

PRESBYTERIAN/EPISCOPAL BI-LATERAL DIALOGUE REPORT AND AGREEMENT

I. Background

It has been nearly fifty years since the Rev. Eugene Carson Blake, Stated Clerk of the United Presbyterian Church in the USA, proposed in a sermon at Grace Episcopal Cathedral, San Francisco, the establishment of a dialogue between the Protestant Episcopal Church and the United Presbyterian Church in the USA, in the hope that this would result in a united church that would be “truly catholic, truly reformed, and truly evangelical”. This would later be expanded to include the United Methodist Church and, subsequently, seven other denominations, including three historically black Methodist denominations. This would give rise to the Consultation on Church Union, which would subsequently be succeeded in this vision in 2001 by Churches Uniting in Christ, with ten denominations from the Reformed, Anglican, Methodist and Moravian traditions.

Historically, Anglicanism and Presbyterianism grew up as cousins, if not siblings, in England, Scotland and later in Ireland and Wales, and these traditions were transplanted into the American context during the colonial period. Having had common roots in Britain, as well as in the colonies, and being generally of similar socio-economic and educational levels, Presbyterians and Episcopalians have over the years engaged in conversations towards unity on and off since the 1890s.

The definitive statement of the basis for church union in the Episcopal Church, indeed in Anglicanism as a whole, is the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral. Originally an invitation by the American Episcopal Bishops to discussions of union with various other church bodies, churches from the Presbyterian tradition alone responded. There were no permanent results of these discussions, although these conversations were background to subsequent and serious proposals towards merger in the 1940s.

II. THE DIALOGUE

The current Presbyterian-Episcopal dialogue is a direct outgrowth of our common participation on the Consultation on Church Union. At the 1999 plenary of COCU, the PCUSA and The Episcopal Church were asked to consider engaging in a bilateral discussion in an attempt to address questions of ministry and polity which would need to be resolved if COCU was to go forward. The 2000 General Convention of the Episcopal Church authorized a bilateral dialogue with the PCUSA. At their initial meeting, held concurrently with the inauguration of CUIC in January, 2002, it was decided that the dialogue’s conversations would take place within the larger context of CUIC’s Ministry Task Force which was to drafting a proposal for the recognition and reconciliation of ministries.

Members:

For PCUSA: Elder Freda Gardner, Co-Convener; Dr. Dale Gruder ; Elder Moon Lee; Elder Janice Sperry; the Rev. Dr. George Telford; and the Rev. Dr. Philip Wickeri. Staff support has been provided by the Rev. Robina Winbush and the Rev. Carlos Malave. The Rev. Dr. Lewis Mudge and the Rev. Dr. Joseph Small, Office of Theology have consulted.

For The Episcopal Church: James Foster; the Rev. Dan Krutz; the Rev. Dirk Reinken; the Rev. Sandra Richardson; the Rt. Rev. Douglas Theuner, Co-Convener; and Dr. Fredrica Harris Thompsett. Staff support has been provided by the Rt. Rev. Christopher C. Epting and Dr. Thomas Ferguson. The Rev. Canon J. Robert Wright has consulted.

The Dialogue has met twice annually since its first meeting in January, 2001 in a variety of venues, including seminaries, diocesan/presbytery offices, and at two Presbyterian-Episcopal congregations, Indian Hill Church in Cincinnati and St. Matthew's Episcopal/Wilton Presbyterian Church in Wilton, Connecticut. The dialogue team was also in conversation with the concurrent work of the Ministry Task Force of CUIC.

The Dialogue has extensively examined relevant documents and deliberations from the past and present both in the United States and abroad, including the Formula of Agreement between the PCUSA and the ELCA, United Church of Christ, and the Reformed Church in America; Call to Common Mission agreement between the Episcopal Church and the ELCA; and the Mutual Recognition and Mutual Reconciliation of Ministries draft document of the CUIC Ministry Task Force. At every meeting of the Dialogue, members have worshipped together using rites approved by either denomination or according to the authorized CUIC liturgy, with ordained ministers of each denomination officiating.

Among the most significant achievements of the Dialogue was the co-sponsorship with CUIC of a Consultation on Episcopate held in St. Louis in October, 2006. In addition to opening and closing remarks by representatives of the Disciples of Christ and the Methodist tradition, there were five scholarly papers presented: one by an Episcopalian, two from the Reformed Tradition (PCUSA and UCC) and one each by a member of the ELCA and the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. These papers, together with three bible studies by the Rev. John Ford (Roman Catholic) and other related presentations have been published in *Call to Unity: Resourcing the Church for Ecumenical Ministry*, generously published by the Council on Christianity Unity of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

III. CONCLUSION

At its initial meeting in Memphis in January, 2002 members of the dialogue present all agreed that both churches were within the "apostolic succession" as defined by the *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* statement: to stand in the succession of the apostolic faith. However the dialogue was still unable to agree on a basis for full mutual recognition and reconciliation of ministry. Disagreements centered on the concepts of

“personal” and “corporate” *episcopate*. Episcopalians hold that in order to be in full communion there must be a sharing in the sign of the historic succession of bishops. Presbyterians believe that *episcopate* has been passed on corporately from apostolic times through the laying-on-of-hands within the presbyterate and speak of a threefold office of ministry (deacon, presbyter, and bishop) within the local congregation as a reflection of the ordering of ministry within the apostolic period. Of concern to Presbyterians was the feeling that the CUIC Ministry Task Force proposal failed to recognize the significance of the presbyterate, which Episcopalians felt that they had done in the United States through the requirement of lay involvement and approval at virtually every level of ecclesiastical governance, albeit their lay people are not ordained as elders.

Mutual recognition and reconciliation seems to rest upon mutual acceptance of the concepts of “personal” and “corporate” *episcopate*. Until this matter is mutually resolved it will be difficult to move into full altar and pulpit fellowship, the place where mutual ministry between the denominations seems most likely to have an effect at the parish level. Because of that the Dialogue has met with collaborating congregations of each denomination and seeks to encourage church leaders to initiate and nourish additional relationships of that type. Although full mutual recognition and reconciliation of ministry still eludes us, we believe we have found a way in which to encourage preliminary altar and pulpit fellowship and, hence, to allow our congregations of both denominations to commonly pursue the mission and ministry of Christ’s One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, a reality which we believe already exists in the Mind of God.

To that end, the Presbyterian/Episcopal Dialogue requests our respective authorizing bodies to consider the following Agreement; to reconstitute the Dialogue for future deliberations; and that both of our Heads of Communion commit themselves publicly to this effort and to consider a public celebration of our progress to date and our hope for the future.

Agreement between the Episcopal Church and the Presbyterian Church (USA)

1. We acknowledge one another's churches as churches belonging to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church;
2. We acknowledge that in our churches the Word of God is authentically preached and the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist are duly administered;
3. We acknowledge one another's ordained ministries as given by God and instruments of grace, and look forward to the time when the reconciliation of our churches makes possible the full interchangeability of ministers;
4. We acknowledge that personal and collegial oversight (*episcopate*) is embodied and exercised in our churches in a variety of forms, episcopal and non-episcopal, as a visible sign of the Church's unity and continuity in apostolic life, mission and ministry.
5. We agree that authorized ministers of our churches may, subject to the regulations of the churches and within the limits of their competence,¹ carry out the tasks of their own office in congregations of the other churches when requested and approved by the diocesan bishop and local presbytery;
6. We agree that The Episcopal Church will invite members of the Presbyterian Church (USA) to receive Holy Communion in their churches and the Presbyterian Church (USA) will invite members of The Episcopal Church to receive Holy Communion in their churches. We encourage the members of our churches to accept this Eucharistic hospitality and thus express their unity with each other in the one Body of Christ;
7. We agree to continue to dialogue in the areas such as diaconal ministries, historic episcopate, the office of elder, etc. that would lead to full reconciliation of our ministries and interchangeability of our ministers.
8. We encourage diocesan bishops and presbyteries to provide regular occasion for planning, discussing, resourcing for missional, educational and liturgical life together. In addition, to explore possibilities for new church development and redevelopment together.
9. We agree to develop a process to support and implement the above recommendations.²

¹ Because we do not yet have reconciliation and full interchangeability of ordained ministries, all authorization for these special opportunities must conform to the Book of Worship and the Book of Order of the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the Book of Common Prayer and the Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church.

² Guidelines will be developed by each of the communions.

10. We affirm these proposals mark an important step in moving toward the full, visible unity of the Church. We know that beyond this commitment lies a move from the recognition to the reconciliation of churches and ministries within the wider fellowship of the universal Church