

9. Because of this koinonia of the churches, they need to meet together in order to discuss matters of mutual concern and to face contemporary challenges. Such gatherings may be drawn from one region or they may have a world-wide representation. This has happened from the earliest days of the church, as is shown in Acts 15, where apostles, presbyters and the whole church came together. It is through such meetings that the church formulates its own rule of faith and life in the light of its will to remain obedient to Christ and faithful to its vocation. When bishops gather in what has traditionally been called 'an ecumenical council', they take decisions that are binding upon the whole church, while a regional council or synod makes decisions only for the churches it represents. In all these official councils of the church, even when they consist only of bishops, their conclusions are valid only insofar as the common faith of the church is expressed in them. Such an exercise of authority, far from being an imposed burden, is ultimately for the benefit of the local churches and of their individual members.