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# KIRCHENGEMEINSCHAFT - CHURCH COMMUNION – COMMUNION ECCLESIALE <sup>1</sup>

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Communions d'Eglises Protestantes en Europe (CEPE)

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<sup>1</sup> See § 46.

## CONTENT

<b>About this text .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1 TAKING STOCK: CHURCH COMMUNION AS AN EXPERIENCE OF THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH .....</b>	<b>2</b>
1.1 Church communion in the perspective of the Leuenberg Agreement (1973)	2
1.2 The Church of Jesus Christ (1994)	3
1.3 Church communion realized in life	4
1.3.1 In the CPCE, church communion has been and is experienced as communion in worship:	4
1.3.2 In the CPCE, church communion has been and is experienced as a communion in doctrine:	5
1.3.3 In the CPCE, church communion has been and is experienced as a communion that is evolving in shape:	6
1.3.4 In the CPCE, church communion has been and is experienced as a communion of witness and service in the Europe of today:	7
1.4 Church communion and ecumenism	8
<b>2 THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS.....</b>	<b>10</b>
2.1 The church as the body of Christ and the communion of saints	10
2.2 Fellowship in Word and Sacrament	10
2.3 Confession, doctrine and life	12
2.4 Fellowship in the Lord's Supper and church communion	13
2.5 Church and church communion as an expression of the event of justification	15
<b>3 CHALLENGES: Verbindlichkeit – Reception – Catholicity.....</b>	<b>17</b>
3.1 Verbindlichkeit	17
3.2 Reception	20
3.3 Catholicity	21
<b>4 RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCRETE STEPS FORWARD .....</b>	<b>24</b>
4.1 Church communion as a communion in worship	24

4.1.1	Communion in worship and catholicity	24
4.1.2	The common celebration of word and sacrament	26
4.2	Church communion as a communion in doctrine	27
4.3	Church communion as a communion evolving in shape	29
4.4	Church communion as a communion of witness and service in the Europe of today	31
<b>5</b>	<b>CHURCH COMMUNION AS A COMMON ECUMENICAL OBLIGATION .....</b>	<b>32</b>
	<b>Appendix: Participants in the study process .....</b>	<b>34</b>

## 1 **About this text**

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

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

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

32 The text that follows presents the fruits of this doctrinal discussion.

# 1 TAKING STOCK: CHURCH COMMUNION AS AN EXPERIENCE OF 2 THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

## 3 1.1 Church communion in the perspective of the Leuenberg Agreement 4 (1973)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

29 In this way the recognition of ministries is grounded in the common understanding of Word and  
30 Sacrament and follows from it.

- 1 8) With the declaration of church communion comes the task of realizing church communion.  
2 This happens “in the life of the churches and congregations”: “Believing in the unifying power of  
3 the Holy Spirit, they bear their witness and perform their service together, and strive to deepen  
4 and strengthen the fellowship they have found together” (LA 35). Thus common witness to the  
5 gospel and common service arising from the gospel become crucial features of church commun-  
6 ion as it is practised.
- 7 9) At the same time, continuing theological work in doctrinal discussions (and joint theological,  
8 ethical and liturgical projects) is a crucial element in practical church communion for the CPCE  
9 churches. On this matter, LA 38 expresses the view that “the common understanding of the  
10 Gospel on which the church fellowship is based must be further deepened, examined in the light  
11 of the witness of Holy Scripture, and continually made relevant to a contemporary context”.
- 12 10) Church communion expressed in practice has organizational implications, and implications  
13 for church law. In the Agreement, however, these are only hinted at and caution is advised (see  
14 LA 42-45).
- 15 11) Church communion expressed in practice looks beyond itself; its participating churches act  
16 “as part of their responsibility to promote the ecumenical fellowship of all Christian churches” (LA  
17 46) in the hope that “the church fellowship will provide a fresh stimulus to encounter and collabo-  
18 ration with churches of other confessions” (LA 49).

## 19 **1.2 The Church of Jesus Christ (1994)**

- 20 12) With the study document, *The Church of Jesus Christ* (CJC; Leuenberg Documents 1,  
21 [1995] <sup>4</sup>2012), the general assembly of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship in 1994 in Vienna set  
22 out the basic tenets of the Protestant understanding of the church and explained the ecclesio-  
23 logical principles which guide the signatory churches in ecumenical dialogue.
- 24 13) The study document distinguishes between the foundation, shape and mission of the  
25 church. “The foundation of the church is God’s action in Jesus Christ to save humankind. In this  
26 fundamental action God himself is the subject, and consequently the church is an object of faith.  
27 Since the church is a community of believers the shape of the church has taken various histori-  
28 cal forms. The one church of faith (singular) is present in a hidden manner in churches (plural)  
29 shaped in different ways. The mission of the church is its task to witness to all humankind, in  
30 word and deed, to the gospel of the coming of the Kingdom of God” (CJC Introduction, 4).
- 31 14) The event that lets the church be church, and which precedes all human action and reaction,  
32 is the justifying, liberating act of God which is proclaimed in the preaching of the gospel and  
33 granted in the sacraments. As witness to the gospel in the world the church is called to be “an

1 instrument of God for the actualization of God’s universal will to salvation” (CJC I. 3.2). In this  
 2 function it should not seek to usurp the place of Jesus Christ: “It will be faithful to this call, if it  
 3 remains in Christ, the sole infallible instrument of salvation” (CJC I. 3.2).

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

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

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

### 23 **1.3 Church communion realized in life**

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

#### 29 **1.3.1 In the CPCE, church communion has been and is experienced as communion in** 30 **worship:**

31 19) Church communion grows out of the encounter between the witness of the Gospel and hu-  
 32 man beings. For that reason, it comes to expression most profoundly in the common celebration

1 of worship. Thus, in the CPCE, Lutheran, Reformed, Methodist and United are joined with one  
2 another in worship, they have fellowship at the Lord's Table, and their ministers exchange pul-  
3 pits. The CPCE as a communion reconciled in Christ has lived from the outset in pulpit and table  
4 fellowship.

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

### 11 **1.3.2 In the CPCE, church communion has been and is experienced as a communion** 12 **in doctrine:**

13 21) Church communion is deepened by theological teaching and learning together. The Leuen-  
14 berg Agreement commits the signatory churches to further theological work: in general, in the  
15 deepening, examination and constant updating of the common understanding of the Gospel in  
16 the light of the witness of Holy Scripture (cf. LA 38); and in particular, through doctrinal discus-  
17 sions or through theological work on the doctrinal differences "that persist within the participating  
18 churches and between them without being grounds for division" (LA 39).

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

25 23) Past doctrinal discussions have considered the themes which in LA 39 were identified for  
26 further work: the relationship of the two kingdoms doctrine to the doctrine of the sovereignty of  
27 Jesus Christ (1975-1981), the doctrine of Baptism and Communion (1981-1987), Ministry and  
28 Ordination (1976-1987, 2006-2012, with the explicit inclusion of episcopate), Law and Gospel  
29 (1994-2001), Scripture and Creed (2006-2012). In addition, studies have been produced whose  
30 composition has arisen from the life of the church communion, such as the ecclesiological study  
31 *The Church of Jesus Christ* (1987-1994), and the studies which built on it: *Church and Israel*  
32 (1994-2001), *The Shape and Shaping of Protestant Churches in Europe* (2001-2006) and *Evan-*  
33 *gelizing: Protestant Perspectives for the Churches in Europe* (2001-2006). These and numerous

1 other theological projects such as for example *The Christian Witness to Freedom* (1987-1994)  
2 further clarify the importance of theological work for the deepening of living church fellowship  
3 and the processes of learning that are associated with it.

4 **1.3.3 In the CPCE, church communion has been and is experienced as a communion**  
5 **that is evolving in shape:**

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

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

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

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

32 28) With the document *Training for the Ordained Ministry in the Community of Protestant*  
33 *Churches in Europe* (2012) the CPCE churches have set out their common understanding of

1 good theological training and developed a concept of training for churches, as well as university  
2 faculties and theological colleges, to use as guidelines, so as to make progress with the ex-  
3 change of ministers in the CPCE — another way of deepening their togetherness and strength-  
4 ening the church communion.

5 **1.3.4 In the CPCE, church communion has been and is experienced as a communion**  
6 **of witness and service in the Europe of today:**

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

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

24 31) Again and again in the past few years the CPCE has expressed an opinion on develop-  
25 ments in Europe and its current problems, with, for instance, the statement from the praesidium  
26 *Meeting the Crisis* on the EU summit in 2011 in Brussels, the statement from the assembly in  
27 2012 on the current situation in Europe with the acute problems caused by the crisis in the fi-  
28 nancial system, the economy and government debts, in 2014 with a statement on the European  
29 elections, in 2015 with a statement on the refugee crisis *Shelter and welcome refugees*, in 2017  
30 with a statement on the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Treaties of Rome. The CPCE churches con-  
31 sciously participate in the socio-ethical questions which preoccupy Europe, for example with the  
32 guidance on end-of-life decisions and care for the dying *A time to live, and a time to die* (2011)  
33 or on questions of reproductive medicine “*Before I formed you in the womb...*” (2017).

1 32) In 2009, the CPCE embarked on a collaboration with the joint working group for Protestant  
2 diaspora work in Europe (AGDE). The AGDE provides a platform for the coordination of shared  
3 relief programmes. Its often long-standing partnerships, its experience of relief programmes, and  
4 its relationship with donors for congregation-building, training and diaconal work, offer a re-  
5 source which should not be underestimated. It may also offer the basis for a possible enlarge-  
6 ment of the agenda of the CPCE around the promotion of church work for solidarity, through  
7 which the character of the church communion as offering service as well as witness is  
8 strengthened and shaped.

#### 9 **1.4 Church communion and ecumenism**

10 33) Ecumenical commitment is inseparable from church communion. In declaring and realizing  
11 church communion amongst themselves, the churches signatory to the Agreement “do so as  
12 part of their responsibility to promote the ecumenical fellowship of all Christian churches. They  
13 regard such a fellowship of churches in the region of Europe as a contribution to this end” (LA  
14 46f.).

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

25 35) In other continents too, Lutheran and Reformed came to make declarations of church com-  
26 munion. They took this step with express reference to the Leuenberg Agreement. The *Formula*  
27 *of Agreement* and the *Amman Declaration* (see above §17), as statements of full mutual recog-  
28 nition, prove the significance of this model of unity beyond the European region. Previously  
29 churches of the La Plata states in Latin America had signed the Leuenberg Agreement. In addi-  
30 tion, the world-wide international Lutheran-Reformed dialogue refers expressly to the church  
31 communion created by the Leuenberg Agreement. The first Budapest Report (1988) recom-  
32 mends that all churches examine the historic anathemas in the light of their significance today,  
33 declare church communion in Word and Sacrament and follow a common course of witness and

1 service. The most recent report of this dialogue *Communion: On Being the Church* (2014) deep-  
2 ens the common understanding of the Church. Here too the lines of connection with *The Church*  
3 *of Jesus Christ* should not be overlooked.

4 36) In Europe as well as in North America and Australia, there have been in recent years state-  
5 ments of church fellowship with Anglican churches. The *Meissen Agreement* (1991) and the  
6 *Reuilly Common Statement* (2001) declare church fellowship between Lutheran, Reformed and  
7 United churches which have signed the Leuenberg Agreement, and, respectively, the Church of  
8 England and the Anglican churches of Britain and Ireland. The understanding of unity upon  
9 which these are based and the model of unity which arises from it correspond to the Leuenberg  
10 approach. Even if this does not result in the common exercise of the office of bishop, the diverse  
11 ministries of the churches are mutually recognised as a consequence of the declared fellowship  
12 in Word and Sacrament. The dialogue between Lutherans and Anglicans resulted in 1994 in the  
13 *Porvoo Agreement* between the British Anglican churches and the Scandinavian and Baltic Lu-  
14 theran churches, amongst them churches of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship. Although these,  
15 in distinction from the Leuenberg Agreement, took the step to a common exercise of the episco-  
16 pal office and so to a more visible unity, here also the model of unity and its shaping is closely  
17 related to that which was realised in the Leuenberg Church Fellowship. This holds good for the  
18 Lutheran-Anglican statements in other continents which follow the Porvoo model such as the  
19 statement *Called to Common Mission* between the Lutheran and Episcopal churches in the USA  
20 (1999), the *Waterloo Statement* between the corresponding churches in Canada (2001) and the  
21 Australian process *A Common Ground*.

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

27 38) The relationship with other Christian confessions has also been stimulated. With the study  
28 *The Church of Jesus Christ* impetus was given to new ecumenical conversations. These are  
29 dedicated primarily to ecclesiology. From 2002 to 2008 there took place a corresponding dia-  
30 logue with the Orthodox churches in the CEC. It led to the recommendation of agreements on  
31 the mutual recognition of Baptism. In 2013 the official conversations got under way with repre-  
32 sentatives of the Roman Catholic Church on questions on the understanding of church and  
33 church communion. These developments show that the Community of Protestant Churches in

1 Europe, based on the Leuenberg Agreement, is perceived today as an independent ecumenical  
2 partner.

## 3 **2 THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS**

### 4 **2.1 The church as the body of Christ and the communion of saints**

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

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

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

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

### 29 **2.2 Fellowship in Word and Sacrament**

30 43) In the gospel of Jesus Christ, God grants his unconditional grace and offers righteousness  
31 through faith alone. In this way he grants new communion with himself and frees humanity from

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

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

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

25 46) In the ecumenical movement, the German term “Kirchengemeinschaft” is established as a  
26 rendering of the Latin word *communio*. It is so used in the Leuenberg Agreement which was  
27 originally drawn up in German. One has to take account of the fact that the German language  
28 only has the expression *Gemeinschaft* to translate *communio* as well as *communitas*.  
29 “Kirchengemeinschaft” emphasises *communio* and the ecclesial quality so expressed. The  
30 French language distinguishes between *communauté* and *communion*, English between *fellow-*  
31 *ship*, *community* and (*ecclesial* or *church*) *communion*. From the Leuenberg Agreement on-  
32 wards, the French texts of the CPCE used the term “communion ecclésiale” as the equivalent of  
33 “Kirchengemeinschaft” while in the English CPCE texts the term “church fellowship” was used  
34 as the equivalent of “Kirchengemeinschaft”. So the Leuenberg “Kirchengemeinschaft” was de-

1 scribed as the Leuenberg Church Fellowship. In other ecumenical texts, both in inner-  
2 Protestant and in interconfessional dialogues, the term “communion” (sometimes “ecclesial  
3 communion”, sometimes “church communion”) prevails. In order to avoid misunderstandings  
4 and to bring it into line with international ecumenical usage, preference will from now on be giv-  
5 en to the term "church communion".

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

### 14 **2.3 Confession, doctrine and life**

15 48) The agreement in faith in the gospel is set out in the doctrine of justification (cf. LA 8). How-  
16 ever, fellowship in faith arises not through doctrinal affirmations, but only through the proclama-  
17 tion of the gospel in worship, in Word and Sacrament, in which Jesus Christ makes himself pre-  
18 sent in the power of the Spirit of God. Even though agreement in the understanding of the gos-  
19 pel is not achieved through doctrinal formulations, it still requires doctrinal development and con-  
20 firmation.

21 49) In the CPCE, the diversity of confessional traditions among the participating churches is  
22 understood as an enrichment. In the confessional documents of the period of the Reformation,  
23 the insights of the Reformers were articulated in concrete terms in their respective regional con-  
24 texts and combinations of problems. They are part of the shaping of the Reformation churches  
25 which in turn recognise the providence of God in their individual histories. Reference to particu-  
26 lar different confessions is recognised in the Leuenberg Agreement as a confession of the same  
27 faith and so is not seen as an obstacle to church communion. This is confirmed in the doctrinal  
28 conversations to date. It is not the subscription to individual confessional formulas that is consti-  
29 tutive of the fellowship in Word and Sacrament, but the agreement in the understanding of the  
30 gospel.

31 50) The special character of the CPCE as a communion of churches with different confessional  
32 positions is based in the first place on the understanding that the Reformation confessions agree  
33 in the understanding of the justification promised in the gospel through faith alone and express

1 this in a variety of ways in different places and times. Secondly, it is based on the Leuenberg  
2 Agreement's overcoming of church-dividing doctrinal differences relating to the sacraments,  
3 Christology, and the doctrine of predestination. As long as individual differences in doctrinal  
4 statements do not bring the agreement in the understanding of the gospel into question, the va-  
5 riety of confessional positions in the churches is not an obstacle to communion, but only an ex-  
6 pression of a legitimate diversity.

7 51) For the realization of church communion it is essential that the agreement in understanding  
8 of the gospel is constantly being deepened and secured in the context of contemporary chal-  
9 lenges and in debate with the individual confessional traditions (cf. LA 37f.). The doctrinal dis-  
10 cussions serve as part of the process in which church communion between churches with differ-  
11 ent confessional positions is realized.

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

## 18 **2.4 Fellowship in the Lord's Supper and church communion**

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

26 For the CPCE churches, that means that it is not the invitation of all who have been baptized to the com-  
27 mon celebration that requires accounting for but rather the restriction and limiting of such fellowship be-  
28 fore the Christ who extends an invitation as Lord of the church and before all to whom fellowship is re-  
29 fused.

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

32 cf. the Commission for Faith and Order: *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* §22: "The Church is  
33 catholic because of the abundant goodness of God 'who desires everyone to be saved and come to the

1 knowledge of the truth' (1 Tim. 2, 4). Through the life-giving power of God, the Church's mission trans-  
2 cends all barriers and proclaims the Gospel to all peoples. Where the whole mystery of Christ is present,  
3 there too is the Church catholic (cf. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Smyrneans*, 6), as in the celebration  
4 of the eucharist. The essential catholicity of the Church is undermined when cultural and other differences  
5 are allowed to develop into division. Christians are called to remove all obstacles to the embodiment of  
6 this fullness of truth and life bestowed upon the Church by the power of the Holy Spirit."

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

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

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

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

## 1 **2.5 Church and church communion as an expression of the event of justifi-** 2 **fication**

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

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

16 60) Each local congregation, each church and church communion bears responsibility in its wit-  
 17 ness and service for the unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity of the church. According to  
 18 the understanding of the reformers, such responsibility is not only a matter for the church lead-  
 19 ership or ministers, but for the *tota ecclesia* and so for all members of the church, each in their  
 20 own way. What goes for the local congregation or an institutionally structured church goes also  
 21 for a church communion. The responsibility for unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity is a  
 22 matter for all members and churches of the *communio* and it remains their constant task. Ac-  
 23 cordingly the study document on the church records in its statement of the characteristic attrib-  
 24 utes of the church of faith the tasks which ensue in each case from its confession (cf. CJC I.  
 25 2.3). In this way it makes it clear that it is intrinsic to the church's mission to make the nature of  
 26 the church, grounded in the action of the triune God, able to be experienced in the world.

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

32 Amongst the most controversial questions preoccupying churches and church communions world-wide  
 33 and frequently testing them to breaking point, there are currently on the one hand the topic of the ordina-

1 tion of women, on the other the evaluation and legal position of same-sex relationships in general and of  
2 ministers in particular. The disagreements reveal how loyalty to the gospel is displayed in very different  
3 ways. These conceal differing assessments of the developments of modernity and differing biblical her-  
4 meneutics. Here too the decisive starting-point for common reflection must be the event of justification.

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

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

27 64) In the study document *The Church of Jesus Christ*, the CPCE churches explain together  
28 their understanding of the church and the significance of the ordained ministry for the being of  
29 the church. The requirement to let the nature of the church be made concrete in witness and  
30 service points to the need for further development of the already existing structures for this task  
31 in the shape of the general assembly, the council, the advisory groups, the doctrinal discus-  
32 sions, and the contacts and joint work at congregational level.

### 1 **3 CHALLENGES: Verbindlichkeit – Reception – Catholicity**

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

#### 6 **3.1 Verbindlichkeit**

7 66) The claim *that* the Leuenberg Agreement is binding can only be truly understood if it is sim-  
8 ultaneously explained *how* the Leuenberg Agreement is binding or *what* in the Leuenberg  
9 Agreement has binding force. What is binding is the declaration of church communion between  
10 previously separated traditions, which now recognise themselves in their mutual otherness as a  
11 true expression of the one church of Jesus Christ and express this by granting one another pul-  
12 pit and table fellowship, and in this way are church together <sup>1</sup>.

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

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<sup>1</sup> Note regarding the notion of "Verbindlichkeit": This German term conveys the obligatory character (the authority) of an agreement, of a mutual engagement, in this case of a declaration of communion. It is a matter of the new bond which now exists between the partners, a bond of trust which goes beyond the solely formal or juridical dimension. The Latin *obligare* – from the verb *ligare* (to bind) – and the derived noun *obligation* cannot be used in English or in French, where these expressions have another meaning today. The original meaning is only found in rare expressions, sometimes from another age, such as *noblesse oblige*. One could certainly talk of "authority" to express this new reality so long as we remember that the root of "authority" is on the one hand "author" but even more the Latin verb *augere*: to grow. One could speak of "mutual accountability", but this does not express the full meaning of the term "Verbindlichkeit". We use in consequence this German word and sometimes "authority" to take account of this reality. This is a provisional solution. It is preferable to find an adequate English term. Perhaps the phrase "loyalty obligation", as described in John Kleinig's book "On loyalty and loyalties: the contours of a problematic virtue" (OUP 2014), pp. 193 ff, may be applicable.

1 synod (or the corresponding governing body of the respective church) of the signatory churches  
2 has sanctioned the articulation of these three elements. It has declared the Agreement and the  
3 CPCE which emerged from it to be binding and consequently has committed itself to a special  
4 ecumenical model of unity. This model of unity, which today is often described as “unity in rec-  
5 onciled diversity,” has been taken up in a similar way in other ecumenical processes.

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

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

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

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

1 where this is expressed and can be verified. Other declarations of church communion put it in  
2 much the same way.

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

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

21 73) This is clarified by the example of the reference to scripture. It is universally maintained that  
22 scripture is binding and has authority. The question of *how* and *why* it is binding is crucial, how-  
23 ever. The classic reply of the Reformers states: it is binding in so far as and because it testifies  
24 to the gospel: the action of God *pro nobis* that has taken place in the Incarnation, Cross and  
25 Resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is not the letter of scripture that is binding but the gospel pro-  
26 claimed in it. Similar considerations apply to the confessional documents, which are not binding  
27 as juridical texts, but because as *norma normata* they provide the context within which the *nor-*  
28 *ma normans*, the gospel, is to be applied without restriction in a new situation. It is thus that our  
29 individual churches are shaped and structured. The method of the Agreement and its claim to  
30 *Verbindlichkeit* is directly analogous to these fundamental decisions of our churches.

31 Numerous churches have problems with the authority of the texts of reference. The authority of scripture  
32 is of course generally emphasized. But it is widely disputed *how* this is to be expounded. This especially  
33 applies to the authority of the confessions and the confessional documents. These are often treated as  
34 historical texts whose authority has expired. Against this background many current difficulties may proba-

1 bly be explained, not least the difficulty of developing common authoritative doctrine. So the question of  
2 the authority of the Leuenberg Agreement leads directly to unresolved questions within the individual  
3 churches. Ecumenical work proves to be an authentic mirror of the internal problems of our individual  
4 churches and acts as a strong stimulus to progress the discussion on the meaning and role of the  
5 Verbindlichkeit of texts of reference.

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

### 13 **3.2 Reception**

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

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

30 77) Such an event of ecumenical reception is closely comparable with similar events in church  
31 history, where local churches received the conclusions of supra-local synods and councils. Only  
32 reception at the grassroots lends a conciliar decision its concrete authority. Besides, doctrinal  
33 decisions – for example those of the first councils – have always had a dual role, both as the

1 starting-point and the end-point of reception. This applies also to the ecumenical movement,  
2 where what is to be received has often already been a reality on the ground for quite some time.

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

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

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

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

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

### 31 **3.3 Catholicity**

32 81) Since God's salvation is for the whole world, the church founded by him is an all-embracing  
33 (catholic) communion. The faithful have always shared in it on the grounds of their baptism.

1 Catholicity is, alongside unity, holiness, and apostolicity, a characteristic mark of the church of  
2 Jesus Christ. The one church is based on the promise of an all-embracing communion of all  
3 people. Catholicity means a border-crossing existence as church in common that transcends all  
4 confessional, ethnic, linguistic, and national boundaries (cf. Gal. 3:28). Only the awareness of  
5 catholicity lends meaning to every ecumenical endeavour.

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

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

23 84) Catholicity is a theological challenge for the CPCE churches. Their model of unity is an in-  
24 novation not least in relation to the shaping of catholicity. Much has happened in the past dec-  
25 ades. It needs however to be consolidated theologically.

26 a) Traditionally in many churches catholicity is guaranteed through the exercise of the office of  
27 bishop and the synods of bishops which result from it. The churches of the CPCE emphasise  
28 that church leadership is exercised in personal, collegial and communal ways (see CJC I. 2.  
29 5.1.1). At the same time a special significance is attached to the leadership of synods, even in  
30 those churches that value the personal office of bishop. In this respect the question arises as to  
31 whether there should also be synodal structures at the level of the CPCE as a whole.

32 b) In order to preserve their unity, churches are endowed with a church order. This describes  
33 and orders primarily the mutual spiritual commitment in the diverse areas of local church life and  
34 is to be distinguished from mere administrative regulation. The development of a “discipline” in

1 the Reformed tradition from the beginning did in no way imply a bureaucratic administration, but  
2 a spiritual discipline, an ecclesiastical order, on the basis of which ministers accept obligations  
3 at their ordination in the same way as they do in relation to the confessions of faith. For the  
4 CPCE the question arises whether initiatives towards a common church order are not necessary  
5 to promote the catholicity of the CPCE *ad intra*.

6 A church order does not pertain to the *esse* but to the *bene esse* of the church. It is therefore not  
7 necessary to the same degree as the celebration of Word and Sacrament in accordance with  
8 the gospel. But even the *bene esse* needs careful attention by the churches. The lack of a con-  
9 stitution or *discipline* (in the Reformed sense of the word), that is a spiritual order, leads not in-  
10 frequently to an excessive amount of bureaucratic regulation.

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

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

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

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

30 86) The capacity for a resolutely practised catholicity *ad intra* is decisive for the ecumenical  
31 plausibility of the CPCE model of unity and for its ability to bring this model of unity into discus-  
32 sion with other Christian churches.

## 4 RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCRETE STEPS FORWARD

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

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

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

### 4.1 Church communion as a communion in worship

#### 4.1.1 Communion in worship and catholicity

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

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

92) It cannot be the point to eliminate differences solely because there are differences. But it is the point to change the character of the differences. From church-dividing divergences they must become expressions of richness in legitimate diversity. The authors of the LA have

1 achieved this in respect of the historical anathemas. This must go further, so that no divergence  
2 may put communion in worship into question afresh.

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

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

27 95) It remains the constant task of the CPCE to bring to expression the reality of being church  
28 that is shared by the local congregation and the wider church. Serving this end are the general  
29 assembly, the council and the office staff as well as all other areas of work in the CPCE. The  
30 representation of the shared reality of being church requires better visibility. In this way, new  
31 ground is broken, although in church history in other contexts there are some pointers to the  
32 solidarity of independent churches, as for example the autocephalous tradition which may be  
33 traced back to early church tradition.

1 96) In this sense the understanding of unity as a worshipping community is the hermeneutical  
2 principle of all the work of the CPCE. This gives rise to and is decisive for communion in doc-  
3 trine, communion in witness and service, communion in growing formation and communion in  
4 the world-wide oecumene. As it realises communion in worship, the CPCE is *one* church in rec-  
5 onced diversity. It is crucial and should be a matter of course that the CPCE churches under-  
6 stand themselves collectively as *one* church and express this view clearly.

#### 7 **4.1.2 The common celebration of word and sacrament**

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

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

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

18 On special occasions, there should be shared services of Word and Sacrament between CPCE churches.

19 The “Leuenberg Sunday” in the middle of March and its design should be given greater attention, for in-  
20 stance through pulpit exchange, the invitation of preachers from other CPCE churches, meeting with  
21 neighbouring CPCE congregations.

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

25 The CPCE should have a stronger focus on church music and make contact with the European Confer-  
26 ence for Protestant Church Music.

27 99) The experience of communion in worship implies something more than existing church  
28 communion. It implies that new challenges are to be recognized and confronted. In more and  
29 more countries in Europe, new congregations are arising, which are often closely related to the  
30 Lutheran, Reformed, United and Methodist traditions, and consciously appeal to these traditions,  
31 but have scarcely any contact with CPCE churches. These are often new ethnic congregations,  
32 usually of migrants, or (neo)Pentecostal groups. Diversity here is experienced particularly in  
33 spirituality and in the forms of piety and worship, but can also rest on theological decisions.

1 100) Since, according to the understanding of the CPCE, church communion is based on com-  
2 munion in worship, it is also part of the ecumenical task of the CPCE to encourage the celebra-  
3 tion of common worship with churches outside the CPCE as well, for instance in the tradition of  
4 the ecumenical “Prayers for a city”. From the experience of such services there can come a new  
5 impetus to the opening of theological dialogue, which ultimately could lead to an extension of the  
6 church communion.

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

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

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

18 The CPCE themes and documents must play a stronger role in ministerial education. Students should be  
19 encouraged to complete parts of their studies (eg. a semester spent in a foreign country) in training insti-  
20 tutions of other CPCE churches. Parts of the service of a trainee minister should also be able to be com-  
21 pleted abroad in other CPCE churches. The CPCE church communion should also be referred to in for-  
22 mularies of ordination; ministers from other CPCE churches should take part in ordinations, if possible.

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

## 26 **4.2 Church communion as a communion in doctrine**

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

30 104) The programme of work followed up to now has proved its worth: project and working  
31 groups authorized by the CPCE council work up a first draft for consultation, based on the doc-  
32 trinal discussion initiated by them. The council then sends it to the member churches for their  
33 opinions. Based on these opinions the project or working group in each case then reworks the

1 text, which is presented to the general assembly for final discussion and resolution. With the  
2 acceptance of the final text by the general assembly the result of the doctrinal discussion is sent  
3 to the individual churches for reception and, if applicable, realization.

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

13 106) The conclusions of doctrinal discussion reflect in each case a definite position in the theo-  
14 logical debate. In not a few cases this debate has developed further and new insights and new  
15 formulations of the questions have arisen. It is an obvious step to then update earlier conclu-  
16 sions of discussions, to rewrite them in the context of the development of theological under-  
17 standing and new problems, or to produce a complete remake.

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

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

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

26 - Ethical differences and church communion (legitimate diversity or divergence sufficient to sep-  
27 arate churches).

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

30 - Community building and new forms of being church.

31 - Religious socialization and catechesis in the family.

- 1 - Baptism and Baptismal Practice (in continuation of the discussions on the practice of Baptism  
2 (cf. LA 39) and in reception of the talks with churches of the Baptist tradition).
- 3 - Preconditions for participation in the Lord's Supper.
- 4 - The ordination of women (in continuation of the study document Ministry, Ordination, Episcopate,  
5 §§ 58-60).
- 6 - Confirmation and the Act of Confirming.
- 7 The two first themes should have priority.

### 8 **4.3 Church communion as a communion evolving in shape**

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

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

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

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

31 113) Church communion lives on the readiness for conciliarity (cf. § 80). So the general assem-  
32 bly stimulates *conciliar processes* which have central significance for the realization of church

1 communion. These include in particular the doctrinal discussions and theological study projects,  
2 which serve the deepening of communion. Discussion takes place on the basis of the docu-  
3 ments, and they are finally accepted by the general assembly. Even if this does not happen  
4 through a vote by synod representatives the documents serve nevertheless to clarify the posi-  
5 tion of the CPCE and its orientation in mutual commitment, both within the CPCE and with ex-  
6 ternal bodies.

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

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

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

17 117) In any change in the ordering of churches, express account should be taken of the Leuen-  
18 berg Agreement and the existing church communion in the CPCE. Churches which have up  
19 until now contented themselves with some administrative regulations, should consider the intro-  
20 duction of a church order in which the mutual spiritual commitments in the various areas of  
21 church life are described and ordered.

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

30 119) Parallel with the meetings of the Protestant synod members the structural networking in the  
31 CPCE would be strengthened both through encounters at the level of the congregation and  
32 through regular meetings of the church leaders of the member churches.

#### 1 **4.4 Church communion as a communion of witness and service in the Eu-** 2 **rope of today**

3 120) The Leuenberg Agreement is a document of the “Reformation churches in Europe”. There-  
4 fore it is a matter of course that these churches also relate their common witness and their  
5 common service to the particular situation of Europe. Europe is their geographical, cultural and  
6 political context. So Europe, and questions about Europe after its division was overcome in  
7 1989, and the new fields of political and social action opened up as a result, have become a  
8 central theme.

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

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

30 123) The CPCE member churches cannot ignore the fact that they give witness and service in  
31 the midst of these critical developments: the witness of the gospel calls and commits us to ser-  
32 vice for justice, peace and the integrity of creation. Christians and churches in Europe should  
33 build a network of reconciliation and commitment to the deprived and needy. They will do every-  
34 thing in their power to create and reinforce signs of reconciliation and help in need. Only in this

1 way can they encourage among politicians responsible action in crisis and solidarity with those  
2 who are affected by flight, migration and impoverishment.

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

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

## 18 **5 CHURCH COMMUNION AS A COMMON ECUMENICAL OBLIGA-** 19 **TION**

20 126) The CPCE regards its understanding of unity and its realization as a service to the general  
21 ecumenical movement (cf. LA 46f.). As demonstrated in section 1.4, the communion achieved  
22 by it has in many places resulted in substantial progress towards unity. This process, however,  
23 as is made clear in section 3.3, is not to be regarded as complete. The model of church com-  
24 munion that is experienced in the CPCE has, to a greater extent than many other ecumenical  
25 models, already brought about visible results and appears for that reason to be particularly fruit-  
26 ful. The Leuenberg Agreement commits the CPCE to go further and introduce its understanding  
27 of the unity of the church into the worldwide ecumenical conversation. The interconfessional  
28 work of the CPCE will also be defined by this in future, particularly in respect of the longstanding  
29 contacts with the Anglican and Orthodox churches, as well as the European Baptist Federation.  
30 The series of consultations begun in 2013 with the Roman Catholic Church has special signifi-  
31 cance, since the focus of interest here is on the effectiveness and loadbearing capacity of the  
32 church communion model.

1 127) The ecumenical obligation resulting from the understanding of church communion in the LA  
2 must be assumed not least in relation to new church movements like neo-pentecostalism and  
3 neo-evangelicalism inside and outside the churches of the CPCE. The encounter with such cur-  
4 rents shows that ecumenical and ethical challenges are similar for many churches. The re-  
5 sponse to such challenges is proof of the capacity for ecumenical action in the conditions of the  
6 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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

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

29 130) The same is true for the world communions. Some churches are members of both the Lu-  
30 theran World Federation (LWF) and the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC).  
31 Others are members of only one of these two world communions, or of the World Methodist  
32 Council (WMC). Others again belong to none of them. The loyalties of individual member  
33 churches to such world communions should not be played off against each other. The ecumeni-  
34 cal model of the CPCE could well enrich the cooperation of the LWF, the WCRC, the WMC and

1 other world communions on the basis of the church communion already practised in the CPCE.  
2 The ways found in the CPCE to attain church communion in different contexts and between dif-  
3 ferent confessional formularies can also give promise on a global level. The member churches  
4 of the CPCE can bring their experiences to the dialogue between the world federations, so that  
5 the theological results already achieved may bear further fruit.

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

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

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

18

## 19 **Appendix: Participants in the study process**

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

21 Prof. Dr. Michael Beintker, Münster (Co-chair)

22 Prof. Dr. André Birmelé, Strasbourg (Co-chair)

23 Dr. Pawel Gajewski, Florence

24 Prof. Dr. Bo Kristian Holm, Aarhus

25 Prof. Dr. Leo Koffeman, Amsterdam

26 Prof. Dr. Friederike Nüssel, Heidelberg

27 Dr. Szilárd Wagner, Sopron

28 Staff member: Prof. Dr. Martin Friedrich, Vienna

### 29 **B) Participants in the consultation in Elspeet, 5th – 8th February 2015**

- 1 Superintendent Dr. Rainer Bath, United Methodist Church, Germany
- 2 Prof. Dr. Michael Beintker, Initial working group
- 3 Prof. Dr. André Birmelé, Initial working group
- 4 Revd Jana Daneckova, United Methodist Church of South – Central Europe
- 5 Revd Dr. Jan-Dirk Döhling, Evangelical Church of Westphalia
- 6 Prof. Dr. Martin Friedrich, CPCE
- 7 Revd Dr. Pawel Gajewski, Waldensian Church
- 8 Jan Gross, CPCE
- 9 Prof. Dr. Bo Kristian Holm, Initial working group
- 10 Revd Fleur Houston, United Reformed Church
- 11 Provost Kirsten Jørgensen, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark
- 12 Vice President Christian Krieger, UEPAL
- 13 Revd Dr Tomi Karttunen, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland
- 14 Prof. Dr. Leo Koffeman, Protestant Church in the Netherlands
- 15 Revd Steffie Langenau, Church of Lippe
- 16 Revd Dr. Christopher Meakin, Church of Sweden
- 17 Prof. Dr. Michael Nausner, Evangelical Methodist Church of South – Central Europe
- 18 Prof. Dr. Friederike Nüssel, Initial working group
- 19 General Secretary Dr. Arjan Plaisier, Protestant Church in the Netherlands
- 20 Revd Dr. Thomas-Andreas Pöder, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Estonia
- 21 Dr. Thomas Schaack, Ev.-Luth. Church in North Germany
- 22 Revd Dr. Otto Schäfer, Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches
- 23 Revd Dr. Susanne Schenk, Ev.- Luth. Church in Württemberg
- 24 Revd Laurent Schlumberger, United Protestant Church of France
- 25 Anikó Schütz Bradwell, Church of Scotland
- 26 Revd Dirk Stelter, Ev.-luth. Church in Hannover
- 27 Revd Dr. Christoph Theilemann, Ev. Church of Berlin-Brandenburg-Schlesische Oberlausitz

- 1 Revd Einar Tjelle, Church of Norway
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- 12 Prof. Dr. Friederike Nüssel, Heidelberg
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- 14 Prof. Dr Thomas-Andreas Pöder, Tallinn
- 15 Revd Dr. Susanne Schenk, Ulm/Tübingen
- 16 Revd Anikó Schütz Bradwell, Edinburgh
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