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Preface

This document, *Declaration on the Way: Church, Ministry, and Eucharist*, is a declaration of the consensus achieved by Lutherans and Catholics on the topics of church, ministry, and eucharist as the result of ecumenical dialogue between the two communions since 1965. It is a consensus “on the way” (*in via*), because dialogue has not yet resolved all the church-dividing differences on these topics. Nevertheless, at this time of important benchmarks in the relationship between Lutherans and Catholics, including both the anniversary of 50 years of dialogue in 2015 and also the 500th commemoration of the Reformation in 2017, it is good to review the path traveled together and to enumerate the many points of agreement between Lutherans and Catholics on these subjects. This review can help both communities to affirm the agreements they have reached together. More importantly, it can encourage them to look for the next steps toward Christian unity.

The document consists of an introduction, a “Statement of Agreements” followed by “Agreements in the Lutheran–Roman Catholic Dialogues—Elaborated and Documented,” a section titled “Remaining Differences and Reconciling Considerations,” and a conclusion. The “Statement of Agreements” consists of consensus statements on the topics of church, ministry, and eucharist that Catholics and Lutherans affirm together.

Declaration on the Way

The section “Agreements in the Lutheran–Roman Catholic Dialogues—Elaborated and Documented” is correlated with the preceding “Statement of Agreements” so that each numbered agreement corresponds with the number in the following section that documents and elaborates on that particular agreement. This section gives references to specific dialogue statements that provide the basis for the agreements in the preceding section.

The section “Remaining Differences and Reconciling Considerations” is not directly correlated to the preceding sections but enumerates a number of topics that have traditionally divided Lutherans and Catholics regarding church, ministry, and eucharist. Each topic is developed in three parts. The first part, which appears in italics, states the controverted issue between Catholics and Lutherans. The second part develops reconciling considerations that contribute to mitigating or resolving the difference. The third part provides possible resolutions or steps forward. In some instances, the difference is determined to be no longer church-dividing, and the document calls for a recognition of this fact by our ecclesial bodies. For other topics, the document recommends further study, clarification, and dialogue.

The hope in offering this *Declaration* is that the Lutheran and Catholic communions at all levels will receive and affirm the consensus statements in the section “Statement of Agreements” as the achievement of our ecumenical dialogues on both the international and regional levels since their inception in 1965. The *Declaration* also offers encouragement that together Catholics and Lutherans will find ways to move forward where work remains to be done.

II. Statement of Agreements

A. Agreements on the Church

The Church's Foundation in God's Saving Work

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.

2 They agree as well that the church on earth arose from the whole event of Jesus Christ, who remains its sole foundation (1 Corinthians 3:11).

3 Further, they hold in common that the church on earth is gathered by the proclamation of the gospel of God's saving mercy in Christ, so that the gospel, proclaimed in the Holy Spirit by the apostles, remains the church's normative origin and abiding foundation.

4 An agreement follows that the church on earth is in every age apostolic, because it is founded upon the apostles' witness to the gospel and it continuously professes the apostolic and evangelical faith while living by mandated practices handed on from the apostles. Thus, Lutherans and Catholics recognize in both their ecclesial communities the attribute of apostolicity grounded in their ongoing continuity in apostolic faith, teaching, and practices.

The Word, Scripture, and Means of Grace

5 Lutherans and Catholics agree that the church on earth lives from and is ruled by the Word of God, which it encounters in Christ, in the living word of the gospel, and in the inspired and canonical Scriptures.

6 They are one in holding that the church on earth participates in Christ's benefits through the historical and perceptible actions of proclaiming the gospel and celebrating the sacraments, as initiated by Christ and handed on by his apostles.

Communion, Visibility, and Hiddenness

7 Catholics and Lutherans agree that the church on earth is a communion (*koinonia*). It shares in God's gifts offered for us by Christ, which, by being held in common, bring believers into unity and fellowship with each other.

8 Consequently, they agree that the church on earth combines audible and visible elements with profound spiritual realities that remain hidden from empirical investigation and perception.

II. Statement of Agreements

Preservation of the Church and Union with the Saints

9 Catholics and Lutherans agree that the church on earth is indefectible, because it is and will be preserved by the Holy Spirit in all its aspects essential for salvation. They share the certainty of Christian hope that the church, established by Christ and led by his Spirit, will always remain in the truth, fulfilling its mission to humanity for the sake of the gospel.

10 They furthermore agree that the church on earth is united with the community of the saints in glory.

Eschatology and Mission

11 This perspective gives rise to agreement that the church on earth is an anticipatory reality, on pilgrimage and expectant of reaching its final destination in God's ultimate gathering of his people in their entirety when Christ returns and when the Holy Spirit completes the work of sanctification.

12 But Catholics and Lutherans agree as well that the church on earth is mandated to carry out a mission in which it participates in God's activity in the world by evangelization, worship, service of humanity, and care for creation.

B. Agreements on Ordained Ministry

In "Agreements on the Church," Catholics and Lutherans affirm the ecclesial character of one another's communities. This affirmation is an essential first step toward a mutual recognition of ordained ministry, for mutual recognition of one another's ecclesial character is intertwined with the mutual recognition of one another's ministry.

Ministry in the Church

13 Lutherans and Catholics agree that the ordained ministry belongs to the essential elements that express the church's apostolic character and that it also contributes, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to the church's continuing apostolic faithfulness.

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.

Divine Origin of Ministry

15 Lutherans and Catholics affirm together that ordained ministry is of divine origin and that it is necessary for the being of the church. Ministry is not simply a delegation "from below," but is instituted by Jesus Christ.

16 We both affirm that all ministry is subordinated to Christ, who in the Holy Spirit is acting in the preaching of the word of God, in the administration of the sacraments, and in pastoral service.

17 Lutherans and Catholics agree that the proclamation of the gospel is foremost among the various tasks of the ordained ministry.

18 They declare in common that the essential and specific function of the ordained minister is to assemble and build up the Christian community by proclaiming the word of God; celebrating the sacraments; and presiding over the liturgical, missionary, and diaconal life of the community.

II. Statement of Agreements

Authority of Ministry

19 The authority of the ministry is not to be understood as an individual possession of the minister, but it is rather an authority with the commission to serve in the community and for the community.

20 Catholics and Lutherans also agree that the office of ministry stands over against (*gegenüber*) the community as well as within it and thus is called to exercise authority over the community.

Ordination

21 Catholics and Lutherans agree that entry into this apostolic and God-given ministry is not by baptism but by ordination. They agree that ministers cannot ordain themselves or claim this office as a matter of right but are called by God and designated in and through the church.

22 Catholics and Lutherans both ordain through prayer invoking the Holy Spirit and with the laying on of hands by another ordained person. Both affirm that the ordinand receives an anointing of the Holy Spirit, who equips that person for ordained ministry.

23 Both Lutherans and Catholics regard ordination as unrepeatable.

One Ministerial Office

24 Both consider that there is one ordained ministerial office, while also distinguishing a special ministry of *episkope* over presbyters/pastors.

25 They agree that the ministry is exercised both locally in the congregation and regionally. Both accept that the distinction between local and regional offices in the churches is more than the result of purely historical and human developments, or a matter of sociological necessity, but is the action of the Spirit. Furthermore, the differentiation of the ministry into a more local and a more regional office arises of necessity out of the intention and task of ministry to be a ministry of unity in faith.

Ministry Serving Worldwide Unity

26 Catholics and Lutherans affirm together that all ministry, to the degree that it serves the *koinonia* of salvation, also serves the unity of the worldwide church and that together we long for a more complete realization of this unity.

C. Agreements on the Eucharist

High Esteem for Eucharistic Union with Christ in Holy Communion

27 Lutherans and Catholics agree in esteeming highly the spiritual benefits of union with the risen Christ given to them as they receive his body and blood in Holy Communion.

Trinitarian Dimension of Eucharist

28 Catholics and Lutherans agree that in eucharistic worship the church participates in a unique way in the life of the Trinity: In the power of the Holy Spirit, called down upon the gifts and the worshipping community, believers have access to the glorified flesh and blood of Christ the Son as our food, and are brought in union with him and with each other to the Father.

II. Statement of Agreements

Eucharist as Reconciling Sacrifice of Christ and as Sacrifice of the Church's Praise and Thanksgiving

29 Catholics and Lutherans agree that eucharistic worship is the memorial (*anamnesis*) of Jesus Christ, present as the one crucified for us and risen, that is, in his sacrificial self-giving for us in his death and in his resurrection (Romans 4:25), to which the church responds with its sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.

Eucharistic Presence

30 Lutherans and Catholics agree that in the sacrament of the Lord's supper, Jesus Christ himself is present: He is present truly, substantially, as a person, and he is present in his entirety, as Son of God and a human being.

Eschatological Dimension of Eucharist

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.

Eucharist and Church

32 Lutherans and Catholics agree that sharing in the celebration of the eucharist is an essential sign of the unity of the church, and that the reality of the church as a community is realized and furthered sacramentally in the eucharistic celebration. The eucharist both mirrors and builds the church in its unity.