We present herewith the results of a dialogue which was conducted between representatives of the European Baptist Federation (EBF) and the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) in the years between 2002 and 2004. These results are less than an authoritative document since our delegations were not mandated to produce any binding agreements for our communities, still less for their member churches or national unions. They are, however, more than a noncommittal paper produced by experts due to the fact that the dialogue was conducted pursuant to the wish of both organisations to reach a deepened communion and cooperation. We, the undersigning in our capacity as chairpersons of the EBF and CPCE delegations respectively, hope that the results of the dialogue may serve as a basis for the intensification of our communion at many levels. In order to underline it, we give at first a short report on the process of the dialogue and its background, single out some important issues of the final declaration, and conclude by providing some pointers on the reception of the results.

1. The Background and the Dialogue Progress

After the joining of the European Methodists, a classical free church, in the Leuenberg Church Fellowship was approved in 1994 and implemented in 1997, already in 1999 and 2000 a first round of dialogue took place between Leuenberg churches and Baptists. It was occasioned by a request of the Union of Evangelical Free Churches in Germany (BEFG) in November 1996 addressed to the Executive Committee of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship (LCF) to launch a dialogue with the view of a possible cooperation. The request of the BEFG was made with the approval of the EBF and thus had from the outset a pan-European effect. However, both delegations, which were set up following the agreement of the LCF Executive Committee in 1998, showed a numerical dominance of German theologians.

The final report of this first round of dialogues, which was adopted in February 2000, points out that the Baptists’ interest in the dialogue is grounded by the wish not to remain apart in an integrating Europe but to give a sign of reconciliation through a deepened communion with the Protestant churches joined together in the Leuenberg Church Fellowship. It was important to strive for an engaging cooperation to begin with, but in the longer term also to consider a membership in the Leuenberg Church Fellowship.

The first round of EBF–LCF dialogues fell into line with the model of the Leuenberg Agreement by emphasising the common understanding of the gospel (section I.2) on the one hand, and by addressing very carefully the condemnations of the Reformation period (II.2). In both points convergences could be found, without reaching any concluding results though. It was agreed that the already existing agreements represented already at that point of time a basis for a closer cooperation at many a level, but further theological work had to be done on

the still remaining questions of disagreement. The final report of 2000 made three concrete recommendations: opening a doctrinal conversation on Baptism between the Leuenberg churches and the Baptists, enabling the Baptist participation in the Leuenberg doctrinal conversations, and accompanying the dialogue through discussions at a national level (IV).
These recommendations were positively received by both sides. The EBF Council during its meeting in Riga, Latvia, in 2000 agreed that the EBF could enter into discussions with the LCF. The LCF General Assembly 2001 in Belfast agreed that the representatives of the Baptists Unions in Europe should be involved in the theological dialogue on baptism, and besides on other issues “which are perceived on either side to stand in the way of mutual church fellowship”.

The Belfast Assembly agreed furthermore that the EBF should be invited to send its own representatives as participant observers within future programme of doctrinal conversations held by the LCF. We are pleased that since the fall of 2002 each LCF study group has already been enriched by a Baptist participant as permanent guest and the theological exchange between our communities is already being fostered this way.

In December 2001 the LCF Executive Committee set up a delegation for the dialogues with the Baptists. Bishop Dr Martin Hein (Kassel, Germany), deputy member of the Executive Committee, was asked to direct the delegation. The EBF representatives to the talks were led by the EBF General Secretary, Dr Theodor Angelov (Sofia, Bulgaria).

Both delegations could meet in October 2002 at a first consultation in Hamburg hosted by the Baptist Albertinen-Diakoniewerk. The agenda focused on the respective understanding of baptism and its foundations in the New Testament. The introduction into the Leuenberg Model of church fellowship was also important as it should provide an important frame for the dialogues.

_The second consultation took place in Hofgeismar in June 2003 at the invitation of the Evangelical Church of Kurhessen-Waldeck. Beside the understanding of baptism, the understandings of faith and church were also examined from the viewpoints of both traditions. At the end of the consultation, both delegations were optimistic of elaborating a joint text at the next meeting. A six-member committee was entrusted with the task of text drafting, which was done at a meeting in Berlin in December 2003._

At the concluding session which was held at the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague from 23 to 25 January 2004, the draft submitted was examined in in-depth discussions and revised – partly considerably – in small mixed groups and plenary sessions. At the end of the meeting a text was presented which was unanimously received by all the 18 delegates present. The clear result obtained after a relatively short period of time reflects the increased confidence and the last-mentioned friendly atmosphere between both delegations. It was also a contribution of our joint prayers and listening to the Holy Scripture, which occupied an important place at every meeting.

### 2. Contents of our final text

The EBF-CPCE dialogue does not lay the claim of delivering a complete examination of controversial theological questions or mentioning all the elements of the manifold agreement in doctrine and practice. For that it refers to the various other dialogues, especially the final texts of the worldwide Baptist-Reformed or Baptist-Lutheran dialogues (1977 and 1990

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2 Hüffmeier/Müller, Versöhnte Verschiedenheit, p. 395.
respectively). It is its wish to come a further step in the core question, viz. the possibility of a church fellowship.

This intention was decisive for the structure and accentuation of our text. In a first point – analogous to the Leuenberg Agreement and the Declaration on the Church Fellowship with the Methodists – the convergence in the understanding of the gospel had to be described in a concise manner. We are grateful that this could be basically done through an affirming quotation of the paragraphs concerned of the Leuenberg Agreement. The two following sections illustrate – not as an alternative, but as a supplement – the biblical foundation of our statements and the mandatory character of the gospel.

The specifications on baptism in Part II of the paper represent in some measure the core of the declaration. We are aware of the fact that this part will trigger most heated discussions as it deals most clearly with the documents achieved so far. We believe, however, that right here the obstacles in the way of thinking, which often stand between Baptist and other Protestant churches, must be broken through an extension of perspectives.

Part III of the paper dealt with a further theme complex in which, according to many theologians, a deep difference lies between Baptists and classical Reformation churches: ecclesiology. We became aware, however, that the supposed front-line position between a pure congregationalism of Baptists and an institutional concept of church of the CPCE churches was not so much a reality as prejudices. Together we could make statements on the nature and mission of the church, in the light of which the divergences in the organisational structure of church ministry appeared non-divisive. Also in the vision of church unity as diversity reconciled in Christ, we could discover a deep common conviction. For particular formulations in this section, we resorted to the result of the dialogue between the Lutheran Church of Norway and the Baptist Union of Norway.

In many passages, however, we could formulate even deeper convergence.

The last part of the paper was dedicated to evaluating the results of the three previous parts and suggesting consequences. It was for us a bitter realisation that the presuppositions for a full church fellowship were not given yet according to the understanding of the Leuenberg Agreement. However, steps towards it became likely and are expressly recommended.

As the working language of the dialogue was English, the English version of the final report is the official one. German and French translations were made for reasons of communication among the CPCE churches.

3. Reception

Both delegations have fulfilled their task by forwarding the final report to the respective governing body. The further procedure is now again in the hand of the prime movers.

Both the Executive Committee of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe and the Executive Committee and Council of the European Baptist Federation have been continuously receiving the progress reports and relayed their expectations to the delegations.

The EBF Executive Committee at its meeting in Yerevan, 1–4 April 2004 made the following decision:

- To ask the member Unions at the EBF Council in September 2004 to receive the Report with thanks to both delegations, and commends it for discussion within the member Unions, especially those that have substantial numbers of CPCE churches in their countries
- The EBF Council encourages those Member Unions that wish to do so to enter into bilateral conversations with CPCE member churches in their own countries, using this Report as a basis to see whether closer fellowship is possible
- Recognises that a full ‘church fellowship’ is not possible at this time, however the EBF is willing to continue the good relations with CPCE and to cooperate in areas which help our mutual concern to further God’s mission in contemporary Europe.

The CPCE Executive Committee at its meeting in Speyer 23–25 April 2004 made a similar decision:

“The Executive Committee thanks the CPCE delegation and especially its chairperson Bishop Dr Hein for the fruitful dialogues with the European Baptist Federation. It regards the final report “The Beginning of the Christian Life and the Nature of the Church” as an important step on the way towards a deepened communion between the CPCE churches and the EBF. It encourages its member churches to bilateral dialogues with the Baptist Unions in their regions and asks them to express their views. The General Assembly 2006 will deliberate on further steps.”

In this sense we present this final report to the EBF member unions and the CPCE member churches, along with all Christians interested. We hope that its theological statements will be carefully studied and its practical recommendations will be implemented wherever possible.

For both delegations:

Dr Theodor Angelov (Sofia)  Dr Martin Hein (Kassel)
General Secretary of the EBF  Bishop of the Evangelical Church in Kurhessen-Waldeck,

List of participants

**EBF Delegates:**
General Secretary Dr. Theodor Angelov (Sofia), Chairperson
Prof. Paul Fiddes (Oxford)
Rector Keith Jones (Prague)
Prof. Johnny Jonsson (Stockholm)
Prof. Tony Peck (Bristol)
Prof. Wiard Popkes (Lunenburg)
Dr Sergei Sannikov (Odessa)
The Beginning of the Christian Life and the Nature of the Church

Results of the Dialogue between the CPCE and the EBF

Part I: Gospel

1. We affirm the statement on the Gospel in the Leuenberg Agreement as the mutually accepted understanding of the Gospel:

“The Gospel is the message of Jesus Christ, the salvation of the world, in fulfilment of the promise given to the people of the Old Covenant.

a) The true understanding of the Gospel was expressed by the fathers of the Reformation in the doctrine of justification.

b) In this message Jesus Christ is acknowledged as the One in whom God became human and bound himself to humankind; as the crucified and risen One who took God’s judgement upon himself and, in doing so, demonstrated God’s love to sinners; and as the coming One who as Judge and Saviour leads the world to its consummation.

c) Through his Word, God by his Holy Spirit calls all humankind to repent and believe, and assures the believing sinner of his righteousness in Jesus Christ. Whoever put their trust in the Gospel are justified in God’s sight for the sake
of Jesus Christ and set free from the accusation of the law. In daily repentance and renewal they live within the fellowship in praise of God and service to others, in the assurance that God will bring his kingdom in all its fullness. In this way God creates new life and plants in the midst of the world the seed of a new humanity.

d) This message sets Christians free for responsible service in the world and makes them ready to suffer in this service. They know that God’s will, as demand and succour, embraces the whole world. They stand up for temporal justice and peace between individuals and nations. To do this they have to join with others in seeking rational and appropriate criteria and play their part in applying these criteria. They do so in the confidence that God sustains the world and as those who are accountable to him.

(e) In this understanding of the Gospel we take our stand on the basis of the ancient creeds of the Church and reaffirm the common conviction of the Reformation confessions that the unique mediation of Jesus Christ in salvation is the heart of the Scriptures and that the message of justification as the message of God's free grace is the measure of all the Church's preaching.

(Chapt. II. The Common Understanding of the Gospel Art. 7-12 of the Agreement between Reformation Churches in Europe (Leuenberg Agreement)

2. The Gospel, as proclaimed in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and attested by the Church, is God’s unique invitation to participate in his love revealed by Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. The Gospel of Jesus Christ brings God’s love to power, leading us from sin to faith in joyful repentance and obedience towards the will of God. The content of the Gospel can be described as God’s activity saving men and women by grace through faith (Eph 2:5; Rom 10:9), justifying them unconditionally (Rom 3:21-24), accepting them into fellowship with Himself (Luke 14 21-23; 15: 22-24), sanctifying them by forgiving their sins (Hebr 9:13-14; 10:14), and renewing them according to the image of Christ (Col 3:10; 2 Cor 3:18) to walk in the newness of life (Rom 6:4).

3. In obedience to the will of God and in order to fulfil the mandate of Jesus Christ the Church is committed to proclaim the Gospel by

(a) Sharing the Word of God, especially the message of the justification and sanctification of the ”sinner” (Rom 4:5; 5:6; 1 Cor 1:30).

(b) Baptizing in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19)

(c) Celebrating the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:23-26)

(d) Practising discipleship and living in unity (John 17:20-23).
Part II: Christian Faith and Baptism

In the event of a person’s baptism, the Christian church celebrates God’s unbreakable promise to meet us as godless human beings, to overcome our godlessness and to have communion with us in time and eternity. In baptism there is thus a coming together of the love of God and the human response of faith. Baptism unites the person baptized with the baptizing community and with all Christians, so that they exist as one church of Jesus Christ. As a ‘bond of unity’ among Christians, baptism points to Jesus Christ as the foundation of this unity, which is stronger and more supportive than all the divisions within the body of Christians. For this reason, the churches recognize every baptism that has been carried out in accordance with the gospel and they rejoice over every person who is baptized.

1. Faith emerges from the proclamation of the Gospel and is enabled by the Holy Spirit (Rom 10:14-17; Gal 3:1-5). Therefore faith is not the product of a foregoing human decision but trust in the God who meets us as godless human beings; in this way faith shows itself in the willing life of discipleship, or obedience (Rom 1:5). Here we acknowledge the existing understanding which has already been achieved in recent rounds of talks between Baptists and other Protestant Churches. Coming back to the results of the Baptist World Alliance and the Lutheran World Federation Conversations from 1990 (Chapt. II, Art. 1: The State of the Question) we reaffirm the following:

‘[Our Churches] have basically the same understanding of faith and discipleship. Our discussions showed that inherited reservations and fears on either side do not affect the substance of the issues, but rather signal dangers of one-sided emphases arising as the traditions have developed. We both regard faith as the appropriate answer to God’s gracious invitation. It is both a life-renewing event and a lifelong process. It is total and confident commitment to God, practised in discipleship.’

Baptists may need to pay more regard to faith as a gift of God. Other Protestants may need to remember that the divine gift of faith necessarily calls for human response and enables a transformed life. Faith will always simultaneously appear as a gracious gift of God and as an act of the individual believer.

2. The gift of the triune God, received in faith, is God’s participation in the life of people whom he has created and affirmed, and God's granting of a share in his own life. Through such participation, God's love is made a reality to be experienced. This reality is God’s ‘Yes’ which has become an event in Jesus Christ. (2 Cor 1:19-20). By faith in Jesus Christ, sinners experience the creative and reconciling love of the triune God, and say their own ‘yes’ to it, in such a way that they know themselves to be part of the history of that love: those who have faith know that nothing can separate them from the love of God which is in Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 8:38-39). In baptism into the name of the triune God, the Christian church celebrates the victory of the love of God over human godlessness and over all the powers of evil which have been given entrance into life by our unbelief, our lack of love and our loss of hope for this world. Death is swallowed up in victory … but thanks be to God who gives us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Cor 15:54ff). Baptism is therefore also a place where human beings can say a ‘yes’ of faith to the God who has already said yes to them in the victory of love.
3. In baptism the triune God testifies to those being baptized that, through the Gospel, they have gained a part in the history of Jesus Christ, in his earthly life, in his death and in his resurrection. The person being baptized is sealed by God into the truth of the Gospel, in which Christians believe (2 Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:13-14). Baptism is thus the sign and central event of initiation, or the beginning of the Christian life, but it is not the whole of the beginning. Initiation is not complete unless baptism is accompanied by repentance and initial Christian nurture, until the point is reached where a person can make his or her own grateful response of ‘yes’ to God, is commissioned for service in the world, and shares in the Lord’s Supper for the first time. Through this whole process of initiation, whose focus is baptism, the Christian disciple comes to belong irrevocably to Jesus Christ and to the freedom of the children of God achieved through the death and resurrection of Christ. Baptized into the death of Jesus Christ (Rom 6:3), the ‘old humanity’ which has fallen victim to sin is ‘crucified and buried with Christ’, and thus ‘has become free from sin’ (Rom. 6:6-7). In this freedom, liberated from the sinful past and its consequences, a future is opened up to the one baptized, for a life with God (Rom. 6:1-2) and for life in the community of believers as a member of the body of Christ. This process of initiation may take a short time or an extended period. Through it a person is received into the church, which rejoices over the fact that a person is granted new life with God, and that he or she will live together with God in the community of believers here and now, and remain together with them eternally.

4. Since God, who loves created beings, is committed once for all in baptism to sinners by justifying grace, and because those baptized commit themselves irrevocably to the grace of God, baptism cannot be repeated. The unique event of baptism has such a fundamental meaning for the life of the baptized, that we can describe the Christian life as a continuous ‘return to baptism’, which can come to liturgical expression in special ‘celebrations of the remembrance of baptism’.

5. In baptism the church celebrates God’s grace, through which the sinner is justified and born again to a new life in the freedom of faith and in caring love. For the person being baptized, baptism thus marks a fundamental change of life: the lack of relationships which destroys life, and which is caused by human beings themselves, is replaced by an abundance of relationships in a life with God and with all creation. With baptism, the one baptized personally takes responsibility for a life which is rich in relationships in the fellowship of believers, and which corresponds to God’s own richness of relationship: a life of trust in God, of love for God and for fellow human beings, lived in the hope of the fulfilment of all the works of God. The whole church also has a responsibility to those baptized, to enable them to live as Christian disciples.

6. The church proclaims and baptizes by the commission of Jesus Christ who is raised from the dead (Mt 28:18-20), and in doing so the church participates in the authority of the crucified one who is raised to God the Father. Christ submitted himself to be baptized at the beginning of his mission of proclaiming the Kingdom of God, and thereby showed his solidarity with sinners. While John the Baptist baptized ‘with water for repentance’, the baptism which is performed in the authority of Jesus Christ happens not only with water, but ‘with the Holy Spirit and with fire’ (Mt 3:11). When the Word of the Gospel which justifies sinners is joined with the symbolic act of
baptism with water, this symbolic act becomes a ‘sacrament’ which portrays death to
the old life for those baptized, followed by a rising to new life which is cleansed from
sin, and through this act God makes these realities happen. In this sense the Christian
confessions echo the assertion of Augustine: ‘when the word is added to the elements,
then there is sacrament’.

7. Baptism witnesses to, and mediates, the loving self-communication of God, which
has happened in the history of Jesus Christ, which is proclaimed in the word of prea-
ching, and which is promised to every person. It does this with the intention that those
baptized should know themselves to be joined together irrevocably as the fellowship
of believers. In this way, baptism is a bond of unity that marks the Christian life, and
that joins all those baptized to the one church of Jesus Christ. Together with other
marks of unity mentioned in Eph. 4:3-8, baptism is of fundamental ecumenical signi-
ficance. It commits the divided church to an agreement that reflects the unity of the
body of Christ.
The unity is based on the redemptive suffering and dying of Christ, in which all
Christians share. This suffering and dying is illustrated in the Gospel of Mark by the
image of a baptism with which Christ himself was baptized (Mark 10:38-39), being
immersed into human life and death. This 'baptism' was unique in that Christ alone
achieved our salvation through it. The baptism of Christians, however, in the New
Testament is to be understood as sharing in this act; we die and are buried with Christ
'so that as Christ was raised from the dead ... we too might walk in newness of life'
(Rom 6:3-4). This already-existing unity challenges the churches to move beyond
their divisions and to explore ways in which their different forms of baptism in water
might be understood to relate to the one ‘baptism’ of Christ in his life, death and
resurrection.

8. The union of the person being baptized with the one church of Jesus Christ, effect-
ted through baptism, means concretely a membership in the baptizing congregation,
or in the confessing church to which this congregation belongs. Nevertheless, no new
baptism is required when someone enters a different congregation or Christian
denomination, since baptism is unrepeatable (see paragraph 3). The point at issue can
only be the validity of the baptism that someone has already received.

9. In baptism, those being baptized make their assent to the confession of the Church
(Rom 10:9-10) and ask with the congregation baptizing them for the Spirit of God and
for a clear conscience (1 Pet 3:21). Those who baptize infants believe that they are
making room for a confession of faith no less than those who baptize confessing
disciples. Those who baptize infants stress the responsibility of the congregation, the
parents and the godparents for growth in the Christian life which is opened to the one
being baptized. If Christian initiation is understood as a process in which baptism is
only one moment, then some Baptists will be able to recognize infant baptism as a
valid part of that process, as long as it is followed later by a faith which is owned
personally by the person baptized. Many Baptists, however, will want to recognize the
initiation of other Christians into Christ and the church, regardless of the form of bap-
tism. Without recognizing infant baptism, they will affirm that Christians baptized
only as infants have been incorporated into the body of Christ, when they discern in
their lives the one Spirit, one body, one hope, and one faith which God grants (Eph
4:3-8).
10. The Spirit of God, who communicates himself in the preaching of the Gospel and therefore also through baptism, unites the one being baptized with Jesus Christ and deepens this union. In baptism, the congregation realizes together with the person being baptized that in this world we have no abiding city, but that we seek one that is to come (Hebr 13:14). In this way, baptism is the ‘sacrament of departure’ for the pilgrim people of God, bringing into a focus the opening stage of the journey of Christian life which is initiation. Alongside this appears the eucharist as ‘the sacrament of provision on the way’. As the sacrament of departure, baptism grounds the mission of Christians in the world, and therefore it is also the foundation of the general priesthood of all believers, according to which every believer is authorized and obligated to declare forgiveness of sins to confessing people in the name of God. This priesthood also means that the Spirit bestows spiritual gifts (charismata) on each person who has been baptized, equipping them for service in the church and the world. When the person baptized is a confessing disciple, the very event of baptism can be the moment of receiving gifts and being commissioned to serve.

11. All baptisms are recognized by our churches which, following the command of Jesus Christ (Mt 28:19), are performed in accordance with the Gospel. A baptism which is carried out in accordance with the Gospel will include at least baptizing in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, with the symbolic action of effusion with water or immersion in water. We declare that the churches in both our traditions are being challenged to examine further what it means to baptize in accordance with the Gospel, and especially what this implies for the place of human faith within the event of baptism. Regardless of our present disagreements over water-baptism, the recognition that all Christians are immersed into the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is, however, a powerful expression of the unity of the church already given in Christ.
Part III: The Church

1. The Church is the work of God

The Christian church is the work of the triune God. God has created the church in the world so that people may come to faith in Jesus Christ and so that they may be kept in this faith by the Holy Spirit.

In the biblical witness to the first Christian Pentecost it becomes clear how the circle of disciples become a Christian congregation characterized by the proclamation of the Word, holy acts and community life. This happens through the work of the Holy Spirit. New members are received into the Church through baptism.

Jesus Christ is the foundation and the fullness of the Church (1 Cor 3:11; Eph 1:22-23; 4:15-16). For this reason the New Testament calls the Church the „Body of Christ“ (1 Cor 12:12-27). Thus Jesus Christ is the measure for the entire being and mission of the Church. Stating this we express that the Church is nothing by herself but a creation of the Word of God.

In the Church faith obtains its social shape. Both Acts and the Epistles show how the New Testament Church, over time, developed its structures and organisational forms in the richness of their diversity. The church is universal and becomes visible in the local community. Wherever Christians gather „in his name“, the Body of Christ is manifested in fullness in the world (Matthew 18:20).

2. The Church is the community of saints

The life of the church expresses a richness of relationships in the fellowship of believers, which participates in God’s own richness of relationship. In the New Testament Christians are called “saints” (Acts 9:13, 32; Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2).

Hence, the apostolic confession of faith calls the church the “community of saints”. This does not mean that the church and the Christians are holy in themselves, but only because they place their trust in Jesus Christ and are thereby sanctified. The Christian church, the congregation, is a community of persons who believe in Jesus Christ (e.g. Acts 5:14; 1 Cor 1:21; Eph 1:1). Therefore the church is both local and universal. The one, holy, universal and apostolic Church is realized where people celebrate God’s love in worship, receiving the Gospel of Jesus Christ in faith, gathering around his Word, practicing baptism, sharing the Lord’s Supper and by doing so confessing their faith before God and the world.

Both the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe and the European Baptist Federation stress the priesthood of all believers. However, since the church is the body of Christ where the individual members are equal but have different tasks, it is the gift of some members of the church to exercise public proclamation, the administration of the sacraments, diaconal activities, teaching and other ministries as their particular responsibility (1 Cor 12:27-30).

These particular ministries are not contradictory to the concept of the priesthood of all believers. It is Christ who calls some individuals to these ministries. A church as a whole recognizes those individuals who are so called and suitable for these ministries.
Thus the church also has the task to guide and supervise the individuals called. This responsibility of supervision and guidance may be entrusted to specific officers of the church.

3. The unity of the Church

Since the Church is the Body of Christ, the unity of the Church is provided by him. Her unity is basically not the consequence or the product of human activity, efforts or struggle but depends on Christ’s call to gather in his name. The given unity of the one Church of Christ may be clouded by sin, evil and struggle for truth, but it cannot be erased. Unity therefore does not have to be provided but has to be discovered. Church-unity means not uniformity, but the discovery that another Christian community is proclaiming, celebrating and serving the same Gospel of Jesus Christ in its own tongue, piety, culture and tradition (Acts 2). Therefore the unity of the Church is realized in a reconciled diversity.

For the CPCE churches, unity is given as ‘church fellowship’ when the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the sacraments according to the Gospel are mutually recognized. In this case church fellowship must be declared and the communities understand one another as true expressions of the One Church of Jesus Christ.

For Baptists, being in the body of Christ and not baptism is the basis of unity. This recognizes the evidence of the work of the Spirit in other believers, in terms of the gifts and fruits of the Spirit.

Despite differences of interpretation we recognize the presence of the true church of Jesus Christ in one another. As Christians of different traditions we are able to share in Holy Communion and to acknowledge the ministry of those who are ordained presbyter (pastor) in each other’s churches.

4. The Church is the eschatological people of God

The church is a visible as well as an invisible entity. Therefore it is to be understood as the eschatological people of God whose true extent and fulfilled unity will be revealed at the time of the appearing of Christ (parousia). This implies that churches should not condemn each other but ought to strive after being the church as an image of Christ. That also implies that the organisational structure of the church – be it episcopal, congregational or synodal – should not play a decisive role, if the churches want to fulfil jointly their calling to be the church of Jesus Christ.
Part IV: Summary and questions

1. We have found an agreement in the most important themes of Christian doctrine, especially in the understanding of God’s act of salvation in Christ and of gospel, faith and church.

2. This agreement in the understanding of the Gospel should strongly encourage us to strive for the closest possible community in witness and service. Therefore we call upon all Christians of congregations and member churches in our respective communities to work together in every responsible way to fulfil our missionary calling.

3. Despite this large measure of agreement and mutual recognition an important barrier to the full realization of church fellowship remains. Concerning the question of a proper administration of baptism, there remain differences which could not be fully overcome by those approaches set out in Part 2.

4. The CPCE churches can recognize that the Baptist practice only to baptize believers who are asking for baptism and who have made a confession before baptism, is a proper practice of baptism according to the gospel. But the churches of the CPCE also claim for themselves that the baptism of infants of Christian parents is a possibility which is in accord with the Gospel. When the baptism of believers is performed in Baptist communities of those who have already been baptized as infants, the CPCE churches perceive this as a denial of the validity of this sacrament. For this reason they must reject this practice, which in their view constitutes an inadmissible re-baptism, as an administration of the sacrament which is not according to the Gospel.

5. Baptist Churches feel obliged by their understanding of the biblical testimony only to practise the baptism of believing disciples as being according to the Gospel. Many Baptist Churches cannot accept infant baptisms which have been performed in other churches as valid baptisms. This is especially the case when an infant baptism has not been followed by a Christian upbringing. Therefore they do not understand those baptisms as re-baptisms when they baptize those who have been baptized as infants.

6. As long as such a difference persists we must face the fact that we have a difference in the administration of the sacrament of baptism which hinders church fellowship (as defined by the Leuenberg Agreement). However we believe that there are ways to come to a closer common life. One way is to continue and to develop the existing practise of mutual Eucharistic hospitality. Other ways are set out in the subsequent paragraphs.

7. We must recognize that in recent decades there have been developments on both sides, which have led to convergences in the practice of baptism. In some Lutheran, Reformed, United and Methodist churches in Europe the baptism of infants is not seen as being the rule any longer, but rather the baptism of infants and that of adults can both be perceived as appropriate. In several Baptist congregations an ‘open membership’ is practised, in which churches accept those who have been baptized as infants and confirmed in other Christian churches.
8. We recognize that the churches of the CPCE and the EBF are each striving, in their baptismal practice, to work out an obedience before the Word of God and to exercise true Christian discipleship. The acknowledgement of each other’s integrity self-evidently also includes the question of ordained ministers. For as long as we do not have a full recognition of ministry in a doctrinal sense, we nevertheless encourage the ensuring, the enabling and the widening of a reciprocal acceptance of ministry in practical and pastoral ways at local, national or trans-national levels.

9. We ask the Lutheran and United churches of the CPCE, to clarify the meaning of the condemnations of the ‘Anabaptists’ contained in the Lutheran confessions. In this regard we thankfully accept the results of the Baptist-Lutheran dialogue on the world level, recognising that the condemnations do not apply to Baptists today, with the exception of the one expressed in CA 9. In this regard we ought to take note of the fact that the major reproach of the Reformers against the Anabaptists, that their understanding of baptism made it into a human work (cf. the condemnation in CA 5), can in no way be applicable to the Baptists.

10. In the light of what we have discussed together as reflected in Part II we ask whether it might be possible for us to place different forms of baptism at different places within a commonly understood process of Christian initiation. We recognize that further theological work has to be done on this issue.

11. Since the single hindrance to ‘church fellowship’ lies in the problem of so called ‘re-baptism’, we ask a question of Baptist congregations in Europe: Would it be possible for them to avoid any appearance of re-baptism when believers come from a CPCE church which practises infant baptism? One way forward might be the following. While most Baptists would certainly consider infant Baptism as inappropriate, they might not explicitly question its validity, and in these cases might make a confession of faith alone the requirement for reception into a Baptist congregation, thus completing the path of Christian initiation.

12. We also ask a question of the churches of the CPCE: Can they adhere closely to the desire expressed in the Leuenberg document On the Doctrine and Practice of Baptism, that churches which practise infant baptism continue to ‘accompany the baptized on their journeys of faith through prayer, pastoral care and instruction’? In this way they will avoid any appearance of baptising infants where it seems unlikely that a Christian upbringing will follow.

13. As a result of the very positive talks between us we encourage the member bodies of CPCE and EBF to actively pursue further possibilities of a closer relationship between us, including areas of co-operation which will enable us to respond to the many contemporary challenges facing the churches in Europe.

5 „They condemn the Anabaptists, who reject the baptism of children, and say that children are saved without Baptism.”
6 „They condemn the Anabaptists and others who think that the Holy Ghost comes to men without the external Word, through their own preparations and works.”