

COMMUNION AND MISSION

A Report from the Australian Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue on the Theology of Church

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Foreword

The members of the Australian Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue are privileged to present this report, *Communion and Mission*, for consideration by our two churches and the wider ecumenical community.

Communion and Mission is our fourth report to the churches. Since our first meeting in April 1975, we have produced the 'Agreed Statement on Baptism' (1977); *Sacrament and Sacrifice* (1985); and *Pastor and Priest* (1989). Almost inevitably, then, the direction of our dialogue journey led us to the topic which has occupied our attention for the past five years: the doctrine of church in the light of our two traditions.

Early in our work we decided to address the doctrine of church from the perspective of our mission in the world. There are many different ways in which we might have explored and developed this perspective. In the end we agreed to do so by way of the concept of 'communion'. The language of communion is biblical and traditional. It has proved to be fruitful in other ecumenical discussions.

We are aware that in this document we are using the word 'communion' in a way which differs from its use in our local congregations, where 'communion' is commonly understood to refer only to eucharistic Communion. We hope that our work will help to introduce our congregations to a wider understanding of communion.

We hope, furthermore, that our approach to the theology of church, with its starting-point and dynamic in the communion and mission of the Triune God, will be of help to our churches as they struggle with current questions concerning God, God's mission, the unity of the church, and the place of the church in God's purposes for the world.

We have found a large measure of agreement in our theology of church. We have come to understand and appreciate better the riches of each other's tradition. We know that we need the best of both traditions. We are, however, aware of significant issues which still divide us. Two of the most important of these concern the office of Bishop of Rome, and the doctrine of justification by faith. We look forward to addressing these matters.

Those of us who have participated in this Dialogue testify that it has been a journey of faith. In meeting to discuss communion we have experienced communion. We have met each other before God, and we have known the gracious presence of God at the heart of our gatherings. We believe that this experience is but a promise and foretaste of what we will all share when, by God's grace, our churches are brought into full communion.

With hearts full of thanks to God for the blessings of our journey thus far, we offer this report to our churches.

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Communion and Mission

I. Communio: A Developing Understanding

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR CHURCH AS *COMMUNIO*

1. Communion between God and creation, particularly between God and people, is one of the fundamental themes of the Bible. According to the biblical record, the story of human existence is the story of the creation, disintegration, and renewal of the relationship between God and God's creatures. Man and woman were created in God's image, to be in communion with their Creator, with one another, and with creation (Gen 1:26,27; Gen 2:15). But human sin broke the relationship between God and people. It brought disintegration to human communities and caused men and women to live in discord with the environment (Gen 3;4;11:1-9; Rom 8:18-22).

2. Sin, however can never thwart God's creative purposes. God set in motion his plan to deal with sin and its effects by selecting one nation to be his special people. Although this nation, Israel, was repeatedly unfaithful to God and the covenant, God nevertheless continued to send prophets to call them to return to the covenant relationship (Hos 6:1; Amos 5:4). When Israel faced national defeat and mass deportation, God promised to make a new covenant with his people (Jer 31:31-34), to bring the Gentiles to worship him (Isaiah 60), and to establish universal peace (Isa 65:17-25). God announced that the age of the fulfilment of these promises would be inaugurated by the coming of the servant of God, the righteous king (Isaiah 49 and 53).

3. The promised era began with the birth of Jesus Christ. He is Immanuel, 'God with us' (Matt 1:23). Jesus was without sin; nevertheless he entered fully into the human situation to redeem people from the power of sin and give them a new relationship with God (1 Pet 2:24; 1 John 2:1,2). Early in his ministry Jesus called twelve apostles who, together with the Christian prophets, became the foundation of the church, the new people of God (Eph 2:20). The church was foreshadowed in the community of disciples who gathered around their Lord to hear the good news of the kingdom of God (Luke 8:1-3). The table fellowship which they had with their Lord – and with the poor and outcasts of society (Luke 15:1,2) – was a foretaste of the feast to come (Matt 8:11; Luke 16:19-24). When the Lord celebrated the Last Supper with his disciples they became participants in the new covenant in his blood. Thus they received the blessings of the messianic age, which had been promised by the prophets (Matt 26:28; Jer 31:31-34).

4. Throughout his life on earth the Lord Jesus was God's Suffering Servant, obedient to his Father even unto death (Phil 2:6-8). Jesus, the Lamb of God who bears the sin of the world (John 1:29), suffered the full consequences of humanity's broken relationship with God (Matt 27:46; 2 Cor 5:21). On the cross was revealed the depth of God's love: the Father gave up his Son (John 3:16; Rom 8:32). By suffering and dying — the righteous for the unrighteous — Jesus dealt with sin and removed the barrier which stood between people and God (Matt 27:51; Eph 2:14-18). And by raising the obedient Son from death and naming him Lord, the Father declared that reconciliation has been accomplished (John 19:30; Rom 4:25).

5. After Easter the Lord commissioned and sent the disciples to be his witnesses and to begin the apostolic task of proclaiming to all nations the forgiveness of sins and new life in Christ's name (Acts 2:38,39). Christ sent his Spirit

upon them to be their comforter, counsellor, teacher, and guide. Empowered by the Spirit, the disciples went into the world and proclaimed the good news: 'God has reconciled you to himself; we beg you, be reconciled to God!' (2 Cor 5:18-21; Col 1:20).

6. The reconciliation effected by Christ is realised by the work of the Spirit, who creates *koinonia* through the gospel, proclaimed in word and sacrament. *Koinonia*, often translated as 'communion' or 'fellowship' (2 Cor 13:14), 'usually signifies a relationship based on participation in a shared reality' (ARCIC 11,1 [12]). Its basic verbal form means 'to share', 'to participate', 'to have part in', 'to have something in common', or 'to act together'. Through the gospel the Spirit calls people to faith in Christ. In the sacrament of baptism the Spirit incorporates believers into Christ's body and grants them a share in his death and resurrection (1 Cor 12:13; Rom 6:3-11). Fellowship with Christ also brings fellowship with the Father (1 John 1:3) and with the Spirit (2 Cor 13:14). And all those who are in fellowship with Christ have fellowship with each other as members of the one body (Rom 12:5; Gal 3:28). This fellowship of believers finds expression in common faith and worship, and in the sharing of meals and resources (Acts 2:44-47; 2 Cor 8:1-15). Above all, the gift of fellowship, anticipated in the fellowship meals of Christ, is expressed and renewed in the eucharist, as the Apostle Paul teaches:

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing (*koinonia*) in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing (*koinonia*) in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. (1 Cor 10:16,17)

7. The New Testament portrays communion or fellowship in a variety of images. For example, the church is the people of God (1 Pet 2:9-10), a flock (John 10:14; Acts 20:28,29; 1 Pet 5:3-4), a vine (John 15:5), a bride (Rev 21:2; Eph 5:22-33; cf Gen 2:21-25) and a temple (Eph 2:19-22). St Paul emphasises that the church is the body of Christ. Individual believers are members or parts of Christ's body (1 Cor 6:15; 1 Cor 12:27; Rom 12:4,5). These images and others seek to express the believers' intimate relationship with the Triune God and with one another in Christ. The reality to which these various images point is the shared life with the Father and the Son through the Spirit.

8. The fellowship of believers is still, however, impaired by sin. The writings of the New Testament do not hide the strife and the divisions in the first Christian communities. Such breakdowns in unity are recognised as hindrances to the acceptance of the gospel by others (eg 1 Cor 14:23-25). Since we are called to unity in Christ, we need to encourage each other to live in such a way as to maintain that unity (Eph 4:3). We thank God that already now in the Lord's Supper we experience a foretaste of the perfect communion of heaven (Luke 22:30). In the age to come, God will continue to live among his people. They shall see God face to face, and with the hosts of heaven and all creation they shall join in endless praise (Rev 21:3-4; 5:11-14). Then the communion of creation with God and of creation with itself will be made perfect.

THE CHURCH AS *COMMUNIO*: THE FIRST MILLENNIUM

9. The picture of church which emerges from the biblical testimony is that there is only one church even though there are many churches. A continuing question which the early Christians had to face was how the many churches could possibly constitute one church. A key to interrelating the one church and the many churches lies in the concept of church as communion. Just as the Trinity is one, so the church, even though it consists of many churches, is nevertheless one. The single church, conscious from the beginning of its oneness in the Holy Spirit, spread as the word of the Lord grew and the Spirit created local congregations. The earlier letters of Paul bear strong witness to his sense that it is truly one and the same church that is present in Thessalonica, Corinth, and Rome. And the letter to the Ephesians teaches that there is only one church in the whole world because 'there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all' (Eph 4:4-6).

10. The oneness of the church, given by the Spirit and expressed primarily as 'one body', is also seen in what Christian communities have in common: faith, sacramental celebration, and witness. This 'having the same things in common' is the foundation of the concept of *communio* (Acts 2:42-47). Because Christians and their churches share essential things in their life in Christ, they are 'in communion' with one another, and thus constitute one body, one church. In non-essential matters, however, it is not necessary for the unity of the church that Christians have everything in common (Acts 15:28).¹

11. In the usage of the early churches, *communio* became a term denoting the unity among Christian communities all

over the world. 'Peace', 'love', 'harmony', and 'concord' were also used as synonyms of *communio* or *koinonia*. These terms were used interchangeably in reference to the community of the churches.

12. In many of the Fathers the *communio sanctorum* referred to the sharing in holy things (*sancta*), that is, faith and the sacraments, especially the eucharist. Other Fathers tended to interpret *communio sanctorum* as the common life with the saints (*sancti*), that is, with the confessors, martyrs, and baptised faithful.

13. Another expression of communion involved the bishops of the sister churches meeting in synods to formulate commonly-held apostolic beliefs. The more widespread the concerns, the more broadly-based were the synods. Eventually, local synods were replaced by provincial synods. In the year 325, at Nicea, the church held its first ecumenical council (literally, a council representing the 'whole wide world').

14. The challenge of a variety of heresies was a major factor in moving the church to establish the canon, or list of sacred writings as the norm of faith, and to underscore the role of bishops in articulating the apostolic faith which lived in their churches. The essential condition for being in the communion of the church was to be in communion with one's local bishop, which meant professing the faith of the church as it was taught by the bishop.² Profession of this faith was required when a person entered the Christian community by baptism. Perseverance in the same faith was a condition for sharing the eucharist which the bishop celebrated for his church.

15. The doctrinal controversies and heresies of the fourth and fifth centuries presented the churches with the continuing challenge of maintaining communion among themselves. Indeed, the seven ecumenical councils from Nicea to Second Constantinople are, apart from their obvious doctrinal significance, evidence of monumental efforts on the part of all of the churches to remain in communion with one another.

16. One necessary component in the concept of *communio* was oneness of faith; another was the sacramental element. Baptism in the Triune name created a people who had a common origin, a common faith, a common calling, and a common hope. Baptismal communion, together with eucharistic communion, furnished the sign and proclaimed the reality of communion in the church. Participation in the eucharist and ecclesiastical communion were virtually interdependent. Thus Christian faith and its sacramental expression were the essential bonds which linked the bishops, and through them the many local churches, in the communion of the one church.³

17. *Communio* in the eucharist was also the visible expression of the bond that united the Christians of a local church with their bishop and with one another. Thus communion could be expressed in terms of faith and of sacramental life, and also in terms of evolving ecclesial structures. But the early churches had developed no formal theology of *communio*. History presents it to us as being above all a reality lived from day to day in the constant give and take of a universal and ordered communion of believers.

18. The bishops established and maintained the links between one local church and another. Every bishop, especially the metropolitans, kept a list of churches in the whole Christian world with which they were in communion. Such a list served as a register of addresses to which letters of communion could be sent and from which such letters could be accepted. An incoming letter of communion was valid only if it came from a bishop whose name appeared on the list. These letters of communion or peace were, in fact, a further sign of ecclesial communion, intimately connected as they were with eucharistic communion. Bishops issued letters of communion so that Christians travelling outside their own country could have access to the eucharist and to hospitality in other churches.⁴

19. The participation of local churches in the communion of churches was given expression by the bishop's links with the episcopate as a whole, and particularly in his relationships with the oldest churches. During the first five centuries the church of Rome gradually became more prominent among the churches. It intervened in the life of distant churches, took sides in theological controversies, was consulted by other bishops on doctrinal and moral questions, and sent delegates to distant councils. The church of Rome came to be regarded as a kind of final court of appeal as well as the focus of unity for the worldwide communion of churches.⁵ A local church which was in communion with Rome was considered to be in communion with the whole church.⁶

20. Sometimes, ecclesial communion and hence participation in the eucharist was severed by excommunication, that is, the breaking-off of relations. Christians who were guilty of grave offences against the faith (heresy), or against church unity (schism), or who were living scandalous lives, or were creating public controversies, were excommunicated until they repented and were reconciled with the church by their bishop. The severing of relations

meant that the excommunicated church or person was first of all excluded from eucharistic communion. Re-instatement into the community of the one church was expressed primarily by readmission to the eucharist in churches already in communion.⁷

21. In these various ways, then, the *communio* of which Paul wrote (1 Cor 1:9; 10:16) was given enduring and living expression. However, from the sixth century to the end of the first millennium, the churches began to go through a series of political and structural developments which shifted emphases away from earlier understandings of *communio*. Gradually, and largely as a result of the feudal context of local churches, the unity of faith came to be expressed in ways which placed more emphasis on legal structuring.

22. By the end of the seventh century (the end of the patristic period and the transition to the middle ages) the church had long since ceased to be a marginalised sub-group in society. Furthermore, as the church became more immersed in the feudal society and culture of its day, the civil structures began to impress themselves on the structures, modes of organisation, and leadership in the church. As the church interacted more vigorously with the mainstream of society, some of society's ways of organising itself began to overshadow the dynamisms of lived communion and their further institutional expressions. The tragic schism of 1054 between the eastern and western churches was a striking symptom of the loss of a sense of lived communion as a predominant characteristic of relationships among the churches.

23. The schism of 1054 also signalled the beginning of a number of developments in the churches of the west which would make the expression of communion even more difficult to sustain: the growth and development of national church traditions without a corresponding growth and development of effective communication among the churches; competitive theologising among various schools of scholastic theologians; a decline in the consistency and quality of training of candidates for ordained ministry; and Rome's tendency to centralise institutional authority as a means of promoting unity among the churches and addressing areas in need of reform. These factors and others contributed further to an understanding of church unity which depended more on structured church order than on the different dimensions of lived *communio* which, in the earliest centuries of their existence, had reminded the churches of their oneness in the Lord.

COMMUNIO: THE LUTHERAN REFORMATION

24. Church communion in its visible expressions was further ruptured at the time of the Reformation. The evangelical princes, pastors, and people believed that the gospel was not as central as it should be in the faith and life of the church. Since the bishops seemed unwilling to correct abuses in the churches, the Lutherans formed regional churches which were outside the jurisdiction of Rome.

25. The break with Roman ecclesial authority posed serious theological problems for Luther and his followers. Can a believer be in communion with God while not in communion with the church of Rome? How is the loss of communion with the church of Rome related to communion with the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church? How is communion with the church catholic to be recognised and expressed? For the recognition and expression of visible communion between churches, which matters are essential and fundamental and which are peripheral and optional? The response of the Lutheran confessional writings to these questions is sketched in the paragraphs which follow (26-31).

26. Convictions concerning *communio* form a fundamental stratum of the Lutheran Confessions. The church's confessional statements were produced primarily to avoid schism and to maintain unity among Christians — initially unity between the churches of the Reformation and the Roman Catholic Church, and subsequently among Lutherans themselves. The name given to the collected body of Confessional writings — the *Book of Concord* — is clear testimony to the confessional concern for *communio*. The documents themselves give expression to the faith by which people are bound together in the body of Christ, and lay the foundation for the practice of communion in the life of the church.

27. The primary Lutheran confession, the *Augsburg Confession*, presents the basic Lutheran approach to *communio*. This document was formulated in response to a plea from Emperor Charles V for the disputing sides 'to have all of us embrace and adhere to a single, true religion and live together in unity and in one fellowship and church, even as we are enlisted under one Christ' (*Augsburg Confession* Pref: 4). The document is conciliatory in tone. Its tendency to avoid polemics and its focus upon agreement between the churches underlines the Lutheran desire for fellowship

and unity.

28. The Lutheran understanding of *communio* flows from the central doctrine of justification by faith. That is to say, it flows from the gospel of God's gracious forgiveness of the sinner for Christ's sake. Those who believe this gospel have what it says: they are forgiven; they have peace with God; they are reconciled to God. This restoration of communion with God depends in no way upon human merit or rituals. It is rather God's gift to all who believe the gospel and look in faith to Christ. This truth is succinctly presented in Article 4 of the *Augsburg Confession*:

It is also taught among us that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God by our own merits, works, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith, when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness, as Paul says in Romans 3:21-26 and 4:5.

29. The Lutheran approach to *communio* is also bound up with its understanding of the church. In Article 7 of the *Augsburg Confession*, Lutherans confess 'that one holy Christian church will be and remain forever'. The article proceeds to define the church as 'the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel'. Here the gospel and the sacraments are held to be constitutive of the church. Where the gospel is preached purely and the sacraments are administered rightly, there is the church. Accordingly, Lutherans regard the gospel and sacraments as essential marks (*notae*) of the church. And since God has provided the office of the ministry for the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments, ministry is understood as being included within the marks of the church.

30. The marks of the church are, at the same time, the means by which God creates the church. Through these means of grace the Spirit of God 'calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the one true faith' (*Small Catechism* 2:6). This 'fellowship of faith and the Holy Spirit in people's hearts' (*Apology* 7:5), in turn glorifies God by preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments. Thus the church is the communion of God's people which the Spirit creates and sustains by means of word and sacraments.

31. The central concern, then, in the Lutheran approach to *communio* is the proclamation of the pure gospel and the right administration of the sacraments. Since *communio* is created by the Spirit through these means of grace, churches are called to be true to their apostolic foundations in the stewardship of these means. For Lutherans, the doctrine of justification in particular is used as a touchstone of faithfulness to the apostolic message. In the ongoing proclamation of the apostolic gospel there is an apostolic succession of mission and message, and communion with the one holy catholic church.

32. Where there is agreement concerning the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments, churches have the necessary basis for the visible expression of communion. According to Article 7 of the *Augsburg Confession*, nothing more is required: 'For the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments'. This focus on agreement in the gospel and sacraments gives freedom for diversity in such matters as the observance of ceremonies, church polity, or constitutional and cultural expressions. In the following three paragraphs the main ways in which the newly-formed Lutheran churches gave visible expression to their communion are briefly presented.

33. A major expression of *communio* in the Lutheran churches was the common confession of faith. The confessional writings of the Lutheran church are the product of intense and prolonged efforts by Lutherans to arrive at a common confession with other Christians and with one another. The *Formula of Concord* is an example of this process. This consensus statement is a product of protracted dialogue between various parties of Lutherans who were in conflict about key teachings. Between 1577 and 1580, 86 states and 8188 pastors and teachers accepted this statement. Today in many Lutheran churches, pastors are still required to subscribe to it. Communion for Lutherans flows from agreement in the confession of the gospel of Christ.

34. Lutherans also expressed and renewed their communion in Christ and the gospel through worship and praise. Under the leadership of those appointed to the public office of the ministry, Lutherans continued to gather for worship, and in particular to gather round the sacrament of the Lord's Supper to express and renew their communion. In order to ensure that this worship truly glorified God and gave faithful expression to the communion, which God's Spirit had established, Lutheran pastors were instructed to follow approved liturgies which clearly

expressed the good news of forgiveness in Christ. For example, Luther's *German Mass* of 1526 was widely used in the Lutheran churches. Congregational worship was enhanced through the singing of newly-written German hymns.

35. Those entrusted with the task of oversight (*episcopê*) played an important part in giving visible expression to the common faith and life of the Lutheran churches. The ancient practice of church visitation was the primary means by which leaders organized territorial churches and ensured that the teaching, worship, and life of pastors and people were in accordance with the gospel. Beginning in 1528, visitation commissions, composed of theologians and jurists, were appointed by territorial rulers and authorised to travel to major towns to interview pastors and leading laity.⁸ Martin Luther, appalled by the ignorance he found among both clergy and laity, wrote a small and large catechism, so that heads of families could instruct their households and pastors could nurture their people. The shorter catechism quickly became popular throughout Europe. Today its use in the church is one of the chief confessional signs of communion among Lutherans.

ROMAN CATHOLIC RECOVERY OF THE THEOLOGY OF *COMMUNIO*

36. The concept of *communio*, fundamental to the church's understanding of itself in its first seven centuries (see pars 9-23 above), was recovered and given a central place at Vatican II. The Council's theology of *communio* has five different but interrelated dimensions.⁹

36.1 The first mode and most fundamental dimension is that of **Trinitarian *communio***, that is, fellowship with God. This mode provides the ultimate understanding of the salvation which the church proclaims, namely, fullness of life with God. The eternal Father has created us to share in the divine life. The communion with God which is the purpose of all salvation history is realised in a unique way in history in Jesus Christ through his redemptive life, mission, suffering, death, and resurrection. That redemption, a unique historical and eschatological event in the broader history of salvation, is carried forward by the Holy Spirit who dwells in the church and in the hearts of believers. In that same Spirit humanity has access through Christ to the Father, so that we may have fellowship with God. In this sense the church is the icon of the Trinitarian fellowship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The church on earth is not itself the realisation of all human longing for the fullness of life and love in the community of love we call God, but it is the unique way to that fullness in God.

36.2 A second dimension, **eucharistic *communio***, involves participation in the life of God through word and sacrament. The second dimension also represents the main meaning of *communio* as found in Scripture and tradition, namely, participation in the good things of salvation conferred by God: the Holy Spirit, new life, love, the gospel, and above all the eucharist. The eucharist is the climax of the *communio* of the church. In addition, participation in the other sacraments, as well as participation in the word, contributes to the reality of *communio*. As eucharistic communion, the church is not merely the reflection of the Trinitarian communion, it also makes that communion present. It is simultaneously the sign and instrument of salvation and its fruit — the all-surpassing response to the fundamental human cry for fellowship with God.

36.3 The fellowship of local congregations founded on the eucharist is the third dimension: **ecclesial *communio***. The fellowship with God (Trinitarian *communio*) leads to fellowship among Christian communities in various localities (ecclesial *communio*). This latter form of *communio* also refers to the unique relationship which exists between the universal church and the local diocesan churches: the universal church exists only in the local churches and out of local churches, and the local churches exist only in the *communio* of the universal church. The universal church is not a federation of churches in which the diocesan churches can be considered as sub-departments. Rather, the relationship is a reflection of the oneness which Christ imparts to the church, and which finds expression in many churches.

36.4 The ***communio* of the baptised** is a fourth aspect of *communio*, which can also be understood as the *communio* of the faithful, as they collaborate in the priestly ministry and mission of Christ. 'Faithful', in this context, refers not simply to the laity, but to the organic and structured whole of the church which finds a common origin in baptism. Furthermore, the shared priestly dignity of the baptised precedes all differences of functions, charismatic gifts, ministries, and offices. The participation in the life of the church and its further participation in the mission of God which baptism calls forth, means that every baptised person is called to be actively involved in the mission of the church.

36.5 The *communio* which is the church represents a type, model, or pattern for the community of peoples and nations, as well as for the community between men and women, poor and rich. This fifth dimension of communion, which might be understood as *communio for the world*, refers to an understanding of the church as a ‘universal sacrament of salvation’. On this level of *communio* the church is a sacrament, that is, a sign and instrument of communion with God and of unity among all people. As such a sacrament, the church’s efforts for justice, peace, and liberty among peoples and nations, and the striving for a new civilisation of love, is a fundamental perspective for the church today.

In coming to appreciate the church as a ‘universal sacrament of salvation’, the Council understood the church not as a ‘separate realm of salvation’ but as a sign that points toward, and an instrument that joins forces with, God’s love and presence in the world. Through this level of the church’s *communio*, God wishes to renew everything in Christ, and so to prepare his final kingdom in which God will be ‘all in all’ (1 Cor 15:28).

II. Our Common Conviction: Communion with the Triune God through the Gospel

37. The discussions which have taken place in the light of our study of the historical developments in the concept of *communio*, have revealed important areas of convergence. Our consensus begins with the conviction that the communion we share in the church finds its origin in the ultimate relationship of love within the Trinity itself. Together we affirm that our heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ our Lord, reaches out to embrace us in eternal communion with himself and, even now, through the blessed work of the Holy Spirit, dwells in and creates unity in the church and in the hearts of believers. With Cyprian we confess that ‘the universal church is manifested as the people of God which is made one with the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit’.

38. A somewhat deeper exploration of the significance and the implications of our consensus seems to us to be desirable and possible. Such an investigation can form the foundation for further consideration of the nature of the church and its mission in the world, and point the way to a fuller expression of the communion we have as Roman Catholics and Lutherans.

PARTICIPATION OF CREATION IN THE TRINITARIAN COMMUNION

39. Out of the fullness of the Godhead the universe has come into being from the Father, in the Son, and through the Holy Spirit. God, who is a Trinity of Persons in loving communion, reached out to share this love and communion with God’s creatures. The creation of all things visible and invisible is grounded in the loving kindness and grace of the Triune God ‘from whom and through whom and in whom are all things’ (Rom 11:36).

40. The creation of human beings was a further expression of God’s limitless love. Man and woman were created in God’s image, to live in fellowship with their Creator. Thus God gave humankind the honour and dignity of participating in the divine life. The biblical witness makes known God’s desire to have personal communion with the people God had made so that they might respond in love and worship (Eph 1:11-14). The whole world, as the home of human beings, was blessed by God so that it might share in the beauty and the harmony of this relationship.

41. It is the testimony of God’s revelation and a fact of experience that human beings have not remained in the state of perfect communion with God. By misuse of their freedom they fall short of God’s glory (Rom 3:23) and turn away from God in pursuit of their own selfish desire for false independence, knowledge, and power. Thus, the human condition reveals estrangement from God’s purposes, rebellion against God’s will, and alienation from the Creator and from one another. The barriers which have been erected between person and person – barriers of pride, prejudice, and fear – are some of the sad effects of humanity’s estrangement from God. This estrangement gives rise to all kinds of oppressive and destructive behaviour (Rom 1:18-32). Indeed, the whole of creation has been affected: it is subject to frustration (Gen 3:17; Rom 8:20), and suffers exploitation and spoliation at the hands of humankind.

42. God pronounced judgment on those who rebel against the divine will. Yet God's will for the world and for the human race is ever one of grace, loving-kindness, and justice. God's saving will embraces all people, and in some way, the whole of creation. God demonstrates his loving will to save by continually reaching out in human history to re-establish fellowship with himself and to restore peace and harmony in creation.

43. In the fullness of time, God's gracious will to save manifested itself in Jesus Christ, in the universal redemption which he accomplished through the cross and resurrection, and in his gift of the Holy Spirit. Hence, the true understanding of God as Creator and his ultimate purposes for the world are finally to be found in Jesus Christ (Heb 1:1,2; Eph 1:9,10). Through the Word made flesh the Creator has identified himself with the human race and has redeemed it from the bonds of sin, corruption, and death. This redemption, however, relates to the whole of creation because all creation finds its origin, purpose, and end in Jesus Christ by whom and for whom all things were made. Through Christ, God has reconciled to himself all things 'in heaven and on earth ... by making peace through the blood of his cross' (Col 1:16,20). Thus, in Jesus Christ, God's intention of re-establishing loving communion between the creation and himself will be fulfilled, and the triumph of God's love will ultimately be revealed. Creation itself 'will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God' (Rom 8:21).

THE CHURCH BORN OF DIVINE COMMUNION

44. The divine plan for the restoration of communion between God and people involves the reconciliation of sinners, so that already in this life they have loving fellowship with God and rejoice in the hope of being in eternal communion with the Triune God in the life to come. The means of this reconciliation is the salvation which has been triumphantly accomplished through the redemptive life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ proclaimed in the gospel. Through this salvation God embraces all those whom Christ claims as his own in the fellowship of the church. This is the body of Christ, the fruit of his passion and death, which is united with him and through him with the Triune God. Joyfully the church acknowledges Jesus to be its Lord and lives under his reign as the holy people of God. They are holy through the perfect righteousness of Christ, who leads them to respond to God's self-giving love (Eph 3:16,17; 5:1).

45. This gathering of the holy people of God into communion with the Father through the Son is effected by the creative work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit carries on God's saving work so that all believers have access to the Father through Christ (Eph 2:18). The Spirit dwells in the church and in the hearts of each Christian as God's temple (1 Cor 3:16, 6:19). Through the Spirit the church is continually renewed until finally each believer is led into perfect, eternal union with Christ the Lord.

46. The church, as the communion of saints, does everything in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, because it has its very being in the saving union with God who has united human nature to himself in Jesus Christ. Thus, on the basis of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, we recognise that the church reflects the Trinitarian life (John 14:6; 17:23).

47. Summing up, we affirm that by virtue of the Father's creative activity, the Son's work of redemption, and the Spirit's sanctifying presence, the church has its origin in the Trinitarian communion and mission of God. Just as the Father created all things out of the fullness of the Godhead in the Son through the Spirit, so it was in the Son and through the Spirit that the Father chose all those gathered into his church to be his adopted sons and daughters, and brought them into fellowship with God. And it is in Christ through the Spirit that the Father is pleased finally to re-establish all things so that Christ may be head over everything for the church (Eph 1:22). In this way it is God's purpose once again to 'bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head' (Eph 1:10), and draw all those who are in Christ into eternal, blessed communion with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

COMMUNION THROUGH THE GOSPEL

48. The saving plan of the Triune God is, therefore, from beginning to end the revelation of divine love which gives itself unreservedly. The Son, who comes from the Father, revealed the coming reign of God through his whole earthly life and through his cross. Those who by the gift of the Spirit have been called together in Christian faith, have always understood that they are charged with proclaiming the good news of 'the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints' (Col 1:26).

49. Christian faith recognises that the love and mercy of God which is the content of the gospel has different forms of expression. Before all else, it is realised in the decision of divine graciousness and freedom on our behalf. This precedes all human initiative. It finds expression in the midst of our world and history in the life, death, and resurrection of the Word incarnate, who is ‘the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being’ (Heb 1:3). As Paul declares, ‘We proclaim Christ crucified ... Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God’ (1 Cor 1:23,24).

50. Already in the New Testament, the church gave the title ‘gospel’ to the narration of the Saviour’s life, death, and resurrection. This narration made it possible for later generations to share in the experience of the first disciples, seeing in Jesus the revelation of the Father. This same gospel has from the beginning found constant expression in the life of God’s people in the proclamation and teaching through which people in every age have met the gracious God in the depths of their need. Finally, the eucharistic celebration, through which those gathered in faith ‘proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes’ (1 Cor 11:26), is a meeting with the self-giving God announced in the gospel.

51. The proclamation of the gospel and the celebration of the eucharist are central to the church’s life in Christ. By these means the Spirit, who inspired the apostles and their associates to proclaim the gospel and put in writing the message of salvation, calls together the church in every age for the task of witnessing to the gospel. The same Spirit guides the church’s contemporary expressions of the gospel.

52. In making this common confession, we gratefully acknowledge the renewal which is taking place in each of our communions. The Second Vatican Council has brought to Catholics a deeper appreciation of the central place of the gospel in the church’s life. The Council points to ‘the announcing of the gospel of Christ’ as ‘eminent among the chief duties’ of the church’s pastors (*Christus Dominus*, 12; *Lumen Gentium*, 25). Looking back on the history of our divisions, Roman Catholics are able to recognise that the new awareness of the power of God at work through the proclaiming of the gospel which inspired the Reformation movement should have given rise, not to a hostile confrontation, but to a life-giving dialogue. Lutherans, for their part, have been encouraged to continue to value the eucharist as a visible, tangible form of the gospel, vital for the life of the church. With joy Lutherans receive the Catholic witness that the eucharistic celebration is pivotal in creating and sustaining the people of God,¹⁰ while Catholics likewise joyfully welcome the Lutheran witness to the centrality of the preaching of the gospel.

53. We thank God that our exploration of a theme so fundamental to the Christian faith - the place of the gospel in the life of the church – has resulted in a common understanding. Both our churches confess that the ultimate truth given to us in the Christian faith is the good news of God’s justifying mercy, the truth of the divine love which chooses us even before we take any initiative. Together we acknowledge the fundamental importance of the proclamation of the gospel. Together we appreciate the eucharist as visible gospel, vital for the life of God’s people. Through our common understanding we have come to recognise how profound is the communion in faith which already unites us.

THE MARKS OF COMMUNION

54. Both Roman Catholics and Lutherans are embraced in the ‘one, holy, catholic and apostolic church’ confessed in the Nicene Creed. Unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity flow from the very nature of the church as a communion in the mystery of Christ. We recognise, however, that these essential and constitutive marks do not have, in the history of the church, that completion which they will have in the church in the fullness of time. Therefore we live under the mandate to become an ever more-visible realisation of the true church – a goal that can never be finally reached within history.

Church Is One

55. The unity of the church is a gift of God: it is established by God’s definitive action through Christ (Eph 2:14-22), and maintained by the dynamic, unifying work of the Holy Spirit (*Lumen Gentium* 13; Eph 4:3-6). The church’s unity, which reflects the inclusive unity of the Trinity, is a sign of hope for humankind, a clear sign to our world that the apparently insuperable barriers which divide the world can be overcome. Unfortunately this is often not so, because of our human imperfection. Therefore, the unity of the church is a task of the church; it is to be worked at by a penitent church constantly in need of renewal.

Church Is Holy

56. The church is holy because to belong to God is to be holy and to be called to grow in holiness (*Lumen Gentium* 5). Such holiness does not result from human achievement but from God's gift and declaration. It is not our holiness, it is Christ's (Eph 5:26). Only insofar as we are in communion with Christ do we share his holiness. We are holy because of the imputation to us of Christ's holiness and because the Spirit leads us into a life of holiness (*Apology* 7 and 8:7,8). This same Spirit, in effecting our communion with God through Christ, is at work through word and sacraments to set God's people apart for service. Yet the church shares humanity's imperfections and suffers from them. Lutherans teach that the Christian is righteous and sinner at the same time (*simul justus et peccator*). Vatican II says that the church 'is at the same time holy and always in need of purification (*sancta simul et semper purificanda*), and incessantly pursues the path of penance and renewal' (*Lumen Gentium* 8).

Church Is Catholic

57. The catholicity of the church is confessed in the article of the Apostles' Creed concerning the *communio sanctorum*, the communion of saints. This phrase has come to mean, variously, the fellowship of the saints in heaven; the communion between them and the faithful who are the church on earth; and the communion of the two in their sharing of the holy things given by God to the church.

58. The catholicity of the church consists especially in this, that it lives under the divine mandate to preach the gospel to the whole world (Matt 28:19), for God 'desires everyone to be saved' (1 Tim 2:4) [see further pars 65-85 below]. The catholicity of the church involves both unity and diversity. The Triune God, who builds and sustains the church, is the source of the rich diversity of gifts with which the church is endowed (1 Cor 12:4-6). The Triune God calls us to a lived *communio* which unites humanity and respects the many cultures and various traditions which are the precious heritage of the church catholic.

Church Is Apostolic

59. The church, through the Holy Spirit, remains and must remain in continuity with its own origins. Apostolicity consists in a recognised continuity between the gospel community of the present day and that which gathered around Christ. Fundamental to this continuity are several God-given elements: apostolicity in doctrine; sacraments; and ministry. 'Apostolicity' should not be understood as an obligation to adhere to archaic forms. Gifted with the power of Christ's Spirit, the church does not lack the capacity to adapt its forms to the needs of different ages and cultures. From the beginning to the end, the church is one church. Time and history alter many of its historical and cultural aspects and its ways of doing things. But they do not affect what lies at the heart, that is, the witness of the apostles. This points to the task of continuing the mission of preaching the gospel and baptising all peoples. The apostles received this mission in the name of the church of all ages, and it belongs to the church to fulfil it in Christ's name.

III. Communion and the Life of the Church

COMMUNION AND THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

60. The church is by its very nature missionary, since it has its origin in the mission or sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit according to the eternal plan of the Father. The Son is sent from the Trinitarian communion to establish fellowship and peace between the world and God, and to put into effect God's plan for the ultimate unity of all people (Eph 1:10). The Holy Spirit who is sent to gather the body of believers into this communion, inspires the hearts of the faithful for participation in this mission.

61. The church, then, in its gathering in communion, in its preaching, and in its celebration of the sacraments, continues God's mission. The missionary church is the manifestation of God's saving mystery in the world; its purpose is to make participation in the divine communion available to all. The church exists to be a community of Jesus' disciples which is a visible, credible, and effective agent of the fullness of life which God wills for all. The Spirit of God uses the church as an effective sign through which people of all places, times, and cultures encounter the living Christ in their midst, and through Christ come to know the Father.

62. We gladly acknowledge our call to mission. We confess, however, that we have not always been faithful to our calling. Dispute and discord have hindered our witness. Yet, by God's grace the call and promise of the Lord remains. In each successive age the Spirit continues to call the church to be an effective sign of Christ's living presence. This gospel-centred life with its invitation to reconciliation is at the heart of the church's mission.

63. Lutherans and Catholics agree on the universal and salvific nature of the church's presence and action in the world. As the body of Christ, the church is used by God to proclaim the divine love through word and sacrament and to model that communion which is the product of the gracious work of the Holy Spirit. It is an essential part of the church's being to be sent out into the whole world on God's mission.

64. We agree, furthermore, that the church may properly be called 'a universal sacrament of salvation' (see par 36.5). This phrase speaks of the place and mission of the church in the total plan of God. It confesses that in Christ the church, in its human and historical reality, is a sign and instrument of communion with God and of unity among peoples of all nations, languages and cultures. It is the manifestation of the mystery of God's gracious purpose for the whole of humanity and of the divine plan to gather all things together under the headship of Jesus Christ (Eph 1:9-10). Accordingly, the church does not exist for its own sake, but it is God's servant in and for the world.

SACRAMENTS AND THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

65. Worship and liturgy are fundamental to the mission of the church. The interaction between God and people in liturgy is a source of ongoing repentance and renewal for God's people. Worship is the fount and summit of our life in communion with the Trinity and with each other. This fellowship is a foretaste of our future, the heavenly worship which includes the whole cosmos (Psalm 148). As a divine service in and for the world, worship energises the whole mission of the church; it empowers every aspect of the church's ministry to humanity and creation; and it enables the church to be a community of transformation 'for the life of the world'.

66. The nature of the church as sign and instrument of God's saving work in the world is most clearly manifested when the church faithfully carries out its mission of proclaiming the gospel and administering the sacraments. Wherever the church announces the good news of redemption through Christ, administers holy baptism to bring people into communion with the Triune God, and celebrates the sacrament of the Lord's body and blood, it functions as Christ's faithful servant and witness to the world, powerfully proclaiming the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ, and demonstrating its unity in Christ. The public ministry of word and sacraments is the constant sign that God has not created the church and sent it out into the world to be a private club, nor a political power bloc, nor simply a social service agency. Rather, as the communion of the redeemed, the church's mission in the world is to serve God and all humankind as the sign and instrument of God's grace.

67. God incorporates believers into the body of Christ through the sacrament of baptism. The communion of the church is a fellowship of those who have been clothed with Christ through their baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt 28:18; Gal 3:27). In this sacramental washing a person is reborn, receives the grace and forgiveness of God, and is incorporated into the body of Christ, the church. Here God's universal love for the world takes the form of drawing human beings into personal union with the Triune God and each other. The fruits and benefits of Christ's redemption flow into their lives. Henceforth the baptised are to bear living witness to the covenant relationship which God has established with them as his forgiven and reconciled people. They have become sharers in Christ's death to sin and have been raised up with him to new life (Rom 6:3,4).

68. Baptism is truly a sacrament of communion, and bears witness to the oneness of the church of God. It is far more than the outward performance of a sacramental ceremony; it is much more than a symbolic rite which only outwardly pictures union with Christ. The gracious work of the Spirit in baptism accomplishes our individual fellowship with God. At the same time the Spirit is also thereby creating one spiritual fellowship throughout the world. This community is consecrated to be God's servant to humanity and the world. The Spirit unites all the baptised in the one body of Christ so that there 'is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female', for they are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:26-28). God is calling all those who are united with him, publicly and universally to proclaim the good news concerning the 'one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all' (Eph 4:6).

69. The gospel story reaches its climax in Christ's sacrifice on Calvary and his resurrection for the redemption of

the world (Rom 4:25,26). This unique sacrifice is proclaimed and actualised in every place where God's people join in thankful commemoration to celebrate the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.¹¹ Wherever and whenever the community of the faithful join in this sacred eating and drinking they do so in memory of Christ, and proclaim his death until he comes (1 Cor 11:25,26). Accordingly, an essential aspect of the church's mission in the world is to celebrate the eucharist and thereby participate in this holy communion with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

70. The eucharist is truly a sacrament of communion, the holy communion of God's people with Christ and with one another. It is an ecclesial sacrament, that is, a holy ritual of the church as the community of disciples, through which all who are united in Christ through baptism are drawn together to celebrate their new and intimate relationship with the crucified and risen Lord. The sacrament of the Lord's body and blood is, therefore, a vital means through which the Spirit enables the Lord's people to carry out God's work in the world. God calls on them to confess in the world the forgiveness and acceptance they have found with God in Christ through his redeeming sacrifice. They give thanks to the God of creation who has become incarnate through the Son and comes to them in the sacrament.

71. A vital part of the mission of the people of God is to translate their thanksgiving into a life of stewardship which involves a wise use of the gifts of creation and a generous sharing of these gifts with the needy. The sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving in which all join through the sacrament means a commitment to give themselves to others in response to God's self-giving. From the eucharistic celebration they go out to reflect the divine love they have so richly experienced at the altar. United in Christ their Saviour, they are called and equipped to demonstrate their unity through loving service and common witness in the world wherever God has placed them.

OUR BROKEN WORLD AND THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

72. Empowered by the communion they have in Christ, the disciples of the Lord move out in mission. Their authorisation for mission comes from Christ himself: 'As the Father has sent me, so I send you' (John 20:21). As they go out into the world, they are confronted with brokenness on every side. Everywhere people are divided, socially and spiritually. Economic injustice and political confrontation lead to struggle and conflict both on a personal and national level. Abuse and prejudice take a great toll of people, and exploitation of the environment leads to ecological disaster.

73. The church shares in this world's brokenness, and sees it reflected in its own life. We acknowledge our failure, again and again, to realise the life-giving and inclusive communion of God both within our own communities and in our relationship with the world. Triumphalism, pride, a schismatic spirit, structures that exclude, neglect of the needy, and a refusal to stand in solidarity with the poor have all too often marked the life of the church. Yet, throughout history the Holy Spirit has been working through Christ's people to reflect the healing love and reconciling presence of God, as the church has reached out to help those in need and those who bear the burden of the world's brokenness.

74. In the celebration of the eucharist we are given a foretaste of the perfect communion to come. At the same time we are empowered by God for our mission to the world as sign and instrument of God's gift of communion. Even while sharing the world's brokenness, the church as the body of Christ shares in the Lord's suffering in his on-going service for the life of the world (Col 1:24).

74.1 The church, like its Lord, ministers to the poor and needy (Matt 20:26-28). The gospels tell how Jesus reached out to all people and every class. Nevertheless, he chose to give special concern to the poor, the sick, the outcasts and those known as 'sinners'. In doing so Jesus expressed God's own love for the lost ones (Luke 15). So great was Jesus' desire that the poor receive justice that he identified himself with people in need and taught that the way people treat the needy is the way they treat him (Matt 25:31-46).

74.2 Another service for healing brokenness is the church's forthright prophetic word. The church proclaims plainly to the world the divine vision of a new creation in which all live in communion with God and with each other (Rev 21:3,4). The church itself is challenged to live in the light of this vision, modelling right relationships in its own communities, structures, and organisations (Eph 4:7-16).

The church is called to speak against all forms of injustice in society, to condemn systemic and other evil

which results in oppression and suffering (Proverbs 31:8,9), and to expose the demonic powers which oppose the kingdom and seek to thwart God's vision for the future of the world (Luke 10:17-20).

Whenever groups of people or individuals are excluded from participation in the community or are treated unfairly, God calls the church to bring good news to the poor, stand in solidarity with these people, give a voice to the voiceless, and pursue liberation for these oppressed ones (Luke 4:18,19).

74.3 Worship is another form of service the church brings to a broken world. Through its priestly intercession the church bears the burdens of the 'weak and heavy laden' and brings them before the throne of grace. The church prays for the world and its political leaders, intercedes for the needs of particular persons and communities, and offers petitions on behalf of those who cannot pray for themselves. Through its worship the church confesses to the world that it has only one Lord and Master, to the exclusion of all other powers and rulers who seek to enslave the people of God. In worship the church participates in Christ's victory over the demonic forces, and is empowered for its ongoing battle against evil and for the healing of brokenness.

75. In all its service to a broken world, the church continues to embody Christ its head, the Suffering Servant (Mark 10:42-45). As he shared the world's brokenness 'in his body on the cross' (1 Pet 2:24), so his body the church lives in that world, its own life marked by the sign of the holy cross. Sharing in the world's brokenness, the church too 'loses its life for Christ's sake and the gospel', and thereby (according to Christ's own promise) it gains its life in the very act of bringing God's life and healing to the world (Mark 8:35).

NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS AND THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

76. Together we affirm that God wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:3). This truth has been revealed in and through the person of Jesus Christ who is himself the truth. The church, empowered and sanctified by the Spirit, is God's instrument to make Christ known to all people (Matt 28:18-20). Through its missionary activity, the church calls people to be reconciled to God, and to enter into the peace of Christ. In carrying out its mandate to evangelise, the church is called to humble service, putting aside attitudes of superiority and paternalism.

77. We recognise that other religions are human responses, in particular times and places, to God's ongoing revelation and blessing in creation. Signs of this ongoing revelation of God are to be found throughout creation: in the intricacy and design of the universe, the power of reason in the human person, and moral consciousness which is deeply embedded in humanity (Rom 1:19,20). At the same time these religions are an attempt by humanity to overcome its restless spirit in a quest for the ultimate, to forge a right relationship with God, the source of creation (Acts 17:22-29).

78. Hence we agree that the teachings, ethical codes, and rituals of the many religions are responses to the revelation of God given in creation, and reflect the human search for a relationship with God. We recognise that Christianity and other religions share certain insights and symbols. We acknowledge that the dynamic Spirit of God affirms all that is life-giving in different cultures and peoples. Thus in God's mission to reconcile all in Christ, the church takes to itself, insofar as they are good, the abilities and customs of different people and religions. When cultural resources are brought into the service of Christ, they are transformed and purified. The richness and diversity of these gifts may well illumine depths of the Christ-event of which hitherto the church has not been fully aware (Rev 21:26).

79. The Catholic Church teaches that the grace of Christ works invisibly in the hearts of all people of good will. As Vatican II says, 'since Christ died for all, and since all people are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery' (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22). God's saving grace extends beyond the boundaries of the church and is offered to all people. This offer can be accepted or rejected. Wilfully to reject God's offer is to sin. To accept God's self-offering is to receive the grace of justification.

80. Lutherans acknowledge that with God nothing is impossible, and that God could use means apart from the word of the gospel and the sacraments to serve his saving purposes. However, Lutherans believe that there are no clear biblical warrants for affirming that God does and will in fact use other ways of bringing people to the saving

knowledge of the truth which is in Christ Jesus. What can be said with certainty is that those who are saved are saved, not by the mere practice of their religion, but by the grace of God in Christ (Eph 2:8); that those who reject God's offer in Christ and persist in this rejection are condemned (John 3:18,36); and that Christians are called urgently to proclaim the gospel to all (Acts 1:8).

81. Together we confess that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life, and that 'no-one comes to the Father' except through Christ. The Lord Jesus won salvation for all (1 John 2:2; 2 Cor 5:15). This salvation is received by faith, which is itself a gracious gift of God's Holy Spirit working through the powerful gospel (Rom 1:16,17; 10:12-17). Salvation will always be the fruit of the grace of Christ, offered and made effective in human hearts by the Holy Spirit.

ECUMENICAL RELATIONSHIPS AND THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

82. Jesus' prayer to the Father was: 'As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me' (John 17:21). Our experience, however, is that faithful Christians confess their faith separated from each other in different church bodies. While we recognise the circumstances which led to division, and the commitment to the gospel which often characterised those involved, we acknowledge that a divided church is not in keeping with Christ's desire that his disciples demonstrate to the world the unity which they all have in him. Although Christ has called us to uphold the truth which he has entrusted to his church, it is clearly not his will that a divisive spirit or rivalry prevail among those who profess to believe that Jesus is the one and only Lord and Saviour for all humanity (Phil 2:1-5). We recognise that the continuing divisions between the churches are a hindrance to the preaching of the gospel of reconciliation. Since our message is that we have been forgiven and reconciled to God through Christ and are one in him, we have a clear responsibility to demonstrate our unity and to be reconciled to each other (Eph 2:14-18).

83. The ecumenical imperative is urgent: our churches have the duty to repent, to pray, and to act so that the oneness for which Christ prayed may be realised among us (Eph 4:3). Striving to express this unity involves us in the duty of developing right relationships with each other; it establishes our ecumenical task. We are aware of many ways in which we can work together to express and to model in the world the oneness given in Christ. Greater co-operation is desirable in many areas of church life as we assist those suffering from injustice, or as we become involved in action which demonstrates our common commitment to the service of love.

84. We are called to face the issues and doctrinal concerns which separate us. This involves, first of all, a willingness to confess whatever responsibility we bear for the divisions which continue to confront us. It means a serious attempt to identify our differences, trying to determine those which are critical in keeping us apart, and those which are not church divisive.

85. With regard to the issues which divide our churches, we pledge fidelity to the truth as we search for a deeper understanding which will make possible a common confession of faith. We commit ourselves to a continuing process of dialogue and discussion in the hope of a final resolution of our differences. Our goal is full reconciliation and communion so that we may experience the joy of proclaiming the word of God and celebrating the sacraments together.

IV. The Next Step Together

86. The formulation of the present document has taken us on a journey together over five years. In bringing this stage of our journey to a close, we recall that we have been involved in much more than an academic discussion about *communio*. We have also experienced growth in communion. At various points along the way, we have stood in awe at the mystery of the gracious condescension of God who has called us and given us a share in the divine communion. We have been struck with wonder at God's plan to sanctify the church to be his own servant in and for the world, and ultimately to unite all things in and under Christ. At the same time, we have joyfully discovered that despite our long history of division and antagonism, and despite our distinctive theological traditions, we have been able to make common confession in many aspects of *communio*. As our discussions progressed, we partners in dialogue have been granted a greater awareness of being companions on the way and sharers in the blessings and

responsibilities of fellowship in and with Christ. For all this we give thanks to God.

87. While we rejoice in our common heritage and the extent of our common confession, we also acknowledge that some issues relating to *communio* require further study. In particular, further discussion is needed on the subject of the relationship between the church and people of other faiths; the veneration and invocation of the saints; and the possibility of recognising communion within diverse organisational forms. Our dialogue has only touched upon these matters; in them lie challenging agenda for the future.

88. Since we have developed a significant momentum and attained an even greater degree of mutual trust and love, it is important that we continue to press on toward further mutual understanding and theological convergence. As a next step, we propose a round of dialogue on the gospel and justification. We have already noted in our discussion on 'Communion through the Gospel' that the gospel is of fundamental importance to the life of the church, and that since the Second Vatican Council there has been renewed appreciation of the truth that those who exercise public ministry in the church have the pre-eminent duty to proclaim the gospel. Dialogue on the gospel promises to be rich and rewarding. While the issue of justification has been a matter of controversy between us since Reformation times, we are confident that our relationship is of such maturity that we can re-examine this issue in depth and with frankness. Our hope is that this discussion will enable us to dispel misunderstandings and to make a common confession on this crucial issue.

89. We look forward to a new round of dialogue. It is our conviction, however, that the time has come for us to give visible and practical expression to the considerable convergence we have discovered and arrived at in our dialogue. We believe that the communion we share ought to be expressed in greater cooperation in areas such as social concerns, shared witness, theological education at various levels, and joint study programs. Such co-operation would give concrete expression to the common confession we have made, and reinforce our commitment to strive for greater expressions of unity. We therefore undertake to encourage our respective churches to explore avenues for further and deeper co-operation. At the same time we commit ourselves to join Christ in praying that we may all be one as he and the Father are one (John 17:22).

References

1 In the third century St Cyprian could write: 'We know that some [bishops] do not wish to depart from some thing about which they are convinced and do not easily change their opinion. But without breaking the bond of communion and concord with the other bishops, they nevertheless retain their own particular usages. In this matter we neither wish to restrict their liberty nor to lay down a law' (Letter 72, 3. CSEL II 1/2, 778).

2 See *Pastor and Priest: A Report from the Australian Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue on the Ordained Ministry in the Life of the Church*, 1990, p 6, par 13-15.

3 Toward the middle of the second century, when Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna came to Rome to discuss the dispute over the dating of Easter with Pope Anicetus, the two bishops failed to reach agreement. This, however, did not make them break the ecclesial unity existing between them. Irenaeus reported, 'They still communicated one with the other' (Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History*, V 24, PG 20, 505-508). In spite of their difference of opinion and their failure to reach agreement, the bishop of Rome let the visiting bishop celebrate the eucharist in his own community and in his presence.

4 In 341 the eighth canon of the Synod of Antioch dealt with the right to grant such letters. Bishops of people living in the country 'can give letters of peace which are to be accepted by everyone' (Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum... collectio* 2, 1131). These Christian passports had only to be presented to the local bishop and their holders would be received wherever they encountered other Christians. People bearing these letters would also be received as guests at the bishop's expense — a custom going back to the earliest times, and mentioned in the *Didache*.

5 The correlation between Peter and the bishop of Rome became stronger in the term of Pope Leo (d 461), who insisted that Peter continues to speak to the whole church through the bishop of Rome. It was also Leo who decisively intervened in the great Christological controversies and whose letter to Flavian of Constantinople in 449 provided the basis for the definitive formulation of faith two years later at the Council of Chalcedon.

6 For a detailed treatment see *Papal Primacy and the Universal Church, Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue V*, Paul Empie and T. Austin Murphy eds (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1974); *Peter in the New Testament*, Raymond E. Brown, Karl P. Donfried, John Reumann, eds (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1973); and 'Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church', *Theological Studies* 40 (March 1979), 113-166.

7. The excommunication of an individual could be formally imposed, as in St Cyprian's excommunication of Felicissimus (Letter 41, 2 CSEL II 1/2, 587,588). But in the majority of cases, where the misdeed was well known, as with those who apostatised from the faith during persecution, excommunication was understood as automatic. Official steps were taken only when the question of readmission arose.

8 The visitors looked at such matters as the qualifications of the clergy, their lifestyle and teaching, their salary and housing, and the worship practices and life of the people. While visitations continued to be carried out on a regular basis, the function of spiritual supervision was taken over by the pastors of the chief towns. These superintendents became the new bishops of the evangelical congregations.

9 Here we follow Walter Kasper's systematic outline of conciliar teaching, in *Theology and Church* (London: SCM, 1989), pages 148-165.

10 Cf the so-called Malta Document: 'Report of the Joint Lutheran/Roman Catholic Study Commission on "The Gospel and the Church"' February 1971, paragraph 61.

11 See *Sacrament and Sacrifice: A report from the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue in Australia, 1985*, par 52 (pages 26-27).

Appendix 1

Participants

On 23 November 1989 at their 63rd Meeting, members of the Dialogue decided that following the completion of *Pastor and Priest* they would turn their attention to Ecclesiology. Discussion of this topic began on 9 March 1990. It is from this latter date that participants are indicated. Unless listed otherwise, involvement is from March 1990 to August 1995.

Roman Catholic Participants

The Most Rev Leonard A Faulkner, Archbishop of Adelaide

The Rev Denis Edwards, **Joint Chairman**

The Rev Michael Rodger

The Rev Kevin O'Loughlin

Sr Mary Cresp, RSJ

The Rev Robert G Simons, CM (March 1990 - October 1993)

The Rev Ernesto Espina, CM, SSL (March 1990 - October 1993)

The Rev Peter Cross (March 1990 - March 1991)

The Rev John Thornhill, SM (April 1992-)

The Rev Gregory Brett, CM (October 1992 - October 1994) **Secretary (1993) Joint Secretary (1994)**

Sr Bernadette Kiley, OP (June 1994 -)

The Rev Laurence McNamara, CM (June 1995-)

Lutheran Participants

The Rev Leslie B Grope, Former President General, Lutheran Church of Australia
The Rev J T Erich Renner, **Joint Chairman** (1990 - 1994)
The Rev Brian H Schwarz, **Joint Chairman** (1995)
The Rev John G Strelan, First Vice-President, Lutheran Church of Australia
The Rev Noel E Weiss
The Rev Siegfried P Hebart, AM (March 1990 - October 1990)
The Rev Daniel Ch Overduin (March 1990 - June 1992)
The Rev Roger H Munchenberg (March 1990 - June 1993) **Secretary** (1990 - 1993)
Mr Mervyn A Wagner (March 1991 -)
The Rev Michael J Hassold (June 1992-)
The Rev Graham R Harms (March 1993 - October 1994) **Joint Secretary** (1994)
The Rev Edward H Schroeder (March 1994 - October 1994)
The Rev Stephen C Haar (February 1995-)
Ms Wendy E Mayer (February 1995 -)

Minute Secretaries

Catholic:

The Rev Andrew Hogan (March 1990 - April 1992)
The Rev James McEvoy (August 1991, June 1992 -) **Secretary (1995)**
Mrs Geraldine Hawkes (October 1991)

Lutheran:

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The Rev John Thornhill (1992-)
The Rev Brian H Schwarz
The Rev Gregory Brett (1994 - 1995)

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The Rev John G Strelan

Appendix 2

Background Papers

Robert G Simons, *The Church's Origin and Participation in the Mission of God.*

Noel E Weiss, *Lutheran Understanding of the Church's Visibility and Invisibility.*

JT Erich Renner, *Universalism Inclusivism and Exclusivism in Reference to the Question 'Is there Salvation Outside of the church?'*

Noel E Weiss, *Justification and Ecclesiology.*

John Thornhill, *Koinonia in the Gospel.*

Denis Edwards, *The Way Forward – An Outline.*