VELKD

Texte aus der VELKD
Nr. 194 EN - March 2024

Church Communion on the Way

Final document on the doctrinal conversations between the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD) and the Union of Evangelical Free Churches in Germany — Baptists (BEFG) in the years 2017-2023

Inhalt

EDITORIAL LEADING BISHOP OF THE VELKD 1

CHURCH COMMUNION ON THE WAY 3

I Introduction..... 3
II A common understanding of church communion..... 7
1. Introduction and explanation of the model of initiation..... 7
2. Common theological foundations 10
3. Paths towards and while being a Christian..... 13
4. Baptism and church communionon the way..... 19
III Consequences and recommendations 24

INITIATION INTO THE CHRISTIAN LIFE 28

Paths to being a christian. 28
Elements of the Path to being a Christian.....29
I Child dedication — Infant baptism 29
II Hearing the gospel..... 31
III Confirmation/Believer's baptism..... 34
IV Discipleship and living by faith..... 37

Imprint..... 43

Editorial

Dear reader,

I am very pleased that the document "Church Communion on the Way" is now finished, the result of a dialogue between the VELKD and the Union of Evangelical Free Churches (BEFG) in Germany that began in 2017. The aim was to examine "whether an appropriate model of church communion can be developed for the Lutheran-Baptist context in Germany that does justice to the specific theological concerns and the different ecclesiological structures of both partners".

The dialogue group was aware that it was embedded in a long history of ecumenical encounters between Baptist and Lutheran churches. It did not start from scratch, but was able to draw on understandings that had already been reached. The concept of an "initiation process", which had already been successfully employed in several ecumenical dialogues, proved to be helpful as a bridge between the positions. By referring to the respective faith experiences of the participants, it was possible to overcome entrenched positions on baptism regarding the normative time when it should take place, its singular character, and its theology. Particular attention was paid to the process of becoming a Christian. It emerged from the discussions that the different concepts in the participating churches are not mutually exclusive, but rather correspond to the gospel in their entirety and in their mutual relationship to one another. As a result, the dialogue commission came to the conclusion that the different paths to being a Christian which have developed in these two traditions and are reflected in their respective baptismal practices should no longer be regarded as church-dividing.

ISSN 2190-7625

Redaktion · Tel. +49 511 2796-532 · Fax +49 511 2796-182 · pressestelle@velkd.de · www.velkd.de

The final report attempts to describe the “paths to being a Christian“ as a process consisting of several stages and elements, which represents as a whole the growth into a Christian existence. It clearly shows that the individual elements of this path are differently emphasised and shaped by Baptists and Lutherans. This applies in particular to their chronological order (in the ideal case). On the whole, however, they lead to the same goal despite different milestones: a life that is redeemed by Christ and called to discipleship

This insight can help Lutherans and Baptists to understand each other‘s faith biographies better and emphasise what they have in common. In doing so, they experience their fellowship with one another as Christians. The same applies to their churches. The fellowship thus discovered and developed step by step can best be described as a “church communion on the way“. It is not yet complete, but is leading to a recognisable convergence through concrete steps and voluntary commitments. This document makes this clear as well. But this travelling companionship has tangible effects on the life of our churches and binding consequences for their relationship with one another. This is why the document points to “Consequences and recommendations“ in the final chapter – including the abstention from re-baptism when Christians convert who were baptised as children.

It is my hope that this final report will be carefully scrutinised in the member churches of the VELKD and that it will provide a stimulus towards deepening the cooperation between our churches, also within church districts and local parishes.

Yours sincerely

Bishop Ralf Meister, Leading Bishop of the VELKD

CHURCH COMMUNION ON THE WAY

Final document on the doctrinal conversations between the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD) and the Union of Evangelical Free Churches in Germany — Baptists (BEFG) in the years 2017-2023

[1] Christians who understand themselves as Lutherans and Baptists share fundamental convictions of their faith and consider it their duty to make these commonalities visible also in the life of their churches and to deepen the fellowship of their churches with each other. They are therefore searching for a model that describes this specific form of their church communion.

[2] In the dialogue between the BEFG and the VELKD, the differences between the two churches in their understanding of baptism must be taken into account if these churches want to seek and shape an appropriate form of church communion on the basis of their common understanding of the gospel. The dialogue commission proposes the model of a "church communion on the way" in order to point to the existing agreements in the understanding of the gospel on the one hand, whilst making it clear on the other that the differences in the understanding of baptism do not have to divide the churches involved, as long as they see the different paths towards being a Christian, for which baptism is constitutive in both churches, as a coherent process and recognise that it is in conformity with the gospel.

[3] "Church communion on the way" describes the fellowship which already exists between the two churches in hearing and proclaiming the gospel, in church worship, in diaconal cooperation and in joint action in a secularised society. This fellowship of the churches involved in this dialogue is an expression of their church communion based on the gospel of Jesus Christ. It differs from other forms of official church communion in that existing differences in the understanding of baptism are taken into account and respected. In this respect, "church communion on the way" is a church communion *sui generis* The churches involved are acting within the framework of existing ecumenical commitments, such as those affirmed in the signing of the *Charta Oecumenica*[1] or formulated in the so-called *Lund Principle* of the *Faith and Order Commission* 1952. The *Lund Principle* emphasises that churches should seek dialogue with each other and act together in all matters as long as there are no strong reasons which prevent them from doing so.

I Introduction

a. The prehistory of our doctrinal conversation

[4] The doctrinal conversations between the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD) and the Union of Evangelical Free Churches in Germany — Baptists (BEFG), the outcome of which is given in this report, was not the first theological dialogue between the two denominations. The first talks took place at the beginning of the 1980s, at first in West Germany in 1980/81 and then in East Germany in 1982/83, whereby the dialogue partner for the BEFG there was the *Federation of Evangelical Churches* in the GDR (BEK). In both cases the dialogues were held on the occasion of the 450th anniversary of the *Augsburg Confession* of 1530 (Confessio Augustana; CA) and the condemnations of the so-called "Anabaptists" contained in this confession.

[5] In the West German report, the Lutheran side states that it finds it onerous that Baptist churches regularly also baptise people who have already received infant baptism in the Lutheran church. The Baptist side declares that in its view the indiscriminately practised infant baptism disregards the New Testament understanding of baptism. For this reason, church communion between the VELKD and BEFG is not considered possible. The GDR report does not address the question of church communion. With regard to the relationship between faith and baptism, both sides agree that faith and baptism essentially belong together. However, there was disagreement as to whether the prerequisite for baptism was the baptised person's own faith

1 Charta Oecumenica, Geneva/St.Gallen, 2001, http://www.ceceurope.org/current-issues/charta-oecumenica/ [last accessed: 27-11-2023].

(according to the Baptist side) or the accompanying faith of the congregation, parents, and godparents (according to the Lutheran side). The discussion in the GDR gained particular significance on account of the fact that — other than the conversation in West Germany — it was explicitly received by the leading bodies of both churches and linked to a mutual request for forgiveness.

[6] The doctrinal conversation reported here is the first dialogue between German Lutherans and Baptists after the country's reunification. However, there were three dialogues on the global, European and regional levels in which Lutherans and Baptists were involved, the results of which could be incorporated into our conversation. There was a dialogue between the *Lutheran World Federation* and the *Baptist World Alliance* between 1986 and 1989, one between the *Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe* (CPCE) and the *European Baptist Federation* (EBF) between 2002 and 2004, and a dialogue between the *Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria* and the *Bavarian Regional Association in the BEFG* between 2003 and 2009.

[7] The dialogue of the two global organisations was unable to reach agreement on the subject of infant baptism. However, the dialogue commission made several recommendations to both sides in order to move forward on the path towards understanding.[2] In a secular society, where the existence of a community of believers can no longer be taken for granted at an infant baptism, Lutherans should develop and practise "a firm baptismal discipline". Baptists should acknowledge a believer's baptism of faith even if it was not performed by them but by Lutherans, and also evaluate the different ways in which their local congregations deal with adults baptised as infants who want to join them. Lutherans should clarify the effects of indiscriminate baptisms on church membership and make efforts to overcome this practice. The report concludes by declaring that the convergences between Baptists and Lutherans are greater than their differences and that the remaining differences should be discussed "from within a fellowship of churches".

[8] The report on dialogue at the European level states that agreement in the understanding of the gospel is central to a church communion and already exists between Lutherans and Baptists. Differences remain on the question of the right administration of baptism, but there has been a significant convergence through the inclusion of baptism in the Christian initiation process.

"Baptism is thus the sign and the central event of initiation or the beginning of the Christian life, but not the whole of the beginning."[3]

[9] The whole of the beginning also includes repentance, initial Christian nurture and sharing in the Lord's Supper for the first time. Through this process of initiation, people are received into the church.

[10] The Bavarian dialogue report, usually referred to as the *Convergence Document of the Bavarian Lutheran-Baptist Working Group (BALUBAG)*, took up the idea of the initiation process and said:

"Both ecclesial traditions hold that the initiation into the Christian life must be understood not only as a one-time event but as a process — either between baptism and confirmation or between conversion and baptism. The process of initiation is completed when the personal response to Christ's call to follow him also leads to the assumption of responsibility for discipleship and self-committal to the faith."[4]

[11] The dialogue group concludes from this: "Baptists and Lutherans can recognise both understandings of baptism as different but legitimate interpretations of the one gospel", and sums up its report with the words:

2 Baptists and Lutherans in conversation. A Message to our Churches. Report of the Joint Commission of the Baptist World Alliance and the Lutheran World Federation 1990, https://ia904603.us.archive.org/13/items/bwa-lwf-baptists-and-lutherans-in-conversation-1990 [accessed 27-11-2023].

3 Leuenberg Texts 9: Dialogue between the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) and the European Baptist Federation (EBF) on the Doctrine and Practice of Baptism, Verlag Lembeck, Frankfurt (Main) 2005, p. 41.

4 Voneinander lernen – miteinander glauben. "Ein Herr, ein Glaube, eine Taufe" (Eph 4:5). Konvergenzdokument der Bayerischen Lutherisch-Baptistischen Arbeitsgruppe (BALUBAG) p. 17, https://www.befg.de/fileadmin/bgs/media/dokumente/Voneinander-lernen-miteinander-glauben-Konvergenzdokument-der-Bayerischen-Lutherisch-Baptistischen-Arbeitsgruppe-BALUBAG-2009.PDF [last accessed 04.05.2023].

"After a thorough examination of the doctrinal statements, we were able to establish a fundamental agreement in the interpretation of the gospel in all essential questions. By carefully considering the previous conflicts in the practice of baptism and the Lord's Supper, we developed proposals for reaching a basic consensus in ways of practising baptism and the Lord's Supper which are in conformity with the gospel. We therefore recommend to our churches the adoption of pulpit and table fellowship."[5]

[12] The two churches to which the Bavarian dialogue report was submitted for reception, the VELKD and the BEFG, expressed their gratitude for what had been jointly formulated as well as their strong, but not complete agreement. In its response, the BEFG notes that during the broad process of discussion on the BALUBAG document that took place on many levels within its ranks, no agreement was reached regarding the statement that both understandings of baptism could be recognised as legitimate interpretations of the one gospel. On the question of church communion, the BEFG considered it important to find a binding form for the fellowship that is already practised and corresponds to the broad agreement on theological questions and the lively cooperation in Germany, yet does not deny the differences. The response of the VELKD emphasises that the model of the "initiation process" is only appropriate if baptism is not merely interpreted as the beginning, but rather as the foundation of Christian existence. The most serious obstacle to church communion is the Baptist practice of re-baptising new members who had been baptised as infants in a way that is valid according to Lutheran understanding. The VELKD expects Baptists to refrain from demanding baptism by consent from those who were baptised as infants.

[13] In order to clarify how the theological conversation between Lutherans and Baptists in Germany could continue in this situation, representatives of the VELKD and the BEFG held three exploratory talks in 2015 and 2016 and produced a final report. On the basis of this forward-looking final report, both church leaderships decided to begin official doctrinal conversations to examine what steps are possible on the way to full church communion.

b. Task and aim of our doctrinal conversations

[14] Since 01-06-2017, in accordance with the decisions of the church leaderships of the VELKD and the BEFG, our commission for doctrinal conversations, with representatives of both churches, has generally met twice a year for consultations. With regard to the topics, we largely followed the recommendations of the exploratory group. This proposed:

- that the conversations focus on the topic of "Justifying faith and Baptism in the context of questions of the formation of faith". "In this way, it should be investigated afresh whether the concept of an 'initiation process' can adequately describe the connection between faith and baptism. It needs to be clarified whether and to what extent different baptismal theologies and practices are possible which are nevertheless judged to be in accordance with the gospel, or at least not contrary to the gospel."

- "The doctrinal conversations should examine whether an appropriate model of church communion can be developed for the Lutheran-Baptist context in Germany that does justice to the specific theological concerns and the different ecclesiological structures of both partners. The declaration of full church communion should be the goal of the talks. Concrete agreements 'on the way' that illustrate the fellowship that already exists in witness and service are essential steps towards this goal."[6]

[15] In the course of our work on these topics, it has become clear that further steps are needed for a joint reappraisal of the burdened history of Lutheran-Baptist relations. The burdens which encumber the mutual relationship have their theological origins in the condemnations of the so-called "Anabaptists" by the *Augsburg Confession* (*Confessio Augustana*; CA). This is

5 Loc.cit., p.2. Cf. the statements of the church leadership of the VELKD and the presidium of the BEFG on the BALUBAG convergence document, https://www.velkd.de/publikationen/publikationen-gesamtkatalog.php?publikation=331 [last accessed: 21-05-2023] and https://www.befg.de/medien-service/online-lesen/stellungnahmen/#c3283 [last accessed: 23-05-2023].

6 Weg und Ziel möglicher lutherisch-baptistischer Lehrgespräche (unpublished document of 03-06-2016), p. 3.

why these condemnations have always been the subject of discussion in the previous dialogues. In the first dialogue between the VELKD and the BEFG in West Germany in 1980/81, the Lutheran side declared that the condemnations of the CA did not apply to people's faith and that future theological discussions should clarify how and how far the present-day teaching of the BEFG correlated with the doctrines condemned at that time. The Baptist side regretted that the Lutheran side did not clearly renounce the persecution of the Anabaptists, which resulted from the condemnations of the CA.

[16] In East Germany, the partners came closer to one another. On the basis of the dialogue report 1982/83, the *Conference of Evangelical Church Leaders in the GDR* declared in 1984 that of the condemnations of the CA, only the statements of Article 9 (On Baptism) still applied to the congregations of the BEFG, but not in the sense of condemnation, but as a rejection of the opposing doctrinal view – a rejection pronounced in a spirit of brotherhood on the basis of the common bond to Holy Scripture. The church leaders further noted that the condemnations of Anabaptists in the CA led to thousands of cruel executions, imprisonments and banishments. The church leaders acknowledged this guilt before God and people and asked for forgiveness. The Federal Leadership of the BEFG in the GDR noted with satisfaction in its 1985 statement that the declaration of the Protestant church leaders 450 years after the *Confessio Augustana* publicly abolished the public repudiation of the Anabaptists. It accepted the request for forgiveness of the regional churches and confessed for its part that the Baptists had also depicted other churches in an unfair and distorting light, often forgetting the spiritual riches God had worked within the Protestant churches and ignoring Early Christian elements in other churches. "So, we also ask for forgiveness and reach out for reconciliation."[7]

[17] In the dialogue between the two global organisations between 1986 and 1989, the doctrinal condemnations of the CA were also discussed. The content of the dialogue report is very close to that of the report from the GDR, even down to identical wording. However, this international report was not officially accepted by the Lutherans and Baptists in Germany, nor were the mutual requests for forgiveness adopted. Since the *Federation of Evangelical Churches in the GDR* and the *Federation of Evangelical Free Churches in the GDR* no longer exist today, it is unclear where the VELKD and the BEFG stand today regarding the process of healing of memories which was initiated in the GDR.

[18] That is why the dialogue report between CPCE and EBF in 2005 was still able to ask the Lutheran churches to "clarify" the condemnations against the so-called "Anabaptists" contained in the CA.[8] The BALUBAG report published in 2009 also referred back to this. It states jointly that there is no direct theological and historical continuity between the Anabaptists of the 16th century and today's Baptist congregations. Insofar was an evaluation of baptism solely from the condemnations of the 16th century inappropriate. The Bavarian working group expressly adopts the confessions of guilt and pleas for forgiveness that were mutually expressed in the worldwide Lutheran-Baptist dialogue.

[19] In our hope that the present dialogue may result in a public reconciliation of Baptists and Lutherans in Germany for the healing of memories, we are encouraged by the reconciliation that has already taken place between Mennonites and Lutherans at the global level. This was achieved at the 11th Assembly of the *Lutheran World Federation* in Stuttgart in 2010 with the mutual request for forgiveness.

c. The social and ecclesial context of our doctrinal conversation

[20] Our doctrinal conversation on the topic of baptism, faith and church communion could not be limited to considering the convictions and traditions of both sides, but also had to put them into relation to today's social and ecclesial context. With the advancing secularisation of society, the Protestant churches now only make up a minority of Germany's population. In eastern Germany, their share of the population is even smaller than in western Germany.[9] But in

7 Wort und Tat. Arbeitsmaterial für den Pastor, Bund Evangelisch-Freikirchlicher Gemeinden in der DDR, No. 68 [1986], p. 63; Amtsblatt der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Landeskirche Sachsens 1986, No. 18 of 30-09-1986, Handreichungen für den kirchlichen Dienst B 71.

8 Dialogue between the EBF and CPCE (see note 3), p. 50.

9 The Evangelical Church in Germany currently has 19.15 mil-

other regions as well, it is noticeable that being a Christian is less and less customary, and is increasingly the result of a decision, a conscious confession. At the same time, most of the population has little understanding of the differences between the denominations, so that the Christian churches are perceived as a unity.

[21] However, social development also influences the churches' situation, in that church convictions and practices are becoming increasingly pluralised. This applies to both Lutheran and Baptist churches. There are more and more ways in which people can get involved in the activities of their local church. Even those who have not been baptised feel at home there, taking part in the services and other events. It is not uncommon for them to take part in the Lord's Supper. The Protestant regional churches are considering graded forms of membership. At the same time, the number of adult baptisms is growing. According to the EKD, the member churches performed 14,000 adult baptisms in 2019 (at the age of fourteen or more), alongside 146,000 infant baptisms. It is no longer a duty to have newborn children baptised, and it is becoming less and less the norm. Especially in the eastern German states, people are being baptised who have only come to faith as adolescents or adults. Baptist congregations are finding that people want to belong to them without sharing all the convictions normally held by Baptists. For example, not all members of the congregations reject infant baptism. It is therefore not uncommon for them to request admission to church membership without receiving believer's baptism. Quite a few local congregations have therefore followed the recommendation of the BEFG Presidium and expressly opened up in their constitution or statutes the possibility of becoming a member of the congregation without believer's baptism, but by a personal testimony of faith. A survey of congregations in 2010 showed that at that time about half of the congregations already had such a provision. The pluralisation in dealing with baptism that can be perceived in both Lutheran and Baptist churches could make it possible to overcome old dividing lines between Lutherans and Baptists in terms of baptismal theology.

lion members (as of 31-12-2022, statistical projection). Source: https://www.ekd.de/statistik-kirchenmitglieder-17279.htm [last accessed: 15-05-2023].

II A common understanding of church communion

1. Introduction and explanation of the model of initiation

a. Preliminary remark

[22] To be a Christian means being on the way. According to the Book of Acts, the expression "those who are on the Way" or simply "the Way" was one of the earliest designations of Christian groups (cf. Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14f.). In the letter to the Hebrews, too, the Christian community is on the way through time into eternity (cf. Heb 10:13-16, 13:13f.). The "wandering (or pilgrim) people of God" was adopted as a biblical metaphor by renewal movements in various phases of church history (among others in mysticism and Pietism) and led to characteristic expressions of spirituality. The same applies to the idea of following Jesus, which was rediscovered as an innovative and non-conformist concept of the life of faith and existential orientation and was implemented or attempted in different historical contexts. Thus, the idea of being on a journey as a Christian also came to be the *leitmotif* of our dialogue.

[23] Our dialogue group was conscious of being embedded in a long history of ecumenical encounters between anabaptist and Lutheran churches. We were not starting from scratch, but could draw on understandings that had already been reached (see Part I, Introduction). Our group, whose members had already taken part in many dialogues, was characterised by a marked sensitivity in this regard. In our deliberations, we repeatedly referred to our own journeys of life and faith, whereby our ecumenical experiences made us well aware of the controversial theological positions on baptism. Thus, we focussed neither on the theological profiling of traditional doctrines nor on the insistence on immutable denominational identity markers. Rather, it was our conviction that an understanding of ways towards being Christian cannot be reached without paying attention to biographical components and differing life contexts. We therefore shared with one another the course of our own journeys to Christian faith and how we are currently shaping our lives as followers of Christ. Such basic experiences formed a hermeneutical key for our dialogue, whereby we were also guided by the recognition of what had

already been achieved in previous dialogues. In this process, the idea of initiation gained particular significance.

b. What does initiation mean, and what ecumenical potential does it contain?

[24] The idea of an initiation process was already highly relevant in earlier dialogues between Baptist churches and churches practising infant baptism (see Part I, Introduction). This is especially true with regard to a possible common understanding on the question of baptism. Initiation is understood as the path to becoming a Christian and to church membership over several stages, a path which had already been developed in the Early Church (catechumenate) and underwent many further developments and differentiations in the course of church history. The practice of infant baptism led to serious changes in the process of becoming a Christian, whereby confirmation and the forms of Christian instruction connected with it were able to replace the period of preparation for baptism.

[25] The impetus for a new or re-discovery of Christian initiation as a process came from the ecumenical movement in the context of baptismal dialogues that had come to a standstill due to traditional controversies on the question of baptism. The rediscovery of the common heritage regarding the process of initiation detracted from deadlocked discussions about the right age for baptism, whether it comes before or after coming to faith, or the theology of baptism and its uniqueness as event, and led to the realisation that the paths to Christianity always consist of several elements, one of which is the act of baptism. The catechetical heritage of church history attests to initiation as a process, a journey or path, which can extend over longer periods of time and encompass various rituals or sacraments.

[26] The elements designated by the term "initiation" for different stages or milestones of becoming a Christian may differ. A study by *Faith and Order* from 2011 on baptismal recognition lists the following components:

"Christian initiation refers to a process that begins with hearing the Gospel and confessing the faith, continues with formation in faith (catechesis), leads to baptism, resulting in the incorporation of the baptized into the Christian community, marked by the sharing of the eucharistic meal."[10]

[27] The journey to being a Christian was notably expanded in the ecumenical dialogues by their emphasis on the discipleship character of the whole Christian life, which is understood as a lifelong process. The rediscovery of initiation process of the Early Church inspired the bilateral dialogues between anabaptist churches and those that also practise infant baptism. This was linked to the hope that mutual recognition of the process of initiation, a central element of which is baptism, would also imply mutual recognition of baptism. It became clear that the difference in baptismal practice and the related understanding of baptism has so far prevented mutual recognition, even though there are far-reaching commonalities in baptismal theology, which have been emphasised again and again.

[28] However, against the background of different paths towards and in being a Christian, the alternative of infant baptism or believer's baptism is not so strict. Baptism no longer stands isolated at the centre of the dialogues, but is embedded in a lifelong perspective. The conclusion of the BALUBAG document contains an analogous argument:

"Christian initiation is therefore to be regarded as a thoroughly complex, shorter or longer process of personal appropriation of faith, in which baptism can be either the beginning or the end."[11]

[29] The theological interpretation of the initiation process by the Baptist theologian Paul Fiddes was particularly influential in various dialogues.[12] For him, in all elements of the initiation process there is an interplay between the working of divine grace and the response of the human being in faith. The relation and significance of God's grace with regard to its reception in people's faith are different in the different phases of the initiation process. One can also

10 One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition, Faith and Order Paper No. 210, World Council of Churches, Geneva 2011, p. 2.

11 BALUBAG report (see note 4), p. 17.

12 Paul S. Fiddes, Baptism and the Process of Christian Initiation, in S. E. Porter and A. R. Cross (eds.), Dimensions of Baptism. Biblical and Theological Studies (Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series 234), Sheffield 2002, pp. 280-303.

understand this process as God's creative movement towards humanity and humanity's trusting movement towards God in response. The initiation process thus forms the connection between each individual's gracious encounter with God, their personal confession of Jesus Christ and their incorporation into the Christian community. All these elements of the initiation process are not isolated events, but belong together and in their togetherness open up life as a Christian, the lifelong, dynamic implementation of faith and discipleship.

[30] On this basis, those involved in our dialogue consider an understanding about the process of Christian initiation to be suitable and meaningful concept in order to overcome the firmly set respective theological positions on baptism and to transform them into creative, dialectical tensions. It was helpful in this context that we no longer adhered solely to the controversies about the biblical priority of believer's baptism, the lack of biblical justification for infant baptism, or the validity of infant baptism. Instead, we were able to perceive, describe and respect the two differing forms of baptism from the perspective of the initiation process. In our discourse, the two baptismal practices no longer confront each other head-on as irreconcilable alternatives, but are seen as varying paths of Christian initiation, which can include the different baptismal practices of our churches. Different interpretations of the various forms of baptism and the theological interpretations associated with them need not be denied, nor does their recognition necessarily jeopardise one's own position. Rather, the process of Christian initiation seen as a frame offers the possibility, regarding the recognition of the whole process, to draw attention to such differences and to appreciate them in their positive meaning.

c. The path of knowledge taken by our dialogue commission

[31] As mentioned, we used the personal biographies of the members of the dialogue commission as the backdrop to our reflections. In contrast to other dialogues that have considered the idea of Christian initiation directly as the basis for a mutual recognition of baptism, we wanted to explore the potential of the idea of initiation in order to be able to make joint statements about paths towards and while being Christians. To this end, we first reflected our own paths to Christianity in their various stages and dimensions. In bilateral denominational groups we wanted to get to the bottom of the controversies surrounding baptism by trying to describe, analyse and make fruitful the elements and stages of initiation on the basis of our denominational traditions and personal experiences (see II 3. Paths towards and in being a Christian; in a more detailed version the results of the working groups were integrated into the text "Paths to being a Christian. Initiation into the Christian life" [see below]).

[32] We hope that in this way the traditional controversies about the scriptural and proper sequence of faith and baptism can be overcome. It is precisely the differences in the concrete form of the various elements of this process, the differing attitudes to their dependence on each other, and the relationship between them that require theological clarification. We asked ourselves whether the process of becoming a Christian, according to both Baptist and Lutheran understanding, may allow different but not mutually exclusive conceptions to apply, which in their entirety and in their mutual relation to each other correspond to the gospel to which we are jointly committed. It became clear that the sequence of the various elements on the path towards and while being a Christian is not fixed from the outset, but can be shaped differently on the grounds of biographic circumstances, life experiences or the respective denominational tradition of understanding the gospel. Therefore, when it comes to mutual recognition of baptism, one should not concentrate on the individual elements of the initiation process, but on the process as a whole, in which baptism can find its place at different places and times.

[33] In our joint work, we did not merely follow the academic research on the controversial theological tradition, but in particular the heuristic model proposed by Paul Fiddes with the aim of working out the interplay or relation of grace and faith at the stages or elements of the initiation process. The concrete positions worked out in the dialogue were not based on an ideal image of the respective church, but on the empirical observation of church life in its everyday reality. The historical changes in the understanding of baptism and the changes in the significance and celebration of various rituals on the way to baptism or after baptism (including catechesis before and after baptism,

baptismal recollection, confirmation) were also taken into account. The aim of this stage in the work of our commission was not primarily to assess the dogmatic and denominational coherence of the church practice to be observed or the typological comparison of different points of view, but rather to screen and translate the respective practices in order to make it easier to comprehend their notional concepts and to understand the respective practice and its problems. In the process, we were able to discover "along the way" some of the advantages of the expressions of faith used by other denominations. We were trying to describe the elements of the initiation process in such a way that — in spite of all different accentuation — it would be possible for both sides to gain a mutual appreciation of their respective different paths to the Christian faith.

[34] Nevertheless, the theological foundations of the understanding of baptism in the respective Lutheran and Baptist traditions could not be neglected in our dialogue. Rather, they had to be analysed and held in esteem with regard to an understanding on baptism on the way to church communion between Baptists and Lutherans. In the process, an extensive body of common theological insights emerged, which gave the agreements reached with regard to the Christian initiation process a solid basis.

2. Common theological foundations

a. Theological commonalities

The common understanding of the gospel (consentire de doctrina evangelii)

[35] The VELKD and the BEFG recognise each other as churches which agree in their understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ as testified in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Their spiritual fellowship is rooted in this common understanding of the gospel, which must also find expression in the fellowship of their churches with each other. The basis of this fellowship is the conviction that the one Church of Jesus Christ on earth and all its members receive their life from God's love for humanity and his mercy towards sinners. God's love for us enables and enjoins our love as Christians for one another. "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another." (1 John 4:10f.) This love can also overcome divergent church traditions and differences in doctrine and church practice.

The mutually recognised celebration of the Lord's Supper (communio sanctorum)

[36] The VELKD and the BEFG mutually recognise the Holy Communion celebrated in their congregations as a valid celebration of the Lord's Supper according to the commission of Jesus Christ and the testimony of the New Testament. They experience and testify that in the communion celebrations of both churches the risen Jesus Christ is present in his church and in it establishes healing fellowship with one another. In this sense, Baptists and Lutherans are and experience themselves as a communion of saints and partakers of the gifts of salvation (*communio sanctorum*).

God's gracious work and the faith of the baptised as the theological basis of the baptismal event (faith as a gift)

[37] In baptism, God's sovereign and loving kindness to the world (Jn 3:16) can be experienced by each individual baptised person, whether great or small, in the community of the church. In their baptism services, the VELKD and the BEFG experience this spiritual event as God's healing action towards human beings and gratefully receive faith as God's gift. The presentation of God's gift and its reception by humans cannot be separated from each other. With the *European Dialogue Report* we can affirm together: "Faith will always simultaneously appear as a gracious gift of God and as an act of the individual believer."[13] Both churches can agree that in the baptismal practice of the other church, even if the underlying theology of baptism has different emphases, God's loving kindness towards humanity finds its visible expression.[14]

13 On the Doctrine and Practice of Baptism (see note 3), p. 18.

14 Cf. for example Martin Luther in the Small Catechism (IV.3)): "Certainly not just water, but the word of God in and with the water does these things, along with the faith which trusts this word of God in the water. For without God's word the water is plain water and no baptism. But with the word of God it is a baptism, that is, a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit." Concordia Publishing House https://catechism.cph.org/en/sacrament-of-holy-bap-

b. Deepening the understanding of the church

The Church as creature of the Word of God (creatura verbi)

[38] The life of the Church of Jesus Christ is grounded and remains rooted in the Word event testified in Holy Scripture. In this sense, the Church is and remains a "creature" of the Word of God (*creatura verbi)*. The starting point of the Church's journey is the coming of Jesus, the Son of God, to this world in which God reveals himself salvifically to his creation, to his people Israel and to all human beings. The foundation of faith laid once and for all in the Christ event unites our churches with one another in the common confession of the triune God.

The journey of the Church through time (Community of the Way)

[39] Like every individual Christian, the Church is on a journey. It has not yet reached its destination, but it is also no longer at the beginning of its journey. Christians today, when they reflect on the reason and the goal of their faith, look back to the origin of the Church in the Christ event testified in Holy Scripture, and to the paths it has taken and been led along by God in the course of time. They look ahead with hope and in the certainty of their faith to the consummation of creation and humanity thanks to the mercy of God as promised to them in the gospel. And in their present environment they look to see how they can serve their neighbours and bear witness to the world of the hope that is in them, as they are charged to do through the crucified and risen Jesus Christ.

[40] In all this, Christians who belong to the VELKD and the BEFG are on the way together today. Their fellowship as Christians and churches on the way finds its biblical model in the fellowship of Jesus' disciples between Easter and the Ascension, as exemplified in the Gospel of Luke in the story of the disciples at Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35): The disciples come from Jerusalem, where Jesus had been crucified and was raised from the dead. They have heard what happened there, but they still lack living and enlivening faith. Only in the encounter with the risen Jesus, who opens their eyes and loosens their tongues, are they endowed with the faith that makes them Easter witnesses. Thus, moved by Jesus in their hearts and called to conversion, they return to the community of the apostles in Jerusalem and join with them in becoming witnesses to the gospel for all humankind.

[41] The fellowship of the apostles in proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ is exemplified at the end of the Gospel of Luke and at the beginning of Acts (cf. Lk 24:36-49; Acts 1:6-8). This fellowship of the apostles, which also proves itself in the dispute over the truth of the gospel (cf. Gal 2:1-10; 1 Cor 15:1-11), is the narrative model for the fellowship of the churches on their way through history, in the present day and in the promise of their salvific consummation. In this way, the New Testament points to the historical origin of the unity of the church with its risen Lord and to the goal of its journey in communion with the triune God. This picture represents how our churches today are also jointly on the journey from Easter towards the completion of the one body of Christ in God's kingdom. They have a common history full of shared joys and sufferings, but also of painful divisions and mutual injuries. They have not yet reached their goal as a visibly united body of Christ, but presently resemble Jesus' disciples on the road between Emmaus and Jerusalem and from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8); they, too, have doubts and hope, sadness and confidence, memories and questions, but are ready to have their eyes opened by Jesus today as well, and to find living faith.

[42] On this common journey through time, the VELKD and the BEFG are seeking fellowship today. We can only be travelling companions in church communion if our churches confirm their common origin in the Christ event, if they share their hope of consummation in the one body of Christ and if they experience the present as the place in time where their common witness to Jesus Christ is needed, heard and believed.

[43] Such church communion on the way will have to be reflected and experienced in the journeys of life and faith taken by the members of our churches. The travelling companionship of our churches can also include discussions and divergences, as long as they remain anchored in the common understanding of the gospel. On our common journeys as churches we are confronted with open questions for which we seek answers jointly in the light of the gospel.

tism.html [accessed 27-11-2023].

[44] The critical question posed by the risen Christ to the two Emmaus disciples also applies to us and our churches today. Jesus' question reveals the narrow limits of our understanding, also of our church denominations and our theology. But at the same time, it also brings us back to the common ground of our faith: "O how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" (Lk 24:25f.)

Churches are on the way to the people together (martyria, koinonia, leiturgia, diakonia)

[45] Our churches agree that the Church of Jesus Christ proves its life in proclaiming the gospel (*martyria*), in common worship in word and sacrament (*koinonia* and *leiturgia*), in the love of the neighbours and in witness and service to the world (*diakonia*). They are united in the understanding that the gospel of Jesus Christ is not only fundamental and vital for themselves, but is intended to be an appealing and healing Word of the living God for all people. Members of our churches experience the fellowship of faith in their worship services, where they gather to pray together and give praise to God, to hear the gospel and celebrate the Lord's Supper. The members and organisations of our churches also work together in diaconal tasks at home and abroad. Such expressions of life connect us with other churches on the way.

Experience church fellowship[15]

[46] Church fellowship which corresponds to the inner, spiritual life of the one Church of Jesus Christ is not merely the object of official declarations or agreements. It can be discovered, may be experienced and should be shaped, and it needs to be deepened in the ecclesial expressions of the life of congregations and their members. We as VELKD and BEFG seek ways to deepen our church fellowship, trusting in the risen and present Christ to open our eyes and let us experience his fellowship on our common journey. The closer we as churches come to our Lord, the closer we come to each other; if we are one with him, we are one with each other.

c. Perspectives on Baptism

Baptism as a constitutive part of church existence

[47] Baptism is a constitutive part of church existence (Mt 28:16-20). Our churches agree on this. Baptism in the sense of an initiation event incorporates people into the one Church of Jesus Christ, bringing them into the community of those who believe in Jesus Christ. There is also agreement between our churches that the incorporation of people into the one Church of Jesus Christ and their inclusion in the community of believers through baptism forms the start of a lifelong journey in faith.

Diversity of contemporary baptismal practice and the Church's mission command

[48] This unity in basic views on baptism stands in contrast to a diversity of baptismal practices obtaining at present in our churches. Today, it can no longer be reduced to the distinction between the Baptist believer's baptism and the Lutheran infant baptism. In their current baptismal practices, both churches are seeking ways to express the full meaning of baptism and at the same time to meet the challenges of the modern ecclesial and social situation.

[49] We recognise together that the origin of Christian baptism according to the witness of the New Testament and the historical baptismal practice of the churches allow different models to be derived for the practice of baptism in our churches today. Not infrequently in the history of our churches, changes in baptismal practice have resulted from missionary challenges or sociological-historical circumstances. Thus, the baptismal practice of the churches has often changed in the course of history without allowing us to question from today's perspective the basic validity of the baptisms performed in our churches through the centuries.

Church communion and understanding of baptism

[50] With regard to the basic theological statements on baptism, we can identify essential commonalities without overlooking differences in the understanding of baptism, which are also

15 The German text speaks here of "Kirchengemeinschaft". This does not indicate full church communion, such as exists in the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE), but rather the specific form of "church communion on the way" described in this document.

reflected in differing baptismal practice. We agree that full church communion would require mutual recognition of the respective baptismal practice and the understanding of baptism reflected in it. In this respect, we are still on the way to full unity.

d. Perspectives on church life today

External questions on our common existence as Church

[51] The current challenges and possibilities of church life in our increasingly secularised society in Germany now make the confessional controversies about baptism that we have inherited appear in a different, maybe fading light. That Christian people belong together regardless of their denomination and church affiliation is perceived nowadays by outsiders more strongly than the corresponding declared self-understanding of the churches, whether in a positive or negative sense. This could also open up potential in the search for church communion on the way.

Internal hopes for our common existence as Church

[52] Today, many people attach much more importance to personal faith convictions and individual decisions of conscience than to church guidelines or fundamental theological statements. In view of differences between our churches in the understanding of baptism, this must also be taken into account as we search for church communion. Any declarations of our churches on church communion and the resulting regulations for baptism must respect the conscience of those who want to live their faith in church fellowship, which is important in searching for concrete, jointly justifiable statements on the question of baptism.

Certainty of faith expressed by our common existence as Church

[53] In their life of faith, the baptised experience the fulfilment of the promise of the living, triune God. With their baptism they have been called and incorporated into communion with God and with one another. By travelling together in the fellowship of their churches, they testify to their certainty of faith. In this way, Christ's presence is felt in his community as the foundation of their faith.

[54] On the basis of the reflection of our different personal experiences on our paths to Christianity, and thanks to our insights into our common theological foundations in the understanding of baptism and the church, we have taken a new look at the practice and theology of baptism in the context of the paths towards and while being a Christian in our churches. In doing so, we were able to get a clearer perception and a better understanding of the denominational profiles of Baptist and Lutheran traditions; at the same time we were able to see what we had in common and gain new insight into our mutually complementary and enriching emphases in the theology and practice of baptism.

3. Paths towards and while being a Christian

[55] As a dialogue commission, we have described four elements of the initiation process which we jointly regard as constitutive: a. Infant baptism or child dedication, b. Hearing the gospel, c. Believer's baptism or confirmation, d. Discipleship and living by faith (cf. in more detail the text "Paths to being a Christian. Initiation into the Christian life").

a. Infant baptism or child dedication

[56] When thinking about elements of the Christian initiation process, the basic biographical orientation leads to the beginning of human life in childhood. In both denominational traditions there are rituals that place children and their families under God's blessing, accompany them spiritually and introduce them to life in the Christian community.

Infant baptism

[57] In Lutheran churches baptism stands traditionally – though no longer exclusively – at the beginning of human life, and thus of Christian life. Baptism in general, and thus also the baptism of children, is understood from the Lutheran point of view primarily as God's action that unfolds in several dimensions. The central aspect of this is God's grace, which is granted to the person being baptised without any action on their part and without any preconditions (*gratia praeveniens/preceding grace*). God's unconditional kindness becomes particularly visible in the baptism of infants.

[58] Even if the salvation promised by God is not dependent on a person's faith, faith is of central importance for baptism according to Lutheran understanding as well. The baptism of a child is connected with the certainty that it is God who gives faith, and that it is the task of parents, godparents and the congregation to accompany the person baptised as he or she grows into faith.

[59] Baptism means incorporation into the body of Christ, i.e. into the Church as the communion of saints (*communio sanctorum),* and in the German Lutheran context also into the respective regional church as it is constituted as an institution.

[60] There is no doubt that the Lutheran understanding of the baptism of children centres on God's inaccessible act of grace. However, faith and baptism belong inseparably together, as is demonstrated by the reference to parents and godparents as helpers and companions on the path to faith, even if it is only later that the person baptised makes a profession of faith.

Child dedication

[61] At the beginning of human life, members of Baptist congregations usually have their child dedicated at a church service shortly after the birth. The essence of child dedication is understood to be an act of benediction, accompanied by thanksgiving and intercession. The prayers for the child and the parents focus on the hope that the child may find its way to faith, baptism and Christian fellowship. This blessing is bestowed as a gracious promise of divine assistance.

Regarding the first element in the initiation process, we can state jointly:

- [62] In infant baptism as well as in child dedication, the aspect of grace becomes visible in the sense of God's unconditional love of the newborn child. In this sense, Baptists and Lutherans can speak of a grace that precedes the step to belief (*gratia praeveniens*), and this finds expression in the respective ritual.

- Baptists and Lutherans agree that infant baptism, like child dedication, aims at spiritual growth towards and in faith.

- In infant baptism and child dedication, the promise is expressed that it is God himself who leads and accompanies people on their path of growth in faith. The *aspect of faith* is therefore present in both acts. It is represented both by the faith of the parents (with godparents) and by the congregation or church that is present.

- Both in infant baptism and in child dedication, the *fellowship aspect* of the *communio sanctorum* is visible. Here, too, it is represented in both acts by the presence of parents (with godparents) and the gathered church.

Differences / accentuations

- [63] Baptists and Lutherans agree that infant baptism and child dedication share an ecclesiologically connective aspect of fellowship. The difference lies however in the fact that by infant baptism the child is already received into the body of Christ and becomes a member of the institutional church before it has made its profession of faith, whereas child dedication does not yet make the child a member of the body of Christ, nor does it therefore belong to the church. Nevertheless, in Baptist congregations, children also participate in the life of the local congregation and in suitable events offered to them.

- The baptism of infants and young children means that there is a long interval of time between the reception of baptismal grace and their response in faith.

b. Hearing the gospel

[64] In both traditions, hearing the gospel is constitutive for the reception of faith and the appropriation of the gospel in faith. In our description of biographical development on the road to becoming a Christian, it was natural for us to deal with the growth of children and young people into the faith they experience in the church or local congregation.

Hearing the gospel in a Baptist context

[65] Corresponding to the principle of congregationalism, according to which the church is the assembly of only those who join voluntari-

ly on the basis of their personal faith, the Baptists understand that a personal and reciprocal relationship with God is constitutive for church membership. Therefore, the element of hearing the gospel, which should lead to appropriation in faith, is of great importance (cf. Rom 10:17). With the help of age-specific congregational activities, Bible study groups, preaching, various types of evangelisation and other opportunities for getting to know the Christian faith, people are encouraged to experience and discover faith personally. That is considered to be the prerequisite for receiving believer's baptism, which is at the same time admission as a member of the congregation.

Hearing the gospel in the Lutheran context

[66] In the Lutheran churches, hearing the gospel and the sermon at church are also of central importance. The proclamation of the Word takes place in sermon and catechesis, in the joint recitation of the creed as well as in the celebration of the sacraments as a "visible word" (*verbum visibile*). The godparents know that until confirmation of the baptised child they are responsible, together with the parents, for ensuring that the child becomes acquainted with the Christian faith. Proclamation of the gospel which is appropriate to various age groups, church music and Christian art also belong to the central forms of expression of congregational life.

[67] Hearing the gospel also takes place in various forms and practices which are not always connected with congregations. The culture of the Lutheran denomination offers a broad range of opportunities for encountering the gospel, whether in art, in education (for school children or adults), or in music and literature.

Regarding the second element in the initiation process, we can state jointly:

[68] For both churches, hearing the gospel is a constitutive condition for receiving faith. "Lutherans and Baptists agree that the salvation wrought by Jesus Christ is mediated by the word of the gospel, which promises the grace of Christ and the forgiveness of sins. According to biblical witness, this word is directed towards responding faith."[16]

16 BALUBAG report (see note 4), section 3.4., p. 8f.

Differences / accentuations

- [69] In the Lutheran context, hearing the gospel does not always aim in the same way as for the Baptists at a specific individual experience and a conscious turning to Christ, manifested in a continuous personal relationship. For Lutherans, hearing the gospel is more often experienced as becoming part of a larger community which – in spite of existential questioning – offers support and space for manifold experiences of God's grace.

- For Baptists, the personal dimension of the appropriation of salvation is important, which occurs in conversion and baptism as a believing acceptance of the Word and is also reflected in the personal conduct of life through the power of the Holy Spirit. For Lutherans, the focus is more on the appropriation of salvation through the proclaimed Word, which produces faith and becomes creatively active in people's lives.

- Traditionally, Baptists emphasise the maturity of each individual who, having received faith, decides to be baptised and to become a member of the congregation. In Lutheranism, the emphasis is more on the community that has been created by the Word and is united in confession, opening room for God's presence in the world, and not so much on the individual believers who join the congregation by virtue of their decision in faith.

- These different emphases are not exclusively contrary to one another. When it comes to the element of listening to the gospel as an element on the path to Christianity, both traditions can be productive in challenging, enriching and complementing each other.

c. Believer's baptism or confirmation

[70] The third element of the path to becoming a Christian leads us biographically to the age of adolescence and religious maturity. Baptist churches hope people will come to be baptised at this age. However, believer's baptism or baptism of consent is not restricted to this stage of life, but can in principle take place at any time when a person is willing and able to desire and give consent to baptism and to profess their faith. In both traditions, the personal claim to

faith and its confession in public belong to this phase of life, in which one also assumes responsibility and brings one's charisms into the life of the church.

Confirmation in the Lutheran context

[71] Confirmation was introduced in Lutheran churches in the 16th century as a ritual to confirm one's baptism and to confess one's faith in public. It is closely connected with baptism, for it brings to a conclusion the confirming action of the congregation, which began with baptism. Today, confirmation is accompanied by a catechumenate, an introduction into the self-understanding and practice of the church and an opportunity to become familiar with the Christian faith. When the candidates express their commitment to the Christian faith, there is a link back to their baptism, because the ceremony serves to confirm their baptism. Confirmation offers a suitable ritual space for the acceptance of baptism in faith.

Believer's baptism in the Baptist context

[72] From the outset, Christian baptism has never been self-baptism, but is performed on the baptised person on God's behalf. This makes it recognisable as a gift of God, assuring God's grace to the candidate. According to Baptist understanding, baptism is an affirmation both of God's promise that he accepts believers as his children and heirs and of the baptised persons' promise that they are willing to live a life of faith in Jesus Christ, in love of God and their neighbour, and in the hope of eternal life. Therefore, baptism takes place "upon the confession of faith". With baptism, a person thus makes the commitment to a life as a disciple of Jesus Christ. This mutual promise of God and the baptised persons leads them to enter into God's covenant with his congregation, which is eternally valid on God's side. Since baptism represents the entry of the human being into the covenant with God, it can also be understood as an encounter between God's grace and a human's faith. Baptism is therefore a gift of God to the person being baptised and at the same time a faithful acceptance of this gift. Through baptism, the baptised person is added to the Christian community as God's covenant people.

Regarding the third element in the initiation process, we can state jointly:

- [73] On the way to being a Christian and the paths taken while being a Christian, the personal appropriation of faith and its expression in a public confession are essential for both traditions. In Lutheran churches, the public confession of the faith of those baptised as children takes place at confirmation. In Baptist churches it is an elementary part of baptism itself (believer's baptism). Confirmation confirms the process that began in infant baptism. For both churches, the reception of baptismal grace and the confessing response of the baptised belong together inseparably, even if they take place at different times in the Lutheran churches.

- Baptists and Lutherans agree that baptism is a solemn act instituted by Jesus Christ and performed on the person being baptised on God's behalf. It is a gift of God that promises the grace of God to the baptised. Lutherans and Baptists together recognise that baptism also involves the binding acceptance of God's grace in faith by those baptised.

- Confirmation and believers' baptism also have a constitutive ecclesiological dimension. Those who are baptised or confirmed become mature members of the congregation with particular rights and duties. For both Baptists and Lutherans, church membership is linked to baptism and not to confirmation.

Differences / accentuations

- [74] The clearest difference is in the time interval between baptism and personal confession. It results from the respective accentuations of the way baptism is presented and ritually celebrated.

- Lutheran churches baptise both mature people and infants and regard this as one and the same baptism. In the case of infant baptism, baptism and the personal acceptance of baptism (confirmation) take place at different phases in life but remain related to each other.

- In Lutheran churches, baptism performed on a child is considered valid even if it is

not confirmed by confirmation. Nevertheless, Lutherans also emphasise that baptism aims at active acceptance in faith, and they commit parents, godparents and congregations to work towards this.

- The Baptist form of baptism seeks to take different aspects of faith (recognition, assent, trust) into account and thus illustrate how grace and faith are interwoven: trusting in God's grace, people publicly commit themselves in baptism to that which has become life truth for them. In their witness at baptism, they tell the congregation what they have come to recognise through the Holy Spirit as the truth of the gospel. This confession made at the baptismal service shows their free and voluntary assent to belonging irrevocably to God henceforth. The three aspects are made visible in the practice of baptism by immersion, which follows the confession of faith (cf. Rom 6).

- Lutheran practice places special emphasis on the fact that God's grace precedes all human achievements and decisions. Since children are baptised long before their confirmation, the candidates can then assure themselves of the grace already promised to them in baptism. The period of confirmation classes is a time of maturing and enquiring, in which they question themselves and the Christian faith. They become aware that the work of God's grace does not depend on the stability of their personal faith, but on the truth expressed in their confession.

- In view of the relationship between faith and baptism, which is expressed in different ways by both traditions, these agreements could contribute to overcoming earlier controversies about the chronological order of baptism and confession. A prerequisite for this is respect for the theological concern of the baptismal practice of the other party, which includes aspects of the truth of the gospel.

d. Discipleship, living by faith

[75] This element in the path to being a Christian differs from the previous ones in that it demonstrates the lifelong dimension of Christian existence, regardless of age, phases and crises. The path *towards* faith develops into the path *within* faith. Discipleship can therefore be described as the goal of the path towards being a Christian and at the same time as the beginning of a new, continuing path, understood as a lifelong vocation and process.

Discipleship in the Baptist context

[76] In Baptist congregations, discipleship plays a central role as a mark of the visible congregation of believers. In Reformation times, the Anabaptists referred to Romans 6, seeing baptism primarily as a sign of the commitment to a life lived according to the standards of Jesus' teaching (e.g. Sermon on the Mount) and God's commandments. The consistent orientation towards Jesus, which has to prove itself in the life of the individual(s) and gives rise to nonconforming behaviour, was long regarded as a criterion which distinguished them from the majority churches. The ecclesiological self-understanding of Baptist congregations is also based on the fundamental idea of the covenant, which, analogous to the idea of the covenant in the Old Testament, obliges believers to be obedient to God and to fellowship with one another.

[77] Followers of Jesus are certain of their reconciliation with God, experience peace and joy with God and the comfort of the gospel in difficult phases of life. Initiation into the Christian faith brings people into the community of believers who are highly committed to living and actively shaping their faith before God and with one another. The idea is that every member should employ their natural and spiritual gifts for the edification of the whole congregation. This presupposes that all believers have a basic knowledge of Holy Scripture through personal and group Bible study, in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of the gospel and Christian doctrine in and through the Bible. For this reason, Baptists emphasise that discipleship is formed in a Christian life of personal responsibility. They see themselves challenged to self-examination and orientation on the basis of Holy Scripture. In caring fellowship, the congregation should encourage and guide each of its individual members to live a life as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Discipleship in the Lutheran context

[78] The Lutheran tradition is characterised by its reliance on the grace of God which, through

the Holy Spirit, works faith, love and hope in each individual. The daily repentance needed by every Christian is understood as a constant return to baptism. The Lutheran tradition assumes that the individual belongs to the communion of saints and the priesthood of all the baptised, whereby the concrete form of this double relationship in fellowship and service has to be determined in more detail.

[79] The Lutheran churches have developed social forms in congregational contexts in which a dynamic faith practice helps people to follow the path to spirituality and wholeness, which goes beyond church institutions and relies on the support of Christian upbringing in the family or the accompaniment by godparents up to confirmation and beyond. However, these social forms are currently clearly losing their influence.

[80] The relation between God and humanity, which Christians come to know through the believing encounter with God's Word, shapes faith down to the deepest layer of human sentiments in the form of love, mercy and righteousness and promotes the development of a Christian conscience. The development of conscience through Christian upbringing corresponds to a faith practice that transfers such orientation into the spiritual practice of the fellowship and the individuals. Lutheran churches have a rich tradition of catechetical elements that serve both the acquisition of knowledge and the introduction to Christian practice.

[81] In addition to practised spirituality and the celebration of the Lord's Supper, baptismal initiation as discipleship also extends to the development of social behaviour in keeping with religious convictions. These dimensions of faith equip those who are baptised to face the challenges with which they are confronted in a religiously and ideologically plural world, giving them assurance of faith, confidence and love for their neighbours.

Regarding the fourth element in the initiation process, we can state jointly:

- [82] Baptists and Lutherans assume that it is God himself who brings people into relationship with himself and therefore also calls them to discipleship. The relationship with God is expressed in personal spirituality, in church services, in the cultivation of spiritual fellowship, in diaconal action and in witnessing to the faith (*leiturgia, koinonia, diakonia, martyria*).

- This shows that faith is a comprehensive, holistic life movement. Baptists and Lutherans share the view that the element of initiation to discipleship describes that phase in which the path towards faith changes consecutively into a continuous journey in faith.

- Baptists and Lutherans therefore both understand discipleship as a constitutive element in the journey of faith.

Differences / accentuations

- [83] The more detailed description of what is to be understood by discipleship in practical terms is marked by theological characteristics which are typical for the denominations, but that does not mean that they are exclusively contrary to one another. The differences can be understood as complementary descriptions of the same thing, supported by a common view of the essential points of view.

e. Conclusion

[84] The reflections presented here on the process of becoming a Christian make it clear that far-reaching theological agreements exist between Baptists and Lutherans – also in the understanding and practice of baptism. These agreements are so comprehensive that both sides can appreciate the remaining differences in their concerns as enrichment and recognise them as challenges to their own tradition.

[85] The above-mentioned agreements in the understanding of Christian initiation make it clear that the traditional controversies about the validity or mutual recognition of baptism can be overcome if the different forms of baptism are located within a comprehensive process of becoming a Christian and being a Christian. In this context, baptism is not seen as a biographically isolated event, but as the beginning of a lifelong journey. This can also overcome the asymmetry that exists between Baptists and Lutherans on the question of baptism, given that the Lutheran churches already

unreservedly recognise the Baptist believer's baptism as valid, while Baptists do not recognise Lutheran infant baptism because of the necessity of faith.

[86] In our understanding of Holy Scripture, the chronological order of the elements on the way to becoming a Christian does not have to be regarded as immutable. However, the constitutive connection between faith and baptism is normative, since biblical witness makes the primacy of God's act of grace as well as the necessity of a personal response of faith on the part of the baptised binding for both churches. Therefore, Baptists can also recognise initiation that begins with infant baptism if it is followed by the baptised person's personal confession of faith, based on hearing the gospel, and a life as disciple of Jesus. The same applies on the part of the Lutherans to the Baptist path to being a Christian, which begins with child dedication followed by believer's baptism on the basis of a personal confession of faith and the consequential commitment to a life of discipleship.

[87] The churches involved in the dialogue thus mutually recognise both paths to becoming a Christian as being in accordance with the gospel, despite different ecclesiological concepts and lasting differences in baptismal practice. We regard this mutual recognition of the paths to Christianity (initiations) as a sustainable bridge on the way to church communion.

4. Baptism and church communionon the way

a. Description of the model of church communion on the way

[88] On the basis of the mutual recognition that different paths to Christianity are each in accordance with the Gospel, our churches can respect the differences that continue to exist in baptismal theology and in the shaping of the initiation process and the related practice of baptism, and they see no reason why these differences should continue to come between them on their common journey. We agree that, according to the testimony of the Bible, God's gracious action in the Christ event and the human response in faith awakened by it are recognisably at the centre of Christian initiation and determine its goal, while the sequence of elements on the way to becoming a Christian is not normatively prescribed.

[89] In our dialogue, we have intensively examined those features in the understanding and practice of baptism in our churches which form their identity. As a result of this renewed in-depth study of commonalities and differences in the understanding and practice of baptism, we have come to the conviction that these differences do not have to hinder our companionship on the way, as long as they can be understood as an expression of fellowship in diversity. The question of the different paths towards and while being a Christian has led us to realise that not only every individual person who encounters Jesus Christ is on a lifelong journey, but that this also applies to our churches. Together, Baptists and Lutherans experience themselves as members of the one Church of Jesus Christ, living in the power of God and his Holy Spirit, seeking and following their path through time towards the goal of perfection in unity with the triune God. This experience is the reason why we, as members of churches separated from one another, can already enjoy and experience church fellowship with one another. Such fellowship should also find expression in the life of our churches in witness and service.

[90] According to our common Protestant understanding, institutional unity is not required for communion between churches, but a model of "unity in reconciled diversity" is considered appropriate. According to this understanding of church communion, lasting differences in the institutional organisation of church life can continue to exist and do not have to be regarded as church-dividing. Church communion in this sense is a "dynamic concept which assumes constant broadening and deepening".[17] According to Lutheran understanding, church communion presupposes a common understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is also reflected in the recognition of the sacraments administered in the respective church as being in accordance with the gospel.[18] If this is the case, church com-

17 Ecumenism in the 21st Century. Conditions – Theological Foundations – Perspectives (EKD texts 124). Hanover 2015, p. 38.

18 Cf. Kirchengemeinschaft nach evangelischem Verständnis. Ein Votum zum geordneten Miteinander bekenntnisverschiedener Kirchen (EKD-Texte 69), Hannover 2001, Section II. 1.: "A church fellowship is then in accordance with its origin in the ac-

munion can be declared, corresponding to the church's mission for the public proclamation of the gospel in word and sacrament, in the form of pulpit and table fellowship as well as fellowship of the ordained ministers.[19]

[91] In describing the paths to Christianity and in looking into the various elements and stages of the Christian initiation process, we became newly conscious of the mutual enrichment that the different accentuations in the understanding and practice of baptism in our churches signify for our own self-understanding. This experience corresponds to a basic motif of the model of "*receptive ecumenism*" developed in the ecumenical movement. Its intention is to ask what can be learned from the ecumenical partner – i.e. from the sister church involved in the dialogue – for the development of one's own self-understanding.[20] Beyond that, receptive ecumenism has set itself the goal of linking the churches together in the common search for change in the face of contemporary social challenges, at both the practical and the organisational levels. According to this model of a mutual willingness to learn, the touchstone for church communion is not only the reception of the results of theological dialogue, but also the question of how far the declared church communion also affects and changes the spirituality, the congregational reality and the joint actions of the participating churches at all levels.

[92] The BALUBAG dialogue had already stated that neither the differences in the understanding of the Lord's Supper nor in the structure of the church ministry constitute an obstacle to mutual recognition between Lutherans and Baptists as the Church of Jesus Christ.

[93] In our dialogue we have come to the conclusion that, despite the existing common theological foundations of our churches, an understanding on the doctrine and practice of baptism has not yet been reached which would enable a declaration of church communion according to the model of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship.[21] The obstacles are the Lutheran conviction that baptism as a sacrament precludes a theological distinction between baptisms of people of different ages, as well as the conclusion derived from this that baptism in connection with joining a Baptist congregation stands in contradiction to our shared conviction that baptism is unique and unrepeatable. Such differences in the understanding of baptism must be taken into account, but need not be regarded as church-dividing if both churches mutually recognise their respective paths to being a Christian, in whose course baptism is integrated, as being in accordance with the gospel. The Dialogue Commission therefore proposes to speak of "church communion on the way" as the form of church fellowship appropriate to them. On the basis of our theological work, we have come to the conviction that it is possible and demanded for both churches to declare this church communion on the way.

[94] Such church communion on the way is characterised by the following features with regard to the understanding and practice of baptism:

- Baptists and Lutherans share a common understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ as the basis and essence of their existence as a church and as the mission for their proclamation. They make this foundation of their faith visible in their church life and also in their respective

tion of the Word of God when the churches united in it establish the common understanding of the gospel of justification and the sacraments and thus recognise Jesus Christ, who communicates himself in Word and sacrament, as the sole sustaining ground of their fellowship, and thereupon recognise each other and carry out their fellowship in word and sacrament in practice".

19 Cf. Visible Unity of the Church from a Lutheran Perspective, A Study by the Ecumenical Study Committee, April 2016 (Texte aus der VELKD Nr. 176), Hannover 2016, 5.3, p. 27f.: "From a Lutheran perspective, church unity has to fulfil three essential conditions: agreement on the understanding of the gospel and of the sacraments, and (in association with both) on the understanding and (mutual) recognition of the ordained ministry. If these conditions are given, full ecclesial communion is reached in the sense of the unitas ("unanimity") in the confessions." This takes up and develops the common understanding of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship.

20 Paul D. Murray, Receptive ecumenism: eine Einführung, Theologische Quartalschrift 196 (2016), 235-247; Paul D. Murray / Gregory A. Ryan / Paul Lakeland, Receptive Ecumenism as Transformative Ecclesial Learning. Walking the Way to a Church Re-formed, Oxford 2022.

21 Cf. Leuenberg Agreement 1973, (2): "This is why, according to the understanding of the Reformers, the necessary and sufficient pre-requisite for the true unity of the Church is agreement in the right teaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the sacraments." www.leuenberg.eu/documents [accessed 27-11-2023].

different baptismal practices, thus testifying to God's work of grace for his creation and for each individual human being.

- *Baptists and Lutherans regard baptism as constitutive of their existence as a church*. Through baptism, each baptised person is assured of God's grace, to which he or she responds in faith. They recognise in the baptismal practice of both churches the aim of emphasising the indissoluble connection between baptism and faith. In the course of Christian initiation, this connection unfolds in different ways.

- *Baptists and Lutherans appreciate the baptismal practice of the other church* that aims to express in its own way the connection between God's gracious action in the Christ event and the response of the person in faith that it awakens.

- *Baptists and Lutherans do not consider the individual elements on the path to Christianity separately and do not evaluate them in isolation from each other.* By seeing the path to Christianity as a whole, they can also accept different accentuations and attributions of the elements to each other and do not have to see them as dividing their fellowship.

- *Baptists and Lutherans hold to their own understanding of baptism and their resulting baptismal practice like brothers and sisters,* refraining from an unjust and distorting portrayal of the other side and respecting its theological concerns. They commit themselves to constant review of their understanding of baptism in the light of biblical witness. They can also recognise that the baptisms performed in the other church encompass constitutive characteristics of the paths to Christianity on which God leads people.

[95] We consider the commonalities in the understanding of the Christian initiation process which we have worked out in our dialogue to be adequate in order to describe and declare the existing and deepening fellowship between our churches as church communion on the way. Remaining differences in the understanding and practice of baptism lead to a form of fellowship between our churches which is to be regarded as a church communion *sui generis*.[22]

Church communion on the way opens up a continuous process not only of common doctrinal discussions and consultations, but above all of specific practical steps aimed at continuing to learn from and with each other.

[96] What belongs constitutively to such a church communion on the way? And what practical steps might follow at the different levels of the churches involved?

- *Baptists and Lutherans are united by a fellowship of church worship*. In both traditions, worship is central to church life, and this worship in turn focuses on the proclamation of the gospel. The worship service represents the high point of the spiritual and physical fellowship of believers. Every service also serves as a reminder of God's great deeds and is thus one of the most important basic constants in the faith and spirituality of the Christian churches. Reflection on the common ground of our faith strengthens the experience of reconciled togetherness despite all existing differences. It is a reality worked by God and at the same time an introduction into a common space of liturgical celebration.

[97] Church communion on the way invites us to hold worship services together, to participate in different forms of spirituality of the partner church and to be enriched by them. We also see in this practice a great opportunity to develop new and attractive forms of worship together. Koinonia (fellowship) in worship shapes a community united in remembrance that offers orien-

22 All existing models of church communion take up the questions that are of central importance for the associated churches. They describe what unites the respective churches. They also name differences and show an understanding of these differences that makes it possible to qualify them as non-dividing for the churches. They are individual models that are appropriate in the respective context. The Leuenberg model enables churches with a common understanding of the gospel to agree on church communion despite historically different understandings of the Lord's Supper and despite different understandings of the ministry of church leadership. The basis for the planned agreement between a Lutheran church such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria and the Episcopal Church in the USA comes from considerations as to how, with a common understanding of the gospel, a way can be found to mutually recognise ministries, including the office of bishop, despite different understandings of the concept of episcopacy. In the dialogue between Baptists and Lutherans, despite a common understanding of the gospel, the question of baptism remains, whose understanding is to be shown in a specific model of church communion as different but not church-dividing.

tation for the future and motivation for action. The Baptist tradition places the assembly of sisters and brothers in the forefront, which is led by the Spirit and offers room for individuals to bring in their particular talents and charisms. In the Lutheran tradition, the liturgy offers a framework oriented towards the church year and the history of salvation in order to hear and experience God's promises.

[98] Fellowship in worship is an important element of "spiritual ecumenism". Not only understandings concerning lasting doctrinal differences and the search for consensus in doctrine constitute living ecumenism, but also the joint celebration in the presence of God. When we join to praise God, offer thanks and prayer, hear the gospel, celebrate the Lord's Supper and confess our faith, we are moving towards the unity to which Christ has called us. When we celebrate together, we can experience the renewal, healing and deepening of our fellowship. This is how church communion becomes concrete at the congregational level.

[99] Against this background, for example, one can try out cooperation in local worship services. By agreeing on different times and themes of worship, believers can be offered a greater number and range of opportunities to practise their faith in their own specific life situation. Fellowship in worship is experienced in services held jointly or by taking part as guests at the worship services of the other tradition. Such fellowship is felt particularly intensively when we invite each other to celebrate the Lord's Supper together.

- *Baptists and Lutherans are united by their common proclamation*. In this way, they recognise that in both churches the gospel is preached as we know it from Holy Scripture. This fundamental agreement makes it possible to invite as guest preachers people who are entrusted with the ministry of preaching in their own churches. The invitation to preach can be a particularly eloquent expression of mutual recognition as churches of Jesus Christ and also contributes to overcoming injuries inflicted historically (such as the accusation of "clandestine preaching"). The high regard for preaching as the central *nota ecclesiae* (characteristic of the church), which stems from the Reformation, is shared by both churches. The mutual recognition of the proclamation of the gospel and the mutual invitation to the preaching ministry are therefore particularly visible signs that can be tangibly perceived at the congregational level.

- *Baptists and Lutherans are united by fellowship in social service*. Diakonia – service to our neighbours – is understood in both churches as a central expression of the life and nature of the church. In the area of diakonia, a considerable degree of cooperation has been achieved between Baptists and Lutherans since 1945. Intensive cooperation has developed over the past decades on the foundation of the diaconal aid organisation of the Evangelical Church in Germany, in which, for the first time, the regional churches and the free churches worked together on an equal footing in reconstruction. The common experiences in service to others was decisive in promoting closer ecumenical cooperation. The special quality of the relationship in various fields of diakonia is also anchored institutionally.[23] At the congregational level there are also numerous positive examples of cooperation. This entails the obligation, in view of the current social challenges, to take responsibility for and shape diaconal projects together. Lutheran and Baptist congregations inform and consult each other when planning local diaconal projects. Preference is given to cooperative projects.

- *Baptists and Lutherans understand themselves as a mission fellowship*. God's mission, his path to humanity, is not yet finished. That is why Christians today are called to witness to the gospel before all the world. Baptists and Lutherans alike are committed to this common mission. They see themselves as being sent, each with their own profile, into a society shaped by processes of secularisation.

[100] Church communion on the way also seeks common ground in the area of world mission, global responsibility and evangelisation.[24] This

23 In this respect, Lutherans and Baptists are putting into practice what was formulated at the Third World Conference of the Faith and Order Commission in Lund in 1952 and is today succinctly summarised as the "Lund Principle". This states that the churches should ask themselves whether they have always shown sufficient eagerness to enter into conversation with other churches, and whether they should not act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately.

24 A central instrument of understanding, which is equally

is not restricted to agreements and consultations on events and initiatives, but also about discovering common potentials that are fed by the faith experiences of the other church.

[101] Church communion on the way proves itself in this central sphere of action when it distances itself from misleading imputations and recognises that common witness is more important than the numerical growth of its own church. At the congregational level, the authenticity of the church communion on the way will be realised precisely in mutual respect and in openness to intensive cooperation. This also includes mutual coordination when the churches make public statements on social and political issues.

b. Open questions

[102] One of the questions which should be handled in future dialogues as well as in the ecclesial practice of both churches is the theological description of the connection between baptism and the faith of the baptised on their Christian journey through life in an increasingly secular social environment and in view of the break with religious tradition within our churches as well. There might be a danger that we describe and recognise the different initiation processes among Baptists and Lutherans as an ideal in the sense of a church communion on the way without taking the ecclesial realities sufficiently into account, which tend to neglect sharing the theologically responsible ways of dealing with baptism we have described.

[103] Together, we as Baptists and Lutherans face a whole series of specific issues in this context:

- How do we stand up to our common understanding of the Christian initiation process in congregations where parents, relatives or friends express their wish to baptise a child although they do not (or no longer) belong to a church themselves?

- How can godparents and a local congregation be encouraged and supported to open the way for a baptised child to a lively, individually responsible Christian faith?

- How do we deal with children who were baptised in our congregations, but are not confirmed and do not profess their faith in any other way?[25]

- What is our understanding of the meaning of baptism for people who have left the church and explicitly turn away from the Christian faith?

[104] Such questions make it clear that nowadays Baptists and Lutherans alike are living in this country in a social environment in which one must inevitably ask how basic Christian instruction, pastoral care, congregational development and mission are connected.[26]

[105] Other open questions are:

- What criteria can determine the age and psychosocial conditions which are necessary before people are capable of giving an individually responsible witness to their faith?

- How can individually responsible confessions of individuals be judged or even measured from the outside, especially but not only with regard to people with cognitive limitations or disabilities?

valued by Lutherans and Baptists, is the joint document of the World Council of Churches, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the World Evangelical Alliance "Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World. Recommendations for Conduct" (2011); see Oliver Pilnei / Friedrich Schneider (eds.), Mission mit Respekt und Toleranz. Baptistische Perspektiven zu dem Verhaltenskodex "Das christliche Zeugnis in einer multireligiösen Welt" (Edition BEFG 1), Wustermark 2015.

25 BALUBAG already stated: "It would be helpful for Baptists to ensure that their Lutheran sister church consistently takes into account the process character of Christian initiation in its baptismal practice. If children are baptised who are deprived of the fellowship of believers because of their family situation, and for whom neither Christian instruction nor an introduction to the faith can be expected, this can obscure the essence of baptism and call it into question for Baptists." (BALUBAG Report [see note 4], 5.1.4, p. 18).

26 In the dialogue between Lutheran, Roman Catholic and Mennonite tradition there is a conclusion that could be made fruitful as an impulse for our dialogue as well: "Therefore the conclusion should be drawn that, whoever baptizes infants has the obligation to do mission, catechesis and make all attempts so that the baptized appreciate their baptism and rejoice in it in faith." (Baptism and Incorporation into the body of Christ, the Church. Lutheran/Mennonite/Roman Catholic Trilateral Conversations 2012-2017, https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/2020/documents/trilateral_report_baptism_and_incorporation_into_the_body_of_christ_the_church_1_0.pdf, no. 141 [accessed 27-11-2023].

- What conditions would make it possible for Baptists to no longer insist on believer's baptism as a basic requirement and norm for membership in a Baptist church?[27]

c. Recommendation for a declaration on church communion

[106] In conclusion, as members of the Dialogue Commission, we declare jointly that, knowing our agreement in understanding of the gospel and acknowledging the different traditions and justifications of our churches for their understanding and practice of baptism, we do not consider the different paths to being a Christian that have developed in our churches and found expression in their current practice of baptism to be church-dividing. We are convinced that the theological results of our dialogue form a sufficient basis for declaring the fellowship existing between our churches to be church communion on the way.

III Consequences and recommendations

1. Declaration of our churches on church communion on the way

[107] Our conversations have shown that our churches agree in many areas of church life, but also in fundamental questions of the Christian faith. Nevertheless, there are still significant differences between our churches in the theological interpretation and in the ecclesial practice of baptism, which still stand in the way of mutual recognition in the sense of full church communion. However, knowing what common ground already exists, we are convinced that the remaining differences are not insurmountable, but can be overcome through further doctrinal conversations and through experiences of togetherness in the faith and life of our congregations. We therefore propose describing the relationship of our churches to each other as a church communion on the way. With the metaphor of the journey or "way" we want to express the fact that our churches have much in common regarding basic faith convictions, but that nevertheless there are still unresolved questions ahead. We recommend that we take up these questions in the spirit of the existing fellowship and continue to work together to resolve them on the way.

2. Visible signs from our churches on the healing of memories

[108] Our churches trace their history back to the Reformation movements of the 16th century. Originating in different places and with different presuppositions, they share the fundamental insights of the Reformation, which led to a reconsideration of the foundation of the Church of Jesus Christ in the word of the gospel. We are aware that there were tensions and conflicts between the Reformation movements that still overshadow the memory today. In countries where the Lutheran Reformation prevailed, Anabaptist movements were persecuted, often with the support of the rulers. On another level, and not to be seen as equivalent, it must be painfully recognised that Anabaptist Christians did not always follow the Spirit of God when they held a distorted view of Christians with different beliefs. We are aware of these memories and are convinced that a new togetherness of our churches today is only possible if we also face up to the burdensome historical legacy. In this sense, we ask each other for forgiveness and propose that our churches bring these memories before God in a joint worship service and ask in prayer for the power of reconciliation.[28]

3. Mutual esteem as churches and renunciation of mutual polemics as a visible sign of church fellowship.

[109] We are convinced that our church communion on the way can already lead to a rene-

27 This consequence is also already addressed in the BALUBAG document: "The Baptist practice of baptising only people who have become believers is therefore not an obstacle to deeper cooperation between our churches or to pulpit and table fellowship, provided infant baptism is not regarded as invalid in principle and there is no insistence on the part of Baptists on post-baptism of believers as a prerequisite for membership in Baptist churches". (BALUBAG report, see note 4, 6., p. 24f).

28 We refer here to the reconciliation process between the Lutheran World Federation and the Mennonite World Conference, which led to a public request for reconciliation by Lutherans in a worship context in 2010; cf: The Lutheran World Federation and The World Mennonite Conference (eds.), Implications of the Reconciliation between Lutherans and Mennonites, LWF Studies, 02-2016, Leipzig 2016.

wed togetherness today. This includes meeting each other with respect and not polemicising the remaining differences against each other. We see it as an important task to give space to the existing spirit of fellowship in our churches and to promote it in our congregations with joint worship services and projects. We are convinced that the renunciation of mutual polemics and the expression of mutual esteem for our churches can be a visible sign of the unity of the Church of Jesus Christ even in the present strongly secularised society.

4. Declaration on the invitation to participate in the Lord's Supper

[110] Participation of Baptists and Lutherans at each other's services of the Lord's Supper is already possible and practised. We propose that our churches underpin this practice, which is widespread and lived out, with a declaration concerning mutual hospitality at Communion and that they invite their members, who have been baptised, to enjoy fellowship at the Lord's Table. In this way, the present practice would be honoured and strengthened. On the basis of the common theological foundations described in this paper and the proposed church communion on the way, we further recommend that our churches develop forms for joint services of the Lord's Supper and encourage our Baptist and Lutheran congregations to celebrate it together. This is in line with the deepening of the fellowship of our churches proposed here.

5. Agreement on a proceeding of mutual esteem for transition of church membership

[111] One of the remaining differences concerns the question of handling transitions from one church to the other. While transition from the Baptist to the Lutheran Church already presents no problem today, since Baptist baptism is recognised by the Lutheran Church as a fully valid sacrament, transition of membership from the Lutheran to the Baptist Church raises questions insofar as a Lutheran baptism is only recognised by the Baptists if it was performed after the person baptised had made a confession of faith. The person who wants to change membership should not be pressurised into believer's baptism in order to become a member of a Baptist congregation. This means that a person willing to change membership should be offered appropriate opportunities to participate in a Baptist congregation even without believer's baptism. If the person involved wants to be baptised as a believer, Lutherans will respect this as an expression of freedom of faith and conscience. The baptism received in infancy should then be honoured by Baptists as part of the biography of belief as it was intended. In any case, our churches and the congregations involved should agree on how transitions of membership can be practised in such a way that they do not go against a person's conscience.

6. Accreditation ("vocatio") of teachers for religious education in schools

[112] On the basis of Article 7 of the German Basic Law, the Protestant regional churches in Germany play a prominent role in the organisation and implementation of religious education in schools. They are involved in the development of school curricula for religious education, participate in the selection of teachers of religious education and support them by offering counselling and further training. Of central importance here is the accreditation (*vocatio*) of teachers granted by the regional churches; this confers the right to teach religious education in public schools. In the light of the common convictions that became clear in our doctrinal discussions, we propose that for Baptist theologians access to a *vocatio* for Protestant religious education be simplified and transparently regulated. We ask the responsible bodies of the regional churches and the EKD to cooperate with the BEFG in developing criteria and procedures with the purpose of further developing access to vocatio for teachers. On the basis of the theological agreements set out in this document with regard to church communion on the way, we consider it appropriate that in future *vocationes* can also be granted by the BEFG in consultation with the relevant regional churches.

7. Appointment of Baptist theologians to state universities

[113] The appointment of professors to state universities is regulated by the law on state-church relations. The relevant negotiations are conducted by the churches involved. For appointments to theological faculties and institutes, an advisory opinion (*votum consultativum*) must usually be obtained from the regional church responsible. Our discussions have shown that the declaration of a church communion on the way is possible, because agreements in the foundations of faith in our churches outweigh the differences that still exist with regard to baptism. We therefore propose that the BEFG be included in the clause on denominations that applies to appointments to theological professorships at faculties or institutes of state universities. This should open the way for Baptist theologians to be appointed to professorships in Protestant theology, provided that they have the same academic qualifications.[29] We ask the responsible bodies, especially the contact committee between the Council of the EKD and the Protestant Faculty Association (*Evangelischer Fakultätentag*), to take up this proposal.

8. Public activity in society

[114] As is repeatedly shown in statements by the churches on socially relevant issues, the public attention towards church life in Germany mostly concentrates on the Protestant regional churches which belong to the EKD and the Roman Catholic Church. As a result, there is little awareness of the denominational plurality of Protestantism as it has developed since the Reformation. We therefore propose that one should look into the issues and events which can be covered by the BEFG and the Protestant regional churches jointly.

29 The fact that it is currently still much more difficult for Baptist doctoral candidates than for Lutherans to be admitted to a doctorate in theology at theological faculties in Germany, and thus to acquire the prerequisite for a university career, is related to the right to award doctorates; it would be necessary to draw attention to this problem.

Members of the Commission for Doctrinal Conversations:

United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD):

OLKR Dr Peter Meis	Co-Chair	until 2021
Prof. Dr Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr	Co-Chair	from 2022
OKR Johannes Dieckow	Co-Secretary	with interruptionfrom 2020 to 2022
OKRin Dr Mareile Lasogga	Co-Secretary	from 2020 to 2022
Prof. Dr Heinrich Holze		
Prof. Dr Ulrike Link-Wieczorek		
KRin Dr Maria Stettner		
Pastor Jürgen Schnare		until 2021
OLKR Dr Thilo Daniel		from 2022
Prof. Dr Henning Theißen	permanent guest	

Union of Evangelical Free Churches in Germany (BEFG):

General Secretary Christoph Stiba	Co-Chair
Prof. Dr Oliver Pilnei	Co-Secretary
Prof. Dr Volker Spangenberg	
Prof. Dr Christoph Stenschke	
Prof. Dr Andrea Strübind	
Prof. Dr Uwe Swarat	
Pastor Dr Ulf Beiderbeck	until 2019

The present text was adopted in this version by the joint Commission for Doctrinal Conversations at its meeting in Leipzig on 25 April 2023.

PATHS TO BEING A CHRISTIAN.

Initiation into the Christian life

The following reflections on the various elements of the path to being a Christian were developed in four Baptist-Lutheran working groups with equal representation. They were described in such a way that confessional positions, commonalities and differences were clearly identified in each case. The proposal for a "Church communion on the way", resulting from the work of the above-mentioned dialogue commission, is based on these reflections and is explained here in more detail, quoting in part individual passages and formulations.

Becoming a Christian is a process, and it finds its continuation in being a Christian. In what follows, the term "initiation" is used for the path towards being a Christian. This term is not universally common in contemporary theological discourse, but it is anchored in tradition and has been proven in ecumenical dialogue.

Baptists and Lutherans assume that the path to faith takes very different forms according to the respective life history. In an ecumenical perspective, becoming a Christian is not described here as a singular event, but as a process encompassing various aspects and elements. The following text focuses on four aspects that the dialogue commission considers constitutive for the process of becoming a Christian. These are described and shaped quite differently in the respective denominations: 1) Child dedication or infant baptism, 2) Hearing the gospel, 3) Believer's baptism or confirmation, 4) Discipleship and living by faith.

The concept of initiation assumes that one can speak of being a Christian when these aspects are to be found in a person's life, whereby there is no need for them to follow in a certain order or to fulfil particular attributes. Both Lutherans and Baptists are sure that God's action and human responses are intertwined in different ways within the elements of the path to being a Christian. Therefore, a proposal by Paul Fiddes serves as a basis for the following procedure in which we look to see how grace and faith relate to each other in these elements of the path to being a Christian. This approach makes it possible to discover commonalities and to perceive and respect differences. It aims to be able to describe the elements of this path in such a way that both sides can mutually recognise these paths to faith — even if they are not fully congruent and the elements are variously emphasised. In what follows, this will be tested and assessed with regard to its viability for a church communion on the way.

Elements of the Path to being a Christian

I Child dedication — Infant baptism

1. What are the dimensions and significance of these elements on the path to being a Christian?

a. Infant baptism in the Lutheran context

In the Lutheran perspective, baptism and thus also infant baptism is first and foremost God's action, which unfolds in several dimensions. The aspect of God's grace lies at the heart of this, grace given to the baptised person without any action on his or her part and without any preconditions. Baptism is the visible expression of God's unconditional kindness.

Baptism "brings about forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this". It "is a water of life rich in grace, and a washing of new birth by the Holy Spirit". Baptising with water "signifies that the old Adam in us should, by daily remorse and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new person should daily come forth and arise, to live before God in righteousness and purity forever".[1] Baptism therefore has a soteriological character. Baptism brings salvation and forgiveness of sins (Confessio Augustana, Art. 9). It marks a change of lordship, a transition from the realm of sin and death to the realm of belonging to Christ, of grace and life: baptised into Christ's death, raised with him in order to walk with him in newness of life (cf. Rom 6) — this is the path signposted by baptism.

Even if the salvation promised by God is not dependent upon people's faith, the aspect of faith is of central importance for baptism. The baptism of a child is connected with the certainty that it is God who gives faith and that it is the task of parents, godparents and the congregation to accompany those baptised as they grow into faith, understood as trust in God. In infant baptism, the confessional aspect of baptism is linked to the *communio sanctorum* (communion of holy persons and the gifts of salvation) and is initially fulfilled by parents, godparents and the believers who are present, on the premise that integration into this community supports a person's growth in faith towards Christian maturity and promotes the formulation of their own confession (e.g. in confirmation). Thus baptism (including the baptism of children) brings integration into the body of Christ, into the church as *communio sanctorum* and, in the specific situation of German Lutheran regional churches, also into the respective church as an institution.

b. Child dedication in the Baptist context

A child dedication in connection with the birth of a child has only gradually developed in Baptist churches as a formal act in the worship service. For a long time, there were reservations because there was no appropriate instruction in the Bible, one was afraid of infringing on parental rights, and it was particularly recognised that such dedication could be confused with infant baptism. In the meantime, however, child dedication has become established in Baptist circles as an offer that can be freely taken up and is now generally practised.

Fundamentally, child dedication is understood as an act of benediction accompanied by thanksgiving and intercession. Thanks are owed to God as the creator of the life of the newborn child and at the same time as the one who is determined to be this human's God. Intercession is brought for the child and its parents, focussing on the hope that the child may find its way to faith, baptism and Christian fellowship. In the act of benediction, blessing is imparted to the child and the parents as "power for external and internal growth" in the sense of a gracious promise of divine assistance, in the hope that both child and parents will experience the presence of the saving God tangibly in their lives.

2. What are the differences and commonalities?

a. Commonalities

In infant baptism as well as in child dedication, the aspect of grace is present in the sense of God's unconditional favour to the newborn child. In this sense, Baptists and Lutherans can speak of the prevenient grace (*gratia praeveni-*

1 Martin Luther, Small Catechism, Fourth Principal Part, translation by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of England (2016), accessed under https://thesmallcatechism.org/downloads/#british (23.10.2023)

ens) that precedes becoming a believer and is expressed in the respective act.

In both infant baptism and child dedication, the aspect of growth in faith is present. Baptists and Lutherans agree that infant baptism, like child dedication, is directed towards growth towards faith. For infant baptism it may be said that baptism reveals an initiating moment with regard to growing into the faith granted by God in baptism, but not only in baptism. Baptists see a growth that leads or can lead to faith and baptism and then continues to progress in faith after baptism. Both in infant baptism and child dedication, God's promise to accompany us on the path of growing in faith plays an important role.

In infant baptism as in child dedication, the aspect of faith is present. In both ceremonies it is represented by the faith of the parents (with godparents) and the congregation/church.

The fellowship aspect of the *communio sanctorum* is present in both infant baptism and child dedication. In both ceremonies it is represented by the presence of parents (with godparents) and congregation. In infant baptism as well as in child dedication, the parents play a special role, insofar as they bear special responsibility as the child's immediate caregivers with regard to the aspect of growth on the way to becoming a Christian.

b. Differences

Baptists and Lutherans agree that God's grace "precedes" the newborn child in the sense that the child enters into existence as a being affirmed by God, to whom God grants his goodness and mercy as long as they live. While Lutherans hold that this is expressed in a particularly clear and appropriate way in infant baptism, Baptists do not see this as the (primary) meaning of Christian baptism.

According to Baptist understanding, the change of dominion described in Romans 6 does not represent a disposition beyond the own will of a person, but a deliberate move into God's dominion through faith and confession. Baptists understand baptism as an act of twofold affirmation. In baptism, God's gracious fellowship imparted to the person who has received the gift of faith in the gospel is affirmed by inclusion in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ through baptism in accordance with Romans 6. At the same time, the person who is baptised affirms that he or she is committed to this change of dominion and willing to live a life as a follower of Christ, i.e. believing in the justification of the sinner and sanctification by the Spirit of God (according to Romans 6:11-14).

Lutherans can in principle endorse the description of a twofold act of affirmation, insofar as parents, godparents and congregation take responsibility as representatives in infant baptism and the baptised person confesses faith in Christ at confirmation. Baptists and Lutherans each emphasise the connection with faith for the ceremonies they practise, insofar as both kinds are performed with and by the community of believers. However, Baptists hold that the act of baptism (unlike the act of child dedication) cannot dispense with the personal confession of faith and thus the affirmation of this act and its consequences (in discipleship) by the person being baptised, nor can this be replaced by a form of representation in confession and affirmation.

Baptists and Lutherans agree that infant baptism and child dedication involve the Christian community. They differ in that infant baptism integrates the child into the community of the congregation or church even before the child's own consent, whereas child dedication does not mean that the child becomes a member of the congregation or church and therefore does not belong to the community in the sense of institutional membership. Experience has shown that in both cases this can lead to problems connected with church membership. In the case of infant baptism in the Lutheran "official" church context, people may not practise their existing church membership, while in the case of the Baptist, "free church" context, they may not take up membership at all. Both problems may be acerbated by specific dangers, such as weak or failing accompaniment for those baptised as children, or exaggerated, demanding accompaniment for those who were blessed as children.

3. And how are grace and faith accentuated in the respective descriptions of these elements?

Common to both Lutherans and Baptists is the conviction that God's grace cannot be earned in any way. Even faith which is due to God's gracious kindness to a person through the Holy Spirit is not a human work, and is therefore essentially a faith gift *(fides adventitia*, lit. "faith that has come", cf. Gal 3:25).

There is disagreement as to how the individual gains a share in God's grace. This is accentuated by Lutherans in such a way that, at least in the reception of baptismal grace, the person is *mere passive* (completely passive). Therefore, according to this view, the child who is brought to baptism can "receive" God's grace without itself being able to articulate the response in faith in the gospel at the time of baptism. The close connection between faith and baptism is represented by parents, godparents and congregation. In the case of baptism of infants and young children, the reception of baptismal grace and their response in faith take place at different times.

Both Baptists and Lutherans state that the bestowal of God's grace is asymmetrical, but dialogical. For Baptists, receiving grace in baptism, as well as receiving faith, is linked with the individual's graciously granted freedom to accept the gospel, saying "Amen, thanks be to God". Baptism means that the gift of salvation granted by God and received in faith by the believer is confirmed by both sides, so that for Baptists every baptism is indissolubly linked to faith and the person's expression of trust in the form of confession, which is constitutive of faith.

That God's grace always precedes the human response is underlined by the Baptist practice of child dedication. Lutherans assume that, in the case of children, a person's own response to God's gracious gift of salvation in baptism occurs at a later time.

II Hearing the gospel

1. What are the dimensions and significance of this element of the path towards being a Christian?

a. Hearing the gospel in the Baptist context

The Baptist understanding of the church implies a conduct of life which is organised as a fellowship, motivated by the Christian faith and connected with ethics consistently oriented towards the Bible and the spiritualisation of everyday life. In any case, it cannot be adequately understood without this experiential dimension. Erich Geldbach has described Baptist and other congregationalist churches "as the expression of an 'experience religion' based on personal commitment".[2]

In accordance with the principle of congregationalism, according to which the church is the assembly solely of those who have voluntarily joined together on the basis of their personal faith (*gathered church* or also *believer's church*), a personal and dialogical relationship with God is constitutive for church membership. This decisive characteristic of congregationalist ecclesiology means that the personal faith of the individual should find its fulfilment in the church as a spiritual community of life and service. The experience of individual conversion or initiation into faith is therefore an important basic motif in the intensely experienced fellowship and familiar character of the congregations. Traditionally, particular responsibility was given to the spiritual potential of the individual members of the congregation, and this was described as "soul competency" in English.[3] Therefore, hearing the gospel, and accepting it in faith, is of great importance in the Baptist context (cf. Rom 10:17).

On the one hand, hearing the Gospel is manifested in the special offers of the congregations for various age groups. According to the "Rechen-

2 Erich Geldbach, Freikirchen, in: Reinhard Frieling / Erich Geldbach / Reinhard Thöle (eds.), Konfessionskunde. Orientierung im Zeichen der Ökumene, Stuttgart 1999, p. 210.

3 Cf. William Henry Brackney, The Baptists, Westport 1988; Karen E. Smith, Kirche als Gemeinschaft der Gläubigen. Der Bundesgedanke in der Ekklesiologie des frühen Baptismus, in: Andrea Strübind / Martin Rothkegel (eds.), Baptismus. Geschichte und Gegenwart, Göttingen 2011, (23-43) p. 40.

schaft vom Glauben" (Account of Faith), the confession of faith of the German-language Baptists, the continuous religious education of children and adolescents is regarded as a special task of the Christian church, "which bears the responsibility before her Lord that the younger generation shall be encouraged to believe in Jesus Christ and to live as his disciples".[4] Thus the congregations organise programmes for children and adolescents from the earliest age. Spiritual formation through the family, but also continuous growth and integration into a binding community, are fundamental.

For this reason, particular attention was always paid to the common study of the Bible. It was often emphasised — albeit hyperbolically — that Baptism was first and last a "Bible movement". Admittedly, this can no longer be said unreservedly today. The high priority given to personal and group Bible study and regular prayer has been one of the characteristic features of Baptist congregations from the very beginning. This form of communal learning in the local church is particularly pronounced in the USA, where it is just as natural, even for adults, to attend "Sunday School" regularly (often before the service) in the respective age group as it is to take part in the church service itself.

Another characteristic is the missionary orientation of the congregations, one of the basic principles of Baptism, even though there have been strong differences in the understanding, forms and practices of evangelism and mission at different times. German Baptists originated in the context of the 19th century revival movement, so that it was particularly characterised down to the 1970s by the methods of evangelism developed during this time. It was customary for the churches to offer evangelistic events every year, in which people were called upon to repent and follow Jesus Christ. Young people from the respective congregations were the main targets of these special event formats. The personal faith engendered by such events was considered constitutive for receiving believer's baptism and thus being accepted into membership of the congregation. Today, in comparison to such earlier, strongly schematised forms, there is clearly a much broader spectrum of personal faith experiences, revealing highly diverse paths to faith and thus to a binding church membership.

However, in the present situation, the remaining constants of Baptist congregational life must be critically questioned. These include, among other things, a reduction of biblical competence, a decline in faith practice amid plural living conditions, diminishing involvement in congregational life and the development of a distanced ecclesiality.

b. Hearing the gospel in the Lutheran context

In Lutheranism, hearing the gospel and preaching at church services play a central role. Jesus Christ as God's ultimate self-revelation is the decisive Word of God, which is heard, proclaimed, recounted, transported and issued as an invitation. The proclaimed Word awakens and encourages faith as the gospel is heard and inspires trust, preparing the path to faith. The Word is proclaimed not only by the sermon, but also in the joint confession of faith and in the administration of the sacraments (the Word made visible). The central concept is that the gospel of God's grace only reaches people through the Word in its various forms. There is therefore a close link between the doctrine of justification and the doctrine of the preached Word of God, the *viva vox evangelii* (the living word of the gospel) in the correlation of promise and demand.

Alongside the Sunday services of worship, the Lutheran traditions offer many ways of encountering and becoming familiar with the gospel according to the relevant age groups. These include catechesis at children's church or Sunday school, in educational institutions for children and adolescents as well as in other groups for adults.

However, the culture of the Lutheran confession goes beyond these traditional ways of proclaiming the gospel. It is often the socialisation in a Lutheran family in the cultural Protestant milieu that plays a major role in spreading the Word of God. Young people who were received into a Lutheran congregation through baptism as a child are influenced not only by their family and godparents, but also by a wider network of

4 Rechenschaft vom Glauben / Account of Faith, ed. by Uwe Swarat, Kassel 2nd ed. 2022, Part 2. I. 2.

acquaintances, teachers, musicians and intellectual supporters. There are a variety of forms and practices which help them to hear the gospel, and these are often not connected to the church congregation. Lutheran confessional culture offers a wide scope for encountering the gospel, whether through education or in the visual arts, music and literature. An important context here is the religious education in schools, which is still taught in a denominational framework in spite of all ecumenical cooperation.

In the Lutheran context, Christians are seen to be open to reflection and resonance of denominational and ecumenical broadness of faith; they offer support, but also allow room and openness for critical questioning, ambivalences and a faith that is searching. Freedom of thought and freedom in forms of belief are constitutive, so that it is possible to defend differing positions or argue about the horizons of interpretation and other controversies. There is conscious acceptance of the inculturation of Christian faith, as well as for the search for intersection between religion and plural culture.

2. What are the differences and commonalities?

"Faith comes from hearing" (Rom 10:17). For both churches, hearing the gospel is a constitutive prerequisite for receiving faith. "Lutherans and Baptists agree that the salvation wrought by Jesus Christ is mediated by the word of the gospel, which promises the grace of Christ and the forgiveness of sins. According to biblical witness, this word is intended to evoke a response in faith."[5]

Hearing the gospel in the Lutheran context does not aim in the same way as in the Baptist churches at a specific individual experience and a conscious commitment to Christ, manifested in a continuous personal relationship. Rather, it is about becoming part of a larger community that gives support and which — despite all existential questioning — allows room for the manifold experiences of God's grace.

Traditionally, Baptists emphasise the mature responsibility of the individual who, after receiving faith, decides to be baptised and to become a member of the congregation. Hearing the gospel enables Christians to achieve such maturity. The emphasis is on the personal ability to make judgments and decisions in interaction with the Christian congregation and the experiences of faith to be found there. It also belongs to the understanding of the Lutheran tradition that one should repeatedly hear and reflect upon the gospel and continuously seek orientation in Holy Scripture as a source of renewal of Christian life. However, the emphasis here is more on the fellowship created by the Word and united by the common confession, thus opening a space for God's presence in the world, and not so much on individuals who are united in faith and decide to form a congregation on the basis of this personal conviction.

3. How are grace and faith accentuated in the respective descriptions of these elements?

Baptists emphasise the subjective dimension of the appropriation of salvation, which takes place in the believing acceptance of the Word and is reflected in the personal conduct of life. For Lutherans, the focus is on the objective appropriation of salvation through the proclaimed Word, which effects faith and becomes creatively active in people's lives.

For Baptists, the constitutive orientation towards the testimony of Holy Scripture applies not only to soteriology, but also to ecclesiology and the concrete form of congregational life. Baptism thus follows the Reformation's basic understanding of the church as an assembly of believers called into being by the gospel of Jesus Christ and sustained in obedience to God's Word. The individual's voluntary decision to join a congregation is understood as part of the process of receiving faith wrought by the Spirit as well as of the consequent witness of the believer in the conduct of life.

In Lutheranism, the ecclesiological perspective does not give priority to an individual's decision and binding readiness to discipleship,

5 Learning from each other - believing together. "One Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph 4:5). Convergence Document of the Bavarian Lutheran-Baptist Working Group (BALUBAG), https://www.befg.de/fileadmin/bgs/media/dokumente/Voneinander-lernen-miteinander-glauben-Konvergenzdokument-der-Bayerischen-Lutherisch-Baptistischen-Arbeitsgruppe-BALUBAG-2009.PDF, section 3.4, p. 8 [last accessed 04.05.2023].

but rather to the creative power of the gospel, since according to Lutheran understanding the Church is essentially *creatura verbi* (creature of God's Word), created from the Word and always constituted anew. These different emphases are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary: in our discussions, the struggle for an existential understanding of the gospel and its value as a gift of faith was recognised as a task common to Baptists and Lutherans. Both traditions can productively challenge, enrich and complement each other with regard to the element of "hearing the gospel" on the path to Christianity.

III Confirmation/Believer's baptism

1. What dimensions and significance do these elements of the path to being a Christian possess?

a. Confirmation in the Lutheran context

From its very origin, confirmation in the Lutheran churches owes its existence to the confrontation with the issues raised by of the Anabaptist movement. Landgrave Philip of Hesse held talks with Anabaptist representatives in 1539. Following theological advice given by Martin Bucer, the so-called "Ziegenhainer Zuchtordnung" (Ziegenhain Decree on Church Discipline) retained infant baptism, but introduced an act of worship at which those who had been baptised were to confirm their baptism at a later date. It included the remembrance of baptism, a test regarding the most important elements of Christian doctrine, the acknowledgment of baptism, laying on of hands and intercession, as well as the admission to the Lord's Supper. However, confirmation only became widely practised in the Lutheran churches after the emergence of Pietism, which in turn focused on the personal confession of faith.

Its origin shows that confirmation derives its significance from baptism. It is not a service for a specific occasion, like marriage. This becomes evident when the regulations for confirmation in the Lutheran Church in Saxony, for example, stipulate that young people who have attended confirmation classes, but were not baptised as children, should not be confirmed at the end of the course, but rather baptised. It has to be acknowledged, however, that this is handled differently in many Lutheran regional churches.

In the past decades, the classical confirmation classes have undergone great changes. A characteristic feature is above all the interaction with church youth work, e.g. by letting youngsters who have been confirmed take part as team members. In some congregations the catechumenate has been extended to cover different phases of life from childhood to adolescence (corresponding to fourth grade and eighth grade at schools), and sometimes also includes the family environment (Hoya model).[6] The spectrum of pedagogical forms ranges from classical classes to leisure time activities and practical insight into various fields of church life. In modern-day terms, the expression "confirmation course" has generally replaced the word "confirmation classes". This expresses the fact that the catechumenate is to be understood in a more comprehensive sense as becoming familiar with and growing into the activities of the church and the Christian faith.

The confirmation service forms the conclusion of the confirmation course. It represents the end of the church's confirmation activities, which began with baptism. In some congregations the confirmation service is preceded by a service of repentance in a form which is appropriate to the age group. The remembrance of baptism is closely connected to the candidates' confession of the Christian faith, which includes their response to the confirmation question found in the order of service. This is in many cases replaced by a personally formulated confession. The confessional character of confirmation is also expressed in the choice of a personal motto from the Bible and often by letting the candidates help to organise or shape a church service in advance ("candidates' presentation"). Today, confirmation is generally no longer seen as a prerequisite for admission to the Lord's Supper. Nevertheless, the Com-

6 Cf. Glauben entdecken. Konfirmandenarbeit und Konfirmation in Wandel: "The discussion on confirmation work is still – basically since the 19th century – co-determined by the question of the time of confirmation. It is justified to take into account the epochal change in young people and the earlier onset of adolescence by starting confirmation work earlier as well, maybe providing for a first phase at the age of 10 or 11 and a second at the age of 14 or 15, according to the so-called Hoya model", https://www.ekd.de/12502.htm (last accessed: 25.05.2023), 1.3.4. In the Hoya model, parents of the candidates give them teaching in small groups during the first block. The parents prepare the lessons together with a professional staff member.

munion liturgy can be an important part of the confirmation service.

The age of the confirmation candidates is such that confirmation is often linked in people's minds with the transition into adolescence. This fits in with the fact that, in legal terms, this is the age at which young people can make their own decisions in religious matters and can exercise their rights in church affairs after confirmation, for example by acting officially as a godparent or joining church committees. In the families, confirmation is often seen as a "rite of passage", the transition into adulthood. That corresponds with the candidates' understanding that their benediction forms the heart of the confirmation service. The confirmation course prepares these levels of meaning by consciously dealing with topics related to the beginning of adolescence, interpreting them in the light of the Christian message.

Confirmation has no independent theological justification in the Lutheran churches. It derives its theological significance from the fact that baptism aims at faith and should be accepted in faith. Martin Luther writes in the Small Catechism: "Of course it is not the water that does it, but the word of God, which is in and with the water, and the faith that trusts this word of God in the water."[7] Confirmation provides a suitable framework for the acceptance of baptism in faith. The congregations are therefore obliged to perform "confirming action" (catechumenate and concluding service). However, confirmation is not a prerequisite for the validity of baptism.

b. Believer's baptism in the Baptist context

According to Baptist understanding, Christian baptism is a solemn act instituted by Jesus Christ, a representation of the demise of the old life and the emergence of a new life. That means that Christian baptism is death and resurrection with Christ. It is not an act of self-baptism, but is performed on the person being baptised on God's behalf. This makes it recognisable as a gift of God, assuring God's grace to the candidate.

In the "Rechenschaft vom Glauben" it says: "In the act of baptism, the one baptized receives confirmation of that, which the gospel promises and which he professes before God and men: Jesus Christ died and rase again for me too. My former life under the dominion of sin has been buried; through Christ I have been given new life. God has given me a share in the effect of Christ's death. He allows the power of his resurrection to take effect on me, already now through the gift of the Holy Spirit, and some day through the resurrection to eternal life."[8]

According to the New Testament, baptism takes place "in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19), because those who are baptised become the property of the triune God. According to Baptist understanding, it takes place "upon the confession of faith". The Christian congregation is therefore only authorised to administer baptism where the Holy Spirit has awakened faith in the candidates who profess Jesus Christ as the Son of God. According to Baptist understanding, baptism is an affirmation both of God's promise that he accepts believers as his children and heirs and of the baptised persons promise that they are willing to live a life of faith in Jesus Christ, in love for God and their neighbour and in the hope of eternal life.[9] With baptism, a person thus makes the commitment to a life as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

This mutual promise of God and the baptised persons leads the baptised persons to enter into God's covenant with his people, which is eternally valid on God's side. For this reason, baptism cannot be repeated. However, the self-commitment of the person(s) associated with their baptism can be renewed at any time without a new act of baptism through repentance and acceptance of forgiveness, should baptised persons have become unfaithful to the covenant and wish to return to it. God and humans are not equal parties to a contract, for humans are creatures and sinners. Therefore, God establishes a covenant, inviting and summoning human beings to enter into this covenant and live within it. The initiative always lies with God, but God wants people to respond, which they do in baptism.

7 Small Catechism (see note 1)

8 Account of Faith (see note 4), part 2. I. 3, p. 25.

9 See: Taufe. Eine Handreichung für die Gemeindepraxis vom Kollegium der Theologischen Hochschule Elstal, Edition BEFG 5, Wustermark: Bund Ev.-Freikirchlicher Gemeinden in Deutschland 2020, p. 12f.

Since baptism represents the entry of the human being into the covenant with God, it can also be understood as an encounter between God's grace and a human's faith. God's action and human action thus belong together in baptism. Nevertheless, they remain distinct from each other, because it is also true in baptism that the Word of God comes before the response of the human being. Baptism is therefore a gift of God to the person being baptised and at the same time a faithful acceptance of this gift. Baptists agree with the Lima Declaration on Baptism which says: "Baptism is both God's gift and our human response to that gift."[10]

Baptists are convinced that in baptism the grace of God is not conveyed by merely performing the ceremony, but by the faith of the baptised in the divine word of promise communicated in baptism. Promise and faith are mutually interdependent. Where Baptists employ the term sacrament, they do so in the sense of such an event of encounter: baptism is a means of grace or salvation as God's grace meets up with human faith. The means of grace are "visible word" (*verbum visibile*), namely God's promise and human response. The proprium of the means of grace with regard to the proclamation of the Word and oral confession lies in their character as actions. Because the means of grace is an action, divine and human action become unified within it.

The result of baptism is inclusion into the Christian community as the covenant people of God. A person can only be a child of God and a follower of Jesus Christ in the fellowship of believers led by the Spirit. Since in baptism a person participates in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, they not only join the local congregation that performed it, but also the universal body of Christ, the "assembly of all believers and saints" or "the congregation of saints and true believers (*vere credentium*)".[11] In the body of Christ, all believers are united with one another as sisters and brothers.

10 Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. Declarations of Convergence of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches. Frankfurt am Main and Paderborn 1982, No. 8; Dokumente wachsender Übereinstimmung, Vol. 1, Paderborn and Frankfurt (Main), 2nd, revised ed. 1991 (545-585), p. 552.

11 The Augsburg Confession, Art. 8; the Latin version in: Die Bekenntnisschriften der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche. Vollständige Neuedition, hrsg. von Irene Dingel, Göttingen 2014, p. 103.

2. What are the differences and commonalities?

a. Commonalities

Baptists and Lutherans agree that baptism is a solemn act instituted by Jesus Christ and performed on the person being baptised on God's behalf. It is a gift of God that promises the grace of God to the baptised. This is expressed in the Pauline image that the baptised person is "buried with Christ" (the old body, enslaved to sin, is destroyed) and "will live with him" (walking in newness of life though grace; cf. Rom 6:1-11).

Lutherans and Baptists recognise jointly that baptism also includes the acceptance of God's grace in faith by the baptised. They agree with the corresponding statements in Luther's Small Catechism and in the Lima Declaration (see above, III 1. a. and III 1. b.). In Lutheran churches the solemn confession of faith is spoken at confirmation. In Baptist churches it is an indispensable part of the baptism itself (believers' baptism).

Confirmation and believers' baptism have some things in common. Both confirmation and believers' baptism are celebrated as a solemn service in and in front of the congregation. Those who have been baptised or confirmed become responsible members of the congregation with special rights (e.g. the right to take on certain positions in the church and to vote). In both churches there are godparents or "companions" who have the task of helping the baptised to confess their faith.

For both Baptists and Lutherans, church membership is linked to baptism and not to confirmation. Similarly, for both, participation at the Lord's Supper is linked to baptism and thus to church membership. In Lutheran churches, children can usually participate in the Lord's Supper from primary school age if they have been prepared for it.

b. Differences

The clearest difference is the temporal connection between baptism and confession. Lutheran churches practise both adult baptism and infant baptism. Both are considered to be of equal value. In the case of infant baptism, baptism and its active confession (confirmation) take

place at different phases of life. However, they remain related to each other.

In Lutheran churches, baptism performed on a child is considered valid even if it is not confirmed by confirmation. Lutherans trust in the promise of God that applies to every baptism that is duly (*rite*) performed in his name. At the same time, they emphasise that baptism aims at active acceptance in faith, and they hold parents, godparents and congregations responsible for working towards this.

Unlike confirmation, which is usually celebrated at the age of about 14, believer's baptism in Baptist congregations is not fixed to a certain age. In principle, it can always take place when a person is ready and able to confess their agreement to baptism and their faith. The aspect of adolescence therefore does not play such a large role in the practice of believer's baptism among Baptists.

Baptist congregations also celebrate the "Sunday school graduation" ceremony. It marks the conclusion of a course of Christian instruction for which the congregation is responsible. In this respect, it can be seen as analogous to confirmation. Unlike confirmation, however, it is not connected with baptism.

3. And how are the elements of grace and faith accentuated in the res pective descriptions?

Both Baptists and Lutherans understand grace as God's saving kindness to humanity, by which God overcomes guilt and the power of sin and restores the relationship to his creature. By reckoning righteousness to human beings in this way, God's grace proves at the same time to be a powerful event that strongly changes human beings. Divine grace, as it has been revealed in Christ, is unique in that it happens unconditionally, other than human acts of grace.

Lutherans and Baptists agree that faith must not be seen as a prerequisite for receiving grace. Rather, both are mutually related and interpret each other. Baptists emphasise that humans can only partake of God's grace through faith. According to their understanding, faith is the mode in which humans receive God's grace. Lutherans emphasise that God awakens and stimulates a person's faith through his grace. Nonetheless, faith is not passive, because it always aims at a personal, active confession.

The Baptist form of baptism takes the various aspects of faith (recognition, assent, trust) into account in a special way and thus illustrates how grace and faith are interwoven: by trusting in God's grace, people publicly commit themselves in baptism to that which has become a life truth for them. Before baptism, they give witness before the congregation to that which they have come to recognise through the Holy Spirit as the truth of the gospel. And with their confession of faith during the baptism service, they give free and willing assent to the fact that they now belong irrevocably to God. The three aspects mentioned above are clearly visible in the practice of baptism by immersion, which follows the confession of faith.

Lutheran baptismal practice emphasises in a special way that God's grace precedes all human works and decisions. Since baptism has taken place before confirmation, the candidates may be certain of the grace already promised to them. The confirmation course should be a time of maturing and testing, in which the candidates can examine themselves and the Christian faith. In doing so, they can be aware that the effect of grace does not depend on the strength of their personal confession. By becoming conscious of God's promise for their lives, they find the motivation to accept it.

IV Discipleship and living by faith

The model of the initiation process according to Paul Fiddes, which describes elements of the path to becoming a Christian, also includes the aspect of discipleship, of living by faith. However, this aspect cannot be strictly separated from the continuing path in faith in Jesus Christ, because here is an overlap between the path to faith and the path in faith. Discipleship can therefore be described as the last stage, or better as the destination, of the path to becoming a Christian, while it reaches far beyond it at the same time as an ongoing, lifelong vocation. One may therefore speak not so much of the completion of initiation, but rather of the outset of a lifelong process of discipleship. Following Jesus Christ belongs to the path to faith insofar as this phase includes the shaping of

faith and the laying of a foundation for continuation of the faith journey. Regardless of whether baptism takes place in childhood, adolescence or adulthood, it is on the road to being a Christian that believers acquire what they need in order to be able to meet the challenges of the world of their own time with faith, love and hope.

In Baptist traditions, Christian discipleship plays a central role as a mark of the visible community of believers. In Anabaptism of Reformation times, baptism according to Romans 6 was already seen primarily as a sign of the obligation to live a life in accordance with the standards of Jesus' teaching (Sermon on the Mount) and God's commandments. The consistent orientation towards Jesus, which had to prove itself in the life of the individual and even led to non-conformist behaviour, was also regarded as a criterion for the distinction over against the majority churches. The ecclesiological self-understanding of Baptist congregations is also based on the fundamental idea of the covenant, which commits the believers to obey God and to hold fellowship with one another.

The Lutheran tradition is characterised by its reliance on the grace of God, that works faith, love and hope. In doing so, it assumes that one belongs to the communion of saints and the priesthood of all those who are baptised, although the intensity and form of this twofold connection between fellowship and ministry are left open. Likewise, there is no attempt to describe how the life of faith can be considered realised. "This life, therefore, is not righteousness but growth in righteousness, not health but healing, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise; we are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it; the process is not yet finished, but it is going on; this is not the end, but it is the road; all does not yet gleam with glory, but all is being purified."[12] Based on this conviction of Martin Luther, it becomes clear that the existence as a believer can never be regarded as complete.

Discipleship as an element of the path to becoming a Christian can be described in four dimensions: in emotions, rituals, knowledge and ethical faith practice. These categories are taken from the EKD document "Grundzüge des Glaubens im Kontext der Konversion" (Fundamentals of faith in the context of conversion).[13] They would seem to be helpful, because they provide an answer in the context of the recognition of grounds for asylum to the question of what it means to be a Christian. Due to its neutrality, this concept of religious sociology is applied here to the ecumenical discussion.

1. Baptist perspective

a. Emotional dimension

Initiation into the Christian faith involves the whole person — head, hand and heart. Recalling Jesus' double commandment, the goal is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and mind (Deut 6:5; Mt 22:37). Love of God also includes reverence for him and striving to live a life to his glory according to his will. Love of God also means love and faithfulness to Jesus Christ and listening to the Holy Spirit.

People who follow Jesus are certain of their reconciliation with God, experience peace and joy in God and the comfort of the gospel. In this certainty, they face the challenges of their lives with courage and confidence. As Jesus' double commandment makes clear, love for God is inseparably connected to love and care for one's fellow human beings: "and your neighbour as yourself" (Deut 19:18; Mt 22:39). Love for people includes respect for them and the willingness to help and encourage them. Those who love God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit will also appreciate creation and seek to preserve it.

12 This word of Martin Luther, comes from the writing "Grund und Ursach aller Artikel D. Martin Luthers, so durch römische Bulle unrechtlich verdammt sind" of 1521 (An Argument In Defense Of All The Articles Of Dr. Martin Luther Wrongly Condemned In The Roman Bull). English translation accessed under https://media.sabda.org/alkitab-8/LIBRARY/LUT_WRK3.PDF. The original text can also be found in: Luthers Werke in Auswahl, ed. by Otto Clemen, vol. 2, p. 75: "Das alßo ditz Leben nit ist / ein frükeit / ßondern ein frumb werdē / nit ein gesuntheit ßondern eyn gesunt werdenn / nit eyn weßen sunderen ein werden / nit ein ruge ßondern eyn vbunge / wyr seyns noch nit / wyr werdens aber. Es ist noch nit gethan unnd geschehenn / es ist aber ym gang unnd schwanck. Es ist nit das end / es ist aber der weg / es gluwet und glinzt noch nit alles / es fegt sich aber alleß."

13 EKD (ed.), Grundzüge des Glaubens im Kontext der Konversion, Hannover / Berlin 12.11.2020, https://engagiert.evlks.de/fileadmin/userfiles/EVLKS_engagiert/E._Materialien/PDF_Materialien/Christen-Asylverfahren-A5-V2-web.pdf [last accessed: 17.5.2023].

b. Ritual dimension

Initiation into the Christian faith brings one into the fellowship of believers who live out their faith consistently before God and one another, actively giving it shape. This not only includes the reception of baptism, but also regular participation in the Sunday service and the joint celebration of the Lord's Supper to confirm and strengthen faith.

In addition, believers experience fellowship, instruction and strengthening of faith in various ways at the local church level, for example at meetings for different age groups, in small groups such as cell groups, as well as chance encounters in everyday life. The essence of congregational life is listening to God and responding in faith and obedience. Individual believers contribute to the edification of the whole congregation by using their natural talents and spiritual gifts. Christian fellowship is a long-term affair. It requires commitment, which is evident not only in the active work of all church members but also in the assumption of joint financial responsibility.

c. Knowledge dimension

Baptists emphasise the experience and affirmation of salvation in Jesus Christ. The Christological and soteriological approach to the knowledge of faith is therefore of particular importance. In Christ, God works the reconciliation which is valid for all people. This experience of salvation changes people. It is only on this foundation that faith opens up understanding.

On this basis, it is emphasised that all believers should have a basic knowledge of Holy Scripture in order to hear the voice of Jesus in and through it. On a continuing open path, the understanding of faith is deepened through Christian teaching. Traditionally, this took place, and continues to do so, not only at church services, but also, for example, in Bible study groups, at faith and baptism courses, in personal encounters and by the private study and reading of Holy Scripture and corresponding literature.

d. Ethical and practical dimension of faith

Baptists emphasise that discipleship is expressed in a personally responsible Christian life. They know that they are challenged to examine critically the conduct of their own lives again and again on the basis of Holy Scripture. With their whole existence, Christians are called and enabled to "live for the praise of his glory" (Eph 1:12). On the one hand, forms of spirituality are practised alone and in fellowship, for example, personal prayer, prayer meetings or cell groups, contemplative devotions and not least missionary witness. As a pastoral fellowship, the congregation should encourage and assist each individual member to lead a life as a follower of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, the Christian life is formed through all kinds of involvement with others on a personal level or in the local church, but also in the context of society as a whole. This includes the many forms of local and institutional charitable service as well as political and social commitment.

2. Lutheran perspective

In their congregational context, the Lutheran churches have instituted social forms in which a dynamic practice of faith helps people to move along the path of spirituality and wholeness. These forms go beyond church institutions, relying on Christian upbringing in the family and the support of the godparents up to confirmation. In accordance with the Reformation's self-understanding as churches of the Word, biblical stories and texts play a central role, because they form the way in which Christians perceive the challenges of the world both fundamentally and comprehensively, touching on the various dimensions of religious influence.

a. Emotional dimension

The relationship between God and humankind, which Christians come to recognise as they encounter God's Word in faith, affects their belief down to the very depths of human emotions as love, mercy and justice, promoting the development of a Christian conscience in the course of baptismal initiation. The experience of this relationship conveys to Christians sensibility for and assurance of a reliable orientation in life.

b. Ritual dimension

The development of conscience through Christian education corresponds to a practice of faith that directs the orientation thus gained into spirituality, whether in fellowship or individually. It leads to a ritual religious practice that

is repeated in form and time, leading to active religious convictions which are consciously implemented in the faith life of the individual and the community. A characteristic feature of Lutheran Christianity is prayer, which combines spiritual practice with the real faith concerns and is therefore anchored both in catechetical instruction and in confirmation classes.

The Lutheran churches have a rich tradition of catechetical elements which serve both the acquisition of knowledge and the learning of Christian practice. They come into use in denominational religious education in schools, but also in the context of local church work, for example, when the Bible and contents from the catechism are used in confirmation classes in order to give help in interpreting life. Beyond the period of adolescence, courses in the Christian faith also include catechetical topics. They do not just deal with cognitive acquisition of Christian convictions, but also with personal experience of the encounter between God and humans that is to be found in the gospel.

c. Ethical and practical dimension of faith

Alongside spiritual practice and the ritual enactment of Lutheran faith, further dimensions of baptismal initiation as discipleship also include the development of social behaviour in line with religious convictions. There are more dimensions of faith that equip Christians to meet the challenges with which they are confronted in a religiously and ideologically plural world, assured of their faith, with confidence and love of their neighbours.

3. Aspects of grace and faith

Baptists and Lutherans are sure that it is God himself who brings people into relationship with himself and calls them to follow him. The relationship with God takes shape in personal spirituality, in Church worship, in the cultivation of spiritual fellowship, in diaconal action and in witnessing to the faith (*leiturgia, koinonia, diakonia, martyria*). This proves that faith is a comprehensive, holistic movement of life. Action motivated by faith is guided by the idea that it is God's action which makes human work possible, engenders and sustains it. This shows that Christian action grows out of God's love for human beings and in turn produces love for God, fellow human beings and creation.

Baptists and Lutherans share the view that the element of initiation into discipleship represents a description of that phase in which the path to Christian faith turns into a (continuous) journey in faith.

4. Joint perspective

Baptists and Lutherans understand discipleship as a constitutive element on the way to faith. The closer description of what is understood by discipleship is marked by theological considerations which are typical for the denominations, but these differences are not mutually exclusive. They can be understood as complementary descriptions of the same matter, supported by a common view of the essential points. The significant consensus makes it clear that when initiation into the Christian faith is understood in this way, the old controversies about the validity or recognition of baptism can be overcome, because it locates the different forms of baptism within the process of becoming and being a Christian.

Conclusion

The reflections presented above make it clear that there is extensive agreement between Baptists and Lutherans with regard to the elements of the path to becoming a Christian. These are so comprehensive that remaining differences can be evaluated and recognised as mutual enrichment and challenge. Differences that still exist are not assessed as church-dividing. It is rather so that the concept of initiation into the Christian faith can serve as a bridge on the way towards church communion.

Literature cited

- Voneinander lernen – miteinander glauben. “Ein Herr, ein Glaube, eine Taufe“ (Eph 4,5). Konvergenzdokument der Bayerischen Lutherisch-Baptistischen Arbeitsgruppe (BALUBAG), https://www.befg.de/fileadmin/bgs/media/dokumente/Voneinander-lernen-miteinander-glauben-Konvergenzdokument-der-Bayerischen-Lutherisch-Baptistischen-Arbeitsgruppe-BALUBAG-2009.PDF [zuletzt abgerufen: 15.5.2023].

- Baptist-Lutheran Joint Commission: Baptists and Lutherans in Conversation. A message to our Churches, Geneva: BWA and LWF 1990.

- William Henry Brackney, The Baptists, Westport 1988.

- Dialogue between the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) and the European Baptist Federation (EBF) on the Doctrine and Practice of Baptism, ed. by Wilhelm Hüffmeier and Tony Peck (Leuenberg Documents vol. 9), Frankfurt am Main 2005.

- EKD (Hg.), Grundzüge des Glaubens im Kontext der Konversion, Hannover / Berlin 12.11.2020, https://engagiert.evlks.de/fileadmin/userfiles/EVLKS_engagiert/E._Materialien/PDF_Materialien/Christen-Asylverfahren-A5-V2-web.pdf [zuletzt abgerufen: 17.5.2023].

- Paul S. Fiddes, Baptism and the Process of Christian Initiation, in St. E. Porter and A. R. Cross, Dimensions of Baptism. Biblical and Theological Studies. Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series 234, Sheffield 2002, 280-303.

- Erich Geldbach, Freikirchen, in: Reinhard Frieling / Erich Geldbach / Reinhard Thöle (Hrsg.), Konfessionskunde. Orientierung im Zeichen der Ökumene, Stuttgart 1999.

- Kirchengemeinschaft nach evangelischem Verständnis. Ein Votum zum geordneten Miteinander bekenntnisverschiedener Kirchen (EKD-Texte 69), Hannover 2001.

- Agreement between Reformation Churches in Europe (Leuenberg Agreement), Trilingual edition with introduction, By Order of the Executiv Committee for the Leuenberg Doctrinal Conversations ed. by Wilhelm Hüffmeier, Frankfurt am Main 1993.

- Martin Luther, Grund und Ursach aller Artikel (1521), in: D. Martin Luthers Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Weimarer Ausgabe (WA), Schriften 7, Weimar 1897, 309-457 (auch in: Luthers Werke in Auswahl, hrsg. von Otto Clemen. Zweiter Band, Berlin 1950, 60-132).

- Paul D. Murray, Receptive ecumenism. Eine Einführung, Theologische Quartalschrift 196 (2016), 235-247.

- Paul D. Murray / Gregory A. Ryan / Paul Lakeland, Receptive Ecumenism as Transformative Ecclesial Learning. Walking the Way to a Church Re-formed, Oxford 2022.

- Ökumene im 21. Jahrhundert. Bedingungen – theologische Grundlegungen – Perspektiven (EKD-Texte 124), Hannover 2015.

- One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition, Faith and Order Paper No. 210, World Council of Churches, Geneva 2011.

- Oliver Pilnei / Friedrich Schneider (Hrsg.), Mission mit Respekt und Toleranz. Baptistische Perspektiven zu dem Verhaltenskodex “Das christliche Zeugnis in einer multireligiösen Welt“ (Edition BEFG 1), Wustermark 2015.

- Account of Faith, ed. by Uwe Swarat, Kassel 2nd ed. 2022.

- Karen E. Smith, Kirche als Gemeinschaft der Gläubigen. Der Bundesgedanke in der Ekklesiologie des frühen Baptismus, in: Andrea Strübind / Martin Rothkegel (Hrsg.), Baptismus. Geschichte und Gegenwart, Göttingen 2011, 23-43.

- Sichtbare Einheit der Kirche in lutherischer Perspektive, Eine Studie des Ökumenischen Studienausschusses, April 2016 (Texte aus der VELKD Nr. 176), Hannover 2016.

- Die Taufe und die Eingliederung in den Leib Christi, die Kirche. Lutherisch/mennonitisch/römisch-katholische trilaterale Gespräche 2012-2017, hrsg. von Fernando Enns, Leipzig und Paderborn 2022.

- Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, Faith and Order Paper No. 111, Growth in Agreement: Reports and Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level, ed. By Herding Meyer and Lukas Vischer, New York, 1984, 545 – 585.

- Unser Glaube. Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche, VELKD (Hrsg.), 2. Auflage der vollständig überarbeiteten Auflage von 2013, Gütersloh 2021.

Imprint

United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD)
Office of the VELKD in the church office of the EKD

Press office
Herrenhäuser Straße 12
30419 Hanover
Tel.: +49 511 2796-532
Email: pressestelle@velkd.de

Online publication
Editorial team: OKR Johannes Dieckow, OKR Dr. Dr. Frank Hofmann, Dörte Rautmann
English Translation: Neville Williamson
Layout: noémia hopfenbach • media design
ISSN 2190-7625
© 2024 VELKD