

**“Called to be the One Church” - Faith and Order Plenary Commission
7-13 October 2009, Orthodox Academy of Crete**

**Brief presentation on the statement “Called to be the One Church”
and its rapport with the paper “The Nature and Mission of the Church”
(short version)**

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The 9th WCC Assembly (Porto Alegre, Brazil, 2006) adopted an ecclesiological text, *Called to be the One Church*, which constitutes an invitation to the churches “to renew their commitment to the search for unity and to deepen their dialogue”. The short introduction to this statement explains that its purpose is two-fold: “(a) to reflect what the churches, at this point on their ecumenical journey, can say together about some important aspects of the Church; and (b) to invite the churches into a renewed conversation - mutually supportive, yet open and searching - about the quality and degree of their fellowship and communion, and about the issues which still divide them”. In the first footnote of this statement it is acknowledged that the draft of this text has been elaborated by the Faith and Order Commission and submitted as draft to the Porto Alegre Assembly.

Besides its short introduction the Porto Alegre statement contains six sections. The first one describes the nature of the WCC as “a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior according to the scriptures, and therefore seek to fulfill their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit”. The second section elaborates on the four marks of the Church: oneness, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity, as formulated by the second Ecumenical Council (381). The third section underlines the significance of Baptism in relation to the unity of the Church. The fourth section speaks again about the Church as the creation not only of the Word of God but also of the Spirit. The Church is a mystery, a sign, an instrument of what God intends for the salvation of the world, and therefore the Church should be perceived as a *reconciled and reconciling community*. Section five expresses a critical view in relation to the fact that the “churches have not always acknowledged their *mutual responsibility* to one another, and have not always recognized the need to give account to one another of their faith, life, and witness, as well as to articulate the factors that keep them apart”. This is one of the reasons why the Porto Alegre Assembly decided to recommit all churches to the search for church unity. In this respect this statement addresses to all churches 10 concrete questions, through which the churches “will be challenged to recognise areas for renewal in their own lives, and new opportunities to deepen relations with those of other traditions.”¹

On the 19th of April 2007 the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland sent to Geneva a comment on the Faith and Order paper *The Nature and Mission of the Church*. In this response they underlined that the WCC can “serve as an instrument for unity, and the theological work relating to controversial issues organically belongs to this service”. Therefore, this church considered that *The Nature and Mission of the Church* text “assists” the process launched in Porto Alegre by the adoption of the statement *Called to be One Church*. This comment indicates that for this church the two ecclesiological texts are closely linked to each other. Another interesting comment on the

¹ www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/porto-alegre-2006/1-statements-documents-adopted/christian-unity

same Faith and Order paper was sent to the WCC by the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) on 5 December 2006. This church “believes” that *The Nature and Mission of the Church* paper “is a very helpful formulation of basic ecclesiological convictions which our church can wholeheartedly endorse, particularly when read in conjunction with the text ‘Called to be the One Church’”. In this case the Porto Alegre statement helps to provide a better understanding of the Faith and Order paper, *The Nature and Mission of the Church*. Further more, in its comments both to the issue of the *Institutional Dimension of the Church and the Work of the Holy Spirit* as well as in relation to the issue of Baptism from the *Nature and Mission of the Church*, the UCA is formulating its comments by quoting *Called to be the One Church*.

If the Porto Alegre statement is addressing 10 questions to all churches we should also be reminded that *The Nature and Mission of the Church* contains four questions at the end of its introduction, which are challenging the churches to consider how far this paper is taking into consideration “our common ecclesiological convictions”². The responses to these questions may lead to a larger elaboration of this text, which as we know is already a revised version of the initial *Nature and Purpose of the Church*. So the purpose of *The Nature and Mission of the Church* is to offer as far as possible a common ecclesiological basis to all member churches of the WCC, otherwise it will only remain a study text. The Lima document on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM) could be a model for *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, but the experience around the BEM text should also be taken into consideration with its positive and negative aspects.

Both ecclesiological texts we are talking about have been formally sent to the WCC member churches which were asked to comment on them. The risk being taken by the WCC in this respect is that the churches may embark on two different reflection processes. We were very happy to discover that at least some churches considered the two ecclesiological texts very closely linked to each other and that these texts should be taken together into consideration, although they have a different character. Following these examples, we hope that the WCC will encourage this pattern so that the reactions to the two texts, even if they would be separate, should lead to only one reflection process within the WCC. In other words the Porto Alegre statement, with all the reactions from the churches to it, should be used to help Faith and Order Commission develop *The Nature and Mission of the Church* into a common statement.

² *The Nature and Mission of the Church. A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*. Faith and Order Paper 198, World Council of Churches, Geneva, 2005, p. 12