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## **The Apostolicity of the Church**

### **Study Document of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity**

The Lutheran World Federation  
The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity

The world-level Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity offers here a study-document opening fresh perspectives in ecumenical ecclesiology. To indicate further steps toward the visible unity of the Lutheran and Catholic churches, the commission's document treats (1) the church's apostolic character in continuity with its original foundation, (2) the apostolicity of its ordained ministry, and (3) the means it has for maintaining faith and teaching in that truth which the apostles communicated once and for all to the churches.

On the church's apostolicity, the dialogue works within the horizon of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic consensus on justification by the grace of Christ and agreement in confessing the work of the Holy Spirit in gathering believers into the church. From this basis and notwithstanding remaining differences, Lutherans and Catholics agree at a basic level on what makes a church apostolic and they acknowledge, each with characteristic accents, the true apostolicity of each other's churches.

Concerning the ordained ministry, the study-document sets forth the complexity of the biblical witness and then relates notable changes over the centuries in the institutional ordering and theology of ministerial office. Today, Lutherans and Catholics agree on the differentiated for service on both congregational and regional levels. Where Vatican Council II spoke of ministries such as the Lutheran as defective, the dialogue proposes that other Vatican II statements, together with the consensus on justification, point toward a more positive Catholic recognition of Lutheran ministries.

On the means by which the churches remain in the truth of the apostolic gospel, the dialogue proposes a Lutheran-Roman Catholic reconciled diversity on the biblical canon and on the relation of Scripture and tradition. While it goes on to acknowledge significant remaining differences over teaching ministries or the magisterium, the Commission shows that these differences co-exist with basic shared convictions on the necessity of teaching ministries amid multiple instances of witness to the apostolic Gospel and to its present-day implications for Christian faith, worship, and life.

By this study-document, the Commission points the way toward strengthening several elements of Lutheran and Catholic life in order to deepen the real, but imperfect communion between the Catholic Church and the Lutheran churches of the world.

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