

**INFORMATION DOCUMENT
FOR THE MORAVIAN-EPISCOPAL FULL COMMUNION PROPOSAL**

Developed by the Commission on Unity and Ecumenical Affairs of the Southern Province
November 2009

(1) Where can I find a copy of the proposal?

On the Southern Province web site, www.mcsp.org.

(2) What is the meaning of "full communion"?

A statement, "The Meaning of Full Communion," prepared by the Provincial Commission on Unity and Ecumenical Affairs and reported to the Synod of 2002, explains that "when we mutually affirm a relationship of full communion with another church:

1. We mutually recognize and respect each other as part of the one holy, catholic [universal] and apostolic church [the church passed down faithfully from the apostles] which affirms its faith through the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds of the church.
2. We mutually recognize each other's practice of the dominical sacraments [the sacraments instituted by our Lord Jesus – baptism and Holy Communion], thus allowing for joint worship, eucharistic fellowship [fellowship around the Lord's Table], and exchangeability of members.
3. We recognize the validity of the ministerial orders [normally ordination as deacons, presbyters and bishops, though some denominations may not have all three orders] of the other church, allowing for the orderly interchange of ordained ministers subject to the regulations of church order and practice of each church.
4. We acknowledge our differences, recognizing the autonomy of each church regarding structure, doctrine, liturgy, and positions on social and ethical issues. At the same time, being in full communion, we shall be open to the encouragement and admonition of the other church for the sake of the Gospel.
5. We recognize and value the distinctive gifts present in each historic but separated part of the Body of Christ, thus believing we have contributions which we can make to each other.
6. We will cooperate in common Christian mission through full communion in faith, life, and witness."

The full statement is available on the Southern Province web site, mcsp.org.

(3) What full communion agreements have been developed among various denominations in recent years?

Completed agreements:

The United Church of Christ—The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

The Episcopal Church—The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America—The Moravian Church in America (Northern and Southern Provinces; extended to include the Moravian Church—Eastern West Indies Province and offered to the Alaska Province)

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America—The Presbyterian Church (USA)—The United Church of Christ—The Reformed Church in America.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America—The United Methodist Church

Interim Eucharistic Sharing:

The Moravian Church (Northern and Southern Provinces)—The Episcopal Church
The Episcopal Church—The United Methodist Church

Other pending agreements:

The Presbyterian Church (USA)—The Moravian Church in America (Northern and Southern Provinces) Covenant Agreement. This has been approved by the Presbyterian (USA) General Assembly in 2008 and ratified by the presbyteries in 2009. It is to be considered by the Moravian synods in 2010.

Other conversations are in progress both nationally and internationally

(4) Is the issue of full communion between churches critical to the mission of the Church of Jesus Christ?

Consider Jesus' prayer for his Church on the night before he knew he would die: "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." (John 17:20-23) It is obvious that Jesus knew that the success of his Church in bringing people to the Father is dependent in a critical way on his followers being one in Him.

And we certainly should not overlook our own Moravian convictions. In the basic document setting forth our faith, *The Ground of the Unity*, we declare that "We believe in and confess the Unity of the Church given in the one Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior. He died that He might unite the scattered children of God. As the living Lord and Shepherd, He is leading His flock toward such unity....It is the Lord's will that Christendom should give evidence of and seek unity in Him with zeal and love. We confess our share in the guilt which is manifest in the severed and divided state of Christendom. By means of such divisions we ourselves hinder the message and power of the Gospel. We recognize the danger of self-righteousness and judging others without love....Since we together with all Christendom are pilgrims on the way to meet our coming Lord, we welcome every step that brings us nearer the goal of unity in Him. He himself invites us to communion in His supper. Through it He leads the Church toward that union which He has promised. By means of His presence in the Holy Communion He makes our unity in Him evident and certain."

The issue that is critical to the mission of Christ's Church is giving evidence that we are at one with our fellow Christians because Christ has called us into such oneness, "so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

(5) Why have we been discussing full communion with The Episcopal Church and a Covenant agreement with the Presbyterian Church (USA), and have adopted a full communion agreement with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America?

Perhaps the first and most basic reason is that our church has sought close relationships with other branches of the church out of serious concern that we might help realize the Oneness of the Savior's followers which was his prayer on the night before he died (John 17 – see #4 above).

Actually, our most ancient forbears looked for other Christians with whom they might

join in seeking reform in the 1400s before beginning as the *Unitas Fratrum*. Then they encouraged Martin Luther and others who were to seek reform in the 1500s. In the 1700s Zinzendorf worked diligently to get Christians in Pennsylvania on the same page. This and other efforts on behalf of the unity of Christians earned him the reputation of “the Ecumenical Pioneer.” Our convictions are written in strong terms in our most important doctrinal statement, *The Ground of the Unity* (see #4 above).

Another reason is that Moravians, Lutherans, Anglicans (the spiritual family that includes the Episcopalians), and Reformed Churches (the spiritual family that includes Presbyterians) represent four of the first Protestant Church families. While our Church dates from 1457, the other three Protestant families of churches began pursuing their “Reformation theologies and practices” between 1517 and 1534. For our four Protestant traditions to be in full communion would represent a remarkable coming together of those who felt the need for reform and are looked to by many of the other Protestant churches for leadership in ecumenical circles today. Actually, being the worldwide missionary church that we are, we have worked together with Lutherans and Anglicans in Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean over the centuries. Right now an Anglican priest is helping out our work in Labrador where we are in need of a clergy person. And we have cooperated with Presbyterians and the Reformed Church in America in our country since the 1950’s in producing Christian Education materials.

Another reason we have entered into this process with Episcopalians is that this is in harmony with relationships established with the Church of England (Anglican) through the years, including by Comenius and Zinzendorf. During Zinzendorf’s time the British Parliament in 1749 declared the Moravians to be an ancient Protestant Episcopal church. A dialogue between the British Province of the Moravian Church and the Church of England continued from 1878 to 1936. Following an overture from the Moravians, a sustained period of discussions took place from 1989 to 1995 resulting in the “Fetter Lane Agreement” which recognized congruence in all matters of doctrine.

(6) What is the opinion of the PECs and bishops of the Northern and Southern Provinces regarding the proposed agreements with the Presbyterian Church (USA) and The Episcopal Church?

The PECs of both Provinces have endorsed the proposals. In August 2008, the participants in the 14th Inter-Provincial Bishops Conference affirmed both proposals and unanimously supported the documents being presented to the synods of the Northern and Southern Provinces in 2010.

(7) What are the practical results of a full communion agreement?

Strengthening our common mission with other Christians is a goal of full communion. Already our dialogue has opened potential lines of significant cooperation in such areas as addressing concerns that affect our work at Star Mountain through The Episcopal Church Office in Jerusalem, cooperation in new church planting and development, addressing church and society issues locally and nationally, cooperation in youth and camping ministries, and clergy continuing education. Full communion agreements offer the opportunity for mutual cooperation and laboring together in any number of vehicles for witness, mission and ministry, enabling Moravians to benefit from increased opportunities offered by larger denominations and diminished need for developing resources and providing staff on our own.

A full communion agreement offers opportunities for enhancing the life and ministry of

local congregations. Some of our congregations have already experienced closer relationships and mutual ministries with neighboring congregations of other denominations through the “Getting to Know You” program developed with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and then with The Episcopal Church. The dialogue with The Episcopal Church produced a process for facilitating cooperative ministry and mission among Moravian and Episcopal congregations entitled, “When Did We See You?” This program leads congregations through Bible study and study of their denominational traditions leading to gathering data on needs in the community and taking action together to meet such needs. This may involve participation in existing ministries, such as Habitat for Humanity, neighborhood home repairs, Laurel Ridge mission camps, or disaster relief, or in establishing a new ministry to meet an identified need. Joint worship opportunities provide a means of witnessing to and experiencing our unity in Christ.

(8) How is the Anglican Communion in which The Episcopal Church participates similar to the worldwide Moravian Unity?

The Anglican Communion is similar in many ways to the worldwide Moravian Unity, but the historical development of Anglican churches has resulted in autonomous Anglican churches around the world rather than to the structural unity of the worldwide Moravian Church. These autonomous Anglican churches cooperate in many ways and clergy ordained in any of them may generally be licensed or transferred without reordination to serve in any of the churches.

Four Instruments of Unity keep the Anglican churches in spiritual unity with each other – the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council, and the Primates’ meeting. The Archbishop of Canterbury presides at Church of England synods and Anglican Communion meetings. He invites other Anglican bishops to the Lambeth Conference, held every ten years since 1867 for consultation. The bishops’ resolutions have moral, but no legal, authority.

The Anglican Consultative Council was formed after the Lambeth Conference of 1968 “to facilitate the co-operative work of the member churches of the Anglican Communion, to share information about developments in one or more provinces of the Anglican Communion with the other parts of the Communion and to serve as needed as an instrument of common action, and to advise on” a number of matters of common concern. It includes clergy and lay representatives from the 40 Anglican churches and usually meets every three years.

Anglican Primates have met for consultation and mutual advice about every two years since 1978. They include the chief archbishop or bishop of each of the autonomous Anglican churches.

(9) Does The Episcopal Church have an official doctrinal statement such as we have in The Ground of the Unity?

The doctrine of The Episcopal Church is defined in the canon law (Title IV, canon 15) as "the basic and essential teachings of the church. The Doctrine of the Church is to be found in the Canon of Holy Scripture as understood in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds and in the sacramental rites, the Ordinal and Catechism of the Book of Common Prayer."

For over 120 years The Episcopal Church has held to the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, which outlines four points upon which Anglican seek full communion with other Christians. These four points,

- 1) Old and New Testaments as the Word of God,

- 2) The Apostles' and Nicene Creeds,
- 3) The two sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist, and
- 4) The historic episcopate, locally adapted,

are also considered to be a summary of the historic Christian faith of the ancient and undivided churches, on which Anglicans are “incapable” of compromising.

(10) How is The Episcopal Church governed?

The Episcopal Church includes over 104 geographical dioceses. Some include a whole state and others parts of states or parts of adjoining states. It also includes dioceses in Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Columbia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Taiwan, Micronesia, and a Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe. A few congregations in the British Virgin Islands are in the domestic diocese of the Virgin Islands. For regional cooperation the 104 dioceses are grouped into nine provinces.

Each diocese has an annual convention of clergy and lay representatives of the congregations; the bishop presides at convention and is the chief executive of the diocese. Episcopal bishops, like Moravian bishops, ordain at the request of the church, serve as pastors to the pastors, and meet annually to consult on the state of the church. The bishop’s ministry of intercession for the church is not as clearly expressed in The Episcopal Church as it is in the Moravian Church. Episcopal bishops also are assigned executive and administrative responsibilities, exercised in all cases in cooperation with elected committees of clergy and lay people.

Each diocese, regardless of size, is represented by four clergy and four lay people in the House of Deputies of General Convention held every three years. All bishops form the House of Bishops at General Convention and all actions must be approved by both houses. The General Convention adopts the Prayer Book and canons governing the ministry of the church.

Congregations contribute to the diocesan budget and dioceses to a national church budget which funds missionary work and other needs of the whole church.

The House of Bishops elects a Presiding Bishop for a nine year term to preside at meetings of the bishops and to oversee the work of the whole church. The Presiding Bishop arranges for the consecration of bishops and has some authority by canon for their discipline. Dioceses also have responsibility for the discipline of clergy with final authority being exercised by the diocesan bishop.

Historically Episcopal clergy have exercised great freedom of expression. While the Presiding Bishop can express the church’s position on matters on which the General Convention has made a decision, opinions on other matters are received with respect but, sometimes, not without considered and respectful disagreement.

(11) What size is The Episcopal Church?

In 2007 the 104 dioceses reported membership of 2,116,749 and Average Sunday Attendance of 727,833. On an average Sunday 34 per cent of church members are in church.

(12) Why have some congregations and dioceses separated from The Episcopal Church in recent years?

Disagreement with actions of General Convention has over the years led three groups of clergy and people to leave The Episcopal Church. All these groups have felt the Convention had departed from important Biblical principles.

In 1873 a bishop objected to what he saw as undue emphasis on baptismal regeneration and formed the Reformed Episcopal Church. In 1976 the ordination of women as priests and the adoption of a revised version of the Book of Common Prayer led to a number of “continuing Anglican” churches.

Since 2003 majorities in four dioceses and in some parishes who objected to the consecration of Bishop V. Gene Robinson in New Hampshire have been accepted as parts of other Anglican dioceses and provinces. Other issues include perceived differences in Christology and moral theology including the blessing in some dioceses of same-sex unions.

The 2006 General Convention approved a resolution that calls on bishops and Standing Committees to “exercise restraint by not consenting to the consecration of any candidate to the episcopate whose manner of life presents a challenge to the wider church and will lead to further strains on communion.”

At the 2009 General Convention by a two-thirds vote the bishops and clergy and lay deputies agreed to "affirm that God has called and may call such individuals [gay and lesbian persons], to any ordained ministry in The Episcopal Church, and that God's call to this ordained ministry in The Episcopal Church is a mystery which the Church attempts to discern for all people through our discernment processes acting in accordance with the Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church." They also "acknowledge that members of The Episcopal Church, as of the Anglican Communion, based on careful study of the Holy Scriptures and in light of tradition and reason, are not of one mind, and Christians of good conscience disagree about some of these matters."

In another action the 2009 General Convention resolved “that bishops, particularly those in dioceses within civil jurisdictions where same-gender marriage, civil unions, or domestic partnerships are legal, may provide generous pastoral response to meet the needs of members of this Church.”

Estimates are that about five per cent of the members have departed. Others with similar objections to current actions have chosen not to leave.

(13) Does full communion mean that any Episcopal clergy can serve in the Moravian Church and any Moravian clergy can serve in The Episcopal Church?

The Moravian Church currently recognizes clergy of other Christian denominations, and, if they are approved for service in the Moravian Church, they are received rather than re-ordained. Before being received into service in our Province, however, any clergy from other denominations, including those with whom we are in full communion, must first meet our expectations for ordained ministry as expressed in the document, "Standards of Responsible Behavior for Ordained Ministers in the Moravian Church," and be approved by the Provincial Elders' Conference. The same would be true for clergy from other denominations who engage in temporary service in the Province. Before serving in The Episcopal Church, Moravian clergy would have to meet The Episcopal Church's expectations.

(14) How will full communion affect our relationship with the rest of the Moravian Unity?

Full communion with another denomination does not affect our relationship with the rest of the Moravian Unity. (Note, for example, that there has been no change following our full communion agreement with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.) Leaders in other Provinces have encouraged our pursuit of full communion in the processes we have engaged in thus far.

(15) How much money will full communion cost the Moravian Church, initially and ongoing?

There will be no additional cost in the Provincial Budget related to the establishment of full communion with The Episcopal Church.

(16) What is our Synod of 2010 being asked to do?

The three parties involved have been asked to give the proposal for full communion earnest and prayerful consideration and to arrive at a decision either approving or rejecting the proposal as received (without any amendments).

(17) When will action be taken on the proposal?

At The Episcopal Church's General Convention, July 8-17, 2009, in Anaheim, California, the proposal was given unanimous approval by both the House of Bishops and House of Delegates.

The Northern Province will consider the proposal at its Synod, June 17-21, 2010, in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

The Southern Province will consider the proposal at its Synod, September 8-12, 2010.

(18) What happens if the Northern Province and Southern Province don't vote the same way on full communion with The Episcopal Church?

The Province which approves the document and The Episcopal Church will be in full communion with each other.