

# **An Overview of the Ecumenical Agreement with the Presbyterian Church, USA**

*Issued by the Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations of The Episcopal Church*

## **Introduction**

In 2009 the 76<sup>th</sup> General Convention of the Episcopal Church approved a proposed Agreement with the Presbyterian Church, USA (PCUSA). An identical Agreement was approved by the 2008 General Assembly of the PCUSA and received the necessary approval by a majority of the presbyteries as is required under their polity. This pamphlet is intended to be a brief overview of the dialogue and the Agreement; the full text may be found at [www.episcopalchurch.org/ecumenism](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/ecumenism).

## **Background to the Dialogue:**

Presbyterians and Episcopalians have been in dialogue, on and off, for nearly a century. Significant conversations in the 1930s and 1940s led to a proposal which was submitted to the 1943 General Convention, which was not approved. The Episcopal Church and the Presbyterian Church were founding members of the Consultation on Church Union in 1962, which eventually became a 9-church multilateral conversation. In addition, the

Anglican Communion engaged in a significant dialogue with churches of the Reformed tradition, producing a theological statement, *God's Reign and Our Unity*.

## **Overview of the Agreement:**

The Agreement between the two churches is not the same as full communion, and the relationship between the PCUSA and the Episcopal Church is not parallel to that between the Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

The Agreement has three main goals. One is to acknowledge the significant theological convergence Presbyterians and Episcopalians have been able to reach, and another is to point out those areas which are in need of further conversation and dialogue.

The third and main goal of the Agreement is to encourage Presbyterians and Episcopalians to work together in mission, witness, and service where already possible under our polity. The dialogue team visited several different Presbyterian-Episcopal congregations and was encouraged by the way local ministry between the two churches has developed.

There are 10 points to the Agreement adopted by General Convention:

#1-3 acknowledge one another's churches to be members of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church; that each is a church where the Gospel is rightly preached and Sacraments rightly administered; and that the ministries of each are given by God as instruments of grace. These assertions are based on our mutual acceptance of the *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* document of the World Council of Churches and our years of joint dialogue with the Consultation on Church Union.

# 4 acknowledges that a ministry of oversight is expressed in both churches in personal and collegial forms.

# 5 encourages Presbyterians and Episcopalians to share in ministry to the extent that is currently possible, and with the permission of the bishop and local presbytery. In the Presbyterian Church, an Episcopal priest may celebrate communion and preside at the Sacraments, under certain conditions. In the Episcopal Church, a Presbyterian Minister of Word and Sacrament may preach, lead Morning Prayer or Evening Prayer, officiate at the Ministry of the Word, or preside at a communion service using an authorized rite of the Presbyterian Church (always with the permission of both the presbytery of the PCUSA and the diocesan bishop as liturgical authority).

#6 fosters Eucharistic hospitality between Episcopalians and Presbyterians, which is already permissible under the *Constitution and Canons*. Anyone baptized with water and in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit may receive Communion in the Episcopal Church (see Resolution A043 of the 1979 General Convention).

#7 identifies future issues in need of clarification and to be the topic of future dialogue: diaconal ministries, historic episcopate, and the office of elder.

#8 requests that dioceses and presbyteries considering working together on common areas of mission and ministry.

#9 states that the two churches develop a process for implementing these proposals.

#10 acknowledges that this Agreement is an important step towards full communion, but that this is not yet reconciliation of ordained ministries.

### Future Dialogue

The Agreement, as passed by the General Convention, also included the authorization of another round of dialogue. This phase of the dialogue will build on the consensus which has been reached, and will focus on the remaining theological issues which need to be addressed. For Episcopalians, this will include sharing in

the historic episcopate, as outlined in the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, the basis for the Episcopal Church's engagement in ecumenical conversations. The future dialogue will also be focused on exploring possible areas of continued joint mission between Presbyterians and Episcopalians, including continuing to learn from joint Presbyterian-Episcopal congregations.

### Resources

*For any questions or for further information, please contact:*

Office of Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations (212-716-6220), or visit the website at [www.episcopalchurch.org/ecumenism](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/ecumenism). The full text of the Agreement is posted on the website.

The following resources are available:

*God's Reign and Our Unity: Anglican-Reformed Report*, 1984. Summary of the dialogue between the Anglican Communion and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

[warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/news\\_file/3.pdf](http://warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/news_file/3.pdf)

General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical Relations:

<http://www.pcusa.org/ecumenicalrelations/> This is the office which provides oversight and direction of the ecumenical work of the PCUSA.

The *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* agreed statement of the World Council of Churches' Faith and Order Commission, 1982. This is a foundational ecumenical document, which both the PCUSA and The Episcopal Church have formally endorsed.

<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/faith-and-order-commission/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/baptism-eucharist-and-ministry-faith-and-order-paper-no-111-the-lima-text.html>

Indian Hill Presbyterian-Episcopal Congregation, the oldest and most successful joint Presbyterian-Episcopal church:

<http://www.indianhillchurch.org/>

