

## Lutheran-Methodist Dialogue

### *THE CHURCH: COMMUNITY OF GRACE 1979-1984*

#### Preface

It is with deep gratitude and joy that we are able to present the results of the dialogue between the Lutheran World Federation and the World Methodist Council to the decision-making bodies and member churches of our two communions.

During five well-prepared meetings between 1979 and 1984, our joint commission has been able to discuss a wide range of questions which are central to our faith and Christian life as individuals and churches. Our report witnesses to important agreements and convergences and indicates the ways in which we express our common faith differently. On that basis the joint commission recommends steps towards closer fellowship between our churches, including pulpit exchanges and mutual hospitality the table of the Lord.

It is our hope and wish that the results of this dialogue will be used in our churches as a source and impulse for closer relations in life, witness and service and as a basis for further dialogue where the need to achieve an even fuller agreement is felt.

May the Holy Spirit whose power and guidance we celebrate again at this Pentecost time lead us towards that visible unity of all Christians for which our Lord prayed.

Dr Carl H. Mau  
General Secretary  
Lutheran World Federation

Dr Joe Hale  
General secretary  
World Methodist Council

## Introduction

### A. History of the dialogue

1. The bilateral dialogue between the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the World Methodist Council (WMC) on the theme "The Church: Community of Grace" traces its origin to the conference of secretaries of Christian world communions in Rome, 1977. On the evening of 17 May a small group of Methodists and Lutherans met to discuss the arrangements for an exploratory conversation between their two confessional families.<sup>1</sup> The officers of the LWF and WMC decided to send seven participants from each side to an exploratory consultation 5-9 December 1977 at Epworth-by-the-Sea, St Simons Island, Georgia, USA.

2. The Epworth-by-the-Sea consultation was organized around four topics: basic commonalities, issues needing clarification, common tasks confronting Lutherans and Methodists, and methodological and practical implications of a Lutheran-Methodist dialogue at the world level. The participants concluded that such a dialogue could contribute to the progress of ecumenism to a degree that would justify the required scholarly effort and financial expenditure. Thus they prepared a statement of purpose and a five-part programme of discussion for submission to their respective executive committees.

3. The purpose of the dialogue would be:

- a) to contribute to mutual understanding and respect between Methodists and Lutherans for both their similarities and their differences;
- b) to help demonstrate that Lutheranism and Methodism are parts of one community in Christ and seek to stand together in their witness and service in the world;
- c) to strengthen possibilities for practising fellowship in word and sacrament between Lutheranism and Methodism;
- d) to provide theological support for church cooperation and unity according to local needs and possibilities.

4. Further, under the theme "The Church: Community of Grace", five topics would be explored:

- a) biblical authority and the authenticity of the church;
- b) the gospel of grace;
- c) the Holy Spirit in the church, the communion of saints, the body of Christ;
- d) the sacraments of the gospel;
- e) the mission of the church in today's world.

5. The Lutheran-Methodist joint commission would be comprised of six to eight members from each side (not including staff), with special attention to world geographical inclusiveness.

6. Both the LWF and the WMC gave approval to this proposal. They appointed a joint commission of 16 members, representing Methodist and Lutheran churches in Africa, Asia, Europe, North America and Latin America, and a significant sequence of consultations followed.

The *first* session of the joint commission was held at Dresden, 20-26 January 1979. The main topics of this meeting were the authority of scripture, the role of human reason, and the nature of Christian experience.

The *second* session was held at Bristol, England, 12-16 May 1980. Issues discussed there were Christian experience, justification and sanctification.

The *third* session was held in Oslo, Norway, 3-9 October 1981. Topics discussed were the Holy Spirit and ecclesiology.

The *fourth* session was held at Lake Junaluska, North Carolina, 20-26 March 1983. The means of grace, baptism and eucharist, church order, and the discussion of a first draft of this common statement were the main themes.

The *fifth* session was held at Bossey near Geneva, Switzerland, 3-8 March 1984, at which time evangelization, social ethics and adoption of a final report were the agenda items.

7. For the Lutheran World Federation, this dialogue with the World Methodist Council was part of a series of official dialogues with other Christian world communions, including the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Communion, the Orthodox churches and (from 1985) the Baptist World Alliance. In 1967 the World Methodist Council began an official bilateral dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church. The dialogue with the Lutheran World Federation was the second international dialogue of the WMC. The present dialogue must be seen not only in the context of worldwide ecumenicity but also as related to a considerable number of Lutheran-Methodist bilateral dialogues on the national level and to other expressions of increasing contacts and improving relationships between churches of our two confessional traditions.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Methodists were Bishop William R. Cannon, member of the Presidium of the World Methodist Council; Dr Joe Hale, general secretary of the WMC; and Mr Frank Northam, secretary, Geneva office, WMC. Representing the Lutherans were Dr Carl H. Mau, Jr, general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation; Dr Daniel Martensen, secretary for interconfessional research, LWF; and Dr Harding Meyer, research professor, Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg.

## *B. Background and experience of the dialogue*

8. The background of and reason for the dialogue is the recognition that while Lutheran and Methodist churches differ from one another in expressions of faith, life ethos and order, these differences are often the result of the specific origins and subsequent developments of both churches.

Lutheranism started as a reform movement within the late medieval church and assumed its specific identity in the conviction that it had rediscovered and restated fundamental Christian truths in obedience to the word of God and in continuity with the early fathers of the church. Its identity was also shaped by its distinction from and conflict with the Roman Catholic Church on the one hand, and the Anabaptist and in part also the Reformed tradition on the other hand.

– Methodism emerged in a completely different context and in a later era. The context of its origin was the Anglican tradition. Methodism was a reform movement, which desired to spread scriptural Christianity to all, especially to the neglected multitudes both inside and outside the church; it assumed its specific identity in response to the developing unbelief of the Enlightenment mentality and within the rapidly changing human and social conditions of the new era of industrialization and urbanization.

9. The differences between the Methodist and Lutheran churches, therefore, cannot simply be identified by reference to a series of specific points of doctrinal conflict and controversy. Rather, both churches represent traditions which are committed to faithful service and proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ in and for this world.

10. Lutheran and Methodist churches have lived side by side in many countries, and often for a long time. Their relationship has on the whole been marked neither by open doctrinal controversy nor by forms of mutual recognition or fellowship. The purpose of our dialogue has accordingly been to clarify the agreements and convergences in faith between us and to examine whether the differences between us are divisive or mutually challenging and enriching.

11. As members of the body of Christ, we share our faith in worship and service, in thought and love, in prayer and neighbour-care. Through these diverse ways we participate in the fullness of Christian life with one another, and especially in our sense of common mission. In this context we have explored our respective understandings and interpretations of Christian faith. We have welcomed the opportunity for such theological focus and have pursued it vigorously, but we also recognize that this discussion is only a part of the larger context of Christian faith and life.

12. In order to realize our purpose, papers were presented by each side on the main topics of our agenda. Our intense discussions have helped to clarify our respective positions, to discover a wide range of agreement, and to achieve a clearer view of the character and significance of our identity as Christians and as churches. We also have made an attempt to combine with our dialogue possibilities of encounter with local churches in the areas of our meetings in order that our theological debates could be informed and enriched by the experience of the actual life of our churches and that we could communicate something of our work and expectations to the people in the congregations.

13. In the process of our dialogue we have grown in mutual respect, understanding and fellowship. Behind different theological expressions and forms of Christian life, we have discovered basic common convictions; we have experienced agreements and disagreements, some of which run along our confessional lines, while others cut across our confessional alignments. Such experiences and insights have reached a deep level and can be communicated only insufficiently to others who have not gone through a similar process. We hope, therefore, that our common statement will be studied, wherever possible, in the context of dialogues and encounters between Lutherans and Methodists on local and national levels so that similar experiences and new insight may become possible.

14. In this common statement we intend to set down the results of our dialogue. The topical sections represent developed refinements and modifications of the original outline. In each case we seek to communicate our points of agreement, to delineate our distinctive emphases, and to acknowledge what we have found to be unresolved issues between Lutheranism and Methodism as two ways of being communities of grace. Our statement concludes with recommendations followed by a select bibliography.

## **I. The authority of the scriptures**

15. Lutherans and Methodists confess Jesus Christ to be the word of God incarnate and we acknowledge the scriptures of the Old and New Testament as faithful witnesses this central revelation. The historic collection of the books of the Bible has been commended by the ancient Christian churches and confirmed by the Holy Spirit as the most authentic, faithful and trustworthy bearer of the word of God. We must each judge our own traditions and hold one another accountable to the criterion of this scriptural testimony.

16. The scriptures provide the primary authoritative standards for faith and life, and work: Written for diverse historical needs and occasions, the scriptures continue to proclaim the word of God as addressed to people in their special times and situations. The long history of the formation, composition, transmission and proclamation of these texts further demonstrates that God uses human words authors and witnesses, and has called and sanctified their many efforts to proclaim his word of justice and mercy.

17. The faithful interpretation of the scriptures must acknowledge their historical diversity and attend carefully to the specific formulations, testimonies and messages of individual passages, books and literatures. Moreover, the scriptures must be read with reference to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, its authentic centre and content. But the Word of God,

revealed in Christ Jesus once for all, is also eternal. Hence the Word of God speaks to each age, and those who bear their witness in new times and occasions must be held accountable for the appropriate use and interpretation of the scriptures.

18. Methodists and Lutherans rejoice in the rich tradition of the one, holy, catholic church and trace their deep convictions about the authority of the scriptures to the founders of their distinctive traditions and beyond them to the faith of the earliest Christian communities. Both Luther and Wesley grounded their efforts to reform and renew the church in disciplined scriptural study. In his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* and in his *Sermons*, Wesley faithfully acknowledges the norm of scriptural authority. Luther repeatedly appealed for an examination of the scriptures that was directed and authorized by that which presents Christ.

19. As auxiliary keys to interpreting the scriptures we have explored tradition, reason and experience. Both church families acknowledge the three creeds of the ancient church (Apostles', Nicene, Athanasian). Because we believe that these ancient creeds authentically interpret the New Testament witness to Jesus Christ, we maintain that theological positions must be developed in continuity with them. Lutherans also give a special place to the Augsburg confession and Luther's Small Catechism (and some Lutheran churches to the entire *Book of Concord*) as a faithful explication of the teaching of the scriptures and the ancient church, and they hope to engage in dialogue with other Christians, using these confessions as a basis for the conversation. Methodists give a special place to John Wesley's *Sermons* and *Explanatory Notes upon the NT* as standards of doctrine and use them as a basis for ecumenical conversation (and some Methodist churches to the *Twenty-Five Articles on Religion*, the *Evangelical United Brethren Articles on Religion*, and the *General Rules*). The hymns of Charles Wesley, also have importance for doctrinal discussion. The confession of apostolic faith today is being raised currently both in our churches and in the larger ecumenical movement with its research project "Towards the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith Today". Such confession requires careful study in view of the changed historical and cultural circumstances in which both churches find themselves. All such theological work, we agree, must be primarily and constantly governed by the scriptures in critical relation to each context.

20. Lutherans and Methodists agree that human reason is a divine gift which helps to clarify and communicate the word of God for the teaching of the church and its mission to the world. Wesley, who was the author of "Appeals to Men of Reason and Religion", shared the appeal to reason of his age. But, as against the Deists, he gave priority to revelation and stressed the need of reason to be illuminated by the Holy Spirit. Luther reacted against the rationalism of medieval scholasticism. He did not attribute to reason any role in human salvation. But he valued reason as a human capacity for the ordering of personal and social life. Therefore, both traditions treat reason with respect and caution. They are also aware of its capacity for being misused and perverted. As critically self-aware, human reason is indispensable for life in this world and, in this way, is in the service of God's purposes.

21. Methodists and Lutherans recognize that experience will always be a significant factor in the understanding of the scriptures – and this in a twofold sense. It is a vital medium through which the Holy Spirit confirms the gospel in the lives of believers. And, at the same time, the gospel witnessed by the scriptures critically interprets experience. Methodists generally have emphasized more than Lutherans the role of experience in confirming Christian interpretation, but both Methodists and Lutherans agree that pl experience claiming to be distinctively Christian must be judged by criteria drawn from the scriptures. The social and cultural contexts within which our churches live deeply affect our Christian experience, our interpretation of the scriptures, and our theological reflection. These diverse social and cultural settings of our churches are also subject to critique and interpretation according to the authoritative standards of our faith. New questions arise in each age which require new answers. The question of whether certain interpretations or theological innovations are faithful to the gospel must always be carefully pursued. Nevertheless, evangelical fidelity leads us to expect and welcome new understandings of God's word of justice and mercy as the Holy Spirit leads us to proclaim it in the midst of various occasions and social contexts throughout the world.

22. For both Lutherans and Methodists the personal experiences and the theological thinking of Luther and Wesley have influenced the spirituality that is vital in and characteristic of the respective church families. In addition to these lasting influences, social, cultural, political and ecclesiastical contexts have contributed to differing practices of faith. Christian life has been expressed in a variety of styles of piety in our two traditions.

## **II. Salvation by grace through faith**

23. We agree that, in accordance with the scriptures, justification is the work of God in Christ and comes through faith alone. Within the context of justification, faith comprises both assent and trust. Persons as sinners are justified by God's gracious love in Christ, and not on the basis of human efforts or worthiness. Christ's righteousness is imputed and imparted to them by an act of God as they are enabled by the Holy Spirit to trust in God. Justification is dependent upon Christ's atoning death. In Christ, God reconciled the world and conquered the evil forces that dominate human life and the created order.

24. Wesleyans stress the prevenient grace of God which prepares humans for acknowledgment of justifying grace. They also affirm justification as the foundation for full redemption in Christ. Thus Methodists tend to understand justification by faith in Jesus Christ as initiating and, as such, determining the whole Christian life through God's action and personal appropriation. Lutherans believe that in justification, at once and constantly, God gives forgiveness, righteousness and eternal life. Christians therefore are in every moment dependent on God's justifying grace and never

move beyond or above the position of justified sinners. For both traditions, Christians throughout their whole life are in need of God's forgiving grace.

25. Reflection upon justification leads to consideration of sanctification. Sanctification is also a work of God's grace. Both traditions agree that sanctification is, on the one hand, seen as God's completed and anticipated act when God justifies and reconciles human beings. On the other hand, sanctification is God's work which is continuously going on in the Christian's life led by the Holy Spirit. In this way human beings are both drawn closer to God in faith and nearer to the neighbour in love. Lutherans stress that in Christ people are justified and sanctified while at the same time they remain sinners before God (*simul justus et peccator*). Methodists speak of this drastic change as a new birth in consequence of which the regenerated Christian lives in ever deepening and more fruitful love of God and neighbour. Methodists dare set no limit to what the grace of God can do for people in this present life. And it was a part of the original tradition received through John Wesley to believe that perfect love should be earnestly sought by believers and might be received in this life.

26. Furthermore, we agree on the basis of scripture that a Christian lives by God's grace received through faith. For Christian life, authentic faith inevitably yields obedience. Christian faith is faith that is active in love and is ever anew called to do good works because of God's command and for the sake of the neighbour. New being in Christ is the result of justification through the Holy Spirit. Methodists emphasize the positive condition of that new creation. Consequently they hold that, transformed by Christ, the believer is set free to be conformed to the will of God. Lutherans also emphasize the positive conditions of new creation and understand the Christian life as daily conversion (recognition of our continuing sin and continuous call upon the forgiving grace of God) and as faithful following of Christ in daily obedience. The law stands as claim and judge; the awareness of the law leads to the renewed trust in Christ's righteousness as the only ground of salvation, life and confidence.

27. There is common agreement that God's creating and sustaining grace is continuously present in the world and in human life. Lutherans maintain that in creation God gives human beings material goods necessary for our living, and as the Lord of nature and pl people, God fights against forces that would destroy the creation. In this saving action, however, God gives to people the fruits of Christ's saving work, such as forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Methodists also stress God as creator and moral governor of the world. The presence of God in the world is centred in Christ's redeeming work. From this centre God graciously blesses pl life. The original significance of this prevenient grace for human beings is the development of a sense of right and wrong, the recognition of fallen life as under the wrath of God, and the drawing of people to the saving grace given to us through word and sacrament and received by faith.

### III. The church

28. The church is the community of Jesus Christ called into being by the Holy Spirit. Those who respond in faith to the gospel of Christ, proclaimed in word and sacrament, are brought into a new relationship with God and with each other. All that divides people from each other has been overcome by Christ who binds men and women together into a new community of love, across the barriers of nation and race, colour and class, age and sex and wealth. As we are made one in the body of Christ we share in the one Spirit, by whom our unity in Christ is sustained and our life in Christ continually renewed.

29. At the heart of the Christian life is the worship of God in which we proclaim what God has done in creation and redemption and offer in response our thanksgiving. The Spirit who enables us to offer ourselves in joyful thanksgiving to God also frees us to give ourselves in service and witness to each other and to the world. The centre of our witness, as of our worship, is what God has done in Jesus Christ. The power of our witness comes from the Spirit who uses our words and our deeds to manifest Christ to the world.

30. Our churches, as historical institutions, have been both appropriately and inappropriately responsive to their social contexts. Hence, while the existence of the church is in the world and for the world, it must be constantly self-critical and critical of the whole life of society, exercising its divinely constituted vocation in obedience to the word of God. Thus in its origin, its worship and its service the church is the community of grace.

31. In speaking of the church as the communion of saints, both Lutheran and Methodist churches affirm the Holy Spirit's initiative in constituting and sanctifying the community of believers in the one, holy, catholic, apostolic church.

Definitions of the church in our two traditions indicate basic agreement:

- a) Article 13 in the *Articles of Religion*, as edited by John Wesley, reads: "The visible church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men in which the pure word of God is preached and the sacraments duly administered according to Christ's ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same."
- b) The confession of faith of the Evangelical United Brethren Church, article 5: "We believe the Christian church is the community of pl true believers under the lordship of Christ ... in which the word of God is preached ... and the sacraments are duly administered according to Christ's own appointment. Under the discipline of the Holy Spirit the church exists for the maintenance of worship, the edification of believers and the redemption of the world."
- c) The Augsburg confession, article 7: "It is also taught among us that one holy Christian church will be and remain forever. This is the assembly of pl believers among whom the gospel is preached in its purity and the holy

sacraments are administered according to the gospel. For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine word.”

32. Special emphases has been placed on the corporate nature of Christian life. To be “in Christ” is to be bound together in the family of God, and it is to be bound in service to the human family. Both traditions have been aware of the personal impact of excessive individualism, and both, while desiring to affirm the significance of the personal dimensions of the life of faith, also emphasize the corporate and communal dimensions of Christian existence.

33. Methodists and Lutherans include the elements of word, sacraments, faith and community in their articulation of what the church is. Lutherans and Methodists hold that the church also shall exercise church discipline even though they may understand and exercise such discipline in different ways. They also recognize that in situations of oppression or discrimination by secular powers the exercise of discipline can become a form of costly confession to Jesus Christ.

34. Historically, both confessional families started as movements within existing churches. Neither of the movements intended to become a separate church. While the Methodists grew into churches which were independent of the state, the Lutherans largely were organized as majority churches and state churches in wide regions (Scandinavian *Statskirker*, German *Landeskirchen*; ethnic/religious predominance in American upper Midwest). Methodist and Lutheran members of the commission affirm that Methodist or Lutheran churches, which are minorities in a situation where the other church is in a majority or privileged position, are to be recognized as fully legitimate churches and should enjoy equal rights and possibilities. We encourage a relationship to secular rule in which the church is independent and all denominations enjoy parity before the state. We rejoice that progress towards better understanding is being made in many of the places where Methodists and Lutherans have experienced problems in their formal relationships. The exchanges we have had in this dialogue itself have contributed positively to the growth of such understanding.

35. The foundation of the church is Jesus Christ, mediated through the means of grace. Baptism marks entry into this community. There is mutual recognition that persons are called to live out their baptism in a daily life of faith and their active participation in the life and mission of the Christian community. In both traditions there is understanding of the need for persons to affirm and to appropriate the meaning of their faith. The Wesleyan tradition places great weight upon growth towards Christian maturity through the constant use of the means of grace. Both church families recognize that there are different legitimate patterns of living the Christian life. This variety should be recognized not only to continue our faithfulness and make us open to other witnesses but also to prevent our tendencies to impose our way upon others.

36. Lutherans and Methodists believe that it is God’s will for the word to be proclaimed and that the word of God accomplishes that for which God sends it – the creation of a faithful people, the salvation of the world, and life according to God’s law. Both sides agree that neither baptism nor holy communion are, in themselves, a guarantee of salvation. Under God the church has responsibility for pastoral care and instruction to assist the baptized to live as Christians in the fellowship of the church. There are times when the church must officially decide that a person has removed himself or herself from that fellowship. Even so discipline is always pastoral and the church must seek ways to bring about repentance and reconciliation.

37. Our two traditions have emphasized the ministry of all the people of God both in their everyday vocations and in particular responsibilities within the Christian community. Accordingly our insistence on the importance of the ordained ministry goes together with our recognition of the manifold lay ministries. Ministries of laity share in the wholeness of the ministry of Christ who bears the form of a servant in the church and in the world. In this broader perspective of ministry we acknowledge God’s gift of the ordained ministry, which in both our churches is exercised by women and men. The ordained minister presides in the proclamation of the word, the celebration of the sacraments and the exercise of pastoral care. Since the New Testament presents diverse forms of ministry, we hold that no particular form of ordained ministry or church order is prescribed by the New Testament as necessary for the church. In obedience to the God-given mission, our churches have developed particular patterns of ministry. The unity of the church is given by Christ. This unity also requires the mutual recognition of the ministries of our churches.

38. For Lutherans ordained ministry is an office and a service decreed by God for the administration of the means of grace for the salvation of the people. Such administration is public and takes place after ordination. Lutherans emphasize the call of God through the church to the office of ministry. A person remains in this office as long as he or she exercises the functions of this office with the approval of the church. Methodists place great stress on the call of God through the Holy Spirit to people who offer themselves for the ordained ministry. The conviction of this call must be tested by the church. Methodists distinguish between a call to preach (service of the word) and a call to ordained ministry (service of word, sacrament and order).

39. Methodists and Lutherans regard oversight (*episcopate*) as fundamental in the life of the church. This ministry is exercised in a variety of ways. In most Lutheran and Methodist churches oversight is exercised by bishops. We value this episcopal ministry, which is, however, not regarded as being an essential mark of the church. Where such a rank and title is employed, both Lutherans and Methodists view the bishop as a minister set aside for superintending

pastoral function. We recognize ordination under either Lutheran or Methodist discipline as having continuity with the apostolic tradition, and we recognize our ministries to be ministries in the church of Christ.

#### **IV. Means of grace**

40. The Holy Spirit creates the body of Christ and communicates God's grace through means that are ordained and made effective by God. Lutherans and Methodists agree that the word of God and the sacraments of baptism and eucharist are the fundamental means of grace by which the gospel of God's redeeming love in Christ is conveyed to people to be received in faith, and by which Christ through the Holy Spirit constitutes, preserves and sends the church into the world.

41. By means of grace we understand certain external words, tangible signs, or acts instituted by Christ and conveying God's grace to human beings and to strengthen them for a life in faith and service. Lutherans and Methodists highly esteem the use of these means because of God's ordination and promise to act through them. On the other hand, they believe that there is no effect or merit in the means as human actions, but God's promise is to work, to strengthen, and to nurture faith in those who receive them according to his order. Their benefit can only be received by faith as confidence in God's effective presence.

42. In bestowing his unmerited love upon people God's sovereign freedom is not limited to certain means. Yet we as his children and Christ's disciples are not free to choose whether or not to use the means ordained by our Lord. Because he has commanded them we neglect them at our peril.

43. Lutherans and Methodists agree that preaching, baptism and the Lord's supper the central means of grace because of their divine appointment and clear relation to objective character of the gospel. The two traditions differ, however, in their opinions about the extent and the content of the range of means. Lutherans prefer to look upon preaching, baptism and eucharist as means of grace in a proper sense because of their clear historic institution according to the scriptures. Methodists also use the expression "means of grace" for a wider range of institutions and practices such as Bible study, class meetings, fasting, vigils, love feasts. God is free to use any means, whether biblically instituted or not, in order to grant his grace to human beings. For the Christians' use of the means of grace it is important to act according to God's commands as well as to rely not on any human action, conviction or worthiness, but solely on God's promise.

##### *A. Baptism*

44. There is agreement among Methodists and Lutherans that baptism is a sacrament instituted by Jesus Christ. Baptism is not primarily a human act, but God's gift of salvation for men and women who are sinners. Baptism is not only a mark of Christian profession, it is an effective sign of God's grace.

45. Through baptism we are given a new relationship with God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In baptism we are united with Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection and are incorporated into the body of Christ which is the church. Therefore baptism is an unrepeatable act. In this sacrament the Holy Spirit is given to renew the life of the baptized. Forgiveness of sins and justification are given. Baptism is the sacrament of entrance, not only into a particular denomination, but into the holy, catholic and, consequently, is a sacrament of fundamental unity in Christ and in the one Spirit.

46. Baptism is inseparably linked with faith. The Holy Spirit enables human beings to rely faithfully upon God's promise of grace expressed in the sacrament. Baptism is the sacrament of the beginning of Christian life and has lasting significance for our continual repentance and daily reception of forgiveness and for our growth in faith and obedience. The benefits of baptism are forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. These benefits may be lost through unbelief and persistent disobedience. Therefore Lutherans and Methodists will call for repentance and the conversion of the non-believing baptized person as a return to the promised gift of grace in baptism.

47. We recognize as valid all acts of baptism in the name of the Trinity using water and administered according to Christ's command and promise. We affirm one another's baptism as prescribed in the present baptismal liturgies of our churches. We also recognize baptism as valid when, in unusual circumstances, it is administered by lay people.

48. Because baptism is God's act of salvation it is intended for all persons without regard to age, mental capacity or other such factors. Consequently, all the baptized are incorporated into covenant with God, into the church of Christ as the divine promise has reference also to them.

49. Baptism is usually administered by an ordained minister in a congregational service of public worship. Further, baptism is connected with the nurturing task of a Christian congregation. In this way baptized persons can be supported in Christian faith and life. We recognize our common need for strengthening this nurture by our churches in today's secularized society.

50. On the other hand there are divergences and disagreements among us on the following points.

We share the understanding that humanity's relationship to God, to one another, and to oneself has been broken and that sin now belongs to all humankind. Methodists, however assert that God's reconciling work in Christ has an anticipatory effect enabling positive response of human beings (prevenient grace): God's gracious action which bestows salvation upon humankind is not bound to particular human words or actions. Consequently, emergency baptism is infrequent among Methodists. Lutherans put a specific emphasis on the necessity of baptism for salvation

because baptism is understood as the fundamental application of God's atonement in Christ to the individual. This does not however involve a conviction that unbaptized infants are outside the love of God.

51. We agree in looking upon baptism as entrance into the church. However, there is a difference among us about the way in which we more precisely define the relationship between baptism and church membership. For Lutherans, baptism establishes church membership. Most Methodists distinguish between preparatory and full membership. The former is given through baptism, the latter through explicit admission on profession of faith. In a historic perspective this is rooted in Methodism as a revival movement which often incorporated new members after conversion. Theological regarded this divergence among us is due to different understandings of faith in relation to the baptismal act. The concern of both Lutherans and Methodists is to hold closely together God's action and human faith. But while Methodists stress the necessity of a personal faith for receiving salvation, Lutherans look upon faith as confidence in God's promise given in the baptismal act.

#### *B. The eucharist*

52. Eucharistic theology and practice in their particular Methodist and Lutheran forms developed with different presuppositions and in different historical contexts Lutherans reformed eucharistic doctrine and practice on the basis of the biblical witness and in accordance with their emphasis on the priority of the gospel of God's free grace in Jesus Christ. This implied a critique of what they regarded as errors and false developments in late medieval eucharistic doctrine and practice as well as of certain developments and convictions in the Reformed tradition. The understanding of the eucharist in Methodism has its roots in the Anglican tradition, which at the Reformation introduced new liturgies which were influenced by the teaching and liturgies of the Reformers. This background in the Anglican tradition received a new expression in the deep eucharistic spirituality of the Wesleys in their hymns and sermons. For Methodists in the evangelical revival the eucharist was itself a means of conversion, and this evangelical dimension of the sacrament deserves consideration of those concerned with evangelism in the present day.

53. Both our traditions regard the Lord's supper as one of the fundamental means of grace. They stress Christ's institution of his supper, his command to continue to celebrate it according to his institution until he comes again, and the promise that he has bound himself to this meal. The action of the eucharist becomes such a means of grace through the power of Christ's creative and promising word, which is the Lutheran and through the action of the Holy Spirit in it, which is the Methodist emphasis. But for both word and Holy Spirit belong together in the sacramental action.

54. We affirm together that the eucharist is not only an outward but an effective sign of the saving presence of the risen Lord Jesus Christ. His presence is real here and now. Christ, with all that he has achieved for us in his life, death and resurrection, gives himself to us in this meal. He offers his life-giving body and blood with bread and wine to all who partake in the meal and receive him in faith. While both traditions believe in Christ's presence in the whole sacramental action, Lutherans tend to emphasize also the real yet mysterious union between Christ's body and blood and the elements of bread and wine more strongly than Methodists generally do. One consequence of the Lutheran view is that for them even unbelievers do in fact receive the body and blood of Jesus Christ, but to their condemnation/judgment. Methodists, while recognizing the need to receive the sacrament worthily, speak of believers but not of unbelievers as receiving the body and blood of Christ. We are, however, convinced that such differences are less significant than the agreements between us.

55. In the Lord's supper we receive forgiveness of sins, the assurance of our acceptance by God for Christ's sake. In this encounter with the living Christ, we are strengthened in our faith and hope and love; and our communion with the Lord of the church and with the members of his body is renewed and deepened. We believe that the Holy Spirit enables us to partake in the eucharist with the confidence that we truly receive Jesus Christ present for us with his good gifts for life in this world and far hope in the world to come. Strengthened by this meal, we are sent forth into the world again to be messengers and servants of God's love through commitment to peace, justice and reconciliation in the midst of the conflicts, struggles and hopes of our world and time.

56. In both of our confessional traditions recent developments in eucharistic doctrine and practice are rather similar. There is an increase in the frequency of the celebration of the Lord's supper. We recognize that the service with word and sacrament is the central act of worship of the Christian community. There is a new awareness of the corporate character of this act of worship, expressing and making real the communion (*koinonia*) with Jesus Christ and with one another. We recognize in the eucharist an anticipation of God's kingdom and therefore a challenge to the injustices of the world in which we live looking forward to a world in which people are truly reconciled to each other and share in justice and generosity all the gifts of God. We also realize afresh the character of the eucharist as an act of praise and thanksgiving for all that we have received from God in creation and in the history of his gracious dealings with his people until the day when God will create a new heaven and a new earth.

### **V. The mission of the church**

#### *A. Evangelization*

57. The church has received the joyful commission to preach the gospel to all humankind (Matt. 28:18-20). Thus engaged in the service of the world, the Christian church gives this commission its highest priority. Methodism began

as part of the evangelical revival in 18th-century England. Its special apostolate has always been to be an evangelistic and missionary movement within the church catholic, calling persons everywhere in their various situations to faith and to holiness of heart and life. In Lutheranism the all-encompassing emphasis on the proclamation of the gospel in word, sacrament and deed constitutes an eminent missionary and evangelistic impulse within that tradition. Methodism may profit from Lutheran concern for the clarity of the gospel; Lutherans may be inspired by Methodism to implement their evangelistic impetus.

58. The evangelization of the world is a divine project which involves human beings. Jesus Christ, God's great missionary to a lost world, was the supreme revelation of God's heart and expression of divine love. Evangelism is indeed the heartbeat of God! God sends Christian disciples as missionaries to the world.

59. Proclamation is announcement – the announcement of God's offer and invitation – all centring in Jesus Christ. God's proclamation is not just words. It is the offer of liberation and deliverance. The announcement of God's call of love and offer of forgiveness looks for a response of repentance, faith and obedience in love.

60. The movement of the Spirit of God is evident in our world today as people are drawn to faith in God. In many places the membership of the church is growing. In other places where churches face the experience of decreasing numbers, there is at the same time a rediscovery of the gospel as a missionary message which leads to further proclamation of God's love to people. In many places, church membership involves hardship or persecution. But even there we find often a renewed vitality of faith leading to a missionary witness.

61. The surrounding spiritual climate of an age has sometimes assisted but more often has made difficult the progress of Christian mission. In our world such hostile elements include secularism of society, especially in the Western world; the spread of scepticism and unbelief and the suspicion of traditional structures and expressions of religion; the existence of great political systems avowedly based on materialistic atheism (liberal capitalism and Marxism), the indifference to spiritual values resulting from the distractions of an affluent and technological society. In other parts of the world deep social and political depravation along with the failure of the churches to champion freedom and justice have resulted in a crisis of confidence between the missionary church and those who listen to its message with a suspicion arising from a defective Christian witness. In recent years new cults and ancient religions have conducted an impressive and challenging missionary enterprise. The distribution in Europe of great numbers of people of other faiths has posed questions in what have previously been nominally Christian lands. Taken together, these considerations involve problems that are likely to increase.

62. We strongly feel our commitment for common witness to the gospel when we read the prayer of our Lord in John 17. We are glad to discover that there is fundamental agreement in the understanding of evangelization; although there is a variety of forms and expressions in both our traditions.

63. "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation ... So we are ambassadors for Christ. .. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:18ff.). There is no doubt about what the task is of all Christians in the world. We are sent to bring every day to all human beings this message of their reconciliation to God.

64. We proclaim this message of reconciliation and invite people to accept their salvation by faith. There is no other way than to trust in God's action on the cross and in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Evangelization is the call to persons to believe in Christ. Incorporated into his body through faith we are given a vision of the world for which he died and are linked with him in love for all people. "Because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 5:5).

65. When the message of Christ is accepted by faith, there is a conversion of the person with the whole life now coming under the reign of the Lord. This experience is also described in the Bible as the new birth, beginning a new life as a disciple of Christ. Life in the Spirit is the consequence.

66. The purpose of evangelization is to help people enter into fellowship with God in this life and to receive eternal salvation in the life to come. The urgency of evangelization arises both from our obedience to our Lord's commission and from our awareness of God's righteous judgment upon sinful humanity. In Christ God has justified the ungodly, giving repentance unto forgiveness of sins to all who believe and are baptized. This justification means we are accepted in God's judgment, we are redeemed for the service of God in this world and delivered from wrath in the age to come. This future aspect of life beyond death is a part of the biblical message and also speaks to life today.

67. Becoming a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ has implications for the way one lives in society. Christians are called to be responsible, active and critical members of the society in which they live, whether their contributions are appreciated or not. The biblical understanding of salvation must be reclaimed today in its bold announcement of God's ultimate dominion over all idols and systems of domination and dependency. Just as Isaiah and the psalmist announced God's salvation as critique of the absolutization of power by the Assyrian and neo-Babylonian empires, so also the prophetic Christian witness of today is a critique of all systems and structures which oppress people, exploit the poor, deny human rights and justify violence. Thus the proclamation of salvation will constantly bring the Christian witness into conflict with such powers.

68. The question is also before us of how we speak of the salvation of the world, when today we are facing a possible nuclear holocaust. The Lutheran understanding of the two realms might be taken into account here because it stresses God's good purpose for his world. In this world there always will be struggle between good and evil. The complete

and final realization of the will of God belongs to the last day, beyond the limits of our world. Nevertheless, Christians are called upon to be penetrating factors in the world – as salt, light and leaven – to realize the will of God in society as far as possible within the context of history. God’s love and victory revealed in Jesus Christ give us courage, hope and joy in our social activities and tasks, one of which is unity in our mission.

#### B. *Ways of evangelization today*

69. The New Testament gives us the pattern for evangelization in a specific culture and context. The Son of God “pitched his tent among us” to make it possible for us to be redeemed. The Word made flesh in Jesus Christ is the supreme example of “contextualization”. For us, the proclamation of this gospel may involve the adaptation of liturgy, dress, language, music and other forms of expression. It is essential that persons are approached as persons, so that we are willing to listen to their concerns and questions and to respect their cultural identity. The *content* of the gospel is a “given”: the *form* of teaching, preaching, service is then fitted to the situation.

70. Ways of evangelization – though not applicable everywhere in the same way may include the following:

- The worshipping community of God is primary in evangelization. Believers, refreshed in their witness to Christ by participation in vital worship, move into the world reflecting the love of God to unbelievers through their behaviour and their explicit witness. “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).
- The apostles called those who believed to be baptized. Baptism as one of the means by which God gives his grace and signifies his great love is an important element of evangelization. Evangelization also involves calling baptized persons who have ceased to claim the benefits of all that is offered in baptism to enter anew into the church, its sacraments and the Christian life in the Spirit.
- Personal witness in which Christians share their experience of the good news of Jesus Christ with others is indispensable to the Christian life. The New Testament provides several examples in which language and thought patterns were adopted to address various audiences (e.g. Jews, Greeks, Samaritans and Gentiles).
- Service which expresses Christian concern for the whole person has been an instrument of evangelization throughout the history of the church.
- The invitation to all people to commit themselves to God and thereby find their true human being, dignity and a direction for life results in the multiplying of the witness and service of responsible men and women. This is of special significance for young people in many parts of the world.
- Through Christian ashrams (in India, for example) the gospel is presented to non-Christians through indigenous methods. Christian and non-Christian children learn about the Lord Jesus Christ by having devotional life in the ashram hostels and consequently whole families are influenced.
- Efforts to support a renewed spirituality and a deep identification with the people are fundamental to the witness of the gospel in every society. This implies cooperation with all Christians to reinforce the Christian conscience in society.
- Evangelistic campaigns have long been effective means of preaching the good news of Jesus Christ to large gatherings of people.
- Preaching the gospel that Jesus is the Saviour and the Master of the world also denotes that Jesus Christ and those who follow him come in conflict with all the forces which work against God’s plan for the world. The church recognizes that in the resurrection, Jesus is victorious over these forces, including death.

71. Often, as evangelization is undertaken, new leadership for the church is discovered. Natural leaders whose gifts have been hidden or unused are put to work in the service of Christ.

72. Evangelization is an essential part of the church’s mission. Evangelism must not be defined in terms of methods. The “evangel” itself is definitive of what is said and how it is communicated in word and deed. As Lutherans and Methodists seek to discharge the commission to evangelize with zeal, they must continually test all means by a clearly discriminated grasp of the gospel. Thus theological reflection must be held accountable to the great commission, and evangelistic methods must be held accountable to theological reflection. We can evangelize by word of mouth, by printed word, by means of visuals, by dramatization, by story-telling, by good works of love, by having exemplary Christian homes, and at times by silent witness and suffering.

#### C. *Christian ethics in the modern world*

73. As Christians in the tradition of the Reformation, Lutherans and Methodists bear witness to the gospel of God’s liberation of humanity and the whole creation in Christ Jesus for the sake of whom God justifies the ungodly. This action of God breaks the enslaving bonds of sin and grants new possibilities for life and is therefore fundamental to any subsequent description of the Christian ethic. Thus, human moral behaviour is never understood as an effort to earn God’s grace, nor is obedience to divine commands regarded as a means to salvation. Christian ethics is grounded in the joy of salvation in Jesus Christ.

74. The joy and freedom of the Christian life are consistently prized in Methodism and Lutheranism. Recognizing humanity’s bondage to sin, both Wesley and Luther were eloquent in describing the freedom of Christian living which relies upon the calling, sustaining and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. Christians, individually and corporately, are

called to witness and service in personal and public arenas of life. Therefore, Lutherans and Methodists stand together in the affirmation of trusting obedience to God as fundamental to the Christian ethic. This ethic is distinguished from others by responding faithfully to the word of God and by recognizing freedom as a gift from God which is exercised with the guidance of the Spirit.

75. Methodists affirm that the wisdom of God is displayed in the natural world and that God created its laws. God's nature revealed in Jesus Christ is the source of universal moral law. God has given conscience to sinful humanity through prevenient grace as a universal work of Christ. Thus, even so-called "natural man" possesses an ethical capability on both the personal and the social level.

Lutherans also affirm that all people have a concept of right and wrong according to God's law, and even though they are sinners they are capable of doing God's will in many ways, although such moral consciousness is present only in limited degrees. Both approaches make it possible for Christians to communicate and cooperate with others in ethical affairs.

76. Both Luther and Wesley believed that Christian obedience involves more than the acceptance of conventional patterns of moral behaviour. Both fought an unending battle against lowered ethical standards. Luther's concern for ethical instruction in the congregations required him to produce catechisms both as a corrective to the devaluation of secular vocation and as a description of the exercise of Christian freedom. In Wesley's era when vast forces of social change and moral indifference were crushing the people, Methodists recognized their vocation to the service of love to their neighbours and to a living witness to the will of God in society. Their high moral standards and personal virtues sometimes led to conflict and even persecution by unbelievers and nominal Christians.

77. Christian service, exercise of love, obedience and discipleship are rooted in God's commandments and reconciling love as attested in scriptures and disclosed in Christ Jesus who "came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Christians and Christian communities are called to discern what is "good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2) as guided by biblical norms and the considerate love of the neighbour. Christian ethical standards are not simply a set of rules or laws. Nor can Christians in any part of the world or in any society or culture insist that all others conform to all their moral traditions or practices. Nevertheless there are basic orientations and goals of Christian commitment which are of universal relevance and which make common worldwide Christian witness and service possible.

78. Lutherans and Methodists understand the vocation of the church in society in the light of God's history of salvation in Christ. Justification by faith necessitates engagement with fellow human beings. Having been freed by God, Christians find their noblest vocation in the service of the neighbour.

79. Many ethical values and practices will be shared with other persons of good will and serious moral purpose so that Christians readily acknowledge Their debt to other systems of high ethical standards (see Paul's use of moral catalogues in Galatians 5). In fact, Christians will in particular circumstances find themselves in solidarity with diverse groups who advocate justice, peace and reconciliation. They may share the stigma of exclusion with those whose moral actions have placed them at odds with prevailing authorities and powers. On the other hand, as believing communities come to have the mind that was in Christ, they also confront and challenge other concepts of human life. In learning from Jesus Christ the Lord of the church who became obedient unto death, Christians also come to understand that the goals of life are no longer privilege, self-interest or power, but service in Christian love and self-giving. These goals are in striking contrast to standards so highly prized in the world, such as dominance and material success.

80. Lutherans and Methodists agree that justification by faith inevitably requires personal and corporate works of mercy. Life in Christ includes ministry to human need. Thus the church sets up and encourages secular agencies to establish institutions and programmes to provide direct assistance to people. The church also speaks to and tries to influence public policy about war and peace, racism, human rights, the rights of women and of children, the distribution of wealth, ecology and other matters of public policy which affect the quality of life and being for all parts of God's creation. We acknowledge that we have often allowed our churches to live in comfortable cultural captivity rather than to risk unpopularity and internal tension. We affirm that discipleship includes stewardship of our personal and communal resources in the continuing struggle for peace and justice.

81. Christian service and obedience in its social orientation seeks to preserve and strengthen the well-being of societies and to heal their weaknesses and defects. In this way Christians serve in cooperation with God in God's sustaining and preserving work in the world. In doing this we together emphasize that God's justice has been revealed in the vindication of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. Thus in Christ, God has conquered the human and cosmic forces of evil. Thereby Christians are enabled to struggle with the powers of death and destruction in freedom from fear and in hopeful confidence of the final realization of Christ's victory.

## **VI. Suggestions for the future**

82. At the close of our second meeting (Bristol 1980) we said: "The important point is that conversations are underway between two traditions of the one, holy, catholic church. These are traditions which by history and present existence should be talking together ... both similarities and differences have been located, and a promising future lies ahead." Although our work as a joint commission will not continue beyond 1984, we are convinced that there is a promising future for Lutheran-Methodist dialogue, diaconal involvement, eucharistic fellowship and visible unity.

83. To widen that dialogue we send to our respective constituencies this common statement. We hope that its use among seminary faculties, seminarians, interested lay persons and pastors will result in a greater consciousness of the other tradition and a greater appreciation of one another's theology, spirituality and historic apostolate. The bibliography [not included here] is designed to indicate where our reading about one another should begin.

84. We testify that ecumenical discussion also helps us to grow in the knowledge and understanding of our own traditions. In working to pull down the walls that have separated Christians, we are forced to define the core of our own ecclesial identity. Thus a double blessing comes from ecumenical dialogue: greater love both for our own church and for other churches.

85. We have been pleased to take notice of Lutheran and Methodist dialogues on the regional level. We have been assisted in our task by the statement on baptism that came from the USA discussions. We hope that such contacts will continue within our two world communions and that regional dialogues will make use of our work.

86. Since our dialogue began the World Council of Churches' Faith and Order paper *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* has been published. Although this document was not introduced formally into our discussions, we note similarities between some of our conclusions and those of this major theological convergence statement. We add our voice to the call for the churches to respond to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. Therefore, we have included it and selected related titles in the bibliography.

87. We also urge Methodist and Lutheran parishes to engage in dialogue. Pastors might organize joint meetings for conversion by using this document or by reading and discussing selected writings of Luther and Wesley from the bibliography. Pastors might also meet regularly for exegesis of the lectionary as they prepare sermons. We recommend that our churches provide for pulpit and altar fellowship exchanges and mutual hospitality at the table of the Lord. We encourage the use of Lutheran pastors to interpret Lutheranism to Methodist lay groups and the use of Methodist ministers to do the same for their tradition to Lutheran congregations. We urge the formation of lay groups of Lutherans and Methodists to read together the Bible, the writings of Luther, of Wesley, and confessional and doctrinal documents as well as to pray and worship together. We request the education boards of our respective constituent bodies to prepare local church study units on themes similar to those discussed in this dialogue. We urge Methodist and Lutheran churches to give leadership in local ecumenical diaconal consortia and to assume together the leadership in forming such consortia where they do not now exist.

88. There are some issues which we believe merit further exploration and discussion. Especially the topics of providence and two kingdoms, aspects of anthropology, and forms of unity require such further study. We hope that these will be pursued in appropriate settings.

## **VII. Recommendations**

89. From the beginning one purpose of the dialogue has been to assist Methodist and Lutheran churches to move towards greater fellowship in faith, witness and service. Such fellowship finds visible expression in full sacramental communion.

90. We gratefully acknowledge that our dialogue has led us a significant way towards this because we were able to discover a great amount of agreement and convergence between us. We regard this theological discussion to have achieved sufficient agreement to make the following recommendations:

91. 1. We recommend that our churches take steps to declare and establish full fellowship of word and sacrament; we recommend that as a first and important step our churches officially provide for pulpit exchanges and mutual hospitality at the table of the Lord. We rejoice that full fellowship of word and sacrament is currently practised in some of our churches.

92. 2. We recommend that in every place our churches work together to manifest their unity in common efforts of witness and service in the world.

93. 3. We recommend that our churches receive and use the results of this theological dialogue in seeking the visible unity of all Christians.

94. Finally, we hope that our churches may find common mission and life together by the sharing of our lives with the world for which Christ died. We covet for our people that in mind, heart and service they may grow together in experiencing the reality of THE CHURCH: COMMUNITY OF GRACE. We trust the Holy Spirit to lead Lutherans and Methodists in forms of witness, service and fellowship that will demonstrate our obedience and love for the same Lord Christ.

Text may be found in:

[GROS, J., H. MEYER, W.G. RUSCH. Edd. *Growth in Agreement II: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level, 1982-1998*. Faith and Order Paper 187. ( Geneva/Grand Rapids, MI: WCC/ Eerdmans, 2000) 200-218.]