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Preface

by the Archbishop of Uppsala

It is with great joy that we celebrate the agreement of full communion between the Church of Sweden and the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht. This is a step towards healing in the divided Church of Jesus Christ. As the final report of the dialogue commission says:

Every endeavour to achieve unity can be seen as obedience to Christ. Unity is not optional, but an essential dimension of what it means to be the church of Christ. Where there is division, the reality of the church is impaired, the credibility of the gospel is weakened, and the mission of the church is hampered.

The wave of ecumenical enthusiasm that followed the disasters of World War II gave way to more sobering experiences at the beginning of this century. However, new ecumenical energies have emerged from such different sources as the challenges of climate change that all humanity is facing and the joint commemorations held throughout the 500th anniversary year of the Lutheran Reformation.

Ecumenical work is not about the suppression of differences and the elimination of distinctions. Ecumenism by and large feels at ease with the acknowledgement of particularities and with agreement on disagreement where significant differences prevail. It is better to be thoughtfully committed than sloppily neutral! The dialogue between our churches has gone deep; we have reflected on issues that could have been considered dividing, and in doing so have discovered a unity that lay beneath the surface, waiting to be recognized.

Unity is not only about the relation between churches. Most of all, it is about the grace and mercy of God that urge us to common witness. Especially in our parts of the world, which are so deeply influenced by secularization, churches need to revisit their ecumenical roadblocks. In the disguise of a foe, secularization often serves us as a friend, helping the Christian community to attend to its centre and let go of some of the favourite controversies. It is my hope that the unity between the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht and the Church of Sweden will be put to good use by the Holy Spirit in common worship, witness and service for the world.

*Dr Antje Jackelén, Archbishop of Uppsala, Church of Sweden
Uppsala, 17 December 2017*