

NOTRE DAME CONSULTATION STATEMENT

Who we are and why we are here

In a broken, divided and contentious world, we as representatives of five world communions, Anglican, Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist and Reformed, have met at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana USA, from 26th to 28th March, drawn by a common urgency to present the message of God's liberating grace and hope for this world. We are convinced of the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ to transform us and the world and we are committed to witness more effectively together to the salvation given to us in Christ (Romans 1:16).

We believe that the Holy Spirit has brought us together following our agreement on the doctrine of justification, expressed in the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) which states that: "Together we confess: By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works" (para.15). This Trinitarian approach is important for us in understanding justification and sanctification fully.

Our communions are witnesses that through JDDJ we are overcoming centuries-old controversies. We are now five world communions that adhere jointly to the JDDJ. And we rejoice in the fresh and new ways in which our five communions can with vigour, trust and confidence work in realising a deeper communion towards the full visible unity of the Church and to make manifest the growth in communion which we have already been experienced.

What we affirm together

Experiencing a deep sense of our commonality in the time we have spent together:

We re-affirm the basic truths of the doctrine of justification which are expressed in JDDJ, emphasising that the message of God's grace is powerful and urgently needed in our time. We commit ourselves to communicate this message to people of our time in meaningful and relevant ways through our common witness and service.

We affirm that justification calls for sanctification, a holiness of life which is both personal and social, and advances a common commitment to resisting and overcoming injustices, which should lead to a life of justice in the world, recognising and defending human dignity and the integrity of all that God has created.

We affirm through our discernment that the Holy Spirit uses one another's ministries, worship and church life, in order to do the Holy Spirit's work to create its fruit, in faith, hope and love.

We affirm that all our activities should be guided by the first imperative of *From Conflict to Communion* (Lund 2016): We “should always begin from the perspective of unity and not from the point of view of division in order to strengthen what is held in common even though the differences are more easily seen and experienced.” We will continue to review how the Lund imperative is being addressed in our church programmes and ecumenical engagement. We rejoice that we are given fresh perspectives of seeing one another and given a new dynamic in our inter-relationships, helping us to find undiscovered fruit in what has already been done before. This will enable us to address further more fully the various questions among us requiring additional clarification as indicated in JDDJ.

We have found that the method of the differentiating consensus has proved to be a fruitful means of overcoming controversies by identifying common substance and distinguishing from its different confessional expressions. Thus this type of consensus encompasses both agreements and differences. It is a creative way to deal with past, present and future complexities, holding together differing perspectives without reducing them to one perspective. We are convinced that we should apply this method to other controversial questions within and between the churches but also to conflicts in the wider society.

We realise that ecumenism proceeds at different levels that are inter-related with each other. Sometimes local ecumenism is lively and is able to inspire theological reflection. In other cases theological reflection challenges ecclesial practices and calls for changes.

What we want to do together

Our churches face similar challenges in communicating the meaning of justification to today`s society in ways in which meet the experiences and needs of the world. We are gripped with the imperative of proclaiming the good news of salvation, through compassion and working for justice.

Yet the message has not reached and engaged with all humankind. There is a challenge for us to witness to God`s liberating grace in ways which provoke and convey the hope and grace of the gospel.

To proclaim God`s grace in our time requires connecting the distinct horizons of justification in biblical times with contemporary perspectives. Language from our traditions about the human person before God, grace and sin, forgiveness and righteousness, must come alive for people today. This work requires careful ecumenical study at all levels, locally, regionally and globally. Such bridging work results also in fresh proclamation. The world is in need of the message of God`s liberating grace. In a time of individualism and commodification, we want to stand together to offer the message that God`s salvation, human beings and creation are not for sale.

We will work to strengthen our witness to the common bond of baptism we share. We propose to work on creating appropriate resources for celebrations of baptism and renewal of baptismal

vows where they do not exist already. In a similar way liturgies to celebrate justification and our common baptism around 31st October, the eve of All Saints, should be offered more widely. Common themes for spiritual edification and ecumenical reflection for each year should be identified.

In all these ways we wish to make more visible our common witness, in worship and service, on our journey together towards visible unity, walking together, praying together and working together. In this new reality in our common life, we shall review the application of the Lund Principle of 1952: "that churches should act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately" which we have all affirmed.

Next Steps

We will establish a Steering Committee to take forward the momentum generated by our meeting through promoting and monitoring the process of developing relationships among the adherents of JDDJ, comprising at least two persons from each world communion, to meet annually at the time of the Conference of Secretaries of Christian World Communions.

We propose a follow up forum, following the affirmations made, to review progress after a further three years.

We propose to develop a range of catechetical tools and resources, in various forms, written and visual, including a dedicated common webpage, to be used in all aspects of church life and theological education.

Conclusion

We thank God for the opportunity to experience the fellowship of our five communions in this new way. We are grateful for the generous hospitality offered to us by the University of Notre Dame which has enabled us to move forward together on our journey, inspired and energised to proclaim anew the good news of God's liberating grace.

May the Holy Spirit bring to completion the work that we have begun.

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The University of Notre Dame, South Bend