

Communion of Nordic Lutheran Dioceses

With this Document, The Mission Province in Sweden (*Missionsprovinsen i Sverige*), The Evangelical Lutheran Mission Diocese of Finland (*Suomen evankelisluterilainen lähetyshiippakunta / Evangelisk-lutherska missionstiftet i Finland*), and the Evangelical Lutheran Diocese in Norway (*Det evangelisk-lutherske stift i Norge*) declare churchly communion and mutual co-operation.

Background

The background for this Document consists in the church-historical reality that is based on a shared spiritual inheritance rooted in the medieval tradition of the Western Church, the Lutheran Reformation and the revivals of the recent centuries. Such a shared reality in our Dioceses can be seen, first and foremost, in our Lutheran doctrinal foundation, liturgical tradition and episcopal polity. Similarly, the three Dioceses have partaken in a similar ‘church struggle’ within the secularised Nordic mainline churches concerning questions of both Christian doctrine and ethics. The current spiritual and ecclesiastical-jurisdictional state of emergency has also given rise to similar solutions and actions. Divine Service communities (*koinoniai*) independent of the mainline churches have been founded in various places across the Nordic Countries to gather around God’s Word and the Sacrament of the Altar. For these congregations, it has been necessary to ordain new Pastors. This development has led to the birth of new, independent Dioceses in Sweden (6 September 2003), in Finland (16 March 2013) and in Norway (20 April 2013). A close co-operation among these Dioceses has existed in the Bishop’s consecrations in Gothenburg (5 February 2005), in Tromsø (24 March 2012) and in Helsinki (4 May 2013).

Shared Foundation

We believe, teach and confess that biblical faith and doctrine which is founded on the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the New and the Old Testament and which has been expressed in the three main creeds of the Early Church, that is, the Apostolic, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan and the Athanasian Creed, and in the unaltered Augsburg Confession, and that is rightly and bindingly explained by all the books accepted into the Book of Concord of the Lutheran Church. We hold as our highest guideline the principle according to which all doctrine, practice and life must be tested, accomplished and directed in accordance with God’s Word.

Similarly to the Reformers, the common goal in our work is to declare Christ’s atoning work and Gospel of grace for the eternal salvation of people. We wish to build congregational life that is in harmony with all the Seven Marks of the Church biblically taught by Martin Luther and to reject all misleading and false teachings and teachers that contradict the confession.

Churchly Communion

We view ourselves as being part of the “one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.” This unity and reality of Christ’s Church obliges and calls us, on the basis of our joint confession, into a visible unity. Because our Dioceses are in a sufficient doctrinal agreement with each other, and because we share a common confessional foundation and practice, a mutual fellowship (communion) of the altar and of the pulpit exists among our Dioceses.

This communion manifests itself above all at the ordinations of Pastors and consecration services of Bishops, in which representatives from each Diocese take part.

Co-operation

Each Diocese acts and makes independent decisions according to its own Diocesan Order. In addition to a spiritual communion, however, the need for co-operation and interaction among the Dioceses is evident. The Bishops’ Conference of the Nordic Lutheran Dioceses is the organ that directs such co-operation. The Bishops’ Conference meets at least twice a year to discuss questions related to the life, doctrine, ecumenical relations and ecclesiastical law of the Dioceses. The Bishops’ Conference meetings rotate among the countries, and the Bishop of the hosting Diocese acts as its chairman. The Bishops’ Conference may take a stand on current issues, if it so wishes, but it cannot make decisions that bind the Dioceses. The Bishops’ Conference seeks to advance the establishment of varied forms of co-operation both among congregation members and among Pastors and congregations, for the common good and spiritual health of all.

We confess the true unity of faith and ecclesiastical communion among us. This spiritual reality obliges each Diocese to inform each other of their actions and decisions, to pray for one another, to encourage each other towards life that accords with the confession, and to cherish our spiritual communion in every way, thus together building Christ's Church in the Nordic Countries.

Signed Lahti, Finland the 7th of November 2015 AD

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