

# **Episcopal Ministry within the Apostolicity of the Church**

## **The Lund Statement by the Lutheran World Federation – A Communion of Churches**

**Lund, Sweden, 26 March 2007**

### **I. Introduction**

1. For forty years, the Lutheran World Federation has been a partner in international ecumenical dialogues. In these dialogues, the Lutheran participants have sought to witness to the teaching of the gospel as maintained in the Lutheran tradition, and at the same time to learn from representatives of other traditions where the gospel has been taught in different contexts and forms. In several of these dialogues the episcopal ministry has been a topic as the churches involved have explored possibilities of furthering the visible unity of the church. The role of the episcopal ministry in relation to the apostolicity of the church has been a particular issue of investigation. Important agreements have been reached, some of which have led to binding forms of communion.<sup>i</sup>

2. Although the ecumenical agreements reached have been processed and received in differing ways among the member churches of the LWF, the thorough processes of the different theological dialogues represent a resource also for the common life of the LWF as a Communion of Churches. Among the Lutheran churches there is a common confessional basis, and at the same time a diversity of traditions regarding the episcopal ministry. This situation has called for a process of clarification for the sake of the Lutheran Communion itself.<sup>ii</sup> The present statement, reached through careful study and deliberation, is formulated as an expression of the commonalities that exist among the Lutheran churches in teaching and practices in the area of episkopé.

3. The statement is developed in the context of the ecumenical movement, in which the LWF has been and remains a committed participant. It draws significantly on bilateral and multilateral dialogue reports, to the point of using much of the language they provide. It is the outcome of a study process in the LWF initiated in 2000. Five regional meetings were held. In 2002 the Lutheran members of international dialogue presented the document “The Episcopal Ministry within the Apostolicity of the Church”, which was sent in 2003 to all the LWF member churches for study and response. The present new statement, formulated upon the request of the LWF Council in Bethlehem, 2005, builds on the 2002 Statement, but takes into consideration all the comments and proposals received from the member churches. It was substantially discussed, edited and then affirmed by the Council in Lund, Sweden, in March 2007 – a meeting which also involved an LWF Church Leaders’ Consultation and in which the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the LWF was celebrated. For more detailed information about the process leading up to this statement see the attached Appendix.

4. Terminological remarks: The terms episcopacy and episkopé build on the Greek verb *episkopein*, which means to look upon, discern and exercise oversight. In Lutheran churches, episkopé (oversight) in the broad sense is exercised by ordained persons, synods and specially designated collegial institutions. These latter instruments generally include both ordained and non-ordained members. As part of this episkopé, Lutheran churches assign specific tasks of oversight to a regional ministry by bishops and similar officials with other titles (church president, ephorus, synodal pastor, etc.), who exercise personally, collegially and communally, a supra-congregational form of ordained ministry for the sake of spiritual discernment and leadership. In the present text the terms “episcopal ministry” and “ministry of episkopé” are used to designate this ordained ministry of pastoral oversight. However, as referred to above, the service of episkopé in the broad sense is also carried out by cooperative, synodical forms of oversight, involving both lay and ordained persons, according to established rules and regulations.

## II. Biblical and Historical Foundations

### *The New Testament*<sup>iii</sup>

5. The canonical writings of the New Testament reflect a phase in the history of the church when different ecclesial patterns developed, coexisted and interacted with each other. Some New Testament writings reveal little concern with ecclesial structures and leadership, and those that are concerned show variations. An ecumenically shared insight today is that the New Testament does not describe a single pattern of ministry, which can serve as a blueprint for later structures in the church. Rather, there is in the New Testament a variety of forms reflecting developments at different places and times.

6. There are, however, many indications in the New Testament that ecclesial offices and titles were being formed, even if they were not yet precisely defined or commonly accepted. The early Christian communities were never without persons holding leadership responsibilities. The plurality of ministerial patterns indicated by the New Testament can provide legitimation for a variety of structures in the office of ministry. The challenge to consider structures of ministry in continual engagement with Scripture remains before the church at all times.

7. In biblical Greek, *episkopé* is used to refer to God’s visitation (cf. Luke 19:44; 1 Peter 2:12). In the rare cases where the subject is not divine but human, it may also refer to an ecclesial task. In Acts 1:16ff, the election of a new apostle to replace Judas is said to be a fulfillment of Psalm 109:8 (LXX): “May another take his position” (*ten episkopen autou*). In 1 Timothy 3:1, *episkopé* refers to a distinct office which one may seek. The term *episkopos* occurs in the New Testament five times. 1 Peter 2:25 describes Christ as shepherd and bishop of our souls; Philippians 1:1 mentions several *episkopoi* in Philippi—the letter’s addressees include both *episkopoi* and *diakonoï* (but not *presbyteroi*); Acts 20:28 and Titus 1:5-9 use *presbyteros* and *episkopos* synonymously.

8. More than other writings in the New Testament the Pastoral Letters connect a faithful transmission of teaching with an orderly conferment of ecclesial offices. However, the picture is far from clear or complete. The letters raise different questions today concerning the particular features of the ecclesial structure they advocate and partly reflect. But they do attest to the fact that the charismatic activity in the church was in the process of being disciplined into an ordered exercise of ministry wearing the prophetic mantle.

9. 1 Timothy and Titus, written in the name of Paul and demonstrating the authority of the apostle, represent a reapplication of what they perceive as Paul's teaching for the next generation. They are concerned about the protection of the apostolic (Pauline) heritage in a situation in which it is perceived as threatened and attacked by distorting speculations and subversive behavior. They voice a growing concern for the forms of transmission of the faith, and for the faithful life and teaching of office holders, since continuity with the teaching of the apostles (especially Paul's) is regarded as a measure of faithfulness.

10. The Pastoral Letters attest to a rite of ordination through a laying on of hands. In 2 Tim 1.6 Paul is the one who lays on hands, while the reference in 1 Tim 4.14 assumes that a council of elders all lay on hands. According to 1 Tim 4.14, three elements are involved: a gift (*charisma*), a prophecy and the act of a laying on of hands. How these elements connect within the framework of one ritual event is not clear. But there is no doubt that the laying on of hands functions as an initiation to a position of leadership marked by the Spirit. In the Pastoral Letters the notion of charism occurs only in connection with ordination. The enabling gift of the Spirit is the charism of ministry. The mention of the rite occurs in an exhortative context where Timothy is being reminded of his obligations. Thus it seems that the actual and effective authority of the minister remains based and dependent on the truth of the doctrine they are requested to defend.

11. Also in Acts a connection was assumed between a laying on of hands and the gift of the Spirit. It is, however, an act associated with or following baptism, and when the Seven are selected for a ministry of service and installed in Acts 6 one of the requirements is that they already are "full of Spirit". The laying on of hands that follows their selection does not confer a specific charism but is an act affirming their selection and authorizing them for a specific assignment. Nevertheless, the function of the rite of laying on of hands in Acts 6.6 and 13.3 already come close to what it seems to have in the Pastoral Letters as a prayerful sign of selection and installment to a special task or office.

### *The Early Church*

12. In the history of the Early Church three principal images or models of the office of a bishop in the pre-Nicene period are exemplified in Ignatius, Irenaeus and Cyprian. For *Ignatius of Antioch* (c. 35 – c. 107), the bishop is primarily the one who presides at the eucharist. The church, in his view, is essentially eucharistic by its nature: there is an organic relation between the Body of Christ understood as community, and the Body of Christ understood as sacrament. The theme of unity and the interdependent relationship between one bishop, the one eucharistic body, and the one church is common in his writings. It should be kept in mind here that Ignatius wrote at a time when there usually was one bishop and one eucharistic assembly in a city.

13. *Irenaeus of Lyon* (c. 130 – c. 200), echoed the eucharistic teaching of Ignatius, but placed more emphasis than Ignatius on the bishop's role as teacher of the faith. The context is the conflict with gnosticism. For Irenaeus, the bishop is above all the one who preserves the continuity of apostolic teaching in succession from the apostles. It is through the bishop's faithful proclamation of the gospel in each local church that unity and continuity in the apostolic tradition is preserved in the church.

14. For *Cyprian of Carthage* (d. 258), there is a clear emphasis on the bishop's ministry as the bond of unity among the local churches within the universal church. Here the collegial aspect of the bishop's role comes to the fore. The bishops are seen as belonging to a worldwide network. They meet in councils and reach a common mind under the Spirit's guidance

and are in this way responsible together for maintaining the teaching and the unity of the churches.

15. These three perspectives from the Early Church, whereby the bishops were seen as representing a) bonds of unity between the local churches through the maintenance of eucharistic communion, b) continuity in apostolic teaching, and c) cooperative supervision of the churches, remained important through the Middle Ages in the midst of historical complexities and were also important for the Reformers.

16. From the beginning of the 4th century, the *episkopos* came to oversee, not just one eucharistic congregation, but a group of congregations headed by presbyters (although the regions of oversight were often small by modern standards). The “local church” then came to be identified with the wider community of congregations headed by the *episkopos* and not with the single eucharistic congregation.

17. The history of the Early Church shows the need for personal continuity in the exercise of responsibility regarding the church’s proclamation, sacraments and discipline. In this way, the bishops served the unity of the church. At the same time, their ministry did not, and does not, provide a guarantee for the church’s continuity in unity and truth.

### *The Reformation*

18. During the Reformation, evangelical Christians confessed in the Augsburg Confession that, to awaken and sustain faith, God instituted the office of ministry through which the word of God is proclaimed and sacraments are celebrated (CA 5). No one ought to exercise this office without a regular call extended by the church (CA 14 and 28). The authority to minister depends finally on God who instituted the office, so that the whole church may receive Christ’s word.

19. Martin Luther spoke of all Christian believers as sharing a common, spiritual priesthood in Christ, the High Priest. Based upon 1 Peter and Revelation 1, all Christians are priests (*hieroi*) through faith alone by the spiritual rebirth given in baptism and lived out in witness, intercession and service. God’s grace and salvation make all Christians equal before God and prevent their separation into distinct estates or classes. The office of public ministry, because of its origins and authority in God’s word, serves all of God’s people.

20. Through ordination, a pastor is called to preach, baptize and administer the eucharist in accord with Christ’s mandate and promise regarding them. In the central part of the ordination liturgy the gift of the Holy Spirit is prayed for, expressing the dependence of the pastor on God’s sustained assistance in all ministerial tasks. Appealing to Christ’s ordinance and trusting in his promise a pastor speaks and performs action in the name of Christ. The divine gifts are valid regardless of the unworthiness of ministers (cf. CA 8). As stated in the Apology to the Confessio Augustana: “When [the ministers] offer the Word of Christ or the sacraments, they offer them in the stead and place of Christ. The words of Christ teach us this so that we are not offended by the unworthiness of ministers.”<sup>iv</sup>

21. According to Reformation practice, ordination takes place with prayer and the laying on of hands as constitutive elements. God the Holy Spirit ordains and claims the entire person in service to the ministry of word and sacrament. Trusting that these prayers are heard, the commissioning is normally carried out with the words of 1 Peter 5:1b-4. The Reformation theology of ministry is well summarized as follows by a Wittenberg ordination formula: “The ministry of the church is most important and necessary for all churches, and is given and preserved by God alone.”<sup>v</sup>

22. In the view of the reformers, the ministry of proclaiming the gospel in word and sacrament is one office. Luther relates the one office fundamentally to the local congregation which assembles at one place for divine worship. With this understanding, Luther's position is very close to that of the Church Fathers for whom the eucharistic community was the primary focus of reflection on the church. In congregational worship, according to both the Church Fathers and the Lutheran reformers, the universal church is present. While word and sacraments are always given locally, they are at the same time marks of the one universal church: "Likewise, they teach that one holy church will remain forever. The church is the assembly of saints in which the gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly" (CA 7).

23. The reformers recognized the value of an episcopal ministry whose task is to ordain and supervise, and made a strong effort to retain the traditional episcopal polity, provided that the officeholders permitted the gospel to be preached (CA 28, Apol. 14).<sup>vi</sup> In the sixteenth century, however, diocesan bishops in the Holy Roman Empire were generally unwilling to ordain those who followed the Reformation. In those cases, the reformers taught that pastors were legitimate presiders at ordination. For some reformers it was thinkable that in emergency situations, where bishops or pastors were not available for years at a time, congregations themselves could ordain pastors by prayer and laying on of hands.

24. Other historical factors also played a role in the Lutheran Reformation regarding the episcopal ministry. The bishops of the Holy Roman Empire were at the same time secular princes and as such they held prominent positions in public and political institutions. They often used both their secular power in ecclesial matters and their ecclesial power in secular matters in questionable ways, and the duty of proper spiritual leadership was easily neglected. The Reformers severely criticized this state of affairs and emphasized that the primary duty of bishops was to see that the people learn about the gospel and love of Christ (CA 28).

25. As has been documented by historical research, "apostolic succession" understood as a succession of episcopal consecrations as essential to episcopal ministry was not a concept put forward in the Middle Ages and was not an element in the Reformation debates until the 1540s. Nevertheless, Luther spoke openly about the need for succession of ministers in the church: "Now if the apostles, evangelists, and prophets are no longer living, others must have replaced them and will replace them until the end of the world, for the church shall last until the end of the world, and so apostles, evangelists, and prophets must therefore remain, no matter what their name, to promote God's word and work."<sup>vii</sup>

26. The one gospel preached in the congregations is a living voice (*viva vox evangelii*). However, the correct preaching of the gospel everywhere cannot be taken for granted, because erroneous teaching is always possible and indeed a reality. Therefore visitations for the purpose of supervision were quickly established in the areas that accepted the Reformation. The reformers clearly recognized and affirmed the need for the ministry of episkopé (superintendents). The Augsburg Confession calls for obedience to bishops by divine right, *de iure divino* (CA 28)<sup>viii</sup>, but also gives the congregations a mandate to refuse obedience to bishops who do not teach according to the gospel. This presupposes the ability of congregations, living in the word of God, to identify the voice of the Good Shepherd (John 10:27) and distinguish true from false teaching.<sup>ix</sup>

### III. Mission and Apostolicity of the Church

27. As the church participates in Christ and receives the blessings of his righteousness, it also participates in the mission of Christ, who is sent by the Father in the Holy Spirit. Christ sends his disciples as he is sent (John 20:21): "So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (II Cor. 5:20). The church is called to the service of proclaiming reconciliation with God and practicing the healing love of God in a world wounded by persecution, oppression and injustice, making manifest the mystery of God's love, God's presence and God's Kingdom. The ministry of episkopé, with its special responsibility to care for the unity and growth of the church, should be set in the context of the mission of the church as the whole people of God.

28. Jesus sent Mary Magdalene to "go tell" that she had seen the risen Lord (Matt 28:10, Luke 24:10, John 20:17b).<sup>x</sup> After Mary Magdalene and the other women told the good news, and after Jesus had appeared to the disciples, they were sent "to make disciples of all nations." The Risen Christ promises to be with them in this mission "to the end of the age" (Mt 28:20). The mission to which the apostles were called remains the mission of the whole church throughout history. As this mission shapes the church, so the church is rightly called apostolic.

29. The handing on (*traditio*) of this mission, in which the Holy Spirit makes Christ present as the Word of God, is the primary meaning of apostolic tradition. Apostolic tradition in the church means continuity in the permanent characteristics of the church of the apostles: witness to the apostolic faith, proclamation of the Gospel and faithful interpretation of the Scriptures, celebration of baptism and the eucharist, the exercise and transmission of ministerial responsibilities, communion in prayer, love, joy and suffering, service to the sick and needy, unity among the local churches and sharing the gifts which the Lord has given to each. Continuity in this tradition is apostolic succession.

30. In baptism, every Christian is called and empowered for participation in this mission. God the Holy Spirit pours out his gifts upon the whole church (Eph. 4: 11-13; I Cor. 12: 4-11), and raises up men and women to contribute to the nurture of the community. Thus the whole church, and every member, participates in the communication of the gospel through word and life and so participates in the apostolic succession of the church.

31. For Lutherans, apostolic teaching is expressed fundamentally in the Scriptures as the "norming norm" (*norma normans*) of faith, and in the historic ecumenical creeds and the Lutheran confessional writings as "normed norm" (*norma normata*). It unfolds continuously in the traditions of liturgical worship, in art and architecture, music and spiritual literature. The Holy Spirit can use a variety of means to call and maintain the church in the apostolic tradition that constitutes its identity. In this sense the church is as a whole a community of living tradition, taking shape and being expressed in the many different ways. As God's gift in Christ through the Holy Spirit, apostolicity is a many-faceted reality expressed in the church's teaching, mission and ministry. God's calling of the church to faithfulness is grounded in God's own faithfulness seeking to preserve the church in the divine truth and love despite the church's brokenness, ambiguity, and unfaithfulness.

32. As churches of Jesus Christ, the Lutheran churches claim this apostolic identity. The Lutheran Reformers saw the apostolic character of the western church's theology and pastoral practice threatened. The Reformation aimed at the renewal of the church catholic in its true continuity with the evangelical mission of the apostles.

33. The church's succession with the apostles has sometimes been identified with only certain isolated forms of continuity. "Apostolic succession" was thus sometimes reduced to specific forms of continuity in episcopal ministry, such as an unbroken chain of the laying on of hands. At the time of the Reformation, the Lutheran churches emphasized different forms of continuity, such as the continuity of the people of God in the faith of the Gospel, continuity of the ordained ministry, and the continuity of place. All Lutheran churches understood themselves to have preserved the one apostolic ministry instituted by God.

34. Recent ecumenical discussions have moved beyond limited views of apostolic succession to a richer and more comprehensive understanding of the apostolic character of the whole church as it continues in the Spirit to pursue the apostolic mission. This deepened understanding has enriched the theology and practice of various churches and has opened new ecumenical possibilities as churches are more able to recognize each other's apostolic character. For this enrichment, Lutherans can only give thanks and seek to be more faithful themselves to the fullness of the apostolic tradition.

#### **IV. Ordained Ministry in Service to the Apostolic Mission of the Church**

##### *The Apostolicity of the Church and Ordained Ministry*

35. Within the apostolic continuity of the whole church there is a continuity or succession in the ordained ministry. This succession serves the church's continuity in its life in Christ and its faithfulness to the gospel transmitted by the apostles. The ordained ministry, the office of word and sacrament, has a particular responsibility for witnessing to the apostolic tradition and for proclaiming it afresh with authority in every generation.

36. Through baptism persons are initiated into the priesthood of Christ and thus into the mission of the whole church. All the baptized are called to participate in, and share responsibility for, worship (*leitourgia*), witness (*martyria*) and service (*diakonia*). Baptism by itself, however, does not confer an office of ordained ministry in the church. "What is the common property of all, no individual may arrogate to himself, unless he is called."<sup>xi</sup> Ordained servants of the church carry out a specific task within the mission and ministry of the whole people of God.

37. The ordained public ministry of word and sacrament belongs to God's gifts to the church, essential for the church to fulfill its mission. Ordination confers the mandate and authorization to proclaim the word of God publicly and to administer the holy sacraments. This special ministry, conferred by ordination, is, as a service of word and sacrament, necessary for the church to be what God calls it to be. Since this ministry is God's gift, it is not the personal possession of any individual minister. Lutheran churches, along with other churches, ordain ministers for life. But the actual exercise of the ordained ministry is subject to the discipline, rules and regulations of the church.

38. The ordained ministry is a permanent part of the church. For the sake of the church's accountability in the world it must always be clearly identifiable and its service must be exercised according to the mission nary requirements of the time and circumstances. As a supplement to the service of the ordained ministry, churches sometimes bless and commission lay Christians to carry out specific tasks which may also belong to the ministerial office. Service in such capacities represents particular aspects of the ministry of the whole church.

39. The ordination of deacons is an open matter in the Lutheran communion globally. Likewise, there is diversity in the understanding of how the ministries of deacons, pastors and

ministers of episkopé may relate to each other with reference to the one ordained ministry of the church. Some Lutheran churches have moved far in recognizing one three-fold ministry, whereas others do not see this model as appropriate for them. Generally the Lutheran tradition does not view the diaconal ministry as merely a stage on the way toward pastoral ordination but as a distinct and often lifelong service. It can be a lay ministry or, as is the case in some Lutheran churches, an integral part of the ordained ministry.<sup>xii</sup>

### *Ordained Ministry of Women and Men*

40. Unfortunately, in the history of the church, the role of women has been obscured to a great extent, for example, Junia, whom Paul calls an apostle (Rom. 16). In some cases even their names have been forgotten, such as the woman at the well (John 4) and the prophesying daughters of Philip (Acts 21). For centuries Lutheran churches, like other churches, restricted ordination to men. Today the great majority of Lutherans belong to churches that ordain both women and men. This practice reflects a renewed understanding of the biblical witness. Ordination of women expresses the conviction that the mission of the church requires the gifts of both men and women in the public ministry of word and sacraments, and that limiting the ordained ministry to men obscures the nature of the church as a sign of our reconciliation and unity in Christ through baptism across the divides of ethnicity, social status and gender (cf. Gal. 3:27-28).

41. The Lutheran World Federation is committed to the ordination of women. The LWF Eighth Assembly stated: “We thank God for the great and enriching gift to the church discovered by many of our member churches in the ordination of women to the pastoral office, and we pray that all members of the LWF, as well as others throughout the ecumenical family, will come to recognize and embrace God’s gift of women in the ordained ministry and in other leadership responsibilities in Christ’s church.”

42. In many member churches of the LWF today, and in the majority of the larger Lutheran churches, women are not only ordained as pastors but are also elected to the episcopal ministry. This is consistent with the Lutheran emphasis on the one office of ordained ministry.

### *Episkopé as Exercised in Episcopal Ministry*

43. The communion of local churches requires supervision for the sake of the faithfulness of the church. It is a regional ministry that oversees several parishes or congregations. It serves the purpose of caring for the life of a whole church. Its faithful exercise in the light of the gospel is of fundamental importance to the church’s life. Lutheran churches generally have a regional ministry of episkopé within the one office of word and sacrament, even though this ministry is structured in different ways and is exercised by persons with different titles.

44. The presence and exercise of a special ministry of oversight is consistent with the confessional character of Lutheran churches. The *Confessio Augustana* affirms the office of bishops in the church (cf. CA 28). Its assumption is that, despite the abuses of worldly power by the bishops in the late Middle Ages, for which the Reformers sought radical change, the proclamation of the gospel is promoted, and not hindered, by the office of supervision in the church, rightly exercised.

45. Episcopal ministry is understood by Lutherans to be a distinct form of the one pastoral office, the *ministerium ecclesiasticum*, and not a separate office. Bishops (and ministers of episkopé with other titles) are themselves pastoral ministers of word and sacrament. It is in this perspective that CA 28 states that “according to the gospel, the power of the keys or the

power of bishops is the power of God's mandate to preach the gospel, to forgive and retain sins, and to administer the sacraments. For Christ sent out the apostles with this command [John 20:21-23]: 'As the Father has sent me, so I send you ... Receive the Holy Spirit. [...].'" Episcopal ministry is pastoral ministry mandated to be exercised at a regional, supra-congregational level.

46. However, as episcopal ministry carries responsibility for larger geographic areas of the church than do pastors of individual parishes or congregations, episcopal ministry is given certain *propria* (specific tasks) which are not shared by pastors at the local level. Episcopal ministers provide leadership to the church in its mission, and an accountable voice of the church in the public sphere.<sup>xiii</sup> They are called to give guidance for the common life of the congregations in the region under their care, especially through visitation, and to support their life together. They are given the authority and responsibility to ordain. They supervise teaching and spiritual practices in the church, particularly as exercised by those who are ordained. In all of these *propria*, their particular responsibility is to care for the apostolic faithfulness and the unity of the church at large.

47. As a service of the ordained ministry, mandated and exercised at the regional level of the church, episcopal ministry is exercised personally, collegially and communally. As a ministry of word and sacrament the ministry of episkopé is never a merely administrative or institutional matter, but is always carried out *personally*, on the basis of a personal authorization, commitment and accountability. It stands simultaneously within and over against the community in service to continuity in the apostolic faith.

48. The personal character of the ordained ministry cannot be separated from its collegial aspect. Episcopal ministry must be exercised *collegially*, together with the ordained ministers of congregations, and together with the other ministers of oversight in the church. Episcopal ministers are called also to maintain substantial collegial relations with colleagues in the episkopé of other churches, particularly in the same region of the world, and thereby help to advance the unity of the church of Christ.

49. Episcopal ministry is also exercised *communally*, in an integral relationship with the different constituencies of the church and their bodies of authority at all levels, promoting communal participation in the discernment of the gospel and common dedication to Christian life in obedience to God's will. Episcopal ministers are called to exercise their special role of pastoral supervision in interaction and cooperation with the wider Christian community, which thereby impacts constructively on the way in which episcopal ministry itself is carried out.

#### *Episcopal ministry and synodical structures in church governance*

50. Bishops are called to a special role of oversight in the church, but the wider community also is called to participate in oversight and to judge the way in which episcopal ministry is being carried out. The development of various committees, synods, and institutions sharing tasks of governance with the bishop, is consistent with Lutheran understandings of the church. In Lutheran churches today, church governance is carried out comprehensively through synodical and collegial structures, which include the participation of both lay and ordained persons, and in which the episcopal ministry has a clearly defined role.

51. In the church there is no absolute distinction between the directed and the directing, between the teaching and the taught, between those who decide and those who are the objects of decision. All members of the church, lay and ordained, exercising different ministries, stand under the word of God; all are fallible sinners, but all are baptized and anointed by the

Spirit. Mutual accountability binds together ordained ministers and other baptized believers. Episcopal ministry is exercised within the communion of *charisms* and within the total interplay of ministries in the church.

52. According to Lutheran understanding, the church exercises responsibility for its doctrine and practices through open, critical deliberation and transparent ecclesial processes. These processes, which can often be tension-filled, involve persons and church bodies with different responsibilities, aiming at the building of consensus and consensual action. Together with teachers of theology, pastors in congregations, persons called to a ministry of education and committed lay persons, episcopal ministers are especially called to judge doctrine in the life of the church, and to reject teaching that is contradictory to the gospel. The responsibility of governing bodies in the church (parish councils and church synods) is also to take formal decisions to ensure that the institutional, practical life of the church is in good keeping with the message of the gospel and witnesses to it.

## **V. Episcopal Ministry and the Unity of the Church**

### *Unity as an essential attribute of the church*

53. The unity of the faithful consists in their participation by faith in the communion of love between the Father and the Son in the unity of the Spirit. This is a gift which the baptized are given in Christ and which must therefore be received in faith. At the core of the faith is, according to the Lutheran tradition, the conviction that Christ is really present in the Christian community by word and sacrament. Since Christ cannot be divided, unity with God in Christ, made possible through the means of grace, is the fundamental impetus to Christian unity. This unity of the faithful with God is an intimate unity, which consists in their participation in the inner communion of love between the Father and the Son (John 17:20-23), shared in the Holy Spirit. Christian unity should not only be regarded as a goal of human effort. It is first of all a divine gift, to be received joyfully with faith and commitment.

54. For Lutherans, the church is one in the common proclamation of the gospel and celebration of the sacraments (CA 7). Every worshiping congregation around word and sacrament is church in its theological and sacramental meaning. All such congregations are indissolubly connected with each other, transcending human boundaries of nationality, ethnicity, gender and culture, however much they contradict this connection in their daily lives. The communion that we seek ecumenically is made visible in shared forms of proclamation, which includes participation in the one baptism and the one eucharist, and which is upheld by a mutually reconciled ministry. This communion in the means of grace witnesses to the healing and uniting power of the Triune God amidst the divisions of humankind, and represents the global communion of the universal church.

55. All ordained ministers are commissioned to serve the unity and catholicity of the church. Parish pastors exercise this ministry of unity within and among local congregations. Episcopal ministers are called especially to serve the church's unity and its living tradition in ways that are clearly recognizable and accountable. Their ministry shall promote and manifest the spiritual unity of worshipping congregations with each other and with the universal church. For this purpose, episcopal ministers preside at the ordinations of those who are called to exercise an office of ministry. Other ordained and lay persons normally assist in the act of ordination. Theologically speaking, ordination is into the public ministry of the one church, not simply into the ordained ministry of a particular national church or denomination. The presiding minister at an ordination acts on behalf of the whole people of God, thereby serving and representing the unity of the church's ordained ministry.

*Episcopal Ministry, Succession and the constitutive elements of the Church*

56. The continuity of the episcopal ministry is important for the apostolic mission of the church. To serve the continuity of the church's apostolic mission is the primary purpose and meaning of "episcopal succession." This succession is witnessed to in the handing on of the faithful oversight of the apostolic mission, manifesting the church's trust that God will maintain the church in faithfulness. The laying on of hands is a prayer for the exercise of the office which is conferred, and the church is confident that God has answered that prayer over the centuries and will continue to do so. Continuity in episcopal ministry shall bear witness to the church's faithfulness to its apostolic mission, but is no guarantee thereof. Even when episcopal ministry proves unfaithful, which it can do and has done, God's faithfulness holds the church in the truth.

57. Continuity with Christ and the apostles in the church's mission through time and space (diachronically and synchronically) is the fundamental concern in what is generally referred to as "apostolic succession" of the church. This notion also commonly designates the continuity in the ordained ministry through the successive participation in installations (consecrations) of ministers of episkopé by other such ministers. The expression of continuity cannot be historically proved to be an unbroken chain back to Christ and the apostles. The reality of apostolic succession in the church of Christ is not limited to a succession of episcopal ministry. Nevertheless, the fact that installations (consecrations) of episcopal ministers take place with the participation of other such ministers from the same region and from other regions of the world is a way in which churches express their commitment in faith to the unity, catholicity and apostolicity of the church of Christ in history.

58. Absence of this episcopal succession does not necessarily mean that there has been a loss of continuity in apostolic faith. The possibility of recognizing that churches may be apostolic even if they have not preserved the sign of episcopal succession is of great ecumenical significance, since the mutual recognition of ministers exercising episkopé at the supra-congregational level is vital in ecumenical rapprochement among churches. At the same time, a church which has not preserved the sign of historic succession is free to enter a relationship of mutual participation in episcopal installations (consecrations) with a church which has retained it, and thereby to adopt it for itself, without thereby denying its past apostolic continuity. The readiness of Lutheran churches to recognize the value of the sign of apostolicity in the historic succession of episcopal ministers and to adopt this sign, without requiring its necessity, is a contribution to the ecumenical movement.

59. Installation (consecration) of episcopal ministers in the Lutheran tradition includes laying on of hands with prayer for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Normally at least three other episcopal ministers participate in this action. In several Lutheran churches pastors and also lay persons may in addition participate in the laying on of hands. The participation of episcopal ministers from non-Lutheran churches is a sign of the shared unity and apostolicity of the universal church. In installation (consecration) of episcopal ministers the sign of apostolic succession is expressed by the participation of episcopal ministers (Lutheran or others) who have themselves received this sign.

## **VI. Looking Toward the Future**

60. Ecumenically, the reconciliation of ministries of word and sacrament is a central concern for the churches of the world as they increase in mutual theological understanding and in shared life and service. Mutual recognition of ministers of episkopé, with their different titles, is of special significance in the search for the visible unity of the church as it strives toward that fullness which remains God's gift and desire for God's people (Eph. 1:17-23).

61. As the Lutheran churches continue to develop their theology of ministry in the face of the many challenges posed within their respective contexts, substantial communication is required, both among themselves and ecumenically, on issues pertaining to the ordained ministry and its role in the church. The understanding and the shape of episcopal ministry is an important topic in this regard. Among issues worthy of common consideration are the liturgical orders for installation (consecration) of episcopal ministers and how they specify and convey this ministry, e.g. in relation to the *ministerium ecclesiasticum*. There is also a need for the Lutheran churches to develop a broader common understanding of how episcopal ministry points to the diaconal dimensions of the apostolic tradition and also of how the personal, collegial and communal dimensions of episkopé take shape in practice. Ecumenical awareness should always be present as the churches devote their attention to these issues.

62. Various questions related to the exercise of episcopal ministry are being raised in various churches. In visitation of congregations, episcopal ministers exercise their role as teachers of the church's faith and guides for the overall life of congregations. In fulfilling their functions episcopal ministers are called to be available to clergy as *pastor pastorum* (pastor of the pastors). As they set priorities in these areas episcopal ministers will provide forms of leadership that are truly shared, facilitating collaborative styles of ministry. The interrelation of the spiritual oversight of the church and the worldly tasks of governance and administration remains a challenge for all churches. The Lutheran tradition of the two "regiments" of God is a resource for theological reflection on this problem. Another important issue is whether the administrative responsibilities related to the church systems has become so time consuming that little opportunity remains for theological discernment with regard to preaching and witness.

63. Attention is also drawn ecumenically to the personal life and faith of those called to exercise episcopal ministry. Episcopal ministers are called to demonstrate humility and simplicity of life. The profile of their ministry is not one of domination, but of service, showing clear awareness of those on the margins of society. Episcopal ministers are expected to show firm rootedness in the liturgical life of the church by regularly leading services of word and sacraments themselves, and by providing support for processes of renewal of the church's life of worship. Episcopal ministers must set aside the necessary time and space for their own prayer, study and recreation, thereby also setting a much needed example for all the ordained and lay persons as well.

## **VII. Conclusion**

64. The Reformation was fundamentally concerned with the apostolicity of the church in faithfulness to the gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ, upheld by the proclamation of the word and by the sacraments, received in faith. In relation to the ministry of episkopé the churches of the Lutheran Communion around the world maintain and develop forms and

practices to serve their divine mission. This statement articulates perspectives for deepened understanding of episcopal ministry and its role of service to the whole church. As in all matters, our final trust is not, however, in the strength of our convictions, the clarity of our analysis, or the wisdom of our advice, but in the Lord whom all ministry is called to serve, Jesus Christ, who, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is worthy of eternal praise.

## **APPENDIX: Stages in the development of this statement**

The present statement has been developed through the following stages:

*1999*

In 1999 the LWF Council approved a study program for the Office for Ecumenical Affairs, to be carried out in cooperation with the Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg, and the Department for Theology and Studies, on “Lutheran Identity in Ecumenical Relationships.” The program plan referred to the need for the LWF to clarify its profile as a communion in certain areas and the first issue to be considered was “Lutheran identity pertaining to the historic episcopate.”

*2000*

In August 2000 a consultation was organized in Geneva on “The Ecumenical Profile of Lutheran Churches Relating Simultaneously to Churches of Episcopal and Non-Episcopal Traditions.” The papers presented were collected in a compendium.

*2001-2002*

In 2001 and 2002 regional meetings were organized on the topic of the episcopal ministry with representatives of LWF member churches in 1) Columbia, South Carolina (USA), 2) Oslo (Norway), 3) São Leopoldo (Brazil), and 4) Budapest (Hungary). For these meetings the LWF study document “Ministry – Women – Bishops” (1993), which contains substantial sections on the episcopal ministry, was provided and discussed. The OEA also participated in a pastors’ conference on the episcopal ministry in Meiganga (Cameroon), arranged by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon. Unfortunately it was not possible to arrange for an Asian regional consultation. At the Council meetings of 2001 and 2002 the project was discussed in the Standing Committee for Ecumenical Affairs.

*2002*

In November 2002 a consultation was organized in Malta of Lutheran members of the different international dialogue commissions where the LWF is a partner. Prior to the meeting a substantial draft was developed for a statement on the Lutheran understanding of the episcopal ministry based on ecumenical documents and on relevant LWF studies.<sup>xiv</sup> Several papers were presented, which developed topics related to the overall theme. The draft text was thoroughly reworked and a statement was agreed upon called “The Episcopal Ministry within the Apostolicity of the Church. A Lutheran Statement 2002”, referred to as the Malta Statement.

*2003*

In the spring of 2003 a booklet with the Malta Statement in four languages was sent to the LWF member churches for their study and response. The project was also mentioned in the Six-Year Report to the LWF Tenth Assembly under the heading, “How do Lutherans understand the ministry of bishops in the church?” and the quadrilingual booklet was distributed for information to all the participants at the Assembly.

*2004*

In 2004 the Council formally received the responses to the Statement from LWF member churches and requested that a small group present a report in 2005 on possible amendments of the text.

*2005*

The 2005 Council meeting was presented with a report with a comprehensive overview of the responses from the member churches. The Council voted to receive this report and to ask that

a new text be developed on the basis of the 2002 Statement, taking into consideration the responses received. For this purpose it appointed a Working Group consisting of Prof. Dr Joachim Track (LWF Executive Committee), Prof. Dr Theodor Dieter (the Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg), Rev. Dr Randall Lee (Director for Ecumenical Affairs ELCA), and Rev. Sven Oppegaard (LWF Office for Ecumenical Affairs). As part of its procedure the working group sent the report on the responses to all member churches, inviting them to see whether their concerns had been properly registered. No church sent in further comments as a result of this. In addition, the Malta Statement was sent to the main dialogue partners for their comment. A substantial response was received from the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission for Ecumenical Relations (IASCER).

#### 2006

In light of the comments and proposals received a new text was developed by the Working Group, building on the Malta Statement. The new text was also considerably expanded, by a biblical section, drawing on contributions from Prof. Dr Turid Karlsen Seim, and a section on the Early Church, building on observations made in the response from IASCER (cf. above). The new text was presented to the LWF Executive Committee, which acted to recommend it to the 2007 Council meeting in Lund.

#### 2007

In 2007 the Working Group carried out further editorial work in consultation with the Department for Theology and Studies and presented a revised text to the Program Committee for Ecumenical Affairs at the 2007 Council meeting in Lund. In conjunction with this Council meeting an LWF Church Leader's Conference was held and the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the LWF was celebrated. The Program Committee considered the revised text in detail and added its own amendments to it, in light of proposals received from regional meetings and a Consultation of Lutheran Women Bishops, Presidents and Leaders in the Ministry of Oversight.

Upon the recommendation of the Program Committee for Ecumenical Affairs the Council voted:

- *to thank the member churches for their cooperation in the process leading to the text "Episcopal Ministry within the Apostolicity of the Church – The Lund Statement by the Lutheran World Federation – A Communion of Churches – March 2007"*
- *to express appreciation to the drafting group for its substantial involvement in the development of the text,*
- *to affirm the text as an appropriate current expression of the Lutheran understanding of the ministry of oversight,*
- *to receive the text as a statement by the LWF, and*
- *to ask the General Secretary to submit the text to the member churches for study and appropriation in their different contexts.*

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<sup>i</sup> ECUMENICAL DOCUMENTS:

The present statement is to a great extent developed using formulations from agreed texts that have been achieved multilaterally as well as between Lutherans and ecumenical partners in bilateral dialogues:

- A. Several perspectives regarding the episcopal ministry in relation to the apostolic tradition of the church, which have subsequently found a place in ecumenical documents, were presented in the WCC/Faith and Order study document “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry,” in 1982.
- B. Among reports from bilateral dialogues involving Lutherans at the international level, the following have considered the topic of the present statement most directly:
- “The Ministry in the Church.” Report of the Lutheran/Roman Catholic Joint Commission, 1982.
  - The Niagara Report. Report of the Anglican-Lutheran Consultation on Episcopate, 1987.
  - “Church and Justification.” Report of the Lutheran/Roman Catholic Joint Commission, 1994.
  - “Called to Communion and Common Witness.” Report of the Lutheran-Reformed Joint Working Group, 2002.
  - “Growth in Communion.” Report of the Anglican-Lutheran International Working Group, 2002.
- C. Among reports from dialogues involving Lutherans at the regional level the following have considered the topic of this statement most directly:
- The Meissen Common Statement, by the Church of England, the Evangelical Church in Germany and the Federation of the Evangelical Churches in the GDR, 1988.
  - The Porvoo Common Statement by the British and Irish Anglican Churches and Nordic and Baltic Lutheran Churches, 1993.
  - The Reuilly Common Statement by the British and Irish Anglican Churches and the French Lutheran and Reformed Churches, 1999.
  - “Called to Common Mission.” An Agreement of Full Communion between the Episcopal Church in the USA and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1999.
  - “Called to Full Communion.” The Waterloo Declaration by the Anglican Church of Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, 2001.
  - “Communio Sanctorum. Die Kirche als Gemeinschaft der Heiligen,” by the Bilateral Working Group of the German Roman Catholic Bishops’ Conference and the Kirchenleitung of the United Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Germany.

<sup>ii</sup> EARLIER LUTHERAN STUDY DOCUMENTS ON THE ORDAINED MINISTRY:

LWF studies with direct relevance to the topic of the present statement have been conducted earlier. The reports from these studies also provide a significant part of the basis for the present statement. The documents are published in the study book “Ministry: Women, Bishops”, LWF Geneva 1993.

The individual documents in this publication are:

- “The Lutheran Understanding of Ministry”, 1983.
- “Lutheran Understanding of the Episcopal Office”, 1983.
- “Women in the Ministries of the Church”, 1983.
- Report from “Consultation on the Ordained Ministry of Women and Men”, 1992.

<sup>iii</sup> Cf. The Apostolicity of the Church: Study Document of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity (Minneapolis, 2007). part 1.

<sup>iv</sup> Apology VII/VIII, 28. In R. Kolb and T. J. Wengert (eds.): The Book of Concord 2000, p. 178.

<sup>v</sup> „*Res maxima et necessaria est omnibus ecclesiis ministerium ecclesiae et a deo solo datum et conservatum.*” WA 38, 423, 21-25; LW 53, 124.

<sup>vi</sup> Cf. also Melancthon’s remarks on the *Regensburger Buch* in *Corpus Reformatorum* 4, 367f.

<sup>vii</sup> *On the Councils and the Church*, LW 41, 155.

<sup>viii</sup> Although the use of the expression *de iure divino* is used in the Augsburg Confession only with regard to the power of bishops, this does not imply that the office of bishop is distinct from the one ordained ministry by divine right. The manner in which CA 28 specifies the areas in which the bishops have authority by divine right,

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or “according to the gospel”, are just those areas for which the ordained ministry as such is instituted, i.e. “to preach the gospel, to forgive or retain sins...”etc.

<sup>ix</sup> Martin Luther, “That a Christian Assembly or Congregation Has the Right and Power to Judge All Teaching and to Call, Appoint, and Dismiss Teachers, Established and Proven by Scripture” LW 39, 305-314.

<sup>x</sup> A tradition in the ancient church understands Mary Magdalene to be an “apostle to the apostles.” In his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, for example, Hippolytus called Martha and Mary (Magdalene) “apostles to the apostles, sent by Christ” and “apostles of Christ.” (G. N. Bonwetsch, “Hippolyts Kommentar zum Hohenlied auf Grund von N. Marrs Ausgabe des Grusinischen Textes,” *Texte und Untersuchungen* N.F. VIII 2c [Leipzig, 1902], 67, 68.) In a disputed sermon, Augustine spoke in passing of Mary Magdalene as “apostle to the apostles (*apostola apostolorum*).” (“Ad Fratres in Eremo Sermo XXXVI,” *Migne Patrologia Latina* 40, 1298). The ninth-century “Life of Mary Magdalene” by Rabanus Maurus stated that Jesus recognized her as apostle to the apostles (*ad apostolos apostola*) (MPL 112, 1474) and bestowed on her the office of the apostolate (*apostolatus officium*) (1475, 1479). In a reported lecture on the gospel of John, Thomas Aquinas stated that Mary Magdalene “became the apostle to the apostles (*apostolorum apostola*) by being commissioned to announce the Resurrection of the Lord to his disciples.” (*Reportatio super Evangelium Johannis*, cap. 20, lectio 3, *S. Thomae Aquinatis Opera Omnia*, ed. Robert Busa S.J., vol.6, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 1980, 354f.) “In Western Church tradition she [Mary Magdalene] received the honor of being the only woman (besides the Mother of God) on whose feast the Creed was recited precisely because she was considered to be an apostle – ‘the apostle to the apostles’ (*apostola apostolorum*).” (Raymond E. Brown, “Roles of Women in the Fourth Gospel,” *Theological Studies* 36.4 [December 1975], 693).

<sup>xi</sup> *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. LW 36, 116; WA 6, 566.

<sup>xii</sup> Cf. *The Diaconal Ministry in the Mission of the Church*, LWF Studies 01/2006. This book contains the statement and the main presentations from an international consultation on the diaconal ministry. Churches are challenged to reexamine how they understand and order the diaconal ministry as a core component of the church’s mission in the world.

<sup>xiii</sup> Lutheran bishops / ministers of episkopé have frequently exercised a function of this kind in the public sphere. So far, that function has not received sufficient theological or church-legal elaboration. This points to a remaining challenge within Lutheranism.