28. März 2014
Begegnung mit Erzbischof von Canterbury Justin Welby
im Rahmen der
Englandreise der Kirchenleitung

gerhalten vom Leitenden Bischof der VELKD, Gerhard Ulrich

Es gilt das gesprochene Wort!

Your Grace,

We are very delighted and honoured that you were able to make this meeting possible. We – members of the Executive Council of the United Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Germany and some executive officers of the Lutheran Church office. The Council is the governing body of our church in-between the meetings of general synod and is made up of members of the Lutheran Bishops Conference and of general synod.

It was a great pleasure for us to be part of the planting of the tree that now corresponds with the one planted by the Anglican Communion in the Luther Garden in Wittenberg in 2009. This garden is a visible symbol of what is important for us when we celebrate the 500. anniversary of the reformation. Those trees right in the centre of the garden also show how much the Lutheran World Federation values its deep and reliable relations with the Anglican Communion and the other denominational bodies. It is a symbol for reconciled diversity.

And maybe the sight of Methodist, Roman-Catholic, Lutheran and Anglican trees growing so close together in Wittenberg might also be an incentive that one day the Anglican Communion will be able to join us Lutherans, Catholics and Methodists if not in signing than at least in officially agreeing to or expressing their support for the Joint Declaration of Justification. That would be a powerful sign for the Reformation Jubilee in 2017.

In many parts of the world Anglicans and Lutherans can already rejoice in the fact that they have overcome all church dividing issues and live together in full and visible unity, working side by side to spread the good news of Jesus Christ.

The Meissen Agreement between the Church of England and the EKD, which our Lutheran Churches are part of, also gives witness to the good and trustworthy relations between our churches. Yet, Meissen stops just short of full communion due to some open questions regarding the ordained ministry and the historic episcopacy. We are hoping and are faithful that those issues can be resolved one day and we can
enjoy the fruits of full, visible communion with a reconciled ministry. In the meantime we are glad that the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany is coming in closer contact with the Porvoo Communion. Even though we are not joining we are very grateful for the offer of the Porvoo Contact group to become a regular guest at the Porvoo Theological Conferences. I believe this is a good way to get to know each other even better and to learn from each other. And hopefully this new interchange will also prove to be fruitful for the whole Meissen process toward full communion.

In the meantime I have the following suggestion:

I happen to know that you, Archbishop Justin and your senior staff are passionate followers of the American TV drama „West Wing“. So the name Leo McGarry should be more than familiar to you. He has a great line in the episode “In the Shadow of the Gunman”:

“Act as if ye have faith and faith shall be given to you.” Put another way: “Fake it until you make it.”

Maybe Leo’s line is a great advice for our Ecumenical endeavour. We have the faith that one day our two churches will reach full, visible unity as Meissen calls it. This is nothing we can make, but will be given by God. Until then we act as if we are already there. Fake it until you make it.

Wherever possible we strengthen and deepen our many partnerships between dioceses and church districts, between Anglican and Lutheran parishes. We use the experiences that many pastors and priests have made working in the other church. We worship together and share in the Eucharist. A Lutheran is living with the Chemin Neuf community at Lambeth Palace. We exhaust all the possibilities and special provisions of Canon B44 and its Local Ecumenical Partnerships that can make things possible that are not really possible by the Meissen Agreement yet.

“Act as if ye have faith and faith shall be given to you.” Put another way: “Fake it until you make it.” And I am sure one day, our churches will be in full communion.

And in case you want to learn in the meantime more about our faith tradition, we would like to present you with our Lutheran Confessions. We have just published a revised German edition. And for your convenience we added the English standard edition of the Book of Concord.

Once again, thank you for sharing some time with us.