

Consultation of Partner Churches of ELCB, 20.-23.11.2007, Neuendettelsau Statement

*“If you have love for one another then the world will know that you are my disciples”
(John 13:35)*

Introduction: *Representatives from 17 Lutheran Churches in five Continents came together for this consultation. This followed the new church law on “Ecumenics, Mission, Partnership and Development” as well as the paper “External Relations – a Contribution to the Worldwide Church”, both passed by the Synod of ELCB in 2006. Our programme did comprise: Spiritual fellowship; a key note on the new LWF-Mission Paper by Dr. Kjell Nordstokke; a key note on the new Partnership paper presented by OKR Rev. Michael Martin; Service at Penitence and Prayer Day with Bishop Dr. Johannes Friedrich, Introduction of realities of our churches and working groups. We do treasure the historical and present dimensions of our relationships as members of the body of Christ and our calling as partner churches. Some of our findings we wish to share as results with the Synod.*

1. A Missional Church – Communion of Saints

- God himself is the source and essence of mission, revealed to us in Jesus Christ. “As the Father has sent me, so I do send you” (John 20). The church is missional in its very being. God’s people therefore are pilgrims in this world. As a God given reality we became part of Gods reconciled people. To follow the footsteps of Jesus implies to reach out to proclaim His gospel by word and deed (Matthew 28 / Luke 9).

- In our relationships we strive for a holistic mission towards each other and the world. Such holistic mission we share implies a ministry with prophetic, diaconal and spiritual dimensions. Evangelism and our responsibility for development must complement each other. We carry out our mission in the attitude of humble respect for everybody’s dignity and preparedness to share our resources. We deplore the deprivation of basic rights, violence, exploitation and destruction of Gods creation. Because in Christ the world has got a new face God wants our world to change. This has impact on our cultures, social and political realities. Churches stand for an alternative globalisation, since we believe that another world is possible.

- Our identities are shaped by confessions and by traditions. We are called to grow in unity and spirituality and to serve for His kingdom to come. To live in ecumenical partnership is the nature of our calling. The partners and ELCB have experienced common histories of different sort, length and intensity. Being blessed with different cultures we are equal before God. Being faithful to bring the gospel is an ongoing and undivided task for the life of all Christians.

- Our place is in the world with its rich beauties, but also its suffering and injustice. As churches and as individuals we carry a unique missionary mandate to proclaim God’s love and to render service towards the healing of God’s world, being bestowed with many gifts by God.

2. Partnership in a Common Mission

As churches we belong to Him and we do need each other to shape our responsibilities. We are walking side by side, with tolerance and acceptance for each other to understand realities and to overcome barriers. Our mandate is carried out locally, still it includes also a crosscultural dimension. In all we do emphasize encounter for mutual encouragement and sharing of experiences. Some essentials:

- We wish to maintain our Lutheran identity as based on the theology of the cross and the freedom of a Christian to shape our ethics

- We want to facilitate the building of new bridges towards and within regions like Asia/Pacific, Africa and Latin America in regard to the present quickly changing realities
- We want to enhance our cooperation. Crossing borders implies continued exchange of experts in various areas of capacity building, development, pastoral care and more. We need a multidirectional exchange of specialists and volunteers alike to serve
- We must discern and tackle common issues of vital Christian importance like Christian education, dialogue, care for the future, overcoming violence, impacts of geopolitical shift of power
- Advocacy is a mandate to promote awareness for critical life situations across the globe, in order to become voice of the voiceless
- We must define together priorities and commitments; we want to share our resources significantly: spiritually, financially, culturally.

3. Concrete Challenges Churches are facing and Mutual Commitments

That is why:

We want to support leadership and capacity building for lay and ordained people. We need training programmes for institutions and other centres to help our churches grow in their ministry. Professionalism and good governance belong together

We are engaged in mission and evangelisation in secular and post secular societies as well as in the reality of old and new religions on the markets in our societies

We realize that our partnership is embedded in our global realities, which are interconnected: Therefore we deplore the discrepancy between opposite life styles like abundant consumerism over against life realities of appalling poverty

We perceive the HIV/Aids pandemic also as a result of poverty and violence, related to education and attitude. E.g.: Due to economic strain in some regions people in despair come to commercialise their bodies and beings. Medical aid is not just a technical issue. We all must understand, protect and promote our God given lives.

We have to deal with the impacts of global migration due to economic, social and political reasons and to support better life conditions

We are to promote awareness on suppression of ethnic minorities and how to overcome it

We look for appropriate pastoral answers as to new charismatic challenges arising in our areas and churches. We want to respond positively to the spiritual search for meaning in the new generation.

4. Forms of mutual encounter and consultations

We do recommend and support the following forms for cooperation:

- a. Multilateral consultations of ELCB and her partners every 5 years or more frequently. Such a meeting should take place in a rotating system in different regions
- b. Bilateral consultations should be continued and existing cooperation structures are to be maintained
- c. We encourage encounter for specific groups of churches in either way on various levels for the purpose of exposure and mission trips as well as official visits in the interest of mutual empowerment
- d. We do emphasize to further South - South networking and cooperation.

The members of the Consultation - Neuendettelsau, 23.11.2007