

## DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS AND THEOLOGICAL OPINIONS (DSTO)

### VOLUME 2 C. CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

# Recognition of relationship: a confessional agreement between the Lutheran Church of Australia and the Lutheran Church—Canada

*Adopted by General Synod, 1993.*

*Unedited.*

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## PREAMBLE

Within Lutheranism there are Lutheran churches who share not only a history, heritage, and confessional basis, but also a unity in faith and profession in terms of public adherence to the confessions to which they subscribe.

Official discussions have led representatives of the Lutheran Church—Canada and the Lutheran Church of Australia to the conclusion that these two churches belong in this category.

We are of the conviction that Lutheran churches which have a common history and confessional heritage should seek to work together wherever and whenever it is proper and profitable to do so.

We believe, furthermore, that churches who agree on the pure doctrine of the gospel and the right administration of the sacraments may work together in all things, including the preaching of the gospel and administration of the sacraments. Such cooperation is a witness to unity in faith and profession.

In this **Recognition of Relationship** statement we provide a brief historical background of the two churches; identify what we have in common; describe and define the relationship as we perceive it; and state the theological and pastoral implications of the relationship.

## RECOGNITION OF RELATIONSHIP: A CONFESSIONAL AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA AND THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—CANADA

### 1. BACKGROUND

- a. The Lutheran Church of Australia came into being in 1966 as a result of an amalgamation of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Australia and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia.

Both former churches had overseas relationships, and were practising altar and pulpit fellowship, with selected churches.

The United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Australia was in declared fellowship with the American Lutheran Church and was a member of Lutheran World Federation. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia was in undeclared fellowship with Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and was not a member of Lutheran World Federation.

Both churches were involved in supporting mission work in Papua New Guinea.

The relationships that the predecessor churches had with overseas Lutheran churches ceased to exist at the time of union, because the predecessor churches ceased to exist. But the newly formed Lutheran Church of Australia immediately stated that 'it is in fellowship' with the churches in Papua New Guinea, so that the support that both churches had provided in Papua New Guinea for many years and the cooperation with the Lutheran churches in Papua New Guinea could resume in the new church without a break.

The Lutheran Church of Australia's position has not altered. Special cases have been dealt with in the manner prescribed by the 1966 constituting convention:

That, although according to paragraph 12 of the Document of Union we cannot automatically invite members of Lutheran churches to our altars and pulpits until altar and pulpit fellowship has been established with their churches, we nevertheless believe that in special cases the question of occupying pulpits should be considered on the merits of each case, and shall require the approval of the officials of the church, and that the question of communing should be determined pastorally according to the past practice of the two amalgamating churches.

The church is now at the stage where it is prepared to enter into a 'recognition of relationship' with the Lutheran Church—Canada.

- b. The Lutheran Church—Canada was established as an autonomous church at a constituting convention in May 1988. Its historic roots are, however, in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Both churches share the same confession and practice as well as basic church organisation. The two churches are in full altar and pulpit fellowship, which is freely practised.

At the same time Lutheran Church—Canada is truly autonomous. It is free to determine its own church relations, although both Lutheran Church—Canada and Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod have agreed that any decisions concerning church relations on the part of either body would always involve mutual consultation.

At the present time, the Lutheran Church—Canada has declared altar and pulpit fellowship with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, the Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of England. It has not yet defined its relationship with those other church bodies which are viewed as 'partner churches' by the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, although it has undertaken joint work with some of them.

Lutheran Church—Canada participates in the International Lutheran Conference, but

## RECOGNITION OF RELATIONSHIP: A CONFESSIONAL AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA AND THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—CANADA

is not a member of any other ecumenical organisation. It has not had observers at meetings of the Lutheran World Federation or the World Council of Churches. It has observer status with the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. Although it is not in altar and pulpit fellowship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, the two churches have jointly formed the Lutheran Council in Canada as an agency for carrying out certain activities on behalf of the two churches.

While Lutheran Church—Canada concurs with the traditional altar and pulpit fellowship model as the best way of formalising inter-church relationships, it realises that such formalisation is not always possible or necessary. Agreement in doctrine and practice is, however, in its view essential for any significant expression of church fellowship.

## 2. WHAT WE HAVE IN COMMON

### a. In our confessional basis

We recognise that we have much in common. We have a common confessional basis, found at Article 2 of the constitution of each church.

#### LCA:

1. The Church accepts without reservation the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as a whole and in all their parts, as the divinely inspired, written and inerrant Word of God, and as the only infallible source and norm for all matters of faith, doctrine and life.
2. The Church acknowledges and accepts as true expositions of the Word of God and as its own confession all the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church contained in the Book of Concord of 1580, namely, the three Ecumenical Creeds: the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed; the Unaltered Augsburg Confession; the Apology of the Augsburg Confession; the Smalcald Articles; the Small Catechism of Luther; the Large Catechism of Luther; and the Formula of Concord.

#### LCC:

The Synod, and every member of the Synod, accepts without reservation:

1. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and practice;
2. All the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God, to wit: the three Ecumenical Creeds (the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed), the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, the Large Catechism of Luther, the Small Catechism of Luther, and the Formula of Concord).

### b. In our theology

We have examined a representative sample of one another's written documents. We have exchanged seminary lecturers. We have held discussions regarding the doctrine and practice of our churches.

## RECOGNITION OF RELATIONSHIP: A CONFESSIONAL AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA AND THE LUTHERAN CHURCH–CANADA

On the basis of our respective confessional articles and as a result of our discussions, we find no disagreement between the doctrine and practice of the churches.

Therefore we joyfully acknowledge and record our understanding that we enjoy a confessional consensus, which expresses itself in the following ways:

1. Both churches have a common understanding regarding the person and work of Christ, and hold that the doctrine of the sinner's justification before God by grace for Christ's sake through faith is the central and most important teaching of the Christian faith. (LCA, Theses of Agreement, I.4(b), 4 (e) (iii); LCC, CTCR, 'Theses on Justification'.)
2. Both churches believe that the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the inspired and infallible word of God, the only source and norm of Christian doctrine and life. (LCA Constitution, Article II, 1; Theses of Agreement I, 1 and 2; LCC Constitution, Article II.2)
3. Both churches confess the three ecumenical creeds and subscribe to the Lutheran confessions contained in the Book of Concord of 1580, because they are a true exposition of the word of God. (LCA Theses of Agreement IX, 4; LCC Constitution, Article II.1).
4. Both churches hold that the church universal is the people of God, called to faith in Christ and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. The church is also those true believers gathered around the word and the sacraments within a local congregation. (LCA Theses of Agreement V.)
5. Both churches hold that the mission of the church is to proclaim the forgiveness of sins to a lost world. Acts of human care (social service) are a natural expression of the church's compassion, but are not a substitute for its divine mandate to 'go and tell'. (LCA Constitution, Article III (a), and 'The Involvement of the Church in Social and Political Problems', paragraph 1; LCC CTCR 'The Mission of the Church in the World'.)

### c. In our mission context

1. Both churches are relatively new, with few declared affiliations.
2. Both churches are similar in size, with a far-flung membership clustered in relatively small congregations. Both exist in Commonwealth countries.
3. Both churches are placed in Western multi-cultural, pluralistic societies with all the difficulties and challenges that that presents.

## 3. PARAMETERS OF OUR RELATIONSHIP

- a. The relationship between our two churches is understood as living and growing. Each church has the right to initiate further expressions of this relationship, or to withdraw from various aspects of its expression at any time.
- b. The relationship in no way impinges on the autonomy of the two churches. It is recognised that either church might wish to enter into special relationships with a number of different churches for a variety of reasons. It is possible that we both might have a different relationship with the same church. The relationship which we wish to

## RECOGNITION OF RELATIONSHIP: A CONFESSIONAL AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA AND THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—CANADA

explicate at this time is meant for our two churches alone. It should be seen as neither inhibiting nor encouraging the Lutheran Church of Australia or Lutheran Church—Canada in unilaterally developing relationships of different kinds with other churches.

- c. On the other hand, given the closeness of the relationship we are entering, the intentions of either church to enter into new relationships will be shared with the other openly and honestly.
- d. Furthermore, in the interests of the vitality and growth of the relationship, we commit ourselves to a periodic review.

### 4. THEOLOGICAL AND PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS OF OUR RELATIONSHIP

On the basis of our common confession, the Lutheran Church of Australia and the Lutheran Church—Canada propose to express our relationship by making the following possible:

- a. The calling of ordained pastors from one church to the other, without additional theological study, subject to procedures and provisions of the two churches.
- b. The calling of certified seminary graduates of one church into the other church, subject to procedures and provisions of the two churches.
- c. Participation in pastoral exchanges of limited duration between pastors of the two churches, in accordance with procedures and provisions of the two churches.
- d. Opening of pulpits to visiting pastors from the other church, assuming that the oversight required by the host church is undertaken.
- e. Opening of altars to members of the other church, recognising the need to exercise pastoral responsibility in accordance with the practices of the host church.
- f. Participation in joint mission work, including the entrusting of personnel to each other's churches, subject to procedures and provisions of the respective churches.
- g. Participation in other joint ventures, in such areas as education, publication, or evangelism.
- h. Participation in theological education through exchange of faculty and students, including vicars, subject to the policies of the respective educational institutions.
- i. Engagement in theological discussion, as opportunity arises, and the exchange of theological information and literature.
- j. The sharing of information, both on the level of leadership as well as the wider church.
- k. The continuing exchange on the part of church representatives, both in correspondence and in person.

### 5. CONCLUSION

We commend this mutual expression of our recognition of relationship to the blessing of God, asking him to strengthen us in our loyalty to him and to his Scriptures and to the Lutheran Confessions, and in our willingness to be his people in ministry and in mission.