



## The Hot Potato in Ecumenical Dialogue

**A doctrinal conversation group is working further in Berlin on a common European understanding of Ministry, Ordination and Episcopate. By Paul-Benjamin Henke.**

Ministry, Ordination and Episcopate in ecumenical dialogue: so ran the official formulation of the 2006 CPCE Assembly in Budapest. Now, ministry is “the” hot potato, especially in dialogue with the non-protestant churches. Yet why should there be problems among the member churches of CPCE?

Some examples from current practice challenge to a renewed and deepened reflection. For example, in German protestant churches honorary preachers are increasingly taking on the conduct of worship. They lead the service, pronounce the blessing and sometimes also celebrate the Lord’s Supper – without being ordained. Where then, ask members of the congregations, is the difference from an ordained minister? In ecumenical perspective too the theme is delicate: Do not the anglican churches, for example, feel themselves justified in their criticism of protestant understanding of ministry when services and the Lord’s Supper are also celebrated by non-ordained women and men? Another example: The Leuenberg Agreement establishes the mutual recognition of ordination. Yet among CPCE churches there is no common understanding of what ordination is and for which offices it should be a precondition. It is therefore the task of this doctrinal conversation group to find a way to a differentiated consensus on the matter. This should do justice to the European dimension of the CPCE member churches.

The second meeting of the group took place in the Academy Hotel in Pankow, Berlin from 18 to 20 September. Following an initial meeting in March 2009, seven participants continued to work as an editorial team on the document. Within the team theological discussion was conducted through the last half-year by email. Various impulses were exchanged from the protestant traditions and current discussions in CPCE member churches. Some examples: From the reformed tradition Calvin’s teaching of the fourfold office, the ordination of deacons in the United Methodist Church as also the significance of the office of bishop (Porvoo-Declaration) for the northern Lutheran churches. The aim was to take account of the diverse positions and make them fruitful for the document. A reworked version of the text could then be laid before the full group in September. Working together, the group structured the text and made it tighter and more precise.

The editorial team is now working further on the document and will hold another working meeting in Vienna in March 2010. It is planned to lay the text before the meeting of the CPCE Council in May of the coming year. After review by the council members the text should then be sent to the CPCE member churches for their response procedure. The text should finally be approved at the next General Assembly in Florence in 2012. The real aim, however, is that the document should prove itself in the daily work of church leadership and ministers.

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