

External relations
of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Bavaria –
a contribution to the worldwide communio

1 Fundamentals

1.1 Rationale for the worldwide ecumenical work of the ELCB

The basic articles of the constitution of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Bavaria (ELCB) place it firmly in the ecumenical context of Scripture and the confessions of the early church. Clearly positioned as a Lutheran church in the Augsburg Confession, the Small Catechism and the message of justification contained therein, its mission to proclaim the Christian faith points clearly towards the ecumenical context: "In the fellowship of the one, holy, universal and apostolic church, the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Bavaria lives from the Word of God, which became human in Jesus Christ ... Together with the Christian churches of the world it professes its faith in the triune God ... Together with the whole of Christianity, the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Bavaria has the mission to bear witness in the world to God's salvation through Jesus Christ" (basic articles of the ELCB Constitution).

The ELCB is thus wholly a church, but not the whole Church of Jesus Christ. It is a realization of the one, holy, universal and apostolic Church as expressed in the Nicene Creed. The ELCB forms part of the mission community of all those called and sent out for the sake of Christ. It is part of the hope community of Christians who believe that the Kingdom of God is at hand in Jesus Christ and through him is brought to fulfilment. This is expressed concretely in the common testimony, in ecumenical learning and in the joint commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of God's creation. Lutheran confession, on the one hand, and ecumenical openness, on the other, thus form the cornerstones of the ELCB's understanding of itself as a church.

The community of all Christians and its worldwide, ecumenical dimension are described in the Bible in many different ways. This includes the images of the Body of Christ, for example (Romans 12:1, Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4:15f), of the shepherd and his flock (John 10:11), of the ship (Luke 5:3ff, Matthew 8:23f) and of the pilgrim people of God (Hebrews 13). All these images transcend the local communities concerned in both space and time, and point to the worldwide bond between all Christians.

Our ecumenical responsibilities derive from this fellowship: "The Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Bavaria advocates the growth of unanimity in the One Church of Jesus Christ throughout the world." (Art. 6 Section 1, ELCB Constitution). The worldwide relations into which our church has entered are examples of how this community of all Christians has been realized. Here we distinguish between interdenominational co-operation and the community of the Lutheran world family. In this paper on the worldwide ecumenical work of the ELCB, the community of the churches within the Lutheran World Federation is of central importance. Nonetheless, interdenominational ecumenism with the Orthodox Churches, the Roman-Catholic Church and the non-denominational churches is not merely a marginal phenomenon. It is an indispensable commitment for the ELCB in terms of how it sees itself as a church - at the level of the local parish, the regional church and the World Council of Churches. How else is the unanimity of the One Church of Jesus Christ to grow in the world?

These two types of ecumenical relations of the ELCB with the churches of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and with those of the World Council of Churches (WCC) are described in the constitution of the ELCB as follows: the ELCB "belongs to the Lutheran World Federation. As a church of the Evangelical-Lutheran confession it is linked to the Evangelical-Lutheran churches and Christians throughout the world" (Art. 6 Section 2, ELCB Constitution) and "participates in the co-operation between Christian churches in the world. It belongs to the World Council of Churches" (Art. 6 Section 4, ELCB constitution). The following applies to ecumenical relations in general: "The Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Bavaria is committed to involvement in world mission and in worldwide ecumenical partnership." (Art. 38, Section 3, ELCB Constitution)

The ELCB has entered into a large number of partnerships with other churches on the basis of these constitutional directives, frequently in close co-operation with the United Evangelical Lutheran

Church in Germany (VELKD) and the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD). This is reflected in numerous partnerships between individual parishes, institutions and organizations within the church, including in its diaconal work and with its partners abroad. The catalogue published in 2004 by the Bavarian Committee for Mission and Ecumenism (LAMÖ) "Partnerships within the area of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Bavaria" clearly demonstrates these diverse ecumenical connections. The partnerships of the ELCB are experienced as communities of learning and mutual sharing, of co-operation and common growth. Within them, the commonality of the "Body of Christ" can be discovered. Parishes, groups and individual Christians experience are changed, reconciled and refreshed in this way. This experience leads to the development of witness and orientation (martyria), the experience of God and self-reflection (leiturgia), community (koinonia), help and support (diakonia) as fundamental dimensions of the church mission.

1.2 Responsibilities for partner relations within the ELCB

The wide range of partnership-based relations is regulated by the Church Law on Ecumenism, Mission, Development Services and Partnership of January 2, 2007. This law sets out the responsibilities of the church governing bodies and the various protagonists within the context of ecumenism, mission, development service and partnership.

Responsibilities are assigned as follows:

Landeskirchenamt:

"Irrespective of the responsibility of the church's governing bodies, the Landeskirchenamt is responsible for the entire area of ecumenism, mission, development services and partnership". (§ 6 Section 1)

"In particular, it co-ordinates involvement in international ecumenical associations (Lutheran World Federation, World Council of Churches, Conference of European Churches, Community of Protestant Churches in Europe) and collaboration with other churches, as well as participation in the ecumenical work of the individual church associations in Germany (United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany, Evangelical Church in Germany). The Landeskirchenamt also engages in interdenominational dialogue and is responsible for consultations of the governing bodies of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Bavaria with those of partner churches." (§ 6 Section 2)

Mission EineWelt (Mission OneWorld) – Centre for Partnership, Development and Mission of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Bavaria:

"In order to fulfil its mission, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria maintains the institution 'Mission EineWelt - Centre for Partnership, Development and Mission of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Bavaria'. This organization administers the partner relations of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Bavaria with churches in Africa, Pacific/East Asia and Latin America. It supports these churches in their testimony and service, in particular in fulfilling their tasks in mission and evangelization, in ecumenical co-operation and in establishing congregations, in providing diaconal services and in development work." (§ 7 Section 1)

The following fundamental principles apply: partnerships are advised, confirmed and supported by the Landessynode. New, long-term partnerships with other churches require the approval of Landessynode. Furthermore, regular reports must be submitted to it and its relevant committees on partnerships at level of Kirchenkreis. The Landeskirchenamt co-ordinates this process in agreement with the responsible member of the church administration (Oberkirchenrat im Kirchenkreis).

1.3 Primary focus areas of the ELCB's partner relations

The document "Perspectives and focus areas of church work in the years to come" of 1998 deals with the ELCB's partner relations, assigning them to the 6th Area of Action "Ecumenism, mission, development service and partnership." To quote the explanatory notes: "The aim of all ecumenical efforts is to achieve unity in reconciled diversity. For this reason, we seek dialogue with all Christian denominations in our own state and worldwide, and look for ways in which to live and celebrate

this unity." A concrete example given is the common striving for mission: "In addition to our own evangelistic work, the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Bavaria supports its partner churches in their mission activities in the various countries."

A key focus is to develop "fellowship, missionary collaboration and exchange with the partner churches in Tanzania, Papua New Guinea, Brazil and Central America." The following "current impulses" are also stated: "As part of worldwide ecumenism and partnership there is currently a particular emphasis on communication with our neighbours in the East, especially our partner church in Hungary."

1.4 The context of partner relations

We live in a "globalised world". International links have become a part of everyday life. Modern means of communication provide us with instant information on situations affecting people in other continents. Events in one part of the world increasingly have a direct impact on those in other parts. Complex economic goods are manufactured in various countries according to the principle of the division of labour. While capital is supposed to flow with increasing ease, it is becoming more and more difficult for migrants to cross borders. The growing network of economic interdependencies is having an enormous impact on local cultures. The ties of the individual to traditional institutions are being broken down. Economic pressures in everyday life reinforce a growing sense of isolation. This reality affects people in the North, South, East and West.

It is within this setting that the Church of Jesus Christ unfolds its liberating power of community (communio). Since time immemorial it has been a "global player". The community of Christians from all cultures and denominations is clearly reflected in partner relations. It is exemplified in the bilateral or multilateral agreements between individual churches. These partnerships make the broader community in the local churches and parishes clearly visible and tangible. They have an effect on the worldwide interconnectedness of all human beings and can lead us to think globally and act locally with even greater intensity.

1.5 Questions relating to the concept of partnerships

Several questions arise relating to the concept of partnerships:

What is a church or diaconal partnership? What are its characteristic features?

What distinguishes partnership from other links between churches such as neighbourly relations, friendships, communities or associations?

What obligations apply to these partnerships?

How have our various partner relations come into being and what are their prospects?

Beyond these fundamental questions, the following additional issues arise in relation to the concept of partnership, in view of the current situation of the ELCB and its partnerships:

To what extent do partnerships help us look more closely at our own local situation? How does our participation as partners in God's mission in the world (*missio dei*) affect the way we approach our work? What are the implications for our missionary task? What are the implications in terms of the way we approach those on the margins of our society? How can partners help each other to be heard as a "prophetic voice" within differing contexts?

What do partnerships mean in terms of the ecumenical community of all churches and denominations in their reconciled diversity? How can it become clear within such partnerships that we are striving to achieve not only joint action but also joint worship and communion?

What financial obligations arise from work in partnerships?

How does partnership work help overcome dependence? Does it respect differences and promote the autonomy of the partner? Is it aimed at reciprocal relations between equals?

What is the role of poverty and injustice in partnerships? How can we overcome poverty and justice by means of the transfer of money, personnel and goods, yet avoid the creation of new dependencies and constraints?

As we move towards a sustainable concept of partnership, questions and issues such as these have to be put forward honestly and discussed openly with our partner churches.

2 Conception of external relations of the ELCB

2.1 The concept of “partnership”

Bishop Kigasung of Papua New Guinea defined partnership as “walking side by side”. The nature of this walk remains open. Partners can be very different people – a spouse, a colleague, a business partner, a friend, etc. Each type of partnership entails a very different kind of relationship, so the term partnership in fact denotes an unspecific form of relationship. The New Testament does not offer a specific concept of partnership, speaking instead of the “koinonia” or “communio” of the Christian fellowship.

The concept of partnership between individual churches in the global North and South has been used explicitly since the Conference on World Mission in Whitby in 1947. This was held during the period of fundamental reorientation after the Second World War: the churches and missionary organizations of the North saw that independent churches had developed in the South during the Second World War and that these were able and willing to take on their share of joint missionary work. The final statement of Whitby bears the title “Partners in Obedience” – i.e. partners in obedience to God. The concepts of partner and partnership quickly became part of church terminology and were used as a qualifying term for relations.

2.2 The theology of partnership

In order to prevent the term from acquiring a purely functional meaning – the final statement of Whitby specified the areas of personnel collaboration, financial aid, responsibility for decision-making and administration as the areas of partnership – the English mission theologian Max Warren, one of the leading figures of the Conference on World Mission, subsequently developed a distinct theology of partnership. His concept of partnership included three elements: involvement, responsibility and liability. Warren saw these aspects of partnership in God’s own self-revelation to humankind: God becomes involved with human beings, God bears the responsibility for their redemption, and finally the sacrifice of the Son of God on the cross reflects the liability of God’s love for humanity.

Warren sees human action as corresponding to the preceding Divine reality. Nonetheless, the concrete and material nature of such partner relations is not defined. Warren only mentions freedom and love as elements of partnership. We are free to answer God or to decline to answer, but any answer on our part entails involvement. Therefore we must also take on responsibility and accept the liability of discipleship. In this sense Warren is also able to refer to the idea of apostolic succession as partnership. Ultimately, Warren sees partnership as being linked to the very essence of the Church: “The Christian Church as the New Testament presents it is intended to be an adventure in partnership” (quoted by L. Bauerochse, “Miteinander leben lernen”, Erlangen, 1996, p.81).

2.3 Characteristics of partnership

Despite this diversity, the adventure of partnership has developed certain criteria which distinguish it from fleeting encounters or collaboration on specific projects. The ELCB partnership catalogue lists the following characteristics:

Relations are regarded as lasting for several years

An integrated approach (spiritual fellowship and diaconal co-operation, communication and reciprocal sharing, encounter and project work)

Incorporation in or links with official structures on the part of all those involved.

Every partnership visit shows whether the chief interest lies in projects and their inspection or assessment, or in the people themselves, their living conditions and the challenges they face. Incorporation within the official structures of a local community is also important. For example, has the Kirchenvorstand been informed of the visit or is it the hobby of a few fans of ecumenism?

Are partnership meetings appropriately prepared and supported or do visits by partnership groups pass by the local church communities and those involved without leaving any trace? In concrete terms, the aim is to give the *communio* of the Church of Jesus Christ a visible expression.

2.4 Fundamental principles of partnership

The following fundamental principles of partnership work follow from the above:

Partnership means giving concrete expression to relations within the *communio*. For this reason, priority is attached to reciprocal visits, talks, participation and sharing in the full breadth of church life, especially joint worship. The money issue is not the most important aspect – though not the least important either.

If the relationship within the broader framework of the *communio* is the main focus, this entails rights and responsibilities for both partners. Joint commitment to the "Mission in six continents" (Conference on World Mission in Mexico 1963) permeates the partnership.

Representatives of the South, North, East and West should meet "on the same footing" as a matter of principle. In spite of differences between the situations of the partners in terms of finance and personnel and in spite of sometimes differing theological positions, partners meet as independent agents. As autonomous churches they engage in dialogue with one another and decide together on the deployment of resources and personnel within the framework of the partner relations. An encounter as equals allows neither the exertion of influence on partners in a paternalistic manner nor the mere subsidizing of existing conditions: the aim is to strengthen the independence of the partners. Wherever this equality of status is not yet present in the partnership work of the ELCB, the causes must be analyzed and addressed.

Partnership is about co-operation and the exchange of experience, knowledge, intellectual resources and personnel – and within this framework it is also about sharing money and goods.

Partnership work is undertaken within the framework of global ecumenical relations. These continue to be dictated unilaterally by a relatively small group. Not only in the South but also in the East and even within the EU there are economic losers who are denied access to development and growth so as not to put the economic development of the wealthy countries at risk. Within this context, the sharing of money and goods and the promotion of independent economic activity is to be seen as an exemplary anticipation of what should be the responsibility of international politics. We should remember the motto of the worldwide Social Forum movement: "Another world is possible!"

Every partnership takes place within the "ecumenical existence" of the partners. It is embedded in their relevant interdenominational and ecumenical relations and thus is a way of walking together ecumenically, in a spirit of reconciled difference.

2.5 Forms of church community and partner collaboration

2.5.1 Differentiation on the basis of origins

The partner relations of the ELCB have varying origins, and this determines their intensity and the degree of commitment, as well as in some cases their duration. For example, neighbourly relations are conceived of as long-term, whereas partnerships in development aid have a specific goal in view and are thus thought of as being subjected to a limited time period. As set out above, partnerships are characterized by the following criteria: a perspective of several years, an integrated approach and incorporation into official structures.

2.5.1.1 Contractually regulated partnerships

Concrete partnership agreements which are supported by church law exist with the Lutheran churches in Brazil, Hungary and Central America. There are also partnership agreements at the level of *Kirchenkreis* with the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) in the US and at level of *Dekanat* with several Lutheran churches in Central America. There are also fixed agreements as

part of the Meissen Declaration with the Church of England, as part of the Leuenberg Agreement with the eastern European minority Protestant churches and – as part of the contract between the EKD and Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Russia and other states (ELKRAS) – with the German Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Ukraine (DELKU). In these agreements, the ELCB has committed itself to specific focus areas of partner work for a particular period of time. These contractually regulated partnerships also require regular evaluation and orientation in joint consultation with the relevant partners.

2.5.1.2 Partnerships which have evolved from Bavarian mission work

Since the 19th century, fixed partnerships have evolved from mission work with the churches in Papua New Guinea and Tanzania, which have in turn led to further partner relations with churches in Africa and South East Asia. These partnerships are shaped by membership and involvement of Mission EineWelt in the relevant international co-ordination bodies and are characterized by multilateral relations. Consideration should be given to the question of how these long-standing partner relations might be expressed in bilateral agreements. Here again, regular evaluation and orientation is required in joint consultation with the relevant partners.

2.5.1.3 Friendships and neighbourly relations

In relations based on friendship, churches take on responsibility for one another without legally binding agreements. Mutual interest and exchange occur on a voluntary basis and with varying intensity. The friendly relations with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Mecklenburg might serve as an example here, though of course all such relations also have aspects of true partnership.

Neighbourly relations are defined for the ELCB by geographical aspects. Good neighbourly relations with the Protestant (and not only Lutheran) churches in the states adjacent to Bavaria – such as Württemberg, Baden, Hesse, Thuringia, Austria, not to mention the Czech Republic and France – also need to be reinvigorated on a regular basis, however. Neighbourly relations are particularly well developed in the border regions. The repair of damaged relations is an important goal of cross-border partnerships today, in particular when considering our neighbours in the East. Theological collaboration on questions of the role of the church within Europe brings us closer to our neighbours and challenges us to take assume our responsibilities in Europe with them. This happens specifically in the Central-South-Eastern European group of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE), which has been organized by the ELCB since 1973.

2.5.1.4 Partnership in development aid and co-operation for a limited period of time

An example of this type of partnership is provided by the relations maintained with the German Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Ukraine (DELKU). In spite of its theological independence, a church in this partnership is still significantly dependent on organizational, structural and financial aid from outside. The goal of these relations is to allow the development of independence within a reasonable period of time. At a later stage, relations can transform into a different kind of partnership.

2.5.2 Differentiation on the basis of denomination

2.5.2.1 Lutheran community

The ELCB fulfils the *communio* within the Lutheran World Federation through numerous partner relations within the Lutheran community. At the same it takes its work within the international Lutheran community seriously by means of active commitment and financial involvement in the Lutheran World Federation and its German National Committee. Active membership of the VELKD forms part of the responsibility arising from the Lutheran community.

2.5.2.2 Interdenominational collaboration

Based on the constitutional mandate to promote the growth of unanimity in the One Church of Jesus Christ throughout the world, the ELCB seeks collaboration with other denominations. This

includes relations with the Roman-Catholic Church and its dioceses, but also with other Christian churches working within the Council of Christian Churches in Germany (AcK). At the European level, it is a member of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) and the Conference of European Churches (CEC). As far as the worldwide community of churches is concerned, the ELCB is involved in the World Council of Churches (WCC). Interdenominational collaboration also includes the bilateral contacts of the ELCB with the Russian-Orthodox Church, in particular with the eparchy of Kostroma, and with the Ancient Oriental-Orthodox Churches in South Eastern Turkey and Iraq.

2.5.3 Project work within the context of partnerships

In this context, project work is to be regarded as a special form of partnership since it is often coordinated by umbrella organizations (e.g. Action by Churches Together ACT, Kirchen helfen Kirchen, Brot für die Welt, Evangelical Development Service EED) so as to overcome catastrophes or to establish church and social life in an exemplary fashion. Project work is carried out by a large number of different organizations, e.g. Mission EineWelt, Diakonisches Werk Bayern (the church social services organization in Bavaria) and its members, by the Dekanats- and parish partnerships and by the Diasporawerke (diaspora organizations such as GAW and MLV).

The networking of project work with other organizers of partnership collaboration is to be promoted. The diaspora organizations and the regional church institutions are not in competition with each other in their work but complement one another. This work can only effectively provide for foreign partners if it is handled between the various organizers in a spirit of partnership.

For this reason, it makes sense to take account of project work and project promotion within the concepts of each individual partnership.

Clearly, ecumenical contacts often have the characteristics of different relationships, including those of partnerships, so that a strict distinction between partner relations and other ecumenical contacts is not possible. For this reason the term is not as important as the actual partnership itself. Relations with other churches are a fundamental expression of vitality for the ELCB, without which it could not be a church. It concerns the *communio* of all Christians of all denominations and from all parts of the world. After all, in every local congregation, the community of the one, holy, universal and apostolic Church is also present – the *communio* of all Christians.

3 Communion as a vision of what it means to be a church

3.1 Communion as a gifted reality

At the 10th Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) held in 2003 in Winnipeg, Canada, the organization decided to change its own name to: "The Lutheran World Federation – a Communion of Churches." This change of name aims to express more effectively the deep communion (communio) and the theological self-understanding of the LWF.

The LWF President elected in Winnipeg, Bishop Mark Hanson, said the following on this point in his first report at the LWF Council Meeting (September 1 to 7, 2004) in Geneva: "Before we seek to grow together or fear growing apart, we are bold to confess who and whose we are. We are the Body of Christ. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminds us, the unity of the Church as the Body of Christ is not a goal to be attained, but a fact to be recognized. According to this image, the mission of the Church is not to achieve unity, but to act as the unified body it is. We do so not only for the sake of unity, but so the world might believe (John 17). By the power of the Holy Spirit, we seek to become (i.e., grow together) the community we already are in Christ for the sake of God's mission in the world."

3.2 Communion takes on a concrete form in our relations

For the sake of communion in the Church of Jesus Christ, partnerships and other forms of church relations must be guided by the following goals:

The relations of the ELCB with other churches should extend its horizon beyond the local church and Dekanatsbezirk and foreshadow the communion of the Church of Jesus Christ. In this communion, the ELCB should be prepared to share the resources entrusted to it with other churches.

The ELCB's relations are to be based on equal status between partners. One-sided dependencies must be identified and overcome. Elements of relationships which create dependence are to be restricted and eliminated.

The ELCB's relations are meant to break down injustice between generations, genders and the various societies as well as to overcome poverty. They are to lay bare structures of violence and contribute to breaking these down. Relations must not create new dependencies and constraints based on the transfer of money and material aid.

Fresh consideration must be given to the transfer of money and personnel to our partner churches. This is to be undertaken in collaboration with our partners. In doing so we seek dialogue with these churches at all levels.

Partnerships, friendly and neighbourly relations and the work of the ELCB in the Lutheran community are to serve the purpose of allowing the churches to grow together in faith and to overcome the theological divisions between them. The aim is mutual theological enrichment and thus the prevention of extreme, fundamentalist positions and narrow perspectives.

Ecumenism at the local level and international co-operation sets out to overcome denominational differences and aims to achieve community in worship and at the Lord's Table.

Relations should change the congregational life of all those involved. For this reason, we should not only be mindful of what we can give but also increasingly aware of what we can learn. We are still at the very beginning of this ecumenical learning process, yet it is indispensable for the communion of all churches.

3.3 Ecumenical learning – the path of our partner work

As we follow the path towards fulfilling the vision of a church as communion, we are guided by the idea of ecumenical learning in collaboration with our partner churches. This includes:

- Being appreciative of different spiritual, life-affirming, cultural traditions
- Being guided by the goal of "reconciled diversity" as we come to terms with areas of spiritual

life and theological thinking which are unfamiliar to us, and so coming to a better understanding of our own identity

- Developing an ecumenical spirituality in which we pray together with partners, taking part in the worship of partner churches and seeking out encounters at all levels of church life
- Gearing all our efforts to learn primarily towards what we have in common and not what sets us apart from each other
- Practising a fair and equal dialogue with partners and – if the necessary basis for this is lacking – examining the causes of inequality through dialogue
- Applying criticism in partner relations where necessary and doing so in a heedful manner
- Being prepared for others to challenge us
- Developing projects jointly and making the benefits to both sides the basis for project decision-making
- Being aware of the social context of our partner churches and – if necessary – engaging in advocacy for our ecumenical partners as they fight for more just living conditions
- In this age of globalization, being aware of the interconnections between our lifestyle and the living situation of those in other parts of the world, which is why the perspective of the poor churches is important to us in our commitment to a just economic system
- Allowing ourselves to be inspired by the living Spirit of God, who encourages us and gives us hope as we pursue our path together with our partners all over the world

3.4 *Communio* as a missionary reality

The LWF Assembly in Winnipeg described the "missio dei" as the Trinitarian action of God in creation, redemption and the current working of the Holy Spirit in the church. Mission is developed as the transformation, reconciliation and empowerment of humankind, the church and the world. "These mission foci – transformation, reconciliation, and empowerment – aptly describe mission as the church's participation in the mission of the Triune God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. They also reflect the characteristics of mission as holistic and contextual; namely, a mission led by the Holy Spirit to walk in the 'way of the Son', the way of incarnation, cross, and resurrection. Mission is the *raison d'être* of the church. It flows from the nature of the church as a witnessing community, a gift of God's gracious justification for and invitation to mission." (Mission in Context, LWF 2004, p.61).

The existing *communio* of the churches in the world is reflected and strengthened by individual partnerships and other forms of relations between churches, Kirchenkreisen, Dekanatsbezirken, congregations and church institutions. It is not least through partnership activity that the Church of Jesus Christ becomes the community that it already is. This takes place so as to better serve the mission of God in the world. Partnerships bear the responsibility for the "community of the one, holy, universal and apostolic Church".

Partnerships and all other forms of church relations allow us to open ourselves to the great goal of a globalization of faith, hope and love in ecumenical fellowship. This endeavour is crucial to survival at a time when the world is increasingly divided into winners and losers as a result of economic globalization.

4. Conclusions

The relations of the ELCB must be reviewed in respect of their categorization within the differentiated relationship structure set out in this paper and their fundamental planning is to be guided by the principles presented. Even in times of scarce resources, partnership-based work in all its dimensions is part of the very essence of the church, since we are only the Church of Jesus Christ in fellowship with other Christians, through the ages and everywhere in the world. Hence a reminder is made of the voluntary commitment of the church's governing bodies "to deploy the appropriate share of church tax revenue for the area of mission, partnerships and development from 2007 in accordance with the continued implementation of the resolutions of Memmingen" (resolution of the Landessynode, spring 2005). Current deployment of resources must be assessed for all relations according to the criteria set out in this paper and where necessary reallocated.

Church unity, called for by Christ and realized in him, is a central criterion for the credibility of the church's proclamation of faith. "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world ... that all of them may be one, Father, just as you 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." (John 17:18-21).

