

# Sacramental Life

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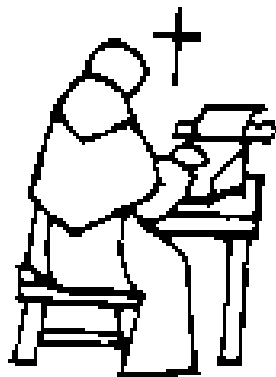
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From the Editor's Desk  
*Daniel J. Doty*

Welcome to the Ordinary Time 2015 issue of *Sacramental Life*. Br. O. French Ball was our Guest Editor and he introduces this issue.

### Guest Editor's Introduction

This issue of *Sacramental Life* took shape around the issue of ecumenism. Specifically, around the current "Full Communion" dialogs that have taken place, and are taking place, between the United Methodist Church (UMC), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), and The Episcopal Church (TEC).

These dialogs are in some ways an outgrowth of multilateral conversations that took place over several decades through the Consultation on Church Union (COCU). The current dialogs differ from those that took place under the auspices of COCU first in that

they are bi-lateral instead of multilateral. In addition, the ELCA was not originally a member of COCU, and so was not party to those earlier conversations until late in the process.

By the time of the turn of the twenty-first century, the Consultation on Church Union, had determined that the time had come to in fact unite, in fulfillment of its decades-long dream. Therefore, in 2002, the ten member communions of COCU plus the ELCA as a "partner in mission and dialog," came together in a new organization, to be known as Churches Uniting in Christ (CUIC).<sup>1</sup> Together, they agreed to the following "Marks of Commitment":

- Receive each other as Christ's church
- Mutually recognize baptisms & members
- Affirm apostolic creeds
- Celebrate Eucharist together
- Engage in mission & anti-racism
- Promote wholeness & inclusion
- Structure accountability, consultation & decision-making
- Support ongoing theological dialogue<sup>2</sup>

Theoretically, these multilateral conversations are, indeed, "ongoing." However, by about that same time, the ELCA had

<sup>1</sup> The COCU communions that came together as CUIC were: The African Methodist Episcopal Church, The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, The Episcopal Church, The International Council of Community Churches, The Moravian Church (Northern Province), The Presbyterian Church (USA), The United Church of Christ, The United Methodist Church.

<sup>2</sup> Information obtained from [churchesunitinginchrist.org](http://churchesunitinginchrist.org), 2013

begun to enter into bi-lateral conversations with both The Episcopal Church and the United Methodist Church. These separate, but related, conversations have occupied much of the energy of those three communions in recent years.

This issue of *Sacramental Life* includes articles from the perspectives of the three communions most closely involved with the bi-lateral conversations. From the United Methodist perspective, Dr. Glen Messer, Associate Ecumenical Staff Officer for the Office of Christian Unity and Interreligious Relationships of the UM Council of Bishops, provides some historical reference material, as well as information regarding other conversations in which the UMC is involved.

Dr. Mitzi J. Budde, of Virginia Theological Seminary, writes from the unique perspective of the ELCA, the only denomination to date to have achieved Full Communion with both of its partner denominations. Budde writes of the process being one of “re-thinking church.” She points out that accomplishment of Full Communion between denominations is somewhat akin to shooting at a moving target, because the landscape of the conversations keeps changing.

For the Episcopal article, *Sacramental Life* is grateful to Church Publishing, Incorporated, which granted us the right to reproduce an article by The Rev. Dr. Ellen K. Wondra, Professor at Bexley Hall Western Theological Seminary Foundation, in *That They May Be One?*, an anthology exploring the Episcopal/United Methodist Dialog. Wondra’s article specifically addresses concerns raised in a previous article, by Bishop William O. Gregg. In her article, Wondra outlines the points made by Bishop Gregg sufficiently that it is not necessary to have read that article in order to benefit from hers.

To bring this issue of *Sacramental Life* to its completion, some information with regard to the current status of United Methodist/Episcopal dialog seems to be in order.

First, the UM/Episcopal “Interim Eucharistic Sharing Agreement” remains in force. This agreement stipulates that if an Episcopal congregation and a United Methodist congregation (served by an appointed Elder) wish to celebrate joint services of Holy Communion, they may do so using the worship material of the host church, with the host pastor/priest presiding and the guest assisting.

Second, The Episcopal Church, at its July, 2015 General Convention, reaffirmed its historic position that only the baptized are to receive the sacrament of Holy Communion. The UM/Episcopal agreements to date are unaffected by this reaffirmation.

Third, there are no church-dividing issues preventing the United Methodist Church and The Episcopal Church from proceeding with our discussions, for possible ratification of Full Communion in 2017 or 2018.

Finally, the recent approval of a United Methodist Elder to preside at Eucharist at the National Cathedral in Washington, DC, was a special agreement between relevant UM and Episcopal bishops, and is not part of the Interim Eucharistic Sharing Agreement.

In compiling the current information, I am grateful to the Rev. Taylor Burton-Edwards, Director of Worship Resources at Discipleship Ministries of the United Methodist Church, Nashville, Tennessee.

**Dr. O. French Ball, O.S.L. - Guest Editor**

*O. French Ball is a retired Elder in the East Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church. During his ministry he served as Chair of the Conference Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns (COCUIC), and was a member of the Ohio Council of Churches, where he served as Chair of the Faith and Order Commission. He also represented the United Methodist Church as a member of the General Assembly of the National Council of Churches. He is a graduate of Boston University School of Theology. He is a Life-Vowed member of the Order of Saint Luke, in which he has served as Provincial General, and is currently a Canon of the Order, with responsibility for the Website, and Constitution and By-Laws. He is a member of the East Ohio Chapter of the Order, which he serves as Sub-Prior.*

***Experimental Ecumenism***

Glen Alton Messer, II

Local communities are the experimental laboratories for ecumenism and vibrant settings for living out the hope among Christians for greater unity. It is from these settings that some ideas and practices emerge. It is also in these settings that ideas and practices developed elsewhere are tried out and enacted. This article gives an overview of some of the ecumenical developments that are important to understanding what is going on in our local churches, what can be nurtured, and what possibilities exist for deepening relations with sisters and brothers in other Christian denominations. In this article, we will survey current relations with ecumenical dialogue partners in the United States (Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, and Moravians). We will also observe how ecumenical conversations led to the affirmation of partnerships, and challenge to deepen, relationships with Pan-Methodist full communion partners. Turning attention to an example of possibilities offered by formal full

communion relationships, we will have a look at a specific example arising out of the full communion relationship between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and The United Methodist Church (UMC). Lastly, I will suggest some ways to build upon these deepening relationships in our local churches in the years to come.

### **Denominational Experiments on Behalf of Christian Unity**

Ecumenical efforts since the 19<sup>th</sup> century have been exercises in experimental and practical divinity. Sometimes those experiments have developed organically, as with cross-denominational tract and bible societies, social reform organizations, and co-operation in the mission field. Sometimes explicit theories and theologies of Christian unity have been promoted (officially or unofficially) as a frame for bringing Christians closer together for a visible testament to oneness in Christ Jesus. The interplay between theory and practice has, throughout the years, been a dynamic one. This present season in the ecumenical world is no less dynamic and changing -- and no less experimental in nature.

When I say experimental I mean to emphasize the characteristic of the striving towards Christian unity that often involves styles of engagement, institutions, and practical enactments of theology that defy a neat, linear progression from a particular moment forward to a particular target milestone. Over time, new strategies have been added to prior ones. It is important to note that as approaches to building Christian unity multiply, seldom does a particular type of ecumenical activity completely cease. Indeed, more than one vital approach can exist side-by-side. Thus, for example, cross-denominational co-operation in mixed membership voluntary societies can flourish while, at the same time, efforts are made to find a way towards organic union.

Many of the mission practitioners of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries saw ecumenism in terms of co-operation between the various empires of Europe and America and the assorted churches that moved in the wake of imperial expansion. Unity was seen, at a basic level, as avoidance of conflict based in competition -- and of the divisiveness of mixed messages in Christian efforts to witness to Christ among non-Christians. One of the deep concerns of that era was that mutual disdain among rival denominations fighting to make converts of the same people in a particular land would give the church -- and Jesus Christ -- a bad reputation. So it was, as in military and economic spheres, the empires and their churches set about drawing lines on maps and parceling out territories for the missional evangelism work of one church in this place and of another in that.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century -- and then more strongly at mid-century -- there was a push towards organic union across denominational lines. This had been preceded, and was paralleled, by efforts to unite related churches (often the products of schisms within a particular type of church). The United Methodist Church is a product of two unions affected among, more-or-less, related denominations (The 1939 union between the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the Methodist Protestant Church to form the Methodist Church, and, the 1968 union of the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church to form the UMC). Across the world, significant unions involving Methodists, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists (and sometimes others) were established by means of the United Church of Canada (in 1925), the Church of South India (in 1947), and the Uniting Church in Australia (in 1977). While there had already been sizable interest in organic union across denominational lines among Protestant churches in many countries, energy around such ideas increased alongside Vatican Council II (1962-1965).

In the United States of America, commencing its work in the same year as Vatican II, the Consultation on Church Union (COCU)<sup>1</sup> was formed in 1962 and reconstituted as Churches Uniting in Christ in 2002. COCU was an effort to create a church union that was even grander in scale than those accomplished in Canada and Australia. At the heart of the effort was a desire to move towards an organic unity that would show clearly that the followers of Christ are, in community, worship, life, and action truly one. The COCU experiment represents the pinnacle (to date) of attempts at unifying many of the leading denominations in the United States. Making a dream into a reality, however, did not progress without expressed ecclesiological reservations by Presbyterians and Episcopalians that precluded the plan of union (in the early 1970s) and a subsequent more modest plan of mutual recognition (in the 1990s).

The shift away from the goal of organic union on the part of COCU member churches at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was not a retreat from goals of deeper ecumenical ties, however. Rather, it was a shift of focus and an entry into a period of reflection upon how the Spirit might be leading the churches towards the best witness in the present moment.

### **Partners in Dialogue**

Dialogues have also been important experimental laboratories for developing closer ties among ecumenical partners. In each of the denominational level dialogues between the UMC and other denominations, there have been important developments and notable shifts in approaches.

The UMC's longest running dialogue at the denominational level is with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). This conversation with Roman Catholics in the United States began in 1966. A meeting in New York in March 2015 marks the

opening of the eighth round of this dialogue. Each round runs for a term of approximately four or five years (with about a year's worth of an intermission between each round). In the case of the USCCB-UMC Dialogue, the initial task, building on the ecumenical euphoria of the the first years following Vatican Council II, was to give both churches the opportunity to get to know one another and to explore possibilities for unity. Dialogue rounds took up specific topics (among these were education, holy living and dying, and Eucharist and the environment)<sup>2</sup> in order to get a sense of the perspectives on each church had on the issues at hand. The new round of dialogue will survey the progress of the near-half-century of conversation and assess what fruits from those discussions can be developed into useful materials and approaches for local congregations and parishes to explore for practical partnerships in ministry.

The dialogue with the Episcopal Church USA, with which United Methodists were COCU partners, has been running for approximately a decade and a half. This conversation has involved in-depth discussion of theological, doctrinal, and ecclesiological issues.<sup>3</sup> The clear goal of both churches, with the aid of the dialogue, is recognition of a relationship of full communion in the near future. To that end, the dialogue will likely be turning its attention from the macroscopic to how our two churches already are -- and how they might become -- partners in local communities in which both denominations are present.

The most recently constituted, and just recently concluded, dialogue with the Moravian Church (Northern and Southern Provinces) (MCN&SP)-- roughly contiguous with the continental United States -- demonstrates one of the significant shifts in approaches to Christian unity in recent years. Nearly all of the denominational level dialogues (including that with the ELCA which resulted in the full communion agreement) had as a primary focus matters coming under the traditional ecumenical jargon heading of 'faith

and order.’ By contrast, the principal focus of the MCN&SP-UMC was framed from the outset in terms of matters relating to ‘life and work.’ Faith and order topics (doctrine, theology, ecclesiology) were touched upon. But, since none of the differences between our two churches was seen as church dividing, the dialogue spent the bulk of its time exploring the meaning of the Christian life as understood in each tradition. This was the means by which dialogue members set about helping to get to know one another. Based upon a large number of similarities in outlook, and upon differences that add to the relationship rather than detract from it, the Dialogue Committee recommended to the legislative bodies of their churches that a relationship of full communion be affirmed.<sup>4</sup>

In each of these dialogues at present, there is a shift of focus towards an awareness of the large amount of ecumenical work that is being done in local communities. The denominations themselves have great resources available to them in the wisdom and experience of practical partnerships in common witness to the grace, mercy, and love of God in Christ Jesus evidenced already in the daily lives of members of our local churches. Denominational leaders have the opportunity to draw attention to these living examples. They can share the best for cultivation in other communities as well. And they can facilitate partnership in ministry at all levels.

### **Informal Partnership Becomes a Full-Communion Relationship -- The Pan-Methodist Churches**

Following (in some cases) nearly two-centuries of informal partnership with five historic black Methodist denominations,<sup>5</sup> the UMC entered into a formal full communion relationship with these churches in 2012. The setting for formal conversations between these churches is in the Pan-Methodist Commission.

The Pan-Methodist churches are another example of how a creative shift in ecumenical methodologies has worked to draw denomina-

tions closer together in Christian unity. Over the course of many generations, the (now) Pan-Methodist churches have worked side by side in ministry in many local communities. These informal partnership activities, along with many other historic ties, led some leaders to ask whether organic union might be the best way for these churches to bear witness to unity in Christ Jesus. Discussions in the setting of the Commission over many years led leaders to conclude that unity that includes diversity (with the richness of difference among churches) is best expressed in acknowledgement that the Pan-Methodist churches are in a vital full communion relationship with each other. This formal, mutual recognition is lifted up as a challenge to form more, and deepen existing, partnerships at all levels in all of the member denominations.

### **An Example of Full Communion Partnership with the ELCA**

One encouraging example of how closer partnership in ministry across denominational lines has taken shape at the local level can be found in the extreme northern reaches of Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. This is a sparsely populated region dotted with small communities; many with a historical connection to copper mining. Immigrants to these communities included a large percentage from Lutheran countries of northern Europe. Various predecessor churches of the UMC also found their places in the area. Now, with a declining population, many of the local congregations find they cannot support the clergy staffing they once had. Clergy resources in the ELCA congregations in the area are sometimes not sufficient for day-to-day needs. This can manifest as difficulty in finding a pastor for a congregation; or for pulpit supply when clergy become sick or go on vacation.

Area leaders in the ELCA saw new and useful possibilities in the relatively recent full communion agreement between the ELCA and UMC (approved by the UMC General Conference in 2008

and shortly thereafter in 2009 by the ELCA).<sup>6</sup> Indeed, ministry partnerships in such situations were specifically envisioned by the agreement. Taking the agreement at its word, an ELCA clergyman and various ELCA laity in the area extended invitations to a UMC elder residing close at hand, Reverend T. Bradley Terhune.<sup>7</sup>

For the past two and a half years, Reverend Terhune has been invited to lead worship and preach at fourteen different ELCA churches. Some of these congregations he has visited once, some more than once, and a few several times. Weekly worship in almost all of these churches includes celebration of the Eucharist.

ELCA members in northern Michigan had heard of the formal full communion relationship that had been entered into with United Methodists and they were curious about what it would mean, on a practical level, to actively partner in ministry with each other. Almost all of the churches to which Reverend Terhune has been invited have small numbers of members. They are communities of people committed to a Christian life and to worshipping together. There is no shortage of faith and passion for the Christian message. For them, the issue is clergy resources. With a shortage of ELCA clergy in the area, and the economic realities of finding it difficult to support what clergy there are, the presence of a United Methodist elder who can make himself available periodically to lead worship and preach was a logical option they wished to explore.

From Reverend Terhune's perspective, it is an interesting exploration of a different church culture. Weekly worship is far more 'scripted' in terms of liturgy. In each of the congregations there are local variations; but expectations of meeting the denomination's and local norms of practice are clearly present in the minds of the people. Bradley Terhune takes the time to learn the general culture of the congregations in the area, as well as the particular characteristics associated with individual congregations. He finds, as well,

that the ELCA church members are interested to get to know him as a representative of their full communion partner. Together, they are forming a genuine mutual relationship in which the members of the ELCA are authentically themselves while accepting the Reverend Terhune for the person (and clergyman) he is.

There is never any doubt that the role Reverend Bradley Terhune is to perform is that of leader of ELCA worship. He uses their liturgy and presides at the Eucharist according to their prescribed forms. Liturgical leadership is an exercise in learning the language of worship with a 'different accent' than that with which he is familiar in the UMC. Likewise, Reverend Terhune finds interesting possibilities for sharing his faith, and sharing in the faith of the ELCA congregations, when he preaches in their pulpits. In performing this function, he keeps an eye towards the doctrines of his host denomination and seeks to accurately represent their teachings. Sometimes, when he does not know exactly what ELCA doctrine is on certain points, he says so and opens the matter for conversation with members of the church inside or outside of worship. Other times, when UMC doctrine is clearly different from that in the ELCA (as with teachings on sanctification), he compares the two approaches to understanding and highlights the reasons why each denomination takes the doctrinal position it does. In this way, he sees to it that Lutheran teachings are honored and the conversation with their full communion partner is engaged. It is about getting to know one another. It is about finding the sacred beauty in each other.

The congregations with which Reverend Bradley Terhune has had extended opportunities for sharing in a visiting ministerial relationship take noticeable delight in not only having a clergy person available to lead them in worship and preach, but also in making good on the promise of relationship offered by the full communion agreement. For both the ELCA and the UMC, there is a stated



commitment at the denominational level to deepening ecumenical engagement. The seal upon any written agreement, however, is in how it is, or is not, lived out in local churches. This example is of how ELCA members and a UMC clergy person in a remote and sparsely populated area are choosing to explore what ‘full communion’ could mean to them. This is the sort of creativity that turns words into a promise.

### Conclusion

The ecumenical commitment of generations of Christians has been driven by creative visions of how Christian unity can be expressed in given times and contexts. The progress towards greater enactment of unity among Christians works best when we draw upon wisdom gained from the practical experiments in our local communities -- whether through common witness that arises at the initiative of persons in those communities, or as local manifestations of ecumenical ideas developed at the denominational level. Ecumenical-mindedness benefits from open-minded discussion of the relative merits of different approaches and strategies towards building up unity among Christians.

The strongest results in the years to come will likely emerge from the courageous engagement of a wide range of possible ways of giving common witness to the teachings and life of Jesus Christ. Sharing the observations and insights from these experiments in faith enacted will help the church at all levels to make wise and faithful choices on how to further refine the ecumenical character of Christ’s church. What is needed is a healthy balance between boldness and humility in action aided by thoughtful reflection upon what can be learned.

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<sup>1</sup> Among the significant documents produced by COCU are: Consultation on Church Union, *A Plan of Union for the Church of Christ Uniting* (Princeton, NJ: Consultation on Church Union, 1970). and *Churches in Covenant Communion : The*

*Church of Christ Uniting; Approved and Recommended to the Churches by the Seventeenth Plenary of the Consultation on Church Union* (Princeton, NJ: Consultation on Church Union, 1989).

2 Please see: USCCB-UMC Dialogue Committee, *Shared Convictions About Education* (Washington, DC and New York, NY: USCCB-UMC Dialogue Committee, 1970)., USCCB-UMC Dialogue Committee, “Holy Living and Holy Dying,” *Origins* 19, no. 15 (1989)., and *Heaven and Earth Are Full of Your Glory: A United Methodist and Roman Catholic Statement on the Eucharist and Ecology* (Washington, DC and New York, NY: USCCB-UMC Dialogue Committee, 2011).

3 Please see: Bilateral Dialogue Committee between The Episcopal Church and The United Methodist Church, *Make Us One with Christ: A Report of the Bilateral Dialogue between the Episcopal Church and the United Methodist Church* (New York, NY: Office of Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations of The Episcopal Church in the USA and the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns of The United Methodist Church, 2006).

4 The Statement of the Dialogue Committee and its recommendations are expected to be presented to the 2016 General Conference of The United Methodist Church and to the 2018 Synods of the Northern and Southern Provinces of the Moravian Church.

5 Pan-Methodist Commission member churches are: The African Methodist Episcopal Church, The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, The African Union Methodist Protestant Church, The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, The Union American Methodist Episcopal Church, and The United Methodist Church.

6 An important document that came out of the dialogue between the ELCA and the UMC was ELCA-UMC Dialogue Committee, *Confessing Our Faith Together: A Study and Discussion Guide* (Chicago, IL and New York, NY: ELCA-UMC Dialogue Committee).

7 Reverend T. Bradley Terhune is an elder in the Detroit Annual Conference, presently serving as the pastor of Painesdale United Methodist Church. He holds a Master of Sacred Theology degree in Worship Arts from Boston University School of Theology. The details offered up in this example are drawn from several conversations and from a formal interview conducted on 14 March 2015 by the author.

### **Dr. Glen Alton Messer, II — United Methodist Church**

*Glen Alton Messer, II is a native of southern West Virginia, grew up in Michigan, and has lived in Boston and New York for most of two decades. He is a United Methodist layman who holds a doctorate in the History of Christianity, with specializations in the Modern Period and in trans-Atlantic Methodism and Pietism. He has served on the teaching faculty of Boston University School of Theology and has been an adjunct lecturer at Yale Divinity School. He has been with the ecumenical and interreligious office of The United Methodist Church since 2010 and is presently its Associate Ecumenical Staff Officer, working on matters of faith and order with the NCC in the USA, overseeing denominational-level dialogues, and contributing an academic perspective to the Council of Bishops on matters of doctrine, theology, ecclesiology, and history.*



## Rethinking the Church's Mission and Ministry Together

Mitzi J. Budde

Over the past two decades, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has entered into full communion agreements with both the Episcopal Church in the USA (2001) and the United Methodist Church (2009).<sup>1</sup> At the first meeting of the United Methodist Church (UMC) – Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) Joint Commission, the UMC General Secretary, Stephen Sidorak, said, “Full communion with the ELCA will require of United Methodists to ‘rethink’ church not only denominationally, but also to ‘rethink’ it ecumenically, especially in terms of mission and ministry... We have not even begun to imagine the possibilities

<sup>1</sup> The ELCA also has prior full communion agreements with the Presbyterian Church USA/the United Church of Christ/Reformed Church in America (1998) and the Moravian Church (1999).

being opened to us through the power of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>2</sup>

This challenge to “rethink church” applies to each of the churches that commit to these new relationships, and not just United Methodists. This article intends to recount the ways in which Lutherans, Methodists, and Episcopalians are rethinking the church’s mission and ministry together creatively and ecumenically, through these two full communion agreements: ELCA-UMC and ELCA-Episcopal Church. It will identify some of the convergences that we have achieved thus far, address the challenges and impediments that we are currently facing, and explore some opportunities for future joint mission and ministry.

*Called to Common Mission* is the full communion agreement between the ELCA and the Episcopal Church; *Confessing Our Faith Together* is the full communion agreement between the ELCA and the UMC.<sup>3</sup> Each of these agreements is the product of nearly thirty-five years of ecumenical dialogue between the churches. In these full communion agreements, we formally recognize one another as truly church, with a shared understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the creeds, and a common theology of the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist. We recognize the validity of each other’s ordained ministries and agree that our clergy can serve in each other’s congregations and that members can freely move their membership from one denomination to the other. We pledge to work together for social justice and outreach as we seek to deepen

<sup>2</sup> “UMC and ELCA Joint Commission Meets,” July 15, 2010: [http://www.gccuic-umc.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=275&Itemid=295](http://www.gccuic-umc.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=275&Itemid=295).

<sup>3</sup> *Called to Common Mission* (2001): <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/page/agreement-full-communion-called-common-mission>; *Confessing our Faith Together* (2009), [http://s3.amazonaws.com/Website\\_UMCGiving/resource-files/Confessing\\_Our\\_Faith.php.pdf](http://s3.amazonaws.com/Website_UMCGiving/resource-files/Confessing_Our_Faith.php.pdf).

the mission of the church together.

It is important to note that a full communion agreement is not intended to be a merger of the denominations or even to lead to a merger. Each church expects to remain organizationally, theologically, liturgically, and constitutionally distinct. But through these agreements we have committed that our work together for the mission of the church will make our joint commitment to unity in Christ visible to the world, to other Christians, and to those of other faiths and of no faith.

### **Convergences achieved together in mission and ministry**

On a snowy Ash Wednesday 2015, a colleague and I visited St. Paul Lutheran Church, a small ELCA congregation in Vonore, Tennessee. Unable to afford a full-time pastor, this parish has been ably served for the past thirteen years by a part-time United Methodist minister, the Rev. Dr. William McDonald. The people welcomed the two strangers from Washington DC and from Saskatoon, Canada warmly into their midst as sisters in Christ. The sermon cited Augustine and Luther; ashes were imposed in the ancient tradition; the Lord's Supper was solemnly celebrated. That small band of Christians gathered that evening in rural Tennessee was a microcosm of the communion of saints across time and space. For a moment, all of Christendom was gathered right there in that little church, an oasis of light and love, faith and witness in a dark, icy world.

### **Convergences in word and sacrament**

The ecumenical movement and the liturgical movement of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are closely aligned. Christian baptism in the name of the holy Trinity is the sacrament of unity, and mutual recognition of baptism is the starting point of every

ecumenical relationship.<sup>4</sup> These denominations have converged in claiming the centrality of baptismal identity and reclaiming weekly celebration of the Eucharist. Exegesis and preaching now draws from the same body of biblical scholarship across the mainline denominations. The ELCA-Episcopal Church and ELCA-UMC full communion agreements each includes the same six characteristics: “1) a common confessing of the Christian faith; 2) a mutual recognition of Baptism and sharing of the Lord's Supper, allowing for joint worship and an exchangeability of members; 3) a mutual recognition and availability of ordained ministers to the service of all members of a church in full communion, subject only but always to the disciplinary regulations of other churches; 4) a common commitment to evangelism, witness, and service; 5) a means of common decision-making on critical common issues of faith and life; and 6) a mutual lifting of any condemnations that exist between churches.”<sup>5</sup> Our churches will together seek opportunities to address injustices in our society, advocate for the dignity of all, and work for the care of creation.

Lutherans and Methodists are joined together ecumenically through their shared commitment to the theological agreement with the Roman Catholic Church, The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ).<sup>6</sup> The Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church adopted this theological convergence

4 For more on the ecumenical significance of mutual recognition of baptism, see Mitzi J. Budde, “Baptism, Sacrament of Unity, Sacrament of Mission,” in *Unity in Mission: Theological Reflections on the Pilgrimage of Mission*, Mitzi J. Budde and Don Thorsen, eds. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2013), pp. 90-109.

5 ELCA-UMC, *Confessing our Faith Together* (2009): p. i.

6 Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999): [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_31101999\\_cath-luth-joint-declaration\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_31101999_cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html).

statement in 1999; the World Methodist Council voted to join the JDDJ through the Official Common Affirmation in 2006.<sup>7</sup> This trilateral ecumenical agreement is enormously significant, bringing theological convergence on the central theological dispute that sparked the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation, just before the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation.

### Theology of ministry

One of the reasons that the ELCA-Episcopal Church full communion agreement is particularly noteworthy is that it is the first ecumenical accord to bring into full communion with one another a church that requires ordination to be in the historic episcopate (The Episcopal Church) with one that does not (ELCA). The requirements for unity of the Episcopal Church, defined in the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, cite the historic episcopate as one of the essentials for unity. Most of the Lutheran tradition lost the historic episcopate at the time of the Reformation and therefore does not, and indeed cannot, require it for the validity of ordination. Article 7 of the Augsburg Confession states that, for Lutherans, agreement on the gospel and sacraments is sufficient for unity. In the full communion agreement, *Called to Common Mission*, the ELCA has agreed to bind its ordained ministry for the future into the historic episcopate, doing so voluntarily for the sake of the greater unity of Christendom, and particularly unity with the Episcopal Church.

The ELCA's policy statement on ecumenism says that we seek to be "bold to reach out in several directions simultaneously to all those with whom it may find agreement in the Gospel."<sup>8</sup> Through

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/meth-council-docs/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_20060723\\_text-association\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/meth-council-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20060723_text-association_en.html).

<sup>8</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Ecumenism: The Vision of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* (Chicago: ELCA, 1991), 11.

its full communion agreements with the Presbyterians, Reformed, and United Church of Christ, which do not have the historic episcopate, the ELCA asserts that there are many valid ways for churches to show their continuity with "the faith once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 1:3). Apostolic succession can be demonstrated through faithful preaching, sacraments, creeds, and work for social justice, as well as through the historic episcopate. The ELCA's multiple commitments to enter into full communion relationships with churches that do not have the historic episcopate, as well as those that do, bears witness to this expansive understanding of apostolicity.

### Ecumenical shared ministries

Some of the most productive and creative expressions of common mission and ministry happen in joint congregations, shared campus ministries, and ministerial exchange such as the one the author described from Ash Wednesday at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Vonore, Tennessee. Joint or shared parishes are congregations of like-minded Christians, gathered together for worship, service, and nurturing of faith, like every other congregation. What is distinctive about them is their multi-denominational life: these congregations are formally covenanted with two or more church denominations and therefore belong to more than one wider church body. These dually-aligned congregations present a viable arrangement for the future of our denominations that moves beyond survival mentality to a mission opportunity for the churches.

To facilitate these ecumenical shared ministries, the national church offices have developed guidelines for each of the full communion agreements that document best practices for the celebration of the sacraments in settings of shared worship. A policy statement for the "orderly exchange" of clergy guides local judicatories in making ministerial appointments in full communion contexts. The national church offices are also coordinating their denominational

work to establish new missions, especially to under-served racial and ethnic groups.

The Coordinating Committee for the ELCA-UMC full communion accord has designed a mini-retreat model to bring Lutherans and Methodists together locally to deepen understanding of each other's traditions and to deepen appreciation of the gifts of each church. Entitled *Living and Growing into Full Communion: A Model for Local Celebration, Formation and Theological Reflection*,<sup>9</sup> it is a guide for local Christians to come together in a day-long event for joint worship, singing, sharing and study.

### *Impediments to common mission and ministry*

#### **Differing theologies of the diaconate**

A decade into the ELCA-Episcopal Church full communion agreement, a resolution about the agreement was adopted by the Episcopal Church General Convention of 2012. This resolution (A036) gave thanks for the full communion agreement and the work of Lutheran Episcopal Coordinating Committee (LECC) encouraged the committee to continue to seek opportunities for new mission and ministry; and directed the coordinating committee to “address the areas of our common life where our ecclesiological practices differ, especially lay presidency and our understandings of the role of deacons” for reporting back to the Standing Commission on Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations for its report to the next General Convention, in 2015.<sup>10</sup>

The Episcopal Church has a three-fold order of ordained minis-

9 The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and The United Methodist Church, *Living and Growing into Full Communion: A Model for Local Celebration, Formation and Theological Reflection*: [http://www.gccuic-umc.org/index2.php?option=com\\_docman&task=doc\\_view&gid=181&Itemid=235](http://www.gccuic-umc.org/index2.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=181&Itemid=235).

10 The Episcopal Church General Convention 2012, Resolution A036, adopted July 6, 2012: <http://www.generalconvention.org/resolutions/download/102-1342119802>.

try (bishop, priest, deacon); Lutherans emphasize one ministry of word and sacrament as the unified ministry of bishops and pastors. Additionally, the ELCA has three lay rosters of ministry, including diaconal ministers, who are not ordained. In the full communion agreement, *Called to Common Mission*, the ELCA recognizes the full authenticity of Episcopal bishops, priests and deacons as fully authentic ministers, and the Episcopal Church recognizes the full authenticity of ELCA bishops and pastors. *Called to Common Mission* also commits both churches to continuing exploration, renewal and reform of the diaconate. The Lutheran Episcopal Coordinating Committee, on which I serve, spent a year working on a response to Resolution A036, identifying resources and discussing the challenge of trying to address the diaconate ecumenically.

Ecumenical conversations are sometimes attempting to address a moving target, especially when theology and practice is being reconsidered within one church, which then has implications for the ecumenical relationship. At the time of writing, this is just the case with the question of the ordination of deacons in the ELCA. The ELCA has appointed a Word and Service Task Force, which has undertaken a multi-year study of the future of its three lay rosters (diaconal ministers, deaconesses, and associates in ministry). Currently the draft proposal recommends joining these three lay rosters together into one ordained order of the diaconate with the ELCA. A final proposal is scheduled for vote at the 2016 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. Thus the ecumenical report to the Episcopal Church on this matter, which had to be submitted in 2014, could only say that reconciliation of the ecumenical questions around the diaconate must wait until the ELCA resolves its theology of the diaconate internally.

#### **Eucharistic Practices: Lay Presidency and Open Table**

The second issue raised in the Episcopal Church General Conven-

tion Resolution 036 is equally challenging, but in a different way. The resolution raises questions around the practice of lay presidency at the Eucharist, a practice that is authorized and licensed by a local bishop in some parts of the ELCA where clergy are not available, yet is an exception to normative church practice and teaching. Similar questions are raised around the practice in some parts of both churches around the practice of open table, i.e. congregations welcoming those who have not been baptized to the eucharistic table. Some parishes in each of these traditions issue an open table invitation to the Eucharist, even though the practice is officially against church polity in both churches. United Methodist theology of the Lord's Supper as a potentially converting ordinance, awaking a hunger for baptism in those who partake of communion before baptism, might serve as a bridge for this divisive issue in sacramental theology. Can the churches use these divergent practices to stimulate theological discussions around sacramental theology and evangelism rather than use them to police or judge one another's liturgical practices?

### Governance questions

When bi-denominational parishes are formed, they discover that the constitutional and legal work necessary to address the issues of property, finances, employment, and accountability can be complex, expensive, and time-consuming. To facilitate the opportunity for these joint or shared parishes in the variety of full communion agreements of the ELCA, the ELCA developed guidelines for federated and union congregations. However, the Episcopal Church has found it difficult to reconcile those ELCA guidelines with Episcopal Church canons. Addressing the complexities in church law around issues of money and stewardship, such as ownership of property, apportionment of membership, issuance of calls and responsibility for clergy and congregational discipline can compete with mission and ministry vision and complicate these congrega-

tions' legal status.

### Opportunities for future rethinking of mission and ministry

In January 2015, a faculty colleague and I led an immersion trip to Rome for a group of twelve seminarians and staff from Virginia Seminary. At the end of the first week, our group of fourteen, consisting of Episcopalians, Lutherans and Methodists, toured the Catacombs and celebrated the Eucharist at one of the small Catacomb underground altars. Through the Lutheran-Episcopal full communion agreement, all of the ELCA-authorized liturgies are available for Episcopal Church use. Because the prayer of Hippolytus, one of the earliest extant eucharistic prayers of the church catholic, is an ELCA-authorized eucharistic prayer, we were able to use it for our Episcopal liturgy in the catacombs. Through our present ecumenical bond with each other, we were joined together in prayer and sacrament in that holy space of burial of some of the earliest Christians. This is the ecumenical gift exchange at its richest.

### Shared social action and witness

In the churches, we have grown accustomed to thinking of ethical issues as being divisive. But there is greater power in addressing the ills of this world together, finding common ground for social action and witness. The ELCA and the Episcopal Church have established a shared national staff position, a Legislative Representative for International Affairs, which works on advocacy for both churches on federal policies and legislation and on building shared advocacy coalitions. The presiding bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Episcopal Church have found common voice, speaking together to their two churches in joint statements on social issues such as carbon emissions, immigration reform, World AIDS Day, and World Refugee Day. Our work for advocacy and justice is immeasurably stronger when we Christians

can speak with a united voice.

### Theological education

Each of these denominations is wrestling in its own way with how to maintain a tradition of an educated clergy, with questions raised around what is the minimum preparation for ordination. Each has its own candidacy procedures, requirements for ordination, and approval processes. Might we not work together to coordinate these procedures and requirements and develop a standardized ecumenical candidacy process? Do local judicatories have structures in place for consulting with one other when a candidate rejected by one church seeks ordination in a full communion partner church?

The seminaries of our churches are gatekeepers for the ecumenical agreements, playing a key role in determining whether these agreements will be integrated into the mission and ministry of the church in a living way. Are seminarians being taught about these ecumenical accords, or are they encountering an unexamined and undefined accidental diversity in denominational traditions and worship styles? Are they learning these partner churches' theology and practice? Are we preparing seminarians for the "cultural" differences to be encountered when serving in an exchange call to a congregation of a full communion partner? The ELCA-Episcopal Church worship guidelines specify that when the service is hosted by a particular tradition, that church's rite is used, and an ordained minister from the other church presides. Are students worshipping with the liturgies of the other churches and being taught to lead those liturgies?

### Reformation 2017 Commemoration

The Lutheran and Anglican/Episcopal traditions were closely linked from the beginning of the continental and English Reformations of the sixteenth century. Lutheran Reformation publications

were smuggled into England in shipments of wool, arriving within weeks of their publication in Germany for clandestine discussion among theologians and church leaders in Cambridge. The Methodist tradition was an outgrowth from the Anglican, with John Wesley's heart and mind warmed by reading Martin Luther's writings on the book of Romans.

October 31, 2017 will be the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of the German Reformation. Lutherans and Roman Catholics have studied the upcoming anniversary and issued a joint statement, *From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017*, on how it might be observed and commemorated (not celebrated).<sup>11</sup> This anniversary provides an extraordinary opportunity for Lutherans, Episcopalians, and Methodists to honor the reformation that began the Protestant movement in the sixteenth century while at the same time confessing the unfortunate schism in the church that resulted and that persists to this day. Theodor Dieter puts it this way: "The symbolic year 2017 is a challenge to identify how the trajectories of the different reformations have developed over the past 500 years; which parts of their heritages deserve preservation and sharing with the whole Church and the generations to come; which parts are failures and shortcomings to regret, repent, and discard; and what the potential of these reformations is for a present reform, especially with respect to the unity of the Church for which our Lord prayed 'so that the world may believe.'"<sup>12</sup> The convergence that Lutherans and Methodists have achieved with the Roman Catholic Church through the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification will

11 Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity. *From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017*. <https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/From%20Conflict%20to%20Communion.pdf>.

12 Theodor Dieter, "What to do about 2017? The Ecumenical Challenge of a Centenary," *Ecclesiology* 8:3 (2012): 287-88.



be a cornerstone for greater unity in this new millennium.

### Conclusion

We are just beginning to envision the creative new possibilities for mission and ministry presented by these full communion agreements between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the United Methodist Church and the Episcopal Church, by the power of God through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Full communion relationships can make visible the unity inherent in the church catholic, given as a gift of Christ, and we do so with intentionality, through reconciled worship, proclamation, community/koinonia, witness and service.<sup>13</sup> These churches have much in common liturgically: similar liturgical orders, the revised common lectionary, common versions of liturgical texts, shared hymnody, and now convergence in sacramental theology. The Lutheran Episcopal Coordinating Committee report to the 2015 General Convention of the Episcopal Church summarizes some of the accomplishments of a decade of full communion with one another: “We have been called to common mission to plant the church together and to cooperate in parish clergy exchanges and in campus ministries. Joint parishes in many places throughout the U.S. are providing new forms of ministry. We have shared disaster relief in times of crisis in the Gulf Coast and in Iowa. Collaborative work has led to joint chaplain retreats and coordinated ministries in our military chaplaincies. Together, we have more effectively fed the hungry, housed the homeless, advocated for immigration rights, assisted refugees, and prayed for persons affected by AIDS...”<sup>14</sup>

13 “Ecumenism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Final Report of the Continuation Committee on Ecumenism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Geneva, 2012,” in *Ecumenical Visions for the 21st Century: A Reader for Theological Education*. Lorke, Mélisande, and Dietrich Werner, eds. (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2013), p. 380.

14 Response of the Lutheran-Episcopal Coordinating Committee to the Request of the Seventy-Seventh General Convention of The Episcopal Church, Approved January 9, 2014, in Episcopal Church, *Report to the 78<sup>th</sup> General Con-*

When our time, energy and resources seem inadequate to the tasks before us, we can renew and inspire one another, refresh our lives of faith, deepen our efforts to serve our neighbors, coordinate our outreach to the world, expand our witness to creative new vistas. We are called to pray for each other as individual churches and for our united witness together as the church of Christ Jesus. These ecumenical relationships help us to “encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact we are doing” (I Thess. 5:11).

### Dr. Mitzi J. Budde - The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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*vention, otherwise known as The Blue Book (2015), forthcoming at <http://www.generalconvention.org/home/buebook>.*

ing Committee, serving as the ELCA co-chair from 2008-2014. Publications: co-editor and co-contributor for *Unity in Mission: Theological Reflections on the Pilgrimage of Mission* (co-edited with Dan Thorsen in the National Council of Churches Faith & Order Commission Theological Series, published in 2013 by Paulist Press), and author of journal articles for *The Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, *Worship*, *Congregations*, *Ecumenical Trends*, and the *VTS Journal*. She maintains an online quarterly annotated bibliography on ecumenism at <http://www.washtheocon.org> <<http://www.washtheocon.org>>.



***Response to “A Theological Foundation for Full Communion between The Episcopal Church and The United Methodist Church”***

Ellen K. Wondra

I have been invited to reflect on the Right Reverend William Gregg’s discussion of to “A Theological Foundation for Full Communion,” in which he focuses on the sections on the historic episcopate, presidency at the Eucharist, and practices of lay ministry. I am most appreciative of Bishop Gregg’s very close reading of “A Theological Foundation,” and largely agree that there are matters touched on here that need much further theological and ecclesiological elaboration as part of the Episcopal Church’s and Anglican Communion’s response to Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer “that they all may be one.”

I also agree with Bishop Gregg in wanting more, and in wanting things put rather differently at many junctures in “A Theological

Foundation.” But I may not agree with Bishop Gregg about what is needed in order for the Episcopal Church and the United Methodist Church to move into a greater visible expression of the communion which we share in Christ.

The concerns that Bishop Gregg raises can, I think, be gathered into four general areas:

- The theological nature and ecclesiological importance of the historic episcopate, and the relation of theology, ecclesiology, and polity more broadly;
- The theology of the sacraments, especially the presence of Christ in the sacrament of Holy Communion;
- The theology of ministry including the interdependence of the baptized and the ordained, focused particularly by presidency at Holy Communion and the scope and significance of the ministry of the laity; and
- The grounds and evidence for making judgments about whether or not certain theological positions, ecclesiological orderings, and ecclesial practices are adequate to the Christian faith and appropriate bases for overcoming past divisions.

There is no question that each of these is a serious issue in ecumenical dialogue and agreement. Each one comes up over and over again in all of the Episcopal Church’s and Anglican Communion’s bilateral, multilateral and conciliar dialogues. Neither the Episcopal Church nor the Anglican Communion has claimed that it is so certain of its position on any of them as to exempt these topics from further conversation with other Christians.

In part this is because it appears to be a key aspect of “Anglican identity” to embrace an acceptable range of diversity in theology, ecclesiology and practice. And, for good and ill, we have not

defined “acceptable diversity” in a way that makes it clear where the boundaries around these topics are, let alone where they ought to be. To put this in its bluntest form: What do Anglicans believe it is not acceptable to believe about the presence of Christ in the Eucharist and lay presidency at the sacrament (for example)?

To put it another way, the question for Episcopalians and Anglicans in our official gatherings is not so much “Can I believe what these other Christians believe about (for example) the presence of Christ in the Eucharist?” The question, rather, is “Can I be in communion with other Christians who believe this about the presence of Christ?” And more often than perhaps we are willing to recognize, the answer to this must be “Yes!” – and in no small part because *we already are* in communion with other Christians we believe this:<sup>1</sup> They are Episcopalians, Anglicans; and we need not hold identical beliefs in order to be in communion with each other. Indeed, one of the purposes of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral is to declare precisely this. We – Anglicans of all sorts and conditions— together affirm these things, and we are not only happy but eager to come into fuller communion with others who do as well. And, by extension, we will find it much more difficult to come into fuller communion with those who don’t affirm these things.

The truth of this is borne out in dialogues with Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Roman Catholics and many others.

Bishop Gregg is quite right in highlighting the important issues I have summarized above. We do in fact need greater clarity about what we believe, and why we believe it. We do in fact need greater clarity about how theology, ecclesiology and ecclesial practice are interdependent. We do in fact need greater clarity about how we judge the adequacy of particular positions and practices in relation to “the essentials of the Christian faith,” and the criteria for making

<sup>1</sup> I am most grateful to the Reverend Dr. J. Robert Wright for his clarification of this point as part of the Anglican-Roman Catholic Consultation in the United States (ARCUSA).

those judgments.

And there is a special gift accompanying that clarity when it comes through honest, charitable and deep dialogue with others, perhaps especially dialogue across lines of difference: That dialogue in and of itself increases our real but imperfect communion, even when it does not lead to short- or medium-term publicly visible unity.

Two things need to be said here.

First, not all difference on issues is divisive, and not all divisive issues are, in fact, church dividing. Anglicans and Episcopalians recognize the truth of this even in the midst of ongoing disputes, disagreements and divisions with our own church and within the Anglican Communion. We do not find it necessary to have complete clarity, identical language, or uniform practice in order to be in communion with each other. We do not even need to pray the same prayers in the same language.

Generally speaking, church-dividing issues are those that are doctrinal: They call into question whether a church may see that the other holds “the essentials of the Christian Faith.”<sup>2</sup> Differences on central doctrine are expressed variously, including in difference of theology and practice in areas such as the nature of the Supper of the Lord/the Holy Eucharist, the exercise of authority, ordained ministry and so on. One of the tasks of ecumenical dialogue is to discern the extent to which what had divided churches in the past need continue to be church-dividing. So, for example, there are among churches quite different ways of speaking about God, the person and work of Christ, the mission of God and of the church, Holy Baptism and so on. Yet in many cases, churches have been able, by the grace of God, to see through notable differences to a mutual recognition that other churches hold “the essentials of the Christian Faith.

“A Theological Foundation” makes it clear that the Episcopal

2 “A Theological Foundation.”

Church and the United Methodist Church do in fact recognize in each other the essentials of the Christian Faith: It is a fact that “Anglicans and Methodists, and specifically the predecessor churches of the Episcopal Church and the United Methodist Church, have not, *as churches*, called into question the faith, the ministerial orders or the sacraments of the other church.”<sup>3</sup> This is a very precise and important statement. It indicates that while our churches are divided, those divisions are not in and of themselves church-dividing. That is, our divisions do not point to fundamental, irreconcilable differences concerning “the essentials of the Christian Faith.”<sup>4</sup> Further, the statement indicates that while individuals and even groups within each church may in good faith and conscience call into question particular beliefs and practices, the church *as such* – that is, formally and authoritatively as a duly constituted body – has not done so and does not do so now.

In the first sentence of the section “Issues Perceived as Separating Our Churches” the statement is made that “there are some areas of church life and teachings that are . . . church dividing issues.” Nowhere, however, does “A Theological Foundation” indicate what precisely these issues are or the basis on which they actually are church-dividing and legitimately so. The rest of the document runs quite against this single sentence. It seems to me, then, both wise and charitable to consider this sentence ill-phrased rather than an assertion of established fact.

Further, “A Theological Foundation” states in concise but comprehensive ways the key (or essential) elements of the Christian faith that the two churches affirm together.<sup>5</sup> And in the subsections of “Issues Perceived as Separating Our Churches,” the document lays out in more detail where the two churches already affirm common beliefs, even while going on to explore some indications that differences remain that may be *perceived* as

3 “A Theological Foundation,” 8; emphasis added.

4 “A Theological Foundation.”

5 “A Theological Foundation,” 14.

church-dividing. Some of these issues have already been resolved within one or both of the two churches in ways that remove the legitimate basis of the perception of division. (See, for example, the section on Baptism and regeneration.) Other issues – such as the presence of Christ in Holy Communion – may appear to be deeply divisive, but when one looks more closely and at current official documents, it becomes clear that these differences are matters of emphasis, and in any case exist as much within each church as between the two. Yet other issues – race and class particularly – are identified as historical rather than doctrinal. They affect both churches, and one of the gifts of fuller communion, it is to be hoped, is increased ability and willingness to address these issues more effectively by addressing them together.

From this angle, then, “A Theological Foundation” makes these basic and necessary claims:

- There is good and ample reason to recognize that the Episcopal Church and the United Methodist Church separately and together hold the essentials of the Christian faith.
- Though the churches are, in fact, divided, this is not necessary in order to preserve either church’s witness to the Christian faith. Differences that might in the past perhaps have risen to this significance have been resolved.
- Current significant differences are of one or both of two types: acceptable diversity within either or both churches; and/or differences that arise from factors that both churches individually have determined must be overcome, and may be best overcome together.

Does “A Theological Foundation” itself give a completely adequate and satisfying account of why all this is the case? No. But it does not have to. And that is my second point.

Ecumenical documents that state agreements or commonalities do so in summary form. They do not claim to adduce all the evidence necessary to do so. It’s generally accepted that we need not explicate in detail that upon which we already agree. Doing so may underscore the point that we already agree on much more than we disagree about. And “A Theological Foundation” summarizes the broad, crucial agreement in the section “Affirmations.”<sup>6</sup>

Further, documents that deal with divisive issues and reach the kind of conclusion outlined above depend on long, careful, well-informed, critically examined study and argumentation that takes place during the course of a particular dialogue over many years. In some cases, this dialogue has taken place in other ways that can bear scrutiny, often because such discussions have led to a greater degree of visible communion.

And it is a general methodological principle of ecumenical dialogues that where two churches have worked out a way forward on divisive issues such that a greater degree of visible unity is possible – as is the case with the Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, for example – it is not necessary to reproduce the same argument a second, third or fourth time when the same issue is present between other church – as, here, between the Episcopal Church and the United Methodist Church.

Quite concretely: If TEC and ELCA have reached substantial, formal, recognized agreement on the historic episcopate, and the ELCA and the UMC hold substantively similar (if not identical) views on the historic episcopate, it is not necessary to reargue the matter from the beginning in dialogue between TEC and the UMC.

Note that this is not the same as saying “the partner of my partner is therefore automatically also my partner.” The fact that the ELCA is in full communion with both TEC and the UMC does not thereby put TEC and UMC into full communion. Rather, it suggests that what has been achieved by one dialogue – for

6 “A Theological Foundation,” 14-15

example, in the process leading up to full communion between TEC and the ELCA – may very well provide the kind of work needed in another one. There’s no need to reinvent the wheel when the existing wheel has been deemed to be what is needed.

Even so: It is well worth noting that “A Theological Foundation” does not do some clearly necessary things, including proposing a way forward that will make visible fuller communion between the Episcopal Church and the United Methodist Church. But, again, it does not need to. The purposes of “A Theological Foundation” are different. It is, explicitly, a document that expresses the views of the members of an officially constituted dialogue at a particular point in time. It is not a formally authorized statement of agreement between the two churches. That being said, it clearly leads in the direction of a formally authorized statement by summarizing the fruits of the dialogue thus far and indicating that, in the opinion of the dialogue participants, no further doctrinal work is necessary before the two churches can consider moving into more visible unity. And in this way “A Theological Foundation” is of great significance. It may not be sufficient in itself, but then, it doesn’t claim to be.

So what remains to be done to move TEC and the UMC into fuller visible unity? The answer to this question depends to considerable extent on what judgment one makes about the claims of “A Theological Foundation.” And here a particular problem arises that is not discussed explicitly in “A Theological Foundation” yet is suggested by Bishop Gregg’s response: the problem of adequacy of evidence. Put bluntly, how do we know with an adequate degree of likelihood that Episcopalians and Methodists do in fact believe what they say they believe? In part, this is a matter of presentation of exiting evidence – and that “A Theological Foundation” does do in many ways. But it is also a matter of whether the existing evidence is itself sufficiently robust and substantial to be convincing.

This is a familiar question in the ecumenical dialogues in

which the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion are engaged. Anglicans do not have a clear, elaborated body of belief expressed as authoritative doctrine (as, for example, the Roman Catholic Church does). Nor do we have authoritative confessional statements (as do Lutherans and the Presbyterians). Nor do we have a commonly accepted magisterial theologian whose theological positions guide us (such as Martin Luther or John Calvin). What we have is common worship, and what we have is an embodied and quite rich tradition of theology, spirituality and practice. But by their very nature, these things do not provide single definitive statements that can be cited. Both sorts of evidence require extensive interpretation to disclose their import, yet the frames of interpretation are various and changeable depending on time and context. And this poses a challenge in authenticating our claims in ways that are clearly recognizable by and acceptable to others.

It’s worth noting that the Wesleyan/Methodist tradition is in a quite similar situation. We are, after all, members of the same family.

In practice, particularly in this dialogue, this means each dialogue partner must do two things: muster the best evidence and best argument available; and, more difficult, trust that our dialogue partner is doing the same thing. Trust is something that is both earned and granted, and the mustering of evidence and argument contributes to earning trust. But it is also necessary to undertake the hard work of developing habits and dispositions that tend toward understanding and trust rather than toward suspicion. And this is no easy work. It is work that is accomplished in actual, concrete, sustained practice at least as much as it is in inward development. The practice of trust is always the practice of risk. And here we are talking about the organizational practice of trust. Quite concretely, we are faced with the work of trusting others even when their statements and practices are susceptible to multiple interpretations – as are ours.

The organizational form of the question about communion that

I posed earlier is not “Can (or do) we as a church believe what these others say they believe?” but “Can we as a church be in communion with people who believe these things?” Can the Episcopal Church be in communion with the United Methodist Church, which has said and done particular things?

My own judgment here is that we can, because we are already in communion with people who believe these things and are Episcopalians and Anglicans. The theological affirmations, ecclesiological positions, and ecclesial practices of the United Methodist Church are all readily found already in the Episcopal Church.

For those who make this judgment, there is no legitimate reason to require greater clarity or agreement from this dialogue partner than the Episcopal Church requires within itself. We cannot justly and fairly require more of our partners than we require of ourselves.

And if the Episcopal Church is not willing to break communion within itself in these areas, there is no legitimate theological or ecclesiological reason for not moving toward fuller communion with the United Methodist Church. The questions that remain are how? and when?

### **Dr. Ellen K. Wondra - The Episcopal Church**

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## Book Reviews

### **Worship in the Garden: Services for Outdoor Worship,**

by J. Wayne Pratt.

Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013.

ISBN 978-1-4267-6594-0.

137pp.

Paperback edition \$14.99.

Worship in the Garden is the Rev. J. Wayne Pratt’s second book with Abingdon Press. Like his first, it is a short collection of liturgies meant for a specific purpose, in this case outdoor worship. Pratt, a retired United Methodist pastor who holds a degree in landscape architecture, not only gives readers a clear sense how gardens can provide spiritual nourishment, but gives us theologically rich liturgies for use in such a setting.

The purpose of the book is to offer liturgies that “provide a basic means of inspiration for the planning and conduct of vibrant and meaningful worship experiences in an outdoor environment” (p. 17). Pratt accomplishes that purpose across nineteen chapters -- an introduction, sixteen liturgies, plus two chapters entitled “Biblical Precedents” and “Liturgical Gardens: A Rationale.” Some liturgies are meant to be used as stand-alone services. Others are meant to be incorporated into a more complete service. The text is acces-

sible without being informal, and is generally easy to read. The intended audience is almost certainly broader than Pratt's own United Methodist tradition. Liturgists in some denominational traditions might not be able to use all the services in Pratt's book, but most could at least find here a source of inspiration.

A few things about this book are noteworthy from a liturgist's point of view. One is that Pratt uses *The Message* as the Bible version throughout the book. He acknowledges *The Message* to be a paraphrase rather than a translation, but he nonetheless favors it because "the author [of *The Message*, Eugene Peterson,] freely employs the image of the garden" in that version (p. 12). The garden imagery in *The Message* does indeed add a layer of depth to many of the liturgies, linking together Biblical passages with the other liturgical texts. If a community were to forego the use of *The Message* in favor of another, more traditional translation when using Pratt's liturgies, much of the strength his work would be lost.

Another intriguing thing is that Pratt, a United Methodist pastor publishing with the UMC's own publishing house, includes standalone services for Baptism and Eucharist that fall outside the current liturgical norms for sacraments in that denomination. These two liturgies might be considered "experimental" because of that fact, and would probably most useful for worship planners in traditions not bound by set rituals or liturgical texts.

Not all the liturgies in *Worship in the Garden* make use of garden themes in a meaningful way, but some do so marvelously. Three liturgies -- the wedding liturgy, renewal of vows, and service of reflection, reconciliation, and renewal -- are noteworthy for their outstanding integration of an outdoor location, biblical passages, and newly written liturgical texts containing "garden" imagery. Other liturgies don't necessarily need to utilize garden imagery in such a purposeful way because their very nature indicates an

outdoor setting. Examples include the Easter sunrise service, burial service, and to some extent the stations of the cross.

Overall, *Worship in the Garden* accomplishes its purpose by providing a collection of new and useful liturgies that will inspire those seeking to worship outdoors. Occasionally the text suffers from an editorial standpoint, especially in the inconsistent use of liturgical terms. One example is the frequent interchange of the terms "benediction" and "blessing." Similarly, labels like "blessing" are often given to texts which are not, in fact, blessings.

The author is to be highly commended for his chapter entitled "Liturgical Gardens: A Rationale." Placed at the end of the volume, this short chapter is perhaps the best and most useful of the book. It provides very good general guidance to communities considering the creation of their own liturgical gardens. One wishes Pratt would have written more here; perhaps he might consider another book dealing specifically with that subject. In any case, communities interested in exploring the interaction of how worship might be brought outdoors would be wise to read *Worship in the Garden*.

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### **Distance in Preaching: Room to Speak, Space to Listen.**

Brothers, Michael.

Grand Rapids, MI

William B. Eerdmans Publishers, 2014.

ISBN 978-0-8028-6969-2. 181p.

Preaching is an essential movement in the liturgy's service of the Word, and for many in the Protestant tradition it is an indispensable gravity point in a congregation's worship. The variety of perspectives and approaches to preaching within the Christian tradition is rich, a reminder of the diversity of both the Scriptures we proclaim and the myriad of contexts in which they are proclaimed. It is in the richness of this diversity that Michael Brothers explores various theories on how the preacher, assembly, text, and larger communion interact with each other to encounter and be shaped by Christ in the Scriptures.

Brothers' work will be dense for some readers. Most of the text is a survey of and interaction with the various academic stalwarts of homiletical theory. Brothers attempts to find a balance in the ways in

which preachers position themselves in relation to the text they are interpreting and the hearers of that word. He engages Fred Craddock's classical model of preaching with more contemporary approaches in post-liberalism and performance theory. Since the biblical text is ancient, the original hearers long passed, and our contemporary context is moving into a position of increasing biblical illiteracy, Brothers' seems particularly concerned to distinguish how the text may be heard by a particular hearer and then how that influences the way in which it is presented.

The tackling of a liturgical subject as practical as preaching afforded Brothers the opportunity to address distance and engagement with a helpful eye toward the every Sunday preacher. By remaining almost exclusively in the realm of academic theory, however, Brothers overshadows the distinctly pastoral nature of preaching with theoretical conversation. The experience itself of reading the book felt like the "overhearing" of the biblical texts that Brothers describes at several points, where the hearer/reader listens from the outside on an already constructed and now presently re-enacted conversation between a variety of characters. The interactivity of Brothers' work was limited by his attempted objectivity in moderating others' writings on homiletical theory. Aside from the two appended sample sermons, the reader is left to draw out their own meaning and develop their own application. While this may have been authorial intent given Brothers' sustained observation that hearers need an ebb-and-flow of closeness and distance from the presenter and text to reach a point of engagement and acceptance with its message, it may also be a marketing misstep from the publisher. From the teaser paragraph on the back, I approached this book with expectations that did not fully align with what Brothers delivered. I moved through the entire work anticipating Brothers to step past literature review into implementation, but it never seemed to fully happen.

Overall, Brothers' contribution to the theory of preaching is important

in that he takes an often unrecognized mechanic of homiletics – that is, distance – and explores the ways in which various preaching theories and theorists grapple with its implementation. I recommend this book primarily for teachers of preaching, but by approaching it with an expectation that is mindful of its theoretical focus, the academically-minded preacher will not be disappointed.

*Christopher J. Montgomery, O.S.L., is pastor of Sermon on the Mount Mennonite Church in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.*



## Sacramental Life Writing Guide

The purpose of *Sacramental Life* is to provide help for persons who have responsibility for the worship and sacramental life in the local church. We seek articles that are practical as well as being historically and theologically sound.

Some of the most effective work comes out of the challenges faced by those who serve local congregations. We often have to provide liturgical leadership in situations that are extraordinary. We seek to meet people's spiritual needs in ways that are responsible to, but not held back by, our traditions.

Our readership is centered in, but not limited to, the United Methodist Church. While most are ordained ministers and many are members of the Order of St. Luke, an increasing number are neither. They are aware of the need for sound worship practices and frequent celebration of the sacraments and are always looking for ways to expand their knowledge in these areas.

Articles are to be written according to the following guidelines:

1. Articles are to address an issue that deals with some aspect of worship, liturgy, sacraments, or the spiritual life.
2. Sermons are not acceptable (unless specifically requested). Material first presented as a sermon should be rewritten.
3. Articles should be approximately 2000-3000 words in length. Works cited should be incorporated in the article or in endnotes. Review guidelines are available from the Book Review Editor.
4. The Editor has the right to edit all materials.
5. Manuscripts solicited by the editors are due 60 days from the date of acceptance by the writer.

Submissions may be sent to:

Daniel J. Doty, O.S.L.

Managing Editor, *Sacramental Life*

email virus-free attachments to: [ddoty@ucctrinity.com](mailto:ddoty@ucctrinity.com)

## **Sacramental Life Book Review Style Sheet**

1. Reviews should be approximately 500-700 words in length. Please contact the editor if a review needs to be longer. We solicit reviews of recent books (2000 - Present) pertaining to liturgics, spirituality, and homiletics.

2. The heading of the review shall include, in this order:

Title

Author

Publisher

City and year of publication

ISBN

Number of pages (e.g., xiv + 215 pages)

Listed price, if available

3. The body of the review shall include:

A brief summary of the major points of the book; statements of intended audience, strengths and weaknesses, and the personal reactions of the reviewer.

4. Paragraphs are not to be indented. A double space should appear between the heading and the first paragraph and between paragraphs.

5. The reviewer's name, position or occupation and other relevant personal information should be appended to the end of the article.

6. The editors of Sacramental Life reserve the right to edit all submitted manuscripts for length, grammar, form and spelling. Reviews submitted may be included in other OSL publications, as appropriate, at the discretion of the editors.

7. Reviews may be sent via email to:

John Brittain, O.S.L.

Book Review Editor, Sacramental Life

email virus-free attachments to: [john.brittain@houghton.edu](mailto:john.brittain@houghton.edu)