

HANDBOOK FOR ECUMENISM



*office of  
ecumenical  
and interfaith  
relations*

*That they all may be one. John 17:21*

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

**For the bishops, diocesan ecumenical officers  
and others representing the Episcopal Church  
in relations with Churches of other traditions.**

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Consensus in relation to the eight reservations. However, the Standing Commission as a whole could not endorse the Elucidations as an authorized interpretation of the text. The report asked for adequate time for a thorough study of Churches in Covenant Communion, but stated that "before real unity can be achieved, there must be growth in our knowledge and understanding of each other and further theological dialogue." The full 1991 General Convention resolution may be found in Appendix D.

The study of Churches in Covenant Communion took the form of a survey instrument and packet of COCU materials sent to all dioceses, which were urged to study this text before responding. Fifty-three dioceses responded. The Standing Commission appointed a theological committee to listen to the responses and evaluate Churches in Covenant Communion, including a comparison of its proposals on the ordained ministry with those of the newly published Concordat of Agreement from the Lutheran-Episcopal Dialogue, as recommended by the House of Bishops Ecumenical Committee. In a separate but related event, the 1993 Delray Consultation, sponsored by the Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and including Methodist, Reformed and Disciples participants, compared treatment of the ordained ministry in Concordat of Agreement, Churches in Covenant Communion, A Common Calling, and Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. The report is available from the ELCA Ecumenical Relations Office.

The Standing Commission's report to the 1994 General Convention recommended that the Episcopal Church "not enter a relationship of covenant communion as proposed in Churches in Covenant Communion".

### **Churches Uniting in Christ**

In January 1999, COCU held its first plenary meeting in ten years, recommending that the churches enter into a new relationship to be called **Churches Uniting in Christ**, to be inaugurated and celebrated during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in the year 2002. The plenary identified nine marks of Churches Uniting in Christ and called for dialogue, with the goal of full reconciliation of ministry by 2007. The plenary also approved "A Call to Christian Commitment and Action to Combat Racism."

While supporting enthusiastically the anti-racism initiative, the Episcopal delegation made it clear that the Episcopal Church cannot enter into a relationship that includes the mutual recognition of ordained ministry, unless it has assurance that future reconciliation will include bishops in historic succession and a common and fully interchangeable three-fold ministry which the Presbyterian Church has rejected.

Following the Plenary session, a theological roundtable was convened to seek to address the problems of the Plenary document. As a result of their discussions, the Executive Committee of COCU passed the "Recommendation to the Churches for a New Relationship, Churches Uniting in Christ" (see Appendix D).

At its meeting in Chicago in October 1999, the SCER discussed the revised proposal from the COCU Executive committee and voted affirmatively to support the next steps in the work of COCU/CUIC. The resolution passed by the 2000 General Convention may be found in Appendix D.

### **Episcopal - Reformed Episcopal**

The 1988 General Convention directed the Standing Commission to explore the possibilities of dialogue with representatives of the Reformed Episcopal Church, a church originating in controversies within the Episcopal Church in the 19th century. An informal dialogue group was formed, drawn from the Philadelphia-Baltimore area. After meeting for several years to discuss such matters as authority, Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, and ordained ministry, the group recommended a formal dialogue be established. The General Council of the Reformed Episcopal Church approved, and the 1994 General Convention approved "a dialogue with the Reformed Episcopal Church, the goals of which will include the basis for a mutual recognition of our ordained ministries". However, the Reformed Episcopal Church later decided not to enter into formal dialogue with the Episcopal Church. In 2001 the EIR Office initiated contact with the Reformed Episcopal Church with the goal of re-establishing the dialogue. After initial discussions, a trilateral dialogue involving The Episcopal Church, the Reformed Episcopal Church, and the Anglican Province in America (APA) met from 2003-2004. In the 2004 further talks were put on hold.

### **Moravian-Episcopal Dialogue**

In 1997 the General Convention established an official dialogue with the Moravian Church in America. A steering committee met in 1999, with a Moravian counterpart group, and prepared a report for SCER suggesting goals,

personnel and a timetable for the dialogue. The goals derived from the 1997 General Convention resolution establishing the dialogue: "...to reaffirm those things we hold in common, to explore the possibilities of full communion, mutual recognition of ministries, and shared mission and evangelism."

At its initial meeting, the dialogue established its goals: "The goal of our dialogue is common Christian mission through full communion in faith, life and witness." In 2002, the Provincial Synods of the Moravian Church in America approved a proposal for Interim Eucharistic sharing, which was in turn approved by the 2003 General Convention. A draft concordat of full communion, including reconciliation and recognition of ministries, will be submitted for formal response in 2007, with hoped-for consideration by the 2009 General Convention.

### **Polish National Catholic - Episcopal**

The Polish National Catholic Church of America terminated sacramental communion with the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada in 1978 (the Old Catholic churches in Europe did not). The international Anglican-Old Catholic Theological Conference set up a North American Working Group to continue dialogue on (1) matters pertaining to the International Conference as well as (2) matters pertaining to the ecumenical relations of the Polish National Catholic Church and the Episcopal Church in the USA. Authorized by the 1988 General Convention, the Working Group met in 1990, 1993 and 1994.

In 1997, the PNCC declared that it was in impaired communion with the European Old Catholic Churches over the question of women's ordination. The International Bishops' Conference (IBC), the governing body of the Old Catholic Churches, declared that such a relationship was not possible under the governing Statutes of the Union of Utrecht. The PNCC was given six years to clarify the status of its relationship with the Union of Utrecht. In 2003 the PNCC declared it was still in impaired communion. Accordingly, at the November, 2003 meeting of the IBC the PNCC was declared to be in non-compliance with the Statutes of the IBC and was expelled from the Union of Utrecht. Thus the PNCC is now no longer a member of the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht.

### **Independent Catholic or Orthodox Churches; Episcopi Vagantes or "Wandering Bishops"**

The term "Episcopi Vagantes" (Latin for "wandering bishops") refers to persons claiming episcopal consecration who may or may not be part of churches recognized as being within the historic episcopate. Frequent inquiries are received by dioceses and parish priests regarding the activities of a growing number of churches which assume the title Orthodox, Catholic, or Old Catholic. Often a kind of historical continuity is claimed, through meandering lines of episcopal consecration, with the Orthodox, Roman Catholic, or Old Catholic Churches.

Often clergy from these churches will inquire about renting worship space from the Episcopal Church, or seek to be received into the Episcopal Church; sometimes they claim to be in full communion with the Episcopal Church on the basis of Old Catholic orders. Please consult the Ecumenical Relations Office for further information about dealing with these groups. In a number of instances, however, religious leaders of this sort operate social welfare and rehabilitation programs of various kinds. Admirable as they may be in themselves, such programs may be employed to provide credibility or an image of an ecclesiastical base which does not, in fact, exist. These groups should be approached with extreme caution.

Ecumenical officers and others should emphasize our relationships with recognized churches when asked about such groups. The Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches, prepared by the National Council of Churches and published by Abingdon Press, is a listing of the denominations which have demonstrated stability and have survived. New incorporations or letterhead organizations are not admitted until they qualify. Check this reference book for information, and for further information contact the national Ecumenical Office, which has official policy statements towards such groups.

None of these groups are in full communion with the Episcopal Church. The only Old Catholic Churches with which the Episcopal Church is in communion are the Old Catholic Churches of Europe. Until 2003 the Polish National Catholic Church was a member of the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht, but that is no longer the case.

The 1958 Lambeth Conference voted the following resolution: