

## ECUMENICAL RELATIONS

# The Joint Commission on Ecumenical Relations

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and activities in the light of other changes taking place in our church life—liturgical, canonical and pastoral.

In short, the Joint Commission believes it is time for the Episcopal Church to assess its general ecumenical posture, restate those essentials to which we are committed, and to articulate those ecumenical goals toward which we intend to move.

JCER proposes, therefore, that during the 1977-79 triennium this process be undertaken by authority of the General Convention itself through its Commission on Ecumenical Relations. We envision a process that will include persons from local, regional and national levels, reflecting a wide spectrum of opinion and experience. We suggest that local dioceses and provinces should be invited to contribute to the process along with other appropriate groups—seminaries, Christian Education task forces, campus ministries, etc. Their efforts would culminate in a national conference. The findings and recommendations emerging from such a process would then be brought to the 1979 General Convention by the Commission on Ecumenical Relations. A suggested authorizing resolution follows:

### **Resolution A-35**

*Resolved, the House of \_\_\_\_\_ concurring, that the Commission on Ecumenical Relations undertake, through the convening of regional meetings culminating in a special national conference or other appropriate ways, to assess this Church's present ecumenical posture and involvement, to suggest restatement, where necessary, of those essentials to which the Episcopal Church is committed, and to formulate those priorities and goals which can guide our ecumenical activities in the future;*

*And be it further resolved, that a complete report of this study, together with any recommendations, be prepared for and presented to the 1979 General Convention.*

### **E. THE HISTORIC EPISCOPATE AND APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION**

The JCER observes that, in the several official dialogues which representatives of our Church are having with other Christian bodies, it is the fourth section of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, the one affirming the role of the Historic Episcopate, where differences of view have presented the greatest difficulty.

During the past triennium our Commission has given special attention and study to the episcopate, as Anglicans have received it, and its relation to "apostolic succession" as other Christian churches understand that concept.

We commend to bishops and deputies attending the 1976 General Convention and to Episcopalians generally the following excerpts from Faith and Order Paper Number 73 of the World Council of Churches, a document entitled "One Baptism, One Eucharist and a Mutually Recognized Ministry" (published in 1975):

"The primary manifestation of apostolic succession is to be found in the life of the Church as a whole. This succession is an expression of the permanence and, therefore, continuity of Christ's own mission in which the Church participates. This participation is rooted in the gift of the Holy Spirit, in the sending of the Apostles and their successors, and will find its completion in the all-embracing realization of God's kingdom.

"The fullness of the apostolic succession of the whole Church involves continuity in the permanent characteristics of the Church of the apostles: witness to the apostolic faith, proclamation and fresh interpretation of the apostolic gospel transmission of ministerial responsibility, sacramental life, community in love, service for the needy, unity among local Churches and sharing the gifts which the Lord has given to each.

"The ordained ministry is related in various degrees to all of these

characteristics. It serves as an authorized and responsible instrument for their preservation and actualization. The orderly transmission of the ministry is, therefore, both a visible sign of the continuity of the whole church and of the effective participation of the ministry in it and contribution to it. Where this orderly transmission is lacking a church must ask itself whether its apostolicity can be maintained in its fullness. Or, where this ministry does not adequately subserve the Church's apostolicity, a church must ask itself whether or not its ministerial structures should continue with no alteration.

"Under the particular historical circumstance of the growing Church in the sub-apostolic age, the succession of bishops became one of the ways in which the apostolicity of the Church was expressed. This succession was understood as serving, symbolizing and guarding the continuity of the apostolic faith and communion. Some Christian traditions believe this faith and communion to have been preserved uniquely in this form of ministerial succession, even though there have been varying interpretations and understandings of this succession among these same traditions.

"Today there is growing agreement among scholars that the New Testament presents diverse types of organization of the Christian communities, according to the difference of authors, places and times. While, in the local churches, founded by the apostles like Paul, there were persons in authority, very little is said about how they were appointed and about the requirements for presiding at the eucharist. On this basis, there have been developed, in the course of history, notably since the 16th century, multiple forms of church order, each with its own advantages and disadvantages: episcopal, presbyteral, congregational, among others.

"There is further agreement among many scholars that although ordination of ministers by bishops was the almost universal practice in the Church very early, it is impossible to show that such a church order existed everywhere in the Church from the earliest times. In fact, there is evidence that in the sub-apostolic age even this practice did not become uniform until after some time. Further, there have been well documented cases in the history of the Western Church in which priests, not bishops, have with papal dispensation ordained other priests to serve at the altar.

"These observations do not imply a devaluation of the emergence and general acceptance of the historic episcopate. They only indicate that the Church has been able to respond to the needs of particular historical situations in the development of its ministerial structures. It follows, therefore, that faithfulness to the basic task and structure of the apostolic ministry can be combined with an openness to diverse and complementary expressions of this apostolic ministry. Such insights, together with a more comprehensive understanding of the apostolicity of the Church and the means of its preservation and actualization, have led to certain modifications of previously held positions."

Using the paragraphs above as prologue, the Joint Commission on Ecumenical Relations now would share with the 1976 General Convention its own "working statement" on

### **The Relation of the Historic Episcopate to Apostolic Succession**

The Episcopal Church, through its membership in the Anglican Communion, has received and preserved the historic episcopal succession as an effective sign of the continuity of the Church in apostolic faith and mission—manifested in community, doctrine, proclamation, sacraments, liturgy and service.

Any plan for the reunion of the Church should, we insist, preserve a succession in the ordained ministry which assures the fullness of *episcopate* as a Gift of God.

We acknowledge, however, that apostolicity has many strands. We see a genuine apostolicity in those churches which, while preserving a continuity in

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apostolic faith, mission and ministry, have not retained the historic episcopate.

This acknowledgement is based in part on our appreciation that many episcopal functions may be preserved in a church which does not use the title "bishop," provided ordination is always done in it by persons in whom such a church recognizes the authority to transmit ministerial commission.

We believe the importance of the historic episcopate is not diminished by our close association with such a church. On the contrary, insights gained from such associations often enable churches without the historic episcopate to appreciate it as a sign of, and element in, the continuity and unity of the Church.

We rejoice that more and more non-episcopal churches, including those with whom we are having unity consultations, are expressing a willingness to see the historic episcopate as a sign and means of the apostolic succession of the whole Church in faith, life and doctrine, and that it is, as such, something that ought to be striven for when absent.

We affirm the desire of our Church to seek ways to promote continuing and growing fellowship with such churches in our pilgrimage together toward full unity.

The Joint Commission on Ecumenical Relations invites study and response on these two statements, the paragraphs from the World Council Study and the one drafted by JCER itself, looking toward the time when they, or some variation on them, might be an acceptable stance for the Episcopal Church to take in unity consultations when we are asked to define the meaning of the fourth provision in the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral.

### **F. UNITY CONSULTATIONS AND THE CONSULTATION ON CHURCH UNION (COCU)**

Since 1961 the Episcopal Church has been involved in the work of the Consultation on Church Union, launched by a notable sermon in Grace Cathedral, San Francisco by the Rev. Eugene Carson Blake in which he called for effort to realize a united Church which would be "truly Catholic, truly Evangelical, truly Reformed." From the beginning the Episcopal Church's participation in this activity was critical for its success, for alone among the participating denominations our Church has held to the historic episcopate in a recognizable succession down through the centuries as well as sharing with other churches in an acceptance of Holy Scripture, the historic creeds and the two major sacraments of Baptism and the Holy Communion. We believe that the catholic element in Christian life and experience would be most fully guaranteed in these negotiations by the participation of the Episcopal Church.

As indicated by JCER in its 1973 Report, the Consultation on Church Union, reacting to a critical reception to its "Plan of Union," made several important decisions at its 1973 Plenary in Memphis. COCU agreed to undertake a revision of the chapters in the Plan which constituted the theological basis for Church union, omitting for the time being the chapters on structure and governance. It authorized and encouraged local attempts to share worship, including eucharistic worship, to engage in joint undertakings in mission and in congregational cooperation in what would be called "Generating Communities." And it determined to draw together Middle Judicatory leaders (bishops, district superintendents, presbytery officials) for joint planning and programming wherever possible.

These experiments were intended to provide grass-roots opportunities for learnings that might give guidance to the national negotiations. The Memphis Plenary also recognized the importance of addressing the persistent problem of racism in American Christianity in order that a united church might represent a new break-through in racial justice and equality of participation on all levels of the united church's life. The importance of this was underlined by the decisions of