

Declaration on the Way: Church, Ministry, and Eucharist
Executive Summary

This *Declaration on the Way* is both an expression of the consensus achieved by Lutherans and Catholics on the central topics of church, ministry, and Eucharist and an indication of differences remaining to be resolved. The document consists of five sections:

- I. Introduction
- II. Statement of Agreements on Church, Ministry and Eucharist
- III. Agreements in the Lutheran/Catholic Dialogues—Elaborated and Documented
- IV. Remaining Differences and Reconciling Considerations
- V. Conclusion: Next Steps on the Way

The Introduction explains the inspiration for the document and its purposes. The inspiration comes from Cardinal Kurt Koch, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU), who in December 2011 proposed such a declaration “on the way” on these three topics; from the ecumenical leadership of Pope Francis and General Secretary Martin Junge of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF); and from the 2012 document of the International Lutheran—Roman Catholic Commission on Unity titled *From Conflict to Communion*.

Two key points from the conclusion of *From Conflict to Communion* guided the work:

- 1) Catholics and Lutherans should always begin from the perspective of unity and not from the point of view of division in order to strengthen what is held in common even though the differences are more easily seen and experienced.
- 2) Lutherans and Catholics must let themselves continuously be transformed by the encounter with each other and by mutual witness of faith.

Declaration on the Way seeks reception of the Statement of Agreements from the LWF and the PCPCU and their commitment to address the theological questions that remain. The *Declaration* also seeks from Catholics and Lutherans at local levels a deeper commitment to Christ and greater engagement and collaboration with one another. Thus the *Declaration* makes more visible the unity Catholics and Lutherans share as they approach the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

Section II presents 32 Statements of Agreement drawn from the international and regional dialogues of the last 50 years. This powerful litany of consensus reflects the real, if still incomplete, common affirmation possible in these crucial and inter-related areas. For example:

- (1) Catholics and Lutherans agree that the church on earth has been assembled by the triune God, who grants to its members their sharing in the triune divine life as God’s own people, as the body of the risen Christ, and as the temple of the Holy Spirit, while they are also called to give witness to these gifts so that others may come to share in them.

- (14) Catholics and Lutherans agree that all the baptized who believe in Christ share in the priesthood of Christ. For both Catholics and Lutherans, the common priesthood of all the baptized and the special, ordained ministry enhance one another.

(31) Catholics and Lutherans agree that Eucharistic Communion, as sacramental participation in the glorified body and blood of Christ, is a pledge that our life in Christ will be eternal, our bodies will rise, and the present world is destined for transformation, in the hope of uniting us in communion with the saints of all ages now with Christ in heaven.

The following section elaborates and documents each of the 32 consensus affirmations that comprise the Statement of Agreements. The longest and most detailed part of the document, this section grounds the Agreements in the work of the international and regional dialogues

Section IV looks to the future. It treats 15 topics that have arisen in dialogue where there are varying degrees of doctrinal difference. A number of them are seen not to be church dividing, and some possible ways forward are sketched. This section is more tentative and not intended to be comprehensive; it shows the “on the way” character of the *Declaration on the Way*.

The concluding section, practical in tone, speaks of next steps. It recommends that the LWF and the PCPCU “together receive, affirm and create a process to implement consequences of the 32 statements.” Recognition of these agreements is itself a further step on the way to unity.

This reception and affirmation naturally lead to practices that advance the growing communion between Lutherans and Catholics. Thus the Conclusion also invites the PCPCU and the LWF to create a process and timetable for addressing the remaining issues. It suggests that the expansion of opportunities for Catholics and Lutherans to receive Holy Communion together would be a sign of the agreements already reached and the distance traveled. It also encourages attention to “moral issues that are often deemed to be church dividing” that would be conducted “in the same spirit of mutual respect and commitment to unity characterized by work on justification, church, Eucharist and ministry.” Reception of the Statement of Agreements also invites local and regional responses. While much is already being done together, communities may look afresh at their collaboration. The Conclusion offers suggestions for initial, continued or enhanced collaboration at local and regional levels.

This *Declaration on the Way* invites church leaders, church scholars and church members to act in the spirit of Jesus’ prayer “That they all may be one” (John 17:21).