



Recommendations: Full Communion with The United Methodist Church

Background

Bilateral Dialogue

The bilateral dialogue between the Evangelical Lutheran Church and The United Methodist Church (UMC) began with a first-round study on baptism (1977–1979). That study concluded that Lutherans and United Methodists shared “in one Spirit and one Baptism.” The second round of the dialogue (1985–1987) focused on episcopacy and concluded that, while there are distinctions between how the two churches utilize the office of bishop, they both insist “that no particular structure of oversight is of the essence of the Church.” The final report was published by Augsburg Fortress, Publishers, in 1991 as *Episcopacy: A Lutheran–United Methodist Common Statement to the Church*, which, in addition to background papers prepared for the dialogue, also included the 1979 common statement on baptism.

The conclusion of the round two participants was that “the remaining topics can and should be addressed in a third and final round of dialogues between our two churches.” After a hiatus of seven years, a formal invitation was received in June 1998 from the ecumenical officer of The United Methodist Church asking that the dialogue be resumed. Staff members met in November 1998 to begin planning the third round of the dialogue. In November 1999, the co-chairs, the Rev. Allan C. Bjornberg, bishop of the Rocky Mountain Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the Rev. Melvin G. Talbert, ecumenical officer and bishop of The United Methodist Church, and dialogue members were appointed. The United Methodist Church was represented by the following: Ms. Judith Crain of Green Bay, Wisconsin; the Rev. Dr. Amy Laura Hall of Duke Divinity School; Dr. Jean Miller-Schmidt of Iliff School of Theology; and the Rev. Lars-Erik Nordby of Norway. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America was represented by the following: Dr. Kathryn L. Johnson of Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary; Dr. Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, the Graduate School of Theology and Ministry at Seattle University; the Rev. Dr. H. Frederick Reisz Jr. of Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary; and the Rev. Dr. Timothy J. Wengert of The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia. Staff members for the dialogue were the Rev. Betty Gamble, Associate General Secretary, General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns (UMC), and the Rev. Paul A. Schreck, associate for bilateral dialogues (ELCA).

The co-chairs subsequently met December 8–9, 2000, in Chicago to organize a schedule of topics for the dialogue and concluded this meeting by adopting the following statement:

As we begin our conversation, we expect to further explore and discover our partnership in the Gospel, and we hope to discern a clearer vision of our common discipleship. In committing ourselves to this next round of dialogue, we express our hope for full communion between our two churches.

The dialogue convened its first plenary meeting in Denver, Colorado, September 6–9, 2001, to discuss a series of papers on the role of Scripture as authority as well as confessional and doctrinal authority within the two churches. The dialogue members were encouraged by significant work previously accomplished by Lutheran and United Methodist churches through bilateral and multilateral relationships throughout the world. United Methodists in several European countries already have entered into agreements with Lutheran churches. The ELCA–UMC dialogue found of particular assistance *Fellowship of Grace*, which describes the 1994 full-communion relationship between the UMC and the Church of Norway, as well as *The Church: Community of Grace*, the 1984 final report of the Lutheran World Federation and World Methodist Council dialogue, which details significant convergence in the two churches’ doctrines of grace and baptism.

The second plenary session convened February 14–17, 2002, in Orlando, Florida. Because of continuing illness, Dr. Jean Miller-Schmidt was replaced by the UMC Council of Bishops with the Rev. Dr. Paul Chilcote of Asbury Seminary, a John Wesley scholar. Discussion centered on a review of the 1979 common statement on baptism and the Lord’s Supper. The two church bodies have these rites in common, the only ones considered sacraments. Baptism is understood to be the entry into church life; the Lord’s Supper is the regular gathering around the holy meal for faith communities. Significant agreement was found among the churches’ history and doctrinal teaching.

The third plenary session convened September 12–15, 2002, in Oslo, Norway, immediately prior to a meeting of the Executive Committee of the World Methodist Council. The dialogue members benefitted from consultations with representatives of the Church of Norway and The United Methodist Church in Norway. The Rev. Andreas Aarflot, former bishop of the Church of Norway and an authority on

Hans Nilsen Hauge, and Dr. Roar Fotland, dean of the United Methodist Seminary in Norway, addressed the dialogue team. The meeting included careful study and discussion of the landmark agreement between the Church of Norway and The United Methodist Church in Norway, *Fellowship of Grace*, with key church leaders providing helpful insights into theological issues to be addressed by the ELCA–UMC dialogue. In addition, the dialogue members discussed papers on justification and sanctification and were encouraged by the level of convergence that was experienced around these topics.

The fourth plenary session convened October 30–November 2, 2003, at the Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Due to other commitments, the Rev. Dr. Amy Laura Hall was replaced by the UMC Council of Bishops with the Rev. Dr. Sarah Heaner Lancaster of the Methodist Theological School in Ohio. Dialogue members discussed papers on the mission of the Church and orders of ministry, as well as a draft version of *This Holy Mystery*, a document articulating the eucharistic theology of The United Methodist Church, which was to be considered at its 2004 General Conference. Participants were encouraged by the understanding of Holy Communion it described but proposed an amendment to clarify reference to a common misunderstanding among United Methodists that Lutherans believe in consubstantiation. This proposed amendment subsequently was considered by the UMC General Conference and adopted for the final version of *This Holy Mystery*.

The fifth plenary session convened February 19–22, 2004, at the Melancthon Institute in Houston, Texas. Discussion began on a proposal for Interim Eucharistic Sharing and the preliminary text of a final report of round three. In addition, a presentation on Lutheran liturgy was made by the Rev. Dr. Gordon W. Lathrop of The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, and a presentation on United Methodist liturgy was made by the Rev. Dr. Gayle C. Felton of the United Methodist Board of Discipleship.

The sixth plenary session convened August 26–29, 2004, at the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) office in Baltimore, Maryland. Dialogue participants completed work on the proposal for Interim Eucharistic Sharing and voted unanimously to submit the proposal for consideration by each church. The process for consideration was to include approval by the Council of Bishops, indicating that such sharing was in compliance with existing policies and procedures of The United Methodist Church, and adoption by the ELCA Churchwide Assembly to authorize such sharing by ELCA congregations. The dialogue also continued to discuss issues related to the Lord's Supper and orders of ministry.

The seventh plenary session convened February 24–27, 2005, in Miami, Florida. The participants discussed principles for congregational guidance during the interim period, with a final text to be completed subsequent to adoption of the Interim Eucharistic Sharing agreement. Work also continued on a final report moving toward preparing recommendations for full communion. Topics of continued discussion were

mission, sanctification, and perfection. A draft version of this report was completed at the August 2005 plenary meeting, to be distributed throughout both churches for review and comment. Comments were considered at the plenary meeting August 2006, with a finished text for study and review by each church completed in early 2007, finishing the work of the third-round participants.

Interim Eucharistic Sharing

The following proposal was presented to the ELCA in 2005:

A Proposal for Interim Eucharistic Sharing between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and The United Methodist Church

In Round Three of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America–United Methodist Church bilateral dialogue, we have examined the basis for a relationship of full communion between our two church bodies. Our study thus far has discovered no impediment to such a relationship. We have found, however, that the extent of our existing convergence in faith has not always been recognized in our faith communities. As we continue the work of this dialogue, we believe the time has come for our churches to deepen our knowledge of one another, honor and extend our currently shared mission, and share in a new relationship of worship and ministry through an agreement of Interim Eucharistic Sharing.

Our work has built upon substantial existing relationships:

- We rejoice in our common witness through the World Council of Churches and the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.;
- We rejoice in the example of the close relationship that exists between The United Methodist Church in Norway (a part of The United Methodist Church) and the Church of Norway (a member of the Lutheran World Federation), described in *Fellowship of Grace* (1994), which has served as an important resource for this dialogue;
- We rejoice that European Lutheran, Reformed, and United Methodist churches have deepened their relationships (1997)
- We rejoice in the joint statement of the World Methodist Council and the Lutheran World Federation, *The Church: Community of Grace* (1984);
- We rejoice in the two previous rounds of dialogue in the United States between Lutherans and United Methodists on baptism (1979) and the episcopacy (1988); and
- We rejoice in discovering that our two distinctive worship traditions have enriched each other and

are sustained by those hymns we share together; that the ELCA statement on sacramental practice, *The Use of the Means of Grace* (1997), has made explicit that (as in The United Methodist Church) baptized Christians who receive Holy Communion in their own congregations are welcome to receive the sacrament in ELCA congregations; and that The United Methodist Church has articulated its understanding of the sacraments in two documents, *By Water and the Spirit: A United Methodist Understanding of Baptism* (1996) (www.gbod.org/worship/articles/water_spirit/) and *This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion* (2004) (www.gbod.org/worship/thm-bygc.pdf).

Drawing upon these resources and previous agreements, the work of the dialogue thus far has discovered significant areas of shared faith:

1. Both churches confess with Christians of all ages the Triune God as the one true God:
 - we confess the Bible as the Word of God and the source and norm of our proclamation, faith, and life;
 - we agree that, in accordance with the Scriptures, human beings are justified by God's grace in Christ received freely through faith alone;
 - we agree that good works are the natural and spontaneous fruit of faith;
 - we agree that in baptism God enables the Christian to rely upon this gift, promise, and assurance throughout all of life;
 - we confess that the Lord's Supper is one of the fundamental means of grace. Like Holy Baptism, the Lord's Supper is an efficacious sign of God's grace, including and giving real participation in Christ;
 - we confess that the entire Eucharistic celebration expresses the real presence of Christ;
 - we confess that Christ is really present, shared, and received in the forms of bread and wine in the Eucharist and that the blessings of this supper are received by faith alone;
 - we confess that in the Lord's Supper believers receive the benefits of Christ's perfect sacrifice on the cross and his victorious resurrection; and
 - we confess that the Holy Spirit uses the Supper to express and realize the communion (*koinonia*) of the people of God with Christ and with each other.
2. Furthermore, both churches emphasize in their liturgies the dimension of worship and thanksgiving in communion (*eucharistia*) and

regard the entire worship service, centered in the proclamation of God's Word and the celebration of the Sacraments with prayer and praise, to be the central act in our common Christian life.

3. While in the dialogue we continue to address such topics as the work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification, perfection in love, and understandings of ministry, we believe that significant convergence exists—and there is sufficient urgency in our need for closer relations of common witness and mission—that a step toward closer relationship is both possible and timely.

On the basis of these discoveries we believe that our churches now should commit to Interim Eucharistic Sharing. This agreement, though short of full communion, makes more visible the unity we already share in Christ, and makes more credible our common witness in the world. For the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (which defines Interim Eucharistic Sharing and Full Communion in "Ecumenism: The Vision of the ELCA" [1991]) this requires approval by its Churchwide Assembly. At the call of its Council of Bishops, The United Methodist Church, for whom such Eucharistic sharing already is possible, will commit to a time of intentional deepening of relations with ELCA congregations.

We continue to hope and work toward a relationship of full communion between our two church bodies. With this interim commitment, congregations and judicatories of our two churches would now be encouraged to study together *This Holy Mystery* and *The Use of the Means of Grace*, to celebrate joint services of the Lord's Supper, and to explore new opportunities for shared ministry. Guidelines for planning joint liturgies and resources for study and conversation can be found online (www.elca.org/ecumenical).

Each of our communions remains a broken and incomplete witness to God's mercy. Longing for that glorious day when all are one, we trust that worship and work together in relationships of mutual challenge and celebration will strengthen our proclamation of the Gospel for the enabling of faith. We prayerfully commit ourselves to this continuing journey together.

In March 2005, the ELCA Conference of Bishops took the following action [CB05.03.05]:

To endorse the proposal to establish Interim Eucharistic Sharing between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and The United Methodist Church.

In April 2005, the Church Council voted [CC05.04.23]:

To recommend adoption by the 2005 Churchwide Assembly of the following action:

To welcome and rejoice in the substantial progress of the Lutheran–United Methodist Dialogue, looking toward the future possibility of a relationship of full communion between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and The United Methodist Church;

To now recognize The United Methodist Church as a church in which the Gospel is preached and taught;

To affirm, on the basis of studies conducted by the Lutheran–United Methodist dialogue, that the basic teaching of each respective church is consonant with the Gospel;

To acknowledge, on the same basis, that the central teaching of The United Methodist Church is sufficiently compatible with the teaching of this church;

To encourage common concern throughout the respective churches by such means as:

1. mutual prayer and mutual support by members of congregations;
2. study together of the Holy Scripture as well as the histories and theological traditions of both churches;
3. joint programs of theological discussion, evangelical outreach, and social ministry endeavors; and

To declare, on the basis of these findings, that a relationship of Interim Sharing of the Eucharist is hereby established between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and The United Methodist Church in the U.S.A., with such an interim sharing to be exercised according to established guidelines.

This resolution subsequently was adopted on August 11, 2005, by the Churchwide Assembly (CA05.04.11) by a strong majority (Yes-877; No-60), and a relationship of Interim Eucharistic Sharing with The United Methodist Church was established.

Full Communion Proposal

A draft document describing a relationship of full communion between the two churches, “Confessing Our Faith Together,” was submitted for review by the Conference of Bishops at its September 29–October 3, 2005, meeting with the intention that it would be circulated in a study format for discussion throughout the two churches. The draft also was submitted to the eight ELCA seminaries for review. The deadline for individual, congregational, and seminary responses and recommendations for revisions was January 15, 2007. Since The United Methodist Church was scheduled to consider the proposal for full communion at its General Conference meeting in 2008, the members of the Conference of Bishops discussed at length whether the ELCA should consider the matter at its 2007 or 2009 Churchwide Assembly.

Based on this conversation, it was agreed that the proposal should come for a vote in 2009.

The Rev. Dr. Timothy G. Wengert, professor of Reformation history and Lutheran confessions at The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia and a member of the bilateral dialogue, was invited to address the Conference of Bishops meeting in October 2006, with the specific request that he address any potentially neuralgic points.

Responses to the study draft were reviewed by members of the bilateral dialogue at its final meeting in December 2007 and, based upon those responses, the dialogue decided to make no changes.

At its April 2008 meeting, the ELCA Church Council voted (CC08.04.10):

To give thanks to God for the deepening relationship with The United Methodist Church that has resulted from Interim Eucharistic Sharing;

To thank the members of the Lutheran–United Methodist Dialogue for the final report of the dialogue and the proposal for full communion, “Confessing Our Faith Together”;

To encourage continued study of this proposal for full communion throughout this church;

To anticipate action of the United Methodist General Conference on this full-communion agreement, as it meets April 23–May 2, 2008; and

To request a formal proposal for a full-communion agreement with The United Methodist Church for consideration by the Church Council at its November 2008 meeting for action by the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

The United Methodist Church approved the proposal for full communion on April 28, 2008. By a vote of 864–19, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church (UMC) adopted an implementing resolution that will establish full communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, if the ELCA adopts the same proposal at the next ELCA Churchwide Assembly, August 17–23, 2009, in Minneapolis.

The following action by the General Conference approved the creation of a coordinating committee, the Joint Commission on ELCA and UMC Full Communion:

To fulfill the vision of full communion between The United Methodist Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, there shall be a Joint Commission on ELCA/UMC Full Communion. The commission shall serve the following functions:

- Coordinate the implementation of action taken by the two churches to achieve full communion.
- Assist joint planning for mission.
- Facilitate consultation and common decision making through appropriate channels in fundamental matters that the churches may face together in the future.
- Report regularly and appropriately to each church.

The United Methodist Church membership of this commission shall be the Ecumenical Officer of the Council of Bishops, the President of the General

Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns (GCCUIC), if the President is not also the Ecumenical Officer, and one lay and one clergy member of GCCUIC elected by GCCUIC. If the President of GCCUIC is also the Ecumenical Officer, then the Vice President of GCCUIC shall be a member of the commission.

The ELCA will appoint members of the Joint Commission (Coordinating Committee) through the Office of the Presiding Bishop.

At its November 2008, meeting the Church Council voted to recommend to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly the following action:

Recommendation for Assembly Action

RESOLVED, that this Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America accept the implementing resolution as the basis for a relationship of full communion to be established, as follows:

IMPLEMENTING RESOLUTION FOR FULL COMMUNION BETWEEN THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA AND THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and The United Methodist Church (UMC) hereby agree that in their legislative bodies there shall be one vote to accept or reject, without separate amendment, the resolutions which follow. If adopted by both churches, each church agrees to take the following measures to establish a relationship of full communion:

WHEREAS, Jesus Christ calls us to unity so that the world may believe; and

WHEREAS, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and The United Methodist Church share a common heritage of faith and a commitment to mission; and

WHEREAS, “Confessing our Faith Together,” the report of the ELCA-UMC bilateral dialogue, affirmed that there are no church-dividing differences precluding full communion between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and The United Methodist Church; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and The United Methodist Church hereby:

- 1) Recognize in one another the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic faith as it is expressed in the Scriptures, confessed in the Church’s historic creeds, and attested to in the Lutheran Confessions and the doctrinal standards of The United Methodist Church;
- 2) Recognize the authenticity of each other’s Baptism and Eucharist, and extend sacramental hospitality to one another’s members;

- 3) Recognize the validity of our respective ministries, including:
 - each other’s ordination of persons to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament;
 - the authentic diaconal service of ordained deacons in the UMC and rostered lay ministers in the ELCA; and
 - each other’s polity and ministries of oversight (including the interpretation of church doctrines, discipline of members, authorization of persons for ordained and lay ministries, and provision for administrative functions);
- 4) Recognize the full interchangeability and reciprocity of all ordained ministers of Word and Sacrament, subject to the constitutionally approved invitation for ministry in each other’s churches;
- 5) Authorize the establishment of a joint commission to:
 - coordinate the implementation of these resolutions;
 - assist joint planning for mission;
 - facilitate consultation and common decision-making through appropriate channels in fundamental matters that the churches may face together in the future; and
 - report regularly and appropriately to each church;
- 6) Direct this joint commission to:
 - develop worship materials to celebrate our churches’ full communion;
 - foster ongoing theological discussion;
 - formulate joint educational materials; and
 - encourage continuing education opportunities for lay and clergy leaders regarding full communion;
- 7) Applaud one another’s ecumenical conversations with other church bodies, acknowledging that each church remains free to pursue additional full communion agreements as each deems appropriate, so that the world may believe.

Recommendation for Assembly Action

To fulfill the vision of full communion between The United Methodist Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, there shall be a Joint Commission on ELCA–UMC Full Communion. The commission shall serve the following functions:

- a. coordinate the implementation of action taken by the two churches to achieve full communion;
- b. assist joint planning for mission;
- c. facilitate consultation and common decision-making through appropriate channels in fundamental matters that the churches may face together in the future; and
- d. report regularly and appropriately to each church.



Appendix A: FAQs Concerning an Agreement of Full Communion Between the ELCA and the UMC

The following frequently asked questions (FAQs) are provided by members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and The United Methodist Church (UMC) bilateral dialogue team. Additional information is available from staff of the ELCA and UMC offices for ecumenical and interfaith relations.

1. Q: *What is the history of bilateral dialogue between Lutherans and United Methodists?*

A: **Lutherans and United Methodists have engaged in formal conversations over the last three decades.** The first round of dialogues (1977–1979) explored the sacrament of Baptism. The second round of dialogues (1985–1987) explored issues of episcopacy. Significant convergence around these topics pointed toward a third round in order to explore the two communions' understandings of Eucharist. Third-round dialogue teams first met in September 2001. The resolution on full communion is the culmination of the entire bilateral dialogue process.

2. Q: *Does a relationship of full communion between the ELCA and the UMC mean that the two communions will merge?*

A: **No, these two communions will not merge.** The ecumenical model of full communion means that these communions recognize: a) in each other “the one, holy, catholic and apostolic faith” as expressed in the Scriptures, confessed in the Church’s historic creeds, and attested to in the Lutheran Confessions and the doctrinal standards of the UMC; b) the authenticity of each other’s Baptism and Eucharist, and extend sacramental hospitality to one another’s members; c) the validity of each communion’s respective ministries; d) the full interchangeability and reciprocity of all ordained ministers, subject to an approved invitation for ministry in each communion; and e) a relationship of working together toward greater visible unity and structural cooperation between these communions.

3. Q: *What are the major implications of full communion?*

A: **A relationship of full communion between the ELCA and the UMC is part of a long journey (from bilateral dialogue to interim Eucharistic sharing) that culminates but does not end in a vote for full communion.** Even though Lutherans and

United Methodists have met since 1977, in full communion we begin a new life together. Full communion is not imposed on these communions, but is a relationship long underway. The question of the shape and form of full communion is addressed practically in theological and missiological terms regarding what will best further the mission of the Church in individual cases (consistent with the basis of the unity of the Church in Article VII of the *Augsburg Confession*). Along with point 2 above, in a relationship of full communion both the ELCA and the UMC will recognize the following in one another: a) a common confessing of the Christian faith; b) a common commitment to evangelism, witness, and service; and c) a means of common decision-making on critical common issues of faith and life.

In ELCA congregations, synodical offices, and the churchwide organization, full communion is fundamentally about strengthening relationships and allowing for new opportunities that already exist in many areas across the ELCA and the UMC. Opportunities for exchanging clergy, greater structural unity throughout the Church, missionary training, young adult formation, and responsibly sharing key resources are but some ways in which these two church bodies will work together for greater unity in mission and ministry, and in more refined stewardship of the gifts God has given to both.

4. Q: *How can full communion be realized when there are theological differences?*

A: **A relationship of full communion does not preclude theological distinctions and differences; however, a relationship of full communion does mean that these differences are not church-dividing.** For instance, both the UMC and ELCA theologies are grace-centered and Christ-centered. Rather than dividing, theological distinctions and differences between United Methodists and Lutherans complement and enrich theological awareness and discourse. The Lutheran understanding of human incapacity and the United Methodist view of the transformative power of God’s grace inform and encourage greater clarity and discernment. In spite of different emphases, these are not church-dividing issues, due to each tradition’s strong trinitarian theology and confidence in the grace of God for salvation.

5. Q: *What do the ELCA and the UMC believe about Baptism?*

A: **Both the ELCA and the UMC accept as valid all acts of Baptism in the name of the Trinity using water according to Christ's command and promise.** Baptism is the sacrament of entrance into the holy catholic Church, not simply a rite of entrance into a particular communion. Baptism is therefore a sacrament that proclaims the profound unity of the Church. Baptism is a gift of God for building up the Christian community. Baptism is intended for all persons, including infants. No person should be excluded from Baptism for reasons of age or mental capacity. God gives the Holy Spirit in Baptism to unite us with Jesus Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection; to effect new birth, new creation, and newness of life; to offer, give, and assure us of the forgiveness of sins in both cleansing and life-giving aspects; to enable our continual repentance, daily reception of forgiveness, and our growing in grace; to create unity and equality in Christ; to make us participants in the new age initiated by the saving act of God in Jesus Christ; and to place us into the body of Christ where the benefits of the Holy Spirit are shared within a visible community of faith. Both communions believe that every celebration of Baptism is a reminder of our responsibility to one another. Baptism is connected intrinsically to mission. The sacrament not only proclaims who we are, it frees us for our primary vocation in life: to love God and neighbor as agents of God's reign of peace, justice, and abundant life for all.

6. Q: *How do United Methodists and Lutherans understand the Lord's Supper?*

A: **Both communions understand that the Lord's Supper is one of the fundamental means of grace.** Christ himself instituted this meal and commanded us to continue to celebrate it until he comes again. Christ himself promised to be present in this meal, and through the Holy Spirit he establishes and strengthens our faith there. The Lord's Supper is a sign of God's grace. This means that Holy Communion is not only a visible sign that points to God's presence in the world, but it includes and gives real participation in Christ. In this sharing (*koinonia*), Christ offers his life-giving body and blood through bread and wine to all who take part in the celebration of this meal. In the words of Christ that institute this meal stands a promise that he himself is truly present for us. These words in the Supper call us to faith. Both communions affirm the special emphasis that the UMC has placed on confessing that the Holy Spirit conveys Christ's presence in communion (*This Holy Mystery*, 11–13). The ELCA also confesses that the fullness of God is given through the real presence of Jesus Christ in the

sacraments (*The Use of the Means of Grace*, 33; *Augsburg Confession*, Article X).

Both communions confess that, according to Christ's promise, all receive his body and blood in the elements of communion, without attempting to simplify this sacramental mystery. In both traditions communicants receive the bread and the cup. The elements that are used may vary, including red or white wine or grape juice, and leavened or unleavened bread. Both United Methodists and Lutherans affirm the real presence of Christ. Both communions agree that Christ is truly present, that he is shared and received in the Eucharist, and that the blessings of this Supper are received by faith alone. Consider the words of the Great Thanksgiving from the United Methodist Hymnal, spoken in preparation for Holy Communion: "Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood."

7. Q: *Do Lutherans and United Methodists hold the same view of ordination?*

A: **Yes. The UMC provides for two forms of ordained ministry: deacons are called to ministries of Word and service, and elders are called to ministries of service, Word, sacrament, and order. The ELCA has established one office of ordained ministry of Word and sacrament.** In both communions persons who are ordained are called to an exemplary life in Christ as a gift from and a witness to the community of faith. In ordination, the church publicly affirms an inward call of God and continues the apostolic ministry through persons empowered by the Holy Spirit. Both communions authorize (or have authorized in the past) other specific forms of ministry as well. Whether described as "deaconesses," "diaconal ministers," "home missionaries," or "associates in ministry," these lay offices are established by both bodies through either "consecration" or "commissioning." Both communions also vest bishops with the authority to "license" lay candidates to serve with full ministerial privileges in local congregations. Whether called "probationary members," "local pastors," "authorized" or "licensed ministers," the bishop is responsible for the supervision of those who serve in these pastoral roles. Both communions are called to work together in equipping the whole people of God for our common vocation in the world.

8. Q: *What do Lutherans and United Methodists believe about justification, sanctification, and perfection?*

A: **Lutherans and United Methodists proclaim the grace of God without limitation; God is not limited but human beings are.** The ELCA confesses that the Christian is at the same time righteous and sinner

(*simul iustus et peccator*). This means that believers are declared totally righteous by God due to Christ's righteousness alone, which is received through faith. At the same time, Lutherans recognize that they remain sinners. Thus, Christians depend at every moment in their lives upon God's justifying grace and forgiveness. Although Lutherans do not customarily use the language of perfection, the *Augsburg Confession* (Article XXVII.49) defines Christian perfection as fearing God earnestly with the whole heart, having confidence in God's grace because of Christ, expecting help from God in all affliction, and diligently doing good in our various callings.

United Methodists set no limit on God's grace in this present life. Thus, especially according to John Wesley, Christians may earnestly hope to receive perfect love of God and neighbor in this life, not according to their works or merit but by God's grace alone. This optimism concerning the Holy Spirit's work is always held in tension with a deep theological suspicion of a human being's best efforts and a genuine awareness of the depths of human sin.

The ELCA also confesses the power and activity of the Holy Spirit in this present life and understands that the Christian life flows from Baptism as daily dying and rising (recognizing and confessing sin and calling upon God's forgiving grace) and as faithful following of Christ in joyful obedience. The law still orders and restrains daily life and judges sin, driving believers to a renewed trust in God's grace.

In July 2006 the World Methodist Council affiliated with and affirmed the "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification." Through this document, Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and United Methodists commit themselves to strive together for the deepening of their common understanding of justification in theological study, teaching and preaching, and to the pursuit of full communion and common witness to the world.