

Church Fellowship Talks

between the Nordic Lutheran Dioceses and the SELK and ELCE

13–14 April AD 2016

Koinonia Centre, Kalevankatu 53, 00180 Helsinki, Finland

Participants:

The Independent Evangelical-Lutheran Church (SELK): Rev. Dr. Armin Wenz

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of England (ELCE): Rev. Chairman Jon Ehlers

The Ev. Luth. Diocese in Norway: Rev. Bishop Thor Henrik With, Rev. Erik Okkels

The Mission Province in Sweden: Rev. Bishop Roland Gustafsson, Rev. Jakob Okkels

The Ev. Luth. Mission Diocese of Finland: Rev. Bishop Risto Soramies, Rev. Dr. Dean Juhana Pohjola, Rev. Dr. Martti Vaahtoranta, Rev. Dr. Samuli Siikavirta

Minutes

1 § Opening of the Meeting

The meeting was opened with Responsive Prayer and hymn 131 (Lutheran Worship) on Wednesday 13 April 2016 at 9.10am.

Bishop Soramies was elected Chairman.

Rev. Dr. Siikavirta was elected Secretary.

2 § Goal and Agenda

It was decided to first discuss confessional basis, to define the different participants' ecclesial identity and to move on to other theological topics according to the draft agenda (Attachment 1).

3 § Confessional Basis and Ecclesial Identity

The constitutions of all churches present, together with the fellowship agreement between the Nordic dioceses, were read and discussed (Attachment 2). Despite the influence of national historical contexts on the wordings of each church constitution, a clear and common understanding of the Lutheran confessional basis was found to exist.

The identity of the Nordic dioceses was discussed on the basis of their constitutions. Especially the definitions of 'free' and 'independent' were clarified as meaning total self-governance. This means independence from all such structures, practices and doctrines that deviate from the Lutheran confessions. This neither means nor requires registration in the state as a recognised religious body.

The meeting was adjourned for lunch at 12.10pm.

The meeting resumed at 1.10pm.

4 § Doctrine of the Holy Scriptures

Our churches believe and confess that the Bible is the only written word of God inspired by the Holy Spirit and written by men. It is the sole rule and norm of all doctrine, practice and life in our churches.

Holy Scripture is to be applied according to the hermeneutical principles of the Lutheran confessions such as christocentricity, Law and Gospel and Scripture interpreting itself.

The purpose of Holy Scripture is to lead sinners to salvation through faith in Christ.

5 § Doctrine of God

Our churches agree on the doctrine of the Triune God as revealed in Holy Scripture and explained in the Lutheran confessions.

6 § Doctrine of Sin

Our churches agree on the doctrine of sin, original sin and its effect on free will and our Christian lives as revealed in Holy Scripture and explained in the Lutheran confessions.

7 § Doctrine of the Son of God

Our churches agree on the doctrine of the Son of God, His two natures, His work and atonement for the sins of the world as revealed in Holy Scripture and explained in the Lutheran confessions.

8 § Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

Our churches agree on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, His work, His relationship to the Father and the Son and His gifts as revealed in Holy Scripture and explained in the Lutheran confessions.

The meeting was adjourned for coffee at 2.30pm.

The meeting resumed at 3.00pm.

9 § Doctrine of Justification and Sanctification

Our churches agree on the doctrine justification as the chief article of faith and on the doctrine of sanctification as revealed in Holy Scripture and explained in the Lutheran confessions.

Our churches do not accept the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (1999).

10 § Doctrine of the Church

Our churches agree on the doctrine of the Church as revealed in Holy Scripture and explained in the Lutheran confessions, particularly in CA VII–VIII.

We agree that the requirements for altar and pulpit fellowship are set out in CA VII–VIII (agreement on the right preaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the Sacraments).

Our churches do not accept ecumenical agreements such as the Leuenberg Concord and the Porvoo Common Statement that fail to show and establish a true unity in the doctrine of the Gospel and in the administration of the Sacraments.

Our churches do not engage in such ecumenical dialogue with other Christians that, at the expense of true doctrine, seeks unity that is merely outward. We are, however, willing to co-operate with other churches in areas that do not lead to compromises in true doctrine and practice, such as in external and social matters.

Our churches accept either an episcopal or a congregational polity.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.05pm.

The meeting continued with Responsive Prayer on Thursday 14 April 2016 at 9.00am.

11 § Doctrine of the Office of the Holy Ministry

Our churches agree on the doctrine of the Office of the Holy Ministry as revealed in Holy Scripture and explained in the Lutheran confessions.

We confess that the Office of the Holy Ministry is divinely instituted for obtaining faith in Christ through Word and Sacrament.

We confess that a call and ordination are mandatory for entry into the Office. The ordaining Bishop or Pastor acts in the name of Christ on behalf of the “one, holy, apostolic and catholic Church” (Apostles’ Creed), with the Word of God, the apostolic practice of the laying on of hands, accompanied by the prayers of the congregation.

Where the local context poses challenges to called and ordained men being in charge of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments in the Church as CA V and XIV instruct, we strive for an ever clearer teaching and practice that is in accordance with the Lutheran confession.

We confess one undivided Office that may or may not have humanly instituted distinctions.

Although some of our churches see apostolic succession as useful (*bene esse*), our churches do not require it of each other as necessary (*esse*). What is necessary is doctrinal succession and the succession of the pastoral Office.

Our churches do not consider the issue of women’s ordination as an *adiaphoron* (a matter of discretion) but as a doctrinal error that we reject in conformity with Holy Scripture and the historic doctrine and practice of the Church.

12 § Doctrine of the Sacraments

Our churches agree on the doctrine of the Sacraments as revealed in Holy Scripture and explained in the Lutheran confessions.

We confess that the Sacraments are divinely instituted by Christ and are to be administered by called and ordained men.

Through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, which is necessary for salvation, God gives us regeneration, the Holy Spirit, faith and the forgiveness of sins.

Through the Sacrament of the Altar, God gives us the forgiveness of sins and renewal in the true Body and Blood of Christ under the consecrated bread and wine.

We confess that admission to the Sacrament of the Altar must follow the guidelines set out in CA VII. Where our practices deviate from this, we strive for an ever-clearer teaching and practice that is in accordance with the Lutheran confession.

The meeting was adjourned for lunch at 12.42pm.

The meeting resumed at 1.18pm.

13 § Worship

Our churches agree on the basis of Holy Scripture and the Lutheran confessions that the congregation is essentially a worshipping community. In worship, God serves us through His Means of Grace.

We cherish the historic Lutheran liturgical heritage and gladly confess that in our churches, the Mass (the Divine Service) is celebrated “with the highest reverence” (CA XXIV).

14 § Ethics

Our churches confess on the basis of Holy Scripture and the Lutheran confessions the sanctity of life from conception to natural death, marriage between one woman and one man and the centrality of the family in society.

We encourage our members to play an active role in society according to their vocations guided by the Ten Commandments.

15 § Doctrine of Eschatology

Our churches agree on the doctrine of the return of Christ to raise the dead bodily and to judge the living and the dead to eternal life or eternal damnation at the end of the ages as revealed in Holy Scripture and explained in the Lutheran confessions (CA XVII).

The preparation of the world for the last judgment is an essential aspect of the mission and proclamation of the Church.

16 § Agreeing on the Next Steps

On the basis of the agreement reached in these theological talks, no hindrance was found for the establishment of church fellowship between the participating churches.

The independent Nordic dioceses will write a letter of invitation to the SELK by August 2016 to enter into church fellowship. The ELCE have already been approached.

There will be one week’s period for all participants to check the minutes for minor corrections.

Every participant will send the Secretary (samuli.siikavirta@lhpk.fi) a summary timetable of how the fellowship process will proceed in their church body (Attachment 3).

After the minutes have been approved, each church may present the minutes to their appropriate church relations committee or equivalent.

17 § Closing of the Meeting

The meeting was closed with prayer at 2.04pm.

In Helsinki, Finland, on 14 April AD 2016,

Rev. Bishop Risto Soramies
Chairman

Rev. Dr. Samuli Siikavirta
Secretary