

United Church of Christ (UCC) and Union Evangelischer Kirchen (UEK)

Berlin, 13.11.2005

Declaration: 25 Years of Kirchengemeinschaft

Our Current Context

(1) Delegates from the UEK and the UCC gathered 11-13 November, 2005 in Berlin, Germany to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of Kirchengemeinschaft, a covenant in mission and faith, rooted in our common call, heritage and commitments to justice and peace. We remember with gratitude this fellowship which bridged the world's political and economic poles divided by the Berlin Wall. This communion has striven over the years to overcome human separation and to promote church unity.

(2) Kirchengemeinschaft is a model of ecumenical fellowship, cooperation and worship. It is a special gift in a context of other forms of international and ecumenical unity. We reaffirm our commitments:

- UEK Churches belong simultaneously to the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) and the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) based on the Leuenberg Agreement;
- the UCC is a partner in "A Formula of Agreement," a relationship between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and three Reformed Churches (the UCC, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the Reformed Church in America).

We are grateful for the growing degree of unity and fellowship among Protestant churches. Within the framework of the EKD, the communion of EKD has grown into that of UEK. At its 24th General Synod (2003), the UCC affirmed its historical relationship with the EKD and expressed its readiness to continue that relationship of Kirchengemeinschaft with the UEK within the EKD. We are thankful that the Evangelical Churches in Baden and in Hesse and Nassau have already committed themselves to active participation. We invite the other churches to join in this life and work.

(3) Set in the context of these ecumenical achievements of the 20th century, and always conscious of our global context in which we strive for ever broader Christian unity, our relationship of full communion has included personal encounter, common theological work, congregational partnerships, Conference and Landeskirchen exchanges, diaconal consultations, prayer, common witness and the sharing of resources.

(4) Shortly after our 2001 consultation, the reactions to the terrorist attacks of September 11th ushered in a new US policy of preemption leading to a war in Iraq and the practice of diplomatic isolationism. During this period, the crisis of global economic injustice has intensified. All of this has escalated the spiral of violence affecting the most vulnerable in our world. In this context we reaffirm our commitments to justice and peace.

Just Peace

(5) The focus of our consultation explored what it means to be a church of peace makers who are hungering and thirsting for justice (Mt. 5. 6 and 9). We shared our visions of working together, in our separate societies and within the communion of Kirchengemeinschaft, for a peace rooted in justice. We expressed our desire to become ever more vigilant in securing this

justice for the most vulnerable in our societies as the necessary condition of a true and lasting peace. We recognized the church's vocation to voice the importance of this way of life for the sake of all peoples as indeed for the integrity of creation itself. We remembered the history of those who bore witness to the hope of this peace during the period of the Cold War, in East and West Germany and in the US, and worked to 'beat swords into ploughshares' (Mic. 4. 3). We explored what it means to be ambassadors for Christ who gives us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5. 18-20), particularly in a world of escalating violence. We agreed that Kirchengemeinschaft calls us into a mission that resists every unnecessary recourse to force and opposes every idolatry, including militarism in every form. We agreed to continue seeking to be communities working to overcome violence, which calls us to strive for an appropriate lifestyle within our churches, modeling an economy of 'enough for all' which will mean scarcity for none.

Affirmation and Invitation

(6) Ecumenical relationships are never formed for their own sake but for the sake of the mission and ministry of the church. In partnerships and exchanges through the past 25 years, members of the UCC and the UEK have discovered deeper expressions of service and witness in a broken world. We have learned from each other's diaconal ministries and educational programs. We have been challenged to hear the voice of the marginalized and to seek justice and peace for all of God's creation. We have have been nurtured and inspired by each other's ministry of music. We have seen hope in the eyes of each other's youth and wisdom in the eyes of our elders.

(7) We believe that Jesus Christ calls us ever more urgently to form and sustain ecumenical relationships within and beyond our national borders. We urge leaders in regional and local settings to nurture expressions of our full communion and give witness to Christ's prayer that we all may be one (Jn. 17. 21). We call on the national leadership of both churches to maintain their strong commitment to Kirchengemeinschaft because in it we have known the courage to overcome bonds of injustice and to confess that another world is possible.

(8) As we look to the future, we propose that we undertake the following joint projects meant to deepen our communion.

- (+)(a) _____ Extending the experience of Kirchengemeinschaft to include more regional churches and local congregations, engaging also the structural changes within the EKD;
- (b) increasing the participation of youth and young adults in our common work;
 - (c) continuing diaconal consultations;
 - (d) challenging each other to more faithful stewardship;
 - (e) sharing in interfaith dialogue and cooperation;
 - (f) engaging in theological reflection and continuing dialogue on key challenges of our time. In the area of peace with justice these may include
 - racism and sexism;
 - issues related to migration and multi-cultural realities;
 - sexual identity;
 - the environment;
 - the economy;
 - all forms of violence.

(9) Kirchengemeinschaft is a gift from God and an invitation that calls us to common vocation in mission and ministry. We pray for God's blessings upon our unity in Christ.