

A Gift to the World: Co-Laborers for the Healing of Brokenness
The Episcopal Church and The United Methodist Church
A Proposal for Full Communion

Preamble

In the fractured human community there is a great need for the realization of the unity among the followers of Christ Jesus. This proposal for full communion between The Episcopal Church and The United Methodist Church is an effort to bring our churches into closer partnership in the mission and witness to the love of God and thus labor together for the healing of divisions among Christians and for the well-being of all. The vision of Revelation 22 is of the tree of life planted on both sides of a river “and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.” (Revelation 22:2) Faithful to Jesus’ prayer that his disciples be one so that the world may believe (John 17: 20-23), may this proposal be an expression of God’s will for the churches.

1. Introduction: The Nature of the Communion We Seek

Since 2002, The Episcopal Church and The United Methodist Church have been engaged in bilateral dialogue, setting full communion as the goal. We understand the relationship we seek as follows:

Full communion is understood as a relationship between two distinct ecclesiastical bodies in which each maintains its own autonomy while recognizing the catholicity and apostolicity of the other, and believing the other to hold the essentials of the Christian faith. In such a relationship, communicant members of each would be able freely to communicate at the altar of the other, and ordained ministers may officiate sacramentally in either church. Specifically, this includes transferability of members, mutual recognition and interchangeability of ministries, mutual enrichment by one another’s traditions of hymnody and patterns of liturgy, freedom to participate in each other’s ordinations and installations of clergy, including bishops, and structures for consultation to express, strengthen, and enable our common life, witness, and service, to the glory of God and the salvation of the world.

We seek to draw closer in mission and ministry, grounded in sufficient agreement in the essentials of Christian faith and order and assisted by interchangeability of ordained ministries. We are not seeking a merger of our churches, nor a relationship that would imply such a goal in future, being convinced that we are already united in the catholic church of Christ Jesus in which we are uniquely formed to share in the mission of God in the world. We are blessed in that neither of our churches, or their predecessor bodies, have officially condemned one another, nor have they formally called into question the faith, the ministerial orders, or the sacraments of the other church.

2. Background: Anglican-Methodist Dialogues

The Episcopal Church-United Methodist Church bilateral dialogue began in 2002. In 2006, The United Methodist Church and The Episcopal Church entered into a relationship of Interim

47 Eucharistic Sharing, a step on the way towards full communion that allows for clergy of the two
48 churches to share in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper under prescribed guidelines.¹ In 2010,
49 it issued a summary of its theological work, A Theological Foundation for Full Communion
50 Between The Episcopal Church and The United Methodist Church. Both of these documents
51 have been sent to bishops and deputies to General Convention in The Episcopal Church and to
52 the Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church, and should be read in conjunction with
53 this proposal. They are available online at
54 <http://www.episcopalarchives.org/collaborate/sceir/methodist>.

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56 The first round Dialogue Committee noted in A Theological Foundation for Full Communion
57 that it sees no church dividing issues between the two churches.

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59 The second round of bilateral dialogue commenced in 2015 to prepare the way for a full
60 communion proposal to be presented to the General Convention of The Episcopal Church and
61 the General Conference of The United Methodist Church, and to assist members in both
62 churches to understand the closer relationship and its relevance to the lives of persons in local
63 communities in which it will be lived out.

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65 This proposal for full communion is the fruit of over fifty years of formal dialogues between our
66 two churches. In the 1950s, there were substantive conversations between the (then) Methodist
67 Church and the (then) Protestant Episcopal Church. However, these bilateral conversations were
68 set aside in favor of both churches’ membership in the Consultation on Church Union (COCU).
69 For nearly forty years, The Episcopal Church and The United Methodist Church related to one
70 another by means of our participation in COCU. Following COCU’s reconstitution as Churches
71 Uniting in Christ (CUIC) in 1999, The Episcopal Church and The United Methodist Church each
72 decided in 2000 to commence the first direct bilateral dialogue with one another in nearly fifty
73 years.

74
75 The United Methodist-Episcopal dialogue also benefits from the fact that we are members,
76 through the Anglican Communion and the World Methodist Council, of an international dialogue,
77 and are informed by the fruits of those conversations. The first round of an international
78 dialogue mutually sponsored by the World Methodist Council and the Anglican Communion
79 produced a theological statement, *Sharing in the Apostolic Communion*, issued in 1996. This
80 landmark document noted that Anglicans and Methodists shared the “core doctrine” of the
81 Christian faith, and need “no further doctrinal assurances” from one another.² Both church
82 families inaugurated a second round of conversations in 2007, the Anglican Methodist
83 International Consultation on Unity and Mission (AMICUM), and have issued a report, *Into All*
84 *the World, Being and Becoming Apostolic Churches*.

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86 3. *Relationship with Historically African American Methodist Churches*
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¹ See resolution Resolution A055 from the 2006 General Convention and Resolution 81456-IC-NonDis of the 2008 United Methodist General Conference.
See *Sharing in the Apostolic Communion*, particularly ¶ 15-17.

88 We are cognizant of the fact that The United Methodist Church is one of several expressions of
89 Methodism. Our two churches have been in dialogue with the historically African American
90 Methodist churches for nearly forty years. The African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME),
91 African Methodist Episcopal Church Zion (AME Zion), and Christian Methodist Episcopal
92 Church (CME) have been constituent members of COCU and CUIC along with The Episcopal
93 Church and The United Methodist Church. At the same time that it engaged in bilateral
94 discussions with The Episcopal Church, The United Methodist Church engaged in dialogues
95 through the Pan Methodist Commission with the AME, AME Zion, CME, African Union
96 Methodist Protestant Church (AUMP) and the Union American Methodist Episcopal Church
97 (UAME) with a goal of affirming full communion among all these Methodist church bodies. In
98 the 2000s, The United Methodist Church, AME, AME Zion, CME, AUMP, and UAME focused
99 on those discussions, resulting in a formal ratification of full communion in 2012. The United
100 Methodist Church and The Episcopal Church have also consulted together with the AME, AME
101 Zion, and CME (in 2006, 2008, and 2009).

102
103 The United Methodist-Episcopal dialogue has noted that church divisions in the US have often
104 reflected racial and socioeconomic divisions. The Dialogue Committees have been adamant that
105 conversations between Anglicans and Methodists must address racism as a church dividing issue.
106 In addition to our common forebears John and Charles Wesley, we also have common forebears
107 in Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, both members of St George’s Methodist Episcopal Church
108 in Philadelphia. Due to policies of racial exclusion, Richard Allen would go on to found what
109 would become the African Methodist Episcopal Church, while Absalom Jones would become the
110 first African American priest ordained in The Episcopal Church.

111
112 4. *Foundational Principles*

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114 We seek the greater unity between our two churches because we believe this is a mandate
115 grounded in Scripture. Jesus calls us into unity for the sake of mission and ministry, so that the
116 world may believe:

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118 I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who
119 will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one
120 (John 17:20-21a).

121
122 Our unity is also grounded in our common baptism:

123
124 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one
125 hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God
126 and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all
127 (Ephesians 4:4-6).

128
129 For over a century, The Episcopal Church has engaged in dialogue with other churches on the
130 basis of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, taking agreement on these foundation principles as
131 the essentials for sharing in mission and ministry with other Christian communions:

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133 The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as “containing all things necessary
134 to salvation,” and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith.

135
136 The Apostles’ Creed, as the Baptismal Symbol; and the Nicene Creed, as the sufficient
137 statement of the Christian faith.

138
139 The two Sacraments ordained by Christ Himself — Baptism and the Supper of the Lord
140 — ministered with unfailing use of Christ's Words of Institution, and of the elements
141 ordained by Him.

142
143 The Historic Episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the
144 varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into Unity.

145
146 It is important to note the term used in the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral is “historic
147 episcopate.” In its ecumenical dialogues, The Episcopal Church has made important
148 clarifications regarding the historic episcopate, historic succession, and apostolic succession.
149 This term is referenced in the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral as “the historic episcopate,” with
150 the two terms “historic episcopate” and “historic succession” understood synonymously.

151
152 In addition, a major ecumenical breakthrough has been acknowledging the differences between
153 “apostolic succession” and “historic episcopate.” We understand “apostolic succession” to be
154 succession in the apostolic faith – that is, to believe, preach, and teach the faith that the apostles’
155 held. Some churches have retained the apostolic succession of the faith proclaimed by the
156 apostles as well as bishops in historic succession; others have not. The United Methodist Church
157 and The Episcopal Church have affirmed the relationship between episcopacy and apostolic
158 succession as described in the seminal ecumenical document *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*
159 (1982):

160
161 The primary manifestation of apostolic succession is to be found in the apostolic tradition of
162 the Church as a whole...The orderly transmission of the ordained ministry is therefore a
163 powerful expression of the continuity of the Church throughout history; it also underlines the
164 calling of the ordained minister as guardian of the faith... Under the particular historical
165 circumstances of the growing Church in the early centuries, the succession of bishops
166 became one of the ways, together with the transmission of the Gospel and the life of the
167 community, in which the apostolic tradition of the Church was expressed. This succession
168 was understood as serving, symbolizing and guarding the continuity of the apostolic faith and
169 communion.³

170
171 Both churches affirm the historic episcopate, in the language of the *Baptism, Eucharist and*
172 *Ministry* statement, as a “sign, but not a guarantee, of the catholicity, unity, and continuity of the
173 church;” and that the historic episcopate is always in a process of reform in the service of the
174 Gospel.

³ *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, ¶¶ M35 and M36.

175 The United Methodist Church provides episcopacy through an “itinerant general superintendency.”
176 The Council of Bishops provides oversight to the spiritual and temporal work of the church and
177 that bishops are elected in regional representative conferences and subject to assignment.

178

179

180 We declare that we recognize one another as members of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic
181 church in which the Gospel is rightly preached and taught; and that the basic teaching of each
182 respective church is consonant with the Gospel and is sufficiently compatible.

183

Affirmations

184 Both The United Methodist Church and The Episcopal Church affirm
185 common doctrines and practices on the basis of our authoritative historic
186 documents and formularies:

187

188 Our churches proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

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190 Our churches worship one God as the divine Trinity of Father, Son,
191 and Holy Spirit, and we baptize those who enter the Christian
192 community in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

192

193 Our churches affirm the Holy Scriptures as “containing all things
194 necessary for salvation,” and as the primary rule for the life of the
195 church.

195

196 Our churches affirm and use the Nicene and Apostles’ Creeds as
197 sufficient summaries of the Christian faith.

197

198 Our churches understand and practice the sacrament of holy
199 baptism as initiation into the life of Christ through the Church.

199

200 Our churches understand and practice the sacrament of the
201 Eucharist (the Lord's Supper, Holy Communion) as a means of
202 divine grace that sustains and deepens our faith.

202

203 Our churches continue to worship in ways that reflect our common
204 liturgical and sacramental roots in our authorized liturgies.

204

205 Our churches affirm the role of bishops as leaders of the life, work,
206 and mission of the church, as symbols of unity, and as guiding and
207 maintaining the church's apostolic faith and work.

207

208 Our churches affirm the gifts and ministries of all persons as
209 grounded in the grace given in baptism.

209

210 Our churches have worked in the last half century to restore the
211 office of deacon as a permanent order for servant ministry in the
212 life of the church.

212 Our churches affirm the need for prayer and holiness of heart and
213 life as ways of growth in the Christian faith.

214 Our churches pursue social action and justice as inherent practices
215 of Christian discipleship.

216 Our churches affirm the unity of the church as the will of Christ for
217 the sake of mission, service and evangelism.

218 Our churches affirm that the scriptures are to be understood today
219 in the light of reasoned reflection on our contemporary experience.

220 From Theological Foundation for Full Communion, pp. 14-15.

221 5. *The Ministry of Lay Persons*
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223 Our churches believe that the ministry of all people is grounded in baptism, where we share in
224 Christ’s eternal priesthood. We recognize one another’s baptisms into the one, holy, catholic,
225 and apostolic church. In addition, over the years, we have developed a number of lay ministries.
226 From its beginning as a movement in the Church of England, Methodism has recognized the
227 central importance of lay leadership. In the United Methodist Church, every lay person is called
228 to participate in the mission of the Church. The Church affirms that “the ministry of the laity
229 flows from a commitment to Christ’s outreaching love. Lay members of The United Methodist
230 Church are, by history and calling, active advocates of the gospel of Jesus Christ.” (2012
231 Discipline, ¶127) Lay leaders serve at congregational, district, and conference levels. Lay
232 persons may be trained and certified as lay servants, lay speakers, lay missionaries, lay ministers
233 and as Deaconesses and Home Missioners.
234

235 The Catechism of The Episcopal Church states that “The ministers of the Church are lay persons,
236 bishops, priests, and deacons.”⁴ Baptism is understood as foundation for the ministry of all the
237 baptized, as the people pray that the newly baptized “Confess the faith of Christ crucified,
238 proclaim his resurrection, and share with us in his eternal priesthood.”⁵ In the Episcopal Church,
239 persons may be trained and licensed as a Pastoral Leader, Worship Leader, Preacher, Eucharistic
240 Minister, Eucharistic Visitor, Evangelist, and Catechist. The Episcopal Church and The United
241 Methodist Church acknowledge the interchangeability of one another’s lay ministries, always
242 according to the standards and polity of the Book of Discipline and the Constitution and Canons
243 of the Episcopal Church.
244

245 6. *The Ministry of Deacons*
246

247 The Episcopal Church and The United Methodist Church have witnessed a revival of the office
248 of deacon. There are persons ordained to a ministry of Word and Service, serving as icons of the
249 servant ministry of Jesus Christ. As a result of the actions taken by both churches in ¶ 9, we
250 affirm the mutual interchangeability of deacons, always according to the standards and polity of
251 each church. We also note that The Episcopal Church has retained the office of deacon for those

⁴ BCP, p. 855.

⁵ BCP, p. 308.

252 persons called to the priesthood, while The United Methodist Church no longer ordains persons
253 called to be elders as deacons.

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255 7. *The Ministry of Presbyters/Elders*

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257 Both of our churches ordain persons to the office of presbyter to exercise a ministry of Word and
258 Sacrament. In The Episcopal Church, the terms presbyter and priest are most commonly used.
259 In The United Methodist Church, the term elder, which is the English translation of presbyter, is
260 used (though presbyter is used by some member churches of the World Methodist Council). The
261 Episcopal Church speaks of clergy “in good standing,” either canonically resident in a diocese or
262 licensed to preside in a particular diocese. The United Methodist Church speaks of elders “in full
263 connection.” We affirm the mutual interchangeability of priests/presbyters in good standing and
264 elders in full connection, always according to the standards and polity of each church.⁶

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266 8. *The Ministry of Bishops*

267
268 We acknowledge and recognize that both churches have adapted the historic episcopate to
269 particular circumstances of mission, ministry, and witness. Following the American Revolution,
270 The Episcopal Church adapted the office of bishop to its new missional context: bishops were
271 elected by representative bodies (Diocesan Conventions) and exercised oversight in conjunction
272 with clergy and laypersons. After the American Revolution, Methodists also adapted the historic
273 episcopate to the missional needs of their ministerial circumstances and settings. Early
274 Methodism adapted the office of bishop as an itinerant general superintendency, and the name of
275 the largest Methodist body incorporated the word: Methodist Episcopal Church, reflecting this
276 choice of episcopal governance.⁷ The United Methodist Church includes among its antecedent
277 denominations the Methodist Protestant Church resulting from a merger in 1939. The Methodist
278 Protestant Church incorporated the Methodist episcopacy at that time as it did not have the office
279 of bishop in its structure. In 1968, The United Methodist Church was created through the merger
280 of the Methodist Church with the Evangelical United Brethren Church, which also had bishops,
281 at which time the churches’ episcopacies were brought together into a unified whole.

282
283 In The Episcopal Church and The United Methodist Church, bishops are consecrated by other
284 bishops and ordain presbyters/elders and deacons. They exercise oversight in a specific
285 geographic area – the diocese or annual conference – and in conjunction with clergy and lay
286 persons.

287
288 We affirm the ministry of bishops in The United Methodist Church and The Episcopal Church to
289 be adaptations of the historic episcopate to the needs and concerns of the post-Revolutionary
290 missional context. We recognize the ministries of our bishops as fully valid and authentic.

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292 We lament any ways, whether intentionally or unintentionally, explicitly or implicitly, that
293 Episcopalians may have considered the ministerial orders of the United Methodist Church or its
294 predecessor bodies to be lacking God’s grace.

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It is our hope and prayer that in this full communion proposal we may heal these divisions, right the sin of separation from the 1780s, and share in these mutual adaptations of the historic episcopate for the greater unity of the church in mission and ministry.

9. *Actions of Both Churches*

Action concerning elders and deacons in full connection of The United Methodist Church

To enable the full communion that is coming into being by means of this agreement, The Episcopal Church hereby pledges, at the same time that this agreement is accepted by its General Convention and the General Conference of The United Methodist Church, to begin the process for enacting a temporary suspension, in this case only, of the 17th century restriction that “no persons are allowed to exercise the offices of bishop, priest, or deacon in this Church unless they are so ordained, or have already received such ordination with the laying on of hands by bishops who are themselves duly qualified to confer Holy Orders.” The purpose of this action will be to recognize the authenticity of elders and deacons in The United Methodist Church and to permit the full interchangeability and reciprocity of all United Methodist elders in full connection as priests and all United Methodist deacons in full connection as deacons in the Episcopal Church without any further ordination or re-ordination or supplemental ordination whatsoever, subject always to canonically or constitutionally approved invitation.

Action concerning priests and deacons of the Episcopal Church

Upon adoption of this agreement by the General Convention of the Episcopal Church and the General Conference of The United Methodist Church, all priests and deacons of the Episcopal Church are granted full interchangeability and reciprocity as elders and deacons, respectively, in The United Methodist Church without any further action, subject always to canonically or constitutionally approved invitation. There are no restrictions requiring a temporary suspension.

The two churches pledge to draw closer together by mutually honoring their respective adaptations of the historic episcopate according to the following pattern:

Actions concerning bishops of both churches.

To share in our mutual adaptations of the historic episcopate, to embody our conviction that our ministries of bishops are fully valid and authentic, and to broaden and deepen our ecumenical partnerships, both churches commit to the following actions:

The United Methodist Church pledges that, effective January 1, 2022⁸, all future consecrations of United Methodist bishops will include at least three bishops drawn from common full

⁸ This date assumes an affirmative vote at the 2021 General Convention of The Episcopal Church and 2020 General Conference of The United Methodist Church. It may need to be adjusted to reflect the year of the actual endorsement and acceptance of this proposal by General Convention and General Conference.

337 communion partners with The Episcopal Church (the Moravian Church and the Evangelical
338 Lutheran Church in America), and with at least one Episcopal Church bishop present. These
339 bishops will be present and participate in the laying on of hands.

340
341 The Episcopal Church pledges that, effective January 1, 2022, all future ordinations and
342 consecrations of Episcopal bishops will include at least three bishops drawn from common full
343 communion partners with The United Methodist Church (the Moravian Church and the
344 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) and with at least one United Methodist bishop present.
345 These bishops will be present and participate in the laying on of hands.

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348 10. *Joint Commission*

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350 To assist in joint planning for mission, both churches will authorize the establishment of a joint
351 commission, fully accountable to the decision-making bodies of the two churches.

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353 This Commission will be charged with planning an appropriate liturgy to celebrate the full
354 communion inaugurated by this agreement. This liturgy will acknowledge the pain of division,
355 call for reconciliation and forgiveness for any sins of the past, and look with hope to celebrate
356 the common mission and witness to which we commit ourselves.

357

358 Its purpose will also be consultative, to facilitate mutual support and advice as well as common
359 decision making through appropriate channels in fundamental matters that the churches may face
360 together in the future. The joint commission will work with the appropriate boards, committees,
361 commissions, and staff of the two churches concerning such ecumenical, doctrinal, pastoral, and
362 liturgical matters as may arise, always subject to approval by the appropriate decision-making
363 bodies of the two churches.

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365 11. *Other Relationships*

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367 The United Methodist Church and The Episcopal Church agree to cultivate and maintain active
368 partnership and consultation with one another in the promotion of unity with other churches and
369 religions. Ecumenical and interreligious agreements entered into by one church represented in
370 this agreement with another church or religious group shall not be understood to impose or imply
371 any formal relationship with the other.

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373 12. *Conclusion*

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375 We give thanks for the gift of unity that is given us through the love of Christ Jesus. We rejoice
376 that this relationship will empower us to more authentically witness to the gospel.

377

378 Charles Wesley, a priest in the Church of England and co-leader with his brother, John, in the
379 Methodist movement in 18th Century England, wrote:

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381 Blest be the dear uniting love that will not let us part; or bodies may far off remove,
382 we still are one in heart.

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We all are one who him receive, and each with each agree, in him the One, the Truth
we live, blest point of unity!

Partakers of the Savior's grace, the same in mind and heart, nor joy, nor grief, nor time,
nor place, nor life, nor death can part.

Soli Deo gloria!