

Partakers in Christ

Report of the common advisory board of The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, United Methodist Church in Finland (Finnish speaking), and the United Methodist Church in Finland (Swedish speaking)

September 13, 2007

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Introduction

“And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.” (Eph. 1:9-10 -- New International Version)

As Lutherans and Methodists we have come in our own churches to know God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We have become Christians, because God has called us with the Word of the proclaimed gospel. We have become partakers of the salvation in Christ, of the "hidden mystery" (Rom. 16:25), which God has made known to us by leading us to him in our own congregations. We have, in our faith, grown aware of the creed and teaching of our respective churches. Commitment to these for us means preserving the apostolic faith, it is continuing "in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it." (2 Tim. 3:14). Our common faith is crystallized in Christianity's three ecumenical creeds, the Apostolic Creed, the Nicene Creed and the so-called Creed of Athanasius.

Above all we pay heed to the Word of God in the Holy Bible. Together we have heard ever more clearly the summons for the communion of all Christendom. Our Lord, Jesus Christ, prays "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me." (John 17:21) The unity to which we have been summoned is one of the central tenets of our Christian faith. Communion is not some arbitrary factor which can be ignored in favor of other "more important" matters, but it determines the place of Christ's own in God's plan of salvation. The unity of the Church is part of the salvation that God has prepared in Christ, which we have been sent to proclaim. Our relationship with Christ, one another and with our testimony of him are related and are different facets of the same plan of salvation.

The unity of the Church is based on the fundamental unity of the triune God. The connection between his persons is the starting point of our shared connection. Christ's prayer on our behalf leads us to partake of the communion that exists between the

Father and the Son. In learning to know the Son, we also come to know the Father. The communion between the Father and the Son, and the fact that the Son dwells in the Holy Spirit among those who belong to him, and the communion of the faithful are a central part of God's plan, of which Christians testify: "I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me..." (John 17:23)

We have a common calling to proclaim the gospel of Christ. This takes place especially in our own country, but stretches to the ends of the earth. In present-day Finland, challenges are posed to our testimony by people's dwindling awareness of the basic principles of Christian faith and the increased desire for instant gratification through a lifestyle of selfish consumption. On the other hand, our testimony cannot be directed solely at our own society and its current needs, but we must explore together what God desires to say to all people at all times. This is why we, as Lutherans and Methodists, wish to examine the fundamentals of our faith and discuss who we are as Christians, what our churches teach about the gift of salvation and how we might obtain the gift of God's salvation. The theological conversation presented in this report plumbs the deepest questions of our churches' identities. Our conviction is that this discourse is meaningful and fruitful for the unity of the Church and for a common testimony.

However, the coming together of two churches cannot take place solely in the form of doctrinal discourse. Christ's original prayer commends us to a shared spiritual life, a shared hearing of the Word and prayer. As Lutherans and Methodists we have shared with each other what we have received and thus helped each other understand more fully the wealth that remains hidden in Christ.

Coming together also requires reconciliation. The Lutheran and Methodist Churches of Finland have enjoyed cordial relations. In many localities communion has been sought as part of the ecumenical movement for decades. On the other hand, other situations have left painful memories. Our churches have not always been trusting of the sincerity of the other's faith and practices. God, however, who has reconciled the world to himself, has made us ambassadors who together announce the message of reconciliation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:18-20). Our shared faith in Christ gives us mutual reconciliation.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, the United Methodist Church in Finland (Finnish speaking), and the United Methodist Church in Finland (Swedish speaking) began theological conversation in the fall of 2002. Nine meetings were held between then and 2007. At the end of these conversations, we together gave thanks to God, who has led us as Lutherans and Methodists to a better understanding of one another, and at the end of this report we present for the consideration of our respective churches steps that can be taken towards fuller communion.

Helsinki, September 13, 2007

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1. Lutherans and Methodists striving for communion
 - 1.1. Common faith and a common calling
 - 1.1.1. The confessional basis of our churches

1 The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, the United Methodist Church in Finland (Finnish speaking), and the United Methodist Church in Finland (Swedish speaking) base their faith on the prophetic and apostolic texts of the Holy Bible. Both Lutherans and Methodists also recognize the ecumenical creeds of the ancient Church.

2 *The Book of Concord* of the Evangelical Lutheran Church list as the creeds of the ancient Church the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed.¹ Methodist *Book of Discipline* includes the Nicene Creed, the Confession of Chalcedon and the Apostles' Creed.²

3 In addition to the ecumenical confessions, the Church Law and Church Order of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland refer to the *Ausburg Confession* and other confessions included in the Lutheran *Book of Concord*.³ The confessional basis of the Methodist churches is not set out by a similar list, but the *Book of Discipline* uses some passages adapted from the Anglican *Articles of Religion* as well as some of

¹ *Evangelis-luterilaisen kirkon tunnustuskirjat*, Jyväskylä 1990, 41–46.

² *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church in Northern Europe*, 2001, § 101-103.

³ Church Law 1:1; Church Order 1:1.

Wesley's texts (*Sermons on Several Occasions, Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*).⁴—

4 The shared foundation of faith of our churches calls us to pray and work together to achieve communion. This enables us to engage in a theological discussion where we learn about ourselves and each other in the light of our churches' doctrinal traditions. As we journey towards communion, we will explore the commonalities between our doctrines and will acknowledge differences, but we will also assess whether those differences should be considered divisive.

1.1.2 Our common belief in the triune God

5 Like the rest of Christendom, Lutherans and Methodists profess faith in the triune God. According to the ecumenical creeds of the ancient Church, God is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. God is one, but he has revealed himself in three persons. Belief in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit forms an entity, where the salvation prepared by God is gifted to us through the actions/functions of each person. The creed expresses belief in God's redemptive work as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

6 The current international ecumenical movement makes the following statement about the acts of salvation of the triune God: "Christians *believe* that the 'One true God', who revealed himself to Israel, has revealed himself supremely in the "one whom he has sent", namely Jesus Christ (John 17:3); that, in Christ, God has reconciled the world to himself (2 Cor. 5:19); and that, by his Holy Spirit, God brings new and eternal life to all who through Christ put their trust in him."⁵—

1.1.3 The unity of the Church and common witness

7 The communion of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the foundation of the communion between our churches. Our belief in the triune God makes us partakers of the fullness of salvation that God in his three persons bestows on us. We know God as the loving Father through his Son in the Holy Spirit. By means of faith we join the communion which exists between God's persons. In this way we also partake of the mission of the triune God: the Father sent his Son, the Son sends his Church and prays to the Father to send his Holy Spirit. The unity of the Church and the calling to witness are thus based in the unity of the Trinity. In the words of the Lutheran/Anglican Porvoo Common Statement:

8 "We have come to see more clearly that we are not strangers to one another, but 'fellow-citizens with God's people, members of God's household... built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone' (Eph. 2:19-20 REB). By the gift of God's grace we have been drawn into the sphere of God's will to reconcile to himself all that he has made and sustains (2 Cor. 5:17-19), to liberate the creation from every bondage (Rom. 8:19-22) and to draw all things into unity with himself (Eph. 1:9f). God's ultimate purpose and mission in Christ is the

⁴ *Book of Discipline* § 102-103.

⁵ *Confessing the One Faith: An Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith as it is Confessed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381)*, Faith and Order Paper No 153, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1991, 16.

restoration and renewal of all that he has made, the coming of the Kingdom in its fullness.”⁶

1.2. Conversations and agreements

1.2.1. The Lutheran World Federation - World Methodist Council 1984

9 Lutherans and Methodists have participated in conversations that have resulted in mutual agreements both on the national and international level. The Lutheran World Federation and the World Methodist Council formed a commission that between 1979 and 1984 held a series of meetings, whose final report was published as *The Church: Community of Grace*.⁷

10 On many points of doctrine a notable agreement was reached, but differing views on the concepts of justification and sanctification were recognized. The Methodists emphasized the prevenient grace of God, which prepares a person to receive the justifying grace of God. Lutherans, on the other hand, specified that God forgives sins completely and continually, whereby Christians are constantly dependant on God’s justifying grace. While the Lutherans placed more emphasis on the simultaneous righteousness and sinfulness of the faithful (*simul iustus et peccator*), the Methodists stressed the sanctification that follows justification.

11 Differences were also noted in the concepts of baptism and the Eucharist. Lutherans considered baptism to be necessary for salvation, while the Methodists saw the prevenient grace of God as working irrespective of human actions. The Lutherans stipulated Christ’s real presence in the communion bread and wine independent of the recipient’s faith; the Methodists also considered Christ to be present and to give his body and blood to all who received it in faith. According to the final report, the differences were not so great as to be seen as wholly incompatible.

12 The joint commission was of the opinion that dialogue had led to greater unity in faith, witness and service. It recommended taking steps towards complete communion of the Word and sacraments, and that as a first step, churches should take part in official pulpit exchanges and Eucharistic hospitality.

1.2.2 Germany, 1987

13 The United Methodist Church in Germany (EmK) of the Federal Republic of Germany and West Berlin, and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD) underwent conversations from 1980 to 1982 and in 1985. The result was the document *Vom Dialog zur Kanzel- und Abendmahlsgemeinschaft*, on the basis of which the EmK and VELKD agreed in 1987 on mutual communion of the pulpit and Eucharist.

14 The dialogue took place in part at the same time as the world-wide councils. The communion of the pulpit and Eucharist was considered to include mutual recognition

⁶ *Porvoo Common Statement*, § 14.

⁷ This appeared in Finnish as *Kirkko – armon yhteisö*. Luterilaisen maailmanliiton ja Maailman metodistineuvoston yhteiskomission (1979–1984) loppuraportti. Published in Risto Saarinen (ed.), *Ekumeeninen työkirja*. Kirkkojen tekstejä 1973–1997. Studia missiologica et oecumenica Fennica 59. Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Seura 1998, 170–197.

of ordination. Themes that were not considered divisive were left to be discussed in future summits.

1.2.3 Austria, 1990

15 After the negotiations in Germany, an agreement was reached in Austria between the Lutheran, Reformed and Methodist Churches. In May of 1990, the *Evangelische Kirche Augsburgischen Bekenntnisses* ratified a declaration that refers to the results of the world summit and declares the mutual communion of pulpit and altar. This included the mutual recognition of ordination. The remaining differences in views were not considered to be divisive in nature.

1.2.4. Sweden, 1993

16 The Swedish Church and the Methodist Church of Sweden began their own negotiations in 1979. The first phase ended in 1985 with recommendations for the full communion of proclamation and sacraments, and the mutual recognition of ordination. The dialogue was continued in 1990 and 1991 by specifying and expanding the results of the previous council. Special attention was paid to the concepts of justification and sanctification.

17 In 1993 the Swedish (Lutheran) synod decided to implement the six procedures recommended by the committee: 1) common services, where the sacrament is performed, can be celebrated either under the leadership of an elder ordained by the Swedish Methodist Church or a pastor of the Swedish Church, 2) if a pastor of one church or the other transfers to the employ of the other, he will not be re-ordained, 3) the opportunity will be afforded to pastors and bishops of one church to participate in the pastoral or episcopal ordinations of the other, 4) both churches retain their independence, 5) the opportunities for cooperation with the other church are made possible, 6) an ordained priest, who seeks to enter the employ of the other church, will be examined on the basis of his training and suitability and he is to make his pastoral vows to the bishop or chapter or give similar assurances of his loyalty. The doctrinal board of the synod was of the opinion that the dialogues had not achieved sufficient consensus to be able to speak of a “full communion of proclamation or sacrament”, but at best of a “closer, deeper connection regarding proclamation and sacraments and the acceptance of the pastoral vow or ordination of the elder of the other church”.

1.2.5 Norway, 1997

18 In Norway, discussions were held between 1991 and 1994 that produced the report *Nådens fellesskap*. The name is a reference to the report filed by the world councils, *Community of Grace*. The delegates in Norway agreed that the results achieved by the Lutheran World Federation and the World Methodist Council as well as those by the Church of Sweden and the United Methodist Church of Sweden belonged to the *Nådens fellesskap* report, and that these issues had been sufficiently discussed to preclude the need to bring them to the table once more.

19 The participants resolved to recommend that the churches “expand their ecclesiastical unity”. This means, among other things, sharing the Eucharist; treating members of the other church as if they were members of one’s own church with

regard to church services and other pastoral affairs; participation in one another's episcopal ordinations and appointments in local congregations; accepting an employee of the other church on the basis of calling and by agreement to perform the same duties for one's own church, observing the regulations without reordination or reconsecration – in the case of permanent arrangements, the churches should observe the same conditions as apply to the appropriate training and loyalty. The agreement was ratified in 1997.

1.2.6 The Methodist churches of Europe and the Leuenberg Agreement, 1997

20 In 1997, six Methodist churches of Europe entered, by means of a special document, into fellowship with the signatories of the Leuenberg Agreement (*Joint Declaration on Church Fellowship*). The Methodist churches operating in the Nordic countries therefore belong to the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE, the former Leuenberg Church Fellowship), while the Evangelical Lutheran churches of Finland, Sweden and Iceland act as observers, participating in the theological work of the fellowship.

1.2.7 The United States of America, 2005

21 In the U.S.A., Lutherans and Methodists have held conferences in 1977-1979, 1985-1987 and in 2001-2005. The discussions were based on the results of the dialogues held by the world councils and the Scandinavian churches, but they also produced new material. As a result of the negotiations, the assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) decided in August of 2005 to establish a temporary agreement with the United Methodist Church (UMC) regarding Eucharistic sharing. The United Methodist Council of Bishops had already approved the measure in May of the same year. The temporary agreement was based on the results of the previous dialogues, which especially concerned justification and the sacraments. According to the agreement, the churches were only on the way towards full communion, but they had established a shared Eucharist. Future dialogues will deal with the issues of sanctification, perfection in love and the mission of the Church.

1.2.8 Other important ecumenical documents

22 In 2006 the World Methodist Council voted to adopt the Lutheran/Catholic *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, ratified by the representatives of the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity on October 31, 1999. The Methodists' decision was confirmed at the general assembly of the World Methodist Council in Seoul on July 23, 2006. A three-party confirmation of the agreement was signed by the the World Methodist Council, the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. According to this agreement, the Methodists will observe the views expressed on justification by the *Joint Declaration*, and all three parties commit themselves to deepening the common understanding of justification in study, teaching and preaching.

23 The most important ecumenical undertaking of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland is the Porvoo Common Statement, signed in 1996 and which binds the Lutheran churches of the Nordic countries and Baltic states together with the Anglican churches of Britain and Ireland. The document creates a close connection,

according to which the churches undertake to consider baptized members of the other church as members of their own and welcome them to participate in the sacraments and other pastoral services. They also undertake to welcome episcopally ordained pastors, bishops and deacons to serve in that capacity in the receiving church, in accordance with regulations that may be in force at that time, without re-ordination.

24 The Church of England and the United Methodist Church of Great Britain signed An Anglican-Methodist Covenant in 2003, according to which both churches commit themselves to developing cooperation. This covenant does not include Eucharistic sharing or interchangeable ministry. Conversations will be continued especially as pertains to pastoral issues. In 2005 the interim report, *In the Spirit of the Covenant* was published, where the theological grounds for the covenant were developed using Scriptural and historical material, and concrete examples of local cooperation were detailed. The report considered three main themes on which the churches disagree: the elements of the Eucharist and the disposal of surplus consecrated elements, presidency at the Eucharist and the preconditions for the interchangeability of ordained ministries.

1.2.9 The significance of the agreements

25 The document produced in 1984 by the Lutheran World Federation and the World Methodist Council has served as the basis for many of the conversations between the national churches. However, the consensus on the international level has not as such led to unanimity amongst individual churches. The communion of altar and pulpit recommended by the world councils has not been implemented without conversations amongst the churches themselves.

26 In the conversations among local churches the same themes that were covered in the dialogue of the world councils have been discussed. These include the issues of justification and sanctification, the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist, and the Church and its mission. Each conversation has made use of the material from previous dialogues, but also delved more deeply into it. In each dialogue it has been observed that differences of opinion remain between the churches on these issues, but they have not been considered divisive.

27 Most large Lutheran churches have formed an agreement with the Methodist churches in their same country. The agreements most frequently concern mutual communion of altar and pulpit. The ministry and sacraments of the other church are recognized, and members may participate in the Eucharist of the other church. A pastor who transfers from one church to the other need not be re-ordained. More detailed agreements have also determined under what other conditions a pastor may accept employment with another church.

28 After the joint doctrine regarding justification was accepted by the Methodists in 2006, a deeper unity can be attained. Issues that have previously caused tension between Lutherans and Methodists have included interpretations of prevenient grace and entire sanctification.

29 The dialogues presented above gave direction for the conversation taking place between the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, the United Methodist Church in

Finland (Finnish speaking) and the United Methodist Church in Finland (Swedish speaking). They show that there is a clear calling for communion, but also show what themes are worthy of deeper theological discussion. These especially include questions about justification, sanctification and the origin of justifying faith. Added to this are issues pertaining to baptism and the Eucharist, which in turn are connected to the issue of the Church and its ministry. These all affect how we as Lutherans and Methodists are able to proceed towards fuller communion and to give a shared testimony of our faith.

2. Justification and sanctification

2.1 The human need for salvation

30 Together we confess that all people born into the world are sinful and guilty before God and therefore cannot simply by virtue of their human nature live in communion with God or enter into heaven. The image of God (*imago dei*) that is inherent in humanity is corrupted. For this reason we need the salvation that Jesus Christ, God's only Son, through his incarnation, death and resurrection, has brought us. This salvation is in some senses already perfect, because it was achieved at Christ's resurrection, prior and extrinsic to us. However, salvation for the individual or the Church is not yet perfect. From this perspective it is necessary that the perfect salvation of Christ come to each individual and that they be joined with Christ's congregation.

31 According to Lutherans, humanity's natural sinfulness and separation from God is so great that people do not possess the natural equipment to genuinely turn towards God, to believe in him in a way that will lead to salvation, or "make their decision" to accept the salvation procured by Jesus. Natural equipment is used to mean the biological, psychical and social components of a human being, without the connection with God which, through grace, renews humanity. People can, through their natural equipment and the life destinies that come with it become conscious of God's existence, of good and evil, and the connection of ethics with the will of God. However, this kind of natural awareness of God is not the same as redemptive faith. Without the direct influence of God through his means of grace, humanity's natural awareness of God leads to self-righteousness, guilt or despair emanating from perceived absence of God. That a person believes in the gospel of Christ is the result of faith, created in that person, by God's Spirit. This faith does contain a personal element, in that each person receives Christ for him or herself. This acceptance Lutheranism does not consider as stemming from God's influence on man's natural equipment, but as the result of the influence of the means of grace.

32 The Methodists also believe that humanity is lost, if it lives without Christ and faith in him. However, Methodists' view of a person's condition before accepting faith in Christ is not as bleak as the Lutherans'. According to the Methodists, Christ has secured God's grace for humanity through his redemptive work. In Methodist theology this is expressed using the concept of prevenient grace. Prevenient grace is partly defined as a yearning to be in communion with God. It does not include a natural awareness of God that would enable "making a choice". Rather, prevenient grace is God taking hold of an individual, addressing and making him or her aware of

God and the need for salvation. Interpreted this way, Methodist ‘prevenient grace’ is not semipelagianism.

2.2 Natural knowledge of God and the birth of justifying faith

33 Our churches’ traditions differ in how we consider the birth of justifying faith. The difference is not very great, when the following points are taken into consideration:

34 Both churches are of the opinion that necessary prerequisites for the birth of redeeming faith are the gospel and the means of grace, for due to its corruption in sin, human nature is incapable of entering into communion with God without them. Methodists, however, believe that God is not bound to the order of the means of grace, especially when its use is not possible, but can produce faith in whatever way he wills. However, the Methodists do agree that the Church is bound in its day-to-day practice by the idea that faith is born through the means of grace.

35 Both churches teach that people possess some kind of knowledge of God and sense of their responsibility before God even prior to knowing of the gospel and the means of grace. In Lutheranism, humanity’s natural knowledge of God is described, e.g., by saying that people possess natural knowledge of God’s existence and God’s natural law. This is, however, not typically called “God’s Grace” but rather “God’s Law”. The concept of grace is in Lutheranism reserved for God’s redemptive and renewing work, which happens through belief in Christ. Despite these differences in terminology, it is possible for Lutherans to join in the Methodists’ doctrine of God’s special revelation, which can happen to an individual before the faith brought about by the means of grace. Even Luther taught, for example, that the Holy Spirit makes it possible for law to reveal sin. This kind of revelation is referred to in Lutheran pietism as “visitation”. In Methodist doctrine the terms “natural knowledge of God” and “prevenient grace” are used.

36 Both churches also teach that, even though the birth of faith is the result of the work of God and his gospel on a person, belief in Christ also contains an element of personal will.

37 Methodism and Lutheranism both have a tendency in different ways to emphasize incorrectly matters of personal will and the birth of faith. In Methodism, as in all Christian revivalism (including revivalist movements within the Lutheran Church), there is danger in the doctrine that stresses personal choice in faith in a way that diminishes the corruption of humanity from sin and gives the idea that belief is a personal choice and not a gift born of hearing the gospel. In Lutheranism there is danger in the thinking that stresses God as working alone, with the result that the personal, individual aspect of reception of faith is dismissed as false synergism. In such instances it is forgotten that the main topic of Jesus’ sermon was “the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” The penitential sermon does not assume synergism if the sermon contains in addition to the necessity of conversion (law) also the declaration of the atonement fulfilled by Christ (gospel) and the assumption that faith is created by the proclaimed Word itself, not a choice made by human will. When both these extremes are rejected, our churches do not disagree on this matter.

2.3 Justification for Christ's sake, out of grace, through faith.

38 "In faith we together hold the conviction that justification is the work of the triune God. The Father sent his Son into the world to save sinners. The foundation and presupposition of justification is the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ. Justification thus means that Christ himself is our righteousness, in which we share through the Holy Spirit in accord with the will of the Father. Together we confess: By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works."⁸ —

39 Together we acknowledge that sinners are justified through grace, when they believe in God's act of redemption in Christ. Both our churches also teach that justifying faith is not merely placing trust in God's grace (*fides qua*), but it includes the message about Christ, in whom and in the redemption of whom God has gifted his grace to humanity (*fides quae*).

2.4 Justification: to receive forgiveness for sins and become righteous

40 The terminology used by our churches for discussing salvation differs in certain ways. Also, Lutheran terminology has, over the centuries, undergone internal changes. For example, the concept of 'sanctification' used in the Third Commandment of Luther's *Large Catechism* differs from its later usage. Similarly, after the most recent Finnish research into Luther, the concept of 'justification' is more complex than its meaning in the *Book of Concord*. For these reasons it has often been difficult for Methodism and Lutheranism to come to an understanding. However, the theological study and ecumenical discourse of the past few years has demonstrated that this has been caused by confusion over terminology. It is clear that both churches have intended to teach that the justification obtained for humanity by Christ includes two aspects: forgiveness of sins and a new life in communion with God.

41 Thus we can together observe the following about the doctrine of justification, using the words of the *Joint Declaration*: "God forgives sin by grace and at the same time frees human beings from sin's enslaving power and imparts the gift of new life in Christ. When persons come by faith to share in Christ, God no longer imputes to them their sin and through the Holy Spirit effects in them an active love. These two aspects of God's gracious action are not to be separated, for persons are by faith united with Christ, who in his person is our righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30): both the forgiveness of sin and the saving presence of God himself."⁹ —

42 When we speak of justification in this sense, it includes both forgiveness (so-called forensic righteousness, or imputation) and a new life in Christ (so-called effective righteousness). Both churches are in agreement on this matter.

2.4.1 Lutheran emphases

⁸ *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, 15.

⁹ *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, 22.

43 For Lutherans it is important to stress that people can obtain the afore-mentioned righteousness only through communion with Christ. Forgiveness of sins and the new life can never be inherent traits of the persons themselves. It is a matter of righteousness being credited to people, extrinsic to themselves. Nor does justification as renewal become a personal trait or state, for life is renewed only through communion in faith with Christ.

44 Lutherans say that a Christian is “at the same time righteous and sinner” (*simul iustus et peccator*). The Methodists join with this statement, when it is used in the same sense as in the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification: “Believers are totally righteous, in that God forgives their sins through Word and Sacrament and grants the righteousness of Christ which they appropriate in faith. In Christ, they are made just before God. Looking at themselves through the law, however, they recognize that they remain also totally sinners. Sin still lives in them (1 John 1:8; Rom. 7:17,20), for they repeatedly turn to false gods and do not love God with that undivided love which God requires as their Creator (Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:36-40 pr.). This contradiction to God is as such truly sin.”¹⁰ Christians are, despite their righteousness and connection with Christ, entirely sinful until death.

45 It should be noted, however, that the afore-mentioned so-called *simul* aspect is not the whole picture of the Lutheran doctrine on justification. Lutherans also teach that the enslaving power of sin has been broken by Christ, when a Christian lives through the means of grace and faith in communion with Christ. “It no longer is a sin that ‘rules’ the Christian for it is itself ‘ruled’ by Christ with whom the justified are bound in faith.”¹¹ When viewed in this way, it must be said that a Christian lives partly justified and partly a sinner (*partim iustus – partim peccator*). From this point of view, according to Lutheran doctrine, Christians can and must continually progress in their justification. This means that their communion with Christ deepens, for they need to take refuge in Christ even more as their awareness of their sinful state increases, and to abandon their efforts to be worthy of God only in terms of their own self-worth.

2.4.2 Methodist emphases

46 Methodists also stress that forgiveness of sins is of foremost importance for Christians. This they express, e.g., by saying that justification through faith, for the sake of Christ’s redemptive work, is the beginning and foundation of a Christian life. However, the internal aspect of justification (described above as a ‘new life’), which is present in a Christian, is significant. It is a new, real, state of sanctity to which Christians are transferred in their faith and in which they are constantly progressing. This is expressed, for example, by saying that “justification is the beginning of the Christian life, but sanctification is its content”, or by saying that the purpose of the salvation brought by Christ is to restore the original image of God in humanity (*imago dei*, see above, § 30).

47 Methodists stress more than Lutherans that the work done by God in renewing people through faith is continuous and there should be continual progress. John

¹⁰ *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, 29.

¹¹ *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, 29.

Wesley often spoke in this context of "perfection in love" that a Christian should aspire to. The theological viewpoint characteristic of Wesley is evident, e.g., in the first epistle of John: "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears,[a]we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3:2)

2.4.3. A clarification of the terminology of "justification" and "sanctification"

48 In these conversations it has become necessary to more closely define terminology than we have previously been accustomed to doing. In this document, the term "justification" is used to mean the side of salvation through which people live in communion with God and on the strength of which they can enter into heaven. As mentioned above, justification includes two aspects, the forgiveness of sins (forensic justification) and the new life in Christ (effective justification). The term "sanctification" is reserved for describing the effects of justification on the Christian life, such as actions, habits, thoughts or character traits that are pleasing to God. Using these definitions, both churches can agree, that the salvation brought to humanity by God through Christ includes both justification and sanctification.

49 In light of the previous clarification, it is apparent that the different emphases placed by our two churches are not significant, especially when the following is taken into account:

50 The Lutheran delegation should observe that the Methodists' use of the term sanctification as described in § 46 does not necessarily mean the same as it does in Orthodox Lutheranism or Pietism. In the latter, sanctification is seen as those thoughts, actions and habits that are in accordance with God's will, that are generated in a Christian as a result of communion with God in faith. If by continuous sanctification, Methodists mean only this, Lutherans cannot join with them in the view that "justification is the beginning of the Christian life, but sanctification is its content". According to the Lutheran view the most important aspect of the Christian life is forgiveness of sins and communion with Christ in the Holy Spirit, not wandering in ourselves according to God's will, which is important, but not the source of our life.

51 The Methodists' concept of sanctification as the substance of the Christian life can be understood in the same sense as in Luther's *Large Catechism*: "Therefore sanctifying is nothing else than bringing us to Christ to receive this good, to which we could not attain of ourselves."¹² The Methodists' view of the necessity of sanctification is understandable in the context of 18th century Lutheranism and its doctrine on justification. For example, Zinzendorf was antagonistic towards Wesley in a way that was not in accordance with Luther's views. According to Zinzendorf, justification could only be forensic, and he denied the idea, central to Luther's doctrine of justification, of the new life in Christ. It is entirely understandable that Wesley did not accept this doctrine, but, differing from Zinzendorf, emphasized renewal as part of justification.

¹² *Large Catechism*, Part Two, 39.

52 The Methodist delegation should note that when Lutherans emphasize salvation as justification, they no longer mean the same as Lutherans in Zinzendorf's time. When using the terminology defined as part of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, Lutherans include the new life created through communion with Christ as part of justification.

2.5 "Growing in righteousness"

53 Once the terminology has been clarified, we can unanimously agree that righteousness is on the one hand an instantaneous and absolute reality, independent of the Christian's own state (forgiveness), on the other hand it is a renewal that is present in a Christian (new life in Christ) that must continually be improved. Methodists consider justification to be the beginning of salvation and that everything that follows is sanctification, which means growth in faith and in knowing Christ's grace.

54 Lutherans and Methodists both teach that in relying on Christ a Christian can grow in justifying faith. According to the Lutherans, Christian righteousness includes the so-called *partim iustus, partim peccator* aspect. The Methodist approach, according to which a Christian grows in owning salvation and joins ever more closely to Christ, is acceptable to Lutherans, even if it is a matter that has not been discussed much. Over the last few decades there has been an increasing interest within the Lutheran Church in so-called spirituality, which indicates that there is a longing for a personal, experiential and ever-deepening awareness of Christ and the presence of his Spirit, which is what the Methodists mean by growing in faith.

2.6 The sanctification that follows justification, and its growth

55 Both churches teach that a Christian life also includes the sanctification that follows justification, which is a change for the better that takes place in the thoughts, motives, feelings, and actions. As a result of justification (the forgiveness of sins and a new life in Christ), the Christian begins increasingly to hate sin and to love God and his will. This is then manifested as new acts of love towards one's neighbors, and as a new obedience and love towards God and his will (sanctification).

56 Both churches agree that sanctification is the natural consequence of justification. We both emphasize good deeds and "new obedience". Even though Lutherans and Methodists agree on this subject, there is a difference in the theological terminology employed to describe the relationship between justification and sanctification. To preserve justification as a gift from God, Lutherans have specified that the sanctification that follows justification is not part of the redemptive faith; to emphasize the aspect of renewal, Methodists have stressed that sanctification is an important part of salvation as a whole. These different emphases are not mutually exclusive. Both agree that sanctification is part of redemptive faith.

57 Both churches agree that specifying sanctification ought not lead to the type of thinking whereby one tries to earn righteousness by one's self by aspiring to do good deeds. Justification is the work of God, through which he renews a person. A remade person produces new acts of sanctification, "naturally" and out of gratitude to God, not to earn justification.

58 Wesley refers to Jesus' words: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48) and states that the Lord cannot command something he does not render possible. However, Wesley also observes that "Christian perfection" is not absolute perfection from which it is impossible to fall or to grow. Mainly he is referring to the fulfillment of the "dual command of love" in a Christian's attitude towards life. The New Testament speaks of "perfect love" as if it were a state that could be attained (1 John 4:16-19). On the other hand, sin remains in the Christian until the end (1 John 1:7-9). Even in this matter the churches can learn from one another: the Lutheran emphasis on sinfulness ought not to suppress the effort to achieve an intact and lasting love of God and one's neighbors; the Wesleyan "perfect love" ought not to create an impression of an earthly condition where Christians no longer have to contemplate their continuing sinfulness.

59 The statement on the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification made by the World Council of United Methodist Churches specifies that "the hope of conquering sin should never lead us to deny or disregard the danger of backsliding and being caught by the power of sin." It then quotes John's First Epistle, chapter 1, verses 6-9: "If we say that we have fellowship with God while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."¹³

2.7 Assurance

60 The central characteristic of Methodist soteriology is the doctrine of assurance. Its scriptural source is mainly the Letter to the Romans, chapter 8, according to which God's children have received God's Spirit. "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." (Rom. 8:16). The spirit of the believer joins with the testimony of the Holy Spirit and assures him of salvation.

61 Methodism emphasizes the subjective experience more than Lutheranism does, but the foundation for the experience of faith are the objective facts about the object of faith. Wesley presents four criteria for truth, foremost of which is the Bible, followed by understanding and tradition, but also includes experience. When Methodism is said to be an experience-based theology this does not mean foremost an emotional experience but rather the accentuation of an inner certainty. Assurance also has nothing to do with predestination. At best it is a joy in salvation, which is apparent in Methodist services as the joy experienced in the presence of salvation.

62 In Lutheran theology the question of assurance is not approached from the perspective of the individual's experience of faith, but from Christ's assured promises. The emphasis is on the sufficiency of Christ's atonement, and the infallibility of the promises of the gospel. Sinners who trust in Christ can trust that despite the weakness of their faith, God will strengthen them until the end (1 Cor. 1:8) and that he, who has begun this work, will see it to its end (Phil. 1:6). Luther's Small Catechism teaches Christians to believe that the Holy Spirit has, by means of the gospel, "call[ed] me by

¹³ *Methodist Statement on the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, 4.4 d.

the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith”, and that he ”makes holy the whole Church on earth and keeps it with Jesus in the one, true faith.”¹⁴

63 Methodists and Lutherans both teach that ”the faithful can rely on the mercy and promises of God”, as stated in the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. According to the Declaration, the faithful can ”rely” on the grace based on the promise inherent in the Word and the sacraments.¹⁵ This certainty of faith is based on the work of the Holy Spirit present in the means of grace. The Methodist Statement on the Joint Declaration specifies that assurance does not mean certainty of possession, but the reliability of a relationship based on God’s love. ”This relationship is lived by using the ‘means of grace’, especially searching the Scriptures and receiving the Lord’s Supper. These are outward signs, ordained by God, through which he conveys his grace to us.”¹⁶

3. Instruments of salvation

3.1 Means of grace

3.1.1 The Word and sacraments

64 The Holy Spirit conveys God’s grace through the means that God has ordained and made effective. Our churches teach that God’s Word, baptism, and the Eucharist are the most important means of grace that God has set. They reveal and give us Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

65 Methodism highlights that other practices may be included in the means of grace. These include common liturgy, prayer, fasting, spiritual meetings and devotions.¹⁷ Lutheranism recognizes their factual relation to the means of grace. The Gospel has influence in many ways: in addition to the verbal proclamation its effect is also felt in baptism, communion, confession and in the “mutual conversation and consolation of brethren”.¹⁸

66 God is the Lord of creation and its caretaker, shepherd and renewer. Through his Word of creation God is constantly present throughout his Creation. Christ is the special Word that we proclaim. At Christ’s special command, the water of baptism and the bread and wine of the Eucharist have been assumed as the means of grace and the bearers of God’s influential presence. For this reason we confess that God in his sovereignty has influence through the external reality of salvation and binds us through these signs of his presence and salvation. “For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith; where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel.”¹⁹ We receive faith, in which Christ who is present saves, renews and changes us truly and effectively.

¹⁴ *Small Catechism*, III.

¹⁵ *Joint Declaration*, 34.

¹⁶ *Methodist Statement on the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, 4.6.

¹⁷ *Book of Discipline*, § 101, 123.

¹⁸ *Schmalkald Articles* III, 4 (The Gospel).

¹⁹ *Ausburg Confession* V.

67 Methodism emphasizes that God has bound us to the means of grace, but has not bound himself. Methodism highlights God's sovereignty and Lutheranism highlights God's commitment to the means of grace. Lutheranism therefore emphasizes God's promise inherent in the means of grace, but Methodism also teaches that the Word, baptism and the Eucharist are sure means to salvation.

3.1.2 The effect of the means of grace

68 The means of grace both express and convey salvation, the content of which is Christ, received by means of the faith inspired by the Holy Spirit. Through the means of grace we are offered forgiveness of sins, assurance that God accepts us for Christ's sake. A person cannot achieve eternal salvation by his own merit but only by trusting in God's promise. The promise has been revealed through Christ. We are able to partake of it through the faith brought about by the Holy Spirit in the Word and the sacraments. As partakers of the promise, we are partakers in faith of Christ and his redemptive work of atonement.

69 Through the means of grace, God awakens, strengthens and bolsters our faith in him by forgiving our sins. In addition to offering salvation, the means of grace also have the power to change. Our nature, corrupted by sin, is allowed to die away and we are born in Christ into a new life, where we are shaped through daily improvement to be more like him. Lutherans and Methodists both teach that the justified life is bound to the continued use of the means of grace. The means of grace give life to the Church, give it a mission and the strength to fulfill that mission.

70 The administering of the sacraments is the ministry and responsibility of ordained pastors summoned from within the holy community. The validity of the Word and the sacraments is nevertheless not determined by the personal abilities or attitude of the person performing them, for they represent redemptive work that belongs to God alone. They are realized when the Word is proclaimed and the sacraments are performed in the name of the triune God. The validity of the means of grace is based on the promise made to us by God. The means of grace do not have any effect or worth if performed as human actions – only God's promise creates, strengthens and tends to the faith in those who receive it with trust and acceptance.

3.2 The Word

71 The "Word of God" has many meanings: 1) the eternal and pre-existing Word that is with God, by which the world was created and which in becoming flesh announced the Father, 2) the written Word of God which is the prophetic and apostolic texts of the Bible, 3) the spoken Word of God, which is the proclamation of the law and gospel, and 4) the sacraments, the visible Word, whose content is Christ, the redemptive Word of God. We recognise that salvation happens based on the Word of the Bible and from faith alone. The Word generates faith when we hear the gospel (Rom. 10:17) and the Word guides us towards constant improvement/self-betterment.

72 In the Word of the Holy Bible, God reveals and initiates his alliance with us. Contained within this alliance is God's promise, which he has expressed and continually demonstrates through his creation, his commandments and by sending his Son as a man into the world. We recognise God's will partly through the richness of

creation which speaks to us, as well as in the guiding voice of conscience which leads to remorse, but without the special love demonstrated by God in Christ we will not find the true foundation of our life or the proper direction, nor will we receive the salvation which brings the beatitude. The Word of God expresses both his demanding will and his loving will. It reveals the nature of our existence and our inability to attain salvation by ourselves, but also as the means of grace in the gospel, it gives us faith and eternal hope, as well as giving us direction in life and the challenge to continually improve ourselves.

3.3 Baptism

3.3.1 Baptism as sacrament

73 In the New Testament, baptism is discussed as part of Christ's death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-5; Col. 2:12), as the washing away of sins (1 Cor. 6:11), as rebirth (John 3:5), as the light given by Christ (Eph 5:14), as clothing one's self with Christ (Gal. 3:27), as the renewal by the Holy Spirit (Tit. 3:5), as being saved from a flood (1 Peter 3:20-21), as release from imprisonment (1 Cor. 10:1-2), as being freed into humanity that is blind to sex and transcends society's boundaries (Gal. 3:27-28; 1 Cor. 12:13).²⁰ Together we recognize that baptism means death for sin and a new life in Christ. Through baptism we have been joined, in the Holy Spirit, to Christ, one another, and to the universal Church of Christ that exists at all times. "Baptism affects forgiveness of sins, life and salvation."²¹

74 Together we confess that baptism is God's gift to humanity. Baptism is not merely a symbol, but brings salvation to individuals by connecting them to Christ's life, death and resurrection. In baptism the Holy Spirit is received and a person is joined to Christ's body. For this reason baptism cannot be repeated. The salvation gifted in baptism is destined for every person regardless of their age or other human attributes.

75 The Lutheran and Methodist views on baptism are the same in essentials. Both churches speak of the sacrament of baptism as a sign that sins have been forgiven as a part of the salvation promised by God, and a new life has begun in communion with God. However, there are differences in points of view and emphasis in the way the churches teach about baptism.

76 A special characteristic of Methodist teaching is the reminder of God's sovereignty. God has bound people to the use of the sacrament, but this ought not to be considered as something that limits God's omnipotence. God himself and his redemptive actions are not bound solely to the sacrament of baptism. In this context one can refer to what was said above about God's so-called "prevenient grace" (§ 32, 35). God's prevenient grace helps to prepare people to receive the justifying grace offered in Christ's gospel.²²

77 The Lutheran perspective raises the question about the relationship between the grace of baptism and prevenient grace. What meaning is there in the sacrament of baptism, if God works to benefit a person outside of it? According to our views, the

²⁰ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry II*, Meaning of the Baptism, 2.

²¹ *The Church: Community of Grace*, 46.

²² *By Water and the Spirit: A United Methodist Understanding of Baptism* (1996), 5-7.

concept of prevenient grace does not diminish the value and meaning of the sacrament. As noted above, prevenient grace is not in and of itself redemptive, but only serves to prepare a person. For this reason the concept of prevenient grace is not in conflict with what has been presented above regarding the decisive role baptism plays in a person's salvation. As humans we are tied to the sacrament of baptism as a means of grace. "In the ordinary way, there is no other means of entering into the Church or into heaven."²³ The concept of prevenient grace has no equivalent in Lutheran doctrine, where the importance of baptism as a means of salvation has greater emphasis. However, the Lutheran doctrine does not mean that an unbaptized person is excluded from God's mercy and love.

78 A special emphasis of Lutheran doctrine is God's promise associated with the sacrament, which means that the sacrament can be considered a means of salvation. According to Lutheran teaching, baptism originates from God, because baptism contains both God's commandment and God's promise.²⁴ Baptism is at its most fundamental an act of God. For this reason the reality and force of baptism remain unchanged throughout a person's life. Luther recommends that those who find themselves bothered by sin and a bad conscience should rely on the salvation received through baptism.²⁵ The life of someone who has been baptized is a continual living and growing in the reality of baptism, and growing into a new humanity through baptism. Baptism is never the less absolute and remains in effect, even if a person gives it up. Lutheranism speaks of "returning to the grace of baptism". This refers to the fact that, through baptism, a person has become part of the totality and perfection of God's redemption, in which entire salvation is already present.

79 The Methodist perspective raises the question about the relationship between baptism and living in faith. Methodists do not speak of "returning to the grace of baptism" but see baptism as a process, which, in addition to the rite of baptism, includes the response of faith. A person is called to turn to God. Lutherans agree with this. The greatness of God's promise emphasized by the Lutherans and the seriousness of human sin and the importance of conversion and penitence emphasized by the Methodists are not in conflict. Methodists and Lutherans both invite baptized unbelievers to repent and convert. Both churches teach about the totality of baptism in such a way that neither require re-baptism.

3.3.2 Baptism and faith

80 We confess together that baptism and faith are inextricable. Faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit received at baptism, through which those baptized receive salvation. Both Lutherans and Methodists teach that the redemptive power of baptism is based on an act of God.²⁶ We confess that a baptism is valid if it has been performed according to Christ's commandment and promise, using water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The life of the baptized person is continual growth in the reality granted by God through baptism.

²³ *The Works of Rev. John Wesley A.M.*, Volume X [London, 1872], 192.

²⁴ *Large Catechism*, Part Four, I, 6.

²⁵ *Large Catechism*, Part Four, I, 44.

²⁶ "We confess together that sinners are justified by faith in the saving action of God in Christ. By the action of the Holy Spirit in baptism, they are granted the gift of salvation, which lays the basis for the whole Christian life." *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, 25.

81 The different approaches of Lutheran and Methodist baptismal theology are in part parallel and complementary. Lutheran theology connects faith more strongly with baptism itself, while in Methodist theology on the other hand faith is connected with the effects of baptism and the new life in Christ. The differences of approach are partly the result of the different way baptismal theology is structured in the two churches. Lutheran baptismal doctrine emphasizes the external promises of God's Word, the Methodist on the other hand the testimony of the Holy Spirit within the believer. Both teach, however, that baptism is the work of the triune God.

3.3.3 The effect of baptism

82 According to Lutheran teaching, the salvation granted through baptism is perfect and removes from the baptized person all guilt from sin inherent in human nature. The content of the sin, that is, the tendency to do bad, however, remains even after baptism. The Holy Spirit given through baptism enables a person to be reborn and renewed. The gifts of the Holy Spirit received in baptism help the baptized person in his battle against the remaining tendency towards evil.²⁷ In Lutheran theology, the effect of baptism which is simultaneously instantaneous and lasting is described in terms of partaking of Christ. The grace granted by baptism is on the one hand absolute, because baptism joins that person with Christ's work of atonement. However, the effect of baptism must be executed in faith and life. From this perspective, growing in the grace of baptism is an on-going process. Because of its effect, the sacrament of baptism is not only an external sign but has an impact through God's own presence. In baptism, God's presence is the presence of God's Word, that is Christ, in the water of the baptism.²⁸ In Lutheran teaching baptism is often spoken of as a person being received as God's child.

83 Also according to Methodist teaching, humans in their natural state are subject to sin and need the grace of God granted through baptism. Methodist theology separates the concepts of original sin and the guilt associated with it from personal sin and the judgment due to it. When speaking of the effect of baptism it is necessary to note the distinction made by Methodist theology between the baptism itself and the rebirth that results from the act of baptism. Despite this distinction, rebirth and its sign, baptism, are connected in accordance with God's promise of grace. In Methodist teaching, the true state of the baptized is emphasized over the act of baptism. The sign of Christ is not the baptism itself, but the fruit of the Spirit that is evident in the life of one who has accepted baptism.²⁹

84 Regarding baptism, Methodists and Lutherans both teach that the grace of God bestowed through baptism brings about a change in a person's condition, which is a prerequisite for salvation. However, Lutheran and Methodist theologies construe the relationship between baptism, rebirth, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit differently. They are still essentially connected according to the views of both groups. Both Methodists and Lutherans teach that through baptism, a person is granted salvation. Despite this, both Methodists and Lutherans summon baptized Christians into a life and faith where the effects of baptism are felt.

²⁷ *Schmalkald Articles* III, 3, 40; *Defense of the Augsburg Confession* II, 35.

²⁸ *Large Catechism*, Part Four, I, 17–18.

²⁹ *By Water and the Spirit*, 4–5, 11–12.

3.3.4 The practice of baptism

85 Both Methodists and Lutherans perform baptism on infants as well as on people of all ages. Following the tradition of the ancient Church, the baptism is performed using water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Lutherans and Methodists both accept baptism by immersion, anointing and sprinkling. The sacrament of baptism is performed by a person especially called and ordained for the task. However, the validity of the sacrament is not dependant on the personal qualities of the person performing it.

86 In the case of emergency baptism, the practices of the Methodists and Lutherans differ. The Church Order of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland notes that “baptism is performed by a pastor” (Church Order, chapter 2, clause 13). If there is concern that an unbaptized child may die, and that the baptism must take place and there is no pastor available, the Church Order obligates “some member of the Church” or “some other Christian” to perform the baptism in the name of the triune God. An emergency baptism must be performed in the manner prescribed by the Church Order, and notification must be given to the parish office, after which the baptism is confirmed. The formula for confirming baptism according to the Church Order is the same as the formula for baptism apart from the baptism with water (Church Order, chapter 2, clause 14). A child baptized in an emergency is not excluded from the congregation, nor does the provision for emergency baptism change the fact that, according to Lutheran theology, baptism belongs to the ministry of a pastor.

87 In the Methodist Church, emergency baptisms are not performed at all. According to Methodist thinking, man is at birth a child of God and not of the devil. As noted above (§ 30), even an infant is subject to original sin, but this does not mean that the child is condemned, because only personal sin can be judged. Methodists do not believe that guilt automatically leads to judgment. In Lutheran theology, being subject to original sin is considered the same as being subject to judgment. There is tension between these two views. This, however, has no impact on what we have agreed on about the impossibility of a person saving himself (cf. § 30-22).

88 Both Methodists and Lutherans stress the nurturing aspect of baptism. In the Methodist tradition, the responsibility for the parents and congregation for the nurturing of the baptized child is emphasized. In the Lutheran tradition, the god-parents of the baptized child also promise to help the parents and the congregation to nurture the child (cf. § 113 below). In both traditions the congregation is urged to pray for the baptized child and its family.

3.4 The Eucharist

3.4.1 A meal of thanksgiving, remembrance, forgiveness, fortification and fellowship

89 The Eucharist, or Lord’s Supper, is a holy meal, set by Christ himself. As we celebrate it, we thank God for his saving works and we proclaim Christ’s death and resurrection. In the bread and the wine we partake of what God, through Christ, has done for us, continues to do and will do in the future. In the Eucharist we commemorate the atoning and redemptive work done by Christ which has come to us.

We are strengthened in faith for the forgiving of sins. Summoning the Holy Spirit to aid us and placing our trust in God's promise we enjoy a spiritual meal, which renews our lives and increases our love for our fellows.

90 The Lord's Supper is a meal of communion, where we become part of Christ's and each others' lives. "Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf." (1 Cor. 10:16-17) The Eucharist expresses the unity of Christ's body, presages the heavenly feast, and calls us to live in faith and realize communion with the saints.

3.4.2 Receiving Christ and forgiveness through the Eucharist

91 Christ gives his body and blood in the bread and wine to all those who partake of the sacrament. The living Christ present in the Holy Communion is received as salvation in faith. We receive the blessing of his life, death and resurrection as forgiveness and the hope of eternal life. We teach that Christ's body and blood are truly and substantially present in the consecrated bread and wine. The bread and wine of the Eucharist are therefore not only a symbol or metaphor for Christ's body and blood, nor do they refer to Christ, but they are actually the body and blood of Christ himself. "We believe that the body and blood of Christ are truly present, distributed and received under the forms of bread and wine in the Lord's Supper (Eucharist). In this way we receive the body and blood of Christ, crucified and risen, and in him the forgiveness of sins and all other benefits of his passion."³⁰

92 Methodism places special emphasis on Christ's real presence in the Eucharist, but understands it in a spiritual sense. Methodism highlights faith as the tool by which the body and blood of Christ present in the Eucharist are received and enjoyed. Lutheranism understands Christ's presence literally: Christ says, "this is my body". His body is "in, with and under" the bread. According to the Lutheran perception, Christ is truly and substantially present in the Eucharist. The sacrament is enjoyed properly/correctly and for salvation by faith.

93 Holy Communion is a sacramental meal, which clearly conveys God's love and grace in Jesus Christ. When we eat the bread and drink the wine, Christ offers us true communion with him. We are joined to Christ and his incorruptible life when he comes to us in the sacrament of his body and blood. The Eucharist is therefore also a foretaste of the reality of the resurrection and his return in glory.

3.4.3 The Eucharist as a meal that fortifies the Church

94 Christ commanded his followers: "Do this in memory of me." The sacramental meal is consecrated during the church service, relying on Christ's promise, appealing to his mandate and praying for the aid of the Holy Spirit. It is performed by a pastor especially ordained for the task. The laying out of the Eucharist is not a procedure that would bestow the promised gifts based on human actions, but a prayer addressed to the Father that expresses the Church's complete dependence on him. Those who

³⁰ *Porvoo Common Statement*, 32h.

partake of the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper to strengthen their faith are those who answer Christ's call, who, repenting of their sins, love him and search for him. In this way the Eucharist strengthens us in communion with him and one another. Lutherans and Methodists teach that the way to deal with the surplus elements of the Eucharist that respects the mystery is to consume them entirely, with the possibility of retaining some portion of consecrated bread and wine for those who are too ill to attend the service in person. Both churches strive to achieve this, although in neither church is this the uniform practice.³¹

95 Methodism stresses that the *de facto* host of the Lord's Supper is Christ himself, and for this reason communion is open to everyone, who is willing to receive in faith the crucified and resurrected Lord. This means that children and those seeking faith are invited to participate, while the Methodist Church considers baptism to be a prerequisite for membership and usually takes place before communion. The issue of membership in the Church is discussed below (§ 112, 113).

96 As followers of Christ we offer ourselves daily as living and holy sacrifices. Our obedience to God's loving and demanding will is nourished through the Eucharist. The more we turn to God and ask his help, also by using the gift of the Eucharist, the more we become like Christ in fulfilling God's will. In the celebration of the Eucharist, Christ gathers, teaches and nourishes the Church. The body and blood of Christ shared and partaken of in Holy Communion change, renew and heal us, strengthening our faith in our resurrected Savior. Relying on Christ, the community of the new union, the Church, lives in communion with the Savior in order to be able to accomplish its mission.

4. Church and ministry

4.1 The nature of the Church

4.1.1 The Church is based on the work of the triune God

97 Lutherans and Methodists share the view that the Church is based on God's work and not on people's own actions. The Holy Bible frequently employs metaphors to describe the Church that explain what the Church's nature and purpose ought to be. The Church is a nation that the triune God has called to himself, redeemed as his own and sent to perform the mission reserved for it in God's plan for salvation (e.g., 1 Pet. 2:9-10). The Church is Christ's body, of which he is the head. It has many members, and his fullness dwells there (Eph. 1:22-23). The Church is the temple of the Holy Spirit, which is built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets and whose cornerstone is Christ (Eph. 2:20-22).

98 The foundation of the Church is God's own work in his different guises as Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier. The Father, the creator and guardian of the world, has sent his Son to become flesh. The Son, through his crucifixion, has atoned for the world's

³¹ *This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion* (2004), 31-32; *Palvelkaa Herraa iloiten*. Jumalanpalveluksen opas. Suomen ev.-lut. kirkon kirkkohallituksen julkaisuja 2000:6, 46; *Vietämme ehtoollista*. Näkökohtia ehtoolliskäytäntöjen kehittämiseen ja ehtoollisen jakamisessa avustavien perehdyttämiseen. Suomen ev.-lut. kirkon kirkkohallituksen julkaisuja 1998:5, 36-37; cf. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* II, 32.

sins, and through his resurrection he has conquered death. The Holy Spirit generates faith and creates the Church by proclaiming the gospel and performing the sacraments, as well as strengthening Christians and leading the Church toward its destination in eternity.

99 Both Lutherans and Methodists teach that the Church is the community of all the faithful, where the gospel is rightly taught and the sacraments are rightly administered.³² The Church is therefore an entity that transcends time and boundaries, although it also manifests itself as a locally gathered community.

100 The Church is the communion (*koinonia*) of the faithful, based on the communion (*koinonia*) between the persons of the triune God. Throughout the ages the mission of the Church has been to proclaim the Gospel, which makes us participants, in the Holy Spirit, of the union between the Father and the Son. "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ." (1 John 1:3) Since the days of the apostles, the Church has been a congregation of the faithful based around the Word and the sacraments: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." (Acts 2:42)

101 Both Methodists and Lutherans emphasize that Christians can remain in faith only in communion with the means of grace and with one another. In this way, the members of a local congregation are also members of the universal Church of Christ. Martin Luther writes in the Large Catechism about the Church as the community of all saints: "Thus, until the last day, the Holy Ghost abides with the holy congregation or Christendom, by means of which he fetches us to Christ and which he employs to teach and preach to us the Word, whereby he works and promotes sanctification, causing it [this community] daily to grow and become strong in the faith and its fruits which he produces."³³

102 In the Methodist concept of the Church the same idea is expressed with the ideas of union and *connection*: the Church is God's union of grace, where the faithful are in communion with Christ and one another. The local church is a connectional society of believers, which is in communion with the global Church of Christ by means of the Word and sacraments, as well as prayer, praising God and the mission: "The local church is a connectional society of persons who have professed their faith in Christ, have been baptized, have assumed the vows of membership in The United Methodist Church, and are associated in fellowship as a local United Methodist church in order that they may hear the Word of God, receive the sacraments, praise and worship the triune God, and carry forward the work that Christ has committed to his church. Such a society of believers, being within The United Methodist Church and subject to its Discipline, is also an inherent part of the church universal, which is composed of all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and which in the Apostles' Creed we declare to be the holy catholic church."³⁴

4.1.2 The Church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic

³² *Augsburg Confession* VII; *Book of Discipline*, Preamble, § 103 XIII.

³³ *Large Catechism*, Part Two, 53.

³⁴ *Book of Discipline* § 203.

103 The Church of Christ is one, because God is one. Division within the Church clouds its mission to testify about the unity between it and Christ and which is based on the unity between the persons of the triune God. The union between the Father and the Son is the source of Christian unity: “[I pray] that all of them may be one, Father, just as you 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)

104 The Church is holy, because it receives in faith the gift of holiness from Christ, and it is the dwelling of the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies it. Christians are called to lead a new life under the guidance of the Spirit, where their sinful prior nature is allowed to die in daily healing, and a new person is born in its place.

105 The Church is catholic, because it is spread over the entire globe and it has the fullness of all salvation. Both Lutherans and Methodists specify that local churches and congregations are part of the universal Church of Christ. As such they have full salvation, even if they are not in themselves the entire Church. Because of the catholic nature of the Christian Church, individual churches need a structure that transcends local boundaries, that unifies regional congregations, churches, dioceses or annual conferences. For both Lutherans and Methodists this structure is provided by the office of the bishop.

106 The Church is apostolic, because the testimony of the apostles has conveyed to it the Gospel of Christ. It is a building “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.” (Eph. 2:20) It has apostolic faith that it confesses, and it participates in its entirety in the mission of the apostles. All those who have been baptized into Christ partake of the apostolic mission of the Church. In order to convey the apostolic creed, in service of love, the Church ordains bishops, pastors, deacons and appoints other officeholders.

107 Both Lutherans and Methodists are assured that in ordination the Church is following the apostolic example (Acts 6:6, 1 Tim. 4:14). The apostolic succession is foremost the continuity of the Church in its apostolic faith and witness. The continuity of the office of the Church in the succession of ordinations performed by bishops also refers to the Church’s apostolic mission and is a sign that it wishes to remain faithful to it. On the other hand, it is a sign of the catholic nature of the Church, for ordination cannot be performed disconnected from the Church as a whole or without communion with other ordained persons.

4.2 Ministry of all Christians

4.2.1 Christians’ common mission

108 Being based on the work of the triune God to recreate the world, the Church is also part of the mission that God has in his different persons. The Father sent his Son and the Son prays to the Father to send his Holy Spirit to the Church. The Church proclaims the gospel of Christ through words and deeds. Its focus is not a timeless notion, but the Lord who has sent the Church is the living and active incarnate God: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen

with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.” (1 John 1:1)

109 All of God’s people have been sent. All who have been baptized into union with Christ are part of the common ministry that is based on Christ’s own ministry as high priest and offer sacrifice. Christ’s own are called to pray for the others and to offer praise to God in gratitude. Everyone has the right to approach God in prayer and testify faith in Christ. Each person received as Christ’s own has the right to proclaim the Gospel about the atonement of sins. ”The heart of Christian ministry is Christ’s ministry of outreaching love.”³⁵

110 Christ sent his disciples ”into all the world” (Mark 16:15). The Church’s mission of evangelism and diaconic service is both local and global. The Church has been called to be both a sign of God’s kingdom and the means of its coming. Living from God’s grace and love, it testifies to God’s regenerative power over individuals and entire communities. In this way, the Church is simultaneously a foretaste of the coming eternal salvation and also functions thanks to the power of the kingdom of God which is already present.

111 All Christians have received gifts from God with which they can build the Church. The wealth of multiplicity of these gifts, however, makes it necessary to fit them together. General and specific ministry of service therefore belong in communion together. Both are based on the ministry of service of Christ himself. They have different tasks, but they serve the same totality: ”Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the Church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.” (1 Cor. 12:27-28)

4.2.2 Membership in the Church

112 Both Lutherans and Methodists are of the view that one becomes a member of the Church through baptism. In baptism one is joined to Christ’s body and joined to other members of the Church: ”so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.” (Rom. 12:5)

113 In both the Lutheran and Methodist Churches, two levels of participation are observed in some matters. In the Lutheran Church, children who have been baptized may participate in Holy Communion together with those who are responsible for nourishing them in the Christian faith, but may take part by themselves only after they have been confirmed. Confirmation gives them the rights enjoyed by other members of the congregation, e.g., the right to be a god-parent, to vote in ecclesiastical elections, and to be a candidate in elections on the level of the congregation. Membership is granted through baptism, but full rights are obtained by answering membership questions, that is, by confessing one’s faith. A person who has confessed his faith and is bound to the Church has rights as a full member. These include, e.g., the ability to be a member of the congregational council and to represent the church at annual conferences.

³⁵ *Book of Discipline* § 125.

4.3 The ministry of the Church

4.3.1 God has ordained a special ministry

114 Although all Christians have the responsibility to proclaim the gospel, not everyone shares an equal role in this task. Not everyone has the right to hold office in the congregation, that is, to lead the liturgy, to preach or to perform the sacraments. For these tasks God has ordained a special ministry, which serves the common priesthood of all. "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up." (Eph. 4:11-12)

115 The ministry of proclaiming the gospel and administering the sacraments is vital to the Church. The Church cannot exist without the proclamation of the Word and the performance of the sacraments. For this reason the ministry is not fundamentally a matter of human order, but is part of the very foundations of the Church. The pastor who proclaims the Gospel and administers the sacraments is ordained by Christ, as Christ says, "he who hears you, hears me". The holder of the office is not proclaiming his own message but the Word of God, which includes God's promises. For this reason, the confessional books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church specify that a pastor works "in the stead and place of Christ".³⁶

116 Both Lutherans and Methodists make clear that the special ministry is appointed by God and is not a human arrangement.³⁷ The ordination takes place during a public church service through a laying on of hands and with a prayer asking that the gift of the Holy Spirit be granted to equip the person being ordained. The ordination is performed by a bishop, but the congregation as a whole prays on behalf of the candidate and recognizes the apostolicity of his ministry: "In ordination, the church affirms and continues the apostolic ministry through persons empowered by the Holy Spirit."³⁸

117 Although ordination includes a prayer that the spiritual gift may be granted, it depends on the charisma already present in the candidate. "On the one hand, by the laying on of hands with prayer a gift of grace already given by God is recognized and confirmed; on the other hand it is perfected for service."³⁹

118 The prerequisites for ordination include, in addition to the required training and personal characteristics, a certain spiritual preparation. Prior to ordination, these and other preparations are examined, and as part of the ordination process in both churches the candidate is asked a series of questions regarding the church's beliefs, doctrine, his commitment to its order as well as his own aspirations to lead by example. In the Methodist Church these questions (the majority of which date to the time of John Wesley) are asked both when being received as full member of the annual conference and on ordination. In the Lutheran Church the questions are not as detailed, but more thematic.

³⁶ *Defense of the Augsburg Confession*, VII, 28.

³⁷ *Augsburg Confession V; Book of Discipline* § 131.

³⁸ *Book of Discipline* § 303, 1.

³⁹ *Porvoo Common Statement*, 47.

119 The Church Order of the Evangelical Lutheran Church makes a distinction between those who have been ordained and those who have received a call to work with a specific congregation. One cannot be ordained if one has not received a calling either in a congregation, in a Christian organization or institution. Nevertheless, a pastor without a congregational call may perform the offices of a priest by virtue of his ordination. Ordination is permanent and cannot be repeated – once ordained one is sent "to serve the Church of Christ at all times and in all places".

120 In the Methodist Church order a similar distinction between ordination and congregational affiliation is not made, but instead it focuses on connectionalism: pastors are not merely in the service of the congregation but of the whole church and belong to the pastors' union. Before he can be ordained, a prospective minister must be elected as a member of the annual conference. If an ordained person does not tend to his assigned duties, he cannot be a member of the annual conference, however, he can be "placed" with a congregation where he can perform some of his offices under the supervision of an elder minister. In this sense the permanence of ordination is part of the mission. However, even according to the Methodists, ordination cannot be repeated.⁴⁰

4.3.2 Pastor, deacon and bishop

121 The duty of a pastor is above all to preach the Word and to perform the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Pastors lead the liturgy as well as the church's activities in terms of witness and service. Their role is to serve as teacher, spiritual caregiver, and to uphold the church order in the local congregation.

122 Both churches ordain deacons to the ministry of Word and service. Deacons have been called to the service of love especially towards the poor and oppressed, and those in greatest need. Both the Lutheran and Methodist Churches have historically emphasized the importance of the service of love and social responsibility as part of the Church's calling. In the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, discussions are going on regarding restructuring the office of deacon as an ordained ministry. In the Methodist Church, deacons are ordained members of annual conferences, so their position is part of a special ministry of service.

123 In the Methodist Church, in addition to the ordained elders, pastoral duties can partly be performed by a local pastor, who has been given clerical rights in a certain parish. The local pastor receives permission to administrate a parish for one year at a time. He has a reduced right to administrate the sacraments. They are typically studying to be ministers, having completed at least part of the degree but not yet been ordained. Probationary members and persons preparing for ordination may also partly perform pastoral offices. Deacons may also be nominated as local pastors. A distinction should be made between these offices and the "localized pastor" who is ordained, but not a member of the connection (or conference). In some circumstances he can administer the sacraments. All pastoral offices described here must be authorised by the bishop and the district superintendent.

⁴⁰ *Book of Discipline* § 303, 5.

124 Both churches also consecrate bishops. The bishop has a special oversight responsibility to maintain and pass on the apostolic faith and to preserve the unity of the Church. The bishop's calling is therefore to be a sign of the catholic and apostolic nature of the Church. The ministry of the oversight (*episkopé*) is tended to "personally, collegially, and communally".⁴¹ In both churches, the oversight is performed not only by bishops but also by other other ordained persons and by members of the church in different contexts (e.g., the church council, annual conference, the district superintendents nominated by the bishops of the Methodist Church, whose ministry of service is considered to belong to the functions of the bishop). The bishop's role is to have oversight over a larger area than a local congregation. In the Lutheran Church this takes place within the diocese of each bishop, in the Methodist Church in the bishop's district. The ministry of oversight is leadership by service.

125 The ministry of a bishop is not separate from the ministry of a priest, but rather both priest and bishop have been appointed to the same ministry of the Word and sacraments set by Christ, where both have the right, *jure divino*, to proclaim the gospel and administer the sacraments.⁴² There are no real differences between the ministry of a priest and the ministry of a bishop that would be based on faith, but each one has its own task for which he has been set aside when ordained and for which a special gift from the Holy Spirit has been prayed for. A bishop is endowed with different rights to the priestly ministry (for example, the right to perform ordinations). In the Lutheran Church, appointment to the office of bishop is for life, in the Methodist Church it is for a period of eight plus four years. In both churches a bishop cannot be reordained.

126 Both churches ordain both women and men as pastors. In the Methodist Church ordination of women has been possible since 1956. The first female pastor in Finland was ordained in 1958. The same decision to allow female ordination and the first instance took place in the Evangelical Lutheran Church thirty years later.

5. Conclusions and recommendations for our churches

127 We have, through these discussions, come to know each other as Lutherans and Methodists. We have familiarized ourselves with each other's doctrines regarding salvation, the sacraments, and dogma. We have been assured of our common faith and common calling. We have labored in prayer on behalf of the unity of Christ's Church. We have been journeying toward communion and prepared ourselves better for a common witness, so that Christ's own prayer "that the world may believe" (John 17:21) might be fulfilled in our churches.

128 As a result of these conversations we would recommend to our churches that they take steps towards achieving greater unity. This can be achieved by our churches sharing liturgy, where, in praying to God we all partake of the Word of the gospel and the sacrament of the Eucharist. In this way our churches would enter into a mutual communion of altar and pulpit, which includes the mutual recognition of ordination.

⁴¹ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* III, 26; *Porvoo Common Statement*, 32; cf. *Book of Discipline* § 427, 2.

⁴² *Ausburg Confession* XXVIII, 5-7; *Episcopacy: A Lutheran – United Methodist Common Statement to the Church*, 18. In *Episcopacy. Lutheran – United Methodist Dialogue II*. Minneapolis: Augsburg 1990.

129 We recommend to our churches that they jointly make the following declaration:

130 Because we are in fundamental agreement on the content of faith, the doctrinal points on justification and sanctification and share a common view on the nature and purpose of the Church, on the shared mission of the Church as well as the Church's ministry, we, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, the United Methodist Church of Finland (Finnish speaking) and the United Methodist Church of Finland (Swedish speaking), make the following acknowledgments and commitments:

a) We acknowledge:

- i. that one another's churches belong to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ and truly participating in the mission of the whole people of God;
- ii. that both our churches share in the common confession of the apostolic faith and that in all our churches the Word of God is authentically preached, and the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist are duly administered;
- iii. that one another's ordained ministries of pastor, deacon and bishop are given by God as instruments of his grace and that those ordained possess not only the inward call of the Spirit, but also Christ's commission through his Body, the Church;
- iv. that personal, collegial and communal oversight (episcopate) is exercised in all our churches to preserve and promote the apostolic faith and life;
- v. that the episcopal office is valued and maintained in all our churches as a visible sign expressing and serving the Church's unity and continuity.

b) We commit ourselves:

- i. to celebrate a common liturgy and to welcome one another's members to receive the sacrament of the Eucharist;
- ii. to welcome persons ordained in either of our churches to the office of bishop, priest or deacon to serve, in accordance with any regulations which may from time to time be in force, in that ministry in the receiving church without re-ordination;
- iii. to establish forms of regular consultation on significant matters of faith and life;
- iv. to develop resources for common witness and service on the local level;
- v. to deepen our efforts to attain communion within Christ's church by engaging in conversation about unresolved issues we still face before our churches can attain full communion.

131 Having come to know the will of God through the Word of the Gospel, and know of his plan "to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ" (Eph. 1:9-10), we wish to strive in prayer toward this goal. Christ, under whose feet "God placed all things" and whom he appointed as "head over everything for the church" (Eph. 1:22) has sent us to announce his victory over death and to live a new life in him. Through his resurrection he has broken boundaries and opened up a new future for creation. He is present with us, but he is also our predecessor in prayer in the triune God. When we pray to our heavenly Father, we are not praying alone, but

his Spirit cries out in us. In this belief we join in the ecumenical efforts of other churches and traditions. As Lutherans and Methodists we are prepared, as they are, to place ourselves at the disposal of the Lord in his plan to save and reconcile all humanity and all creation.