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**A Theological Foundation for Full Communion
between The Episcopal Church
and The United Methodist Church**

**The Episcopal-United Methodist Dialogue Team
adopted 16 April 2010**

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PREFATORY NOTE

The following document, *A Theological Foundation for Full Communion between The Episcopal Church and The United Methodist Church*, was adopted by the Episcopal-United Methodist Dialogue Team on Friday, April 16, 2010. As noted in the text of the document, the document speaks only for our current Episcopal-United Methodist dialogue team at this point, but it is commended to our churches for study and discussion. This is a preliminary printing of the document, but the text that follows is the text as adopted by the Dialogue Team. A more formal printing will follow and will be available both as a hardcopy book and also for download.

The membership of the Episcopal-United Methodist Dialogue Team at the time when the statement was adopted is as follows.

The Episcopal Church:

The Rt. Rev. Frank Brookhart, *co-chair*
 The Rev. Dr. Paula Barker
 The Very Rev. David Bird
 The Rev. Theodora Brooks
 The Rt. Rev. Philip Duncan
 Ms. Janet Farmer
 The Rev. Dr. Thomas Ferguson, *staff*
 Dr. Bruce Mullin
 Dr. Patricia Page

The United Methodist Church:

Bishop William Oden, *co-chair*
 Bishop Gregory Palmer, *co-chair*
 The Rev. Dr. Ted A. Campbell
 The Rev. Elizabeth Gamble, *staff*
 The Rev. Erica R. Jenkins
 The Rev. Dr. Diedra Kriewald
 The Rev. Dr. Russell E. Richey
 The Rev. Jeannie Treviño-Teddlie

The Dialogue Team has also included the following persons at various points in the period between 2002 and 2010 and we we acknowledge with gratitude their contributions to this report: the Rev. Lois Boxill (Episcopal), the Rt. Rev. Christopher Epting (Episcopal, interim co-chair), the Rt. Rev. John Lipscomb (Episcopal, former co-chair), Deacon Sunny Lopez (Episcopal), the Rev. Dr. Ephraim Radner (Episcopal), the Rev. Trey Hall (UMC), the Rev. Dr. Douglas Mills (UMC staff), and Bishop Fritz Mutti (interim representative of UMC General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns).

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INTRODUCTION

In accord with our Lord's prayer that all of his followers should be one (St. John 17:20-21a), and in accord with the mandate from our two ecclesiastical bodies, the Episcopal-United Methodist dialogue has set full communion as the goal for our future relationship. In this case, 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.¹

The present statement speaks only for our current Episcopal-United Methodist Dialogue Team. It has not yet been approved by church bodies but is submitted for the consideration of our churches and others. This is a documented theological statement that builds upon our earlier study guide *Make Us One in Christ*. But although this reflects the consensus of our group of United Methodist and Episcopal members, we have met on three occasions with leaders of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, and the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church and we are committed to the goal of including their churches in our dialogue and in possible agreements for full communion. We have also consulted with our counterparts in the British Anglican-Methodist dialogues, and we have kept abreast of developments in Churches Uniting in Christ (CUIC) and in two concurrent sets of bilateral dialogues: one between The United Methodist Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the other between The Episcopal Church and the two provincial synods in North America of the Moravian Church.

¹ *Make Us One With Christ*, the study guide produced by The Episcopal-United Methodist Dialogue Team, released in 2006, 16. See also ¶ 2 of *Called to Common Mission* (which established full communion between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and The Episcopal Church) and ¶ 3 of *Finding Our Delight in the Lord* (the proposal for full communion between The Episcopal Church and the Moravian Church).

The following aspects of this relationship that we seek deserve specific emphasis:

- This proposal is not a proposal for a merger of our two communions. Each will retain its autonomy, and its current structures, precedents, and practices, except at very specific points noted in this report where, for the sake of unity in mission, specific practices may be altered on the part of one or both churches.
- The proposal is grounded in the 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. We believe that we can move forward on the basis of the grace-given gift that we are not working from a point of disunity that involved any formal or corporate anathemas or excommunications or other formal assertions or declarations of disunity. Our two communions have already declared publicly, as churches, that we recognize each other as part of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church in which the Gospel is rightly preached.² We come now to find ways to make explicit and concrete our unity in faith, sacraments, and ministries.

Our quest for full communion is grounded in our calling to mission today, and we recognize that our current state of visible division is a hindrance to our mission. Both of our churches' governing documents try to define the mission of the Church in carrying out God's mission. The Episcopal Church states:

The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.³

Similarly, The United Methodist Church affirms:

The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.⁴

² See Resolution A055 of the 2006 General Convention and Resolution 81456-IC-NonDis of the 2008 United Methodist General Conference.

³ *Book of Common Prayer* of The Episcopal Church (1979), 855.

⁴ *Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2008), ¶ 120, p. 87.

We believe that our work towards full communion represents the practical living into our consistent prayers for unity. This goal of unity is stated as a petition in the Eucharistic liturgies of our churches. The Episcopal Church prays:

Let the grace of this Holy Communion make us one body, one spirit in Christ, that we may worthily serve the world in his name.⁵

Similarly, The United Methodist Church prays:

By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world...⁶

The form of visible unity envisioned here is a concrete expression of the unity we have long sought; indeed, the unity for which Christ himself prayed,

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 (St. John 17:20-21a).

A similar vision of unity is part of the description of the gathered community of Christians in the New Testament:

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

A significant part of the work in this dialogue has been to consider specific instances of ecumenical work in mission: for example how United Methodists and Episcopalians work together in a single congregation in Buena Vista, Colorado, and how Anglicans and Methodists work together in a local ecumenical partnership in East Barnet, London.

⁵ *Book of Common Prayer* (1979), liturgy for Holy Communion, 372. The Prayers of the People in the *Book of Common Prayer* also have specific prayers for Christian unity (*Book of Common Prayer* [1979], 387, 388-390, 392) as well as assigned readings and prayers on Christian unity for the celebration of the Eucharist (*Book of Common Prayer* [1979], 255, 929).

⁶ United Methodist liturgy for Word and Table I and II in *The United Methodist Hymnal: Book of United Methodist Worship* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1989; hereafter cited as “*United Methodist Hymnal* (1989)”), 10 and 14. *The United Methodist Hymnal* (1989) also includes prayers for Christian unity: see items 556, and 564.

The quest for visible unity is grounded, moreover, in earlier ecumenical work on the part of both of our churches. Both of our churches participated in the process of developing the World Council of Churches Faith and Order consensus document entitled *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*,⁷ both of our churches formally received this document, and the ecumenical consensus expressed here builds on the consensus expressed in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. Since that time, both The Episcopal Church and The United Methodist Church have entered into similar full communion agreements with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the form of visible unity envisioned here extends these earlier ecumenical agreements.⁸

The work of the United Methodist–Episcopal dialogue has also built on earlier Anglican–Methodist discussions. In England during the 1960s members of the British Methodist Church and the Church of England (albeit unsuccessfully) considered proposals for merger of the two traditions. As part of these dialogues, essential doctrinal agreement was reached between Anglicans and Methodists, as both the Church of England and Church of Ireland declared they needed “no further doctrinal assurances” from the Methodists, and similar agreement was stated in the International Anglican–Methodist dialogue’s statement, *Sharing in the Apostolic Communion*.⁹ In the United States, the Methodist–Episcopal dialogue in the 1950s was curtailed as both The United Methodist Church and The Episcopal Church were committed to multilateral dialogue in the Consultation on Church Union. Partially as a result of the success of the Anglican Methodist International Dialogue in the 1990s, a bilateral dialogue between the two churches began to meet in 2002. Part of the work of the dialogue group has been to consult with British counterparts concerning the status of the covenant relationship between the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Church of England.

⁷ *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, produced by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches in 1982 and formally adopted and received by The United Methodist Church and The Episcopal Church.

⁸ *Called to Common Mission* established full communion between The Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in 2001. *Confessing our Faith Together* established full communion between the ELCA and The United Methodist Church in 2009.

⁹ See *Sharing in the Apostolic Communion*, the theological statement issued by the International Anglican–Methodist Dialogue, particularly ¶ 15–17.

1. OUR COMMON ROOTS AND TRAJECTORIES

The Episcopal Church and The United Methodist Church share a common heritage in the broad tradition of English Christianity as well as the eighteenth-century Church of England, among other sources and influences. In the late eighteenth century, after the American Revolution, three groups of Anglicans in North America¹⁰ felt it necessary to adapt historic Anglican polity and worship in order to face the challenges of mission and ministry in the North American context. Two of these groups came together to form the Protestant Episcopal Church, now also known as The Episcopal Church; the other group formed the Methodist Episcopal Church, a principal predecessor church of The United Methodist Church. Both of these churches were forced to adapt Anglican polity in order to face the challenges of mission in the North American context. The resulting churches shared much in common, including similar liturgies and episcopally structured forms of church polity.

From the beginning, each of these groups included African-American as well as Euro-American constituents. United Methodism brings to the dialogue with The Episcopal Church the witness from and memory of its roots also in the United Brethren in Christ and the Evangelical Association. Leaders in these two pietist movements shared much with Methodism but came to faith as members of Reformed (William Otterbein), Mennonite (Martin Boehm) and Lutheran (Jacob Albright) communities. These two episcopally ordered churches, the United Brethren and Evangelicals, united in 1946. The 1968 conjoining of the Evangelical United Brethren and Methodist churches into The United Methodist Church effected something of an ecumenical statement in itself, a convergence, symbolically at least, of the four major Protestant Reformations (Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed, and Anabaptist). It is our belief that our predecessors in all of these churches would be pleased with our movement towards restored visible unity between their heirs, and we envision a form of unity in which we bring our ecclesial ancestors with us into restored unity.

Although this report focuses on the most critical theological and practical issues that we have faced in our quest for visible unity, many of

¹⁰ A group of Anglicans predominantly in the middle colonies took steps towards forming a church in 1785 and 1786. At the same time a group of Anglicans in Connecticut had elected Samuel Seabury as their bishop to seek consecration in England. In addition, there were the Anglicans who were members of the Methodist societies. See also the discussion of these groups in Robert W. Prichard, *A History of The Episcopal Church* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Morehouse, 1999), 111-114.

the factors that have divided us in the past have been non-theological matters. American H. Richard Niebuhr famously wrote of the social sources of denominationalism, and we have seen in the developments of our two churches how the dynamics described by Niebuhr¹¹ caused Episcopalians and Methodists to live almost parallel and separate existences. Niebuhr's work argued that class, nationality, region, language, and race were defining aspects in the sources of divisions within American Christianity, which in turn hindered the witness of the churches: "Denominationalism in the Christian Church is an acknowledged hypocrisy. It is a compromise made far too lightly, between Christianity and the world... It represents the accommodation of Christianity to the caste-system of human society."¹²

We have come to recognize especially that racial divisions have affected our church communities in differing ways. Initially the Methodist Episcopal Church involved African Americans as members and opposed slaveholding. Yet many Methodist divisions have had little to do with theological issues or issues of church practices, and everything to do with issues of attitudes towards slavery, with skin color and with enduring racial prejudice. Similarly, while The Episcopal Church on the national level never had legislated segregation, through various other means (such as the suffragan bishop canon and separate convocations of predominantly African American congregations) established *de facto* segregation on the diocesan level.¹³ The Episcopal Church has also formally apologized for its own involvement in slavery and racial injustice, and established processes for offering repentance for its actions.¹⁴

The United Methodist Church's 2000 General Conference held a service of repentance for racist acts and attitudes in the past that had led to the separate existence of historically black Methodist denominations. Moreover, the UMC followed this service with specific acts of reconciliation, in close cooperation with leaders in the African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, and Christian Methodist Episcopal Churches. In the year 2004, the UM General Conference held a service of thanksgiving to celebrate those African-American persons who had remained in the predecessor denominations of the UMC.

¹¹ As expressed in H. Richard Niebuhr's classic work, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (originally published in 1929; New York: World Publishing, 1972).

¹² Niebuhr, *Social Sources of Denominationalism*, 6.

¹³ See subsection 3.9 below on "Experiences of Race/Racism in the Histories of our Churches."

¹⁴ Resolution A123 from the 2006 General Convention.

2. OUR COMMON AFFIRMATION OF THE GOSPEL AND THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

The unity we seek is a unity grounded in common mission and common affirmation—as a foundation for all that follows—of the one apostolic Gospel, the churches' faith

*that Christ died for our sins
in accordance with the scriptures,
and that he was buried,
and that he was raised on the third day
in accordance with the scriptures (I Corinthians 15:3b-4).*

This is the faith expressed in our historic creeds, including the ancient Western baptismal creed that we commonly call the Apostles' Creed and the fourth-century creed associated with the councils of Nicaea and Constantinople.

This movement towards theological consensus has been the work of over forty years of labor. It involves contributions achieved during the British Methodist and Church of England discussions of the 1960s and 1970s, the shared response of Anglicans and Methodists to such documents as *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, our common affirmation of elements (though not the entirety) of *The COCU Consensus*, (which expanded on the section on ministry from *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*) and the international Anglican/Methodist agreement, *Sharing in the Apostolic Communion* (1996).

Significantly, *Sharing in the Apostolic Communion* identifies a common inheritance of Christian faith between Methodist and Anglican churches in this way:

The following can be affirmed as central ... doctrines that we share in common: we believe in God the eternal and undivided Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; in the work of God as Creator of all that is; in the saving work of our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and truly human; in the sanctifying and liberating work of the Holy Spirit. We recognise the fallenness of humankind and the need for redemption. We believe in the sufficiency of Christ's redemptive work; justification by grace through faith; the Church as the body of Christ; the sacraments of bap-

tism and the Lord's supper as instituted by Christ; the final judgement; and the hope of eternal life in God's Kingdom.¹⁵

Affirmations

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

Our churches proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁵ *Sharing in the Apostolic Communion* ¶ 15.

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

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

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

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

Thus The Episcopal Church and The United Methodist Church receive and celebrate the Christian gospel as it has been transmitted to us through the sacred scriptures, the ancient Christian creeds, and the historic liturgies of Christian churches. Our churches seek to live out this ancient faith in today's world as we sing, pray, and work by divine grace for God's kingdom.

3. ISSUES PERCEIVED AS SEPARATING OUR CHURCHES

In addition to the convergences in our histories, our doctrines, and our consistent practices, there are some areas of church life and teachings that are – as well as others that may be perceived as – church dividing issues. Some of these issues have to do with sacramental theology and practice, some have to do with issues of church polity, and others have to do with our churches' responses to contemporary moral or ethical issues.

3.1 The Relationship between Baptism and Salvation

Almost all Christian communities practice baptism as the means by which persons are incorporated into the Christian community. The Episcopal Church and The United Methodist Church hold much in common concerning our belief in and practice of the sacrament of baptism:

- Our churches have similar baptismal services drawn from the 1662 Book of Common Prayer.
- We have both been shaped by participation in the liturgical renewal movement and its corresponding recovery of baptismal ecclesiology and the central place of the baptismal covenant.
- Our churches affirm and practice that baptism requires the use of water and the Trinitarian formula (Matthew 28:10); that it is also linked to the overall process of Christian initiation, including instruction in the faith (catechesis) and personal profession of faith; and the definition of sacraments by the broader Christian church as “outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace.”
- Our churches affirm together that all ministries of the church, lay and ordained, are grounded in baptism.
- Our churches affirm that baptism is a grace and gift received by faith.
- Our churches affirm that baptism and the covenantal relationship established through it is the doorway to the life of holiness.
- Both of our churches baptize infants as well as adults.

- Our churches affirm that holy baptism initiates women and men into the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. Thus, in baptism we are already united in Christ.
- Our churches agree that baptism is not to be repeated. It is a sign of our unity in Christ: “One Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Ephesians 4:5).

The Issues

One of the key issues regarding baptism has to do with the relationship of baptism to our salvation in Jesus Christ. Historic Christian teaching—including that of Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Lutheran churches—maintained that baptism is the divinely appointed means by which human beings are born again in Christ and through which their sins are forgiven. Historically this has been known as baptismal regeneration. The Church of England and The Episcopal Church follow this longstanding tradition. Previous editions of the service of baptism in the Book of Common Prayer had the priest say, “Seeing now, dearly beloved brethren, that this Child is regenerate, and grafted into the body of Christ’s Church, let us give thanks. . .”¹⁶ Similarly the 1979 revisions speaks of being “reborn by the Holy Spirit.”¹⁷

John Wesley followed this Anglican pattern of teaching about baptism, especially as it was applied to infants. Thus, Wesley’s account of his Aldersgate-Street conversion experience begins,

I believe, till I was about ten years old, I had not sinned away that “washing of the Holy Ghost” which was given me in baptism...¹⁸

Consistent with this, Wesley’s sermon on “The New Birth” (published in 1760) cautions against the presumption that because one is baptized one must be currently in a state of regeneration. It acknowledges, however, that the grace of regeneration does accompany infant baptism.¹⁹ Such passages about infant regeneration are consistent in

¹⁶ *Book of Common Prayer* (1928), 280.

¹⁷ *Book of Common Prayer* (1979), 306.

¹⁸ John Wesley, *Journal* for 1738:05:24, par. 1 (in W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, eds., *Journal and Diaries* [Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988ff.], 1:242-243).

¹⁹ John Wesley, sermon on “The New Birth” IV:2 (in Albert C. Outler, ed., *Sermons* [Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984-1987; 4 vols.], 2:197).

Wesley's writings, and a train of Wesley interpreters has acknowledged Wesley's teaching in this regard.²⁰

However, in other places, John Wesley spoke at length about regeneration, scarcely mentioning baptism. For example, his sermon on "The Great Privilege of Those that are Born of God" defines regeneration, contrasts it with justification, and describes its relationship to sanctification, with only the barest mention of the sacrament of Christian initiation.²¹ His sermon on "The Original, Nature, Properties, and Use of the Law" makes the point that the second use of the Law is to bring believers to life in Christ (the language is the same as Wesley regularly uses to describe the new birth), but does not mention baptism.²² Two of his sermons describe the way in which believers can know they are regenerate, both by the testimony of God's Spirit and the testimony of human conscience, but only one of them makes a passing mention of baptism in relation to the new birth. The prayer offering thanks for the work of regeneration of an infant in baptism (cited above) was deleted from John Wesley's edition of the Book of Common Prayer, *The Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America*. Similarly, the word "regeneration" was omitted from the first drafts of the nascent American Episcopal Church's *Book of Common Prayer* before being re-inserted in the final version approved in 1789, and in the 1800s would become a point of controversy between the Evangelical and High Church parties in the church.

From the nineteenth century, Methodist interpreters of Christian theology laid great emphasis on the conversion experience as the normal means of the new birth and regeneration, and they tended to see baptism as a sign of divine grace preparing a person for belief in Christ by incorporation into the Christian community.²³

²⁰ Cf. Colin Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), 116-119; Kenneth J. Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation: The Heart of John Wesley's Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 126-127.

²¹ John Wesley, sermon "On the Great Privilege of Those that are Born of God" passim (in Outler, ed., *Sermons*, 1:431-443); Wesley mentions that the new birth is "not barely the being baptized" at I:1 (in Outler, ed., *Sermons*, 1:432).

²² John Wesley, sermon on "The Original, Nature, Properties and Use of the Law" IV:2 (in Outler, ed., *Sermons*, 2:16).

²³ Richard Watson, *Theological Institutes*, IV:3 (ed. Thomas O. Summers; Nashville: Stevenson and Owen, 1857), 703-729; Thomas O. Summers, *Systematic Theology* (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1888) VII:V, 2:351-404; Miner Raymond, *Systematic Theology* (3 vols.; Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, and New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1879), book VII, chs. IV-VI, 3:275-342; William Burt Pope, *Compendium of Christian Theology*, chapter on "The Church" (3 vols.; New York: Phillips and Hunt; Cincinnati: Walden and Stowe, 1881), 3:310-324; John Miley, *Systematic Theology* (2 vols.; New York: Hunt and Eaton, 1892-1894) V:[2]:9, 2:395-410.

An additional issue for Episcopalians concerns the way in which confirmation relates to baptism. Until 1967 confirmation (or the desire for confirmation) was the prerequisite for receiving communion in The Episcopal Church, and was generally considered to be when an individual took her place in the full life of the church; popular texts often spoke of it as the “ordination” of the laity. With the recovery of the place of baptism as full inclusion in the life of the church, in the liturgical revisions leading to the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* Confirmation has taken on a different interpretation. Confirmation is now understood to be the continued nurturing of the life of faith in the baptized person, but also still is part of the classification of categories of membership.²⁴

Ways Forward

Just as the ecumenical and liturgical movements influenced Methodist views of Holy Communion in the twentieth century, so they have influenced Methodists to reconsider the sacrament of baptism. The revised ritual for baptism incorporated in *The United Methodist Hymnal* (1989) states in the preface to the service,

*Through the Sacrament of Baptism
we are initiated into Christ's holy church.
We are incorporated into God's mighty acts of salvation
and given new birth through water and the Spirit.*²⁵

Although this may appear to be an unequivocal assertion of baptismal regeneration, the framers of this statement maintained that the second sentence does not imply that regeneration comes by way of baptism alone, but “through water and the Spirit” denotes the whole work of God in bringing a person to Christ and into the Christian community of faith.²⁶ The document *By Water and the Spirit: A United Methodist Understanding of Baptism* (adopted by the 1996 General Conference), reflects on the issue of the relationship between baptism and salvation in this way,

Baptism is the sacramental sign of new life through and in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Various identified as regeneration, new birth, and being born again, this work of

²⁴ See *Book of Common Prayer* (1979), 415-417. See also Title I, Canon 17, with the category of “confirmed communicant.”

²⁵ *The United Methodist Hymnal* (1989), 33.

²⁶ The intent of the framers of this baptismal liturgy is documented in Ted A. Campbell, “Baptism and New Birth: Evangelical Theology and the United Methodist ‘Baptismal Covenant I’” (*Quarterly Review* 10:3 [Fall 1990]: 34-45).

grace makes us into new spiritual creatures (2 Corinthians 5:17). We die to our old nature which was dominated by sin and enter into the very life of Christ who transforms us. Baptism is the means of entry into new life in Christ (John 3:5; Titus 3:5), but new birth may not always coincide with the moment of the administration of water or the laying on of hands. Our awareness and acceptance of our redemption by Christ and new life in him may vary throughout our lives. But, in whatever way the reality of the new birth is experienced, it carries out the promises God made to us in our baptism.²⁷

The Episcopal Church and The United Methodist Church have placed baptism within the overall context of the process of Christian initiation, a process in which baptism, training in the faith, personal commitment to Jesus Christ, and public profession of the faith are all seen as critical elements in the process by which women and men come to faith in Christ and are incorporated into the Christian community.²⁸ Part of the call for The Episcopal Church and The United Methodist Church is to continue to live seriously into the baptismal covenant as it has been recovered as part of the liturgical renewal movement.

3.2 The Presence of Christ in the Eucharist

The crises of the late eighteenth century that led to the formation of the Protestant Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church centered around the need for administration of the sacraments, especially the Lord's Supper, in the North American context after the departure of a significant number of Anglican priests during the American Revolution. In the formative period in the late eighteenth century, both churches utilized Eucharistic liturgies derived from the *Book of Common Prayer* of 1662 and both accepted the Eucharistic teaching of the Anglican tradition.

In the early nineteenth century, however, Eucharistic teachings and practices between Episcopal and Methodist churches in the United States began to diverge. The Episcopal Church was influenced by the Oxford or Tractarian movement (which began in the Church of England and had broad influence on the Anglican world), which itself re-emphasized Anglican understandings of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. This in turn would eventually lead to changes in practice and liturgical ceremonial as part of this renewed emphasis. In the same period, Methodist churches were influenced by frontier revival-

²⁷ *By Water and the Spirit: A United Methodist Understanding of Baptism* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1996), 15 under the heading "Baptism and New Life."

²⁸ See especially *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, paragraphs B8-9.

ism which typically valued enthusiastic preaching and vivid religious experiences over traditional sacramental celebration. At the same time the paucity of ordained elders in the Methodist Episcopal Church meant that local Methodist societies (congregations) grew accustomed to infrequent celebration, although the elders themselves celebrated frequently.²⁹ By the early twentieth century many Methodist leaders—both those of traditional Evangelical piety and those with modern liberal tendencies—explicitly claimed a memorial understanding of the Eucharist, even though this was not formally taught in Methodist doctrinal standards and stood in tension with the liturgy that the churches continued to use.

The Issues

Given the divergences described above, there has been a widespread perception of serious discontinuity between Episcopalians and Methodists concerning the meaning of the sacrament of Holy Communion and consequently of specific practices related to the celebration of the sacrament.

Ways Forward

The Anglican tradition has laid emphasis on the “real presence” of Christ in the Eucharistic elements while at the same time acknowledging that the expression has nevertheless been capable of a range of meanings.

Both ecumenical and liturgical renewal in the twentieth century have helped Methodists understand the depth of Eucharistic piety expressed by John and Charles Wesley, a depth of piety that has also been expressed in the liturgies consistently used in Methodist churches, including the more traditional liturgies derived from the tradition of the *Book of Common Prayer* and contemporary liturgies consistent with those developed by Catholics, Anglicans, and others in the liturgical movement of the twentieth century. The term “real presence” can be used to describe the Wesleys' view of the presence of Christ: in fact, the Wesleys themselves used this expression twice in their published collection of *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*.³⁰ The Wesleys' Eucharistic piety ends not in a precise explanation of Christ's presence but in adoration and mystery. Speaking again of Christ's

²⁹ Since elders itinerated and traveled between numerous congregations, elders would celebrate the Eucharist regularly at different congregations, though any individual congregation might only have the services of an elder perhaps once a month.

³⁰ John and Charles Wesley, *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* (1745), hymn 66, stanza 2 (in *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*, ed. George Osborn; London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1868; 3:264) and hymn 116, stanza 5 (in Osborn 3:302).

presence, they write of the mystery of Christ's presence and power in the sacrament:

*Angels round our altars bow
To search it out in vain.*³¹

In 2004 the General Conference of The United Methodist Church adopted a statement entitled *This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion*. This statement deals at some length with the issue of the presence of Jesus Christ in the sacrament, and concludes as follows:

United Methodists, along with other Christian traditions, have tried to provide clear and faithful interpretations of Christ's presence in the Holy Meal. Our tradition asserts the real, personal, living presence of Jesus Christ. For United Methodists, the Lord's Supper is anchored in the life of the historical Jesus of Nazareth, but is not primarily a remembrance or memorial. We do not embrace the medieval doctrine of transubstantiation, though we do believe that the elements are essential tangible means through which God works. We understand the divine presence in temporal and relational terms. In the Holy Meal of the church, the past, present, and future of the living Christ come together by the power of the Holy Spirit so that we may receive and embody Jesus Christ as God's saving gift for the whole world.³²

A challenge for The United Methodist Church is to continue to live into this statement as its normative practice.

A challenge for The Episcopal Church is to continue to strike a balance between Word and Sacrament. It is our hope that through our developing relationships the historic Methodist emphasis on the three-fold presence of Christ in the preached word, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and in mission in the world can be helpful for Episcopalians in this regard.³³

³¹ Hymn 57 from the first sequence of hymns in John and Charles Wesley, *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* (1745; in Osborn 3:256); in *The United Methodist Hymnal* (1989), no. 627.

³² United Methodist statement on *This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion* (Nashville: Board of Discipleship of The United Methodist Church, 2004), 13.

³³ The United Methodist Church's mission statement holds that "The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world" (United Methodist *Discipline* [2008], p. 87). The emphasis on mission has been so strong in Methodist culture that Albert C. Outler argued that Methodists had little sense of a doctrine of the church (beyond that inherited from Anglicanism), but a consistent sense of the missional vocation of the church: cf. Albert C. Outler, "Do Methodists Have a Doctrine of the Church" (in Dow Kirkpatrick, ed., *The Doctrine of the Church* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964], 11-28).

3.3 One Bread, One Cup: Practices related to the Elements of Holy Communion

The Issues

A number of specific practices related to the elements of Holy Communion (bread and wine) have divided the United Methodist and Episcopal churches.

Consistent Christian practice following the literal words of the New Testament has insisted on the use of bread and wine in the celebration of the sacrament of Holy Communion. This was stated as a requirement for Christian unity in the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, which held that Christian unity on the part of Anglican churches requires “The two Sacraments ordained by Christ Himself—Baptism and the Supper of the Lord—ministered with unfailing use of Christ’s words of institution, and of the elements ordained by him.”³⁴ However, since the early twentieth century, in the wake of the temperance movement and Methodists’ adoption of the ideal of total abstinence from beverage alcohol, Methodist churches used unfermented grape juice in the celebration of Holy Communion. This was formalized in the so-called “Welch Rubric” that states that “The pure unfermented juice of the grape shall be used” in the celebration of the sacrament. This rubric remains in effect in The United Methodist Church.³⁵

Another area of divergence has to do with the use of a single cup (chalice) for the wine. Methodist churches, including The United Methodist Church, have not specified the need for a single cup. For The Episcopal Church, since 1979 the use of a single cup has been a symbol of unity in gathering around the holy table.³⁶

Another important issue separating Episcopalians and United Methodists concerns the treatment of the Eucharistic elements following the service. For The Episcopal Church, any remaining bread or wine must be reverently consumed or reserved. The joint Anglican/Methodist document “Sharing in the Apostolic Communion” notes this issue of reverent disposal of the elements of Holy Communion.

³⁴ Lambeth Conference of 1888, Resolution 11, as given in the *Book of Common Prayer* (1979) of The Episcopal Church, 878.

³⁵ *The United Methodist Hymnal* (1989), 6. It should be noted that early printings of this hymnal omitted the “Welch Rubric,” but the General Conference of 1992 specified that it should be reinserted, and it has appeared in the hymnals printed since that time.

³⁶ *Book of Common Prayer* (1979), 407, where the rubric states that a single chalice should be on the altar. This does not preclude other chalices being nearby on another table. It should also be noted that rubrics of the *Book of Common Prayer* are as binding as the canons of The Episcopal Church.

Ways Forward

Ways forward on these issues would be to follow the guidelines drawn up by the United Methodist-Episcopal dialogue team, for example, to use bread, wine, and grape juice, allowing local practice to determine exactly how this should be done. United Methodists are encouraged to use de-alcoholized wine rather than grape juice, and the use of real wine in addition to grape juice. Any unconsumed elements should be disposed of reverently, and a single chalice, with flagons for grape juice and wine to be touched by the celebrant, should be placed on the altar.

3.4 The Relationship between Baptism and the Reception of Holy Communion

The Issues

The canons of The Episcopal Church, consistent with those of other Anglican churches and with the broad consensus of Christian tradition and practice, limit the sacrament of Holy Communion to those who have been baptized and can respond positively to the invitation given in the Eucharistic liturgy.³⁷

From some point in the nineteenth century, it became the custom of Methodists to invite other Christians to participate in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Although this practice was not grounded in doctrinal sources—and it may also be important to state that it is not ruled out in Methodist doctrinal sources—this practice has become nearly universal in Methodist churches and has come into existence as a communal consensus arrived at without formal means of consent.³⁸ The liturgies for Word and Table in *The United Methodist Hymnal* do specify terms or requirements for communion:

- love for Jesus Christ (Word and Table I, II)³⁹
- repentance for sin (Word and Table I, II, and IV)⁴⁰

³⁷ See the Guidelines for Eucharist Sharing, Resolution A043 of the 1979 General Convention; also Title I, Canon 17, Section 7: “No unbaptized person shall be eligible to receive Holy Communion in this Church.”

³⁸ Scott J. Jones, *United Methodist Doctrine: The Extreme Center* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 265-266; cf. Ted A. Campbell, *Methodist Doctrine: The Essentials* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 76-77.

³⁹ *United Methodist Hymnal* (1989), 7, 12.

⁴⁰ *United Methodist Hymnal* (1989), 7, 12, 26.

- the intention to live in peace with each other (Word and Table I, II, IV)⁴¹
- the intention to lead a new life following God's commands (Word and Table IV)⁴²

United Methodist Bishop Scott J. Jones states that these requirements, "basically invite those who are Christians to come and participate in the sacrament."⁴³ However, the United Methodist *Discipline* and United Methodist liturgies do not strictly rule out communion for persons not yet baptized, and this raises the possibility (however rare) that communion will be extended to unbaptized persons.

Ways Forward

It should be emphasized, with respect to United Methodist practice, that communion of the unbaptized is not an affirmation on the part of The United Methodist Church but simply a possibility that exists due to the lack of any explicit rubric or statement ruling this out. The United Methodist Statement of *This Holy Mystery* (approved by the 2004 General Conference of The United Methodist Church), states that if unbaptized persons can respond positively to the invitation to Holy Communion in the liturgy, they should be welcomed to the table and counseled to receive the sacrament of baptism:

Nonbaptized people who respond in faith to the invitation in our liturgy will be welcomed to the Table. They should receive teaching about Holy Baptism as the sacrament of entrance into the community of faith—needed only once by each individual—and Holy Communion as the sacrament of sustenance for the journey of faith and growth in holiness—needed and received frequently. "Unbaptized persons who receive communion should be counseled and nurtured toward baptism as soon as possible" (*By Water and the Spirit*, in BOR; page 814).⁴⁴

Celebrations of Eucharist in each of our churches should be guided by the canons or disciplinary/liturgical requirements of each church. United Methodists are challenged by these claims to make clearer to laity as well as clergy that the terms of communion specified in the United Methodist liturgy presuppose Christian commitment ("those who love him," i.e., Jesus Christ), and also to make clearer to laity as

⁴¹ *United Methodist Hymnal* (1989), 7, 12, 26.

⁴² *United Methodist Hymnal* (1989), 26.

⁴³ Jones, *United Methodist Doctrine*, 266.

⁴⁴ United Methodist statement on *This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion*, 15.

well as clergy the extraordinary nature of the possibility of communion of the unbaptized as explained in *This Holy Mystery*.

3.5 Understandings of the Historic Episcopate

A precedent in ancient Christian churches has been that deacons and presbyters were ordained by bishops who in turn had been consecrated by other bishops. This was seen as an important sign of the churches' continuity with the teachings and practices of the apostolic Christian community. Thus Irenaeus of Lyons, writing in the late second century AD, saw the succession of bishops in a church founded by one of the apostles as one criterion of apostolic continuity along with the use of the Old Testament (Hebrew) scriptures, a canon of New Testament (Christian) scriptures, and fidelity to the churches' "rule of faith," the basic announcement of the Gospel message that was eventually codified in versions of the Christian baptismal creed.⁴⁵ The ancient canons, however, saw bishops not as independent, but as part of a synod. As the Anglican commentator, John Fulton, explained, "And as the power of the episcopate was exercised by one bishop over the people of one parish, so the bishops of every province, acting in their corporate capacity, exercised the power of their united episcopate over every bishop and every parish within their jurisdiction."⁴⁶

The ancient precedent of the consecration of bishops by other bishops was followed at the time of the Reformation by the Church of England. From the seventeenth century, in the midst of the conflict between Puritans and Anglicans, some Anglican theologians began to insist on the unbroken succession of bishops as a *necessary* sign of the fidelity of the Christian church to its apostolic origins, although a consensus was never reached or stated that this was the case. The American organizers of the Protestant Episcopal Church were concerned to maintain the succession of bishops. Samuel Seabury, elected bishop by clergy in Connecticut, was refused consecration by English bishops and later secured episcopal consecration through the Scottish Episcopal Church. William White and Samuel Provoost, as representatives of the early General Conventions of The Episcopal Church, were consecrated by the bishops of the Church of England. With the formation of The Episcopal Church in 1789 these two traditions were incorporated into a single church.

⁴⁵ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (5 vols.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971–1989), 1:108-120.

⁴⁶ John Fulton, *Index Canonum: The Greek Text, an English Translation, and a Complete Digest of the Entire Code of Canon Law* (New York, 1872), 44-45.

John Wesley's ordinations of the Rev. Thomas Coke as a Superintendent and of Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey as elders in 1784, which led to the clergy orders of the Methodist Episcopal Church and eventually of The United Methodist Church, broke the precedent of episcopal ordination and thus of episcopal succession for subsequent Methodist Episcopal bishops. These acts also violated the canons of the Church of England, although Wesley justified his ordinations on these grounds: a) the need for sacramental clergy for the North American context, b) his belief that presbyters held "an essential right to ordain" and could do so in extraordinary circumstances such as the Methodist faced in North America, and c) his belief that in ordaining clergy for North America he was not intruding on the diocesan territory of existing Anglican bishops.

In his 1784 letter "To Dr. COKE, Mr. ASBURY, and our Brethren in *NORTH AMERICA*" introducing the provisions he had made for the establishment of an episcopal church, Wesley explained that he had endeavored to obtain the regular transmission of order. It had been proposed, he noted, "to desire the *English* Bishops, to ordain part of our Preachers for *America*. But to this I object, 1. I desired the Bishop of *London*, to ordain only one; but could not prevail." He then addressed forthrightly the emergency reasoning on the basis of which he as the effective superintendent of the Wesleyan movement in an exercise of *episcopo* proceeded to the ordinations.

Lord King's Account of the Primitive Church convinced me many years ago, That Bishops and Presbyters are the same Order, and consequently have the same right to ordain. For many years I have been importuned from time to time, to exercise this right, by ordaining part of our travelling Preachers. But I have still refused, not only for Peace' sake: but because I was determined, as little as possible to violate the established Order of the national Church to which I belonged.⁴⁷

The ordinal that he included in *The Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America*,⁴⁸ his revision of the Book of Common Prayer, provided for the ordination of deacons (transitional deacons), elders (author-

⁴⁷ John Telford, ed., *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*, 9 vols. (London: Epworth press, 1931), 7: 237-38.

⁴⁸ Curiously titled, *The Sunday Service of the Methodist in North America. With other Occasional Services* (London, 1784), provided a brief lectionary of lessons for morning and evening prayer; orders for morning and evening prayer; the Litany; a Sunday Prayer and Thanksgiving; Communion, Baptism, Matrimony, Communion of the Sick and Burial orders; the ordinal with "bishop" replaced by "superintendent"; Wesley's version of the Articles of Religion; and two appendices.

ized to celebrate the sacraments), and “superintendents” who were consecrated and authorized to ordain deacons and elders.⁴⁹

These rituals preserved, from his point, the succession of clergy as a sign of apostolic continuity. Thomas Coke preached for Asbury’s ordination, and the sermon was published at the request of the conference as “Substance of a Sermon preached at Baltimore, Maryland before The General Conference of The Methodist Episcopal Church, December 27, 1784 at the Ordination of The Rev. Francis Asbury to the Office of a Superintendent.”⁵⁰ In the sermon, Coke addressed the emergency conditions under which the ordinations occurred, his and Wesley’s right to exercise “the episcopal office” [Coke’s term], the precedents of ordination by presbyters and the case against “an uninterrupted line of succession.” He noted that “of all the forms of church government, we think a *moderate* episcopacy the best.” And he then spent much of the sermon addressing Asbury and the gathered preachers on “the character of a Christian bishop.” Thereafter, an orderly succession of episcopal consecrations has followed in the denominations which form the major streams into The United Methodist Church. Similarly, the African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, and Christian Methodist Episcopal churches as well as the Evangelical Association and the United Brethren all maintained a regular succession of episcopal ordinations from the time of their original ordinations.

There has been considerable discussion in the past of a “break” between Methodists and Anglicans in the United States due to Wesley’s setting apart of superintendents. While not denying that these actions set in motion trajectories which would lead to the development of different churches, we also believe that we should not overlook important similarities.

Those who formed The Episcopal Church and those who formed the Methodist Episcopal Church both adapted historic understandings to their own missional concerns. At first this may seem more evident for Methodists. However, Episcopalians also significantly adapted the of-

⁴⁹ Wesley’s own consecration of Thomas Coke as superintendent amounted to a “presbyteral succession” rather than an episcopal succession of clergy (here utilizing the term preferred by Bishop Henry McNeal Turner of the African Methodist Episcopal Church). See also Nolan B. Harmon, *The Rites and Ritual of Episcopal Methodism with Particular Reference to the Rituals of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Respectively* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M.E. Church, South, 1926) provides in six parallel columns Liturgical sources, the 1662 Book of Common Prayer (1979), Wesley’s liturgies, the 1844 Methodist Episcopal Church rituals, the 1922 Methodist Episcopal Church, South, rituals and the 1916 Methodist Episcopal Church rituals.

⁵⁰ It was “Published at the desire of the Conference” and then republished (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1840).

fice of bishop. Bishops were elected by representative bodies, had no civil or legal authority, were not connected in any formal way to the state, and shared oversight of the church with clergy and laity. Indeed, in the United States, as in nowhere else in the Anglican world, bishops do not rule over synods or conventions but are bound by their decisions. While many of these are now commonplace in parts of the Anglican world, at the time these were considered innovations and departures from established practice; indeed, these were some of the reasons for the initial refusal and resistance by the Church of England to consecrate bishops for Anglicans in the United States.

The Issues: Distinctions between “Historic Succession” and “Apostolic Succession”

An issue here for United Methodists may be the perception on the part of some that the restoration of episcopal succession would amount to an admission that the ministerial orders and, by implication, sacraments of The United Methodist Church have been deficient in the past. It should be noted that The Episcopal Church has never declared the ministries of any other church formally to be deficient or invalid. The Episcopal Church draws a distinction between reconciliation and recognition of ministries. Recognition involves acknowledging the ordained ministry to be an occasion of grace and a means by which the gospel is preached and sacraments administered. Reconciliation involves removing all canonical or constitutional impediments in order to allow for mutual service by ordained clergy in one another's churches. Not having a reconciled ministry does not imply any kind of deficiency; The Episcopal Church, for instance, does not have a reconciled ministry with the Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox Churches. The Episcopal Church has not made any formal statements on the status of the ordained ministries of The United Methodist Church or its predecessors.

The Episcopal Church outlined its understanding of the need for agreement on the historic episcopate as part of full communion with another church in the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral (proposed by the House of Bishops of The Episcopal Church, 1886):

The Historic Episcopate locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the unity of His Church.⁵¹

This statement was affirmed by the Lambeth Conference of Bishops (1888), reaffirmed by numerous General Conventions of The Episcopal Church, is contained in the historic documents section of the *Book*

⁵¹ *Book of Common Prayer* (1979), 877, 878.

of *Common Prayer*,⁵² and has subsequently been received by the larger Anglican communion.

As noted above, both Methodists and Episcopalians went through a process of adapting the historic episcopate to their particular missional contexts. The Episcopal Church did so while retaining the sign of the historic succession of bishops, while Methodists did not. Hopefully our two communions will be able to heal this historic breach by mutually receiving one another's gifts with regards to episcopacy.

Ways Forward

A major ecumenical breakthrough has been acknowledging the differences between "apostolic succession" and "historic episcopate." The two communions have affirmed the relationship between episcopacy and apostolic succession as described in the seminal ecumenical document *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (1982):

The primary manifestation of apostolic succession is to be found in the apostolic tradition of the Church as a whole...The orderly transmission of the ordained ministry is therefore a powerful expression of the continuity of the Church throughout history; it also underlines the calling of the ordained minister as guardian of the faith... Under the particular historical circumstances of the growing Church in the early centuries, the succession of bishops became one of the ways, together with the transmission of the Gospel and the life of the community, in which the apostolic tradition of the Church was expressed. This succession was understood as serving, symbolizing and guarding the continuity of the apostolic faith and communion.⁵³

The manner of the reconciliation of the two episcopacies is still a matter of discussion and study. As part of this discussion, it is our hope that with regards to a future reconciliation of episcopal ministries, Episcopalians and United Methodists affirm the following:

- Our journey toward full communion must include a way to recognize and reconcile the two episcopacies in such a manner as not to call into question the authenticity of each other's ordinations.
- Both churches affirm the historic episcopate, in the language of the *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* statement, as a "sign, but

⁵² *Book of Common Prayer* (1979), 876-879.

⁵³ *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, ¶¶ M35 and M36.

not a guarantee, of the catholicity, unity, and continuity of the church.”

- Both churches agree that the historic episcopate is always in a process of reform in the service of the Gospel.
- From their formative periods in the colonial age both churches locally adapted the historic episcopate for the sake of mission.

As a sign of our developing full communion partnerships, we would hope that bishops from the Moravian Church and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (but not limited to these churches) could be present and participate in any hoped-for reconciliation of ministries between United Methodists and Episcopalians.

3.6 Practices Related to Presidency at Eucharist

From the fourth century AD consistent Christian practice was that presbyters (priests/elders) presided at Eucharist in addition to bishops. This custom has been followed by Orthodox churches, the Roman Catholic Church, and by churches of the Anglican Communion, including The Episcopal Church. Although John Wesley's ordinations of Methodist preachers to serve as elders in North America were irregular or illegal according to Anglican canons (see the previous section) he also restricted celebration of Eucharist to those ordained as elders. On the other hand, John Wesley and other early Methodist leaders would not tolerate administration of the sacraments apart from ecclesial authorization. The Welsh lay evangelist and close associate of Wesley, Howell Harris, recorded that John Wesley told Conference that “he would rather commit murder than administer without ordination.”⁵⁴ From 1808 the Methodist Episcopal Church ordained “local elders” (as contrasted with itinerant elders) who were also authorized to preside at the Lord's Supper in their local communities.

Methodist reorganizations in the twentieth century have led to some divergences from this pattern.⁵⁵ The office of local elder was done away with from the time of the union of 1968. From that point persons ordained as deacons (at this time, this was a transitional office leading to ordination as an elder) were authorized to preside at Holy Communion. By 1976 persons appointed as local pastors were also authorized to preside at the table and to perform baptisms within the context of their local churches. The 1996 General Conference of The

⁵⁴ In Frank Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England* (London, 1970 [2000]), 162-3, 175-9, 257.

⁵⁵ The Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Protestant Church, and The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, merged in 1939 to form the Methodist Church. In 1968 the Methodist Church merged with the Evangelical United Brethren Church to form The United Methodist Church.

United Methodist Church created an office of permanent deacon and did away with the transitional diaconate. At this point, the denomination created a transitional category of “commissioned” ministers who are authorized to celebrate the sacraments if they are appointed as pastors of local congregations. This has become a contested issue in The United Methodist Church, which has engendered a variety of proposals, including authorization of ordained (permanent) deacons to celebrate sacraments and the re-introduction of the older Methodist category of local elders.

Despite changes in terminology, United Methodism has sustained in its authorization of sacramental authority the polity and practice under which the church previously appointed ministers and designated them as local elders. Such persons, earlier and now, celebrate and baptize under episcopal appointment, licensing, and conference authorization, each recognition of which functions as a kind of ordination.

The Issues

For Episcopalians, presidency at the Eucharist has always been restricted to bishops and priests. Other provinces of the Anglican Communion who have considered licensing deacons and/or lay persons have routinely and consistently been nearly unanimously urged not to do so.

A parallel issue for United Methodists is how to make sacraments available to congregations (especially smaller congregations) served currently by local pastors. This is something which also has been of concern to The Episcopal Church, which for several years had a process often referred to as “Canon 9” priests, after the specific canon which authorized the practice. Canon 9 priests were clergy ordained with the intention of serving a specific, usually rural, congregation, and had different standards for education, training, and deployment. In 2003, however, these distinctions were removed with a revision of The Episcopal Church’s ordination canons.

Ways Forward

One way forward may depend upon United Methodist General Conference action in 2012 when legislation may be adopted that would ordain all (United Methodist ministers) who preside at Eucharist as elders.⁵⁶ In any case, it should be noted that the discussion of reform in the UMC on these issues is going on in the light of our ecumenical dialogues, including this dialogue. The Episcopal Church is in full communion with the ELCA, which also licenses lay persons to preside at

⁵⁶ A task force on the study of ordained ministry authorized by the United Methodist General Conference of 2004 and continued by the General Conference of 2008 has considered such proposals.

the Eucharist, with the understanding that such persons are not permitted to serve in The Episcopal Church and are not part of any formal recognition of ministries.

3.7 Practices with respect to the Ministries of the Laity

The Issues

The Episcopal Church holds that the ministry of all people is grounded in baptism.⁵⁷ In addition, The Episcopal Church has a variety of licensed offices: Pastoral Leader, Worship Leader, Preacher, Eucharistic Minister, Eucharistic Visitor, Evangelist, or Catechist.⁵⁸ Requirements for training and licensure are determined at the diocesan level. In addition lay persons have an important role in the governance of the church. At the congregational level, each parish has a Vestry which calls the Rector and manages the affairs of the parish.⁵⁹ Diocesan Conventions also have lay and clergy representation, as does the Standing Committee in each diocese. The General Convention of The Episcopal Church has a House of Bishops and a House of Deputies, which has equal lay and clergy representation.

The United Methodist Church likewise affirms baptism as the grounding for all ministry.⁶⁰ In addition there is a longstanding tradition of lay involvement in Wesleyan and related churches. John Wesley employed lay Methodists as class leaders, stewards, exhorters, and lay preachers. The office of lay preacher has continued to be an important office in Methodist churches, a means by which thousands of local Methodist congregations are enabled to have regular prayer, praise, and preaching. Methodist churches historically recognized other quasi-official offices such as that of exhorter (from the time of John Wesley through the nineteenth century). The United Methodist Church today utilizes certified lay speakers and lay pastors.

Ways Forward

We see these licensed ministries for lay persons as ones which enrich our lives as churches, and do not see them as problematic as we move towards full communion. It may be fruitful in enriching local dialogues between United Methodist and Episcopal congregations to consider

⁵⁷ See Title III, Canon 1; see also *Book of Common Prayer* (1979), 531 and 855.

⁵⁸ Title III, Canon 4.

⁵⁹ These duties of the Vestry also involve the diocesan bishop, who, for instance, must confirm the Vestry's choice of a rector (Title III, Canon 9, Section 3) and the diocese must agree to any decisions regarding the property of the congregation.

⁶⁰ United Methodist *Discipline* (2008), ¶ 125, p. 89.

the different ways in which the ministries of laypersons have been employed in their churches.

3.8 Issues of Internal Denominational Unity that May Hinder Full Communion

The Issues

Both of our churches have faced internal tensions and threats of schism in recent decades, and these internal tensions have distracted the churches from their primary mission of witness to the Gospel and in some ways these internal tensions have made critical ecumenical discussions between our churches more difficult to sustain. The Anglican Communion and The Episcopal Church have seen turmoil since the 1970s, including the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate, prayer book revision, and human sexuality. Some of these matters are shared between our churches, and in separate sections we shall deal with issues of race and racism (section 9) and human sexuality (section 10) that have been divisive for both denominations. In this section we deal with the more general range of issues raised by internal disagreements within our churches and the problems raised by stereotypical images we may hold of each other's churches.

Both of our churches have evolved subcommunities with particular theological, social, and political outlooks, many of which have been institutionalized since the 1970s as formally organized caucus groups within the denominations. One might say that there exists a liberal-conservative spectrum in each of our churches, though this takes on particular nuances in each denomination. In The Episcopal Church, the subcommunity supporting a traditionally catholic and sacramental vision of ecclesial life often finds common cause with other Anglicans of a more evangelical perspective.

In The United Methodist Church, a number of interrelated conservative Evangelical groups have great strength, some of them representing the Holiness movement that has been an important part of Methodist life since late in the nineteenth century. In both denominations, moreover, groups supporting progressive political and social issues have been highly influential since the early twentieth century. These subcommunities have been a source of strength for our churches and in some ways have helped the cause of unity, insofar as they give participants a sense of belonging and specific vocation within the denominations. Sometimes, however, partisan strife has left participants on all sides feeling alienated from the denomination, feeling that someone else, perhaps the other "party," really "owns" the denomination. A common sentiment expressed by local participants in both de-

nominations can be stated as “Our congregation is doing fine; it's the denomination that has the problem(s).”⁶¹

The relevance of these internal disagreements to our quest for unity should be obvious. Church leaders focused on internal squabbles (and on whatever side of them) have little time or energy for negotiations between their denominations and others. But this is particularly tragic, because it is the ecumenical witness through which, we believe, the Holy Spirit is calling the churches to unity in Christ, both internally and externally. We seek, in short, a form of unity between our churches that will let us focus our time and attention on the holy Gospel of Jesus Christ, the evangelical truth that unites Christians, what Martin Luther called “the church's great treasure.”⁶² Appropriate forms of external unity grounded in the Gospel and in our sense of a common mission such as envisioned in this Statement ought to be an evangelical antidote to the poison of internal disunity.

Ways Forward

The most important way forward on issues of internal disunity is for all of our work for external unity to focus on the central truth of the Christian message, the common mission that we share as Christians, and the common practices, especially the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist, that have already united us to Christ and to each other. We do not seek any unity greater than that which is given in baptism and which is celebrated and realized in Holy Communion.

An important way forward on this issue is for local interaction in which members of each denomination can come to know each other as fellow Christians called to common mission. We continue to encourage local United Methodist and Episcopal leaders to find ways to enable these kinds of rich, local dialogues in which we can come to know each other as Christians. A form of unity between our churches that is merely institutional and does not engage this kind of local interaction should be regarded as a failure and a waste of resources.

3.9 Experiences of Race/Racism in the Histories of our Churches

Both of our traditions acknowledge that the church intended by God and described in the Nicene Creed and affirmed by our churches is

⁶¹ Cf. Diana Butler Bass, *The Practicing Congregation: Imagining a New Old Church* (Herndon, Virginia: The Alban Institute, 2004), *passim*.

⁶² Martin Luther, Thesis 62 of the “Ninety-Five Theses on Indulgences.” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1926), 1:236. English language translation in Helmut T. Lehman, general editor, *Luther's Works* (55 vols.; Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), 19:31.

one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. We also acknowledge our frequent failures to realize these notes of the church. Issues related to racial divisions and the historic power disequilibrium between black and white church constituents, in particular, have been evident in both of our churches, and constitute failures of God's intention for our catholicity. A truly catholic church offers the fullness of the Gospel to the fullness of God's world, including all of the nations, races, and cultures of God's human family. But these issues have faced our churches in different ways.

The Issues

Issues of race have tied together our two churches almost from the very beginning. The two individuals who led the African American exodus from St. George's Methodist Church in Philadelphia in 1786 were Richard Allen and Absalom Jones. Together they organized in 1787 the Free African Society. This organization would be the seedbed of the St. Thomas African Episcopal Church (the first Episcopal parish organized by African Americans) and eventually the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Some particular forms in which racial issues have faced our churches are the following.

American Methodism began as a bi-racial movement, and when formally constituted as a church in 1784, committed itself to purging slavery from its ministry and membership. That resolve proved difficult to sustain and Methodism suffered several divisions over slavery and racial discrimination. Because of racial discrimination and oppressive practices in the North as well as in the South, two very large Methodist bodies – the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AME Zion) Church – became separate from the Methodist Episcopal Church early in the nineteenth century, leaving a pattern of formal denominational division among Methodist bodies along racial lines. This continued in 1870 with the formation of the Colored Methodist Episcopal (now Christian Methodist Episcopal, CME) Church out of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. In addition to these separations, many African Americans remained within the Methodist Episcopal Church and Methodist Protestant Church.

When Methodist bodies united in 1939, they created a segregated, non-geographic Central Jurisdiction in which African American churches were placed and which overlapped five geographically defined jurisdictions. This structure was not fully dismantled until the years following the union of The United Methodist Church in 1968, and many black and white Methodist leaders felt it was inappropriate

to go forward with the union of the Methodist and Evangelical United Brethren churches prior to dealing with the issue of systemic racism inherent in the Central Jurisdiction.

The Episcopal Church ordained its first African American priest, Absalom Jones, in 1804, and the early decades of the 1800s saw several African American Episcopal congregations founded in northern cities. However, these congregations were not given vote at diocesan conventions. In southern dioceses, a plantation system of slave chapels was often set up, so that some dioceses had significant African American communicants. At the end of the nineteenth century into the twentieth century, the creation of a non-geographic diocese for African Americans was proposed numerous times, though voted down by General Convention. After the Civil War, some of these communities sought to continue in The Episcopal Church and organize their own congregations, only to be refused to have their own clergy ordained.

While never setting up a formally organized segregated system, The Episcopal Church in effect had de facto segregation of black and white congregations. Suffragan or assisting bishops were elected for “colored work” to provide episcopal oversight to African American congregations, and some dioceses had “colored convocations” of African American parishes which were not part of diocesan conventions. Similarly African Americans were routinely denied admission to predominantly white seminaries. Early in the twentieth century an ex-Episcopal priest, Alexander McGuire, formed the African Orthodox Church as an alternative to The Episcopal Church.

We also want to note some areas of positive progress in racial areas between our churches and in this dialogue.

- Since the 1960s African American leadership has come to prominence in The Episcopal Church and in The United Methodist Church as a result of deliberate efforts to overcome the continuing effects of historic racial discrimination.
- There is growing recognition of the fact that persons of African descent now represent very large constituencies of our denominations and our larger church families throughout the world. The United Methodist Church has been hugely enriched by the coming of the Methodist Church of Côte d'Ivoire into the denomination (between 2004 and 2008). Persons of European racial descent are a minority in the Anglican Communion.
- The bilateral dialogue between The United Methodist Church and The Episcopal Church has focused on dialogue with these historically black Methodist denominations. Sessions in Atlanta

in March, 2007, at the Interdenominational Theological Center; in Dallas in October 2008 at Southern Methodist University; and in Chicago in 2009 focused on the role of racism as a church dividing issue and involved representatives from historically African American Methodist Churches. The work in these sessions has illuminated much of this Statement, and it continues to be the goal of the bilateral dialogue to expand these conversations formally to include African American Methodist churches.

An additional concern is that reconciliation of episcopal ministries as part of full communion is somehow a “validation” on the part of historically African-American churches from historically Euro-American churches. The issue of “validation” relies on the belief that Anglicans have held Methodist ministerial orders to be “invalid” because of the lack of historic episcopal succession.⁶³ This is stated explicitly in the “Declaration on Apostolic Succession” that has appeared in the Disciplines of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church since the 1880s, and has persisted in Methodist culture very broadly. However, a very significant part of our work has been to hear consistently from Episcopal leaders and from other Anglican leaders that Anglican churches have not in fact declared the ministerial orders or sacraments of other churches to be invalid. Our quest for reconciliation of ministries proceeds on the assumption of the validity of ministerial orders of each other's churches, and seeks ways in which this can be fully expressed in a relationship of full communion between our churches.

Nevertheless, our discussions with leaders in our churches and in the African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, and Christian Methodist Episcopal churches have convinced us that there are very serious issues of racial sensitivity involved in the reconciliation of ministries envisioned here. Any service of reconciliation must make clear that ministries and sacraments of other churches have already been recognized as valid.

Ways Forward

The dialogue has attempted to address these issues of race, racism, and the historic episcopate as church dividing ones both internally within our own communions as well as between Methodists and Episcopalians. We hope by continually engaging these issues we can come to a deeper understanding of how racism has deeply wounded the body of Christ, and seek to find tangible ways forward.

⁶³ See the article by Bishop Thomas Hoyt, “A Reconciled Episcopate and Racism,” *Call to Unity* (7: 2006), 45-49.

3.10 Teachings and Practices related to Human Sexuality

In their official statements, both churches affirm the sanctity of marriage and the family, as well as chastity in singleness. Both churches affirm that all persons have dignity and sacred worth, and therefore are deserving of the acceptance and pastoral care of the church as well as common human rights and civil liberties. Nonetheless, issues of sexuality have become increasingly complex in the current period in both of our churches.

The Issues

Over the last fifty years many societies have wrestled with questions of sexuality such as divorce, gender, and the nature of the family. Long assumed patterns have been questioned, and other models suggested. Our churches have been compelled take up these questions, because the society at large was doing so. But our churches had a further (and higher) responsibility of providing Christian insight. This necessitated finding a balance between a respect for the authority of Scripture, and a concern for the gospel message of love. Finding such a balance has been challenging.

Since the 1990s the issues of the ordination of gay and lesbian persons and of the authorization of clergy to perform unions of gay or lesbian persons have been elevated (at least in the practice of some constituents and judicatories) to *status confessionis*, that is, the level of a doctrine or practice that must be affirmed (or denied) for the sake of the unity of the church. The United Methodist Church has declared since 1972 that as a church it “do[es] not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider[s] this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.”⁶⁴ The denomination subsequently ruled out the ordination or appointment of “self-avowed, practicing homosexuals”⁶⁵ and has ruled out clergy performing unions of gay or lesbian persons.⁶⁶

The Episcopal Church has developed a variety of practices. In 1998, the Lambeth Conference of Bishops passed a resolution rejecting homosexual practice as “incompatible” with Scripture and could not “advise” the legitimatization of rites for same sex unions. Lambeth Resolutions are advisory and not binding, however, upon member provinces. In The Episcopal Church, access to the ordination process may

⁶⁴ United Methodist *Discipline* (2008), ¶ 161, p. 103.

⁶⁵ United Methodist *Discipline* (2008), ¶ 304.3, p. 206.

⁶⁶ United Methodist *Discipline* (2008), ¶ 341.6, p. 253, and cf. ¶ 2702.1, p. 754.

not be denied solely on sexual orientation.⁶⁷ In reality, a variety of practices have developed, with some dioceses permitting the ordination of non-celibate gay and lesbian persons and some not. In 2003, an openly gay, partnered priest was elected bishop of New Hampshire and the necessary consents to his election were given by the House of Deputies and House of Bishops of The Episcopal Church. It should be noted there is nothing equivalent to the proscription of ordination or service of non-celibate gay and lesbian persons in the Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church as is contained in The United Methodist *Book of Discipline*.

Ways Forward

While these issues are important ones which touch on matters of Scriptural authority, ecclesiology, and polity, and while our two churches continue to struggle with these issues, we do not find this to be an impediment towards full communion. While there may be differences within and between our two churches, standards and qualifications for ordination are matters of internal polity of each church. Exchange of clergy in any possible full communion agreement is always by invitation, and we envision that in any future agreement for full communion, each church will continue to order its ministry as it sees fit. We seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in seeking a way forward.

3.11 Issues related to the National Origins of Our Churches and the Growingly International Character of Our Churches Today

The Issues

Both of our churches have developed into global communions. The United Methodist Church has significant membership in Central Conferences,⁶⁸ and The Episcopal Church has congregations in sixteen different countries. Both churches have struggled with its US origins – particularly since much (but certainly not all) of the overseas presence is a result of the colonial expansion of the United States and accompanying global mission movement. In addition, both of our churches are members of global communions: The Episcopal Church is one of the

⁶⁷ See Title III, Canon 1, Section 2 of the *Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church*: “No person shall be denied access to the discernment process for any ministry, lay or ordained, in this church because of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, sex, marital status, sexual orientation, disabilities or age, except as otherwise noted in these canons. No right to licensing, ordination, or election is hereby established.”

⁶⁸ Central Conferences denote jurisdictions of United Methodist Churches outside of the United States; cf. United Methodist *Discipline* (2008), ¶¶ 540-548, pp. 342-351. There are seven Central Conferences on three continents: the Africa Central Conference, the Congo Central Conference, the West Africa Central Conference, the Central and Southern Europe Central Conference, the Germany Central Conference, the Northern Europe Central Conference, and the Philippines Central Conference

autonomous provinces of the Anglican Communion, and The United Methodist Church is a member of the World Methodist Council. There are specific ways in which our global character impacts this dialogue.

One is that ecumenical agreements for United Methodists in the United States are approved by the Council of Bishops and the General Conference. Central Conferences are not bound by these agreements, and may negotiate their own concordats of full communion. This is not the case in The Episcopal Church, where overseas dioceses do not have the kind of independent decision making authority in the same way as Central Conference, but are part of the General Convention.

Another is that there are places globally where our churches overlap and where this full communion, if accepted by all parties, would be in effect. However there are places where the Methodist presence may be non-United Methodist, or that the Anglican presence may be non-Episcopal Church. Any proposal for full communion would only include The United Methodist Church and The Episcopal Church, and other parties would need to sign on.

Ways Forward

We will need to be intentional looking at where full communion might have the most impact in our non-USA dioceses and conferences, and be in contact and dialogue with those areas.

CONCLUSION

This *Theological Foundation* statement represents years of reading, research, writing, discussion, and common prayer by the members of The Episcopal-United Methodist dialogue team. Our goal is to pursue the goal of full communion between our churches, building upon previous dialogue between Anglicans and Methodists. As we worked together we heard stories from the history of our communions that allowed us to understand ourselves in a new way. We have begun to see that we are two members of the same family who responded to a common mission imperative in eighteenth-century North America, out of a sense passion for Christ and the church. While our communions diverged since then, we are still a family with deep, common roots. We believe that this Statement shows us a path into the future where our two great churches can share in full communion while we both pursue the mission Christ sets before us in the twenty-first century.

We know, however, that this document does not represent the end of the journey. This dialogue team urges that our communions' members read and digest this report, and that we begin to deepen the relationships we already share in our current interim Eucharistic sharing agreement. Common prayer, study, service and worship are called for. Our hope is that this document will assist in this process of growing together as a single community of resurrection people.

In the meantime, the dialogue team will also begin to address the next major task, developing a proposal for full communion for action by the General Conference and General Convention of our respective churches. This task will likely engage our team for several years.

We remain committed to our original vision of making more fully visible the profound *koinonia* in our baptisms in the death and resurrection of our Lord. The writer of Ephesians eloquently gives words to our vision and goal: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:4-6). May we continue to move forward to deepen the unity already given to us in Christ Jesus.