

# *Ecumenical policy and plan of action for the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden*

*The following policy and plan of action have been elaborated by the Committee of Theology and are part of the work with the "Ecumenical Basic Document". The policy and the plan of action were ratified by the MCCA Board on March 20th, 2004, and were most recently updated on March 14th, 2009. Check-up and updating will take place on a yearly basis.*

## **Introduction**

### **a) Basis to be found in the Constitution**

*The foundation of faith* indicates briefly the theological basis for unity as an overarching aim:

**Ecumenism is linked to mission, the sending into the world. The basis for unity is to be found in God's unity as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Ecumenism implies a movement towards unity between different denominations and local congregations. Through the unity of Christians the world will believe and understand that God has sent Jesus Christ in His love for all people.**

**Jesus' prayer for his disciples about unity implies that all Christians living in the same place are united in one big fellowship. In a world of divisions, the congregation lives on, waiting for the visible unity, heading toward this goal. Both the MCCA and its local congregations are provisional arrangements while we are waiting for the visible unity of the Church of Christ.**

*The Order of the Church* further develops the ecumenical goals. There concrete issues are also taken up in relation to other churches and denominations:

**The MCCA wants to work for ecumenism in Sweden and on an international level. The ecumenical task becomes most evident in the fellowship between local congregations. The unity provides room for diversity but must be manifested through concrete and continuous expression in the life of the Church. Both different church structures and the need for joint solutions between the denominations thus call upon the MCCA to facilitate the visible unity everywhere where it is present.**

**The MCCA and its congregations want to work for fellowship around the Holy Communion and in evangelism and diaconal and social work. It wants to reach mutual recognition of other churches and their service/ministry. It wants to seek paths for church fellowship or fusions with other churches and denominations in Sweden and stimulate international ecumenical work.**

*Ecumenical and confessional affiliation* is indicated as a sign fellowship on the international and the national levels. *The Order of the Church* states that affiliation with certain ecumenical bodies is an expression of the MCCA ecumenical identity. This also implies a sign of priority in relation to e.g. The Conference of European Churches (CEC), Nordic ecumenical collaboration via the Ecumenical Institute of the Nordic Countries (EIN) or the Council of Free Churches (FSR):

**The MCCA is member of the World Council of Churches and of the Christian Council of Sweden and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. The MCCA Board decides about affiliation with other collaboration bodies.**

### **b) Different levels in the description of goals**

The expressions used in the *Order of the Church* describe different levels of consultations and agreements, depending on the partner or the relationship in question, and indicate that the goals may vary or be developed step by step:

- *Facilitation of the visible unity in every locality.* In order to achieve unity in every locality there is a need for interplay between national agreements and local acting.
- *Fellowship in worship service, Holy Communion, evangelism and diaconal/social work.* Among these goals are contained joint actions carried out also with organizations like the Swedish Mission Council, the study centre Bilda (testimony and ministry in cultural and social life), Diakonia and Hela Människan (“The Whole Human Being”) (diaconal issues).
- *Mutual acceptance of other churches and their service/ministry.* Here the acceptance of baptism is not mentioned even though in practice it is adopted among a number of churches within the Christian Council of Sweden (SKR).
- *Church fellowship* implies a mutual ecumenical agreement presupposing some form of joint theological foundation and a joint stance on baptism, Holy Communion and ministry. Opens the way for sharing worship services and local exchange of ordained ministry.
- *Fusion*, a church union of two or more churches.

On the above basis the following short term (three years) plan of action can be indicated for three areas: bilateral consultations, local collaboration and the M CCS membership of national, international, ecumenical and confessional bodies. Moreover some more fields of multilateral negotiations are indicated.

### c) Other bodies of collaboration

Apart from the ecumenical or confessional bodies mentioned by the Constitution, the M CCS has a historic collaboration via the International Federation of Free Evangelical Churches (IFFEC). In addition, it is member of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Ekumeniskt Institut för Norden (“Ecumenical Institute for the Nordic Countries”)(EIN). As to organizations in Sweden some examples have been given above. What is valid for all of them is that the M CCS Board takes decisions, but that important changes in relation to policy can be anchored through decisions by the Church Conference.

### d) Mission partnership and Sister Churches

Under the heading “Mission work in other countries” in the Order of the Church, the relations with the M CCS Sister Churches are described in the following way:

**The M CCS historic commitment for mission work engages us to continued partnership with the churches having developed out of mission collaboration. The fellowship with independent churches in different parts of the world challenges us to reciprocity in intercession and to the sharing of experiences and resources.**

The M CCS has partnership agreements with Sister Churches in Ecuador, Estonia, India, Japan, Congo-Brazzaville, Congo-Kinshasa and Nicaragua. Furthermore there is project based exchange with churches in the following countries: Costa Rica, China, Lithuania, Pakistan, Palestine/Israel, Poland, Russia and the Czech Republic.

This partnership falls under the auspices of International mission within the M CCS rather than ecumenical and confessional fellowship and is therefore treated there.

## 1. *Bilateral consultations*

Consultations are being held with churches and denominations on various levels, depending on the partner and what common realistic goals have been identified.

As a basis for the continued bilateral work, two books from the Christian Council of Sweden (SKR) should be taken into consideration with their opinions, results and suggestions i.e.

*Faith – Baptism – Membership* (2004) and *Churches in Consultation – on bilateral dialogues* (2005). The working party on ecclesiology, the third part of the Christian Council of Sweden (SKR) work on Ecumenical theology which started in 2006 and which will be finished in 2009 is expected to contribute to the bilateral consultations too that the MCCS is having with other churches and will shed new light on the understanding of the ecclesiology of our own church.

### **a) The Methodist Church in Sweden and the Swedish Baptist Union**

#### *Goals:*

To create together with these churches a new joint church open also for other denominations. The work on this assignment is given top priority in bilateral consultations during the years to come.

#### *Situation:*

The three Conferences of 2007 decided to continue the consultations on a joint future. The collaboration council finished its assignment partly through the ecumenical agreement of 2006, ratified by the Conferences of 2007, partly through the final report *A Joint Future?*

A special process group prepared a Future Conference in January 2008, and elaborated a suggestion about a Declaration of Intention for the Conferences of 2008. The Declaration of Intention was accepted by the three churches at the Conferences of June 2008. Three working parties were appointed reporting to the Conferences of 2009. It is suggested that the Conferences accept the Declaration of Intention.

#### *Measures and schedule:*

On January 1st 2009, a coordination function was appointed for *A Joint Future* where the three churches reserved means for 1 full-time post which is for the moment shared by three persons. The joint meetings of presidencies continue and in 2009 some twenty local/regional meetings are planned in relation to *A Joint Future*. If the Declaration of Intention is adopted the work will be intensified during the second half of 2009. This will entail special needs for financial and staff resources.

### **b) Church of Sweden**

#### *Goals:*

On the basis of the ecumenical agreement of 2006 to follow up the work through local agreements. The Council of Consultation will work not only with advice and recommendations for local implications but also on a long term basis with handling of remaining theological issues. The agreement will be evaluated gradually.

#### *Situation:*

During 2008, the Council of Consultation has followed the local application of the Agreement. A number of meetings have been held on the diocese/district and regional levels. The MCCS Board decided to give the district supervisors a clearer role as to the adoption of local agreements. In view of the fact that the work with the Agreement has now entered a calmer phase of execution, the first priority is changed, the one concerning these consultations since 1997, in favour of a new joint church together with the Swedish Baptist Union and the Methodist Church. Such a new Church should be shaped in a way so that the Agreement with the Church of Sweden can be transferred to this new Church.

### *Measures and schedule:*

Current examples and advice should be provided continually on the web site of each respective Church. The Youth Sections consultations on local work in e.g. partner Churches should be encouraged.

Work on long term theological issues continues on the basis of the areas taken up by the background document and the answers from the various instances e.g.:

- The view of the Congregation and the Church and its practical implementation on a local level
- The Ministry issue, remaining issues, but also the promise to continue the consultations on the episcopacy.
- Deepening of the work in relation to baptism confirmation – baptism renewal, ultimately consultations on child blessing and the joint issue of non baptized members

The Council of Consultation should initiate recurrent thematic days or seminars on issues of collaboration and joint theological issues on a national and/or a regional level.

### **c) Stockholm Catholic Diocese**

#### *Goals:*

To take up issues of common interest e.g. in our capacity as minority churches and in relation to society. To stimulate local exchange and collaboration in a number of places. Agreements between the churches can be made in relation to certain theological and pastoral issues.

#### *Situation:*

The final drafting of the document *Ecumenical marriages* has been accomplished, but it is not yet published. A document has been elaborated and adopted.

#### *Measures and schedule:*

Consultations started in 2006 concerning the meeting with other religions in multi-cultural Sweden. The publication *Samtal över gränserna (Consultations across frontiers)* has been published and sent out to the congregations.

Parting from the acceptance of baptism, new areas are being sought for where the call to unity can be made visible.

### **d) The Swedish Alliance Mission (SAM)**

#### *Goals:*

To follow out the existing contacts with openness for possible closer relations in the future. The consultations between the Methodist Church, the Swedish Baptist Union and the M CCS are continuously presented to SAM in openness for the possibility of extension.

#### *Situation:*

Regular contacts are taking place between SAM and the M CCS district of Östra Götaland. Consultations on e.g. joint congregations are held. The process in which the M CCS finds itself not only vis-à-vis the Church of Sweden but also the Methodist Church and the Swedish Baptist Union does not imply a deterioration of relations with SAM. The development is followed with satisfaction. Informal regular contacts continue on the church level.

#### *Measures:*

Continual contacts in congregational and pastoral issues, particularly in the district of Östra Götaland, and when so required, with the M CCS on a national level. Continual information about the consultations between the Methodist Church, the Swedish Baptist Union and the M CCS.

## **e) Other denominations**

### *Goals:*

Collaboration and encounters should take place primarily via the Christian Council of Sweden (SKR). There must be openness for new bilateral dialogues.

### *Situation:*

In connection with the creation of some joint congregations, consultations have been held, something which is also valid for the norms in relation to temporary "lending" of pastors and transfer. Wishes have earlier been expressed not only as continual consultations in questions that may arise, but also in relation to continued consultations in an official group of consultations. Suggestions concerning a joint congregation order and joint statutes have been worked out and coordinated in the working party of the Council of Free Churches (FSR) in relation to joint congregations.

Agreements about proceedings at and instructions not only for a temporary post but also for transfer to post within another denomination are at hand in relation to the Methodist Church, the Swedish Baptist Union, the Swedish Alliance of Mission, Interact and the Pentecostal movement.

### *Measures:*

To follow up and give advice to local congregations at consultations about collaboration or fusion on the basis of FSR material and to consult with the denominations concerned.

To take up these agreements when so required in the local congregations and see to it that agreements are drafted in every case of employment by pastor or other person qualified within another denomination. The district supervisor is primarily responsible for doing this.

## **2. Local collaboration**

### **a) Local ecumenical councils**

#### *Goals:*

To stimulate the active participation of the congregations in the local ecumenical efforts and to work for a broad ecumenical collaboration in that context. "Churches together", both in relation to joint worship services, evangelism, diaconal work, school work, and in spiritual care within health and medical care and criminal care.

#### *Measures:*

Primarily through the Christian Council of Sweden (SKR) work for stimulation of local ecumenical councils on one hand and transmit results of studies which could open ways for local ecumenism on the other hand, and also point to the possibilities of deeper collaboration, especially in worship service, between some congregations within the local ecumenical fellowship.

### **b) Joint congregations**

#### *Goals:*

To elucidate the implication of a joint congregation, to give advice and examples and to facilitate the process of joint action on the basis of the material produced by the FSR, *What to consider for joint congregations*. In each situation an appreciation should be made as to the future church/denomination participation. Alternative forms of double/triple participation are accounted for in this material.

*Situation:*

Three kinds of joint congregations are at hand today: First, historical ones, congregations which from the beginning were doubly affiliated, secondly congregations which were created during the 1970s, mostly on the basis of the constellation the Methodist Church, the Swedish Baptist Union and the M CCS and thirdly, from 1980 and onwards, in wider constellations, sometimes resulting in a weakened relationship with the churches/denominations. Local fusions are a sign of a wish and possibilities of unity and a challenge for a wider form of unity. Simultaneously this means that in case the churches/denominations remain, the joint resources might be weakened and the congregation runs the risk of just being a local one.

### ***3. Ecumenical and confessional bodies and other national and international forms of collaboration***

#### **a) The Christian Council of Sweden (SKR)**

*Goals:*

The Christian Council of Sweden has top priority in the M CCS ecumenical commitment. Joint action with the "Churches Together" with all, or alternatively in the form of networking is given priority before our own programmes.

*Measures:*

Continued active participation not only in Board work, principal activities and theological working parties but also in such networking that lies near the M CCS ambition in various issues. The Christian Council of Sweden should therefore be given high priority as to budget considerations and staff participation. The M CCS should work actively for the ongoing work of ecclesiology.

The M CCS should actively influence a change of the current dividing up within the Christian Council of Sweden of church families. The M CCS is represented in the FRS and works in favour of its organizational extent being kept at a low level for the benefit of the Christian Council of Sweden.

#### **b) The World Council of Churches (WCC)**

*Goals:*

To take an active part in the WCC work not only via the representatives of the M CCS but also via an exchange of ideas and inspiration. To support the development assistance collaboration within the WCC.

*Situation:*

After the General Assembly in Porto Alegre, the M CCS has regained a seat in the Central Committee, in the Executive Committee for World Mission and in the Commission for Ecumenical training. Thereby the earlier M CCS goal, to act for the regaining of the direct M CCS commitment within different WCC bodies, has been fulfilled.

The M CCS has its own development assistance cooperation with the WCC via the International Department and during 2006, it acquired the status of observer as a member organization among "Specialized Ministries" which means that the interface with the WCC has been enlarged.

*Measures:*

To maintain the close contact with the WCC work in its different forms, especially in relation to the development within ecumenical theology (Faith and Order). To follow the work of the Central Committee, the World Mission and the Commission for Ecumenical Training via the MCCA representatives since 2006 in these bodies. This implies responsibility for the Commission of Theology to closely follow the issues to be able to give support to the representatives.

To plan for a long term adaptation of coming generations to an international ecumenical commitment. To maintain the close collaboration with the Church of Sweden in relation to important issues in the WCC and for general policy, e.g. through a network with the Christian Council of Sweden.

To coordinate the ecumenical contacts with the WCC and the development assistance collaboration.

To plan for young people's participation as stewards, youth delegates and their ecumenical training at the Bossey Institute. To continue the collaboration with the Church of Sweden and to work within the network of the Christian Council of Sweden in favour of issues related to the WCC and the CEC. To participate actively in a Nordic coordination of the WCC and the CEC collaboration. To carry out coordination between the contacts related to ecumenical work and to development assistance vis-à-vis the WCC.

**c) The Conference of European Churches (CEC)**

*Goals:*

To follow the ongoing work within the European Christian churches and when the resources so permit participate in various conferences. To work for an MCCA presence at least in one Commission or working party.

*Situation:*

Compared to the WCC and the WARC, the commitment for the CEC is of lower priority. There are however important fields to follow up in relation to the Christian churches in Europe. Particularly the work with Charta Oecumenica has given ecumenism in Sweden important impulses. Since 2003 the MCCA is represented in the Commission for Church and Society.

*Measures:*

Support our representative in Church and Society. Consult with other Swedish churches about the CEC within a Christian Council of Sweden network. Continually follow the issues taken up by the CEC and on every occasion consider participation at the conferences organized.

**d) The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) - on a global level and in Europe**

*Goals:*

To create - with the help of belonging to a confessional church family - conditions for contacts and exchange with separate churches in different countries, especially in Europe and to make use of experiences of church fellowship and church union that many of these churches have. To work for the maintaining of the organizational extent of the WARC on a low level to the benefit of the WCC. Continued representation, among other things through participation in the Executive committee. The WARC prepares a fusion with another reformed organization, namely the Reformed Ecumenical Council, and is expected to form with that organization a World Communion of Reformed Churches in 2010.

*Situation:*

Since the creation of the WARC, the MCCA has entertained close personal contact in different bodies and the MCCA is represented in the Executive committee.

*Measures:*

To support our representative in the WARC executive committee. Develop bilateral contacts with member churches within WARC/Europe, in the Baltic States and in Poland, especially through the MCCA Europe Committee. Follow the theological work within the WARC.

**e) The International Federation of Free Evangelical Churches (IFFEC)**

*Goals:*

To maintain the relations which have been created historically above all between European member churches. To give special support the small minority churches in their situation. To develop collaboration and exchange on the Nordic level, especially in relation to mission work in other countries.

*Situation:*

The MCCA holds the post of General Secretary since 2006. The General Assembly (2006) and the conference of theologians (2008) are held every four years.

*Measures:*

Participation in IFFEC meetings when the resources so permit, continually keep the Nordic contacts, especially where mission collaboration is concerned.

**f) Nordic collaboration - EIN**

*Goals:*

The MCCA shall participate actively in the Nordic-Baltic ecumenical work (EIN) and work for its promotion not only through the national Christian councils but also through interested churches, among other things by participating in the steering group.

*Situation:*

The Nordic Ecumenical Council was dissolved in 2004 after some years of differing opinions on among other things a cumbersome form of organization. In order to find forms for a continuation a three year project was started (EIN - the Nordic Ecumenical Institute) within the Sigtuna Foundation and with financial guarantees from the Evangelical Church of Finland and the Church of Sweden. Furthermore the Orthodox Church of Finland, the Stockholm Diocese and the MCCA have taken part as "members" and been part of the steering committee which has also tried to find alternative paths for the future.

During the project, programme activity has if possible been better than within the old NER and has attracted an ever growing interest on the part of the old members of the NER. A yearly ecumenical forum of ideas has proved important as well as seminars and conferences commissioned by various Nordic networks and the Christian Council of Sweden on various theological matters.

There are several different networks within the region comprising the Nordic countries- the Baltic States in relation to the preparations for participation for example in the WCC and the CEC. Yearly Nordic-Baltic meetings for ecumenical secretaries have a long tradition. Furthermore, the new region of the Nordic countries and the Baltic States is considered by both the WCC and the CEC as a joint region.

From 2008 EIN constitutes a programme activity within the Christian Council of Sweden with its own financing and a special steering group. The work is anchored through the national ecumenical councils in the Nordic countries and the Baltic States,

The MCCA supports the work financially on the same modest level as before but actively takes part in the work of the steering group and in offers concerning ecumenical activities.

*Measures:*

To continue the commitment for Nordic-Baltic partnership within the framework of a project linked to the Christian Council of Sweden. Actively contribute to the enlargement of the group of churches and denominations within the EIN. Actively support the recreated Nordic Faith&Order network.

#### ***4. Other joint agreements and multilateral consultations***

##### **a) A mutual acceptance of baptism and ministry/service**

On the basis of the report from the Christian Council of Churches, *Faith, Baptism and membership*, the MCCA should work within the Christian Council of Churches for the arriving at the agreement between as many churches as possible where baptism and ministry/special service are concerned. Through the agreement with the Church of Sweden and with the Swedish Baptist Union and the Methodist Church, this has partly been achieved. As to baptism an agreement has been arrived at with the Stockholm Catholic Diocese (2007).

##### **b) Issues of qualification for pastors and deacons**

Both within the different churches/denominations and in relation to the society it is important to be very clear as to who is officially a pastor or a deacon in order to strengthen the confidence of the general public for these persons and to facilitate joint actions in every locality. Even though the criteria of qualification and statutes related to them may differ, just as the relations of responsibility, one should, in respect of different orders, try to agree about certain basic criteria and claims of quality. It is especially pointed out that there are common norms e.g. in relation to professional secrecy.

##### **c) Transfer to other service in another church and temporary "lending"**

The work in relation to these issues has been carried out on the basis of the MCCA document. An agreement has been entered upon so far by the Swedish Alliance of Mission, Interact, the Swedish Baptist Union, the Methodist Church and the Pentecostal movement.