

CPCE Oslo Consultation

Rethinking Ministry in the CPCE: Responding to Diversification through Ministry, Ordination, Episkopé (LD 13)

Plenary session on group work results

25 April 2026, 10:27

Executive Summary

The plenary session gathered and compared the results of four group discussions on the CPCE document *Ministry, Ordination, Episkopé* and its ten recommendations. Across the groups, there was broad agreement that the document remains highly relevant but needs to be re-read in light of contemporary challenges: changing forms of ministry, minority church situations, gender justice, the role of lay people, misuse of power, political polarization, and ecumenical relations.

Several recurring themes emerged. First, the recommendations should more clearly affirm and strengthen the ordination and leadership of women. Participants stressed that the issue is not only whether women are ordained, but whether ordained women are fully recognized, empowered, and treated equally in leadership and ministry. Secondly, the role of lay people and other ministries—such as catechists, church musicians, teaching ministries, and diaconal ministries—needs further reflection. Churches should ask how such persons are called, trained, equipped, entrusted, and, where appropriate, commissioned or ordained.

Thirdly, many groups emphasized that the CPCE should distinguish more carefully between ordination, commissioning, delegation, and qualification. This is especially important because CPCE member churches use different concepts of ministry and church order. The goal is not a uniform system of ministry, but a common understanding of different church orders within the framework of church communion. Fourthly, the question of reception was considered crucial. CPCE texts should not remain unused documents; member churches should be encouraged to take responsibility for receiving, discussing, and applying common recommendations.

The session also identified new issues that were not sufficiently visible in the 2012 document. These include the use and misuse of power, especially in relation to episkopé; the role of ministry in polarized societies; the danger of religious language being misused for nationalism; and the need to reflect on inclusion in a broader sense. The model of unity in reconciled diversity was repeatedly affirmed as the CPCE's basic Protestant approach.

The discussion concluded with a focused exchange on the diaconate and ordination. Participants distinguished between recognizing ordination and recognizing the interchangeability of ministries. The Leuenberg Agreement's focus on the ministry of word and sacrament was understood not as excluding other ordained ministries, but as naming the shared point of reference within diverse church orders.

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Stefan opened the session by recalling the practical time constraints and noting that some participants would need to leave soon. He informed the group that wraps were available for lunch and encouraged those who had to depart to take food with them. He then framed the common task

of the session as gathering and presenting the results of the group work. Referring to Ghazaneh's earlier plea, he stressed that the reports should, as far as possible, contribute to the systematization of the consultation's outcome. The aim was not to enter into a full plenary discussion at this stage, but to collect the main insights, questions, and proposed amendments.

Report from Group 1

Ulrich introduced the report of the first group and thanked Alexandra for having taken notes. Alexandra then presented the group's discussion, which had gone through all ten recommendations of *Ministry, Ordination, Episkopé*. She began with recommendation 1. The group proposed that the CPCE churches should be invited to take a new and critical look at their ministries, reflecting especially on the role of ministries in a time of change. This reflection should also take place in relation to other Christian traditions.

Alexandra explained that the group wanted to broaden the horizon of the recommendations by explicitly taking into account ministries beyond ordained ministry in the narrower sense. Church musicians, teaching ministries, catechists, and other forms of service should be named more clearly. In relation to recommendation 5, the group therefore proposed further study not only of the diaconate but also of teaching, church music, and other ministries.

A particularly important point concerned recommendation 8. Alexandra stated that the group wished to formulate the question of women's ordination more affirmatively. The group took for granted that the CPCE churches ordain women and therefore recommended not only that women be ordained but that the ministry of women, especially in leadership roles, be actively empowered. In relation to recommendation 9, the group suggested referring to the CPCE Council's orientation guide on gender, sexuality, marriage, and family.

Alexandra further reported that the group identified the question of power as an important topic that had not been sufficiently present in the 2012 document. They proposed an additional recommendation on the exercise, use, and misuse of power in church life and ministry. Another proposed additional recommendation concerned the reception of CPCE texts. The group suggested that member churches should carefully consider what membership in the CPCE means, especially in relation to how they receive and work with common recommendations.

Jochen asked for clarification about this last point, especially what was meant by "reception of recommendations." Alexandra explained that the concern was whether texts produced within the CPCE are actually received in the churches or whether they remain papers that are put aside. The group wanted to make the question of reception explicit, because the work done in common should also have consequences in the life of the churches.

Jochen supported this point from his own experience in the Hanover church. He observed that the ten recommendations of the MOE document were very helpful, but that the document as a whole had often not been received because many people were discouraged by its length. If readers had been encouraged to begin with the recommendations, the reception might have been easier. He therefore underlined that the recommendations could function as an accessible entry point into the document and into the CPCE process more generally.

Alexandra also noted that the group discussed theological education. They recommended exploring more collaborative ways of delivering theological education, especially in view of churches that find themselves in minority situations. As an example, she mentioned forms of training in which students spend part of their curriculum in other churches. The group saw such models as potentially helpful for CPCE churches facing similar challenges.

Finally, Alexandra reported that the group had a significant discussion on ordination but did not find a final formulation. The group wanted to hold together the fact that ordination carries the order of church life, witness, and service to the world, while avoiding a merely functional understanding. The issue was considered important but too complex to formulate in a short recommendation during the session.

Thomas-Andreas added that the group had gone through all ten recommendations. Where no amendments were proposed, the group in effect affirmed the existing recommendation. Jochen then underlined that the question of the use and misuse of power is currently being discussed intensely in the German churches and perhaps also elsewhere. He observed that this was not yet on the radar of the Florence 2012 document, and therefore deserved fresh attention.

Report from Group 2

Stefan then invited the second group to present its results. Ulrich reported on behalf of the group. He began with a reflection on what he called a "Protestant corridor." The group had observed the real diversity of ministry in CPCE churches but also considered whether there are limits to what can still be regarded as belonging to a common Protestant understanding. This raised the question of how to describe both the diversity and the boundaries of Protestant approaches to ministry.

A central topic for the group was the inclusion of lay people. Ulrich noted that "lay people" should perhaps be put in quotation marks, because the term itself is not unproblematic. Nevertheless, the group saw a need to reflect more deeply on the training of lay people, the charisms of lay people, forms of assignment or delegation, and the ways in which lay people can be entrusted with tasks in the church. This topic was closely connected to the question of how ministries are delegated and recognized.

The group also discussed the formation of pastors and other ministers. Ulrich emphasized that training should not be understood only as academic education, but should also include spiritual formation. The group therefore saw a need to connect theological training, practical preparation, and spiritual formation more closely.

In relation to the existing recommendations, Ulrich mentioned three remarks. First, in connection with recommendation 4, the creation of a greater diversity of ministries demands deeper reflection on ecumenical relations. Churches need to be aware of what they are doing when they develop new forms of ministry. Secondly, on the question of women's ordination, the group felt that the recommendation should not only speak of serious consideration, but should also include women in leading positions. Thirdly, the group's reflection on the "Protestant corridor" should be complemented by the question of what the CPCE churches share with non-Protestant churches.

Marko developed this last point further. He observed that the question is not only what CPCE churches have in common with one another as Protestant churches, but also what they share with other Christian churches. Both individual member churches and the CPCE as a communion have ecumenical partners. For many churches, it is extremely important to identify what is shared not only within a Protestant corridor but also within a broader Christian corridor.

Report from Group 3

Thomas-Andreas presented the report of the third group. He began by noting that the group had had a substantial and lively discussion, even if the proposals written down did not fully show the depth of the debate. The group's first major point was that in times of trouble and crisis, the CPCE churches need to engage even more deeply with the existing work on ministry, ordination, and episkopé. There

is much to learn from what has already been done, and the MOE document can be a significant help in addressing present challenges.

Thomas-Andreas emphasized that the document offers a dogmatic framework for problems that churches are currently facing in very different contexts. The decisive question is therefore how this framework can be related to practice. The group asked how the document can be used in a way that respects different contexts while still drawing on the common theological framework already established.

A second point concerned the language of inclusion. Thomas-Andreas explained that the group discussed recommendations 8 and 9 and asked how these issues can be addressed without creating further separation. The group proposed formulating that the ministry of all persons is a gift of God. This formulation was intended to include all persons and all kinds of sexualities, rather than focusing only on specific categories in a problematizing way. The group wanted to avoid language that isolates particular groups as “issues,” while still recognizing that questions of gender, sexuality, and inclusion need to be addressed.

The group also recommended further study on how people come into ministry. This includes questions of calling, education, personal experience, previous experience, and the ways in which churches discern and receive these elements. Thomas-Andreas related this to the broader discussion of teaching, formation, and the use of experience.

Finally, the group raised the question of the role of ministers in relation to politics and polarization. Thomas-Andreas asked how ministers speak into societies that are becoming increasingly polarized and how churches can ensure that religious language does not become a religious argument for nationalism. The group therefore saw a need to reflect on ministry in relation to public responsibility, political polarization, and the dangers of nationalist misuse of religion.

Ulrich added that the group had not had enough time to go through all the recommendations in detail. The report should therefore be understood as a set of important ideas rather than a complete treatment of the whole document.

Report from Group 4

Jochen presented the results of the fourth group, noting that they had tried to go through each recommendation. On recommendation 1, the group proposed rephrasing the sentence in order to achieve greater clarity. When churches look critically at their ministries, they should do so in view of their common witness to Christ. This common witness was understood as the foundation and basis of reflection on ministry.

Regarding recommendation 2, Jochen said that the group underlined its importance but wanted to open the question again. The recommendation speaks of a common understanding of the concept of an order of ministries. For the group, this was a complex but crucial point. They did not understand it as aiming at a single common system of church orders. Rather, the churches remain free to have their own orders, but the CPCE needs to work on a common understanding of the different concepts of ministry and order.

Hans Martin clarified this point. He explained that the recommendation does not seek to establish one shared system of orders. Instead, it concerns a differentiated diversity in which the ministry of word and sacrament, diakonia, and episkopé each have their place. The churches may retain their own concepts, but there should be a common understanding of how these different concepts relate to the shared ecclesial reality of the CPCE.

On recommendation 3, Jochen noted that public preaching and the administration of the sacraments belong to the ordained ministry. At the same time, the group considered the question of delegation and qualification to be important. The question is who may be entrusted with particular tasks, under what conditions, and with what form of training or authorization. This may require either a development of recommendation 3 or perhaps an additional recommendation.

Recommendation 4 led the group to ask for greater clarity in distinguishing between ordination and commissioning. Jochen referred to the Norwegian perspective, in which everything may be understood as ordination, while in other churches distinctions between ordination, commissioning, assignment, and delegation are more pronounced. The group therefore proposed elaborating more precisely what mutual recognition of ministries means under these conditions.

On recommendation 5, the group asked for clarification of the relationship between deacons and diakonia. Jochen formulated the question as the need to clarify the proprium of the ministry of deacons. The group considered recommendation 5 highly relevant, but also suggested looking beyond Protestantism to wider ecumenical discussions of the diaconate.

Recommendation 6 was regarded as still relevant. The group underlined especially the shared responsibility involved in episkopé. Since CPCE churches include Lutheran and episcopal churches as well as United and Reformed churches with stronger synodal principles, the democratic and synodal dimension of episkopé must be emphasized. Episkopé should not be heard simply as a matter of bishops.

Recommendation 7 was linked to the responsibility for unity in episkopé. On recommendation 8, Jochen stated that the group wanted a stronger and more demanding formulation concerning the ordination of women. The group asked whether this should be expressed as an expectation of member churches or perhaps as a requirement. It also considered whether the language should be broadened beyond male and female to include persons of a third gender, though the group had not reached a final conclusion.

On recommendation 9, Jochen affirmed its continuing relevance, especially in relation to questions of sexuality. The group stressed that the model of unity in reconciled diversity remains the Protestant way of approaching these questions. Jochen described this as a middle way between different ecclesial positions, neither simply adopting a Catholic model nor moving to a more radical opposite position.

The group also proposed additional topics. Catechists and church musicians should be mentioned and discussed as ministries. There may also be a general task of episkopé, or of the church more broadly, to call and train lay people. The ordained ministry might have a special responsibility to equip and entrust others. More generally, the group asked how churches can attract and invite people to work in and for the church.

Several members of the group then added comments. Maia commented on recommendation 8 and suggested that the issue should perhaps be framed not only as a gender question but in terms of all people. Hans Martin clarified the group's interpretation of recommendation 1. He noted that the recommendation can be heard negatively, as if it criticizes certain ministries. The group's intention was rather to invite every church to discern and reflect on its own ministry. The wording should therefore make clear that this is not a criticism of concrete forms of ministry.

Harald emphasized that the ordination of women is not only a question of whether women are ordained. It also concerns the role of ordained women in the church, their access to leadership, and

whether they are treated as equal ordained ministers. The work is not finished once women are ordained; it must be followed through in church policy and practice.

Thomas-Andreas added that the specific point of recommendation 8 should be preserved as a point about the ordination of women. At the same time, there should also be broader reflection on the inclusion of all human beings in calling, ministry, and pastoral work.

Eva then summarized several topics that resonated across the groups. First, the ordination of women should be affirmed more strongly, and the question should be considered whether this should be formulated as a requirement. Secondly, the role of lay people was repeatedly mentioned and may require an additional recommendation. Thirdly, the question of power, including the misuse of power, was raised in several groups, especially in relation to episkopé. Fourthly, education and formation also emerged as a shared concern.

Plenary discussion on ordination, diaconate, and recognition

Mati raised a question connecting recommendation 2 with recommendation 5. If the CPCE were to work towards a common understanding of ministry involving diakonia and episkopé alongside the ministry of word and sacrament, would this also mean working towards the recognition of the ordination of deacons? He noted that the Leuenberg Agreement speaks only of recognizing ordination to the ministry of word and sacrament.

Thomas-Andreas responded by clarifying that the Leuenberg Agreement speaks of ordination into the ministry of word and sacrament, but not in an exclusive sense. The MOE document explicitly acknowledges that in some member churches deacons or bishops are ordained, and that in some contexts even catechists or church musicians may be ordained. The shared point is that CPCE churches ordain into the ministry of communicating the gospel in word and sacrament. This common affirmation does not exclude other forms of ordination in particular church orders. Addressing Mati directly, Thomas-Andreas underlined that the document does not deny the ordination of deacons in churches where this exists.

Jochen added that the key is not one concept of ministry, but one common understanding of different concepts and orders. The task is to recognize another church's order and concept while continuing to clarify together how the churches are church in Christ. He connected this with the hermeneutical insight of Körtner's contribution.

Another participant then raised the practical consequence of ordaining a deacon whose ministry is not directed toward the administration of word and sacrament. The question is whether such an ordained person could apply for a position requiring ordination in a church whose concept of ordination differs. The participant suggested that it is important to distinguish between accepting the concept of another church and assuming that all consequences are automatically the same across churches.

Mati formulated this distinction as the difference between recognizing ordination and recognizing the interchangeability of ministries. Hans Martin confirmed that these are two distinct questions. He added that, in his interpretation, the recommendation does not say that the CPCE needs a single common ministry, nor that all churches must agree on whether deacons should be ordained. Rather, all ministries should respect three dimensions: word and sacrament, diakonia, and episkopé. The point is wider than the question of ordination alone.

Stefan then brought the discussion to a close and announced a coffee break. He proposed a break of approximately twenty minutes and reminded participants to return on time.

