

**17th Plenary Session of the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Theological Commission
Helsinki, Finland, 7-14 November 2017**

2017 Common Statement

The Mystery of the Church: F. Ordained Ministry/Priesthood

Following the mandate given by the 15th Plenary Session of the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission (Lutherstadt Wittenberg, Germany, 31 May – 7 June 2011), that discussions on the “Mystery of the Church” should continue and focus on the “Ordained Ministry/Priesthood,” the Commission met in Rhodes, Greece (28 April – 5 May 2015), and Helsinki, Finland (7 – 15 November 2017) to review the work of four preparatory meetings, which met in London, UK (5 – 10 May 2012), Sibiu, Romania (24 – 28 May 2013), Tallinn, Estonia (8 – 13 May 2014), and Nicosia, Cyprus (7 – 13 December 2016) and to produce a Common Statement on the mandated topic.[1]

I: Introductory Remarks on Structure and Terminology

1. The umbrella topic “The Mystery of the Church,” begun in Damascus, has so far been dealt with in five sub-topics: a) “The Mystery of the Church: Word and Sacrament” (Damascus, Syria, 2000); b) “The Sacraments/Mysteria as Means of Salvation” (Oslo, Norway, 2002); c) “Baptism and Chrismation as Sacraments of Initiation into the Church” (Durau, Romania, 2004); d) “The Holy Eucharist in the Life of the Church” (Bratislava, Slovak Republic, 2006); d/2) “The Holy Eucharist in the Life of the Church: Preparation, Ecological and Social Implications” (Paphos, Cyprus, 2008); e) “The Nature, Attributes, and Mission of the Church” (Wittenberg, Germany, 2009-2011). Already in our Damascus Common Statement, we affirm together “that the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments by the ordained ministry in the Church are among the most important marks of the Church.”[2] It is therefore fitting that this final round of discussions on the “Mystery of the Church” should conclude with “The Ordained Ministry/Priesthood.” This is a complex and comprehensive topic, which is treated in eight sections. The Common Statement contains both Lutheran and Orthodox positions as well as statements we make together.
2. Although the specific focus of this statement is Ordained Ministry/Priesthood, it also contains a section (VI) on the “royal priesthood” (βασιλείον ἱεράτευμα), or the general priesthood (γενική ἱερωσύνη) of all baptized Christian believers and its relation to the Ordained Ministry/Priesthood, the former being also known as “clergy” and the latter as “laity.”
3. Lutheran and Orthodox have their own specific terminology for their Ordained clergy. Orthodox use the term “Sacramental Priesthood” (μυστήριον ἱερωσύνης) and refer to their clergy as “Priests” and “Fathers,” while Lutherans generally speak of “Ordained Ministry” and refer to their clergy as “Pastors” (German: Pfarrer) or “Priests.” The Joint Commission has been unable to find any common terminology with exact parity of content because, in spite of closeness and similarities, the terms that are used by both sides are deeply rooted in their respective ecclesiologies and traditions and carry significant theological weight. Some Lutherans do not use the term “Priest” for their Ordained clergy, although the term is common in Nordic countries, parts of Africa and elsewhere. The term does not correspond easily with the main emphasis in their

approach to the Lord's Supper, since the term "Priest" denotes a person who offers a sacrifice, and Lutherans do not regard the Lord's Supper as a sacrifice, except in the narrow sense of re-enacting the once-and-for-all sacrifice of Christ (see Bratislava Statement § 2). On the other hand, the term Priest is a necessary and appropriate term for Orthodox, precisely because it denotes a person who offers the bloodless Sacrifice of the Eucharist, which is offered to the Triune God, is changed by the invocation of the Holy Spirit (Epiclesis) into the Body and Blood of Christ, and is partaken by the Orthodox in the Divine Liturgy.

4. Members of the Commission noted that there are important semantic differences in the use of the terms "Ministry" (διακονία) and "Priesthood" (ιερωσύνη). Whenever the Statement mentions Lutherans and Orthodox in connection with the Ministry/Priesthood and any other terms pertaining to the Church and its functions, it will presuppose their distinctive contents.
5. For the Orthodox, "Ministry" (διακονία) primarily denotes "Sacramental Ministry," i.e. "Ordained Deacons"; but this term also has a secondary meaning, which refers to the non-ordained diaconal ministries or diaconates and services of the faithful in and for the Church. This Sacramental Ministry or Ordained Diaconate goes back to the seven Deacons (cf. the Book of Acts) who were ordained by the Apostles in the Church of Jerusalem to assist them in the gatherings of Christians for fellowship (ἀγάπη), which ended with their participation in the Eucharist – an institution which has been continued to this day as an Apostolic Order and occupies the third place in the threefold Apostolic Order of Orthodox clergy: Bishops, Presbyters and Deacons. On the other hand, "Priesthood," (ιερωσύνη), is connected with the Ordination of Apostolic Successors by the Apostles, that is, "Bishops" and "Presbyters," who were elected and ordained to carry out their Apostolic work in the local churches, which were established by them or their appointed collaborators beyond Jerusalem, in Judaea, Samaria, Syria, etc. Bishops and Presbyters, as distinct from Deacons, are called respectively High-Priests (Ἀρχιερεῖς), Priests (ιερεῖς), and Fathers (Πατέρες), because they preside at the Eucharist and celebrate all other Sacraments/Mysteria that are related to it, namely, Baptism, Chrismation, Confession, Marriage, etc.
6. Nevertheless, Deacons belong to the threefold Office of the Sacrament of Priesthood, because their order was established in the Church by the Holy Apostles through Ordination and their work is primarily offering assistance to the Bishops and the Priests in the sanctuary and generally in their sacramental and administrative duties. Deacons who belong to the Sacrament of the threefold Priesthood should not be confused with the many Diaconates of the royal or general priesthood of baptized Orthodox Christians, some of which have specific diaconal tasks, such as Deaconesses, Sub-Deacons, Readers, Acolytes, etc. and are established through prayer and the laying-on of hands (χειροθεσία) by the Bishops.
7. In Lutheran theology, "Ministry" (διακονία) is a broad and all-encompassing term for the διακονία to which the whole Church is called. It describes the work of the Gospel carried out by Ordained Ministers and lay people together. "Ordained Ministry" specifies the work commanded by Christ that is reserved to the Ordained Ministers alone.

II: Biblical Foundations and Ordained Ministry/ Priesthood

8. Lutherans and Orthodox hold that the priesthood of the Old Testament anticipated the coming of Christ. This Old Testament Priesthood, known as the Aaronic Priesthood, which is richly presented in the books of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers, had to do with the covenant God made with Israel through Moses. It was provisional, because it was a type of the New Testament Priesthood and was based on the sacrifices offered for the atonement of the people. It was replaced by the New Testament Priesthood, which has to do with God's covenant with the whole of humanity through Jesus Christ and his Body (the Church), and was predicated upon the Sacrifice of Christ on the cross. According to the Christian Bible, the New Testament Priesthood is greater than that of the Old Testament because Christ himself is the only great and eternal High Priest in the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 5:5-6, I Cor. 3:1, 14:20 and Ps. 109:4), who was sent by the Father to establish the saving Mystery of the Church, his Body, and to entrust it first to his disciples, the Holy Apostles, and through them to their Successors.
9. Orthodox and Lutherans agree that Christ sent the Apostles, as he himself was sent by the Father, to continue his mission (John 20:21); he gave them the authority to forgive sins through the power of the Holy Spirit (John 20:22-23). He ordered them to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to keep all his commandments, and promised to be with them always until the end of time (Matt. 28:18, 20). This promise is connected with the Mystery/Mysterion of the Holy Eucharist, which he instituted and entrusted to the Holy Apostles at the Last Supper (Luke 22:19-20) and which is fulfilled, revealed and celebrated as the eschatological Mystery of the Kingdom after the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ (Luke 24:35, Acts 2:42). It is central to the Apostolic Ministry (1 Cor. 11:23-26) and to the Mystery of the Church as the Body of Christ.
10. For Orthodox, the teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews on the Priesthood of Christ, and the Eucharistic teaching and practice of the Apostles and their Successors, the Bishops, are the key texts for understanding the New Testament Priesthood. They give priority to the High Priestly Office of the Lord and to the celebration of the Eucharist as the primary activity of the Church. To that extent, Orthodox ecclesiology is primarily Eucharistic. For Lutherans, the Office of the Ordained Ministry, which is a Ministry of both Word and Sacrament, was established by Jesus Christ through the call and commission of the Apostles (Matt. 16:16-19; 28:18-20; John 20:22). Those whom the Apostles appointed to carry on their Ministry are called to uphold the Apostolic faith and teaching of the Church.

III. The Ordained Ministry/Priesthood in the Early Church and the Ecumenical Councils

11. Orthodox and Lutherans together emphasize the importance of the Early Church's witness and history for our understanding of the Church's Ordained Ministry/Priesthood today. Substantial agreement has been reached between Lutherans and Orthodox regarding the Ecumenical Councils in previous statements of the Joint Commission. The Limassol/Cyprus statement (1995) says "We agree on the doctrine of God, the Holy Trinity, as formulated by the Ecumenical Councils of Nicea and Constantinople and on the doctrine of the person of Christ, as formulated by the first four Ecumenical Councils." The Limassol/Cyprus statement also affirms the teaching of the subsequent three Ecumenical Councils, while that of the

Sandbjerg/Denmark statement (1993) affirms that the “canons establish a close relation between the faith once for all delivered to the saints and the necessity of ordering the Church’s life and structure.”

12. Both traditions perceive that their own structures of Ordained Ministry/Priesthood build on the witnesses of the Early Church, both the witness of Scripture and of the Ecumenical Councils. Scripture and Tradition are interwoven and cannot be separated. The Church Fathers decided on the Canon of the New Testament and binding Christian doctrine, as expressed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381). Thus, they are indispensably and inseparably intertwined. Nevertheless, there are differences in our perceptions and understandings of these witnesses and in the understanding of the role of Church Tradition.
13. For Orthodox, Scripture, the seven Ecumenical Councils, Local Synods, and the Church Fathers’ Canons, are the doctrinal norm of their Tradition. They emphasize that the Tradition established in the Early Church, beginning with Jesus’ calling of the Apostles, is unchangeable for the Church. Examples are Canon 6 of Chalcedon (451) on Ordination practices, Canon 19 of Trullo (692) on the teaching Ministry of clergy, Canon 102 of Trullo on the Pastoral Ministry of the Bishop and other Canons giving detailed advice concerning all ranks of clergy.
14. Lutherans, according to their confessional writings, emphasize the binding validity of the first four ecumenical councils, i.e. the Creeds. The Lutheran emphasis on “Scripture alone” does not mean that Lutherans do not emphasize the Early Church Tradition. Luther himself underlined that his understanding of the Gospel was in accordance with the true understanding of the Early Church, referring to the Early Church, the Church Fathers and the Scriptures: “We teach nothing new. We teach what is old and what the apostles and all godly teachers have taught, inculcated, and established before us”.[\[3\]](#)
15. Lutherans and Orthodox hold that the Church needs oversight, exercised personally, collegially and communally; it needs Ordained Pastors/Priests to proclaim the Gospel and administer the Sacraments, and it needs ministers with a special responsibility for the Church’s service to people in need. These tasks must be taken care of today just as they were taken care of in a variety of ways already at the time of the Early Church.
16. Lutherans underline that there is a flexibility in how these ministries are structured in different churches within the Lutheran Communion of Churches, which accords with the flexibility that was known to exist during the earliest history of the Church. Orthodox emphasize that the threefold Ministry is given by Jesus Christ and so is unchangeable.
17. Lutherans and Orthodox, in their respective traditions, agree that the celebration of the Sacraments and the proclamation of the Word of God have always been a primary focus of the Priesthood. Earliest documents of the Apostolic and post-Apostolic age, such as the Didache and the Epistles of St. Ignatius of Antioch, describe the importance of congregational life as revolving around the Eucharist, celebrated by the Bishop and Presbyters under his authority.[\[4\]](#)

18. Lutherans and Orthodox hold that the Early Church established clear structures of leadership and oversight. Among the New Testament writings, especially the Pastoral Epistles underline that the Apostles established offices of leadership in the local churches they founded. There was a close connection between the office of leadership and the transmission of the teaching of the Apostles, the “treasure entrusted” to the disciples of the Apostles (cf. 2 Tim. 1:13-14). Both traditions emphasize the need for oversight of the true transmission of the Apostolic teaching.^[5]
19. There are differences in the hermeneutical approach of Orthodox and Lutherans to the reading and use of writings from the ancient Church. Nevertheless, they both stress that the ministerial structures during the first centuries were closely linked with the need to safeguard the authentic content of the Gospel message. The continuity of the Episcopal Office was an important criterion for recognizing the public mediation of Apostolic teaching. The ongoing task of the Church to provide a binding witness to preserve its unity and protect the integrity of its faith and teachings, was bound together with its establishment of unified ministerial structures

IV: The Ordained Ministry/Priesthood in the Reformation and Lutheran Confessions

20. The Lutheran Reformers, responding to certain long-standing abuses of discipline, to the lack of clarity in sacramental teaching and practice, and to Luther’s insights into the doctrine of justification, sought to reform the Church and its Ministry. In doing so, they appealed to Scripture and to the teachings of the undivided Church. The Lutheran doctrine of the Ministry is presented in the *Book of Concord*, which contains the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church.
21. After the fifth century, the Priesthood of the West began to be shaped by factors that increasingly distinguish it from its counterpart in the East. The most obvious of these factors was the decline of the Western Roman Empire and the collapse of unifying imperial governing structures. This had far-reaching implications for Church-State relations as well as for the Church itself and its clergy. Theological reflection on the Office of Priesthood after the tenth century was heavily influenced by the Church’s penitential practice and the growing consensus that Penance be included among the Church’s seven Sacraments. Western medieval theology distinguished between two kinds of powers conferred on Bishops: one was the power deriving from Ordination that gave them the right to administer the Sacraments and to preach publicly in the Church (*potestas ordinis*), the other was the power that gave them the right, among other things, to forgive and retain sins and to excommunicate the impenitent and heretics (*potestas jurisdictionis*). The Augsburg Confession accepts the first power, critically modifies the second, and refers both to the Office of the Ministry rather than to the person of the Bishop. It thereby denies those aspects of the Episcopal Office that were unique to Bishops and asserts that, by divine right (i.e. according to the Gospel), a Bishop has no more authority than any ordinary Pastor.^[6]
22. According to Augsburg Confession, the authority of the Pastoral Office comes from Christ through the Church, and Ordained Ministers are ultimately accountable to him (1 Cor. 4:1-4). The confession also says that “no one should publicly teach, preach or administer the sacraments without a proper [public] call” (*rite vocatus*).^[7] Only those properly called and ordained have the authority to assume the Public Office since it does not belong to any individual as such but is Christ’s gift to the Church. Whereas

all believers receive gifts through the Holy Spirit, those who are called to the Ordained Ministry receive a special charism that enables them to carry out the tasks of the Office.

23. Luther, in agreement with the ancient Patristic Tradition, said that the Ordained Minister is God's hands and God's mouth, or alternatively Christ's hands and Christ's mouth.^[8] It is really the Triune God himself who baptizes, speaks through the words of the sermon, absolves the penitent, and administers the Holy Eucharist.
24. Luther did not call the Ordained Ministry a Sacrament, mainly because he had in mind the medieval rite of Ordination. This rite was very complex, consisting of many different elements (long litanies, prostrations, anointings, the *prorectio* of chalice and paten, and so on), but the core element was the *prorectio* of chalice and paten, not the laying-on of hands. Since Luther couldn't find a biblical foundation for the *prorectio* (the giving of the symbols of office), he was critical of the Ordination rites of that time. Yet Luther himself could still recommend to the Bohemians that they ordain Pastors with prayer and the laying-on of hands,^[9] and as early as 1535 Ordination became obligatory for Lutheran Pastors in Wittenberg.^[10] Moreover, Luther considered Ministry and Ordination among the visible signs of the Church in his treatise "On the Councils and the Church" (1539). Here he points out: "The church is recognized externally by the fact that it consecrates or calls ministers, or has offices that it is to administer. There must be bishops, pastors, or preachers, who publicly and privately give, administer, and use the aforementioned four things or holy possessions [the Word of God, the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, the public use of the Keys] on behalf of and in the name of the church, or rather by reason of their institution by Christ...Wherever you see this done, be assured that God's people, the holy Christian people, are present."^[11]
25. The Augsburg Confession affirms the divine origin of the office of preaching and administering the Sacraments.^[12] Melanchthon can even recognize Ordination as a Sacrament as long as it is not linked with the Priestly Office of sacrifice but only with the preaching and teaching of the Gospel.^[13] In line with the reformers and confessional writings, Lutherans today acknowledge that Ordained Ministry has a sacramental character.

V: The Theology and Practice of Ordination

26. Lutherans and Orthodox, in their respective traditions, perform Ordination services within the celebration of the Eucharist. Both refer to the basic Priestly functions that are enabled by Ordination; they do this with the understanding that the Priesthood in their traditions is grounded in the person and work of Christ. The efficacy of the Ordained Ministry is a charismatic operation that reflects God's effectiveness in the divine economy of Christ. Lutherans and Orthodox teach that preaching the Gospel and celebrating the Sacraments is an authoritative task of the Ordained Ministry. While they also teach that it is the Bishop who ordains candidates to the Ministry/Priesthood, differences regarding Episcopacy and the sacramentality of Ordination still remain between our traditions.

A. Orthodox Perspectives

27. The Ordained Priesthood is a charismatic authority within the Church, which directs and coordinates all the functions of the Body of Christ, that is, the historic Church, and maintains its unity. The Sacrament of Priestly Ordination is God's gift to the Church and is received by the candidate who comes forward to be ordained by the Bishop. The ordained person receives the grace of the Holy Spirit that enables him to represent Christ in the Church, to celebrate the Sacraments/Mysteria and, through the gifts of the Holy Spirit, to sanctify the whole life of the Church and render possible the growth and well-being of the Body of Christ. In this sense, the unbroken Succession of Bishops is absolutely necessary because, without the Bishop, the Sacrament of the Priesthood cannot be celebrated, especially the all-inclusive Sacrament of the Divine Eucharist.
28. The Orthodox incorporate the Sacrament of Ordination within the divine Eucharist as a manifestation of the sacramental character of the Orthodox Priesthood. The Orthodox Church is highly sensitive to the doctrinal, canonical, and moral presuppositions of Ordination, elements of which are incorporated into her rites, as can be seen specifically from the extensive "Confession of Faith," which refers to the principal dogmas of Triadology, Christology and Ecclesiology and which is legally required of the candidate for the Office of Bishop.
29. The Bishop's privilege to ordain Priests is linked to his role in the Eucharist. It is remarkable that, although some Sacraments, such as Baptism and Marriage, can also be celebrated outside the Eucharistic Liturgy, only Ordination continues to be performed exclusively in the context of the Eucharist. It is also typical for the Orthodox Church that the Ordination of a Deacon, Presbyter, and Bishop each takes place at a different time within the Liturgy, determined by the special function of each in the Eucharistic celebration. The Deacon, an assistant in the celebration of the Eucharist, is ordained after the consecration of the Holy Gifts. The Presbyter who, in accordance with the mandate of the Bishop, presides over the Eucharistic celebration, is ordained after the Great Entrance, in direct reference to the subsequent consecration of the Holy Gifts, which are transferred to the altar. The Bishop is ordained after the Trisagion, which is followed by the readings and the preaching of the word and the culmination of the Eucharistic celebration. This indicates the indivisible responsibility of the Bishop for both the Word and the Sacraments.
30. It is remarkable that Lutherans do not call Ordination a Sacrament in spite of its many sacramental characteristics. Ordination, which was instituted by Christ, takes place within the Eucharistic Liturgy, and is normally performed by a Bishop with the laying on of hands and the invocation of the Holy Spirit. Orthodox wonder if the Lutheran decision not to call Ordination a Sacrament is simply a semantic choice based on history or if there is really a deeper theological rationale. Reflection on this point would be useful to our dialogue.

B. Lutheran Perspectives

31. In dogmatic terms, the Holy Ministry belongs to the *esse* (essence) of the Church. Without it the Church would not exist. The main functions of the Ordained Ministry are the proclamation of the Gospel, crystallized in the offer and bestowal of the forgiveness of sins, and the administration of the Holy Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist. The Ordained Minister, as the servant of the Liturgy, is the one through

whom Jesus Christ publicly proclaims the Gospel and administers the Sacraments in the Church. The Lutheran Confessions teach with the ancient Church that the efficacy of the Ordained Ministry is not dependent on the character of the office holder but depends solely on the effectiveness of God's word (Isa. 55:11).[\[14\]](#)

32. Lutheran Ordination is mostly linked to the Eucharistic service in a congregation. Lutheran candidates for the Ordained Ministry are usually ordained by their local Bishop. In most Lutheran Churches, Bishops are elected from among the Ordained Ministers and installed in a special Eucharistic service involving the participation of at least three Bishops. That installation, however, is not considered a new Ordination since Lutherans hold that there is only one Office of Ordained Ministry. Lutheran Ordination rites underscore the special character of the Ordained Ministry. Through the rite of Holy Ordination, God's blessing and grace are invoked on the candidate and the newly Ordained Pastor is acknowledged to be a Minister of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church through the gracious work of the Holy Spirit.

VI: The Relationship between the Royal Priesthood and the Ordained Ministry/Priesthood

33. Lutherans and Orthodox hold that in the Old Testament there is a general royal priesthood and a special Priesthood consecrated to offer sacrifices. Though all Abraham's descendants as God's chosen people benefited from his promise to Abraham (see Gen. 17:4-14; 22:16-18; 28:13-15; Ex. 19:4-6), God still chose certain people to become Priests to serve him and his people, and to enact the cultic laws that he gave them.
34. The notion of the royal priesthood is used by both our traditions. It is an ancient teaching of the Church and has biblical roots. Christians belong to a spiritual priesthood which serves the world in word and deed on God's behalf and brings the world's needs to God in prayer. In this way, Christians are involved in God's work and mission (1 Peter 2:9). Christians exercise their royal priesthood, each according to his or her own situation and calling in life (1 Peter 2:9-12; Eph. 5:1-2; Col. 3:1-4:6).
35. According to Orthodox teaching, the Sacraments of Baptism (and Chrismation) and the Eucharist equip Orthodox faithful to experience the Lord's loving and salvific work in the particular contexts of their lives. This in turn is what they witness to in the world through acts of caring, teaching, praying, and by engaging in the non-sacramental aspects of the Church's ministry. This is the meaning of the royal priesthood for Orthodox. No one can become a sacramental Priest without first belonging to the royal priesthood. Lay people (λαός) are active in the life and work of the Church. Together with the clergy (κλήρος), they make up the members of the Body of Christ. Paul draws an analogy between these members and the members of the human body, where each supports the other, and each needs the other (1 Cor. 12:26). The clergy, each in his own degree, have specific duties. But the Church cannot be understood without the presence and cooperation of the laity. Laity constitute the assembly (σύναξις) of the faithful, which is fundamental to the life of the Church. This synaxis expresses the consciousness of the Church and has an important role in the proclamation of Saints.[\[15\]](#) Throughout the history of the Church, the laity in most Orthodox Churches have participated in the election of Bishops, and in some Orthodox countries even Priests and Deacons. No Liturgy can be celebrated without the participation of lay people. Moreover, the term "liturgy"

derives from the words λειτός (λαός, laity) and ἔργο (work) and means “work of the people.” During the Orthodox rite of Ordination, the approval of the congregation is proclaimed by the word “worthy” (ἄξιος); if anyone calls out “unworthy” (ἀνάξιος), the Ordination stops immediately so that the claim can be examined. Moreover, lay people can undertake, always with the Church’s blessings, a variety of duties and practices, such as teaching, mission, catechising, charity work, and any other pastoral, social and theological tasks in the Church, to “equip the saints for the work of ministry and for building up the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12).

36. Lutherans put a strong emphasis on the royal priesthood. While Luther in his treatise “To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation” (1520), referred to the royal priesthood to encourage the nobility to take responsibility as lay leaders for reforming the Church (because he felt the Bishops had failed to do so), he was eager at the same time to show that the idea of the royal priesthood stands in opposition to the medieval division of Christians into two classes: the “spiritual/clerical” and the “secular.” All baptized Christians are “priests.” As a result, Priests and Bishops should not be considered distinct from other Christians because they belong to a higher spiritual estate, but only on account of their Ministry. Luther specifically emphasized the royal priesthood to counteract a false understanding of the Ordained Priesthood at the time, which saw it as a spiritually superior estate “above” lay people and for that reason “nearer” to Christ. Since the Reformation, Lutherans have often utilized the notion of the “priesthood of all believers” as a reminder that, even though the Ordained Ministry is essential to the Church, so is the ministry of the laity.
37. Lutherans and Orthodox teach that the Ministry/Priesthood of the Apostles is continued in the proclamation of the Gospel and the celebration of the Sacraments/Mysteria. The authority of both the Apostles and Pastors/Priests depends on the foundational words of Christ. Like the Apostles, the Ordained Ministers/Priests receive their Ministry/Priesthood from the Lord and are leaders whom Christ has appointed/ordained to govern his Church (Col. 4:17; Heb. 13:17; 1 Tim. 5:17). Pastors/Priests exercise oversight over God’s flock, preach God’s word, teach true doctrine and shepherd God’s flock (1 Peter 5:1; Acts 6:2,4; 1 Tim. 3:2; 5:17; Titus 1:9; Acts 20:28).
38. Lutherans and Orthodox agree that the Ordained Minister/Priest does not act on behalf of himself, but on the authority of the Church and ultimately of Christ himself. Therefore, the authority of the Ordained Ministry/Priesthood is not to be understood as a possession of the Pastor/Priest but as a gift from Christ for the continuing edification of the community in which and for which the Pastor/Priest has been ordained. Authority has the character of responsibility before God and his Church and aims to nurture the royal priesthood and in this way to assemble and build up the Body of Christ by proclaiming and teaching God’s word, celebrating the Sacraments, and guiding the life of the community in its worship, mission, and caring ministry.

VII. Apostolic Succession

39. Orthodox and Lutherans confess in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381) that they believe in “One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.” This joint confession provides a firm foundation for our dialogue about Apostolic Succession. This theme was already treated in paragraph 12 of the 2011 Wittenberg Common Statement. This

current statement focuses on the way in which our two traditions understand Apostolic Succession. There are four ways in which the Church can be understood to be Apostolic. Lutherans and Orthodox agree substantially on three of them but on the fourth there are serious differences.

40. Lutherans and Orthodox agree that the Church is Apostolic in that: 1) it is instituted by Christ and its foundation is laid by the Apostles, 2) it is sent by Christ to proclaim the Gospel to the world, and 3) it preserves the Apostolic teaching and Tradition received from Christ.
41. Lutherans emphasize this third sense in which the Church is Apostolic. Their understanding is clearly elaborated in the Lutheran World Federation's 2007 Lund statement on *Episcopal Ministry within the Apostolicity of the Church*: "Apostolic tradition in the Church means continuity in the permanent characteristics of the Church of the apostles: witness to the apostolic faith, proclamation of the Gospel and faithful interpretation of the Scriptures, celebration of Baptism and the Eucharist, the exercise and transmission of ministerial responsibilities, communion in prayer, love, joy and suffering, service to the sick and needy, unity among the local Churches and sharing the gifts which the Lord has given to each. Continuity in this tradition is apostolic succession" (Lund 2007, paragraph 29).
42. Orthodox too insist on the importance of Apostolic teaching but they also emphasize that the Church is Apostolic because its Bishops have received their Ordination in unbroken Succession from the Apostles. This is a point on which Lutherans have differing opinions among themselves, but they do not consider the historic Succession of Bishops essential for the Apostolicity of the Church.
43. The fourth way in which the Orthodox understand the Church to be Apostolic is the unbroken Succession of Ordination from the Apostles. Lutherans recognize that the historical chain of Episcopal Consecration was interrupted by the extraordinary events surrounding the Reformation in Germany in which emergency measures were adopted to ensure that the Church of the Reformation was not without Ordained Pastors. Some Lutherans today are seeking to address this situation by inviting Bishops, who they consider to be in the historic Succession, to participate in the Consecration of new Bishops. This is encouraged by the Lutheran World Federation in its 2007 Lund statement on *Episcopal Ministry within the Apostolicity of the Church*, but some Lutherans feel that this is not necessary. Lutherans emphasize that these steps to restore the historic Episcopate would only be taken for the sake of love and good order and not because the Ordained Ministry of the Lutheran Church is somehow defective without it.
44. Orthodox believe it to be the normative teaching of the whole Church up to the time of the Reformation that every Bishop had to receive Ordination in unbroken Succession from Christ through the Apostles, and be in communion with the other Bishops in Apostolic Succession. Any Bishop who does not have historic Apostolic Succession is in an irregular situation, which needs to be resolved before full communion is possible.
45. For many Lutherans, the historic Apostolic Succession of Ordination is desirable but for none of them is it essential. For Orthodox, the historic Apostolic Succession of

Ordination is an essential requirement of the Apostolicity of the Church which they confess in the Creed. For this reason, historic Apostolic Succession is a Church-dividing issue for Orthodox, not simply because Lutherans and Orthodox have different theologies of Apostolic Succession, but primarily because of the historical fact that historic Apostolic Succession has been broken in most Lutheran Churches. This historic Apostolic Succession would need to be restored before communion could be possible.

VIII. The Role and Place of Women in the Life of the Church and the Ordination of Women

A: Orthodox Perspectives on the New Testament

46. In keeping with the unanimous tradition of the Church throughout her history, the Orthodox Church does not ordain women to the Priesthood. This practice is based on God's plan for men and women in the whole Economy of Salvation and has been the consistent practice of all Christians for almost 2000 years. This is the clear teaching of Holy Scripture as a whole and therefore does not depend solely on the exegesis of those New Testament passages that are most often debated.
47. Human beings are created by God as male and female, each with his or her own distinct vocation. To imagine that male and female are simply interchangeable is to contradict God's order of creation and deny an essential part of the Economy of Salvation. Already in the Garden of Eden, the man and woman are called upon to be fruitful and multiply. In this way, they are able to do something together, precisely because they are different, which they would not otherwise be able to do if they were interchangeable.
48. Man and woman, who are both created in the image of God, are called to become one flesh and so image the relationship between Christ and human beings: "For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a profound mystery which, according to St. Paul, refers to Christ and the Church (Eph. 5:31–32). Man is created differently from woman so that the relationship between man and woman can be an image of the relationship between Christ and his Church: "For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, his Body, and is himself its Savior" (Eph 5:23). This headship is not one of domination but of love and self-sacrifice: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her." But it is also a relationship where one person is under the authority of the other: "As the Church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands" (Eph. 5:23). The roles of man and woman in marriage are not interchangeable because God established marriage to image the relationship between Christ and the Church. Male headship is therefore rooted in creation and is an essential part of the Economy of Salvation.
49. When Christ established his Church, he also established the structures for Ordained Ministry/Priesthood according to the complementary relationship between men and women that he had established in creation. Just as men are responsible for headship in the family, they are also responsible for oversight in the Church. For Orthodox, there is both Ordained Sacramental Priesthood/Ministry, for which only men are eligible, and many non-sacramental ministries (royal priesthood) in the life of the Church for

which all baptized Christians, both lay women and men, are equally eligible. These different complementary ministries do not imply any inequality among the members of the Church. Ordained Ministry is not about status, but about a particular service which is tied to the person and work of Christ, the pre-eternal Son of God, who became man for our salvation and for the restoration of the entire creation to its original design by the Creator. This tradition is rooted in the Apostolic Succession and Christ's commission to gather all nations into his Body, the Church, and in the Ordination of Bishops, Presbyters, and Deacons by the Apostles, to continue this mission of the Lord in history for the salvation of all human beings in Christ's Church.

50. It is obedience to this order of redemption, which is intrinsic to the Gospel as laid out in the canonical Scriptures of the Church and in her ecumenical creeds and dogmas, which restricts Ordained Sacramental Ministry in the Church to men. Faithfulness to the Gospel, which is given to us in the words and deeds of Christ by the Apostles, determines these distinctive Ordained and non-ordained Ministries. They are complementary and undivided, bearing witness to the new order of redemption that restores creation to its original image, fulfilling the divine purpose of creation by making humanity the means of bringing the entire creation into God's eternal kingdom. In the Orthodox Tradition, this is personified by two persons: the Last Adam, Jesus Christ, and the Blessed Virgin, the New Eve, the Theotokos, who provided, on the part of humanity, the "flesh of the Church,"^[16] by which we are all restored and saved.
51. It has been the unanimous consensus of the Church, everywhere, always, and by all, that only men can serve in the Ordained Ministry. This has been the clear teaching of the Church for centuries and has never been the occasion of debate or even significant discussion. It is therefore surprising and painful for Orthodox Christians that members of other Christian traditions can now overturn this fundamental Christian teaching, which has been the unbroken Holy Tradition of the Church.

B: Lutheran Perspectives

52. Lutherans have included women in the Ordained Ministry/Priesthood since the 1920s. That step came not as the result of social pressures but out of a recognition that a) ordained women would make a substantial and unique contribution to the Ministry of Lutheran Churches, and b) since women in most Lutheran countries now had access to higher education, one of the main obstacles to including women in the Priesthood—the lack of proper preparation—had been removed.
53. Lutherans do not understand the Ordination of women as an "innovation." The Lutheran tradition has never included the matter of gender in its official definitions of Ordained Ministry/Priesthood. There are no legal or dogmatic prohibitions preventing the Ordination of women. Therefore, the Ordination of women did not require a change of doctrine for Lutherans. Instead, existing laws and teachings were simply applied to a group, namely women, who had previously not been considered eligible for Ordination.
54. Although there was no clear precedent for ordaining women prior to the 19th century, Lutherans drew on an extensive body of scriptural examples that showed women

active in the Ministry of the New Testament Church. For example, Mary Magdalene was the first witness of the risen Christ (Mk. 16:9-10; Matt. 28:7-8), Junia was outstanding among the Apostles (Rom. 16:7), Priscilla took the lead in teaching Apollos (Acts 18:24-26), and the daughters of Philip the Evangelist were prophets (Acts 21:9-11). According to St. Paul, women also prayed and prophesied in the worship services of the New Testament Church (1 Cor. 11:5).

55. Since the time of the Reformation, Lutherans have taught that the exercise of the Ordained Ministry is an act of pastoral service (*pascere*) and not one of domination (*dominare*). Therefore, biblical statements such as Genesis 3:16, which describe a husband's "rule over" his wife, do not prevent women from serving in the Ordained Ministry/Priesthood in the Lutheran Church.
56. Jesus taught that women and men are each created in the image of God (Gen 1:26-7) and therefore have the same status before God. Although sex/gender distinctions between men and women originating in creation were not abolished with the incarnation of Christ, it is also true that in Christ we are a new creation, the old has passed away and all things have become new (2 Cor. 5:17). As St. Paul says, "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26-28). Based on these passages, Lutherans have concluded that considerations of gender are not a primary factor in assigning roles and offices or exercising specific ministries in the Church. And for this reason, women are eligible, no less than men, to serve in the Ordained Ministry/Priesthood of the Lutheran Church.
57. A further support for the Ordination of women comes from Luther himself. Luther teaches that all Christians receive the privilege of priesthood through Baptism, forming a "priesthood of all believers," similar to the Orthodox notion of a "royal priesthood".^[17] Luther emphasizes that this priesthood includes women as well as men. Although this priesthood of all believers is not the same as the Ordained Priesthood, in principle anyone who belongs to the former is eligible to be called to the latter. For this reason, Lutherans during the Reformation affirmed the long-standing tradition of allowing and training certain women to perform emergency Baptism. For this reason, too, Lutherans in more recent times have concluded that women were eligible in principle to be called to the Ordained Ministry/Priesthood, provided they were otherwise properly qualified.
58. Although Lutherans teach that both women and men can be ordained, they do not hold that this makes the ministry of men and women interchangeable. Women and men bring different perspectives and life-experiences to their ministries. Lutherans have experienced women in the Ordained Ministry/Priesthood as a unique enrichment of that Ministry.
59. Most of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches ordain women to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament, a practice that began in the 1920s and accelerated after the Second World War. Because Lutherans practice a single Ordination to the Pastoral Office/Priesthood, any woman who is an Ordained Minister is eligible to be elected as a Bishop, and so there are both male and female Bishops in LWF member churches. The minority of member churches that do not presently

ordain women are expected to recognize the Ministry of Ordained Women in their sister churches within the LWF. According to the principles of the Lutheran Communion, the Ordination of women is not church-dividing within its member churches and the practice of ordaining women is not a requirement for membership.

C: Concluding Perspectives

60. Both Orthodox and Lutherans look back on a rich and profound tradition of women who have contributed to the life of their churches, and who continue to do so. Every Orthodox Church has numerous icons not only of the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos, but also of female saints who serve as reminders and as examples of such contributions. Lutherans, too, celebrate the contributions of female saints and of other women to their Church. Contemporary Lutheran and Orthodox Churches are full of committed women assuming a variety of significant roles in the ministry of those churches. Like most Christians, their contributions are often silent and not always acknowledged adequately, but are surely seen and blessed by the Triune God in heaven. Orthodox and Lutherans together affirm the contribution of women and encourage emphatically the continued service of women in their churches. This affirmation stands irrespective of theological or canonical considerations that affect their practices of Ordination. While Lutherans and Orthodox disagree on whether to ordain women, both agree that women play an essential role in the life of their traditions.
61. At present, Orthodox and Lutherans recognize that the issue of the Ordination of women separates them. Orthodox cannot agree with the exegetical and hermeneutical approaches that Lutherans have employed to support this practice, and Orthodox also draw on a different body of theology and canon law regarding Ordination. Nevertheless, Lutherans and Orthodox remain convinced that they should continue to work through their differences and explore other areas of potential convergence. Together, Lutherans and Orthodox, each according to their respective traditions, teach that it is primarily God who acts through the Ordained Ministry/Priesthood, which they have by the mercy of God (2 Cor. 4:1), and that Pastors and Priests are nothing but clay vessels to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us: “To be baptized in God’s name is to be baptized not by human beings but by God himself. Although it is performed by human hands, it nevertheless is truly God’s own act.”^[18] Again: “Neither Angel nor Archangel can do anything with regard to what is given from God; but the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit dispenses all, while the priest lends his tongue and affords his hand.”^[19]

^[1] The following papers were presented and discussed in the *Rhodes* Meeting: “Orthodox Reflections on the London Draft Statement (2012)” (V. Rev. Prof. Dr. George Dragas); “A Lutheran Commentary on the London Papers” (Rev. Prof. Dr. Jeffrey Silcock); “‘So That We May Obtain This Faith...’: A Lutheran Commentary on the Sibiu Papers and Statement” (Rev. Prof. Dr. Stephanie Dietrich); “The Sibiu Statement (May 2013): An Orthodox View” (Prof. Dr. Konstantinos Delikostantis); “Brief Commentary on the Preparatory Papers by Kenneth Appold, Risto Saarinen and Metropolitan Isaias” (Superintendent Klaus Schwarz); “Orthodox Reflections on the Tallinn Draft Statement of 2014” (V. Rev. Dr. Valentin Vasechko); “Biblical Foundations of Ordination in Lutheran Tradition” (Rev. Prof. Dr. Jeffrey Silcock); “Ordained Ministry/Priesthood in the New Testament: An Orthodox Perspective” (Prof. Dr. Christos Voulgaris); “The Ordained Ministry/Priesthood in the Early Church and the Ecumenical Councils and the Ordained Ministry/Priesthood in the Early and

Medieval Church” (Prof. Dr. Kenneth Appold); “The Ordained Ministry/Priesthood in the Early Church and the Ecumenical Councils” (Dr. Nathan Hoppe); “The Relationship between the Royal Priesthood and the Ordained Ministry/Priesthood” (Rev. Prof. Dr. Stephanie Dietrich); “The Royal Priesthood in Relationship to the Ordained Ministry/Priesthood” (V. Rev. Prof. Dr. George Dragas); “Episcopate and Apostolic Succession: A Lutheran Perspective” (Rev. Heidi Zitting); “Episcopate and Apostolic Succession: An Orthodox Perspective” (V. Rev. Dr. Valentin Vasechko). Remarks and Observations on Sections I and II of the Nicosia 2016 Draft Statement were presented in the *Helsinki Meeting*: “Hermeneutical Approaches on the Terminology and Different Understandings of a) ‘Ministry’, ‘Ordained Ministry’/Priesthood and ‘Service’ (Diakonia) and b) Biblical foundations of Ordained Ministry/Priesthood” (Rev. Prof. Dr. Jeffrey Silcock from a Lutheran and Prof. Dr. Rade Kisić from an Orthodox perspective). Remarks and Observations on Section III: “The Ordained Ministry/Priesthood in the Early Church and the Ecumenical Councils” (Rev. Prof. Dr. Stephanie Dietrich from a Lutheran and the V. Rev. Archimandrite Dr. Alexi Chehadeh from an Orthodox Perspective). Remarks and Observations on Section V: “Theology and Practice of Ordination” (Rev. Prof. Dr. Risto Saarinen from a Lutheran and H.E. Metropolitan Isaias of Tamassos from an Orthodox Perspective). Remarks and Observations on Section VI: “The Relationship between the Royal Priesthood and the Ordained Ministry/Priesthood” (Rev. Prof. Dr. Jennifer Wasmuth from a Lutheran and Rev. Prof. Dr. Cosmin Pricop from an Orthodox Perspective). Remarks and Observations on Section VII: “Episcopate and Apostolic Succession” (Rev. Prof. Dr. Thomas-Andreas Pöder from a Lutheran and Dr. Nathan Hoppe from an Orthodox Perspective). Remarks and Observations on Section VIII: “The Role and the Place of Women in the Life of the Church and the Ordination of Women” (Prof. Dr. Kenneth G. Appold from a Lutheran and V. Rev. Prof. Dr. George Dragas from an Orthodox Perspective).

[2] See *Growth in Agreement III, International Dialogue Texts and Agreed Statements, 1998-2005*, edited by Jeffrey Gros, FSC, Thomas F. Best, Lorelei F. Fuchs, SA, WCC Publications, Geneva (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 25.

[3] LW (Luther’s Works, American Edition) 26:39 (Lectures on Galatians, 1535) (trans. alt.).

[4] The letters of Ignatius of Antioch (ca. AD 110) testify to the existence of a single Bishop surrounded by a College of Deacons and Presbyters. Ignatius also describes the Presbyterate as the independent hierarchical level between Bishop and Deacon. “Let the bishop preside in the place of God, and his clergy in the place of the Apostolic conclave, and let my special friends the deacons be intrusted with the service of Jesus Christ, who was with the Father from all eternity and in these last days has been made manifest. Everyone should observe the closest conformity with God; you must show every consideration for one another, never letting your attitude to a neighbour be affected by your human feelings, but simply loving each other consistently in the spirit of Jesus Christ. Allow nothing whatever to exist amongst you that could give rise to any divisions; maintain absolute unity with your bishop and leaders, as an example to others and a lesson in the avoidance of corruption” (Ignatius to the Magnesians, 6, in *The Apostolic Fathers. Early Christian Writings*, translated by Maxwell Staniforth [London: Penguin, 1968], 72).

[5] The concept of a Succession of the Apostles appears in the First Letter of Clement to the Corinthians. Clement there describes Succession as a single line of commission from God through Christ to the Apostles and “their first converts,” whom, “after testing them by the Spirit,” they “appointed to be bishops and deacons for the believers of the future” (para. 42),

The Apostolic Fathers (see above), 40. Clement also mentions in his letter the appointment and Ordination of Presbyters along with Bishops (44,47,54,57). Disregard for these Presbyters was the reason the letter to the Church in Corinth was written in the first place. See First Epistle of Clement, in *The Apostolic Fathers. Early Christian Writings* (see note above).

[6] Augsburg Confession, Art. 28: 21,22 in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2000), 94; Apology Art. 28:12,13 in *The Book of Concord*, 290.

[7] Augsburg Confession, Art. 14 in *The Book of Concord*, 46.

[8] LW 22:505–6 (Sermons on the Gospel of St. John).

[9] LW 40:4-44 (Concerning the Ministry, 1523).

[10] LW 53:122-26 (The Ordination of Ministers of the Word, 1539).

[11] LW 41:154.

[12] Art. 5: “To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel,” in *The Book of Concord*, 40.

[13] Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Art. 13, in *The Book of Concord*, 220.

[14] Augsburg Confession, Art. 8, in *The Book of Concord*, 42.

[15] This refers to the process in the Orthodox Church where persons are proclaimed to be saints.

[16] St. John Chrysostom, “Homily Before Exile,” PG 52, 429.

[17] See Section VI.

[18] Martin Luther, Large Catechism, in *The Book of Concord*, 457.

[19] St. John Chrysostom, “Homily 86 on the Gospel of John” in Philip Schaff (ed.), *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. XIV: Saint Chrysostom (Grand Rapids, MI Eerdmans, 1956), 326 (trans. alt.).