

One single baptism

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. **EPHES. 4:1-6**

FOR MORE THAN 30 YEARS the Catholic Diocese of Stockholm and the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden have had talks with one another. The object of these has been our common situation as churches. During the last few years, we have also talked about the common mission to bring forward the Gospel into the Swedish society, as presented in the document *Mission and Ecclesiology* in 2001. In affronting the traditions of one another, we have drawn up pastoral advices and directives for ecumenical marriages and common marriage service. We have paid less attention to common matters in faith and tradition.

THE BASE FOR OUR TALKS is the prayer of Jesus about unity among his disciples. This prayer is more than an exhortation to reconciliation and a sign to make the World believe. (1) It touches the real identity as people of God and the significance of being Church. (2) So, the call for unity is more than an exterior manifestation – it is about our own spiritual life as a response to the message that God at first meet us with his grace. The deepening of the Church of its faith and the sanctification of individuals are growing from the prayer of Jesus about unity. (3)

EVERY VISIBLE PATH that we are taking towards unity is important. The evolution since the 60's brings us slowly but surely closer one to another. The European directives for collaboration between the churches in Europe, the *Charta Oecumenica*, mention the differences that still prevent the visible unity. Above all it is about the Church, the sacraments, and the ministries of the Church. Jesus Christ has revealed his love and the mystery of the reconciliation on the cross. By following him, we will do anything we can to overcome what is still separating the churches. In the document, the churches engage themselves, in the power of the Spirit, to promote the visible unity of the Church of Jesus Christ in one single faith expressing itself in our common recognition of the baptism of one another, in our life in a Eucharistic community, in our common testimony and in our common service. (4)

ALSO IN SWEDEN we are taking small steps towards the day when there will be only one Church. Together with other churches in the Christian Council of Sweden, we have studied which those steps might be. The study group of *Faith, Baptism, and Membership* proposed that the member churches of the Christian Council of Sweden should examine the possibilities of an official recognition of the baptism of one another, officiated in pure water and in the name of the Triune God. We are also exhorted to value our common inheritance in the symbolic language and also in words and images that can make clear the biblical sense of the theory and the practice of baptism. (5)

OUR COMMON BAPTISM, that unites us with Christ in faith, constitutes a fundamental link of unity. We are *one people* and we are called to confess and serve *one single Lord* at any place and in the whole world. (6) In our two churches we agree that the first step to take on the way of faith is to receive the grace God gives to us in the baptism. The baptism, with its strong symbolic language about life and death,

revival and growing in the faith, brings us into the Christian life. It is a sign of the kingdom of God and the life of the coming world.

WE ARE SHARING A FUNDAMENTAL CONVICTION that the one who is baptised is grafted into the body of Christ, at the same time as the response to the grace of God, the personal response in faith of the baptised is accentuated. We are also sharing a common liturgical evolution of understanding the baptism as a part of the divine service of the church. The faith we are baptised in is the treasure of the whole church of Christ. Every baptism is a reminder for those who are present about the gift and the obligations of their own baptism. To renew in faith the baptism is one of the important steps on the way of life.

WE ARE REJOICING AT the unity of our conception of the baptism that we in fact already have. We will bear in mind this joy and develop what we not yet have in common, instead of grieving at it. We need, at the utmost, to exploit our common faith in the baptism. Only in this way can we advance.

The pope Benedict XVI is using the baptism as a sign of unity when he speaks about the community of the Christians: "It is founded in the supernatural reality of one single baptism, making us members of the one single body of Christ." (7) And the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden is writing that "the baptism, in its character, is transcending the frontiers and leads to the fact that all who are baptised are one in Christ". (8)

TO RECOGNISE THE BAPTISM OF ONE ANOTHER, we consider that to be a decisive path forward on the way toward the complete, visible, and sacramental unity in the Church of Jesus Christ. The fact that our two churches want to proclaim this recognition in a clear way by a divine service means a renewed confirmation, in the presence of God and one another, of our desire to take another step on the way of unity. At the same time, we would like, by means of this recognition, to exhort also other churches and communities in the Christian Council of Sweden to explore the possibilities of similar recognitions as steps on the way of unity.

**WE – *the Catholic Diocese of Stockholm and the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden* –
WANT TO**

In faithfulness to the prayer of Jesus Christ about unity and to the exhortation of the Apostle Paul, to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of Peace

RECOGNISE THE BAPTISM OF ONE ANOTHER AS A SIGN TOWARD A DEEPER UNITY;

TOGETHER RENEW THE GIFT AND THE OBLIGATIONS OF THE BAPTISM;

EXHORT OTHER CHURCHES AND COMMUNITIES IN THE CHRISTIAN COUNCIL OF SWEDEN TO EXPLORE THE POSSIBILITIES OF COMMON RECOGNITION OF THE BAPTISM.

¹ John 17:21

² John 17:22

³ John 17:17, 23

⁴ *Charta Oecumenica* swedish translation.: CCS's booklet NR 1, 2001, p. 13f.

⁵ *Faith, Baptism and Membership*, CCS's booklet nr 6, 2004, p. 68f.

⁶ *Baptism, Communion, Ministry*, Faith and Order 1982, THE BAPTISM II:6

⁷ *Greeting to the Christians in Cologne*, 19th of august 2005

8 *The fundament and the contents of the faith*, Constitution of the Mission Covenant Church Sweden