this task in the shape of the  
 754 general assembly, the council, the advisory groups, the doctrinal  
 755 discussions, the contacts and joint work at congregational level.

756 **Part 3: Challenges: *Verbindlichkeit* – Reception – Catholicity**

757 65) The terms *Verbindlichkeit*, *reception* and *catholicity* sum up the  
 758 challenges which confront the CPCE today. It is a question of  
 759 strengthening and deepening the communion of the churches of  
 760 the Reformation in Europe, of putting into practice the unity of the  
 761 church of Jesus Christ declared, lived out and striven for in the  
 762 CPCE, and also of the credibility of this model of unity.

763 **3.1. *Verbindlichkeit*<sup>2</sup>**

764 66) The claim *that* the Leuenberg Agreement is binding can only be  
 765 truly understood if it is simultaneously explained *how* the Leuen-  
 766 berg Agreement is binding or *what* in the Leuenberg Agreement  
 767 has binding force. What is binding is the declaration of church  
 768 communion between previously separated traditions, which now  
 769 recognise themselves in their mutual otherness as a true expres-  
 770 sion of the one church of Jesus Christ and express this by grant-  
 771 ing one another pulpit and table fellowship, and in this way are  
 772 church together.

773 67) This authority is expounded in the Leuenberg Agreement itself.  
 774 The Agreement does this by tying three steps closely together.  
 775 The three elements are the following: a) the common understand-  
 776 ing of the gospel, b) the establishment of the non-applicability of  
 777 the historical condemnations in relation to today's conversation  
 778 partner and c) mutual recognition as a true expression of the  
 779 church of Jesus Christ. In this way it arrives at the declaration of

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<sup>2</sup> This German term conveys the obligatory character (the authority) of an agreement, of a mutual engagement, in this case of a declaration of communion. It is a matter of the new bond which now exists between the partners, a bond of trust which goes beyond the solely formal or juridical dimension. The Latin *obligare* – from the verb *ligare* (to bind) – and the ensuing notion of obligation cannot be conveyed in English or in French, where these notions have another meaning today. The original meaning is only found in rare expressions, sometimes from another age, such as *noblesse oblige*. One could certainly talk of “authority” to express this new reality so long as we remember that the root of “authority” is on the one hand “author” but even more the Latin verb *augere*: to grow. We use in consequence the German word “*Verbindlichkeit*” and sometimes “authority” to take account of this reality. This is a provisional solution. It might be preferable to find an English term that is suitable for conveying the meaning, and the churches are requested to give suggestions in their comment. Perhaps the phrase “loyalty obligation”, as described in John Kleinig's book “On loyalty and loyalties: the contours of a problematic virtue” (OUP 2014), pp. 193 ff, may be applicable.

780 church communion which is expressed in the joint celebration of  
 781 word and sacrament and the mutual recognition of ministries  
 782 which arises from it. a), b), and c) are not binding as such. What  
 783 is binding is the interplay of these three dimensions and their ar-  
 784 ticipation as proposed in the Agreement. By their approval, each  
 785 synod (or the corresponding governing body of the respective  
 786 church) of the signatory churches has sanctioned this articulation  
 787 of these three elements. It has declared the Agreement and the  
 788 CPCE which is its end product to be binding and consequently  
 789 has committed itself to a special ecumenical model of unity. This  
 790 model of unity is today often described as “unity in reconciled di-  
 791 versity.”

792 68) The same applies when looking at the authority of the other  
 793 statements of church communion made by the signatory churches  
 794 of the Leuenberg Agreement with the Methodists, or by individual  
 795 churches of the CPCE with the Anglicans.

796 69) The particular authority which the Leuenberg Agreement claims  
 797 and which represented something new in 1973 is not always  
 798 seen. Certainly today one would formulate certain points other-  
 799 wise than 40 years ago. The Leuenberg Agreement is also not a  
 800 new confession of faith (cf. LA 37). The individual formulations  
 801 are not as such absolutely binding. In addition, the Agreement by  
 802 no means makes a claim to completeness. Even the right under-  
 803 standing of the gospel as set out only maintains its authority in in-  
 804 terplay with the other elements: the non-applicability of the anath-  
 805 emas and the recognition of the other tradition as church in its  
 806 otherness. The articulation and interplay of the three named ele-  
 807 ments should still today be the central, authoritative focus.

808 It is a well-made point that “churches of different confessional positions”  
 809 accord one another church communion (LA 29, 37). To put it pointedly:  
 810 church communion, according to the understanding of the Reformers, is  
 811 always also confessional communion. But confessional communion is  
 812 not the same as being bound by confessional documents that are identi-  
 813 cal word-for-word. That some participants are bound by certain confes-  
 814 sional documents and others by others does not pre-empt the collective  
 815 *confessio* in its full dimension as *leiturgia*, *martyria* and *diakonia* (see the  
 816 study document *Scripture, Confession, Church*). The CPCE is a confes-  
 817 sional communion in its relationship to different confessional positions,  
 818 as consequence of the authority which is claimed by the Agreement.

819 70) If it is the authority of the Leuenberg Agreement that “churches  
 820 with different confessional positions accord each other fellowship  
 821 in word and sacrament and strive for the fullest possible co-  
 822 operation in witness and service to the world” (LA 29), then there  
 823 must be some place where this authority is verifiable. Otherwise,  
 824 this communion cannot be experienced. The Agreement takes

825 that into account. From this starting point, there have arisen five  
 826 points of verification for the CPCE: a) communion in worship, b)  
 827 communion in doctrine through further theological work, c) com-  
 828 munion in growing structural evolution, d) communion in witness  
 829 and service in the Europe of today, e) communion in ecumenical  
 830 responsibility (see above 1.3). These five stand in service of the  
 831 authority of the Agreement, and are the places where this is ex-  
 832 pressed and can be verified. Other declarations of church com-  
 833 munion put it in much the same way.

834 71) A particular weight is given in the Agreement to further theological  
 835 work. Here we are not dealing with efforts to elaborate a common  
 836 doctrinal statement, but with the constant verification of the fun-  
 837 damental authority expressed in the common celebration of word  
 838 and sacrament. All theological questions, old as well as new, in  
 839 which the different traditions think differently must be regularly  
 840 worked over, so that none of them might become divisive and ne-  
 841 gate the authority of the Agreement. Differences are part of  
 842 church communion. It is not differences as such that must be  
 843 overcome, but their potential to be church-divisive. The criterion  
 844 for the legitimacy of differences is to establish whether or not  
 845 these differences can dissolve the fellowship in word and sacra-  
 846 ment. This applies to every particular dogmatic or ethical ques-  
 847 tion. Each particular question must be checked against the fun-  
 848 damental authority of the Agreement. In this way the common un-  
 849 derstanding of the gospel is deepened further, examined in the  
 850 light of the witness of Scripture, and continually made relevant (cf  
 851 LA 38). If one suspects that consensus has here been reduced to  
 852 a minimum, one overlooks the fact that the authority of the decla-  
 853 ration of church communion has consequences for every area of  
 854 theology and of the life of the church. In addition, this model's ca-  
 855 pacity to be fruitful for the whole ecumenical movement is under-  
 856 stood as a point of verification of its authority.

857 72) This understanding of authority is based on the adoption of fun-  
 858 damental decisions of the Reformation by the ecumenical move-  
 859 ment.

860 73) This is clarified by the example of the reference to scripture. It is  
 861 universally maintained that scripture is binding and has authority.  
 862 The question of *how* and *why* it is binding is crucial, however. The  
 863 classic reply of the Reformers states: it is binding in so far as and  
 864 because it testifies to the gospel: the action of God *pro nobis* that  
 865 has taken place in the Incarnation, Cross and Resurrection of Je-  
 866 sus Christ. It is not the letter of scripture that is binding but the  
 867 gospel proclaimed in it. Similar considerations apply to the con-  
 868 fessional documents, which are not binding as juridical texts, but

869 because as *norma normata* they provide the context within which  
 870 the *norma normans*, the gospel, is to be applied without restriction  
 871 in a new situation. It is thus that our individual churches are  
 872 shaped and structured. The method of the Agreement and its  
 873 claim to authority is directly analogous to these fundamental rul-  
 874 ings of our churches.

875 Numerous churches have problems with the authority of the texts of ref-  
 876 erence. The authority of scripture is of course generally emphasized. But  
 877 it is widely disputed *how* this is to be expounded. This especially applies  
 878 to the authority of the confessions and the confessional documents.  
 879 These are often treated as historical texts whose authority has expired.  
 880 Against this background many current difficulties may probably be ex-  
 881 plained, not least the difficulty of developing common authoritative doc-  
 882 trine. So the question of the authority of the Leuenberg Agreement leads  
 883 directly to unresolved questions within the individual churches. Ecumeni-  
 884 cal work proves to be an authentic mirror of the internal problems of our  
 885 individual churches and acts as a strong stimulus to progress the dis-  
 886 cussion on the meaning and role of *Verbindlichkeit* of texts of reference.

887 74) Authority is always evolving, and is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is  
 888 not realized overnight. The history of the reception of the Leuen-  
 889 berg Agreement in the individual churches is the best evidence  
 890 for its growing authority. A text that was initially often disputed has  
 891 over time acquired authority which to a large extent is undisputed  
 892 today. The communion bestowed and declared is a commitment.  
 893 It has been constituted co-operatively on the journey. An authori-  
 894 tative tradition has begun, which has led the churches to a new  
 895 awareness and from which the churches draw. The Leuenberg  
 896 Agreement and the CPCE that grew out of it have been received  
 897 by the churches.

### 898 3.2. Reception

899 75) Reception is a process in which a church or a church tradition ap-  
 900 propriates a truth that does not derive from itself, but which it rec-  
 901 ognizes and receives as a formulation of faith. Reception is dis-  
 902 tinguished from an act of obedience, in which a subordinate di-  
 903 rects her will and her conduct according to the legitimate instruc-  
 904 tions of a superior out of respect for her authority. Reception pre-  
 905 supposes the free assessment and assent of those of whom it is  
 906 asked. The churches of the CPCE find themselves in such a pro-  
 907 cess.

908 76) Reception cannot be restricted to the formal act of assent. Only  
 909 spiritual acceptance, the taking over of what is to be received into  
 910 the spiritual life of the communion, gives its true authority to what  
 911 is to be received. In ecumenical terms, it is not simply a question

912 of information or of the examination of the result of a dialogue.  
 913 The reception, for example, of the results of a study group cannot  
 914 be restricted to the formal approval of the results by individual  
 915 synods. In reception, the theologically binding consensus creates  
 916 a new quality of communion between traditions, which, though  
 917 they appealed simultaneously to the gospel, had separated from  
 918 each other or at least had become estranged. It is the work of the  
 919 Holy Spirit that certain conclusions gain acceptance over time,  
 920 become texts of reference and thereby gain authority (e.g. the  
 921 study document *The Church of Jesus Christ*).

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

931 78) There are crucial differences between the reception of council  
 932 resolutions by the local churches (for example in the case of the  
 933 creeds of the first centuries) and the ecumenical reception which  
 934 occurs in the CPCE. The churches of the CPCE receive the recip-  
 935 rocal recognition of another communion in its otherness. For a  
 936 church tradition to be recognised in its otherness as an expres-  
 937 sion of the true church is an exceptional occurrence. For the  
 938 churches, such a reception is nevertheless ecumenically decisive,  
 939 and is the positive challenge which the churches of the CPCE  
 940 confront. This challenge sets daily new tasks, which are not to be  
 941 solved solely through recourse to analogous situations in history.  
 942 It requires creativity and also needs time. In the area of the  
 943 CPCE, many more steps have been taken on this way than is of-  
 944 ten supposed.

945 Such a conception embraces a reform of one's own tradition, the check-  
 946 ing if not the modifying of "my" conviction, as well as a reassessment of  
 947 the "truth" of another tradition, which "my" church now understands as a  
 948 legitimate expression of the one church of Jesus Christ.

949 79) In such an action there occurs true reconciliation. Mutual recogni-  
 950 tion opens the way to an actual life together – to a true commun-  
 951 ion of legitimately different churches in one place. So in the for-  
 952 mula "unity in reconciled diversity," special weight is placed on the  
 953 aspect of reconciliation.



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

965 There has certainly never been a council of the CPCE. However,  
 966 through the resolutions of the synods (or the corresponding bodies) to  
 967 declare and realize church communion, the CPCE churches are no  
 968 longer in a pre-conciliar situation, as is the case in most other ecumenical  
 969 dialogues between churches. The situation of the CPCE is conciliar,  
 970 even though there is no common synod.

### 971 3.3. Catholicity

972 81) Since God's salvation is for the whole world, the church founded  
 973 by him is an all-embracing (catholic) communion. Catholicity is,  
 974 alongside unity, holiness, and apostolicity, a characteristic mark  
 975 of the church of Jesus Christ. The one church is based on the  
 976 promise of an all-embracing communion of all people. Catholicity  
 977 means a border-crossing existence as church in common that  
 978 transcends all confessional, ethnic, linguistic, and national  
 979 boundaries (cf. Gal. 3:28). Only the awareness of catholicity lends  
 980 meaning to every ecumenical endeavour.

981 82) Catholicity is unity in extension. The Leuenberg Agreement is  
 982 aware of this and expresses it by saying that the realized church  
 983 communion seeks "to promote the ecumenical fellowship of all  
 984 Christian churches" (LA 46). This commitment was first discerned  
 985 by the signatory churches and implemented in practice in the dia-  
 986 logue with the Methodist churches and the expansion of the  
 987 communion from the Leuenberg Fellowship to the CPCE. A fur-  
 988 ther step was the dialogue of many churches of the CPCE with  
 989 Anglicans, which resulted in church communion in many places.  
 990 The CPCE also strives to achieve this catholic understanding of  
 991 unity in dialogue with the Baptist churches, with the Roman Cath-  
 992 olic Church and with the Orthodox churches. The effort at catho-  
 993 licity is all the more urgent for the fact that in many countries new  
 994 spiritual movements, for the most part with pentecostal or evan-  
 995 gelical roots (neo-pentecostals and neo-evangelicals) have arisen  
 996 and are arising and extend to the churches of the CPCE.

- 997 83) Catholicity must also be discerned *ad intra* through the CPCE.  
 998 Through the declaration of church communion important dimen-  
 999 sions of catholicity are already given and realized. But it must be  
 1000 deepened and consolidated and further developed in the direction  
 1001 of a lived conciliarity. Unity is intense catholicity. Progress in the  
 1002 realization of church communion must be accompanied by a  
 1003 growing awareness of catholicity and its realization in each indi-  
 1004 vidual member church of the CPCE.
- 1005 84) Catholicity is a theological challenge for the CPCE churches.  
 1006 Their model of unity is an innovation not least in relation to the  
 1007 shaping of catholicity. Much has happened in the past 40 years. It  
 1008 needs, however, also to be consolidated theologically.
- 1009 a) Traditionally in many churches catholicity is guaranteed  
 1010 through the exercise of the office of bishop and the synods of  
 1011 bishops which result from it. As a confessional communion, the  
 1012 CPCE goes in another direction. Church leadership is exercised  
 1013 in personal, collegial and communal ways (see CJC II, 5.1.1). At  
 1014 the same time a special significance is attached to the leadership  
 1015 of synods, even in the churches that hold the personal office of  
 1016 bishop in high regard. From that arises the question as to whether  
 1017 there should also be synodal structures at the level of the CPCE  
 1018 as a whole.
- 1019 b) In order to preserve their unity, churches are endowed with a  
 1020 church order. This describes and orders primarily the mutual spir-  
 1021 itual commitment in the diverse areas of local church life and is to  
 1022 be distinguished from mere administrative regulation. The devel-  
 1023 opment of a “discipline” in the Reformed tradition from the begin-  
 1024 ning did in no way imply a bureaucratic administration, but a spir-  
 1025 itual discipline, an ecclesiastical order, on the basis of which min-  
 1026 isters accept obligations at their ordination in the same way as  
 1027 they do in relation to the confessions of faith. For the CPCE the  
 1028 question arises whether initiatives towards a common church or-  
 1029 der are not necessary to promote the catholicity of the CPCE *ad*  
 1030 *intra*.
- 1031 A church order does not pertain to the *esse* but to the *bene esse* of the  
 1032 church. It is therefore not necessary to the same degree as the celebra-  
 1033 tion of Word and Sacrament in accordance with the gospel. But even the  
 1034 *bene esse* has to be carefully observed by the churches. The lack of a  
 1035 constitution or *discipline* (in the Reformed sense of the word), that is a  
 1036 spiritual order, leads usually to an excessive amount of bureaucratic  
 1037 regulation.
- 1038 85) Catholicity within the CPCE also encounters concrete difficulties  
 1039 not related to doctrine, which are to be overcome:

1040 a) A first difficulty results from the concern of individual churches  
 1041 that they might lose their independence. The Leuenberg Agree-  
 1042 ment stresses the legal independence of the individual churches  
 1043 and expressly resists any kind of uniformity, which would be at  
 1044 the cost of the living diversity of the individual churches (cf. LA 43,  
 1045 45). The other church has to be recognized in its otherness as a  
 1046 legitimate expression of the true church of Jesus Christ (see Re-  
 1047 ception). This does not however mean a self-regarding particular-  
 1048 ism, in which each individual church is self-sufficient, be it at the  
 1049 local, regional or national level. Communion imposes obligations,  
 1050 and changes the previous way of being a local church.

1051 b) A second difficulty arises from the danger of fatigue and habitu-  
 1052 ation. We tend to be satisfied with what we have already  
 1053 achieved. After centuries of antagonism we have come at last to  
 1054 live and work together in friendship, and there is a great tempta-  
 1055 tion to rest content with that. This does not correspond to the  
 1056 CPCE understanding of church communion. However, the CPCE  
 1057 is reproached by other churches, not always without grounds, that  
 1058 its model results in standing still and maintaining the status quo.

1059 c) A third difficulty for lived catholicity within the CPCE is inherent  
 1060 in the fact that synods and church leaders of many of its churches  
 1061 pay too little attention in their decisions to the communion of the  
 1062 CPCE as a whole and the binding obligations and commitment to  
 1063 conciliarity.

1064 86) The capacity for a resolutely practised catholicity *ad intra* is deci-  
 1065 sive for the ecumenical plausibility of the CPCE model of unity  
 1066 and for its ability to bring this model of unity into discussion with  
 1067 other Christian churches.

#### 1068 **Part 4: Recommendations and concrete steps forward**

1069 87) In parts 1 and 2 of this study, it was explained that the unity that is  
 1070 given and realized in the CPCE is lived and experienced by the  
 1071 worshipping community. The participating churches declare  
 1072 church fellowship and grant one another pulpit and table fellow-  
 1073 ship (LA 33f). Thereby, according to their conviction, the unity of  
 1074 the church of Jesus Christ has been created. It is a gift of God to  
 1075 previously separated churches which now bear witness together  
 1076 in the world and commit themselves to common service.

1077 88) Part 3 of the document cites the current challenges and connects  
 1078 these with the present situation of the CPCE. *Verbindlichkeit*, re-  
 1079 ception and catholicity receive their true meaning if they contrib-  
 1080 ute to the *visibility* of the declared and realized communion. This

1081 communion takes concrete shape here and now. Only as a visible  
 1082 ecclesial communion is the model of unity practised in the CPCE  
 1083 credible in dialogue with other churches which do not belong to  
 1084 the CPCE.

1085 89) As far as this concluding Part 4 is concerned, it must make con-  
 1086 crete recommendations with which the CPCE can better discern  
 1087 its task in the service of the one church of Jesus Christ. This will  
 1088 take place through taking up anew the five dimensions of church  
 1089 communion which are explained in part 1.

## 1090 **4.1. Church communion as a communion in worship**

### 1091 **4.1.1. Communion in worship and catholicity**

1092 90) If communion in worship is an expression of realized visible unity  
 1093 in the CPCE, then it is necessary to strengthen the awareness  
 1094 that the churches of the CPCE are *one* church and to profess that  
 1095 faith clearly (see above § 56).

1096 91) This awareness of together being *one* church, and not merely a  
 1097 league or a federation of churches, does not in the least mean  
 1098 standardization. It cannot be a question of advocating a single  
 1099 way of being church, let alone a single national or international  
 1100 church structure. The CPCE churches are and remain churches  
 1101 with different confessional positions (LA 29). Each speaks its own  
 1102 language, has its historical shape, its special traditions and par-  
 1103 ticular confessional character, its various theological emphases,  
 1104 its particular church structures. In some places this has certainly  
 1105 led to the result that some CPCE churches in recent years have  
 1106 come together to form a united church, in others this is not on the  
 1107 agenda. This can only be decided in the local context.

1108 92) It cannot be the point to eliminate differences solely because they  
 1109 are differences. But it is the point to change the character of the  
 1110 differences. From church-dividing divergences they must become  
 1111 expressions of legitimate diversity. The authors of the LA have  
 1112 achieved this in respect of the historical anathemas. This must go  
 1113 further, so that no divergence may put communion in worship into  
 1114 question afresh.

1115 93) As a communion in worship the CPCE is a confessional commun-  
 1116 ion. That churches of different confessional positions declare  
 1117 themselves to be in church communion means on the one hand  
 1118 that the church communion is characterized by a variety of ethi-  
 1119 cal, social and political stances. The one gospel leads in different  
 1120 situations to different positions. But it is not a question of diversity  
 1121 for the sake of diversity. "The Leuenberg Agreement intends ...

1122 the obligation of the member churches to join together a common  
 1123 way of confessing in spite of different confessional traditions. The  
 1124 Agreement is in this respect a ‘signpost’ to those churches of the  
 1125 CPCE to walk the way of contemporary confessing together”  
 1126 (*Scripture, Confession, Church*, end of para.7). Communion in  
 1127 worship cannot be separated from the common confession that is  
 1128 invariably the standard for the legitimacy of diversity on this con-  
 1129 fessional way (see 3.1.4).

1130 94) A communion in worship means that the CPCE is a *catholic*  
 1131 church. Where Word and Sacrament are truly celebrated, the *one*  
 1132 *catholic* church of Jesus Christ is present. Catholicity means that  
 1133 each congregation that celebrates divine worship is wholly church  
 1134 without claiming that it is the whole church. It is also a Reform-  
 1135 ation conviction that a worshipping congregation is a catholic  
 1136 church, if it is held together with the universal church beyond its  
 1137 individual boundaries in space and time. Even if they gave a  
 1138 greater autonomy to the local church than was the case in the  
 1139 Middle Ages, the Reformers avoided any congregationalism. The  
 1140 congregation celebrating here and now is, of its nature, united  
 1141 with every other local congregation. Ethnic, national and other  
 1142 boundaries are transcended. The catholic church also reaches  
 1143 out beyond time, and ties the congregation celebrating here and  
 1144 now into the Christendom of all times, from the communion of the  
 1145 church of the first centuries onwards. In this way the Reformation  
 1146 too understands the catholic church not as an extra to the local  
 1147 congregation gathered for the service of worship, but as the *una*  
 1148 *catholica ecclesia* to be experienced in the individual congrega-  
 1149 tions.

1150 95) It remains the constant task of the CPCE to bring to expression  
 1151 the reality of being church that is shared by the local congregation  
 1152 and the wider church. Serving this end are the General Assembly,  
 1153 the Council and the office staff as well as all other areas of work  
 1154 in the CPCE. The representation of the shared reality of being  
 1155 church requires better visibility. In this way, new ground is broken,  
 1156 although in church history in other contexts there are some point-  
 1157 ers to the solidarity of independent churches, as for example the  
 1158 autocephalous tradition which may be traced back to early church  
 1159 tradition.

1160 96) In this sense the understanding of unity as a worshipping com-  
 1161 munity is the hermeneutical principle of all the work of the CPCE.  
 1162 This gives rise to and is decisive for communion in doctrine,  
 1163 communion in witness and service, communion in growing for-  
 1164 mation and communion for the sake of the world-wide oecumene.  
 1165 In this way, the CPCE is *one* church in reconciled diversity. It is

1166 crucial and should be a matter of course that the CPCE churches  
 1167 understand themselves collectively as *one* church and express  
 1168 this view clearly.

#### 1169 **4.1.2. The common celebration of word and sacrament**

1170 97) The declaration of pulpit and table fellowship assumes that com-  
 1171 mon worship actually takes place. Shared services of worship  
 1172 have for years been a matter of course at national and interna-  
 1173 tional meetings of CPCE churches (Assemblies, international  
 1174 consultations, meetings of regional groups etc.). It is crucial that  
 1175 this happens also in provinces or regions where various CPCE  
 1176 churches co-exist in one locality. The declaration of church com-  
 1177 munion allows for the particularity of each individual church.  
 1178 However, it must go beyond peaceful local co-existence.

1179 98) A shared worship life requires the fostering and promotion of litur-  
 1180 gy and hymnody. Much has been achieved in past years (see  
 1181 1.3.1). The achievement is worth cultivating and building upon.

1182 In the consultation process for this study document numerous  
 1183 suggestions were given:

- 1184 • At special occasions, services of worship shared between CPCE  
 1185 churches should be celebrated.
- 1186 • The “Leuenberg Sunday” in the middle of March and its design  
 1187 should be given greater attention, for instance through pulpit ex-  
 1188 change, the invitation of preachers from other CPCE churches,  
 1189 meeting with neighbouring CPCE congregations.
- 1190 • New forms of worship, which also speak to the younger genera-  
 1191 tion, should be included or developed. The CPCE should be  
 1192 open to new worship songs and new liturgical elements, which  
 1193 attract people who are outside the circle of traditional churchgo-  
 1194 ers.
- 1195 • The CPCE should have a stronger focus on church music and  
 1196 make contact with the European Conference for Protestant  
 1197 Church Music.

1198 99) The experience of communion in worship implies something more  
 1199 than existing church communion. It implies that new challenges  
 1200 are to be recognized and confronted. In more and more countries  
 1201 in Europe, new congregations are arising, which are often closely  
 1202 related to the Lutheran, Reformed, United and Methodist tradi-  
 1203 tions, and consciously appeal to these traditions, but have scarce-  
 1204 ly any contact with CPCE churches. These are often new ethnic  
 1205 congregations, usually of migrants, or (neo)Pentecostal groups.  
 1206 Diversity here rests not so much on theological decisions, but it is

1207 experienced particularly in spirituality and in the forms of piety  
1208 and worship.

1209 100) Since, according to the understanding of the CPCE,  
1210 church communion is based on communion in worship, it is also  
1211 part of the ecumenical task of the CPCE to encourage the cele-  
1212 bration of common worship also with churches outside the CPCE,  
1213 for instance in the tradition of the ecumenical “Prayers for a city”.  
1214 From the experience of such services there can come a new im-  
1215 petus to the opening of theological dialogue, which ultimately  
1216 could lead to an extension of the church communion.

1217 101) From encounters for example with churches of a Pente-  
1218 costal character and congregations of migrants stimuli for spiritu-  
1219 ality could be derived. At the same time, the helpful role of institu-  
1220 tional forms and opportunities for theological reflection could be-  
1221 come more accessible to these churches.

1222 102) Communion in worship includes the mutual recognition of  
1223 ministries, especially the ordination to the particular ministry of  
1224 Word and Sacrament (cf. LA 33). The recognition of ordination  
1225 however does not imply the possibility of employment in every  
1226 church. In each church, “the rules in force for induction to a pasto-  
1227 ral charge, the exercise of pastoral ministry, or the ordering of  
1228 congregational life” are not affected (LA 43). Efforts at mutual  
1229 recognition of training, especially for pastoral ministry, are in pro-  
1230 gress.

1231 In the consultation process for this study document the following  
1232 suggestions were given:

1233 The CPCE themes and documents must play a stronger role in ministe-  
1234 rial education. Students should be encouraged to complete parts of their  
1235 studies (eg. a semester spent in a foreign country) in training institutions  
1236 of other CPCE churches. The CPCE church communion should also be  
1237 referred to in formularies of ordination; ministers from other CPCE  
1238 churches should take part at ordinations, if possible.

1239 Furthermore these were proposed: common European seminars for fur-  
1240 ther ministerial education, support for fixed-term exchanges of ministers  
1241 between CPCE churches in Europe, ecumenical visits with CPCE part-  
1242 ner churches for gaining new insights.

## 1243 **4.2. Church communion as a communion in doctrine**

1244 103) With the Leuenberg Agreement the signatory churches en-  
1245 tered into a commitment to further theological work with one an-  
1246 other and have thereby taken a productive path which is one of

1247 the distinctive characteristics of their church communion. This  
1248 path must be tenaciously pursued.

1249 104) The programme of work followed up to now has proved its  
1250 worth: project and working groups authorized by the CPCE coun-  
1251 cil work up a first draft for consultation, based on the doctrinal  
1252 discussion initiated by them. The council then sends it to the  
1253 member churches for their opinions. Based on these opinions the  
1254 project or working group in each case then reworks the text,  
1255 which is presented to the General Assembly for final discussion  
1256 and resolution. With the acceptance of the final text by the Gen-  
1257 eral Assembly the result of the doctrinal discussion is sent to the  
1258 individual churches for reception and, if applicable, realization.

1259 105) In the past the reception of the texts agreed by the Gen-  
1260 eral Assembly has been very variable. There have been texts  
1261 which achieved a considerable breadth and depth of impact. But  
1262 there have also been texts which in spite of their considerable  
1263 relevance had no impact beyond the specialist committees. In  
1264 many instances there have been underlying communication prob-  
1265 lems: often not enough time had been provided for the notification  
1266 and circulation of the conclusions of the discussion. The CPCE  
1267 member churches should commit themselves to suitable lines of  
1268 communication for the conclusions of doctrinal discussion more  
1269 than they have done up until now. In theological education too  
1270 these must be taken into account more vigorously than in the  
1271 past.

1272 106) The conclusions of doctrinal discussion reflect in each  
1273 case a definite position in the theological debate. In not a few  
1274 cases this debate has developed further and new insights and  
1275 new formulations of the questions have arisen. It is an obvious  
1276 step to then update earlier conclusions of discussions, to rewrite  
1277 them in the context of the development of theological discovery  
1278 and new problems, or to develop a complete remake.

1279 107) In future it should be possible for the discussion themes to  
1280 be proposed, to an increased extent, by the CPCE member  
1281 churches and commissioned by the CPCE council. Apart from the  
1282 doctrinal discussions there should also be, if required, the possi-  
1283 bility of giving expert opinions through project groups especially  
1284 convened for that purpose.

1285 108) The following themes require special attention in the com-  
1286 ing years:

- 1287 • Church and Politics (in continuation of the discussions on  
1288 the Kingship of Christ and Two Kingdoms Doctrine and  
1289 “Church and Society” cf. LA 39).



- 1290 • Ethical Differences and Church Communion (legitimate di-  
1291 versity or church-dividing divergence).
- 1292 • Christian Faith and Islam in the Context of the Europe of  
1293 Today.
- 1294 • Community Building.
- 1295 • Baptism and Baptismal Practice (in continuation of the dis-  
1296 cussions on the practice of Baptism (cf. LA 39) and in re-  
1297 ception of the talks with churches of the Baptist tradition).
- 1298 • Preconditions for Participation in the Lord's Supper.
- 1299 • Confirmation and the Act of Confirming.
- 1300 The two first themes should have priority.

### 1301 **4.3 Church communion as a communion in growing formation**

- 1302 109) For the CPCE church communion it is fundamental to real-  
1303 ise the communion in worship, in doctrine, in witness and service  
1304 and in ecumenical responsibility, and to strengthen the togeth-  
1305 erness of the churches. To this end, it is important also to strength-  
1306 en the structures in which the church communion lives and is  
1307 shaped in mutual commitment.
- 1308 110) Since the signing of the Leuenberg Agreement and the  
1309 development of the CPCE, many churches have attained a new  
1310 shaping of their life as churches of the Reformation. In some  
1311 countries (eg. the Netherlands, central Germany and France),  
1312 church unions or at least church federations have been formed, in  
1313 which churches with different confessional positions recognise  
1314 their task together. In many regions notable models of cross-  
1315 border co-operation have emerged, as for example in the upper  
1316 Rhine.
- 1317 111) In order to strengthen the church communion of the CPCE  
1318 in its entirety, new ways and forms must be thought of which con-  
1319 tribute at the same time to furthering the *Verbindlichkeit* of the  
1320 church communion and the life of individual churches as member  
1321 churches of the CPCE in their different contexts, without restrict-  
1322 ing the independence ("autocephaly", autonomy of reception) of  
1323 the participating churches.
- 1324 112) While the individual churches in the CPCE regulate the  
1325 task of their mission and their common life in the framework of a  
1326 church order, for the CPCE an all-embracing order can be rec-  
1327 orded in its statutes and in a *Charta spiritualis* yet to be devel-

- 1328 oped. These enable the implementation of what follows from the  
 1329 established agreement in the gospel and the reciprocal recogni-  
 1330 tion of churches as churches on the basis of the Leuenberg  
 1331 Agreement for the worshipping, spiritual, theological and diaconal  
 1332 common life of the churches in the church communion. The *Char-*  
 1333 *ta spiritualis* should describe the mutual spiritual commitments of  
 1334 the churches in the five already identified forms of empirical expe-  
 1335 rience of church communion in the CPCE.
- 1336 113) Church communion lives from the readiness for conciliarity  
 1337 (cf. § 80). So the General Assembly sets off *conciliar processes*  
 1338 which have central significance for the realization of church com-  
 1339 munion. These include in particular the doctrinal discussions and  
 1340 theological study projects, which serve the deepening of com-  
 1341 munion. Discussion takes place on the basis of the documents,  
 1342 and they are finally accepted by the General Assembly. Even if  
 1343 this does not happen through a vote by synod representatives the  
 1344 documents serve nevertheless the clearer positioning of the  
 1345 CPCE and the orientation in mutual commitment, inwards and  
 1346 outwards.
- 1347 114) The role of the General Assembly could be strengthened  
 1348 further in two ways: first, by recording the significance of the re-  
 1349 ception of the conciliar decisions for the deepening of church  
 1350 communion in the constitutions or rules of the churches.
- 1351 115) The other way of strengthening its role would be for the  
 1352 churches to come to an agreement to link the sending of dele-  
 1353 gates to the General Assembly to a synodal decision, or other-  
 1354 wise suitably anchor the mandating of their representatives pub-  
 1355 licly in the context of acts of church leadership.
- 1356 116) In order to strengthen the reception of the conciliar pro-  
 1357 cesses in questions of doctrine and ecclesial practise in the  
 1358 CPCE, it would be helpful to describe in the *charta spiritualis* not  
 1359 only the processes of decision making but also the pathways of  
 1360 reception in the churches.
- 1361 117) In any change in the ordering of churches the Leuenberg  
 1362 Agreement and the existing church communion in the CPCE  
 1363 should be expressly taken account of. Churches which have up  
 1364 until now contented themselves with some administrative regula-  
 1365 tions, should consider the introduction of a church order in which  
 1366 the mutual spiritual commitments in the various areas of church  
 1367 life are described and ordered.
- 1368 118) CPCE member churches initiated two meetings of  
 1369 Protestant synod members in Europe in 2012 and 2015. The aim  
 1370 was to deepen the church communion of the CPCE at synod level

1371 and to strengthen the opportunities of working together. The  
 1372 meetings proved to be an important and promising instrument for  
 1373 strengthening church communion through an internal exchange  
 1374 about areas and themes which are decisive for the future of Eu-  
 1375 ropean societies and thereby present further challenges for the  
 1376 churches. Meetings of Protestant synod members should be con-  
 1377 tinued. The General Assembly should receive a report of the work  
 1378 on the themes.

1379 119) Parallel with the meetings of the Protestant synod mem-  
 1380 bers the structural interlinking in the CPCE can be strengthened  
 1381 through regular meetings of the church leaders of the member  
 1382 churches.

#### 1383 **4.4. Church communion as a communion of witness and ser-** 1384 **vice in the Europe of today**

1385 120) The Leuenberg Agreement is a document of the “Refor-  
 1386 mation churches in Europe”. Therefore it is a matter of course that  
 1387 these churches also relate their common witness and their com-  
 1388 mon service to the particular situation of Europe. Europe is their  
 1389 geographical, cultural and political context. So Europe, and ques-  
 1390 tions about Europe after its division was overcome in 1989, and  
 1391 the new fields of political and social action opened up as a result,  
 1392 have become a central theme.

1393 121) Great hopes in the opportunities of Europe on the one  
 1394 hand and a considerable scepticism on the other about the high  
 1395 expectations regarding the cooperation of the peoples of Europe  
 1396 are characteristic states of mind among people in today’s Europe.  
 1397 That is a tension which is also reflected in the churches of the  
 1398 CPCE. The tension between hope and scepticism has grown  
 1399 considerably through the crises of recent years. The programmatic  
 1400 demand of the Belfast General Assembly (2001), to let “the  
 1401 voice of the Protestant churches in Europe” be “clearly audible”,  
 1402 represents the perspective characterized by confidence. Concern  
 1403 for the future of Europe was manifest in the report of the General  
 1404 Assembly in Florence (2012) on the current situation in Europe  
 1405 with the acute problems of the crisis of finance, economy and na-  
 1406 tional debt in the states of the continent. The CPCE member  
 1407 churches will have to set the encouragement of the cooperation  
 1408 and solidarity of the European states across boundaries against  
 1409 the voices of despair, and contradict the concentration on national  
 1410 egoisms.

1411 122) The Europe of today is struggling with a large number of  
 1412 difficult problems which seemed inconceivable in the euphoria of  
 1413 awakening after 1989. The warlike conflicts following the collapse  
 1414 of Yugoslavia in the 1990s and the war in eastern Ukraine show  
 1415 how costly peace is and how very much one must struggle to  
 1416 achieve it. The crisis of finance, economy and national debt has  
 1417 emphasised a marked difference between the north and south of  
 1418 Europe. The enormous migration of refugees, most recently from  
 1419 the civil war in Syria, is a dramatic challenge to European society.

1420 123) The CPCE member churches cannot ignore the fact that  
 1421 they give witness and service in the midst of these critical devel-  
 1422 opments: the witness to the gospel calls and commits to service  
 1423 for peace and justice. Christians and churches in Europe should  
 1424 build a network of reconciliation and commitment to the deprived  
 1425 and needy. They will do everything in their power to create and  
 1426 reinforce signs of reconciliation and help in need. Only in this way  
 1427 can they encourage politics to act responsibly in crisis and to ac-  
 1428 cept solidarity with those people who are affected by flight, migra-  
 1429 tion and impoverishment.

1430 124) There are ethical problems on which the churches cannot  
 1431 speak with *one* voice, and do not need to do so. The assessment  
 1432 of a some ethical questions is strongly contextual; here among  
 1433 Protestant churches plurality, and decisions that differ from one's  
 1434 own point of view should be accepted. The standard of the legiti-  
 1435 macy of an ethical difference is its compatibility with community in  
 1436 worship (see 3.1.6). With statements on the topics of peace and  
 1437 reconciliation or justice and the meeting of need, the Protestant  
 1438 churches must still find a common voice, even if different per-  
 1439 spectives on the assessment of political ways of dealing with cri-  
 1440 ses can be thoroughly legitimate. If we expect the member  
 1441 churches of the CPCE to speak with *one* voice, we must endeav-  
 1442 our to ensure that the voice of the gospel is heard in Europe.

1443 125) The cooperation that has existed since 2009 with the Con-  
 1444 sortium of Protestant Diaspora Work in Europe (AGDE) is an im-  
 1445 portant step towards the coordinating of common relief work; it  
 1446 must be deepened further. In the same way the projects of inter-  
 1447 church aid promoted by individual member churches must be  
 1448 promoted single-mindedly.

#### 1449 **4.5. Church communion as a common ecumenical obligation**

1450 126) The CPCE regards its understanding of unity and its reali-  
 1451 zation as a service to the general ecumenical movement (cf. LA  
 1452 46f.). As demonstrated in section 1.4, the community achieved by

1453 it has in many places resulted in substantial progress towards uni-  
 1454 ty. This process, however, as is made clear in section 3.3, is not  
 1455 to be regarded as complete. While most other ecumenical models  
 1456 have not yet led to the desired results, the CPCE model appears  
 1457 particularly fruitful. The Leuenberg Agreement commits the CPCE  
 1458 to go further and introduce its understanding of the unity of the  
 1459 church into the worldwide ecumenical conversation. The intercon-  
 1460 fessional work of the CPCE will also be defined by this in future,  
 1461 particularly in respect of the longstanding contacts with the Angli-  
 1462 can and Orthodox churches, as well as the European Baptist  
 1463 Federation. The series of consultations begun in 2013 with the  
 1464 Roman Catholic Church has special significance, since the focus  
 1465 of interest here is on the effectiveness and loadbearing capacity  
 1466 of the church communion model.

1467 127) The ecumenical obligation resulting from the understand-  
 1468 ing of church communion in the LA must be taken on not least in  
 1469 relation to new church movements like neo-pentecostalism and  
 1470 neo-evangelicalism inside and outside the churches of the CPCE.  
 1471 The encounter with such currents shows that ecumenical and ethi-  
 1472 cal challenges are similar for many churches. The response to  
 1473 such challenges is proof of the capacity for ecumenical action in  
 1474 the conditions of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

1475 128) The understanding of unity in the CPCE proves itself in re-  
 1476 lation to other churches locally. It is a general experience that  
 1477 basic principles show their significance only in real encounter with  
 1478 others. The ecumenical process is not restricted to the exchange  
 1479 of documents, but develops in the encounter with people, on  
 1480 whom God bestows a new quality of community. Specific prob-  
 1481 lems emerge here, for majority churches, which easily overlook  
 1482 other member churches in their own area, as much as for minority  
 1483 churches, which in some cases tend to cut themselves off. Where  
 1484 there are functioning ecumenical structures in a place (local study  
 1485 groups, Councils of Churches, etc.), the congregations of CPCE  
 1486 churches should always be involved. Here the question invariably  
 1487 arises, how they make their common contribution to the conversa-  
 1488 tion with other local churches. In the local proving of unity, unity  
 1489 can be experienced as a gift of God.

1490 129) Several churches of the CPCE have communion with oth-  
 1491 er churches that do not belong to the CPCE. For example, some  
 1492 churches are members of the CPCE as well as of the Porvoo  
 1493 Communion. Others have individual agreements with Anglican  
 1494 churches. Others again have no kind of agreement. The resulting  
 1495 variations in the extent of church communion within the CPCE  
 1496 pose the question of the compatibility of the different agreements.

1497 On the road to unity the fact that at first sight there is some ten-  
 1498 sion cannot be avoided. A closer look shows that there is no  
 1499 question of mutually exclusive models. For example, since the  
 1500 model of the Porvoo Common Statement is a variant of the  
 1501 church communion unity model, membership in the Porvoo  
 1502 Communion and in the CPCE are not in competition. So long as it  
 1503 does not bring the results achieved in the CPCE into question, the  
 1504 double membership of many churches serves to widen and deep-  
 1505 en ecumenical fellowship. The unity model of the CPCE is not  
 1506 aimed at preserving the *status quo*, but at the fellowship of all  
 1507 Christians.

1508 130) The same is true for the world communions. Some  
 1509 churches are members of both the Lutheran World Federation  
 1510 (LWF) and the World Communion of Reformed Churches  
 1511 (WCRC). Others are members of only one of these two world  
 1512 communions, or of the World Methodist Council (WMC). Others  
 1513 again belong to none of them. The loyalties of individual member  
 1514 churches to such world communions should not be played off  
 1515 against each other. The ecumenical model of the CPCE aims to  
 1516 enrich the cooperation of the LWF, the WCRC, the WMC and  
 1517 other world communions, based on the church communion al-  
 1518 ready practised in the CPCE. The ways found in the CPCE to at-  
 1519 tain church communion in different contexts and between different  
 1520 confessional formularies can also give promise on a global level.  
 1521 The member churches of the CPCE can bring their experiences  
 1522 to the dialogue between the world federations, so that the theo-  
 1523 logical results already achieved may bear further fruit.

1524 An example is the recently published report of the Lutheran-Reformed  
 1525 Commission of the LWF and the WCRC, *Communion: On Being the*  
 1526 *Church*, which establishes a common understanding of the Gospel be-  
 1527 tween the Lutheran and Reformed churches, as well as the actual rec-  
 1528 onciliation of their confessional identities. The closeness to the under-  
 1529 standing of Church and unity in the CPCE is obvious.

1530 131) Since the signing of the Leuenberg Agreement the church  
 1531 communion of the CPCE has developed richly. An aim achieved,  
 1532 however, must always be given fresh applications to remain alive.  
 1533 The history of the CPCE can encourage us to deepen what has  
 1534 already been achieved.

1535 “Changes in society or in the forms of life and order of the church  
 1536 do not have to result in a loss of identity; on the contrary: they of-  
 1537 fer opportunities for new spiritual experiences when the churches  
 1538 live with commitment on this basis.” (CJC I, 1.4)

1539

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