

## **Proposal of the ELCF Bishops' Conference 6<sup>th</sup> September 2023 to the ELCF General Synod in November 2023**

### **RECOGNITION OF THE PARALLELISM OF THE NORTH AMERICAN ANGLICAN–LUTHERAN AGREEMENTS WITH THE PORVOO DECLARATION**

#### *Background*

This proposal concerns the official interpretation of the extent of the ecumenical and international agreements the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland has concluded, namely the Anglican–Lutheran Porvoo Declaration and the Porvoo Communion constituted on its basis, as well as the agreement's relationship to other similar Anglican–Lutheran agreements. Both the Anglican Communion and the Lutheran World Federation have recommended the recognition of the parallelism of agreements at the same level as the Porvoo Agreement, of which there are currently another two. This is not therefore a matter of concluding a new agreement, but of the official acknowledgement of the compatibility of previous agreements. However, as the matter clearly concerns the ecumenical agreements our church concludes, it should be discussed not only in the Bishops' Conference (Church Law 5:5) but also at the General Synod (Church Law 5:2,5).

#### *Rationale*

Our church has been an active member of the Porvoo Communion since its inception in 1996. The General Synod approved the signing of the Porvoo Declaration as being in accordance with the Lutheran confession in November 1995. We are also a founding (1947) and active member of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). The international conversations organised by the Lutheran World Federation and the Anglican Communion have recommended the wider application of the results the communions' churches have achieved with reference to the ecumenical agreements Anglicans and Lutherans have concluded. The report *To Love and Serve* (2012), which the LWF's council adopted at its meeting in Bogota in 2012, states:

Lutheran pastors ordained to the office of priest from churches with whom the Anglican churches have agreements of (full) communion should be recognised in other Anglican churches in areas where there are agreements of full communion in the same way as priests from other Anglican provinces. In the same way, Anglican priests from churches with which Lutheran churches have agreements of (full) communion should be recognised in other Lutheran churches in the same way as ordained pastors from other Lutheran churches. They should be invited to participate in the laying on of hands of pastors and priests in accordance with local custom. Where their qualifications for a special appointment are concerned, they should be eligible for the post. ALIC III, 53.

The Consultative Council of the Anglican Communion endorsed this outcome of the dialogue in 2016 and commended the steps taken by the Anglican (Episcopal) churches of North America, Great Britain and Ireland to bring the three regional agreements on ecumenical fellowship into alignment. The official recognition of the equivalence of individual ecumenical agreements and the conclusions it implies is a key element of ecumenical growth and development to strengthen ecumenical unity for the sake of common witness and service.

Encouraged by the international development sparked by the Porvoo process, the Episcopalians and Lutherans of the United States and the Anglicans and Lutherans of Canada

entered the process based on the recognition of the US Episcopal–Lutheran *Called to Common Mission Agreement* (1999) and the Canadian Anglican–Lutheran *Waterloo Agreement* (2001), which made central use of the parallelism of the Porvoo Agreement. This larger fellowship, which forms the basis of the two agreements and was approved by the churches’ general synods in 2022, is called *Churches Beyond Borders*. The parties to the agreement saw the next step as the recognition of the parallelism with the churches that had joined the third ‘full communion’ agreement – the Porvoo Declaration.

In the Porvoo Agreement’s Common Statement and Declaration the desire to pray and work for the growing fellowship of the churches is expressed in emerging ecclesial communion and more broadly ecumenically. In tangible terms it agrees on the communion of the member churches, the theological recognition of the interchangeability of ministries, and the treatment of members of each other’s churches as members of one’s own. A commitment to the proclamation and service of the apostolic gospel in secularised societies as part of a shared common faith and mission were seen as a key bridge to mutual rapprochement.

6. Above all, we face a common challenge to engage in God’s mission to the people of our nations and continent at a time of unparalleled opportunity, which may properly be called a *kairos*.

7. The faith, worship and spirituality of all our churches are rooted in the tradition of the apostolic Church. ... We each understand our own church to be part of the One, Holy, Catholic Church of Jesus Christ and truly participating in the one apostolic mission of the whole people of God. We share in the liturgical heritage of Western Christianity and also in the Reformation emphases upon justification by faith and upon word and sacrament as means of grace.

The traditional theme of the doctrinal conversations between Anglicans and Lutherans, the bishop’s office, was now viewed from a new perspective, which saw it as a sign of apostolic continuity and the servant of the apostolicity of the whole church. The Porvoo Common Statement states:

i. We believe that *all members of the church* are called to participate in its apostolic mission... k. We believe that *a ministry of pastoral oversight (episcopate)*, exercised in personal, collegial and communal ways, is necessary as witness to and safeguard of the unity and apostolicity of the Church.

The Porvoo Common Statement ties the bishop’s office to the service of the church’s apostolic task of mission in the whole church.

50. The whole Church is a sign of the Kingdom of God; the act of ordination is a sign of God’s faithfulness to his Church, especially in relation to the oversight of its mission. ... In so doing the Church communicates its care for continuity in the whole of its life and mission, and reinforces its determination to manifest the permanent characteristics of the Church of the apostles.

It was already known at the time of the Porvoo Declaration that similar agreements were being made between Anglicans and Lutherans in North America. The Common Statement also states: ‘We do not regard our move to closer communion as an end in itself, but as part of the pursuit of a wider unity.’ It is natural to seek opportunities for mutual exchange given our common mission, and where the practical exchange of workers is concerned, priests working in other churches without the requirement of a new ordination. Cooperation under

the agreement also supports the shared use of premises by the signatory churches, especially in supporting parish work among members living abroad.

The Porvoo Communion's Contact Group has discussed the formal acknowledgement of the parallelism between the Porvoo Agreement and the North American Anglican–Lutheran agreements. There has been no theological obstacle to this. The hope is that each church's leadership will study the kind of process that makes most sense for their church in recognising the parallelism of these three agreements.

It is not therefore desired to draw up new bilateral transatlantic agreements between churches but to recognise the parallelism of the agreements at a sufficiently high level in each member church. Concerning the interchangeability of ministries, the recognition is above all theological because the churches' various regulations result in it requiring practical examination on a case-by-case basis, taking academic qualifications and other practical criteria into account. It is important, however, to confirm officially that the churches of the Anglican Communion recognise Lutheran episcopal ordination and the ordinations of priests and deacons performed by Lutheran bishops, while the Lutheran churches of the agreement recognise Anglican bishops, priests, and deacons in the same way as the bishops, priests, and deacons of the Lutheran member churches. Through the Lutheran World Federation our church is in communion with Lutherans in the United States and Canada. There is also a great deal of cooperation with them in connection with the ministry to Finns abroad. Meanwhile, those working as expatriates in these countries have practical connections with Episcopalians and Anglicans, especially in Canada. We are thus already involved in some way in communion with North America. Similarly, priests from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) have served and are serving in Europe.

From the perspective of the Church Law and the Church Order, this would mean that Church Law 1:3/Church Order 1:2, 1, point 3 on the acceptance of the reciprocal conditions for membership and Church Law 7:2/Church Order 7:6,2 on the conditions for the reciprocal handling of the priest's office, as well as Church Order 1:3,2 on rights of service in parishes, would become applicable to these North American agreement churches at the point when they have themselves accepted the decision concerning complementarity. This being the case, the priests of The Episcopal Church (US) and the Anglican Church of Canada should also be added to the church's statutes as among the priests of those churches that can in individual cases provide services and certain acts of worship in accordance with our church's ecclesiastical ordinances. We are already in communion with the Lutherans of the United States and Canada, and in individual cases their priests have the right to serve in our church through their membership of the Lutheran World Federation. Eucharistic hospitality with Anglicans was already agreed in Archbishop Eino Kaila's letter to the Church of England in 1936.

**Proposal:** The Bishops' Conferences proposes to the General Synod that our church agree to recognise the parallelism of the Anglican (Episcopal)–Lutheran ecumenical agreements concluded in North America in Canada and the United States with the Porvoo Common Statement and Declaration.