

Executive Summary

The final plenary session drew together the theological, practical, and procedural outcomes of the Oslo Consultation. Susanne framed the consultation as a significant experience of CPCE church communion, especially as communion in learning and teaching. She emphasized that participants had come from different linguistic, academic, church-leadership, and ecumenical contexts, yet had managed to communicate across these differences in a spirit of patience, trust, and mutual recognition.

A central theological point was that deepening CPCE communion and serving the unity of the wider church are not alternatives. Susanne argued that the mutual recognition of ministries within the CPCE is itself a visible form of communion and can therefore contribute to wider ecumenical credibility. She illustrated this with an example from Württemberg, where Catholic students were struck by the fact that CPCE churches actually recognize one another's ordinations and allow ministers to serve across church boundaries.

The session also reflected on the reception of the 2012 document *Ministry, Ordination, Episkopé* (MOE). Susanne described the consultation itself as an act of reception and asked participants to become ambassadors of the document in their own contexts. She outlined the next steps: a small reaction group will prepare a short letter of approximately one to one and a half pages for the CPCE Church Leaders' Consultation in Wittenberg in 2027. Further possible steps include digital formats, a CPCE map of ministry practices, regional discussions, and integration of church leaders' responses into subsequent work.

The intended letter should, according to Susanne, contain three main elements: first, a report that the consultation received the MOE document; secondly, an affirmation that the document remains a valid instrument for reflection on ministry, ordination, and episkopé; and thirdly, an indication of where changed circumstances require further development, especially at the level of concretization. The key themes identified for further work included the diaconate, women's ordination and leadership, inclusion, recognition of ministries and ordinations, misuse of power, catechists and church musicians, the role of ministers in political contexts, training and continuing education, and the role of non-ordained persons in church service.

Several participants then proposed concrete ways to continue the work. Jochen suggested a working group on ordination that would combine theological and liturgical reflection. Others supported attention to ordination liturgies, asking how being ordained within a communion of churches becomes visible in the liturgy. Susanne and Stefan also referred to an emerging CPCE initiative bringing together ordinands, especially from smaller churches, though financial support would need to come from interested member churches.

In the procedural discussion, Marko proposed that the forthcoming letter should be addressed not only to the church leaders but also to the CPCE Council, since the Council has responsibility and resources for integrating the results into the wider CPCE process. Kenneth asked whether the sections of MOE on training and continuing education were also being reviewed. Stefan and Susanne clarified that, due to limited resources at the CPCE head office, no such process is currently underway, though member churches or boards could take responsibility for specific strands of work.

The session concluded with Ulrich's closing words on behalf of the CPCE Council. He thanked the participants, the Church of Norway, and the CPCE staff. He underlined that the consultation had shown both the continuing elasticity and relevance of the 2012 document and the need to address new challenges. He highlighted questions of diversity, limits of diversity, episkopé, recognition of

ministry, interchangeability of ministries, women's ordination and leadership, and the next steps towards the 2027 Church Leaders' Consultation.

CPCE Oslo Consultation

Final plenary session and closing discussion

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Susanne opened the session by expressing deep gratitude for the days spent together. She observed that although this was by no means her first CPCE meeting, this consultation had been marked by a particular intensity of common focus. The participants had come together, in her image, like a flock, gathering closely around one urgent topic. This common focus had made it possible to experience not only the challenges but also the richness of diversity within the CPCE.

She first referred to linguistic diversity. The consultation had repeatedly shown how important and difficult language is for the work of church communion. Susanne recalled the worship services, where participants sang in different languages and sometimes repeated one verse in several languages. In such moments, even when not all words were understood, participants could sense something of one another's linguistic worlds. She also mentioned the Lord's Prayer, which all churches pray in their own languages, as an example of a shared Christian practice that nevertheless exists in linguistic plurality.

This linguistic diversity, Susanne continued, also affects theological concepts. She recalled moments in the consultation when participants realized that certain terms could not simply be translated into German, French, or another language without loss. The question of who is welcome in ministry showed how sensitive this can be. She referred, for example, to the Norwegian discussion and the problem of translating a phrase such as "all men," which would not work in every language or context.

Susanne then broadened the point. The greatest achievement of the consultation, in her view, was not only the handling of different national languages but the capacity to communicate across different social, institutional, and professional languages. Strong academics, church leaders, and people responsible for ecumenical relations had all brought their own forms of speech and experience. Often, she noted, when academics and church people meet, it can feel like the Tower of Babel: they do not understand one another. In Oslo, however, the participants had met in a sisterly and brotherly spirit, with patience, and had in fact communicated.

For Susanne, this was an experience of church communion. More specifically, the consultation had been an example of communion in learning and teaching. The CPCE had not only discussed ministry, ordination, and episkopé; it had also enacted a form of common learning. In this connection, she recalled that the consultation had repeatedly asked how this dimension of communion relates to another dimension: the service of the unity of the church.

Susanne addressed the concern that deepening CPCE communion might stand in tension with serving wider Christian unity, especially in relation to Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches. She rejected the idea that these are alternatives. Without denying the real difficulties, she argued that both are theological dimensions of the same communion. Deepening communion within the CPCE can serve the unity of the church rather than competing with it.

To illustrate this point, Susanne recounted a concrete experience from a seminar she had once taught together with Johanna Rahner, professor of Catholic theology in Tübingen, on the Leuenberg Concord. In that seminar, Susanne had explained the CPCE and its mission to students from

Methodist, Lutheran, and Catholic backgrounds. When she mentioned that in Württemberg the ordination of pastors from other CPCE churches is recognized, and that such pastors can serve across church boundaries — for example, Württemberg pastors in the Waldensian Church in Italy, Methodist pastors in Württemberg, and a Russian Lutheran archbishop who had left Russia after speaking out against Putin now serving as a pastor in Ulm — the Catholic students reacted with surprise and interest. For them, this visible mutual recognition of ordination made the CPCE's communion concrete and credible. Susanne concluded that the CPCE's efforts to maintain and deepen mutual recognition of ministry also serve the wider unity of the church.

She then turned to the question of reception. The consultation itself, she said, had been a strong act of reception of the 2012 document *Ministry, Ordination, Episkopé*. When the CPCE General Assembly adopted the document in 2012, it asked the churches to receive it. The Oslo Consultation had now followed that request. Susanne therefore asked all participants to recognize that, from now on, they are ambassadors of this document in their own contexts. Even if they are not specifically ordained to such a ministry, they should take seriously the task of multiplying and communicating the insights of the consultation.

Susanne then outlined how the work would continue. One point had already been agreed. On the basis of the consultation's results, a small reaction group would draft a short letter of approximately one to one and a half pages. It should not be longer, since church leaders are unlikely to read a long text. This letter would go to the CPCE Church Leaders' Consultation in Wittenberg in 2027, where the topic of ministry, ordination, and episkopé would also be taken up. Once the draft letter has been prepared, it will be shared with the consultation participants.

She then mentioned further possible steps that would need to be discussed with the Presidium and Council. One idea is to develop digital formats through which participants from the consultation could share what they experienced and make the results available to a wider audience. Another idea is to create some form of CPCE map of ministry practices. Such a map would offer short and basic information about how member churches deal with questions of ministry, ordination, episkopé, and related topics. It would require carefully formulated questions, but it could become a tool for learning from one another and for contacting churches whose practices seem especially interesting or unfamiliar.

A further possibility would be to integrate the reactions of the church leaders after the Wittenberg consultation and then invite regional groups to take up the discussion. Susanne stressed that these were still ideas and would need further consideration in the Council. She invited participants to send further suggestions.

Susanne then sketched the possible structure of the letter to the church leaders. First, it should state that the consultation received the 2012 document and was grateful that the churches had agreed on this common understanding. Secondly, it should affirm that the MOE document remains a valid instrument for facilitating reflection on ministry, ordination, and episkopé, both within the CPCE and within individual member churches. The aim of such reflection is to help the churches care for the flock, rather than appearing to care only for themselves. Thirdly, the letter should indicate that changed circumstances now require some lines of the document to be drawn further or, where necessary, adjusted. This concerns mainly the level of concretization.

At this point Susanne invited participants to look together at the collected results on the wall. She explained that, with the help of Jochen and Maria, the points had been arranged into three broad categories: first, comments or amendments to the ten existing recommendations; secondly, possible additional recommendations; and thirdly, more general theological lines that might belong either at the beginning or at the conclusion.

The first general line concerned the present “time of trouble.” Susanne summarized the shared insight that precisely in difficult times the churches need a re-reading of MOE, but also more cooperation and solidarity. She described the present moment as a *kairos* for deepening communion at the level of ministry, ordination, and episkopé. A second general line concerned the call to the churches to find ways of receiving CPCE documents more fully.

Looking at the comments on the ten recommendations, Susanne identified two main concentrations. The first concerned the diaconate. Several groups had emphasized the high relevance of the diaconate and the need to reflect on it further, including in relation to the wider ecumenical context. The second concerned recommendation 8 on women’s ordination. Across the groups, there had been agreement that women’s ordination must be affirmed more strongly and that the issue does not end with ordination itself. It also concerns leadership, equal recognition, and participation. This could be connected with a further point, or perhaps formulated separately, namely that ministries should in general be inclusive and open to all people.

Susanne then turned to possible additional recommendations. One topic was recognition. She noted that the precise terminology remains open: the CPCE may need to distinguish between recognizing ministries, recognizing ordination, and recognizing the consequences of such recognition. Drawing again on Württemberg, she observed that even where recognition is church policy, it must be known and applied by those responsible for personnel. In large churches, the personnel departments may not know much about CPCE agreements, because ecumenical questions are handled elsewhere. The recognition of ordination and ministry must therefore become part of practical church administration.

Another additional topic was power. Susanne observed that this had been made quite large in the discussion, even if it looked small on the wall. The question of power also links with the CPCE safeguarding conference planned for June. Although safeguarding and the theology of ministry are not the same issue, they are connected by the question of power. Susanne emphasized that CPCE documents and processes should not be treated as isolated from one another; they interlink.

A further topic concerned the ministries of catechists and church musicians. Susanne underlined especially the importance of music for Protestant churches. Protestant piety without singing is hardly imaginable; singing is a form in which the common priesthood is practiced. This theme therefore belongs not merely to practical church life but to the theology of ministry and participation.

Another possible additional point concerned the role of ministers in times of political trouble. Susanne formulated the question as what it means to be a minister when ministers stand publicly for the Word of God. How should they position themselves, or refrain from positioning themselves, in political questions? This topic linked the theology of ministry with public responsibility.

She then identified two clusters related to training and education. The first concerned training for ministry, continuing education for pastors, and the question of how formation can take seriously the person who enters ministry, including what he or she brings in terms of experience, gifts, and background. This also links to the question of how the churches can make entry into ministry more effective and attractive. Reception of CPCE documents could also be integrated into education. The second cluster concerned non-ordained persons in church service. Susanne noted her own sensitivity, as a Reformation historian, concerning the language of “lay persons” in a Protestant context. Since one of the main achievements of the Reformation was to overcome a strict division between lay and non-lay Christians, the term must be used carefully, even if participants understand what is meant in the present discussion.

Susanne concluded this part by explaining that the drafting group would take all these points into account when preparing the short letter.

Jochen then added a specific proposal concerning ordination. He recalled that, before the pandemic, when he was liturgical adviser of the CPCE, member churches had been asked about their ordination services. At that time, there had been an idea to organize a consultation or working group on ordination, with a particular focus on the liturgy of ordination and the question whether there is something common to all CPCE member churches. The response had been limited. But now, in light of the present kairos, Jochen suggested that it might be time to take up this question again. A working group could combine theological reflection on ordination with liturgical reflection on what happens when a person is ordained: from God's side, from the church's side, and from the side of the person ordained. Jochen expressed his own interest in continuing this work.

Susanne welcomed this suggestion and noted also Jochen's willingness to be involved personally. She then shared two examples. First, she mentioned that the Waldensian colleague had told her that in their ordination formula they always understand ordination in the context of the CPCE. Secondly, she described a practice in her own church. In earlier times, ordinands in Württemberg received a short church history of Württemberg. Now every ordinand receives a copy of *The Church of Jesus Christ*, the CPCE's Protestant ecclesiology. Susanne suggested that such a tangible gift could also be considered by other churches. She added, half practically, that the text is available from the CPCE office in Vienna. Thomas-Andreas noted that it exists in at least six translations, including Estonian.

Hans Martin then returned to the question of how being ordained within a communion of churches becomes visible in ordination liturgy. He considered this an important question to be raised. He also cautioned that the variety of ministries should not be reduced to catechists and church musicians. These should be treated as examples, since many other professional services in the church may also deserve theological attention. Susanne agreed and suggested marking such ministries as examples rather than as an exhaustive list.

Ole Kristian also underlined the importance of working on liturgy. In Norway, he explained, they are currently working on liturgy, and liturgy expresses theological thinking. Susanne welcomed this and suggested that this might be another reason to take up the topic in future CPCE work.

Another participant then brought in a reflection from research on pastoral leadership. The chapter in question had the heading "to be a shepherd is to be a mom" and explored biblical images of shepherding. The participant noted that in many Old Testament contexts shepherds are women, children, or slaves. This challenges familiar images, including Christmas imagery, and opens up the question of who can be a minister. It invites the churches to ask who wants to become a pastor, what motivates them, what their call is, and how they enter ministry. This reflection was presented as another strand that connects with the wider discussion about calling, inclusion, and formation.

Susanne then referred to a practical CPCE initiative on pastoral education and asked Stefan to say a few words. Stefan explained that the CPCE is developing a program to bring together ordinands, especially from smaller churches, though Württemberg also wants to contribute ordinands. A focus group with ordinands from three countries had already taken place. The CPCE head office had considered a digital platform, but the ordinands had emphasized that while digital contact is useful, personal meetings are even better. This would therefore need to be taken into account.

Susanne turned this into an invitation to member churches. If a church were willing to invite such a group and cover the finances, the CPCE could help organize the gathering. The project could then move from country to country, growing by including people from different places. The CPCE head office can coordinate but does not have the funds to finance such a process on its own.

Frank then noted that he had not heard the keyword of external ecumenical relations in Susanne's summary and asked that it be included, especially because this is important for diaspora churches.

Susanne agreed and said that it is indeed included theologically. Deepening CPCE communion is always related to serving the unity of the church. Still, she accepted the point that it should be named specifically.

Stefan then moved the session toward its procedural conclusion. He said that the consultation had reached the point where the baton must be handed to the group that will draft the short paper for the church leaders. He reminded participants that further ideas had been mentioned for bringing the results into the churches and asked them to remain open to future requests connected with this work. Before the closing words, he invited any remaining questions or statements.

Marko then spoke as a member of the CPCE Council and Presidium. He suggested that the letter should be addressed not only to the church leaders but also to the CPCE Council. The Council will in any case review the process of the consultation, but he thought it should be directly addressed and invited to take responsibility. While he did not want to underestimate the church leaders, he noted that they are busy people who may attend conferences, listen, and then return to other business. The CPCE Council, by contrast, has a specific responsibility and some resources to integrate the results into the wider CPCE processes. Marko expressed the hope that the ideas from the consultation would not remain merely in the room or in a written report, but would lead to further work.

Kenneth then asked about the parts of the MOE document dealing with training for ministry and continuing education. He noted that those sections also contain recommendations, in a somewhat different and sometimes more concrete form, and asked whether any review of those sections is currently underway.

Stefan replied that no such work is currently taking place, mainly because of the limited resources of the CPCE head office. He said he would be very happy if a member church were willing to take responsibility for such a line of work. Susanne specified that the head office has only two and a half positions, held by three people, plus Oliver Engelhardt for church relations. Given the number of processes underway, the head office has to choose what it can take on. Some suggestions from the General Assembly cannot be followed up immediately. However, a topic can be taken down and proposed to the next General Assembly as something that should be addressed.

Jochen then pointed out that the CPCE has permanent boards dealing with ethical, liturgical, financial, and ecumenical questions. The new board for liturgy, for example, could receive a report from the consultation and be asked to consider the liturgical work that arises from it. Thomas-Andreas added that the Advisory Board on Ecumenism had also been mentioned. Frédéric Chavel, who serves on that board and was present in the consultation as a connecting person, would report back at its next meeting in two weeks.

Stefan then emphasized an important ecclesiological and practical point: the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe is not identical with the head office in Vienna. The participants themselves, and their churches, are the CPCE. With a humorous aside concerning Ireland and England, he added that this might also be a good beginning for them. He encouraged participants to speak with responsible persons in their own churches and ask whether they could lead or support a process. The head office can help, make connections, and sometimes delegate someone, but not everything discussed in the room can be organized by the head office. "You all are our hope," Stefan said, before adding that Jesus is of course the hope on another level.

Ulrich then gave the closing words on behalf of the CPCE Council. He described the two days as very intensive, not only in the working groups but also in conversations during the breaks. The consultation had shown that a new generation is now reading the 2012 text in light of new

challenges. At the same time, the text itself had proved to have a certain elasticity. The different situations of the churches had led the participants to ask how they are together as a communion.

Ulrich recalled the image of a “corridor” that had emerged in one group, namely the question of the limits of diversity. He noted that the consultation had not discussed episkopé as much as it might have, though related questions had surfaced, such as whether one may continue to wear a cross after holding a particular function, or whether someone is ordained or installed. Such questions may also need further consideration.

He also mentioned the CPCE’s engagement with recognition of ministry, the welcome of ministers from other churches, and the interchangeability of ministries. These questions had been discussed and should be taken into account in the next steps. The same applies to the questions of women’s ordination and the position of women in the churches.

Ulrich recalled that the next step would be the preparation of a letter or recommendation for the church leaders. The Council would then consider the results after the gathering of church leaders in Wittenberg in 2027 and discern how to proceed further. He thanked the participants for the time they had given, describing it as an important gift to the CPCE. Their reflections and engagement had helped the churches read the 2012 document again and apply it more concretely and with a view to the future.

Finally, Ulrich thanked the Church of Norway, especially Beate, Einar, and the church leadership, for welcoming the consultation and taking care of the logistics and hospitality, including the festive evening. He also thanked the CPCE staff — Stefan, Thomas-Andreas, and Susanne — for guiding the gathering. He concluded by wishing participants a good journey home and encouraging them to take the documents with them, spread the information, and be blessed in their travels and in their churches.