

Zeitschrift: Internationale kirchliche Zeitschrift : neue Folge der Revue internationale de théologie

Band: 108 (2018)

Heft: [1]: Utrecht and Uppsala on the Way to Communion : report from the official dialogue between the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht and the Church of Sweden (2013)

Artikel: Utrecht and Uppsala on the way to communion : report from the official dialogue between the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht and the Church of Sweden (2013)

Autor: [s.n.]

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-939241>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 26.03.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

Utrecht and Uppsala on the Way to Communion

Report from the Official Dialogue between the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht and the Church of Sweden (2013)

1. Introduction

In 2005 an official dialogue between the Church of Sweden and the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht started on the initiative of the Archbishop of Uppsala, Karl Gustav Hammar, and the Archbishop of Utrecht Joris Vercammen. Since then a working group appointed by the two churches has met twice a year in Sweden, Switzerland and the Netherlands. What follows is the report of this group with concluding recommendations agreed upon on 12th April 2013. This report is now presented to the two churches for consideration and appropriate action.

1.1 Two churches with one faith and one mission

The Church of Sweden and the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht are in some respects as different as churches can be in Europe: one is a national majority church, shaped by a common history, confession and language. The other is a family of churches, autonomous in their inner life and administration but held together by a common liturgical tradition and the International Old Catholic Bishops Conference. Thus it is possible to speak of this church either in the plural or the singular. The Old Catholic Churches are minority churches in their countries, shaped by different cultures with their local histories and traditions. The Church of Sweden and the Old Catholic Church are, however, bound together by a shared theological foundation, common catholic and apostolic heritage, and common mission in Europe.

The two churches have a history of separation from the Roman Catholic Church whilst continuing the catholic heritage in their own ways, from pre-reformation catholicism in the Church of Sweden and from counter-reformation catholicism in the Old Catholic Church. The present encounter of these two traditions is unique. They both preserve a rich liturgical and eucharistic life, value an unbroken episcopal structure, have a priesthood including both men and women, have a deep commitment to

the visible unity of the church and to the ecumenical movement, and maintain an open, though critical, attitude to changing values in society.

The Church of Sweden and the Old Catholic Church were founding members of the World Council of Churches (WCC), and they are members of the Conference of European Churches (CEC). Both have for many years participated in inter-confessional dialogues with the Roman Catholic Church. They have similar agreements of full communion with the Anglican churches in the British Isles and with the Philippine Independent Church.

1.2 Two churches on the way to communion and visible unity for the sake of the world

The ultimate motivation for seeking visible unity between churches is the high-priestly prayer in John 17:21. Christ himself prays that his followers “may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” Every endeavour to achieve unity can be seen as obedience to Christ. Unity is not optional, but an essential dimension of what it means to be the church of Christ. Where there is division, the reality of the church is impaired, the credibility of the gospel is weakened, and the mission of the church is hampered.

The unity of the church does not require absolute uniformity in structure, nor in forms of worship or even theology. Unity is a unity in reconciled diversity, spiritual, but made visible through sacramental communion. As Christians we are called to make “every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”. The apostle affirms that “there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all”. (Eph. 4:3–6).

As the document will show, we have discovered that our churches are already united in faith, worship and mission, so that nothing seems to prevent us from affirming full sacramental communion between them. In accordance with Christ’s prayer and the apostolic exhortation, we therefore propose that the Church of Sweden and the Old Catholic Church of the Union of Utrecht recognize one another as truly catholic and apostolic churches and agree on full eucharistic communion.

1.3 *A changing ecumenical landscape*

The ecumenical landscape in Europe is changing. National and confessional borders no longer separate churches from each other to the same extent as in the past. Traditional churches, modern denominations and new faith communities encounter each other everywhere. All are impacted by an increasingly secular context. New means of communication bring a world of diversity into every home, and in the multi-cultural and pluralistic society, not only mutual tolerance but an active recognition of “the other” is expected. Churches are challenged in their faith, self-understanding and mission and need to consult and support each other in this situation.

In profound gratitude for the heritage of the ancient church and the renewal of our churches from the 16th century and onwards, they now seek to make a joint and constructive contribution to European values and spirituality by coming closer together. Both churches bring with them a long heritage of ecumenical dialogue with the ultimate aim of reaching the full visible unity of the worldwide church.

In the ongoing reformation of the church (*ecclesia semper reformanda*), these churches – different as they are – bring a particular and invaluable gift: the faith of the apostolic church, which can be related to freedom, equality and democracy. Open to everyone seeking God, vulnerable but strong through the gospel, these churches are signs and instruments of Christ’s presence when God’s grace is proclaimed and the sacraments are celebrated. They share the conviction that neither unlimited diversity, nor protective institutionalism could provide a relevant response to the challenges of our time. At a time when commitment to visible unity is weakened and historical tradition is often disregarded, the two churches are called to be a bridge from the past to the present and to be signs of the future.

1.4 *Implications of church community*

If communion between the Church of Sweden and the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht were acknowledged, there would be a number of possible implications, for example:

- Baptized members of the two churches, visiting, working and living where there are congregations of either church, would be able to

- receive sacramental and pastoral ministries and be regarded as full communicant members of the other church.
- Church buildings and other facilities could be made available to the other church for their own services. This would be particularly important for the Church of Sweden with its extensive international ministry.
 - Coordination of and cooperation in common obligations and interests in relation to partner churches like the churches of the Anglican Communion and the Philippine Independent Church and in those ecumenical organizations of which both are members.
 - The Church of Sweden and the Old Catholic Churches could mutually strengthen each other in their spiritual and diaconal work.

1.5 Preliminary remarks on terminology

In this document we use a number of terms that, as long as they are undefined, may seem to be self-evident or unequivocal. In fact they can be misleading because of connotations that are linked to them in common use, or because their contents have changed over time. In the context of two churches trying to find out how much they have in common and to what extent their differences are compatible, in order to discern the possibility of living in some form of ecclesial communion, this fact involves the risk of facile illusions as well as unjust prejudices. Moreover, such terms have sometimes served distinct contemporary and sometimes ecclesiastical political agendas.

As the Roman Catholic Church still determines the image of catholic Christianity in the public consciousness, the use of the term “catholic” requires explanation. When the word is used without further qualification, it is here a phenomenological description referring to a number of aspects of theology and life which are shared by a number of churches, for example a desire to be in continuity with the church through the ages, the role of sacraments and liturgical worship, the presence of episcopal ministry etc. When used to connote a specific church, the word will be qualified, such as Roman Catholic or Old Catholic. In what specific sense the Old Catholic Churches are catholic will become apparent in chapter 3, but the name should not lead to them being confused with reactionary groups within Roman Catholicism. Similarly, how the Church of Sweden can be understood as catholic will become apparent in chapter 4. In chapter 5 the

term is elaborated in a more theological, ecclesiological manner comparing both our churches to formulate a common vision.

In some European countries the term “Lutheran” is simply identified with a local Protestant tradition, at times in contradistinction to the Roman Catholic Church. In this document we avoid polemical use of the term. The word can be used in a generic sense as referring to churches or ideas belonging to the reformation tradition stemming from Martin Luther. In chapter 4 the way in which the Church of Sweden has been shaped by that tradition will be specified, as will the appropriateness of the use of the term “Protestant” for it.

The English word “evangelical” can be translated in two ways in Swedish. When connoting that the life and teaching of a church are in accordance with the teaching of the gospel, it is rendered *evangelisk*, whilst when having the sense of a low-church movement that stresses conservative biblical interpretation and a personal and actual experience of faith, it is *evangelikal*. The relevance of this distinction will become apparent in understanding the Church of Sweden.

The term “folk church” is generally used where a church is an unquestioned part of a society. In a folk church, membership is almost automatically passed on from generation to generation or is only to a limited extent consciously chosen. The terms “folk church” and “national church” can be connected, but the latter has often been used to define a church within definite national boundaries but relatively independent and autonomous in relation to the state and without necessarily having a majority status in terms of population. Thus both the Old Catholic Churches and the Church of Sweden can be defined as national churches, but in different ways, as will become apparent.

1.6 The disposition of the document

Since the purpose of this document is to provide an understanding of the two churches which will enable their governing bodies to make a responsible decision on the possibility of church fellowship or ecclesial communion, the remaining sections will have the following disposition. In chapter 2 there will be a brief description of contacts between the churches previous to this dialogue, as well as the immediate background to why and how it was initiated. Since the Old Catholic Church is relatively unknown to members of the Church of Sweden and vice versa the next two major chapters (3 and 4) will provide historical overviews of their development

as well as key aspects of their theological self-understanding. Moreover, their respective ecumenical contexts will be described. Finally, these presentations will try to communicate an impression of what church life looks like in practice. Chapter 5 discusses various aspects of a theology of the church in a way which shows some basic common features whilst indicating distinctive nuances. It is proposed that there is sufficient convergence in this understanding to provide a basis for communion between the two churches. In chapter 6 a number of issues are discussed which will need to be subject to profounder mutual understanding, especially in relation to our respective ecumenical contexts. These matters should not be obstacles to communion but understanding them more fully will be part of the shared journey that lies ahead. Finally, on the basis of the mutual understanding of our histories and characteristic theological identities, as well as the shared ecclesiological vision and the acceptance of a continued journey of theological discovery, chapter 8 proposes the acknowledgements and recommendations that will bring the Union of Utrecht and the Church of Sweden into communion.

2. Occasional contacts and the start of the dialogue

Preceding this official dialogue between the Church of Sweden and the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht initiated in 2005, there have been a number of earlier contacts and mutual visits. Though these contacts were rather incidental in character, they have a certain mutual interest.

The first contacts date from the last quarter of the 19th century. Eduard Herzog (1841–1924), the first bishop of the Swiss Old Catholic Church, mentioned his meeting in 1886 with the young Swedish theologian, Karl Magnus Thordén, who was working on an academic study of the Swiss Old Catholic Church. Herzog quoted the opinion of the Anglican bishop John Wordsworth, who wrote a book on the history of the Church of Sweden and who considered this church as the closest to pre-reformation catholicism among all Protestant churches.

The life and teachings of the Church of Sweden were the subject of several articles in the Dutch Old Catholic newspaper (“*De Oud-Katholiek*”) in 1912 and 1913, which considered the Church of England, the Scottish Episcopal Church, the Church of Ireland, the Church in Wales, the Episcopal Church in America, the Old Catholic Church, the Church of Finland and the Independent Philippine Church as sister churches of the Church of

Sweden. In 1925, during the World Conference on Life and Work in Stockholm, the Swedish Church had opened the possibility for all participants to receive Holy Communion, including Anglicans and Old Catholics. In 1952 this was repeated at the Faith and Order Conference in Lund.

After World War II the Lambeth Conference of 1948 considered organizing meetings, at regular intervals, of bishops of churches which were, or could be, in communion with the bishops of the Anglican Communion. The idea of a “larger episcopal unity” was reaffirmed by the Lambeth Conferences in 1958 and 1968, now called “wider episcopal fellowship”. There was, however, only one such conference, held at Canterbury in 1964 with thirty-nine bishops representing episcopally organized churches, mainly from Europe. The three archbishops of Canterbury, Utrecht and Uppsala read papers on episcopacy.

In 1951 the Old Catholic Church invited Archbishop Yngve Brilioth and Bishop Gustaf Aulén to a bishop’s consecration in Essen. They could not participate but sent two young priests to represent them. In 1953 Swedish participants were invited to the Old Catholic Conference in Munich. A eucharist was celebrated according to the order of the Church of Sweden and a number of Old Catholics took part.

In 1960, at the Youth Conference of WCC in Lausanne, a proposal was made to open an official dialogue between the Church of Sweden and the Old Catholic Churches. The Church of Sweden again sent a representative to the Old Catholic Congress in Vienna in September 1965, and the archbishop of Uppsala sent the congress a telegram. With the prospect of the planned 20th Old Catholic Congress the wish was expressed, that the voice of the Church of Sweden would enrich the congress.

During this congress in 1965, the bishops of the Old Catholic Churches decided on full communion with the Spanish Episcopal Reformed Church, the Lusitanian Catholic Apostolic Episcopal Church in Portugal and the Philippine Independent Church. As the relationship with the latter church developed, Old Catholics discovered the importance of a closer cooperation with the Church of Sweden, which in the meantime developed its own contacts with the Philippine Church leading to a concordat in 1994. The latter also signed a growing number of concordats of full communion with Anglican Churches, beginning with the Episcopal Church in America.

From 1977 onwards Old Catholic bishops now and then ordained deacons and priests for some congregations in Denmark and Sweden, mainly in Copenhagen and Malmö. At the start these small congregations

largely consisted of former Lutherans who were dissatisfied with modern tendencies in their former church, such as the ordination of women. They therefore strived for a catholic church that kept these modern phenomena at a distance. In the last decades however they changed in character to espouse an outspoken modern and inclusive theology. Though several efforts were made to establish sustainable ecclesial structures, these efforts proved unsuccessful. In 2013 there are still two small groups in Copenhagen and Malmö which are under the supervision of the Old Catholic bishop of Haarlem.

In August 2003 the 38th International Old Catholic Theologians' Conference met in Elspeet, the Netherlands, at which Prof Sven-Erik Brodd lectured on the eucharist from a Lutheran perspective. The conference report stated that there are no significant differences between the three [i.e. Old Catholic, Anglican and Swedish Lutheran] understandings of the eucharist. All three traditions teach the real presence of Christ and the sacrificial character of the sacrament of the eucharist. The conference maintained "that in order to take up ecclesial communion, it is not enough to have a joint understanding of baptism, the eucharist and the ordained ministry (which was not specifically addressed) as isolated entities. Rather a common fundamental understanding of the church as a communion grounded in the triune God must be presupposed, for only then will baptism, the eucharist and the ordained ministry or, respectively, the elements of scripture and tradition, the ancient creeds, the sacraments and the office of bishop in apostolic succession find their place in the mystery of the church."¹ The theologians' conference considered it desirable to establish relations with the Church of Sweden, since it was, like the Churches of the Union of Utrecht, in ecclesial communion with the British and Irish Anglican Churches and the Philippine Independent Church.

Just prior to this theologians' conference, in April 2003 the archbishop of Utrecht, Joris Vercammen, had been invited to the consecration of two bishops in the Church of Sweden. In January 2004 he proposed – on behalf of the International Bishops' Conference of the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht – an official dialogue with the Church of Sweden. This correspondence resulted in the official dialogue between the Church of Sweden and the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht starting in 2005.

¹ 'Conclusions of the 38th International Old Catholic Theologians' Conference', in: *IKZ* 93 (2003) 207–208.

3. Presentation of the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht

3.1 Historical development

The Union of Utrecht at present comprises seven churches, each of which is organized on an episcopal and synodical basis within the boundaries of a particular country. They are autonomous in their internal administration and share a central organ for common witness and mission in the International Old Catholic Bishops' Conference (IBC). Members of the Union of Utrecht are at present the Old Catholic Churches in the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland (both German- and French-speaking parishes), Austria, the Czech Republic, Croatia and Poland. We may distinguish three groups on the basis of the historical background of their coming into existence as institutionally distinct churches: the Old Catholics in the Netherlands, those in the mainly German-speaking parts of Europe and those with a Slav origin. Other Old Catholic groups without synod or bishop exist in France (*Mission vieille-catholique en France*) as well as in Sweden (*Gammalkatolska Kyrkan i Sverige*) and Denmark (*Gammelkattolsk Kirke i Danmark*). They do not count as member churches of the Utrecht Union and are under the supervision of one of the bishops of the IBC. There are also many communities, especially in the English-speaking world, calling themselves in some way or other *Old Catholic* and claiming to stand in the episcopal succession stemming from the hierarchy of the Old Catholic Church of Utrecht. These churches and their bishops (often called *episcopi vagantes*) are not recognized as such by the churches of the Union of Utrecht. None of them belongs to the union and they are not involved in this dialogue, nor will they be affected by this agreement (this also applies to the Nordic Catholic Church, a body which has developed since the 1990's and is now in union with the Polish National Catholic Church in North America).

3.1.1 The Old Catholic Church in the Netherlands

The Old Catholic Church in the Netherlands (*Oud-Katholieke Kerk van Nederland*) regards itself as being in historical continuity with the Church of Utrecht founded in the 7th century by St Willibrord and organized as a church province with the metropolitan see of Utrecht in 1559. Weakened by the reformation and the Dutch war of independence against the Spanish king, the church had to find a new (and often hidden) mode of life in the

Calvinist republic. In this difficult and unclear situation, a debate arose between Rome and Utrecht, whether the Church of Utrecht headed by an apostolic vicar was a missionary church to be governed by the *Congregation de Propaganda Fide* in Rome or the continuation of the ancient see, which preserved its ancient rights to govern itself. As this debate became influenced by controversy over interpretations of grace and ethics often termed Jansenism, it ended up in a breach between Rome and Utrecht in the early 18th century.

The majority of Catholics in the Dutch Republic accepted direct governance from Rome, whereas a minority held on to the ancient rights. The latter were called “the Church of Utrecht”. It elected an archbishop of Utrecht, had him validly consecrated and appealed to a general council to defend its rights. Until this council might meet, Utrecht refrained from everything that would widen the gap that divided it from Rome. So the Church of Utrecht stayed very close to the tradition of counter-reformation Roman Catholicism both in faith and order, as can be seen in its still official name: “The Roman Catholic Church of the Old Episcopal Clergy”. Even after the pronouncement of the dogmatic definitions of the Immaculate Conception of Mary in 1854 and papal infallibility and universal jurisdiction in 1870 by Rome, the Church of Utrecht only hesitantly got into contact with the Old Catholic movement in Germany and Switzerland. Today the Dutch Church has two bishops: the archbishop of Utrecht and the bishop of Haarlem. A new Roman Catholic hierarchy was established in Holland only in 1853.

3.1.2 The Old Catholic Churches in Germany, Switzerland and the Habsburg Monarchy

The Old Catholic Churches in Germany (*Katholisches Bistum der Altkatholiken in Deutschland*), Switzerland (*Christkatholische Kirche der Schweiz*), and the Habsburg Monarchy (for the present names see below) go back to the refusal of Catholics of a long-standing politically liberal outlook to accept the conception of the church as it found expression in the two decrees of the First Vatican Council in 1870 on the universal jurisdiction of the bishop of Rome and his infallibility as supreme teacher in matters of faith and morals. Being excommunicated they were to organize churches that were no longer under the obedience of the pope. This resulted in the creation of diocesan synods and the consecration of a bishop elected by the synod. The protest has been linked from the very beginning

with the intention of reform and reunion on the basis of the faith and life of the ancient undivided church, which explains the name Old Catholic.

While in Germany and Switzerland the organization of the church was completed in the years 1871 to 1874 and 1871 to 1876, respectively, the Old Catholics in the Habsburg Empire were not allowed by the state authorities to have a bishop consecrated; so they had to be content with a diocesan administrator. After the collapse of the Habsburg Empire two autonomous churches, now each with a bishop, were established in Czechoslovakia and in Austria (now *Altkatholische Kirche Österreichs*).

The Church in Czechoslovakia was predominately of German origin (*Altkatholische Kirche in der Tschechoslowakischen Republik*). Its German members were forced to leave Bohemia after the end of World War II. The remaining Czech-speaking church (now *Starokatolická Církev v České Republice*) has its roots in an effort around 1900 to found a national “czecho-slavic” church claiming to stand in the tradition both of Cyril and Methodius, who brought the faith to the Slavs, and of John Huss, the Bohemian reformer. Their ideational continuity with the second group, to which they formally belong, is equivocal.

These four churches consist of one diocese each.

3.1.3 The Old Catholic Churches of Slav origin

The other Old Catholic Churches of Slav origins do not owe their organization to the controversies over the First Vatican Council, but are the result of a wish to live with a distinct ethnic and national identity within the Catholic Church, which the Roman authorities were unable to concede. Towards the end of the 19th century a number of independent-minded communities emerged among Polish emigrants in the USA. Two different groups were established in Chicago, Illinois, and Scranton, Pennsylvania, which merged into the Polish National Catholic Church in the USA and Canada (PNCC). They had their bishops consecrated by the European Old Catholic Churches. This church left the Union of Utrecht in 2003 because of its refusal to be in communion with those Old Catholic Churches that introduced the ordination of women to the priesthood.

After World War I the PNCC started a mission in Poland then enjoying a new national independence. The missionary diocese erected in 1924 became an autonomous church in 1951 and the consecration of its first bishop (signifying his being a member of the IBC) took place in 1959.

Today the Polish National Church (*Kościół Polskokatolicki w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*) comprises three dioceses.

In 1909 a bishop was consecrated for the Church of the Mariavites in Poland. This church originated at the end of the 19th century as a reform movement within the Polish Roman Catholic Church. As Rome declined their request for acknowledgement, the Mariavites turned to Utrecht. In 1924 the relationship was broken off, because of so-called mystical marriages between Mariavite priests and nuns. This church split and one part, distancing itself from those practices, seeks to be reunited to the Union of Utrecht and is in an official dialogue with the Churches of the Union of Utrecht.

In Yugoslavia an Old Catholic Church was organized among the Croats in 1923, and a bishop was consecrated at Utrecht a year later. The history of this church has been rather confusing and has been a continual source of difficulties for the other bishops of the union. Today the Croatian Catholic Church (*Hrvatska Katolička Crkva*) after having suffered severe losses during World War II has been without a bishop since 1974 and is limited to a few parishes, one of them in Bosnia.

3.1.4 The Union of Utrecht and its theology

The Union of Utrecht came into existence on 24th September 1889, when the three Dutch bishops and the bishops of the Old Catholic Churches in Germany and Switzerland declared “that the churches headed and represented by them are in full ecclesial communion with each other”. Later the administrator of the Austrian diocese was accepted into the union. This nucleus of the union was the result of the consolidation of the German and Swiss Old Catholic Churches and of a growing understanding within the Dutch Church for the objectives of Old Catholic policy as laid down in the decisions of the important first three Old Catholic congresses held in Germany in 1871–1873. After 1897 bishops and churches of the third group mentioned above, i.e. of Slav origins (see 3.1.3) were admitted to the union as member churches.

The setting up of the Union of Utrecht in 1889 resulted in what might be called the Old Catholic mainstream theology manifesting a marked closeness to Orthodox and Anglican ecclesiology. The leading centres of theological reflection were and still are the Faculty (now Department) of Old Catholic Theology in the University of Berne and the Seminaries at

Amersfoort (now Utrecht and linked with the University of Utrecht) and Bonn (connected with the University of Bonn).

The Old Catholic Churches of Slav origin have hardly participated in the formation of a distinct Old Catholic theology. In recent times however a considerable number of Old Catholic theological contributions have been translated into Polish; to a lesser degree this may be said for the Czech situation. In these countries Old Catholic clergy receive their theological education in the Old Catholic section of the Christian Theological Academy in Warsaw and in the Hussite Faculty of Theology at the Charles University in Prague.

3.2 *The significance of protest and reform for Old Catholic self-understanding*

The reasons for the split within the Catholic Church after the First Vatican Council were succinctly spelled out in 1874 by Ignaz von Döllinger in Munich, who was the leading figure of the anti-infallibilist opposition to that council and who can therefore be regarded as the classical proponent (*spiritus rector*) of the traditional Old Catholic ecclesial policy:

- *Protest* (against the innovations of Vatican I, which stem from the same centralizing tendency causing the break in the Netherlands earlier),
- *Reform* (taking the criteria from the undivided church),
- *Reunion* (thus in a way anticipating what later became manifest in the ecumenical movement).

The second and the third point are in many ways interrelated and still significant, while the first point has, as a result of the renewal of the Roman Catholic Church connected with the Second Vatican Council, lost its acute anti-Roman edge.

In the Old Catholic Churches, protest and reform have been justified with the claim of continuing the catholic tradition of the faith. This implied a rejection of unjustified innovations, usually with an appeal to the ancient church. During the 17th and 18th century the Dutch Old Catholics opposed conciliar ideals, based upon this ancient church, to the centralization of church power in the Roman curia and the denial of the rights of the local church of Utrecht. For the German-speaking Old Catholics in the 19th century the influence of the Catholic Enlightenment and of parliamentary democracy was predominant. The appeal to the ancient church

did not imply a repetition of the past but rather a reorientation to the origins of the church.

The ordination of women to the priesthood is an example of “reform” that in fact can be seen as an innovation compared to the order and discipline of the ancient church. The theological rationale for this however will amongst other things refer to the basic dogmatic truth that the incarnate Son of God assumed the human nature that is common to male and female. This truth obtains a new significance in a society where the androcentric idea of humankind is disintegrating. Thus, the change of mentality of the “world” (or the *Zeitgeist*) can launch (and has launched) a process of discernment which leads to a deeper understanding of the truth. This process can be considered an example of Old Catholic theology as mentioned before.

Some modifications in the life and discipline of the church are common to all the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht. When they were introduced, these reforms made a noticeable difference in relation to the majority Roman Catholic Church in the west: the use of the vernacular for the liturgy; the establishment of an episcopal-synodical organisation; the participation of the laity in the liturgy and government of the church; abolition of compulsory confession before communion and of obligatory celibacy for clergy etc.

A further item of reform is the liturgy of the eucharist, the daily office and the administration of the sacraments, as they are presented in the various prayer and hymn books of each Old Catholic member church. They manifest greater or smaller similarities in their general outline, because they all reflect the insights of the interdenominational liturgical movement in the western churches. A special place must be given to the Liturgy of the Ordination to the Threefold Ministry (office of bishops, presbyters/priests and deacons): it has been common to the member churches since the 1980’s and shows a renewed understanding of the synodical character of the local church and its communion with other local churches.

In details, however, there may be variations among the member churches of the union. Due to the different historical developments and the national settings of the churches, there is no single church order (*Kirchenverfassung*), nor a union-wide canon law. Thus the members of a synod may have either a deciding or only a deliberative vote, and the bishop may be elected by a synod composed of laity and clergy or only by the clergy assembly. The same is true for liturgical reform, because the extent and the

way in which the member churches in the 20th century adopted the insights of the interdenominational Liturgical Movement varies. Similar observations can be made for eucharistic or Marian devotion.

In view of the tension between the differences in traditions and characteristics of the local churches and their common concern for Old Catholicism it is the task of the IBC to maintain unity. Successful initiatives were the creation of a common eucharistic prayer and the ordination rite of bishops, priests and deacons.

3.3 Foundational documents of the Union of Utrecht

In 1889, the Old Catholic bishops and their churches joining together in the Union of Utrecht recorded their intentions in three foundational documents, together known as the *Convention of Utrecht*:

1. the “Utrecht Declaration”, setting out the theological principles, based on the faith and order of the ancient church, of their witness and ecumenical mission, together with a repudiation of the dogmas of 1854 and 1870 and a self-commitment to work for the restoration of the unity and communion of churches on the said basis.
2. the “Utrecht Agreement” expressing the ecclesial communion of the churches forming the Union of Utrecht and specifying a few rules for maintaining the communion;
3. the “Regulations” stating the rules of procedure of the International Bishops’ Conference, which is to assemble at regular intervals and is chaired by the archbishop of Utrecht.

The Utrecht Declaration as the main historical document has never been changed, whereas the two other documents have been revised, finally resulting in the *Statute of the Old Catholic Bishops United in the Union of Utrecht* (2000),² whose preamble expounds the ecclesiological vision of Old Catholicism and its principles. Each bishop of the Union of Utrecht is obliged to sign the Statute, which includes the Utrecht Declaration.

² Cf. Urs von Arx/Maya Weyermann (eds), *Statut der Internationalen Altkatholischen Bischofskonferenz (IBK). Offizielle Ausgabe in fünf Sprachen* (Beiheft zu IKZ 2001; Bern: Stämpfli, 2001); see pp. 28–42 for the English translation.

3.4 *Episcopacy, synodality and the ordained ministry*

The common understanding of episcopacy in its inherent relation with the synodality of the church is expressed in the liturgical texts of the consecration rite and described in the aforementioned preamble of the *Statute of the Old Catholic Bishops' Conference*.

Bishops have a double belonging and responsibility. As they are synodically elected in the local church, they belong to this church. At the same time, through their consecration by bishops of other churches, they become members of the synod or conference of bishops, and this synodical body is the institutional expression of the communion of the respective local churches.

Episcopacy is part of the threefold apostolic ministry: bishop, presbyter (usually called priest) and deacon. This internal differentiation of the one (ordained) ministry is the outcome of developments in the first two or three centuries of the church. Though Old Catholics acknowledge the fact that this ministry underwent great fluctuations in the course of history, it is considered to be as binding as the canon of Holy Scripture, the creeds of the ancient church (i. e. the Niceno-Constantinopolitan as well as the Apostolic) and the nascent conciliar system of common witness and decision-making of the church.

Presbyters/priests and deacons share in the ministry of the bishop within the local church (diocese). For example: to preside at the eucharist is a primary task of the bishop, which is usually delegated to the presbyter in the parish.

Traditionally Old Catholics have only known the *transitional* diaconate, which still is prescribed for candidates to the priesthood and thus never drew much attention. The discussion to find a consistent and distinct role for the *permanent* diaconate, which the IBC had established for men and women in the 1980's, is still in its initial phase.

In most of the member churches the threefold ministry is open to both men and women. The difference in practice is considered not to be church-dividing. The first woman deacon was ordained in 1986 (Switzerland), the first woman priest in 1996 (Germany).

Old Catholics embrace the concept of the threefold episcopate, as introduced by the document of the Faith and Order Commission of WCC, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM) in 1982, and continued in the commission's recent document *The Church – Towards a Common Vision*

in 2012³: within the local church the bishop exercises a personal episcopate, with the presbytery (and the deacons) a collegial episcopate, with the baptized who are not ordained (for instance in a synod) a communal episcopate. They are all part of a network of mutual and joint responsibilities for the mission of the church.

It is in the national church, be it a single local church (i.e. a diocese such as in Germany, Switzerland, Austria and the Czech Republic) or a communion of local churches (i.e. the dioceses of the church province of Utrecht in the Netherlands or the dioceses in Poland), that Old Catholics perceive aspects of the synodality of the church in an immediate way. The institution of a synod, consisting of lay delegates of each parish and of (all or especially elected) members of the ordained ministry, is the realization of one of the main objectives of reform in the 1870's, as it was stated in the Programme of the first Old Catholic Congress at Munich in 1871: "We aim at a reform in the church [...] which in the spirit of the ancient church will remedy the grievances and abuses of our time and will especially fulfil the legitimate aspirations of the catholic people to participate in a constitutionally ordered way in church affairs." There are various types of such synodical bodies in the Old Catholic Churches: the Diocesan Synods on the one hand, the General Synod (in Poland) and the "Collegiaal Bestuur" with only a consultative synod (in the Netherlands) on the other, and the exact position of the bishop(s) vis-à-vis the synod(s) and executive and administrative bodies such as a synodical council (with clerical and lay members) may vary. The general principle of participation in religious matters is not restricted to synods in the strict sense.

The IBC does not have jurisdiction over the member churches with their episcopal-synodical polity and it has no legal right to interfere in their autonomous administration, but it is the organ of the witness to the truth enshrined in the apostolic tradition and of the maintenance of the unity of the Old Catholic Church as a communion of national churches. The Union of Utrecht is to some extent analogous to the Anglican Communion with its autonomous provinces or the Orthodox Church with its autocephalous churches, although the majority of the national Old Catholic Churches are single dioceses, and the IBC is the one organ obliged and entitled to speak for the Union of Utrecht.

³ Cf. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Faith and Order Paper 111; Geneva: WCC, 1982), §§ 26f (M); *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (Faith and Order Paper 214; Geneva: WCC 2013), § 52.

The IBC is responsible for a number of tasks (cf. the Order of the said Statute):

1. taking the necessary decisions in all organizational or disciplinary matters concerning the maintenance of communion and the implementation of joint projects;
2. taking a stand in controversial questions of faith and related ethical behaviours as well as in church order;
3. making statements on faith and principles in the name of the Union of Utrecht, if required;
4. ordering the relationships with other churches and religious bodies;
5. accepting a church into the Union of Utrecht and thus a bishop into the IBC.

In order to accomplish its tasks, a two-way process of discernment between the IBC and the member churches is necessary in order to safeguard the communion and its common witness and mission, which is a primary responsibility of the individual bishops as representatives of the local churches in the conference, and as representatives of the conference in the local churches.

Contrary to what is sometimes asserted the Union of Utrecht as well as its Bishops' Conference is definitely a body sharing mutual obligations of a legal character (it is a *Rechtsgemeinschaft*), but it does not present itself as a super-diocese or as a metropolitan entity nor is the IBC something like a collective metropolitan.

There are other bodies of a union-wide composition that are important in terms of opinion making on theological, ecumenical and spiritual issues and concerns for Old Catholics, such as the "International Old Catholic Congress" (assembling every four years), the "International Old Catholic Theologians' Conference" (meeting every year) etc. The *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift* (IKZ) is the traditional scholarly forum for presenting historical research and promoting theological debate on Old Catholic concerns, also inviting contributors from other Christian traditions.

3.5 Ecumenical concerns and achievements

As all the Old Catholic Churches emerged from inner-church conflicts, the wish to overcome these has always been there. In this way the Dutch Church appealed to a general council to defend her rights as a local church

against the usurpation of authority by the Roman curia. During the 19th century the German-speaking Old Catholics were in what today would be termed ecumenical contacts with other churches before their own church organization was implemented with the election and consecration of a bishop and the constitution of a synod. The clearest response to the declaration of this intention came from the traditions that in their own ways also valued the ancient church: the Orthodox and the Anglican. In 1872 an Old Catholic Union Committee was set up, which met with semi-official representatives of these two churches to determine the principles of reunion work. All of these principles reflect the fundamental importance of the faith of what was perceived as the one church founded and willed by Christ, the church of the ecumenical councils and the common fathers. To find out what belonged to the common heritage it was agreed to apply discriminately the Vincentian canon with the triple test of ecumenicity, antiquity and consent (“id teneamus, quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est, hoc est etenim vere proprieque catholicum”). Therefore, the Old Catholic Church has been seen by others as a bridge-building church.

It is in this context the two so-called Reunion Conferences of Bonn in 1874 and 1875 were organized. Although Lutheran and Reformed theologians were also present at these conferences, the response of churches from these traditions was weak. However, Protestant and Old Catholic Christians for a long time shared a feeling of belonging together in the face of what was considered to be a common adversary, the Roman Catholic Church, with its 19th century centralizing tendency.

3.5.1 Relationships with the Anglican Churches

The first two or three decades after 1870 saw many signs of rapprochement between individual Old Catholic Churches and Anglicans: statements of sympathy of varied official status on the part of the Lambeth Conferences of 1878, 1888, and also later; the offer of eucharistic hospitality on the part of the German Church; even a declaration of being in communion with the “Anglo-American” church by the Swiss Church etc. The constitution of the Union of Utrecht in 1889 curbed the dynamics. It was only in 1925 that the Dutch Church was prepared to recognize the validity of Anglican orders. After that, the way was paved for what became the *Bonn Agreement* of 1931, which is the formal basis of “intercommunion” – a term that was

altered to “full communion” around 1960 – between the churches of the Anglican Communion and the Union of Utrecht.⁴

The will to find a common way and the growing mutual trust resulted over the years in an ecclesial communion with many forms of exchanges (youth groups, theologians’ conferences, mutual participation in episcopal ordinations, etc.), which in 1999 was institutionalized with the establishment of the Anglican Old Catholic International Co-ordinating Council (AOCICC), which meets regularly. For various reasons ecclesial communion does not include a common *episcopé* to overcome the somewhat irregular state of overlapping jurisdictions in Europe, nor are the Old Catholics in communion with all the other churches that for the last thirty years or so have been in (“full” or “partial”) communion with parts of the Anglican Communion in Europe or elsewhere – with the exception of the Philippine Independent Church: In 1965 the Bonn Agreement was extended to this church as well as to the Lusitanian Catholic Apostolic Evangelical Church and the Spanish Reformed Episcopal Church (both of which are now under the metropolitan authority of the archbishop of Canterbury and thus belong to the Anglican Communion). Yet, for many Old Catholics the relationship with members of the worldwide Anglican Communion is an experience they would not want to be without.

3.5.2 Relationships with the Orthodox Churches

The contacts with the Orthodox established in the 1870’s continued, but gained a more official dimension after the constitution of the Union of Utrecht. In the 1890’s a theological dialogue was initiated between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Union: two commissions several times exchanged their findings on issues like the *filioque*, the theology of the eucharist and the validity of Old-Catholic orders. World War I and the Russian Revolution brought this process of rapprochement to an end. A new initiative, now under the leadership of the Ecumenical Patriarchate was started in the 1920’s. From an Old Catholic perspective, the result of

⁴ The text of the Bonn Agreement of 1931 is best accessible in: Harding Meyer/Lukas Vischer (eds), *Growth in Agreement: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level* (New York: Paulist Pr., 1984), 37. See also ‘Belonging together in Europe – A Joint Statement on Aspects of Ecclesiology and Mission by the Anglican Old Catholic International Coordinating Council’, *IKZ* 102 (2012) 140–158.

the meeting of a mixed dialogue commission again at Bonn in 1931 – some weeks after the conclusion of the Bonn Agreement with the Anglicans – was expected to lead to a similar “intercommunion” with the Orthodox in a trilateral context, thus implementing the hopes of the 1870’s. This proved to be unrealistic. The next phase of the Old Catholic-Orthodox dialogue – now at last including all the Orthodox churches – began in the 1960’s and was conducted in a well prepared and coherent way. In 1975–1987 it produced twenty-six agreed statements (each time explicitly stating a consensus), which cover the main dogmatic issues, while placing special emphasis on ecclesiology.⁵ It was the most engaging theological dialogue the Old Catholics were ever committed to, and it is still the only dialogue of the Orthodox with a western church that was brought to its scheduled conclusion. For various reasons the hope for ecclesial communion has not yet been achieved. Comparing the wording of the Bonn Agreement with the last consensus text on “Ecclesial Communion: Presuppositions and Consequences”, which in their objectives correspond to one another, may well confirm the impression of some observers that the Old Catholics were possibly led to follow a dogmatically minimalist policy with the Anglicans (hardly mentioning theological issues in the Bonn Agreement) and a maximalist one with the Orthodox (spelling out detailed texts of theological agreement).

Be this as it may, the ecclesial communion existing between Anglicans and Old Catholics appears to be one of the two repeatedly stated obstacles to the implementation of a unity without uniformity; the other is the recent Old Catholic adoption of the practice of ordaining women to the priesthood.

Notwithstanding the fact that the synods or other authoritative bodies of all the Old Catholic churches have adopted the main objective of the dialogue texts in the 1990’s, there is a certain impasse in the relationship, which has not quite been overcome by the working group set up in 2003 by the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the IBC, commissioned to stimulate common pastoral and theological projects on a local and regional level.

⁵ Cf. Urs von Arx (ed.), *Koinonia auf altkirchlicher Grundlage. Deutsche Gesamtausgabe der gemeinsamen Texte des orthodox-altkatholischen Dialogs 1975–1987 mit französischer und englischer Übersetzung* (Beiheft zu IKZ 79; Bern: Stämpfli, 1989), see pp. 173–229 for the English translation.

3.5.3 Relationships with the Roman Catholic Church

The mutually strained and often overtly polemical relations, which were the consequence of the various instances of schism within the western Catholic Church, have gradually given way to dialogue and to the consciousness of after all belonging to the same family. The change is connected with Vatican II, at which Old Catholics were invited to take part as observers. Impediments to dialogue between Utrecht and Rome stemming from the so-called Jansenist controversy of the 17th and 18th centuries having been removed, an official dialogue between the two churches could begin. It was conducted on a national level (in the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland), but was co-ordinated and supported by the Pontifical Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and the IBC. Its immediate goal was an agreement of mutual pastoral help in well-defined emergency situations. Although a remarkable consensus on several theological issues came to light, the concrete goal was not achieved. For a while some of the national bilateral dialogue commissions continued their work, but a substantial new start was only possible after the turn of the century. This time an international joint commission was established in 2003 by the IBC and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Within five years it produced its report,⁶ which is in its first stage of critical discernment and reception in the two churches. On the basis of a so-called *communio*-ecclesiology and using the method of differentiated consensus and taking account of other bilateral dialogues and of ecumenical convergence texts, the joint commission came to the conclusion that a form of ecclesial communion appears to be possible. Remaining questions, which however do not annul the fundamental consensus in the understanding of the faith and the church, require further dialogue. These are for instance the exact nature of the primacy of the bishop of Rome in the framework of a worldwide communion of local churches; the Marian dogmas of 1854 and 1950; and the issue of the ordination of women to the priesthood.

⁶ *Kirche und Kirchengemeinschaft. Bericht der Internationalen Römisch-Katholisch – Altkatholischen Dialogkommission* (Paderborn: Bonifatius – Frankfurt: Lembeck, 2009). For an English translation see Thomas F. Best et al. (eds), *Growth in Agreement IV. International dialogue texts and agreed statements, 2004–2014* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2017), 2 vols: vol. 1, 533–568.

3.5.4 Relationships with Lutheran and other Protestant Churches

On local or national levels friendly contacts between Old Catholics and Protestant Churches have been a constant feature in the history of European Old Catholicism (in earlier times nurtured by a common anti-Romanism), but so far this has never really led to a consistent theological dialogue with the goal of ecclesial communion.⁷

In the context of dialogues which churches of the Anglican Communion had begun with Lutheran and other Protestant churches in Europe, the Old Catholic side got indirectly involved in contacts with the latter. The IBC was kept informed about the process leading to the Porvoo Common Statement (1992) and the establishment of communion between the respective British/Irish Anglican and the Nordic/Baltic Lutheran Churches. An Old Catholic observer (from Germany) participated in the process leading to the Meissen Common Statement between the Church of England and the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (1988). Currently, there is an Old Catholic observer in the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission (ALIC).

For the Old Catholics, the dialogue of the Union of Utrecht with the Church of Sweden is the first one conducted with a church that – from an Old Catholic perspective – in an unequivocal or differentiated way belongs to the Reformation churches, because with respect to the Anglican Communion the prevailing Old Catholic perspective still follows the broad Anglo-Catholic self-understanding in seeing the *Ecclesia Anglicana* as a church that is, though reformed and thus free from abuses, catholic in all its essentials. Whatever the pertinence of such distinctions, the Old Catholic side started the present dialogue with a certain expectation to find in the Church of Sweden an analogous manifestation of a catholic church shaped by the reformation.

3.5.5 The Significance of Faith and Order in the ecumenical movement

The early Faith and Order movement (and later the Commission of Faith and Order as part of the WCC) was warmly welcomed by Old Catholics, since the efforts and goals of this particular type of ecumenical work cor-

⁷ The agreement on mutual eucharistic hospitality, drawn up in 1985 between the German Old Catholic Church and the Evangelical Church in Germany, does not commit the Union of Utrecht.

responded best to the focus on theology of the Old Catholic ecumenical commitment. The Old Catholic Churches participated right from the start in 1948 in the work of WCC and usually one of the Old Catholic bishops is a member of its governing body. Achievements like the *BEM* document of 1982 or *The Church. Towards a Common Vision* of 2012 are appreciated and as far as possible correlated with the insights stemming from bilateral theological dialogues with Old Catholic participation.

3.6 The life of the church

However small the Old Catholic Churches are and however much specific historical developments mark each local church, several common characteristics can be mentioned that apply to all of them.

The main characteristic of the Old Catholic Churches is that they are celebrating communities. The eucharist and other forms of worship are the base of each local church. Distinct witnessing and serving activities have been secondary activities in most Old Catholic Churches for a long time. They were always there in forms of pastoral care and diaconal work, but usually consisted in private actions by individual church members. During the last decades a growing awareness of the importance of witnessing and serving has led to new initiatives.

The ministry of teaching has been in focus in recent decades. More modern catechetical methods have been developed and many churches practise some form of catechesis for adults.

3.6.1 A celebrating church

As has been said, each Old Catholic Church is a celebrating church focusing on the eucharist. In this celebration, always on Sundays, but in several places also on weekdays, all members of the community participate equally and experience the partaking in the Body of Christ. Given the common western catholic structure of the liturgy in the different local churches, mutual recognition is possible, even if the liturgy is celebrated in different languages. By their liturgical tradition Old Catholics are connected to their ancestors in faith. The centre has always been the eucharist, but most of the other sacraments are foci of church life as well.

As a rule, there are three readings and a sermon in a celebration of the eucharist (liturgy of the mass). The participation of the people is earnest and concentrated. The weekly services follow the liturgical year, cen-

tred round Lent-Eastertide and Advent-Christmastide. Other annual feasts, mostly those commemorating the saints, are celebrated as they occur. Old Catholics were hardly ever drawn to extra-liturgical devotions like pilgrimages or rosary prayer. The same can be said about the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Still, there can be exceptions. In for instance Poland, more popular sacramental and specifically Marian devotional traditions can be found.

Personal practice of prayer is to a large extent shaped and passed on by family traditions. Efforts are being made to reintegrate daily liturgical prayer into parish life.

3.6.2 A witnessing church

Each Old Catholic Church is a learning community. However small the local parishes are, people gather regularly to study the Bible or to discuss ecclesial or social questions. Every parish priest has his/her duties in the education of young people or those who come from other churches (or nowadays from no church at all) to join the Old Catholics. Learning also concerns ecumenical contacts on the level of the parish. Usually every parish is active in a local ecumenical council of churches or even in an interreligious dialogue group. Individual piety is stimulated by publications (printed or digital) and prayer books.

Especially in urban areas, an important portion of the active members are originally not Old Catholics, but have found a new home in the Old Catholic Church. This means that these communities are somehow present and attractive. Many parishes work on being an inviting community. In consequence, not only in theory, but also in practice every liturgical act has a witnessing element.

A second form of common witnessing consists in the passing on of Christian tradition to the next generation by catechesis and other forms of religious instruction.

On a more personal level, taking a stand in debates for a Christian point of view is also a form of witnessing. This is rarely done as church or by church media. The Old Catholic Churches have limited possibilities in this field because of their minority position.

3.6.3 A serving church

Each Old Catholic Church has its diaconal projects. The Churches of the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland have their national committees, which also internationally work together in setting up projects which help people worldwide to improve their standards of living. Parishes are also active in supporting their own projects or work together in ecumenical organizations.

An evident but essential way of serving is pastoral care in its broadest sense, either professionally by ministers or voluntarily by members of the parish. More recent are initiatives to find connections and to build up a network in the local neighbourhood.

Small communities must limit themselves to modest projects, except when they cooperate with other churches. That is a positive option and helpful for the building of ecumenical contacts. On the international level there is cooperation too in this field.

Even if many projects are small, it is still remarkable what small parishes achieve, in view of the need to maintain church buildings and vicarages.

In the diaconate, the Old Catholic Churches would benefit from cooperation with the Church of Sweden, by learning from their experience and by joint projects.

4. Presentation of the Church of Sweden

4.1 Historical development

It would not be possible to describe the whole history of the Church of Sweden in a document of this sort. This presentation is simply a sketch of three major periods that have formed this church. Clearly much more could be said and the history could be presented in other ways.

4.1.1 Medieval origins

The Church in Sweden originated as a part of the medieval western church. The first recorded missionary presence in Sweden was already in the 9th century. More lasting contacts with Christianity developed during the Viking era of the 10th and 11th centuries. On their travels Swedes encountered both the western and the eastern traditions of the church. There was an

early Orthodox presence in Sweden. But the decisive missionary influence came from the British Isles, France and Northern Germany.

At first Sweden was under the jurisdiction of the archbishop in Lund, which at the time was part of Denmark. The selection of Uppsala as the seat of an archbishop in 1164 signified a breakthrough for Christianity in Sweden. The church became a strong indigenous institution, closely linked with the crown and the nobility. Counties had their own laws, which reflected considerable regional independence, to a certain extent even in relation to canon law. There was a high degree of lay responsibility in the local parishes.

The most famous Swede in the church of the middle ages was St Bridget (1303–1373), the only canonized Swede. She was a mystic and founder of the dual Order of the Most Holy Saviour with its centre at Vadstena (with both nuns and monks in different sections of the same monastery). Bridget herself lived in Rome for more than twenty years. She used her extraordinary spiritual and political gifts as an outspoken critic of abuses of both worldly and papal power, and she tried persistently to persuade the pope to return from Avignon to Rome.

4.1.2 Reformation in Sweden

From the end of the 14th century the Nordic countries were united, but when the union king, Christian II of Denmark, had two bishops executed in Stockholm in 1520 a movement for national liberation, both from the union and from the pope, began. The leader of the insurrection, Gustavus Vasa, was crowned king of Sweden in 1523. The new monarch received ideological support for the break with Rome and for the creation of a national Swedish church from theologians, for example the brothers Olavus and Laurentius Petri, who had studied in Germany. The Swedish reformers were cautious: much of the old structure and order was retained, unless perceived as superstition or false belief. Though most of the sees were vacant, the apostolic succession was transmitted to a new generation of bishops approved by the king. In 1531 Laurentius Petri was appointed as the first archbishop of Uppsala during the reformation.

The reformation brought with it new books and practices: in 1530 it was decided that the mass should be celebrated in the vernacular; the New Testament was published in Swedish in 1526, and the whole Bible in 1541; in 1543/44 a Swedish hymnal and lectionary appeared, and a new church ordinance was finally ratified in 1571. A convocation in Uppsala in 1593

finally and formally decreed that the Church of Sweden had severed its ties with Rome and based its confession on the Bible, the three classic creeds, the Augsburg Confession of 1530 and the Ordinance of 1571.

Church practice and spiritual life in the local parishes continued much the same in the local churches, which had been built by the parishioners from the 12th to the 15th century. They were not despoiled by iconoclasm. Church buildings remained relatively unchanged as did their liturgical function. In some areas certain medieval practices and popular religiosity continued into the 19th century. The diocesan structures were preserved as was the office of bishop.

Although the Swedish reformation was theologically and liturgically moderate, under the impact of Lutheran Orthodoxy in the 17th century the church took on a more distinctive confessional Lutheran character amidst fierce controversy. The monarch was seen as responsible for enforcing the law of God, as Sweden increasingly became a major power through its role in the religious wars in Europe. This period is known as “the era of the great bishops” because of their great influence on both church and state.

The first church law that codified reformation practice and theology was adopted in 1686, reflecting the consolidation of Lutheran orthodoxy as it had developed after the Thirty Years War. Lutheran doctrine and catechism were used for creating social cohesion amongst the diverse ethnic and linguistic groups around the Baltic Sea. Religious and social uniformity was promoted and foreigners, who for some reason lived in Sweden and who did not subscribe to the Augsburg Confession, were obliged to worship in private.

4.1.3 The Church of Sweden and increasing pluralism

In the 18th and 19th centuries a number of pietistic and revivalist movements challenged Lutheran Orthodoxy. The authorities reacted strongly. In 1726 the so-called “Conventicle Edict” was issued, prohibiting worship in private groups. During the 19th century the parish church with its public Sunday service was still regarded as the natural focus of a predominantly rural life. Clergy still exercised great influence on people, not only through catechism but as being responsible for schools and social welfare. Some revival movements remained within the church, such as the Swedish Evangelical Mission. Others left and formed their own congregations joining into “free” denominations. This was a result of tensions with the official

church leadership, but there were also theological reasons for splitting the church, such as different understandings of the atonement, adult baptism, lay leadership of the eucharist, and a “pure” communion table. Freedom of religion gradually increased. In 1784 a public Roman Catholic service was allowed in Stockholm for the first time since the reformation. The Conventicle Edict was repealed in 1858. From 1860 Swedish citizens could leave the Church of Sweden, as long as they became members of another denomination recognized by the state, but it was not until 1951 that full freedom of religion was guaranteed by law for everyone.

The church played during these centuries an important role in increasing literacy through encouraging Bible reading and the use of the hymn book, as well as teaching the catechism. It was involved in the development of a basic school (*folkskolan*). In these ways it contributed to the gradual improvement of the status of ordinary people.

At the turn of the 20th century, the Church of Sweden seemed to be losing ground, with the increase of free churches and nascent secularization with a resultant decrease in church practice in many parts of the country. The early 20th century, however, witnessed a profound renewal of the Church of Sweden. It regained self-confidence and developed through the so-called Young Church Movement (*ungkyrkligheten*) a greater interest in Swedish history, not least its medieval history, national concerns and the idea of a “folk church” (*folkkyrkotanken*), which connected to the development in the political context of the idea of the “folk home” (*folkhem*) as the basis of the welfare system in society.

At the same time international dimensions became significant in the church. It became strongly involved in ecumenical and missionary work. At the universities of Uppsala and Lund, exegetical and systematic theology gained international reputation, and Lund became the centre of a renaissance of Luther studies. There was a growing interest in questions of ecclesiology. A high church movement, inspired by Anglo-Catholicism, enriched liturgical life and strengthened the ‘catholicity’ of the church.

As Sweden remained outside World War II, the post-war church was materially well off. But it was affected by increasing secularization and decreasing church attendance. Demography changed, urbanization accelerated, agriculture decreased and innovative and heavy industry flourished. City parishes started to build small district churches and parish houses. Professional lay workers were increasingly employed, and the parish councils and voluntary organizations took on new activities directed at different age groups.

Liturgy and theology were influenced by a number of movements within the churches at large, for instance liturgical renewal and ecumenism, liberation and feminist theology, and international involvement. Sweden has in the late 20th century and into the 21st seen a remarkable renewal of hymnology, in ecumenical circles sometimes called the “hymn explosion of Sweden”.

Separation between church and state had been on the political agenda for decades, and was discussed in the church throughout the later 20th century. There were structural and financial complications, and varying theological and political groupings influenced the process. In the year 2000 the church ceased to be a state church, which in fact meant an adjustment of relations rather than a radical separation. The Swedish constitution obliges the church to maintain its outreach and serve people in the entire country. But for the first time since the reformation, the church regulates its own life by its own church ordinance, not determined by the state. This ordinance includes theological introductions to major sections and key chapters, which is a novelty in Swedish ecclesiastical legislation. Despite a large increase of other faiths, dwindling church attendance, and a small but steady defection, some 70% of all Swedish citizens remain members of the Church of Sweden. All church members pay a small percentage of their income as an obligatory church-membership fee collected through the tax system. In surveys about what motivates people to remain members and pay the fee, the most common answers are: diaconal work, international aid, the role of the church in personal and general crisis, the desire to maintain and keep churches open for people to visit, and the more general role of the church in society and culture, not least with its rich musical and choral life. There is an obvious need for public sacred spaces and signs of transcendence. The Church of Sweden is an open folk church inviting all who are baptized to participate in communion. With such large numbers of members, it still has a comparatively solid financial base.

4.2 The significance of reformation for the self-understanding of the Church of Sweden

Protest and reform were historically an essential reason for the reformation movement, of which the church in Sweden became a part. This does not, however, mean that protest and reform have been a continuing dimension of the church or a characteristic theological/ecclesiological trait. Nor

has the ideal of the undivided church, though seen as one significant model, been adopted without ecclesiological qualification.

The official designation of the Church of Sweden today in Swedish constitutional law (*Lagen om Svenska kyrkan*) is

- “[...]an Evangelical Lutheran faith community (*trossamfund*) manifested in parishes and dioceses. The Church of Sweden also has a national organisation.” (§ 1)
- “[...]an open folk church, which, working with a democratic organisation and through the ministry of the church, covers the whole nation”. (§ 2)

The term Lutheran or Evangelical Lutheran was however not introduced as a characteristic description of the Church of Sweden until the 19th century. It was not in fact until 1982 that the Church of Sweden was called Evangelical Lutheran in an official text. Lutheran indicates that this church adheres to the reformation interpretation of the Christian faith originating with Martin Luther and formulated in the Lutheran confessional writings, which as was the intention of the Augsburg Confession, are today increasingly seen as expressions of the catholic faith understood in an ecumenical sense. Evangelical means a fundamental emphasis on the gospel of grace. As the word of God the Bible is recognized as the corrective principle of all doctrine (*norma normans*).

Protestant has not been a frequent characteristic description of the church in Sweden. When it appears internationally it seems to be a translation of *evangelisk*. Many members would today spontaneously identify themselves as “Swedish Church” (*svenskkyrkliga*) rather than Protestant, but some groups would describe themselves as Protestant, evangelical or charismatic. The Church of Sweden can be considered as belonging among those who wish to be both Protestant and Catholic.

There is still some suspicion about the use of the word “catholic”. Perhaps this can be seen in the creed, where the word “catholic” is rendered by *allmännelig*. This has actually been the translation of *catholica* since the late Middle Ages and was taken up by the reformers because they wanted all parts of the mass to be in Swedish. For average churchgoers today this term probably has the meaning of “general”, without any further connotations, but since “catholic” in Swedish usually denotes Roman Catholic, the use of the Swedish word *katolsk* in the creed is usually considered problematic. However, the idea of catholicity has historically been understood to be connected with the idea of “true evangelical teaching”; orthodoxy and catholicity belonged together. A number of prominent

theologians in modern times such as Nathan Söderblom and Gustaf Aulén have often made reference to “evangelical catholicity” as characteristic of the Church of Sweden. And in the official response in 1999 of the Swedish Conference of Bishops to Pope John Paul II’s encyclical *Ut unum sint* of 1995, the bishops maintained that the Church of Sweden is also, in the apostolic sense, catholic.⁸

In the 20th century, it became common to describe the Church of Sweden as a “folk church” (*folkkyrka*). In comparison with the general sense of the term it is used here with some specific elements: the participation of the people in the activities and governance of the church, the vocation of the church to reach out to the Swedish people as a whole, and a revitalization of Swedish ecclesial traditions, not least from the medieval and reformation period. The church is called to minister to everyone who seeks its pastoral services. The adjective “democratic” underlines the fact that all eligible members may participate in the election of and sit on governing bodies at the parish level, in the diocese and at the national level.

With its character as an Evangelical Lutheran faith community and folk church, the Church of Sweden regards itself as an expression of the catholic and worldwide church. This was expressed in a programmatic statement of the Central Governing Board in 1990: “The church is and transmits God’s purpose to all peoples and to all members of the people. The word “folk church” is an expression of the universality of the church or, if you will, its catholicity.” Therefore, being a folk church implies being ecumenical. The Committee for Inter-church and Ecumenical Relations described its understanding of the ecumenical commitment of the Church of Sweden as a process aimed at “restoring the visible unity of the church and thereby its ecumenicity and catholicity”.

Though the Church of Sweden is shaped by the process of reformation, due to both tradition and ecumenical commitment it understands itself as catholic.

⁸ The response in either an English or a Swedish version can be ordered from info@svenskakyrkan.se. The statement is on page 5. The response was handed over to the pope personally by the archbishop of Uppsala on a visit to Rome on May 6, 1999.

4.3 Foundational documents

In the first paragraph of the Church Ordinance (chap 1, § 1)⁹ it is stated that:

- The faith, confession and teaching of the Church of Sweden
- comes to expression in worship and life,
 - is founded on the Holy Word of God, which is given to us in the Holy Scripture,
 - is summarized in the three creeds of the early church, and in the Augsburg Confession,
 - is ratified in the convocation in Uppsala 1593,
 - is explained and commented on in the Book of Concord and in other documents which have been approved by the Church of Sweden.

This is a contemporary confessional summary of the self-understanding of the Church of Sweden. It is worth noticing that it starts with the expression of the faith in worship and life, rather than in a text, indicating that faith is to be lived, taught and learnt. This also means that the approved book of worship, the hymnal and its lectionary are important foundational documents. The Bible is in principle and in practice the primary source of the teaching of the church, but has to be interpreted by the church in the preaching and teaching of every age. Traditionally, the Augsburg Confession and the expositions of Luther's Small Catechism have served as authoritative interpretations of the faith. The Church Ordinance also refers to the ecumenical documents which have been officially received, as witnessing to the understanding of the faith in the Church of Sweden.

Today, the formal process of doctrinal interpretation is the responsibility of the general synod with its two hundred and fifty democratically elected members. The synod decides on questions of doctrine and worship. Such decisions have to be prepared and approved by the Doctrinal Commission, of which all the bishops are *ex officio* members together with eight elected theologians. The bishops also participate in the synod *ex officio*. They can initiate discussions on various matters and take part in discussions, but not in the decisions.

⁹ Gunnar Edqvist et al. (eds), *Kyrkoordningen för Svenska kyrkan. Med kommentarer och angränsande lagstiftning* (Stockholm: Verbum, 3rd edn, 2010).

4.4 Episcopacy, synodality and ministry in the Church of Sweden

The baptismal calling is the basis of every ministry. Every Christian man and woman should fulfil this calling in his or her specific circumstances of life. The priesthood of all believers is one way to describe this common calling to serve the community of believers and all the people. For the preaching of the gospel and the administering of the sacraments certain people are called to a special ministry, to which they are ordained. There is a strong emphasis on *rite vocatus*: the ordinand should have a personal vocation and must be recognized by the church through the bishop.

According to the Church Ordinance of 1571, the episcopal office is warranted by being found in the early church. Moreover, “it has been given to the church by the Holy Spirit, it has been approved by all Christendom everywhere and at all times, and therefore it must remain for as long as the world will last.”

Since 1963 lay people of a diocese have the right to take part in the election of their bishop, returning to a practice which already existed in medieval times. As a sign of the unity of the church, bishops are ordained in Uppsala Cathedral by the archbishop, assisted by other bishops. Bishops from other churches are invited, but only those from churches in full communion with the Church of Sweden participate in the laying on of hands. After the ordination the bishop is solemnly received in his or her diocese.

Today the ordained ministry is described as being threefold in the sense that there is only one ministry but three specific dimensions, episcopal, priestly and diaconal. There is a sequential relationship between priesthood and episcopacy, but not between diaconate and priesthood. The diaconate is a permanent ministry with its own integrity. The diaconate was only fully and formally restored as a permanent, specific order of ministry in the new church ordinance of the year 2000, after a long and gradual development from the mother-house deaconess system of German pietistic Lutheranism in the 19th century.

In both the common baptismal calling of all Christians and the special vocation of the ordained ministry, it is today emphasized that there must be equality between women and men. The role of women has been significant throughout church history but often not acknowledged in the past. Many of the activities of the parishes would not have been possible without the involvement of women. Today the presence and determinative influence of women can be seen at all levels, both lay and ordained. Access to the priesthood and the episcopate respectively were not kept separate.

When the general synod of Church of Sweden in 1958 took the decision that the priesthood should be open to women, that decision also implied that it was possible to have women bishops. In 1997 the first woman was elected bishop.

The Church of Sweden has a synodical structure at all levels, with a decision-making assembly and an executive board: parish assembly and parish council, diocesan assembly and diocesan board, general synod and central board. These consist of elected members (lay and ordained) and *ex officio* ordained members (parish priest at parish level; bishop at diocesan level; bishops in general synod and archbishop and one other bishop on the central board). In each diocese there is also a diocesan chapter, with roots in medieval times. The chapter is an organ of oversight over clergy and parishes in the diocese. Prior to the separation of church and state it was a state institution employing the clergy; now it is a purely ecclesiastical organ of authority. It consists of bishop and cathedral dean, one elected representative of the priests and the deacons, and three elected lay representatives. In addition there must be a qualified judge on the chapter. The role of the chapter is to accept candidates for the ordained ministry, admit to and examine them for ordination, vet and declare eligible any priest or deacon who applies for a position in a parish, exercise oversight on how clergy fulfil their ministry and keep their ordination vows, and on how parishes fulfil their pastoral tasks according to the Church Ordinance. It can censure clergy, and also has to adjudicate on whether there are any doctrinal questions involved in a conflict if a parish wants to dismiss a priest. A parish is the legal employer of the clergy, but may only dismiss a priest or deacon if it is a question of problems which could arise in any work place, i.e. mismanagement, embezzlement, bad leadership, not on questions of faith and order.

The dioceses are divided into deaneries. The dean is the bishop's representative and liaises between the clergy and the bishop, keeps the bishop informed of the situation in the parishes, assists the bishop in oversight through amongst other things visitations, supports the clergy in their pastoral work and ministerial identity and encourages voluntary pastoral cooperation over parish boundaries.

4.5 *Ecumenical concerns and achievements*

The Church of Sweden has often in modern times described itself as a "bridge-building church". It has taken an active part in the contemporary

ecumenical movement since its beginnings in the early 20th century, both multilaterally through various ecumenical organizations, and bilaterally by maintaining relations with particular churches.

Archbishop Nathan Söderblom was an early pioneer of ecumenism. The Stockholm Conference on Life and Work which he convened in 1925 was one of the major steps leading to the creation of the WCC in 1948. He also adopted a pan-Scandinavian and Baltic church policy with the intention of making the Church of Sweden a bridge church gradually reuniting Lutherans, Anglicans and even Catholics by taking advantage of the episcopal succession.

The Church of Sweden has since financially supported and actively taken part in all dimensions of the ecumenical movement organized in the WCC. The Faith and Order Conference in 1952 took place in Lund and the General Assembly of WCC in 1968 in Uppsala. It has also been a member of the CEC since its inception in 1959. The Church of Sweden plays a major role in the Swedish Christian Council with its twenty-five members.

4.5.1 Relationships with the Anglican Churches

Relations between the Church of Sweden and the Church of England began already in the early 18th century. There was cooperation between the Episcopal Church in America and congregations of the Church of Sweden there, involving mutual recognition and interchange of ministries. After the rejection of the validity of Anglican orders by Rome in the encyclical *Apostolicae Curae* of 1896, there were discussions at Lambeth Conferences in the late 19th and early 20th century about rapprochement to other churches with the historic episcopate. These included both the Old Catholic Church and the Church of Sweden. Episcopal bishops were amongst those who proposed contacts with the latter.

The Church of England in particular sought contact during this period with the Church of Sweden as it perceived that the question of apostolic succession gave an area of ecclesiological commonality. There has been an agreement of intercommunion between the Church of England and the Church of Sweden since 1922, and mutual participation in bishops' consecrations followed. Even before that contacts were established between Anglo-Catholics in England and high church groups in Sweden.

From the 1980's conversations were carried on in a wider context between the Anglican churches of the British Isles and the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran churches, which eventually led to the Porvoo Agreement

on communion in 1992. An episcopal structure was recognized as necessary for this close relationship, and continuous historic succession was seen as an important sign of apostolicity. If, however, other important factors prevailed, a break in succession could be accepted and restored. Since the signing of the agreement many dioceses and parishes have formed links with each other, and clergy from one church have served in another. A number of theological conferences and consultations have been held.

4.5.2 Relationships with the Orthodox Churches

The Church of Sweden has developed contacts with Orthodox and Oriental Churches for many years on a bilateral level but particularly within the multilateral context of WCC and CEC.

At the local level there is practical cooperation between Church of Sweden parishes and different Orthodox and Oriental immigrant congregations, for instance in the use of the same church building. Many individual members of the Church of Sweden have been profoundly influenced by Orthodox spirituality and not least iconography.

At the national level the Church of Sweden has for the last twenty years annually invited all the Orthodox and Oriental communities in Sweden to conversations about topics of common interest, without the intention of producing ecumenical documents. In addition at present official dialogues are being conducted with the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church and the Coptic Church in Sweden. Theologians from the Church of Sweden have been involved in international dialogue between the Orthodox Churches and the LWF. There have been no official relations between the Church of Sweden and the Patriarchate of Moscow. In spite of this, the Russian Orthodox Church in 2006 decided to break off relations when the Church of Sweden decided to recognize and bless same-sex partnerships. At the local level, however, contacts continue.

4.5.3 Relationships with the Roman Catholic Church

Some informal contacts between the Church of Sweden and the Roman Catholic Church, both at home and internationally, existed prior to the Second Vatican Council, but it was in connection with this council that relationships really began to develop. A Swedish bishop was one of the LWF observers at the council. When the official Lutheran-Catholic dia-

logue started immediately after the council, Swedish theologians were involved.

In the 1970's dialogues started also at the national level between the Church of Sweden and the Roman Catholic diocese of Stockholm. They have produced a series of documents.¹⁰

The visit to Sweden by Pope John Paul II in 1989 led to a decade of intense and creative relations with the Roman Catholic Church. The pope's visit was followed by joint visits by the archbishop of Uppsala and the archbishop of Turku in Finland to Rome in 1991. Together with the pope they led vespers at the high altar of St Peter's. Since then all the archbishops of the Church of Sweden have officially visited the Vatican and joint vespers in St Peter's were conducted also in 1999. At the celebration of the 400th anniversary of the Uppsala Convocation in 1593, the head of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity was present and preached in the Cathedral of Uppsala (along with the Patriarch of Constantinople) and the warm relationship was again strongly affirmed. The cordial and promising relationships were later partially disturbed by growing disagreement on ethical matters. The Brigittine sisters in Rome have played a significant role in building and maintaining the good relations. A bishop of the Church of Sweden served for many years as co-moderator of the Joint Working Group between the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church.

As with the Orthodox and Oriental churches there has been at the local level a lot of contact and practical cooperation between parishes, and between priests in pastoral situations. This has included the use of church buildings belonging to the Church of Sweden for Roman Catholic masses and other services or activities, if the Catholic parish has not had premises of its own.

The Church of Sweden ratified the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* published by the LWF and the Pontifical Council for

¹⁰ *Äktenskap och familj i kristen belysning* [= Marriage and the Family from a Christian Point of View] (Stockholm, 1975); *Dop och kyrkotillhörighet* [= Baptism and Church Membership] (Stockholm, 1978); *Biskopsämbetet* (Stockholm 1988), published in English as: *The Office of Bishop. Swedish Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue* (LWF Studies; Geneva, 1993); *Kyrkan som sakrament* [= The Church as Sacrament] (Stockholm: Stockholms katolska stift och Svenska kyrkan, 1999); *Ekumeniska äktenskap* [= Ecumenical Marriages] (Stockholm: Stockholms katolska stift och Svenska kyrkan, 1999).

Promoting Christian Unity in 1999.¹¹ This statement has also formed the basis of one of the most recent expressions of ecumenical relations between the Church of Sweden and the Roman Catholic Church in the Nordic context. In the spring of 2010 a dialogue between the Church of Sweden and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland on the one hand and the Roman Catholic dioceses of Stockholm and Helsinki on the other was concluded with the publication of *Justification in the Life of the Church*.¹² This round of conversations was an indirect outcome of the papal visit to Scandinavia in 1989, when the pope felt that the special character of the reformation and consequent history of the Lutheran Churches in Sweden and Finland gave good reason for further investigation. This started in 2002 and has dealt with various aspects of ecclesiology in the light of the *Joint Declaration*. It proposed that the possibility of dispensation for members of these two Lutheran churches to receive communion in the Roman Catholic Church be extended. It also asked Rome to consider the possibility of considering the Church of Sweden and the Church of Finland as sister churches, in the full ecclesiological sense in which this term is used by the Roman Catholic Church.

4.5.4 Relationships with other Lutheran and Protestant churches

Many of the inter-church relations of the Church of Sweden are channelled through the LWF, which was founded in Lund in 1947. Even if this is an intra-Lutheran forum, the great diversity of history and context among member churches encourages ecumenical approaches. All member churches of the LWF are in communion with each other, but the Church of Sweden maintains direct bilateral relations with a number of specific churches, especially in the global south.

It has for instance long-standing relations with the Evangelical Ethiopian Church Mekane Yesus (which have recently been broken off due to disagreement on homosexuality), and with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania through a long missionary cooperation, in the former

¹¹ The Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids, MI – Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2000).

¹² *Rättfärdiggörelsen i kyrkans liv* (Stockholm 2010); English translation: *Justification in the Life of the Church. A Report from the Roman Catholic – Lutheran Dialogue Group for Sweden and Finland* (Uppsala et al., 2010).

case mainly through the Swedish Evangelical Mission. Similarly, it has well-developed relations with Lutheran churches in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Liberia. With them there are special agreements called Letters of Understanding, as with the Lutheran Church in Costa Rica. It has also supported the small but important Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land.

The Church of Sweden has related to various German Lutheran *Landeskirchen* through history. During the 20th century several dioceses developed special relations with both Lutheran and united churches, especially in the German Democratic Republic to support them in the difficult communist era. Only since 2003 has there been a formal agreement on church fellowship between the Church of Sweden and the Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD). With the United Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD), there is no special agreement since they are in fellowship through the LWF. The Church of Sweden has chosen not to be a member of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE, formerly The Leuenberg Fellowship), since its model of church fellowship was felt to be based on a minimalistic definition of unity, not dealing with differences in the understanding of ecclesiology and ordained ministry.

In 1994 the Church of Sweden entered an agreement on church fellowship, mutually recognizing ministries, with the Methodist Church in Sweden, which is episcopal and a part of the global United Methodist Church. The Methodist Church is very small in Sweden and the agreement has in one or two places led to the Methodist congregation becoming a group within a Church of Sweden parish and the Methodist priest working in that parish. The understanding of apostolicity and ministry developed in BEM and in the Porvoo Agreement is also reflected in an agreement on church fellowship with the Swedish Mission Covenant Church from the year 2006. The Church of Sweden has also conducted a theological dialogue with the Baptist Union of Sweden between 1998 and 2010, producing three documents but not the agreement some people had hoped for. Despite greater convergence on sacramentality and ecclesiology than might have been expected, there were still aspects of the understanding of baptism which could not be reconciled. The Methodist, Mission Covenant and Baptist denominations have now formed a united church. It remains to be seen what kind of relationship with this new church will develop in the future, since the existing agreements with two of them cannot simply be transferred.

4.6 *The life of the church*

In the Church Ordinance from the year 2000, it is stated that the task of a parish is to celebrate worship, teach the faith, carry out diaconal ministry and conduct mission. These four aspects of the church's life and mission are equally essential and mutually dependant. Each parish is required to have a parish strategy (*församlingsinstruktion*) in which it presents how it intends to work with all these four aspects. This strategy must be approved by the diocesan chapter. The four aspects identified in the Ordinance can be subsumed in celebrating, witnessing and serving.

4.6.1 A celebrating church

The history of worship in Sweden is in continuity with the liturgical life of the western medieval church. Since the reformation, and especially since the period of Lutheran Orthodoxy, the emphasis in the services of worship has often been on the proclamation of the word. The frequency of eucharistic worship has varied through the centuries, but until the revival of regular communion in the middle of the 20th century, mass was celebrated only a limited number of times each year. This was not necessarily an expression of depreciation, but to receive the sacrament was considered an important act that required proper preparation. Celebrating communion with the sick in their homes has been a regular part of pastoral care. Participation in communion was part of the social control in the uniform society to the end of the 19th century. Today the main Sunday service is usually eucharistic due to a strong eucharistic revival as in many other churches since the early 20th century, as a fruit of the international liturgical renewal and the ecumenical movement.

Following Lutheran tradition only the two dominical sacraments of baptism and eucharist have been recognized (possibly three if confession is included). Regardless of formal definition, the rites of the church such as confirmation, marriage and funerals have functioned as means of grace at significant junctures in the lives of people. Today these occasions may be the primary encounter of many people with the church and with the gospel, and an experience of God's presence.

There has been a carefully ordered form of worship, following the classic liturgical structure: preparation through confession, the liturgy of the word with the reading of Scriptures and preaching, confession of faith and intercessions, and (when the Lord's supper is celebrated) the meal with

prayers of varying form but always including the words of institution (with an epicletic element though not necessarily an epiclesis), the Lord's prayer and communion. There has always been a lectionary with set readings for the seasons of the church's year. Liturgical vestments have never been completely abolished, but have been used in more or less liturgically consistent ways at various periods since the reformation. In the 20th century vestments have come back into general and consistent use throughout the church.

The current book of worship was introduced in 1986. It was heavily influenced by the liturgical reform of the Second Vatican Council and a result of liturgical renewal and experimentation in the 1970's and early 1980's. It is characterized by a proliferation of alternatives in comparison with its predecessor. There are three forms (solemn, simple, family) for each of the two basic types of main Sunday service, eucharistic and non-eucharistic. A great variety of other services, influenced for instance by Taizé and Iona, or using meditative types of Swedish origin, for example "The Mass of Inner Quiet" (*Sinnesromässan*), are used. Services or devotions with a predominantly musical content of varying styles attract many. The worship book of 1986 is presently being revised, proposing a clear classic *ordo* and a more inclusive language. The proposed revision is being used during a trial period of a year from the First Sunday of Advent 2012, and it may be approved by the General Synod in 2015.

A significant feature of worship in the Church of Sweden is hymn singing. It would be most unusual not to sing hymns, regardless of whether it is a Sunday or weekday service, or even just simple devotions. Since the publication of the first officially approved hymnbook in 1695, an official hymnal has been used (at least at the main service) throughout the church. In the past pupils in schools had to learn hymns by heart, and this was a significant part of preparation for confirmation. There is also an old tradition of liturgical singing with a Swedish adaptation of Gregorian chant. Choir singing is a very prominent part of parish life. There are more than 100,000 people who regularly sing in church choirs.

Sweden is considered a secularized country. Although there is a large nominal church membership, the average church attendance is low at ordinary Sunday services. Despite this, large numbers go to church on certain days of the year: First Sunday of Advent, St Lucy's Day (13th December), Christmas Midnight Mass and Christmas Morning service, Good Friday and Easter Sunday, as well as All Saints Day. The readings and hymns convey basic Christian themes which, even if only subliminal-

ly, can affect the people attending these celebrations. This creates a pastoral challenge for the ministers and other representatives of the church to present the gospel in a clear but popular manner in such a context.

4.6.2 A witnessing church

Witnessing can be understood to include both presenting and explaining the faith in preaching and teaching to those who have already heard about Christ, and also proclaiming the Gospel to those who have not yet been reached by the Good News. The task of witnessing can also include making the voice of the church heard in public debate. This will be done in the parishes to the extent that individual priests and other parish representatives are willing or feel equipped to do it, or are known to media as someone to turn to. Otherwise, it is usually bishops, or other representatives of the dioceses or the national church, whether elected or staff, who are active in this public role.

All parishes will have a variety of catechetical activities. All of those that are aimed at children and youth are seen as a form of baptismal catechesis post factum. Even if baptism is a unique unrepeatable act, it is also an on-going process. Luther taught that Christians must daily live out their baptism, dying to the old man and rising with Christ in newness of life, which is explicitly stated at baptisms. Each parish is supposed to have a pastoral strategy for following up baptism and taking responsibility for those that have received the sacrament.

Some parishes will run Sunday schools, usually by offering children special instruction during the sermon on the theme of the texts for the day. Most parishes have different children's groups meeting during the week, from parent and toddler groups up to pre-school groups. In these there will be some form of "teaching" in addition to play and socializing, and in the groups where parents participate there will be aspects aimed at them as well.

The most explicit and even liturgically marked form for following up baptism is confirmation. The Church of Sweden still confirms a large number of youths at the age of fifteen – varying in different parts of the country between 30% and 60% of the age group. All parishes have a pastoral strategy for this and structured confirmation classes usually meet for about fifty hours over a period of one year. The actual method of catechesis can vary a lot, often combining special interests in confirmation groups, i.e. music or sport. The groups must spend some time at a confirm-

ation camp, sometimes in the form of travel abroad. Some parishes and many diocesan institutions offer summer camps during which the preparation for confirmation is carried out intensively for a month.

For post confirmation contact with young people many parishes have youth clubs. There is a national organization for young people (up to the age of thirty) called Church of Sweden Youth. For all catechetical programmes related to children and young people, most parishes employ specially qualified youth workers. They are trained at special colleges run by the church, or have an equivalent teaching qualification. The priests are also involved in the teaching, especially of confirmation classes, and often there are catechetical teams consisting of several categories of staff in a parish.

The need for adult catechesis is felt in many parishes. Various methods for an adult path to faith are used, for example The Adult Catechumenate, Alpha, Emmaus. There is no generally approved method; it is up to a parish to find the one that suits them and the people they encounter.

4.6.3 A serving church

The Church of Sweden does not run many large diaconal institutions for social and medical services. This became difficult when the welfare state was built up. There was little space left for non-governmental actors and they were seen as interfering with what was considered the sole responsibility of society. This is now changing and there is greater scope for other agencies to work in these fields. The Church of Sweden makes its particular contribution to social welfare through parish diaconal work.

Each parish has the responsibility to serve those within its boundaries who are in need. The responsibility for leading and coordinating the diaconal work of a parish belongs to the permanent deacons. Most parishes have employed deacons. The deacon's role is not to do everything that needs to be done, but to inspire and train others to serve their neighbour and to apply professional social and caring competence in the work of the parish. Diaconal volunteer groups often help with pastoral visiting and other activities for people needing support. Much of such work relates to the elderly and disabled, addicts, immigrants and refugees.

The deacon will represent the parish in its relations with social institutions, and strives also to give voice to the voiceless in both church and society. This is not an easy task, and it happens that representatives of the

church are accused both within and outside the church of being too political.

There has traditionally been a strong interest in “foreign missions” in many parishes. The Church of Sweden International Department, which previously was two organisations, Church of Sweden Mission and Church of Sweden Aid, is responsible for developing strategies and coordinating concrete work for international diaconal work and mission in the form of projects either with bilateral partners or through the work of WCC, Action of Churches Together (ACT Alliance) and LWF. This international work has diocesan, deanery and parish ombudsmen who work voluntarily to awaken interest and increase involvement in and support for international issues, for instance by collecting money. Many parishes will have voluntary international groups for this. In the past missionaries were sent out to other countries. The work of these missionaries was often followed with great interest in many parishes. Today the number of missionaries abroad has been significantly reduced, and the emphasis is on supporting partner churches in their missionary task in their own context, through capacity-building and concrete projects, and when necessary by providing personnel on a limited time contract rather than on a long-term basis.

5. The church as a gift of God’s presence in the world: our common vision

This part of the document is about ecclesiology from the overarching perspective of the church as a mystery and an effective sign, in other words as a sacrament for the world.¹³ It starts with a reference to the marks of the church and the reminder that the church is both a gift given by God and a task to accomplish (5.1). The focus is twofold: the first part (5.2) highlights the similarities of the two churches as can be seen from the respective ecclesial structures and the importance given to the celebration of the eucharist. The second part (5.3) describes differences between the two churches in as much as one of them is a national majority church, and the other an international minority church. This offers to both of them perspectives which could be developed. Lastly, the question of sacraments is taken up (5.4), since there is a difference in defining them.

¹³ *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (as note 3), §§ 25–27. Cf. *Church and World. The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community* (Faith and Order Paper 151; Geneva: WCC Publications, 1990), esp. 25–34.

The church as a reality in which we “believe” is the realm of life and salvation, created by the Father in his sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit, where human beings who are justified by and reconciled to God, and brought together as his people, are called to share in God’s saving and life-giving acts and to lead the entire creation to its eternal consummation.

The church is primarily a mystery of God. As such it has a fundamental sacramental character. It is an instrument of God’s love and mercy for the world. This love and mercy culminates in Christ, who may justly be termed the original sacrament.

In its human aspects the church is also a socially constructed institution with its own form and history. The church as God’s creation is not entirely coterminous with its human manifestation, nor is its human manifestation free from sin. Therefore the church is in continuous need of God’s mercy and forgiveness.

At the very heart of the church, there is ambivalence. On the one hand the true church is hidden and an object of faith. On the other hand it is visible and an object of practical reflection or research. This ambiguity affects in two ways the way in which we perceive the marks of the church. The first is that from a phenomenological point of view the church is seen as broken into confessions, denominations and separate communities. The second is that we can never be certain about who truly belongs to the church. Even if all churches were visibly one, we would not be sure of who were members of the Body of Christ until he came to judge the living and the dead (cf. Mt 13).

5.1 The marks of the church according to the creed

Both our churches refer to the creed of Nicaea-Constantinople as the basis for a theological elaboration of the faith and the church. The section on the Holy Spirit is elaborated with the words: “we believe in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church”. The reality that in the creed is called the church is grounded and has its origin in the triune God. The four adjectives one, holy, catholic and apostolic – often called *notae ecclesiae* or the marks of the church – are the four interdependent characteristics or attributes of the church. They are correlated divine gifts and as such also to be translated into the concrete life of the members of the church in *leitourgia*, *martyria* and *diakonia* (see below).

5.1.1 The church is one and holy

The church is one and holy because the one and holy triune God is the ground of the church and the goal of its pilgrimage towards its final consummation in the Kingdom of God.

The *oneness* and *unity* become manifest in the eucharistic liturgy as celebrated in the parishes and other communities of the local church (on this term see below). Here the one Christ, made present by the power of the Holy Spirit, is proclaimed in the gospel and is given in the eucharistic gifts of bread and wine (to be received as his body and blood) to each of the communicants who thereby become what they already are: a social body called the Body of Christ. The church as Body of Christ is a community (*koinonia*) of people united by what they receive: Christ through the gospel and the sacraments. Since they participate in a God-given reality, they are also sanctified and renewed in their relationship with the holy God, and thus called and empowered to show love for and unity with one another.

Each member of the church is called to a life of *holiness* by his or her being baptized in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Baptism is fundamentally linked with faith and the first stage of a sacramental initiation – including what later has become the distinct rite of confirmation – organically leading up to the eucharistic sharing, signifying a full incorporation into the Body of Christ. This process is a life-long process of growing in faith, sanctification, and fellowship with others. Through holy people, the hidden holiness of the church may become a visible reality.

Christ sacramentally given in the holy supper is none other than Jesus of Nazareth, confessed as the risen Christ and Son of God, and the messenger of the Good News of the coming kingdom of God. In the eucharistic liturgy, his words are made present through the power of the Holy Spirit in the proclamation of the gospel of God's saving love to all creation to be received with an open heart and discerning mind. To hear the gospel implies and should lead to a life of sanctification, and for the members of the church to become attentive witnesses of God's mercy, sharing in the proclamation of the gospel, praying for the salvation of the world, repenting one's loss of orientation and faith, and looking for the ultimate reality of the kingdom.

The holiness and the unity of the church are connected with each other, but experienced in different ways by different people. The one and holy church is a gift of God, but it is the duty of all the baptized to share

in the responsibility of preserving the unity of the church and increasing its holiness in service and mission.

5.1.2 The church is catholic and apostolic

The Greek term *katholikos* denotes something that many have in common amongst a plurality of given realities. This meaning of the term becomes intelligible if we regard the *one* church confessed in the creed as being expressed in a *plurality* of local churches in communion with each other. The local church gathered around its bishop (i.e. the diocese) represents and realizes in one particular place the one church which we confess in the creed. The faith, life and mission which it has in common with others – that which is catholic – make the local church into what it essentially is: the presence of the triune God as revealed in the Father’s sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit, which has found its sacramental form in a local human community.

The local church carries the mark of catholicity inasmuch as it is centred in God. It does not possess this catholicity of itself but only in communion with other local churches. These represent the one church in their respective places. Thus the presence of the triune God gives all the local churches a fundamental common identity. This theological identity – not to be confused with other identities of a historical and socio-cultural kind – points to the real source of unity in each local church and between all the local churches. The communion with other churches and with the worldwide communion of Christians is a consequence of the catholicity of each local church.

The catholicity of the church is not the same as geographical universality, nor can the term “catholic” simply be translated as “universal”. Rather, the universality of the church is the corollary of each local church being catholic, i.e. sharing an identical reality that fully mediates God’s salvation to humanity through the church’s faith, sacramental life and ministry.¹⁴

The *apostolicity* of the church should also be seen in the context of the local church being in communion with other local churches. Apos-

¹⁴ The term local church in this paragraph does not apply to denominations living in separation from each other albeit with the highest degree of ecumenical commitment. It applies to communities that are in visible ecclesial communion with each other.

tolicity denotes the continuity of the church in time and space with the mission that Christ and his apostles carried out in the power of the Holy Spirit. This continuity is related to the entire witness of the church in word and sacrament. Some constitutive elements can be singled out, but should not be seen in isolation. The passing on of the ordained ministry by prayer and the laying-on of hands is such an element, called “apostolic succession”.¹⁵ This is especially manifested in the consecration of a bishop: he or she is elected by the local church, ordained by bishops of other local churches in communion with it. It takes place in a eucharistic context where all baptized present share in the commitment of the church to the passing on of the faith once and for all revealed and yet entrusted to the obedient responsibility of the church. Two dimensions can be discerned in the event: the “horizontal” historical continuity within the communion of local churches and the “vertical” immediacy of the congregation to God made clear in the epicletic ordination prayer. It thus symbolizes the co-responsibility of the local church and the communion of local churches for its remaining true to the gospel and in continuity with the ancient church. The apostolic succession is in the first and last analysis the process of the church continuing the apostolic tradition in various forms of mission-oriented adaptation.

5.2 *Local, regional and worldwide dimensions of the one church*

Thus far the term local church has occurred several times, and it is appropriate to expand on it with a view to explaining how the unity of the visible church and its mission in a worldwide context is to be understood. In both our churches there is a continuous discussion about how best to find sustainable structures for the future and how best to express the relations between bishop, priest and parish. This is not just a question of organization but of theology. In what follows, we describe a view of the local church which is close to ancient and general tradition and applicable to both churches. Furthermore we also give special attention to the wider communion of local churches, which transcends national boundaries. This is a challenge for both of our churches.

¹⁵ See § 5.4.

5.2.1 The local church

Both our churches are episcopally and synodically ordered churches. In a certain place – which in most cases is a region of varying size – there is one bishop who is the personal focus of unity for baptized men and women, ordained and lay, living in this particular place. It is this ecclesial community that is called “local church” and is considered to be the basic ecclesial unity in our reflection on the various geographic dimensions of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church in its visible aspect.

How the bishop is the personal focus becomes apparent in various ways. He or she presides at the eucharistic assembly and is the preacher of the gospel, because the episcopal office is rooted in the central act of the church (word and sacrament), not somewhere else.

This becomes visible in the interrelationship of bishop and all the other members of the local church. It can usefully be described by means of the widely shared concept of the threefold “episcopé” (introduced by BEM in 1982, as already mentioned in § 3.4), i.e. the shared responsibility for maintaining the church in obedience to its God-given mission and unity. The “personal episcopé” belongs to the bishop, the “collegial episcopé” belongs to the presbyters (priests) who preside at the eucharistic assemblies of parishes and other communities and proclaim the gospel, the “communal episcopé” belongs to other baptized members of the church who join the other bearers of the episcopé for deliberation and decision-making in synodical assemblies (like the diocesan synod or parish councils or other bodies). Whatever legal form this interaction of shared responsibilities may take, in which the lay members play an important part in the general direction of the church, they all together form the local church (in our traditions usually called a diocese). By its composition and size it should be able to fulfil all the manifold tasks of the church in *leitourgia*, *martyria* and *diakonia*. It is in these basic actions that the church lives its mission in the world.

These three concepts are used in the contemporary ecumenical context to refer to the fundamental aspects and expressions of the church. *Leitourgia* includes all the various forms of worshipping God in praise, thanksgiving and intercession for his creation. *Martyria* includes the various acts of the proclamation of the gospel, catechesis, the accounting for the Christian hope and faith in all its dimensions, statements on social and political issues as far as they are necessary consequences of the gospel. In *diakonia* the church fulfils its mission of healing and caring for men and

women and the whole of creation on the way to the fulfilment of God's plan. These aspects of the church's mission cannot be neatly differentiated, since they often overlap and have their inner, spiritual centre in the eucharistic service. But to live up to and fulfil these tasks in a coherent and professional way a parish is ordinarily too small, which is another reason for taking the diocese as the basic unit for further reflection on the wider unity of the church.

All these aspects of mission and interrelationship of the baptized have to be borne in mind to appreciate the above statement that the local church is a representation and realization of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church as confessed in the creed and that each local church shares the same theological identity. This, however, becomes only manifest if the local churches are in visible communion (*koinonia*) and unity.

5.2.2 The regional and worldwide communion of local churches

Regional *koinonia* is always a communion of local churches gradually extending into a worldwide communion. The first stage may be a communion of local churches of a particular country (for instance the Church of Sweden as a national church and the Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands as a church province) or of a part of it. The geographical limits or further extensions (regional or otherwise, for instance the Union of Utrecht) will be dependent on contingent factors of history, culture, tradition. Finally there is the worldwide communion of communions of local churches.

Each communion of local churches, however wide, is also a representation and realization of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church being an object of faith and confessed in the creed. Again, the common element is their soteriological-trinitarian identity by way of their participation in God's trinitarian life. Each type of communion has to manifest the unity of the church and its mission in various ways.

In order to maintain the regional communion of churches there must be appropriate forms of common consultation and decision-making and giving witness to the common faith in the gospel. In this the bishops have a special responsibility, as they are at the interface of local church and supra-local church, which is regional and worldwide communion. As individual bishops being integrated in a synodal network they have a personal responsibility for the unity of each particular local church; as a group of bishops again integrated in a synodal network they are the collegial focus

of unity of a particular communion of local churches. The synod of bishops has a common responsibility to manifest the unity and communion of local churches. Their collegiality thus represents the communion of their local churches rather than the communion of an exclusive episcopal body somehow set apart from “their” local churches.

The responsibility of the bishops is also shared by other members of local churches (lay or ordained) as is the case in the general synod and the diocesan synods of the Church of Sweden. There is no exact analogy in the Union of Utrecht: the IBC as the highest organ of the union consists of bishops only, but their decisions and declarations require the preceding general agreement of the local churches (dioceses).

What has been said for regional communions of local churches could with appropriate adaptation be said about the worldwide communion of communions of churches. Again it is up to the primates of these communions of local churches to act together synodically when giving witness to the common faith in the gospel and when consulting on matters put before them. One of the primates has the primary responsibility for the overall synodical process.¹⁶

5.3 *The sacramentality of the church and the means of grace*

For half a century there has been a growing consensus among the churches, that the church in its universal and local expressions should be seen as a sign and instrument for the kingdom of God and a sacrament for the world. The church is sent into the world, not primarily as an institution, but as the fundamental expression of God’s love in Christ. The church is a sacrament of healing, reconciliation and renewal of all creation. She is a mystery and a prophetic sign, a communion sustained by the Holy Spirit, participating in God’s mission for the salvation of the world.

A sacrament is a material element transformed by the word of God into a means of salvation. In baptism, water is this material element, in the eucharist bread and wine. The institutional organization of the church is not in itself sufficient to make it the church, which is the Body of Christ. It becomes a sacrament for the world only by sharing in communion (*koi-*

¹⁶ The question of primacy in the worldwide communion of local churches has been given ecumenical consideration in other dialogues in which our churches have been involved. See for instance *Kirche und Kirchengemeinschaft* (as note 6), §§ 27–33, 41–47, and *Justification in the Life of the Church* (as note 10), § 5.4.4.

nonia) with the Father through the Holy Spirit. The church as *koinonia* is the fundamental sacrament for the life of the world, transcending the limits of the secular and bringing the world to peace with God.

Institutionally churches take different forms in history and culture. As a sacrament for the world, the church is, however, united in communion, mission and hope. The sacramental life of the churches likewise varies, but as a stream of grace from the heart of the triune God, it feeds and unites all believers in a common mission of love. The Old Catholic Churches and the Church of Sweden share this understanding of the sacramentality of the church, but differ somewhat in their sacramental theology and praxis.

5.3.1 Sacramental life in the Old Catholic Churches

The Old Catholic Churches celebrate what in Latin tradition since the 12th century has been defined as seven sacraments: baptism, confirmation, eucharist, penance/reconciliation, anointing of the sick, ordination to holy orders, and marriage. For each of them, the prayer books offer liturgical rituals, either for public celebration as for the eucharist, or rather for a private act as for anointing of the sick. It has in recent years become more unusual that individuals come for confession and absolution; the sacrament of penitence is today mostly performed in the context of public worship.

Among Old Catholics there is an awareness of certain inherited doctrinal problems in western sacramental theology, but there has never been a tendency to discontinue the celebration of all the seven sacraments as symbolic acts through which the reality of God's grace is communicated by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The number of sacraments was not fixed until the 12th century, nor did the early church more exactly define what constitutes a sacrament. The Old Catholic Churches are not bound by any rigid, scholastic systematization of all aspects of sacramental theology. Baptism and eucharist are regarded as the two main sacraments for every believer, and episcopal ordination is seen as essential for the structure of the church. Beside the seven acts recognized as sacraments, there are other symbolic acts named *sacramentalia*.

Listing the eucharist as one sacrament among others, does not, however, fully correspond with the eucharistic ecclesiology of the local church, which has become the hallmark of contemporary Old Catholicism. The

eucharist is the central manifestation of the pilgrim church on its way to the kingdom and the ordinary context for other sacramental acts. In all Old Catholic parishes the sacrament is reserved in the tabernacle for the communion of the sick.

5.3.2 Sacramental life in the Church of Sweden

Since the reformation, the Church of Sweden regards baptism and eucharist as the two sacraments to be celebrated in every parish, since they are instituted by Jesus Christ whereas there are other acts which may be considered means of grace although they are not called sacraments. In the past fifty years, there has been a remarkable strengthening and liturgical renewal of eucharistic sacramentality, putting the eucharist at the centre of the life of most parishes. This renewal has been stimulated by international ecumenical relations and supported by liturgical reform as an appropriate response to a new search for spirituality. Baptism has also been given new theological attention and found richer pastoral and liturgical forms. Adult baptism has become more common than in the past. At the same time, private confession and absolution has lost ground.

With regard to confirmation, marriage, ordination and anointing different tendencies can be noticed. These acts have not been regarded as sacraments in the full sense of the word, but they have an obvious sacramental dimension. Confirmation is administered by a priest and not by the bishop. It includes the laying-on of hands and prayer for the Holy Spirit, but rarely the use of oil. Although marriage is distinguished from sacraments like baptism and the eucharist, it is regarded as a means of grace. The liturgy of marriage includes vows, a blessing of the rings and of the couple. Ordination of deacons, priests and bishops also has a sacramental character, which has rather been strengthened in recent years. Deacon, priest and bishop share in the same three-fold ministry, and the rites of ordination follow the same pattern. The anointing of the sick, finally, is returning after many years of almost complete absence in the pastoral ministry of the Church of Sweden, but it is still not commonly used and certainly not regarded as a sacrament by most people.

5.3.3 Conclusion

The above sections suggest that there is no church-divisive difference between our churches in the theological understanding of sacramental acts

and means of grace. The churches show dissimilarities, but at the fundamental theological level and in pastoral practice they are compatible.

5.4 *The apostolic succession and the understanding of the episcopal ministry*

The fundamental idea is that apostolic tradition is an expression of the apostolicity of the church. It has two main aspects: that the church is sent into the world and that it is built on the faith of the apostles. The very existence and thus the unity of the church is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” (Eph. 2:20). In the early church the succession in teaching (*successio doctrinae*), the succession in episcopal ministry and the succession of the whole church were held together. Later they were separated and even the succession in episcopal ministry was divided into the succession of episcopal sees (*successio sedis*) and the succession by the laying-on of hands (*successio manuum*). After several dialogues there is today a convergence which maintains that apostolic succession derives from the apostolicity of the church in all its dimensions.

The basis of the doctrine of the episcopal ministry in apostolic succession is the understanding of the church as a communion grounded in the triune God. The office of a bishop is embedded in the *koinonia* of the whole people of God, related to baptism, eucharist and ordained ministry of deacons and priests and to lay ministries of various kinds. The ministry of bishops is a sign and instrument for keeping the church faithful to the Holy Scriptures and tradition, to the unity of the church through all ages ministering to the people of God the mystery of the church.

So apostolic succession is a fundamental mark of the Catholic Church, assigned the task of maintaining the tradition handed over by the apostles. In this apostolic community of all Christians, the bishops are signs and instruments. They are by means of ordination entrusted with their ministry. Ordination is the liturgy by which a bishop elect by means of the laying-on of hands and prayer receives the gifts of the Holy Spirit and he himself or she herself becomes a life-long gift to the church. Through ordination by bishops in continuity with other bishops through the centuries, the apostolic tradition becomes manifest and effective.

What a church teaches about the apostolic succession of bishops is thus what it teaches about the whole people of God.

Laying-on of hands in conjunction with prayer is practised in diverse contexts within the church. Its meaning only becomes clear through the specific context and the accompanying words. It is always understood that the persons who are laying on hands are themselves transmitters of something received. What is transmitted and passed on in the act of laying-on of hands is a gift of God, something divine. Therefore the prayer to God as the giver is part of the laying-on of hands. The laying-on of hands at ordination (practised with reference to Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6; cf. also Acts 14:23; 1 Tim 5:22) is understood as a sacramental act of expression of the Holy Spirit, in which it is prayed that the Holy Spirit may come upon a person.

The ordination of a bishop through prayer and the laying-on of hands is an act of church communion. The bishop to be ordained is chosen to lead a local church. This is, however, an expression of the presence of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church in communion with other local churches, made visible through this symbol of faith. This is expressed through the fact that bishops of other local churches conduct the ordination, and what is more, this is in the context of the eucharist, in which the communion of churches is constituted and represented in the most significant way (cf. Canon 4 of the 1st ecumenical council of Nicea; *Traditio apostolica* 2; Cyprian, Ep 55,8; 67,5). The participation of bishops at the consecration of a bishop is the consequence and the proof of the full communion which exists between the local churches, which is represented by the bishops at the consecration (cf. also the Statutes of the IBC of 2000, Preamble).

5.4.1 The historic episcopate in the Old Catholic Church

The Old Catholic Church deems the ecclesial ministry as it developed after the apostolic generation and grew into what is called the threefold ministry of bishop, priests and deacons as a gift to the church. Therefore, it is considered to be constitutive for its mission and unity, irrespective of great fluctuations over the centuries in its concrete manifestations and the societal position especially of the bishops. The maintenance of this ministry in history is primarily realized in the ordination of a bishop, duly elected by the local church and ordained by bishops of other local churches. These thereby witness to and actualize the ecclesial communion that exists among them.

As intimated above, the passing on of the ordained ministry by prayer and the laying-on of hands is an element of what is called “apostolic succession”, but this must be seen in connection with the preservation of the apostolic faith and as integrated into the ecclesial context of the co-responsibility of the local church for its remaining true to the mission of the church since the apostles.

For the Old Catholic Churches the existence of apostolic succession thus understood, and the episcopal ministry as set out above, as well as the commitment to both, have always been requirements in recognizing the essential identity with another church and entering into formal visible communion.

5.4.2 The historic episcopate in the Church of Sweden

Well aware of the fact that apostolic succession has been given different meanings in the western church during the centuries and that the medieval understanding was basic for the standpoint of the Church of Sweden during the reformation period, the Church Ordinance of 1571 remained in place up to the year 2000 and stated that the office of bishop must remain, “so long as this world stands”. This has been the tradition of the Church of Sweden.

During the 20th century the late medieval juridical understanding of apostolic succession gave way to a more ecclesiological motivated understanding. One of the dominating figures in this was the Swedish archbishop Nathan Söderblom. After him the tradition of the Church of Sweden has been on the one hand to reaffirm the meaning of apostolic succession as a sign and instrument of the unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity of the church, binding on the Church of Sweden and offered to other churches which do not have it. On the other hand, the Church of Sweden has not questioned the claim of churches without the historic succession of bishops to be churches of Christ. Therefore, the Church of Sweden has also entered church fellowship with such churches. This is expressed in the Porvoo Common Statement in the following way: “The mutual acknowledgement of our churches and ministries is theologically prior to the use of the sign of the laying on of hands in the historic succession. Resumption of the use of the sign does not imply an adverse judgement on the ministries of those churches which did not previously make

use of the sign. It is rather a means of making more visible the unity and continuity of the church at all times and in all places.”¹⁷

5.4.3 Conclusion

Neither of the churches in this dialogue has an experience of being church without episcopacy in apostolic succession. Both churches have struggled with adapting the late medieval tradition to new insights into the understanding in the early church and the forms for being church in the contemporary world. In spite of some differences in how to express episcopacy in apostolic succession in the present ecumenical context, there is fundamental agreement about the meaning and content of it.

6. Themes for ongoing consideration following from the common vision

If the two churches decide on the basis of this document to acknowledge their communion, there are a number of themes for ongoing joint consideration in view of their wider ecumenical implications. There are usually three areas which are discussed in ecumenical debate:

- the fundamental faith of the church as given in scripture/apostolic tradition and witnessed in the liturgy, the creeds, the dogmatic decisions of ecumenical councils and other common statements and expressed in the practical life of the baptized;
- the liturgy of the church, especially the eucharist structured around its poles of word and sacrament;
- the ordained ministry of the church in its inner organization, both related to the local church and to the communion of local churches.

All these elements must have enough in common to show the theological identity of separated churches with all their differences that contribute to the plurality that may enrich unity and communion.

¹⁷ *The Porvoo Common Statement. Conversations between The British and Irish Anglican Churches and The Nordic and Baltic Lutheran Churches. Text agreed at the fourth plenary meeting, held at Järvenpää, Finland, 9–13 October 1992* (London: Council of Christian Unity, 1994), § 53.

6.1 *The apostolic tradition and the teaching of the ecumenical councils*

In ecumenical dialogues generally the norms for discernment of truth, of divine revelation, are turned into hermeneutical tools, i.e. certain passages in the Holy Scriptures or quotations from a normative document (tradition) become decisive arguments. Today, both our traditions look for possibilities of discovering divine revelation in scripture and tradition in a more dynamic way, trusting in the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

6.1.1 The authority of the ecumenical councils

The Old Catholic bishops, when explaining what they and their churches abide by in their autonomous ecclesial existence, referred to “the faith of the ancient church as it is formulated in the ecumenical symbols and in the universally accepted dogmatic decisions of the ecumenical synods held in the undivided church of the first millennium” (Declaration of Utrecht, 1889). In their dialogue with the Orthodox Church it was always specified that the Old Catholics accept seven ecumenical councils (within the period of 325 until 787 A.D.).

Instead of speaking of scripture and tradition (thus including the above mentioned dogmatic decisions) as two separated entities or sources of revelation, Old Catholic theology tends to see them as two expressions of the one apostolic tradition, which is interpreted in and by the church. It is confident of being enlightened by the Holy Spirit when using hermeneutically reflected methods.

According to the Church Ordinance of the Church of Sweden of 2000 (as mentioned in § 4.3 above) “the faith, confession, and teaching” of the church is expressed in “worship and life”. It is “founded” in the Holy Scriptures and “summarized” in the Apostle’s, the Niceno-Constantinopolitan and the Athanasian creeds, but also in the unaltered Augsburg Confession. There is a reference in the concluding text of the first part of that confession (repeated twice) to the early fathers, and it is stated that “our teaching does not include anything opposed to the Holy Scriptures or the Catholic Church or the Roman Church, to the extent that it is known through the early fathers.”¹⁸

¹⁸ “Haec fere summa est doctrinae apud nos, in qua cerni potest, nihil inesse, quod discrepet a scripturis vel ab Ecclesia Catholica vel ab Ecclesia Romana, quatenus ex scriptoribus [German: “so viel aus der Väter Schriften”] nota est.”

The early fathers were frequently quoted in sermons and dogmatic writings in the Church of Sweden up to the 19th century and there is today renewed interest in their writings.

6.1.2 The question of the *Filioque*

Both our churches confess the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381. In ecumenical documents the *filioque* (“and from Son”), a later western interpolation into the original conciliar text according to which the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father”, not “from the Father *and the Son*”, has been discussed. The addition to the original text has caused severe problems in the relations between the churches in the West and the Orthodox Churches.

The Old Catholic Churches have removed the *filioque* in all the Old Catholic liturgical books. Additionally the Old Catholic bishops officially declared in 1970 that they reject any interpretation of the *filioque* implying that the Son is source and origin of the Holy Spirit together with the Father. The high relevance of this particular issue for Old Catholic ecumenical enterprises aiming at the restoration of ecclesial communion requires a response from an ecumenical partner and if needed a common clarification.

The Church of Sweden has not attached the same importance to the *filioque* question as the Old Catholic Churches have, probably because of not having had the same intense dialogue with Orthodox Churches. In the Church Ordinance of the Church of Sweden it is, however, allowed that in a liturgy at which Orthodox faithful are present, the Church of Sweden priest responsible can decide on the omission of the *filioque* (KO, chap.18, § 7).

6.2 *The connection between eucharistic sharing and ecclesial communion*

In recent ecumenical thought the idea that there is a profound relationship between eucharistic sharing and ecclesial communion has found growing acceptance in many churches in West and East, not least as being in accordance with important patristic voices. Eucharistic sharing and communion – which cannot be seen in isolation from hearing the word of God and carrying on the communion received with Christ into manifold acts of

martyria and *diakonia* beyond the mass – is an expression of ecclesial communion and, at the same time, a means of deepening it.

For centuries members of one church did not receive communion in another (denominationally separated) church. In recent times the ecumenical movement has brought about a change in many churches. Eucharistic sharing among members of visibly still separated or not fully reconciled churches has become either an officially agreed or tacitly accepted practice (often termed eucharistic hospitality). This, however, stands in contradiction to the above mentioned recent re-evaluation of the eucharistic service and assembly as the primary manifestation of ecclesial communion in Christ. The eucharist, which is no longer seen as simply one of a number of other sacraments, is recognized as the gift by which through the action of the Holy Spirit the celebrating community is affirmed and constituted as the Body of Christ. The baptized who hear the Word of God and receive the Body and Blood of the Lord are united with God and with their fellow celebrants. They are the one church and are called visibly to live and manifest this communion in Christ in all their actions.

This is the official Old Catholic position judging from agreed dialogue texts with the Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. However, it refers to the issue of how *churches* relate to each other: eucharistic sharing presupposes and implies ecclesial communion, not a form of what is now called intercommunion. And in order to take up ecclesial communion, it is not enough to have a joint understanding of baptism, the eucharist or the ordained ministry as isolated entities. Rather a common fundamental understanding of the church as a communion grounded in the triune God must be presupposed, for only then will baptism, the eucharist and the ordained ministry or, respectively, the elements of scripture and tradition, the ancient creeds, the sacraments and the office of bishop in apostolic succession find their place in the mystery of the church.¹⁹ Thus visible eucharistic sharing without being able to manifest its spiritual corollary and meaning, i.e. visible ecclesial union, is self-contradictory.

There is, however, an exception to this: in Germany an official bilateral agreement on eucharistic sharing with the EKD was reached without ecclesial communion linked to a shared understanding of the church and the episcopal ministry.²⁰

¹⁹ See above § 2.

²⁰ See note 7.

The practice of *individual* baptized communicants of other churches hardly ever being refused is considered to lie on a different level.

In the past the Church of Sweden had a long history of not only forbidding intercommunion but even participation in worship in another ecclesial tradition. This has gradually changed during the 20th century and from the 1970's eucharistic hospitality for individual baptized Christians of any tradition has become increasingly accepted. It has mainly to do with on the one hand a convergence in eucharistic theology and in the view of ordained ministry in general, but also the realization of the fact that the lines of division were not necessarily drawn between traditions but right through them.

Eucharistic hospitality is usually seen as a consequence of the mutual recognition of baptism. As there is a certain tension between this and our common vision in which eucharistic sharing is an expression of ecclesial communion, this theme needs further consideration.

6.3 Transitivity in established communion

When communion is established between churches the basis for it should be coherent with other agreements the churches involved have made. This is evident in multi-lateral dialogue processes but a challenge in bilateral dialogues. The reason for this is generally seen in the fact that the dialogue themes chosen depend on the historically grounded controversies and possibilities of establishing unity between the particular churches. It is also important to draw attention to the character of ecumenical dialogues: they are not negotiations stamped by compromises but attempts to work together to understand divine revelation, taking into account the traditions which the participants represent.

If a bilateral dialogue presents a document containing a proposal for possible communion between churches, it is handed over to the churches to be received, revised or rejected. If it is received and the result is a communion incorporating the two churches, the question of transitivity arises, i.e. the consequences for the churches involved in relation to other communions of churches in which one of the churches might be involved.

This dialogue between the Old Catholic Church and the Church of Sweden accepts that it is not possible to extend one ecclesial communion with a particular church to all the other churches with which this particular church is in communion. Thus – to take an obvious example – the Old Catholic Union of Utrecht is in ecclesial communion with the Anglican

Communion, but it is not in communion with those Nordic and Baltic churches which are in communion with the Anglican churches of the British Isles (the Porvoo Communion, of which the Church of Sweden is a member church).²¹

In terms of ecclesiology it is difficult to say whether this is indicative of a superficial process of establishing communion or if the mechanisms in the dialogue process and the decision-making grounded on that, or both, give rise to the problem that one church might be in communion with another that the sister church is not in communion with. In our dialogue we have tried to solve one of these problems in relation to the Anglicans and the Independent Philippine Church. But the problem of intransitivity also arises: whether the churches who are in communion have moved in their ecumenical outreach in different directions or whether ongoing dialogues with churches that are outside this untidy constellation actually prevent the one church from joining the other church (in communion) in its “communion building”.

As churches enter into ecumenical agreements with various other churches, transitivity and the consistency between these agreements become more complicated and need continued consideration.

7. Recommendations

In as much as we acknowledge

1. that each other's churches realize the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church of Jesus Christ,
2. that variant traditions in our churches, be they structural, liturgical, theological or disciplinary, do not prevent them from being part of the continuation of the apostolic tradition through the centuries but manifest a basic unity in diversity, which can be deepened in future communion,
3. that each other's churches have a rich liturgical and eucharistic life, an unbroken episcopal structure, a deep commitment to the visible unity of the church and therefore to the ecumenical movement, and an open and critical attitude to changing values in society,
4. that there is a solid foundation on a spiritual as well as on an institu-

²¹ Declaration of the IBC on participation in the consecration of Anglican bishops, November 2003 (http://www.utrechters-union.org/page/146/declaration_of_the_ibc_on_the_pa).

tional level, which enables future relationships between our churches, and that our common faith and mission provide opportunities to support each other, either in Europe or through our common contacts on other continents,

we recommend the Church of Sweden and the Churches of the Union of Utrecht to commit themselves

5. to regard baptized members of all these churches as members of their own, in accordance with regulations in force;
6. to welcome one another's members to receive sacramental and other pastoral ministrations;
7. to share a common life in mission and service, to pray for and with one another, and to share resources;
8. to welcome persons ordained in the Church of Sweden or in one of the Churches in the Union of Utrecht, to serve in any of our churches, by invitation and in accordance with any regulations which may be in force, in the receiving church without re-ordination;
9. to invite one another's bishops to participate in the laying-on of hands at the ordination of bishops;
10. to encourage consultations of representatives of our churches, and to facilitate learning and exchange of ideas and information in theological and pastoral matters; as well as exchange of students;
11. to invite observers from each other's churches to major events;
12. to encourage cooperation between Old Catholic and Church of Sweden parishes wherever possible.

As their mandate comes to an end, the members of this dialogue, giving thanks to God, submit their report to the authorities of the Church of Sweden and the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht for appropriate decision and action.

8. Appendices

8.1 Diagrammatic presentations of the internal structures of both churches

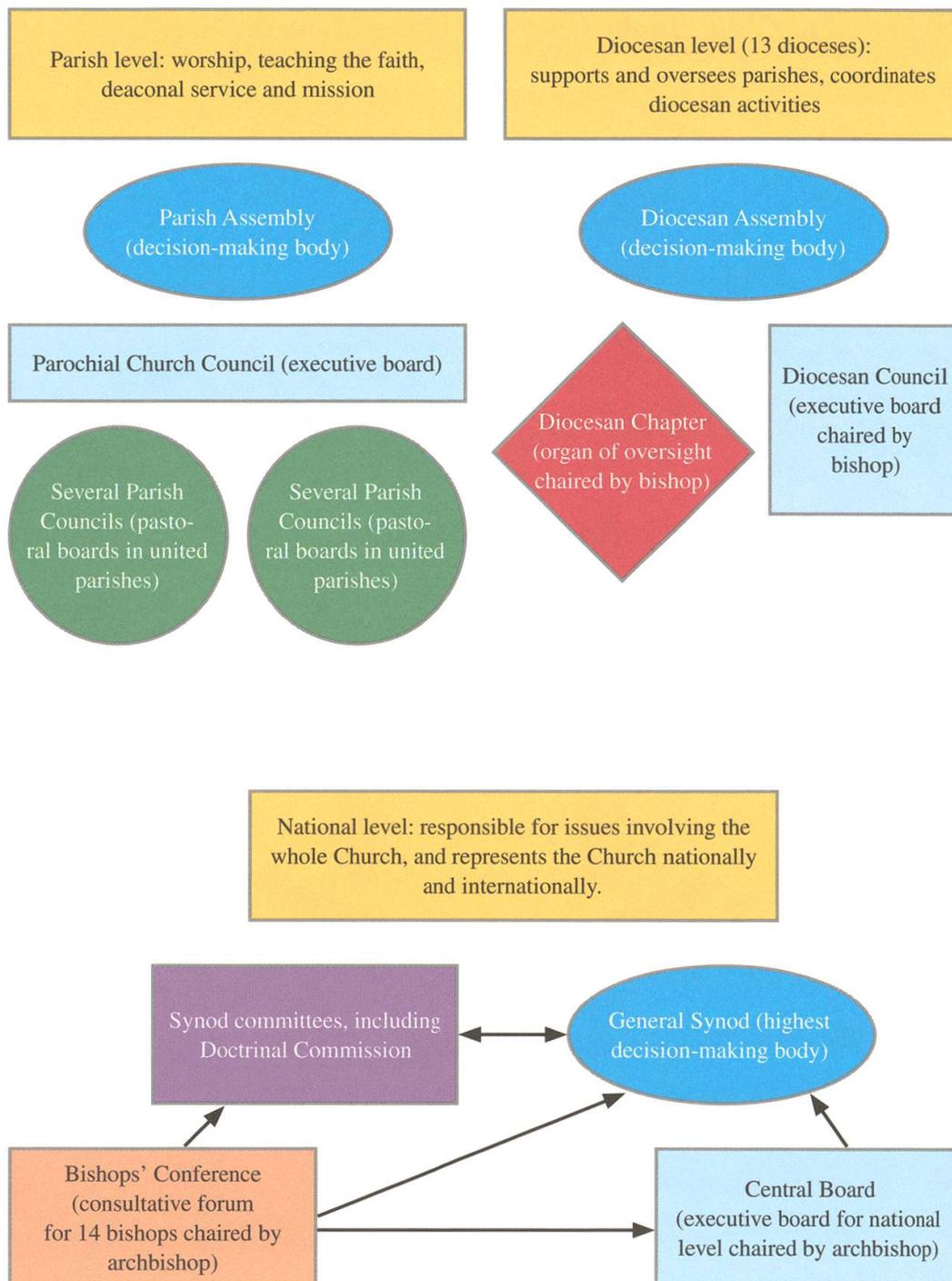
The Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht



- B Bishop
- AB Archbishop of Utrecht
- PB Prime Bishop
- International Old Catholic Congress, since 1890
- "Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift", since 1911, before "Revue Internationale de Théologie", since 1893, the scholarly theological quarterly of Old Catholicism
- International Old Catholic Theologians' Conference, since 1950
- International Old Catholic Lay Forum, since 1991

Structures of the Church of Sweden

(direct elections to decision-making bodies at all levels every four years)



8.2 *Members and meetings of the dialogue commission*

Delegates	Place of work	Years of participation	Present at sessions
Church of Sweden			
Rt Revd Dr Jonas Jonson, co-chairman	Strängnäs	2005–2013	2–6, 8–12
Revd Prof Dr Sven-Erik Brodd	Uppsala	2005–2013	1–12
Revd Dr Johan Dalman, co-secretary	Uppsala	2005–2008	1–4
Very Revd Margarethe Isberg	Västerås	2005–2012	2–4, 6–8
Revd Dr Christopher Meakin, co-secretary	Uppsala	2009–2013	5–12
Union of Utrecht			
Rt Revd Dr Dirk Jan Schoon, co-chairman	Amsterdam NL	2009–2013	5–12
Revd Peter Feenstra, co-secretary	Haarlem NL/ Bern CH	2005–2013	1–12
Revd Harald Münch	IJmuiden NL	2008–2010	4–7
Revd Prof Dr Urs von Arx	Bern CH	2009–2013	6–12
Rt Revd Dr Bert Wirix, co-chairman	Haarlem NL	2005–2006	1–3
Revd Prof Günter Esser	Bonn D	2005–2008	1, 2, 4
1.	23 rd –24 th March	2005	in Haarlem NL
2.	19 th –21 st June	2006	in Sigtuna SE
3.	7 th –8 th December	2006	in Haarlem NL
4.	25 th –27 th March	2008	in Sigtuna SE
5.	3 rd –5 th June	2009	in IJmuiden NL
6.	14 th –16 th December	2009	in Uppsala SE
7.	7 th –9 th June	2010	in Haarlem NL
8.	17 th –19 th January	2011	in Västerås SE
9.	10 th –12 th October	2011	in Berne CH
10.	11 th –14 th April	2012	in Sigtuna SE
11.	3 rd –5 th September	2012	in Heiligenschwendi CH
12.	10 th –12 th April	2013	in Höör SE