

A THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION for Uniting Church in Sweden

INTRODUCTION

There is only one true and living God – The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit – who creates, saves, and gives life. Creation and salvation come from the hand of God, and are outpourings of the same divine love. Life is meaningful since it is created by God. At the same time life is threatened by evil, fragmentation, and death. Sin separates humans from God. All are born into a divided world, and are part of both the evil and the good in the existence.

God became man in Jesus of Nazareth. He proclaims the gospel of the kingdom of God, defeats the power of sin and death, and restores humans and creation. Through the crucified and risen Christ, the first born of the new creation and true image of God, the way to new life is opened.

The Holy Spirit calls to conversion and faith in Jesus Christ, childhood with God, and fellowship in the Christian congregation. The Spirit equips humans to live in imitation of Christ, and sanctification. The Spirit leads the Church in this time, and calls it to carry the hope of eternal life.

Gen. 1:1–2:4, Mark 1:15, John 14:26, John 16:7–15, Acts 17:22–31, Rom. 3:23–24, Rom. 8:18–27, Col. 1:9–23

THE CHURCH

The Church is one, holy, universal and apostolic. The Church is one, which reflects the unity of God, triune, with whom the Church lives in community. The foundation of the unity is in God as Father, Son, and Spirit. The Church is the body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit, and the people of God. It is called upon to express its unity within the framework of the diversity of all humanity and creation. The Church is holy since it is created and chosen by God. The Church is universal since it transcends all boundaries and proclaims the Gospel to all people and all creation. The Church is apostolic since it is sent into the world. It rests on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, and has Christ as its cornerstone.

Matt. 28:18–20, Mark 16:15, John 15:12–17, Col. 3:12–17, Eph. 2:4–22, 4:15–16

The Church is visible in the world as well in the small group and the local congregation as in the denomination and in the universal Church.

The Christian faith has its foundation in Christ and in the Holy Scripture. The Apostolic and Nicene creeds are summaries, witnessing to this faith. On the basis of these creeds the Uniting Church in Sweden wants to affirm its fellowship with the whole of God's Church.

Isa. 40:8, 1 Cor. 3:11, 2 Tim. 3:16–17

The Uniting Church in Sweden is a community of local churches, and a fellowship of people confessing Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord.

Rom. 10:9, 1 Cor. 8:6, Phil. 2:9–11

The Uniting Church in Sweden is part of the world-wide church, and shares the Christian confession and praise to God. The Uniting Church in Sweden has elements of its heritage from the testimony of the apostles and God's actions with his church in all times and among all people. Prominent features in this heritage are the emphasis of the personal commitment to Christ, the responsibility of the individual as part of the congregation and society, and the democratic forms in decision making. This heritage has its historic roots in The United Methodist Church in Sweden, The Baptist Union of Sweden, and The Mission Covenant Church of Sweden.

In a world of divisions the church wants to be a sign of a community that is rooted in the unity that is in God, the triune. Through the unity of the Christians the world will believe. The unity continually needs to be renewed, confirmed and grow, with diversity, in faith and action. Ecumenism contains prayer and work for unity between local congregations and different denominations. The Uniting Church in Sweden is in this time provisional, awaiting the visible unity of the Church of Christ.

John 17:21–23, Eph. 3:11–4:6, Phil. 2:1–5, 1 John 1:3

THE CONGREGATION

The congregation is the body of Christ where divine and human life meets. The local congregation gathers regularly for worship in which the Word of God and the Gospel is shared, baptism takes place, and the Holy Communion is celebrated.

1 Cor. 12:12–27, Col. 3:16–17

Christ is made visible through the fellowship of the believers, and in the mission of the congregation to proclaim the Gospel and practice ministry of love among people.

Matt. 25:31–40, Jam. 1:19–27

The congregation is independent and democratically accountable for its own ministry while remaining part of Joint Future.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE CONGREGATION

The congregation welcomes as members all those who confess Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord and are baptized. The congregation can offer the possibility of membership while awaiting baptism. Membership in one congregation is valid in the whole Joint Future.

Acts 2:38–42, Rom. 10:9–10

The care of children may be expressed in various ways according to the custom of the congregation. The congregation may decide that children, following parents' wishes, may be welcomed as preparatory members. The local church has a special responsibility for the continual support young people's journey of faith up to their own decision to follow Christ and become members of the congregation.

Matt. 18:1–10, Mark 10:13–16

MUTUALITY OF INTERDEPENDENCE

The Uniting Church in Sweden and the congregations are organically united and, therefore, they live in mutual interdependence with each other. In solidarity and joint responsibility, they share the calling to minister to the world.

Rom. 12:9–13

It is the task of the Uniting Church in Sweden to support the local congregations in their mission and to carry out the part of the mission of God which presupposes collaboration, such as education, national and international ministry, ordination and consecration for special ministry. The community expresses partaking and solidarity through taking responsibility for each other and the ministry that the congregations and the Uniting Church in Sweden performs, economically and through own effort according to ability.

Rom. 15:25–27, 2 Cor. 8–9

In the Uniting Church in Sweden mutual oversight is exercised in order to make it a credible, cohesive, and open church. The local congregations watch over the joint organization. Those who have been entrusted with the task to lead the joint work support, guide, and serve the congregations and oversee the ordained ministries.

John 13:1–17, Rom. 12:8, Hebr. 13:17

SOURCES OF POWER FOR THE FAITH

God works in various ways through his grace to make it possible for people to grow in faith and be equipped for ministry. The sacred deeds, the sacraments, instituted by Jesus Christ himself, have a special position.

Eph. 4:15–16, Phil. 1:9–11, 2 Pet. 1:3–11

THE WORD OF GOD

All things created have come into existence through the Word that became flesh and dwelled among us. In Jesus Christ the divine fullness has been revealed, and in him everything is summarized.

John 1:1–15, Col. 1:15–20, Rev. 22:13

The Word of God

- is revealed in Jesus Christ
- is given in the Bible, the Holy Scripture
- is interpreted by the Church throughout history
- is proclaimed in the preaching of the congregation and in the daily testimony in words and deeds

The Bible, the Word of God, is a means of grace and a guiding principle for the faith and its application in life. The Bible is interpreted and expounded on the basis of its center, Jesus Christ and his work of salvation. The Spirit makes the Word of God come alive and be active today. The Word provides teaching, guidance, admonition, comfort, hope, and joy.

Everyone who encounters the Word of God is called upon to interpret it, and to be guided along by it, together with others in the congregation, under the guidance of the Spirit.

Ps. 119:105, Isa. 55:10–11, 2 Tim. 3:16–17, Heb. 4:12

COMMUNITY

The community embraces different generations and cultures and is seeking to make the Uniting Church in Sweden and the congregations accessible to all people. The community helps and supports so

that the body of Christ grows and is built up in love. The community is also characterized by people's willingness to live in forgiveness, restoration, and reconciliation through Jesus Christ.

Eph. 4:7–32

In the community, people are equipped through the sources of power for the faith to spiritually grow and minister in love. The act of worship is the center of the congregational life and is a meeting between God and the people, gathered around Jesus Christ. They share the Word of God, pray and praise, partake in baptism and Holy Communion, and receive the forgiveness of their sins.

1 Cor. 14:26, Heb. 10:24–25

21. In the congregational meeting, the congregation seeks the will of God and consensus in order to form its ministry in the place in which it is working.

Matt 6:33, Acts 15:28

PRAYER

Prayer is an expression of the community and a conversation that people have with God as a part of worship, in small groups, or individually. The common prayer includes praise, thanksgiving, dedication, and intercession. It can also inspire individual devotion. The Psalms, as a book of prayers, and the Lord's Prayer belong to a shared Christian heritage, uniting the Church at all times and in all places.

Matt. 6:6–14; 7:7–11; 18:19–20, 1 Tim. 2:1–4

CONFESSION

Confession implies confessing one's sins in order to receive the forgiveness of God that is given to us. The main components of the confession are the individual's confession of sins and the words of absolution spoken on behalf of Christ.

John 20:23, Jam. 5:15–16, 1 John 1:9

SACRED DEEDS

Baptism and Holy Communion are sacred deeds, or sacraments, instituted by Jesus Christ and confirmed by the first churches in the New Testament. They are signs of the new covenant in which Christ is the mediator through his life, his death, and his

resurrection. Through faith they mediate the presence of Christ, the grace of God giving atonement and restoration, and unfold a community between people transcending all boundaries.

Gal. 3:26–28

BAPTISM

Baptism is given with water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is a gift of God met by the individual's response in faith. Baptism is the celebration of new life in Christ and implies a unity with him and his Church. Faith, baptism, and membership of a congregation form a union. To live in one's baptism is a process which has to do with growth in faith and imitation of Christ.

Matt.3:13–17, Rom. 6:1–11, 1 Cor.12:12–13

There is just one baptism. Opportunities for Confirmation or Renewal of one's baptism emphasize the importance of baptism as part of the life in faith. The Confirmation of baptism can be made at a certain opportunity as an expression of the individual's willingness to live within the covenant of the baptism. The Renewal of baptism is an opportunity to recurrently express one's willingness to live in faith and the imitation of Christ. In the Uniting Church in Sweden, local congregations perform different baptismal practices.

Eph. 4:5

HOLY COMMUNION

Jesus Christ invites us, and meets with us in the Holy Communion. Everyone who seeks fellowship with him is invited to partake in Holy Communion. The Holy Communion, in which bread and wine are shared, is a sacred meal in which earthly gifts, accompanied by Christ's words in The Great Thanksgiving, mediates and brings to life his presence. The Holy Communion contains the prayer for the presence of the Spirit, and is celebrated in remembrance of Jesus Christ and his death of reconciliation for the forgiveness of sins. The bread and wine represent the generosity and the abundant characteristics of both creation and salvation. The holy meal is, therefore, characterized by thanksgiving, praise, and a living hope.

Matt. 26:26–29, 1 Cor. 11:23–29, Rev 3:20

The Holy Communion proclaims a community across all boundaries. The celebration of the Holy Communion also contains an exhortation to reconciliation, fair distribution, and care for others. The communion is a mystery of faith that is a foretaste of the Kingdom to come.

Matt. 5:23–24, 1 Cor. 10:16–17; 11:20–33, Rev. 21:1–7

THE MISSION

The Church of Christ lives in the world and for the world. In the proclamation and the life of the congregation, the mission of the Church is accomplished.

John 17:15–23

The Christian Church worships and follows Jesus Christ. Through the power of the Holy Spirit the Church takes the commission of Jesus as its starting point and seeks

to make disciples of Jesus Christ, mediating the freedom of God, for the transformation of the world. Together with other denominations, the Uniting Church in Sweden wants to fulfill the calling, commissioned by Jesus Christ, to make the Kingdom of God visible in Sweden and in the world.

Matt 28:18–20, Luke 4:16–21, Acts 1:8

Through the congregation, Jesus calls people to conversion and faith. The congregation wants to meet the needs of people of all ages and in all situations of life. Through testimony, ministry, and community the mission of the Church will manifest in the world. The congregation is present in everyday life, in work life, and in the society at large. It wants to defend what is just and disclose what is unjust, encourage participation and coresponsibility in the society, contribute to an equal distribution of the world's resources, work for peace and reconciliation, and assume its responsibility for the stewardship of God's creation.

Gen. 1:26–27, Amos 5:24, John 3:16–17; 14:6, Rom. 3:23–26; 8:19–23

The Great Commission is universal and is valid for all. In the worldwide community of the Uniting Church in Sweden, resources and needs are shared. In the meeting with other Churches one's own understanding of the richness of the Gospel is enhanced. Of its very nature the Church is missionary, called and sent to serve in the creation of God as an instrument of the Word and the Spirit, as a witness to the Kingdom of God.

Matt 28:18–20, Mark 16:15

THE MINISTRY OF ALL PEOPLE

All are called to serve and witness to the salvation in Jesus Christ, and with aid from the congregation, search for, discover, and use the gifts given by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives the congregation a multitude of gifts so that the whole abundance of the Gospel may be expressed. The priesthood of all believers implies that Christians, individually and together, have access to God the Father through Jesus Christ, and is an expression of God's use of every single part of the body of Christ, according to its capacities. The gifts and the ministries are different, but God works through them all. All ministries emanate from God and extend towards all human community and all of the creation of God.

Rom 12:1–8, 1 Cor. 12:4–11; 14:26, 1 Pet. 2:4–10

SPECIFIC MINISTRIES

God calls and equips people for specific ministries in the congregation and in the XCHURCH. These ministries are based on the ministry of all people and the shared faith. Those that have been called to specific ministries work for openness and cohesiveness in the community.

Matt. 9:36–38, Acts 6:1–6, 2 Tim. 1:6–7

ORDINATION OF DEACON OR PASTOR

Women and men are ordained as deacons and pastors through a decision made by the Church Conference. Deacon and Pastor are two parts of the ordained ministry with a different focus and mission. The ordained ministry belongs to the Church, and is expressed in active service in church and congregation through diaconal or pastoral mis-

sions, but does not necessarily have the characteristics of an employment. Ordination is a confirmation to the calling of God and people and gives authority to minister in the congregations. When being ordained, the deacons and the pastors confirm their faith in Jesus Christ, their desire to adhere to the joint ordinances of the XCHURCH, and to work for the visible unity of the Church of Christ, thus fulfilling their calling with Christ as a role model. At their inauguration, the local congregation receives the deacon and the pastor.

John 20:21–23, Eph. 4:11–13

DEACONS

The deacon is a servant of Christ in the congregation and in society with the task of transmitting the Word of God, providing care, offering fellowship, giving particular support to people in vulnerable situations of life, and to stand side by side with the oppressed. The deacon gives a promise of confidentiality in matters shared during pastoral counseling or relating to people's personal circumstances.

PASTORS

The pastor is the servant of Christ in the congregation and in society with the task to gather and build up the body of Christ, preach the Word of God, administer the sacraments, exercise pastoral care, and lead the life of the congregation in its efforts to fulfill its calling. The pastor has professional secrecy and gives a promise of confidentiality in relation to matters confided to him/her in confession or in individual pastoral care.

RECEPTION OF DEACONS AND PASTORS FROM ANOTHER DENOMINATION

Deacons and pastors who have been ordained in another denomination may, after having expressed their willingness to follow the Uniting Church in Sweden joint ordinances, be accepted for service in the Uniting Church in Sweden through a decision made by the Church Conference. Deacons and pastors who are related to another denomination but serving in joint congregations already share fellowship and responsibility in the Uniting Church in Sweden in accordance with its Basic Document.

INTERNATIONAL MISSIONARIES

The task of an international missionary is to make visible the mission of the Church to cross boundaries. This task is mutual with churches in other countries. Missionaries are commissioned by the Church Conference. Those that have been called to be co-workers in a certain church will be received by the Church which has called them in accordance with the current agreement for cooperation. Others fulfill their task in the country to which they have been sent, in accordance with the plans that have been made for the assignment. In the same way, the Uniting Church in Sweden receives missionaries coming from other churches and denominations.

THE CHURCH LEADER AND THE ASSISTANT CHURCH LEADER

The Church Leader and the Assistant Church Leader are appointed in accordance with the statutes of the Uniting Church in Sweden. They are consecrated for their ministry, just as any other persons who have been called by the Church Board, at the Church Conference. The Church Leader, being the spiritual leader of the Uniting Church in Sweden and its principal representative, is called upon to:

- Be responsible for the coordination and supervision while caring for the life and fellowship of the Uniting Church in Sweden
- Promote preaching and pastoral care
- Work for the visible unity of the Church of Christ
- Overseeing the development of the JFC while being mindful of issues pertaining to its future
- Plan and lead the work of the Uniting Church in Sweden together with the Church Board
- Actively pursue the engagement of the Uniting Church in Sweden in words and action in society. In cooperation with the Leader of the Church, the Assistant Church Leader has the corresponding assignment within his/her area of responsibility