

## Mission and dialogue

### Background

The organisation Folkekirke og Religionsmøde (*The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark and the Encounter with Other Religions*) wishes to clarify its understanding of how the Christian commitment to mission, which the Church cannot renounce, can be reconciled with the recognition of other religions in a democratic society characterised by religious plurality.

The presence of other religions and life philosophies in Denmark has placed the concept of mission on the Church agenda for renewed debate. Of late a number of alternative responses have been raised: either dialogue or mission; either compromise or clash; either compliance or rejection. These alternatives are a simplification of the nature of the problem.

Mission and dialogue are about the concrete meeting of religions, the meeting between Christians and people of another religion or no religion. The issue is how we as believing Christians can combine the communication of our message, which for the individual is life-determining, with the recognition of the other person and thus of the other person's faith or conviction as life-determining too.

### Mission

The Church's mission is the task with which the Church is sent into the world. The Christian duty to mission is rooted in the actual preaching of the Christian gospel that God became man in Jesus Christ. In the light of Jesus' own Great Commission the Church is sent to *be* a community celebrating service; to *do* acts of neighbourly love; to *speak* or tell the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- Mission is presence. The Church must reflect the fact that God becomes man through an authentic presence as an inclusive fellowship of faith in Christ, which serves to strengthen the fellowship between all people. Mission is closeness, arising from the community celebrating service.
- Mission is action. In its diaconal the Church must reflect service to Jesus Christ and care for all of human life and all of its people. This service has independent value as an expression of God's unconditional love for all people.
- Mission is words. The Church must tell the good news to others that the kingdom of God has come close in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Church's responsibility is to witness to what we have seen and heard, while it is the task of the Holy Spirit to convince, convert and create faith.

Altogether the Church's mission – what we as a church are sent to be, do and say – must be a witness to God's love in Jesus Christ.

## **Dialogue**

Dialogue is a way of fulfilling the tasks of the Church. At its deepest level dialogue between religions has to do with ethics. The ethical attitude to dialogue arises from the fact that all people are created in God's image. The other person in this meeting must always be a you. Through dialogue we open ourselves to each other and create relations between people. We listen to each other because there is something valuable in listening to every person created in God's image, and we share what we have at heart with each other because the other is our neighbour. In this meeting we can come to a recognition of our agreements and disagreements and to clarity over our significant critical conflicts.

The Church in dialogue is a way of being: a course of action and a way of preaching and conversing.

- Dialogue is a way of *being present* – the dialogue of everyday life  
The Church's presence as a fellowship in a multi-religious world must be characterised by a dialogue with people of other or no faith. The challenge is that through dialogue Christians and people of other faiths and life philosophies can get to know each other as people and in so doing help to create good relations between Christians and their neighbours.
- Dialogue is a way of *acting* – the dialogue of co-operation  
The dialogue which among others deals with peaceful co-existence must be seen as part of the Church's commitment to diaconal. The task is, through dialogue, to seek to contribute to the solution of some of the problems that follow on from Denmark's development into a multi-racial society. In such co-operation people of different faiths will naturally draw on the resources which they each have in their religious traditions.
- Dialogue is a way of *preaching and conversing about faith* – the dialogue of faith  
Seen from a Church perspective the inter-religious dialogue cannot be separated from the Church's commitment to share the Christian message with others. Communication of the Christian message must take place in a dialogue where both the Christian and 'the other' must listen to one another's witness and where there is room to learn from one another so as to be influenced by one another and to be critical of one another's religion.

*6th December 2006*

*This document has been drawn up on the basis of discussions in the committee of The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark and the Encounter with Other Religions.*