



General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns

The United Methodist Church

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Report to Relational Concerns Summarizing Dialogues and Relationships

- The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- The Episcopal Church
- Churches of the Pan-Methodist Commission
- Churches Uniting in Christ
- Roman Catholic Church
- Wesleyan Holiness Churches

Evangelical Lutheran Church of America

The United Methodist Church and the ELCA share together an agreement of **Interim Eucharistic Sharing**, approved by The United Methodist Church Council of Bishops on May 5, 2005 and the ELCA Churchwide Assembly on August 11, 2005. The agreement comes after nearly thirty years of intensive Lutheran—United Methodist dialogue and is based on the most recent report of the dialogue teams, *Confessing Our Faith Together*. Though short of full communion, Interim Eucharistic Sharing makes more visible the unity we already share in Christ, and

makes more credible our common witness in the world.

With this interim commitment, congregations and judicatories of our two churches are encouraged to study together *Confessing Our Faith Together* as well as the United Methodist sacramental resource, *This Holy Mystery* and the ELCA resource, *The Use of the Means of Grace*; to celebrate joint services of the Lord's Supper; and to explore new opportu-



Photo © Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
Bishop William Oden takes communion Aug. 11, 2005 at the ELCA assembly.

nities for shared ministry. Future conversations will concentrate on ordering the life of the church, especially for mission; and about the nature and theology of the sacraments.

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The Episcopal Church

The United Methodist Church Council of Bishops adopted a covenant relationship of **Interim Eucharistic Sharing** with The Episcopal Church. A similar resolution was approved by The Episcopal Church General Convention in June of 2006. In this covenant, the two traditions recognize each other as members of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church in which the Gospel is rightly

preached. The resolution permits common, joint cele-



Photo by Paul Kottke

bration of the Eucharist where it is deemed appropriate for the sharing of worship by congregations of the respective Churches. The

adopted resolution requires that a United Methodist ordained to sacramental service (elder or bishop) and an ordained Episcopal priest or bishop stand together at the Lord's Table. Further, the resolution requires that the service of worship be an authorized one and agreed upon by the United Methodist and Episcopal bishops involved.

Future conversations will focus on ministry, ordination, episcopacy, and ordering the life of the church.

ELCA-UMC Dialogues Background



Bishops Ann B. Sherer (United Methodist) and David deFreese (ELCA) join in the benediction song during the joint service celebrated by the Nebraska United Methodist Church and the Nebraska Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) on Sept. 20 at Lincoln Saint Paul UMC.

Lutherans and United Methodists in the United States first met in 1977 to begin official dialogue. By 1981, this first round of dialogues had produced a common statement between our churches on the Christian sacrament of Baptism. This common statement affirmed the validity of baptism administered in accord with Scripture in our churches. From 1985-1987, a second round of dialogues concluded with a common statement on the role of bishops in each of our church bodies. The conclusions of both Rounds One and Two are printed in the

volume edited by Jack M. Tuell, titled *Episcopacy*.

Following earlier successes, September 2001 saw the beginning of a Third Round of dialogues. The dialogue team developed a proposal for Interim Eucharistic Sharing between the two churches at its meeting in August, 2004.

In October of 2005, the dialogue team completed a statement of faith, "Confessing Our Faith Together." Staff in the two ecumenical offices produced a study guide to the statement, then sent it to theological faculties and local congregations across the country for response.

In partnership with ELCA bishops, United Methodist Bishops in several annual conferences held study sessions and worship services celebrating this relationship. The dialogue team will meet again in December of 2006 to consider the feedback and to perfect "Confessing Our Faith Together." We anticipate that the 2008 General Conference may consider a resolution for full communion and that the same resolution would go to the ELCA church-wide assembly in 2009.

"Confessing Our Faith Together" and the study guide are available on the GCCUIC website.

*Web-site for The
General
Commission on
Christian Unity
and Interreligious
Concerns:*

www.gccuic-umc.org

Episcopal Church Dialogues Background

Building on the momentum from international dialogues and the Anglican-Methodist Conversations in England, and from an important and very productive local Episcopal-United Methodist dialogue in North Carolina, The United Methodist Church, authorized by its 2000 General Conference, and the Episcopal Church, authorized by the 2000 General Convention, met for its first bilateral dialogue in 2002. The period from 2002-2006 marked the initial stage of the dialogue, and focused on two goals: first, an examination of one another's poli-

ties, ecclesiologies, and shared history; secondly, the dialogue sought to identify convergence on matters of core doctrine for both churches.

While focusing on matters of core doctrine, the dialogue also began to discuss the one issue upon which convergence was unlikely to be reached during the initial phase: that of the ordained ministry, in particular the historic episcopate. The two churches chose to begin discussion on the ordained ministry by looking at how both churches have maintained faithfulness to the apostolic faith through mission and through the

episcopate.

In preparation for the 2006 Episcopal General Convention, the dialogue produced a study booklet, *Make Us One*, which detailed the dialogue process and laid out our shared history, issues of theological convergence and discussion, both churches' expressions of mission and calling, and the gifts manifested in each church.

Future dialogues will focus on issues of apostolicity, including the ordering of ministry and apostolic succession. Other sessions will be held with British Methodists and Pan-Methodists of the U.S.



Episcopal-United Methodist dialogue team, September, 2006

Dialogues with the Roman Catholic Church

United Methodists and Roman Catholics have been in conversation for forty years, both in the United States and, worldwide, through the World Methodist Council dialogues with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. These dialogues and the relationships of our parishes and congregations across the world have been very fruitful for Christ's mission in the world and for deepening the communion we share as we move in pilgrimage toward that full visible unity for which we so earnestly pray.

The sixth round (2001-2005) of the United Methodist dialogue with the US Conference of Catholic Bishops,

co-chaired by Bishop Walter Klaiber, took up the issue of the one ("universal" or "global") Church and the local churches, and how the one body of Christ that is encountered in particular communities is understood variously and in common by the two traditions. "Through Divine Love: The Church in Each Place and All Places" (2005) makes an important contribution to the ecumenical discussion of communion ecclesiology, particularly in regards to matters such as the principle of "subsidiarity" as applied to the Church and the role of the laity in the Church's mission.

"Through Divine Love" is available on the GCCUIC web site and many of the papers associated with the state-

ment will soon be published in the Faith and Order on-line journal, *Speaking of Unity*.

Staff from GCCUIC and the USCCB propose that the seventh round of dialogue undertake the theme of **"From Justification to Justice."** The round would consist of a five year term of annual meetings of the plenary group (six Roman Catholics and six Methodists, in addition to episcopal co-chairs and staff), and an additional annual meeting of the Steering Committee made up of two scholars and a staff person from each tradition. Meetings are to begin in 2007.



Bishops Carcaño and Domingos are greeted by Pope Benedict XVI in Rome, April 2006.

As an additional note about the activity of the World Methodist Council, continued conversations with the Salvation Army were approved by the WMC at its 2006 meeting.

International Methodist–Roman Catholic Dialogues

Although not sponsored by The United Methodist Church, we are affiliated with the Joint Commission for Dialogue between the World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church by our membership in the World Methodist Council and by the active presence of United Methodist theologians on the team. Bishop Scott Jones served on the two most recent rounds of the dialogues.

The Eighth Round of dialogues engaged in what has been called the "dialogue of truth" and the "dialogue of love". Its report and statement, presented to the

World Methodist Council meeting in Seoul, Korea in July of 2006, is entitled *Towards a Statement on the Church: Catholics and Methodists Reflect Further on the Church*. The Council approved continued dialogues.

In a historic movement and at a solemn service, the World Methodist Council endorsed the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) originally signed at Augsburg on 31 October 1999 on behalf of the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church. The action of the WMC was in concert with Resolution 16 of The United

Methodist Church. The WMC declared JDDJ to be wholly consonant with Methodist teaching on this important subject. While this signing received very little attention from our church media, its historic significance and implications should not be overlooked.



(Photo: The Christian Post / Christian Today Korea)



Churches Uniting in Christ

After 40 years of “consulting” together, the nine member churches of the former Consultation On Churches Uniting agreed to start living their unity more fully in 2002 by forming CUIC. The member churches agree to express their relationship with visible “marks,” including faithfulness to Scripture, commitment to Jesus Christ, and recognition of one another’s baptisms.

In 2005, the Ministry Task

Force issued a report, “Mutual Recognition and Mutual Reconciliation of Ministries,” and asked the churches for response. The GCCUIC, working cooperatively with other UM agencies, received feedback from various segments of the church and issued an interim report—awaiting a final response by the Council of Bishops.

The Ministry Task Force recently held a consultation on episcopate and hopes to draft

the next version of its ministry report by the spring of 2007. The goal of the Task Force, is to determine the conditions necessary for a shared covenant under which the member churches can mutually recognize one another’s ministries and allow for the interchangeability of ministers.

The GCCUIC response, as well as multi-media study resources, are available from the GCCUIC office.

*Potential
dialogue with
churches of the
Wesleyan-
Holiness
movement*

Wesleyan Holiness

In February of 2006, staff from GCCUIC met with the Wesleyan Holiness Study Group sponsored, in part, by Azusa Pacific University. The study group has an academic component and a pastoral one. It re-organized in September to form the Wesleyan Holiness Consortium in order to continue to meet and to open the door to possible ecumenical dialogue.

At its spring meeting, the GCCUIC approved the motion that “appropriate staff be authorized on behalf of GCCUIC to proceed cautiously, humbly, and frugally as a partner in developing a detailed proposal for dialogue.” GCCUIC staff continue to meet with members of the consortium about possible projects or further encounters.

Pan-Methodist

The 2000 General Conference approved the merger of the **Commission on Pan-Methodist Cooperation and the Commission on Union** with the responsibility to carry on the work of the two previous separate commissions.

In important ways, the relationship between The United Methodist Church and the churches of the Pan-Methodist Commission might be our closest and dearest affiliation. The

churches share an important history and common roots. Our own *Book of Discipline* intends that these denominations “shall work to define, determine, plan, and, in cooperation with established agencies of the several denominations, execute activities to foster meaningful cooperation... and to explore possible union and related issues” (para. 2403.2).

The relationship between these churches can be described as one of “full com-

munion,” indicating that each recognizes that the other is part of the one, apostolic church. Each denomination fully recognizes the sacramental practices of the others and the ordering of the church’s life, including the ordained ministry. Ordained clergy are more easily transferred between denominations and could be jointly appointed under certain conditions.

