



Doors open for unity and fellowship

Ecumenical policy of the Evangelical Lutheran
Church of Finland until 2026

NATIONAL CHURCH COUNCIL †

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The Church and Action

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Strategies

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Foreword

The Christian church is the church of the Triune God. It has been commissioned to offer the message of Christ as the light of the world in words and deeds (John 8:12; Matt. 28:18–20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46–49). The Doors Open strategy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland until 2026 defines this commission of the church as follows: “The church’s basic mission is to advance the kingdom of God and proclaim Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the world... It is the church’s mission to invite people into a relationship with God and encourage them to care for their neighbours and creation. The definition underlines that the proclamation of the saving gospel, inclusion, solidarity, advocacy on behalf of the vulnerable, pastoral care, the pursuit of equality and human dignity, and the preservation of the integrity of creation go hand in hand.” (Doors Open, 3)

In promoting the communion (*koinonia*) and unity of the Christian churches, *ecumenism* is based on faith in the Triune God and God’s loving purpose for human beings (John 3:16). The Church of Christ has been sent into all the world to witness to and serve our neighbours. Prayer and work to strengthen the ecumenical relationship contribute to this basic mission. The building of the visible unity of the Church of Christ and the fellowship of Christians belong together.

The Doors Open strategy embodies the classical theological virtues of faith, hope, and love as Christian values (1 Cor. 13:3): “Fellowship with God through faith creates a foundation for the life of the Christian and the church. Undergirding this hope is Jesus’s promise of God’s justice, care, and eternal life. Love means caring for your neighbours always and everywhere.” These virtues are also the clear premise of the churches’ shared ecumenical work.

This policy, which directs our church’s ecumenical activities at the various levels of church life, is related to the key basic principles of the church’s overall strategy. It opens and signals on what basis and how, as the church and as Lutheran Christians, we will seek the fellowship of Christians and thereby the better fulfilment of the church’s overall mission in the coming years. Not only in its principled approach but also at the level of concrete goals, the Doors Open strategy refers to the importance of ecumenical work for the church’s life, especially in the context of the strategic choices section, *Doors Open to the Future*: “Our church operates across borders and is active in ecumenism, mirroring its own activities globally to the experiences of Christians, especially where churches are in a minority position” (Doors Open, 10). Ecumenism is also important for the church’s future work.



1. THE DOORS OPEN STRATEGY AND ECUMENISM

In the churchwide *Doors Open* strategy six basic strategic choices have been made, which are crystallised by six doors with the “open” slogan. In what follows, these choices are examined from an ecumenical perspective. Ecumenical networking and the building of fellowship support the performance of the church’s fundamental mission in its basic areas and thus the realisation of these priorities as well. The other parts of the policy provide a deeper and more detailed picture of the foundation and goals of ecumenical action at various levels of church life, both for church workers and trust holders, and for our ecclesiastical partners and other interested parties.

I Doors open outwardly – the church’s mission approach and ecumenism

Strengthening the unity and fellowship of the church supports the missionary work of our own church and the common witness and service of the churches. An important element of this is taking into account the richness, resources, and networks offered by the various Christian traditions in meeting the challenges of common mission. Lutheranism and ecumenism belong together.

II Doors open to church and growth – young people and ecumenism

In collaboration with other churches and in learning from each other, we work to ensure that everyone can experience parish fellowship and membership of

the church throughout their lives. Particular attention should be paid to the ecumenical perspective in the church's educational work and the involvement of the new generation in ecumenical activities.

III Doors open to all – equal treatment of minority churches and the sexes

The church is international and transnational in nature. As the majority church, the Lutheran Church has a special responsibility to safeguard the operating conditions of ecumenical partners in our country. This also applies to support for religious freedom in Finland and internationally. The Lutheran World Federation's gender justice policy also applies to our church in ecumenical relations.

IV Doors open to shared work and partnerships – a bold approach to ecumenical cooperation

In future the organisation of the church's work will require determined cooperation not only with the Lutheran Church's own parishes but with congregations of other denominations. In international relations opportunities for renewal must be sought not only in the experiences of our partner churches in the Northern Hemisphere but in the theology and practices of the churches in the South.

V Doors open to new opportunities – drawing on ecumenical capital

Changes are faster and more unpredictable than before, challenging us to examine our own ways of working and seek sustainable models of renewal. It is good to learn from the experience and good practice of others around the world. Doctrinal conversations, fellowship with other churches, and inter-

national cooperation also offer prospects for the development of local parish work. Remote connections bring new possibilities for this.

VI Doors open to the future – a global church, sustainable development, and Christian hope

Based as it is on the unity of creation and redemption, the church's mission is worldwide. As Christians, we need each other. We need research knowledge and the exchange of experiences with both growing and minority churches. We can help and be helped. We can combine forces to maintain concern for creation and the most vulnerable conditions of Christians and all living people.

The finances of the main donor churches of the international church alliances, in the Nordic countries, Germany, and the United States, are shrinking. During the strategy period how multilateral ecumenical connections will be resourced in the future must be resolved internationally, as well as how the operating culture needs to be reformed. The premise and goal is that we can maintain hope in people's lives and society through the Christian faith. We bear our responsibility for living together and remind ourselves of the voice of another world and the kingdom of heaven.



2. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHURCH'S QUEST FOR VISIBLE UNITY

At the heart of ecumenism is the fellowship of churches and Christians, that is, the attitudes, deeds, and actions that promote fellowship among Christians throughout the world. The building of the visible unity of the Church of Christ and the fellowship of Christians belong together. Ecumenism seeks the church's renewal on the basis of the common Christian faith. In its nature it is holistically connected with the life of the church and the churches.

The theological premise of ecumenical action is faith in the Triune God and the Church as a sign, instrument, and foretaste of God's salvific work. Christ has given hope to the world, and his church has been sent to testify to this throughout the world (John 8:12). All Christians are needed for this task. Jesus therefore prayed for his own that "they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21).

The word and sacraments and the ministry that serves them are given as intermediaries of God's grace and builders of communion (Augsburg Confession 7). However, this is undermined by the churches' divisions concerning the acceptance of each other's baptism and eucharist. The New Testament takes as its starting point "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph. 4:5) and urges that this faith be reflected in the mutual love and peace of Christians. Despite its visible division, the church is called to act as a mediator of hope. Jesus promises to be with his own "always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). The Augsburg Confession affirms that as the Body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit the church will endure until the end of time (Augsburg Confession 7). Faith, hope, and love will not pass away (1 Cor. 13:13). However, the richness of diversity cannot optimally affect the common good when mutual fellowship and trust are lacking.

Unity is a gift and a mission that is based on the interaction of the persons of the Triune God. In the *Church of Encounter* policy (2016) the anchoring of the church and ecumenism to this inclusion was described as follows: “The essential unity of God is the fellowship of God’s persons. Similarly, the church’s unity can be realised in the mutual fellowship of regional churches. This requires the recognition of one another as part of the Church of Christ and is most deeply manifested in the common sacrament of the eucharist. Christ’s church is his body, and at the holy eucharist Christians become one body as they share the sacrament of his body and blood with each other. The goal of ecumenism is the visible unity of the church. It is not enough for unity to prevail spiritually, in the world of faith; it must become visible in the worship of the church, diaconal service, and the proclamation of the gospel. Yet this also means separation and independence. The fellowship of God’s persons prevails in God’s unity, and it is this that enables the churches to realise their unity as mutual communion.”

The basic goal of ecumenical action is the visible unity of the Church of Christ, which is not unification but the reconciliation of differences on the basis of common faith and mission, so that the various traditions may the better bring their own gifts together for the spread of the apostolic gospel. The universal Church of Christ combines both local and global realities. Ecumenical fellowship therefore entails the building of fellowship between churches locally, regionally, and globally.



3. OBJECTIVES OF DOCTRINAL CONVERSATIONS

The church's visible unity requires a consensus on the fundamental truths of the faith, and the mutual recognition of the sacraments and offices of the church (Augsburg Confession 7, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Article 37). This unity is manifested in the corporate celebration of the eucharist, the common witness of Christians, and selfless service. In practice, working together requires regular interaction between the churches in the quest for a common path. Indeed, church life requires decision making and shepherding structures. This also applies to the wider context.

However, the churches and Christian communities may perceive the purpose of ecumenism in ways that deviate from the classical goal of visible unity. The Lutheran Church respects its partners' expressed will and seeks a mutually beneficial way to nurture Christian fellowship.

The general goals of theological dialogues can be defined from the goal of the church's visible unity according to a step-by-step model. The attainment of the goal of visible unity is thus embodied above all by the attainment of eucharistic communion, even if the process does not end there. In some conversations eucharistic communion remains a "distant goal". The process steps listed here are not precise, but they illustrate the progress of the classical learning conversation process:

1. *Becoming acquainted with each other and building collaboration.* Based on the common understanding already achieved, parishes can undertake joint evangelistic or diaconal projects, for example (relations with Orthodox, Pentecostals, Free Churches, Baptists, etc.).
2. *Attainment of eucharistic communion* (the goal of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue).
3. *Practical implementation of an ecumenical agreement:* shared operating models, distribution of resources (Finnish Methodists, the Porvoo Communion, the Lutheran World Federation).

4. *Common decision-making structures* (the Porvoo Communion, Lutheran World Federation, Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe).

Ecumenism does not merely entail the field of work or a small number of activities, but is part of the church's Christian faith and life. The *Church of Encounter* policy emphasises: "Prayer and undertaking work to realise it belongs to the mission of Christians and churches. It requires a truthful and loving attitude towards other Christians."



4. LUTHERAN IDENTITY

Truthfulness requires honesty with oneself and others, an awareness of one's own identity. The Lutheran Confessions play an important role in ecumenical work in this respect. They begin with the three creeds of the ancient church. This speaks of the desire to be joined to the apostolic and catholic and common faith of the church. It reverts to belief in the Triune God and Christ's two natures as expressed in the Bible and by the church's ecumenical councils. The Nicene Creed unites Christians in both West and East. An emphasis on the righteousness of faith and biblical authority has been considered a special gift of Lutheranism. The Lutheran World Federation seeks to strike a balance between the basic issues and the contextual emphases that unite all Lutherans. Lutheranism is associated with evangelism, sacramentality, diakonia, and ecumenism.¹ The Ecumenical Institute in Strasbourg has published a volume on Lutheran identity that takes an ecumenical approach (2017).²

It is significant that the doctrine of justification, or the question of salvation, which was at the heart of the controversies of the Reformation period, has seen the achievement of common ground in the international *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999). In addition to Lutherans and Catholics, it has since been adopted by the Methodist, Reformed, and Anglican world communions. The cooperation of world communions on this basis also contributes to the continuation of ecumenical work in Finland.

The *Our Church* policy (2009) summarised the legacy of Finnish Lutheran ecumenism as follows: "We are committed to the common heritage of undivided Christianity on the basis of our Lutheran identity... Our Lutheran Church is an heir of the Western Catholic Church and a successor in its work, which, even after the Reformation, represents the same Christian faith that St Henry ... planted in our country. In being faithful to the Reformation's striving for renewal, our church emphasises the word of God and the sacraments as the foundation of faith and salvation, and as actual constitutive elements of the church, along with the ministry of the word and the administration of the sacraments." This self-understanding of the church is manifested in the Church Act (Church Act 1:1) and the Church Order (Church Order 1:1).

1 <https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/our-lutheran-identity>

2 https://www.strasbourg-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/LutheranIdentity-ENG_fin.pdf

The following principles of ecumenical action can be highlighted on this basis:

1. The activities and ecumenical fellowship of our church arise from the Christian faith and the Lutheran Confessions. Lutheranism and ecumenism are manifestations of the same faith.
2. Unity cannot be achieved by remaining silent about doctrinal differences. When churches take their own traditions and confessions seriously, they can genuinely encounter the representatives of other traditions.
3. According to the Augsburg Confession it is enough for unity that there is consensus concerning the doctrine of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments (Augsburg Confession 7).
4. The starting point for our church's ecumenical endeavours is Christ's prayer for our unity. Ecumenism requires faith in Christ and obedience to his will. In our efforts for unity we rely on the grace of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
5. Our church consciously works to be the same church, whatever direction it faces.
6. The goal of ecumenism is to strengthen unity, witness, and service.
7. The premise for Christian cooperation is faith in Christ as God and Saviour, and acceptance of biblical authority and the doctrine of the Trinity.



5. THE DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL ECUMENICAL OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

Finnish Ecumenical Council

The Finnish Ecumenical Council (FEC) is the most important forum for cooperation between the Finnish churches. It is one of the oldest national church councils (1917). It embraces almost every recognised church and Christian community operating in Finland, either as full or observer members. In addition, the FEC has a significant number of partner organisations. Over the decades our church has been an active member, and as the largest member church, the most significant funder through collections and membership fees.

*“The purpose of the Council is to serve as a cooperation body for churches and Christian communities
to promote efforts for the visible unity of the church
to strengthen the fellowship, service, and witness of Christians in Finland
to strengthen the voice of churches and Christian communities in society
to serve as a place of encounter for churches and Christian communities.”*

At the beginning of 2021 the General Secretary of the FEC has just changed, and our Archbishop is its chair. A new form of strategic work has begun in the Council. With other member churches our church’s representatives need to find a fresh and meaningful way to perceive the FEC’s identity as a cooperative body of churches, and on this basis to direct its activities and sustainable finances in the context of today’s dwindling resources.

Doctrinal conversations

In the Lutheran Church's management of bilateral relations between the Finnish churches, bilateral doctrinal conversations continue to play an important role alongside and in support of practical contacts, of which the earliest strand, with the Russian Orthodox Church, was initiated in 1970. In addition to theological themes, they address practical and ethical issues. In a globalised and digitalised world, local doctrinal conversations increasingly interact with the global reality of church families. This especially applies to the universal Roman Catholic Church, but also to the Orthodox Church and others. This needs to be taken into account in the objectives and framework conditions of the discussions.

Lutheran World Federation

Our church is one of the founding members of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) (1947), and one of the largest member churches and major donors. The LWF is a confessional union and communion of Lutheran churches, but it is also a major ecumenical actor. The member churches of the LWF have enjoyed pulpit and altar fellowship since 1984. The Curitiba General Assembly in 1990 defined the nature of the LWF's church communion as follows: "The Lutheran Federation is a communion of churches that recognise the Triune God, are unanimous in their proclamation of God's word, and enjoy pulpit and altar fellowship."

Most of the LWF's budget is allocated to the World Service, which is a prominent actor in international diaconal work. The LWF also plays a key role in coordinating Lutheran international ecumenical theological dialogues. This is important from the perspective of the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue, for example. The LWF is also a major actor in the mission and theological education of the Lutheran churches, as well as in advocacy. It is currently undertaking a work programme on Lutheran identity, developing a network for theological education, and promoting gender and climate justice.

The Lutheran World Federation has prepared for the dwindling resources of traditional Western donors, and the process of developing operations sustainably remains ongoing since the reorganisation that has taken place. To continue this work, a new General Secretary will be elected in 2021 before the 2023 General Assembly. The aim is to strengthen the global multilateralism of the worldwide communion and the capacity of the regions. As part of this, the Nordic Lutheran churches have launched the *Lutheran Churches in Times*

of Change project, in which the issue of baptism and its decline in the Nordic folk churches is at an early stage. The aim is for the project to develop into a pan-European, global, and ecumenically oriented development project.

The World Council of Churches, Global Christian Forum, and Act Alliance

The World Council of Churches (WCC) is the most comprehensive ecumenical church federation, with around a quarter of the Christian world represented among its members. The Catholic Church is a member of its Faith and Order Commission and the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism. Our church is one of the founding members of the WCC (1948) and is one of its active member churches.

The World Council of Churches is in the process of building a Green Village at the Geneva Ecumenical Centre. If implemented, it will play an important fundraising role. The WCC is also preparing for the election of a new General Secretary and is preparing to hold the General Assembly that was postponed until 2022 because of the coronavirus pandemic. Traditionally, our church has especially supported the work of the Faith and Order Commission, but in recent years cooperation with the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism has intensified. We have been actively involved in building a dialogue between the WCC's Orthodox and other member churches.

The Global Christian Forum originated as an initiative of the WCC. Its aim was to create a new model of action to reach members of Christian churches and communities who are not involved in traditional ecumenical activities. The forum's working methods can also be utilised in encountering various Christian groups in Finland.

One of the themes that has provoked debate is how the WCC views the ACT Alliance, which is the humanitarian work of the churches within the World Council of Churches. Finn Church Aid and the Finnish Missionary Society (Felm) are members of ACT Alliance in Finland. At the European level ACT Alliance operates within the ACT Europe Forum, whose main goal is advocacy work in the EU. Appreciation of aid organisations operating on the basis of a church or faith-based framework has increased significantly in recent years – for example, within the UN, which has created new opportunities. The challenge for ACT is to target dwindling resources at international diaconal work as appropriately and effectively as possible.

Conference of European Churches

The Conference of European Churches (CEC) is the most comprehensive pan-European ecumenical institution. In addition to Protestants, Anglicans, and Old Catholics, it includes Orthodox members. Our church is one of its founding members (1959). The organisation also works closely in EU advocacy work with the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE), member churches' own advocacy agencies, and the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME). CEC received a new statute at the 2013 General Assembly, and its activities were centralised in the Brussels headquarters. Development work in accordance with the new operating model remains in progress. Our church has actively participated in the activities of the thematic groups established by the CEC Board. We have also supported the development of CEC's advocacy work with human resources. In the coming years the role of CEC in advocacy and as a social-ethical, ecumenical-theological, and missionary actor needs to be further specified.

The Porvoo Communion

On the basis of the Porvoo Common Statement (1992) and the Porvoo Declaration (1996) a close connection was established between the Lutherans of the Nordic and Baltic countries and the Anglicans of Great Britain and Ireland. Our church was involved in the drafting of the declaration and was among the original signatory churches. The communion is now a forum for representatives of member churches in meeting common challenges. Its work is guided by the churches' Porvoo Contact Group. The Porvoo Declaration's commitment to the sharing of resources between member churches has especially benefited the lives of minority churches in Europe. For example, the activities of twin dioceses and parishes in Finland have also intensified gradually, and in some cases have been lively. A lack of human resources and a certain organisational ambiguity, the fragmentation of a concrete shared vision, and legal implementation have resulted in the communion lacking that kind influence the organized church alliances have in the life of the member churches – for example, through the production of material and joint agreements – with the exception of the Porvoo Declaration and its commitments. The importance of the communion will be emphasised in future already in maintaining ties with the British Isles, even after Brexit.

The Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe

For theological reasons our church did not sign the Leuenberg Agreement (1973) in the 1970s. It formed the basis for the fellowship of Lutherans, and the reformed and united churches. The Agreement has not been changed since, so despite subsequent ecumenical and ecclesiastical developments, the basic problem has survived. Over the decades our church has participated in the work related to the theological and practical life of the churches and has thus contributed to the development of the communion. The CCPE is also quite active in producing materials on current issues in ecclesiastical life to offer guidance to member churches and others.

Ecumenical interfaces

Strengthening unity and fellowship among Christians and churches also benefits witness and service. Ecumenism serves missional activity as a fundamental principle of the church's life. Through it the field of mission, evangelism, and interreligious dialogue are brought into the realm of ecumenism. The same is true of the essential and fundamental roles of diakonia and worship in the church life, including ecumenical encounters in the occasional services, both at home and abroad. Internationally, the practical work of the church and organisations is governed by inter-church agreements that also address aspects related to Lutheranism and identity and ecumenism.

As a general principle, the ecumenical activities of our church follow the guidelines of the church's overall strategy and policies in various fields of activity, serving their implementation by highlighting ecumenical dimensions and promoting the fellowship of the churches through doctrinal conversations and thus their preparedness to join forces in working together in practice. At the same time, it is expected that the ecumenical and international agreements of the church and the principles of ecumenical policy be observed in all the church's work at the various levels of its life.

General operating environment

The coronavirus pandemic has weakened the churches' economic circumstances and strengthened a new form of network and digitised operating culture. The "digital leap" has accelerated the use of remote meetings in international communication and the opportunities brought by information technology to create new personal contacts and gain expert knowledge. However, in nearly all cultural circles web-based communication does not work equally well. As the membership and economic potential of traditional mainstream churches in the West dwindle, ecumenical and international work must also seek new ways of sustainable development, both economically and in the equal consideration of various regions and the church's core mission through mutual support and learning. The experience of patiently listening to each other gained in ecumenical work can benefit building of reconciliation and understanding in an age when polarisation threatens cooperation and even social peace. More concerning the general change in the operating environment can be found in Church Research Institute's report for the 2016–2019 period, *Religion in Daily Life and in Celebration*.



6. IMPLEMENTING THE PRINCIPLES OF THE OPERATING POLICY IN THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF FINLAND UNTIL 2026

In light of the abovementioned guidelines for the church's strategy, its theological foundations, and our church's ecumenical commitments, the goals for ecumenical activity that follow the different levels of life and our church's partnerships can be outlined. Their implementation will be monitored in the annual reports and the mid-term review in the autumn of 2023.

Parishes

- Parishes support their members' ecumenical growth to ensure that they become aware of the church's global nature and commit to carrying out its mission in a hospitable, communicative, and open attitude.
- We especially need to invest in ecumenical activities that engage the new generation.
- Parishes encourage their members to implement hospitality and build an inclusive experience through their own activities and those of the congregation. This is done both through spiritual life (prayer, discussion, participation in worship) and through the fulfilment of the church's diaconal ministry.

- Parishes develop the skills of their workers for international work and ecumenical encounters. Parishes encourage their workers to actively build fellowship with local Christian churches and Christian communities. An understanding of the global and ecumenical nature of Lutheranism and the broad fellowship of Christians as a resource for the church's life is maintained at the parish level.
- Parishes approach other Christian churches and communities in their area, get to know them, and develop concrete forms of cooperation. The goal is for every parish of the Lutheran Church to observe the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the ecumenical mission day, Creation Sunday, and the ecumenical responsibility week.
- For example, parishes can invite an ecumenical guest to preach during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Parishes with a significant Orthodox population or other Orthodox links can promote the use of the Nicene Creed without the filioque clause ("and the Son") on ecumenical occasions.
- Parishes maintain active international and ecumenical activities both locally and outside Finland. At the parish level activities can include ecumenical events and ecumenical elements in the parish's basic activities. The parishes independently establish and maintain international and ecumenical twinning relationships, keeping the diocesan secretaries and the National Church Council's Department for International Relations' experts in international work aware of the relationship.

Dioceses

- Dioceses allocate sufficient human resources to support local churches in their international and ecumenical work. The diocesan secretaries/experts in international work play a special role here.
- Dioceses may have diocesan-level international and ecumenical cooperation. Dioceses encourage and support parishes in cooperating with other denominations in concrete cooperation projects.

- Diocesan-level cooperation belongs to the international and ecumenical relations of the church. It is also intended to support and strengthen cooperation between parishes.
- The dioceses strengthen mutual communication and cooperation.
- With the National Church Council the dioceses support parishes in implementing ecumenical agreements at local level for the church as a whole. Significant agreements include the Porvoo Agreement and the agreement with the Finnish Methodist Churches.
- In the coming years the 2022 General Assembly of the World Council of Churches, for example, will provide an opportunity to introduce ecumenical activities, especially to young people.

National level

- At the church's national level we are responsible for the international and ecumenical relations to which the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland as a whole is party. Depending on the issue, decisions are taken by the General Synod, the Bishops' Conference, or the National Church Council.
- The key task of the National Church Council's workers is to provide expert assistance and information, and coordinate the work in dioceses and parishes.
- Communication focuses on the communication of ecumenical issues and the international development in church alliances and churches. A particular developmental task is to involve the younger generation in ecumenical activities – including doctrinal conversations – and to promote the mirroring of our church's activities, in line with the church's strategy, to Christian experiences elsewhere in the world, especially where Christians are in a minority position.
- At the level of the church as a whole lies the responsibility to organise and maintain the church's ecumenical doctrinal conversations. **The following objectives are established for doctrinal conversations:**

Lutheran-Orthodox dialogue:

- When the coronavirus is at an end, there will be a visit to the Patriarch of Moscow. This will coincide with the 50th anniversary doctrinal conversations conference that was postponed in 2020.
- In continuing the more systematic treatment of doctrinal themes agreed with the Finnish Orthodox Church in 2019, we will seek to flesh out the results of the conversations, for example, through a joint statement on the doctrine of salvation and the mutual recognition of baptism. Issues related to practical cooperation will be addressed as appropriate.

Lutheran-Catholic dialogue:

- We will support the international process of drafting a joint declaration on the church, eucharist, and ministry by the anniversary of the Augsburg Confession in 2030, and we will continue the domestic dialogue with the Catholic Diocese of Helsinki on doctrinal and pastoral issues.

Lutheran dialogue with the Methodists:

- We will continue annual meetings and monitor the development of international Lutheran-Methodist dialogue, especially in connection with the possibility of a tripartite dialogue in the Porvoo Communion between Lutherans, Anglicans, and Methodists.

Lutheran-Pentecostal dialogue:

- In addition to the current exchange of information, the Advisory Board deals with thematic issues. A joint ecumenical publication on evangelism will be published during the work period.

Lutheran-Free Church dialogue:

- In addition to the current exchange of information, the Advisory Board will address a thematic issue, to be agreed at the beginning of each term of office for each three-year period.

Lutheran dialogue with the Baptists:

- We will continue to address doctrinal and practical themes in the triennial theological dialogue.

Connections with other churches:

- In connection with the meetings of the National Church Council and the Finnish- and Swedish-speaking Free Christian Councils, as well as the Finnish Ecumenical Council, discussions and work will be undertaken with representatives of the Adventists and the Salvation Army, among others. In addition, the development and integration of the several Oriental Orthodox Churches and other Middle Eastern Christians in ecclesiastical life will be monitored with the Finnish Orthodox and the Catholic Diocese of Helsinki. The Church Research Institute monitors the development of Christian groups in Finland.
- The church as a whole has the responsibility to coordinate ecumenical education.

The following goals will be set for the development of ecumenical education:

- We will invest in the creation of a new form of ecumenical education that is as attractive as possible. Particular attention will be paid to the younger generation of workers. Above all this would entail a reform of the Worldwide Church course (5 cr.). The aim will be to strengthen the profile of ecumenical education and broaden the recruitment base to the church's ecumenical, theological, and international functions.
- The aim is to integrate the ecumenical dimension more clearly with the general training of workers for various operational groups.
- The National Church Council's online pedagogy training project will be integrated with ecumenical education, and online courses will be created.
- The whole church has a responsibility to cooperate with both the worldwide Lutheran Communion and other ecumenical organisations. **The following objectives will be set for the main partners:**

Lutheran World Federation

- We will participate in the LWF's Nordic project, Churches in Times of Change, especially in relation to the role of Christian baptism in the Nordic folk churches and in developing theological reflection, and the exchange of practical experiences and good practice within the LWF Communion, as well as with ecumenical partners.
- Clear targets for the 2023 General Assembly will be set during 2022.

- We are participating in the debate on the role of the Strasbourg Ecumenical Institute in the LWF Communion, as well as working to secure the overall resources of ecumenical theology.
- The church will draft a clear policy concerning the general level of financial support by 2023.
- Reciprocal interaction with Lutheran minority churches will be developed.

World Council of Churches

- Clear goals for the 2022 General Assembly will be set during 2021.
- The church will support the work of the Faith & Order Commission and the preparation of the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea in 2025.
- The church will promote learning from the experiences of WCC member churches in Finland.
- The church will draft a clear policy concerning the general level of financial support by 2023.

Conference of European Churches

- The church will support CEC in its involvement in the societal debate with the European institutions on issues related to Europe's future, as well as current social-ethical issues such as artificial intelligence, transhumanism and autonomy, and economic, security, and immigration issues.
- The church will participate in the work of CEC's thematic groups.
- The church will draft a clear policy concerning the general level of financial support by 2023.

Global Christian Forum

- The church will integrate ecumenical work within the GCF with Finnish ecumenism and will continue to monitor the development of new Christian communities, and establish connections with them.

Porvoo Communion

- The church will actively participate in the theological and other work of the Porvoo Communion, as well as in the discussion of the Communion's vision and instruments for building fellowship.
- The church as a whole will support dioceses and parishes in implementing the Porvoo Agreement.


Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CCPE)

- The church will actively participate in the theological work of the CPCE and will monitor the Communion's other work and institutional and ecumenical developments.

Reformed churches and evangelical Christianity

- We will develop contacts with the Church of Scotland under the 1954 ecumenical agreement.
- The church will monitor the development of evangelical Christianity and cooperate with it, especially through the Finnish Mission Council and the Finnish Ecumenical Council.

- The church as a whole will have **relations** with partner churches and communities **as defined by agreements**. By 2023 the church will outline agreement practices (with whom, why) and unify agreements at different levels (parish, diocese, the church as a whole) (e.g. coordination meetings).
- The missionary and international diaconal actors undertaking the church's overall mission will be guided by an **agreement procedure**. Annual steering discussions will be developed further in such a way that messages concerning guidelines for the international work of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland will be conveyed consistently, avoiding duplication of work and taking ecumenical guidelines into account.
- The **Archbishop's office** will coordinate the participation of bishops in the episcopal ordinations of sister and partner churches. The development of events organised in connection with episcopal ordinations will be studied, for example, through seminar-type open work.

A decorative border at the top of the page consists of three rows of icons. The first row contains 16 icons, the second row contains 16 icons, and the third row contains 16 icons. The icons are a mix of three types: a cross with a circle in the center, a cross with a circle and a vertical line through the center, and a cross with a circle and a horizontal line through the center. The icons are arranged in a repeating pattern across the three rows.

At the heart of ecumenism is the fellowship of churches and Christians, that is, the attitudes, deeds, and actions that promote fellowship among Christians throughout the world. The building of the visible unity of the Church of Christ and the fellowship of Christians belong together. Ecumenism seeks the church's renewal on the basis of the common Christian faith. In its nature it is holistically connected with the life of the church and the churches.

On 13 April 2021 the Bishops' Conference approved this ecumenical policy, which provides an orientation for the ecumenical work of the Evangelical Lutheran Church at various levels of church life until 2026. It is connected with the basic principles of the church's general strategy. The document develops and offers guidelines concerning the basis and means we will use in coming years as a church and as Lutheran Christians to promote the fellowship of Christians, and thus better fulfil the mission of the Church as a whole.