

1 A Gift to the World: Co-Laborers for the Healing of Brokenness  
2 The Episcopal Church and The United Methodist Church  
3 A Proposal for Full Communion  
4 Revisions to November 21, 2017  
5

6 *Preamble*  
7

8 In the fractured human community there is a great need for the realization of the unity among the  
9 followers of Christ Jesus. This proposal for full communion between The Episcopal Church and  
10 The United Methodist Church is an effort to bring our churches into closer partnership in the  
11 mission and witness to the love of God and thus labor together for the healing of divisions  
12 among Christians and for the well-being of all. The vision of Revelation 22 is of the tree of life  
13 planted on both sides of a river “and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.”  
14 (Revelation 22:2) Faithful to Jesus’ prayer that his disciples be one so that the world may believe  
15 (John 17: 20-23), may this proposal be an expression of God’s will for the churches.  
16

17 *1. Introduction: The Nature of the Communion We Seek*  
18

19 Since 2002, The Episcopal Church and The United Methodist Church have been engaged in  
20 bilateral dialogue, setting full communion as the goal. We understand the relationship we seek as  
21 follows:  
22

23 Full communion is understood as a relationship between two distinct  
24 ecclesiastical bodies in which each maintains its own autonomy while recognizing  
25 the catholicity and apostolicity of the other, and believing the other to hold the  
26 essentials of the Christian faith. In such a relationship, communicant members of  
27 each would be able freely to communicate at the altar of the other, and ordained  
28 ministers may officiate sacramentally in either church. Specifically, this includes  
29 transferability of members, mutual recognition and interchangeability of  
30 ministries, mutual enrichment by one another’s traditions of hymnody and  
31 patterns of liturgy, freedom to participate in each other’s ordinations and  
32 installations of clergy, including bishops, and structures for consultation to  
33 express, strengthen, and enable our common life, witness, and service, to the  
34 glory of God and the salvation of the world.  
35

36 We seek to draw closer in mission and ministry, grounded in sufficient agreement in the  
37 essentials of Christian faith and order and assisted by interchangeability of ordained ministries.  
38 We are not seeking a merger of our churches, nor a relationship that would imply such a goal in  
39 future, being convinced that we are already united in the catholic church of Christ Jesus in which  
40 we are uniquely formed to share in the mission of God in the world. We are blessed in that  
41 neither of our churches, or their predecessor bodies, have officially condemned one another, nor  
42 have they formally called into question the faith, the ministerial orders, or the sacraments of the  
43 other church.  
44

45 *2. Background: Anglican-Methodist Dialogues*  
46

47 The Episcopal Church-United Methodist Church bilateral dialogue began in 2002. In 2006, The  
48 United Methodist Church and The Episcopal Church entered into a relationship of Interim  
49 Eucharistic Sharing, a step on the way towards full communion that allows for clergy of the two  
50 churches to share in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper under prescribed guidelines.<sup>1</sup> In 2010, it  
51 issued a summary of its theological work, *A Theological Foundation for Full Communion*  
52 *Between The Episcopal Church and The United Methodist Church*. Both of these documents  
53 have been sent to bishops and deputies to General Convention in The Episcopal Church and to  
54 the Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church, and should be read in conjunction with  
55 this proposal. They are available online at  
56 <http://www.episcopalarchives.org/collaborate/sceir/methodist>  
57

58 The first round Dialogue Committee noted in *A Theological Foundation for Full Communion*  
59 that it sees no church dividing issues between the two churches.  
60

61 The second round of bilateral dialogue commenced in 2015 to prepare the way for a full  
62 communion proposal to be presented to the General Convention of The Episcopal Church and  
63 the General Conference of The United Methodist Church, and to assist members in both  
64 churches to understand the closer relationship and its relevance to the lives of persons in local  
65 communities in which it will be lived out.  
66

67 This proposal for full communion is the fruit of over fifty years of formal dialogues between our  
68 two churches. In the 1950s, there were substantive conversations between the (then) Methodist  
69 Church and the (then) Protestant Episcopal Church. However, these bilateral conversations were  
70 set aside in favor of both churches’ membership in the Consultation on Church Union (COCU).  
71 For nearly forty years, The Episcopal Church and The United Methodist Church related to one  
72 another by means of our participation in COCU. Following COCU’s reconstitution as Churches  
73 Uniting in Christ (CUIC) in 1999, The Episcopal Church and The United Methodist Church each  
74 decided in 2000 to commence the first direct bilateral dialogue with one another in nearly fifty  
75 years.  
76

77 The United Methodist-Episcopal dialogue also benefits from the fact that we are members,  
78 through the Anglican Communion and the World Methodist Council, of an international dialogue,  
79 and are informed by the fruits of those conversations. The first round of an international dialogue  
80 mutually sponsored by the World Methodist Council and the Anglican Communion produced a  
81 theological statement, *Sharing in the Apostolic Communion*, issued in 1996. This landmark  
82 document noted that Anglicans and Methodists shared the “core doctrine” of the Christian faith,  
83 and need “no further doctrinal assurances” from one another.<sup>2</sup> Both church families inaugurated  
84 a second round of conversations in 2007, the Anglican Methodist International Consultation on  
85 Unity and Mission (AMICUM), and have issued a report, *Into All the World, Being and*  
86 *Becoming Apostolic Churches*.  
87

### 88 3. *Relationship with Historically African American Methodist Churches*

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<sup>1</sup> See Resolution A055 from the 2006 General Convention and Resolution 81456-IC-NonDis of the 2008 United Methodist General Conference.

<sup>2</sup> See *Sharing in the Apostolic Communion*, particularly ¶ 15-17.

89

90 We are cognizant of the fact that The United Methodist Church is one of several expressions of  
91 Methodism. Our two churches have been in dialogue with the historically African American  
92 Methodist churches for nearly forty years. The African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME),  
93 African Methodist Episcopal Church Zion (AME Zion), and Christian Methodist Episcopal  
94 Church (CME) have been constituent members of COCU and CUIC along with The Episcopal  
95 Church and The United Methodist Church. At the same time that it engaged in bilateral  
96 discussions with The Episcopal Church, The United Methodist Church engaged in dialogues  
97 through the Pan Methodist Commission with the AME, AME Zion, CME, African Union  
98 Methodist Protestant Church (AUMP) and the Union American Methodist Episcopal Church  
99 (UAME) with a goal of affirming full communion among all these Methodist church bodies. In  
100 the 2000s, The United Methodist Church, AME, AME Zion, CME, AUMP, and UAME focused  
101 on those discussions, resulting in a formal ratification of full communion in 2012. The United  
102 Methodist Church and The Episcopal Church have also consulted together with the AME, AME  
103 Zion, and CME (in 2006, 2008, and 2009).

104

105 The United Methodist-Episcopal dialogue has noted that church divisions in the US have often  
106 reflected racial and socioeconomic divisions. The Dialogue Committees have been adamant that  
107 conversations between Anglicans and Methodists must address racism as a church dividing issue.  
108 In addition to our common forebears John and Charles Wesley, we also have common forebears  
109 in Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, both members of St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church  
110 in Philadelphia. Due to policies of racial exclusion, Richard Allen would go on to found what  
111 would become the African Methodist Episcopal Church, while Absalom Jones would become the  
112 first African American priest ordained in The Episcopal Church.

113

#### 114 4. *Foundational Principles*

115

116 We seek the greater unity between our two churches because we believe this is a mandate  
117 grounded in Scripture. Jesus calls us into unity for the sake of mission and ministry, so that the  
118 world may believe:

119

120 I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who  
121 will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one  
122 (John 17:20-21a).

123

124 Our unity is also grounded in our common baptism:

125

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

130

131 For over a century, The Episcopal Church has engaged in dialogue with other churches on the  
132 basis of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, taking agreement on these foundation principles as  
133 the essentials for sharing in mission and ministry with other Christian communions:

134

135 The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as “containing all things necessary  
136 to salvation,” and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith.

137  
138 The Apostles’ Creed, as the Baptismal Symbol; and the Nicene Creed, as the sufficient  
139 statement of the Christian faith.

140  
141 The two Sacraments ordained by Christ Himself — Baptism and the Supper of the Lord  
142 — ministered with unfailing use of Christ’s Words of Institution, and of the elements  
143 ordained by Him.

144  
145 The Historic Episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the  
146 varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into Unity.

147  
148 It is important to note the term used in the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral is “historic  
149 episcopate.” In its ecumenical dialogues, The Episcopal Church has made important  
150 clarifications regarding the historic episcopate, historic succession, and apostolic succession.  
151 This term is referenced in the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral as “the historic episcopate,” with  
152 the two terms “historic episcopate” and “historic succession” understood synonymously.

153  
154 In addition, a major ecumenical breakthrough has been acknowledging the differences between  
155 “apostolic succession” and “historic episcopate.” We understand “apostolic succession” to be  
156 succession in the apostolic faith—that is, to believe, preach, and teach the faith that the apostles’  
157 held. Some churches have retained the apostolic succession of the faith proclaimed by the  
158 apostles as well as bishops in historic succession; others have not. The United Methodist Church  
159 and The Episcopal Church have affirmed the relationship between episcopacy and apostolic  
160 succession as described in the seminal ecumenical document *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*  
161 (1982):

162  
163 The primary manifestation of apostolic succession is to be found in the apostolic tradition of  
164 the Church as a whole. . . . The orderly transmission of the ordained ministry is therefore a  
165 powerful expression of the continuity of the Church throughout history; it also underlines the  
166 calling of the ordained minister as guardian of the faith. . . . Under the particular historical  
167 circumstances of the growing Church in the early centuries, the succession of bishops  
168 became one of the ways, together with the transmission of the Gospel and the life of the  
169 community, in which the apostolic tradition of the Church was expressed. This succession  
170 was understood as serving, symbolizing and guarding the continuity of the apostolic faith and  
171 communion.<sup>4</sup>

172  
173 Both churches affirm the historic episcopate, in the language of the *Baptism, Eucharist and*  
174 *Ministry* statement, as a “sign, but not a guarantee, of the catholicity, unity, and continuity of the  
175 church;” and that the historic episcopate is always in a process of reform in the service of the  
176 Gospel.

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<sup>4</sup> *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, ¶¶ M35 and M36.

177 The United Methodist Church provides episcopacy through an “itinerant general superintendency.”  
178 The Council of Bishops provides oversight to the spiritual and temporal work of the church and  
179 that bishops are elected in regional representative conferences and subject to assignment.

180

181 We declare that we recognize one another as members of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic  
182 church in which the Gospel is rightly preached and taught; and that the basic teaching of each  
183 respective church is consonant with the Gospel and is sufficiently compatible.

184

#### Affirmations

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

188

189 Our churches proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

221 From *Theological Foundation for Full Communion*, pp. 14-15.

222 5. *The Ministry of Lay Persons*  
223

224 Our churches believe that the ministry of all people is grounded in baptism, where we share in  
225 Christ's eternal priesthood. We recognize one another's baptisms into the one, holy, catholic, and  
226 apostolic church. In addition, over the years, we have developed a number of lay ministries.  
227 From its beginning as a movement in the Church of England, Methodism has recognized the  
228 central importance of lay leadership. In the United Methodist Church, every lay person is called  
229 to participate in the mission of the Church. The Church affirms that "the ministry of the laity  
230 flows from a commitment to Christ's outreaching love. Lay members of The United Methodist  
231 Church are, by history and calling, active advocates of the gospel of Jesus Christ." (2012  
232 Discipline, ¶127) Lay leaders serve at congregational, district, and conference levels. Lay  
233 persons may be trained and certified as lay servants, lay speakers, lay missionaries, lay ministers  
234 and as Deaconesses and Home Missioners.  
235

236 The Catechism of The Episcopal Church states that "The ministers of the Church are lay persons,  
237 bishops, priests, and deacons."<sup>5</sup> Baptism is understood as foundation for the ministry of all the  
238 baptized, as the people pray that the newly baptized "Confess the faith of Christ crucified,  
239 proclaim his resurrection, and share with us in his eternal priesthood."<sup>6</sup> In the Episcopal Church,  
240 persons may be trained and licensed as a Pastoral Leader, Worship Leader, Preacher, Eucharistic  
241 Minister, Eucharistic Visitor, Evangelist, and Catechist. The Episcopal Church and The United  
242 Methodist Church acknowledge the interchangeability of one another's lay ministries, always  
243 according to the standards and polity of the Book of Discipline and the Constitution and Canons  
244 of the Episcopal Church.  
245

246 6. *The Ministry of Deacons*  
247

248 The Episcopal Church and The United Methodist Church have witnessed a revival of the office  
249 of deacon. There are persons ordained to a ministry of Word and Service, serving as icons of the  
250 servant ministry of Jesus Christ. As a result of the actions taken by both churches in ¶ 9, we  
251 affirm the mutual interchangeability of deacons, always according to the standards and polity of  
252 each church. We also note that The Episcopal Church has retained the office of deacon for those  
253 persons called to the priesthood, while The United Methodist Church no longer ordains persons  
254 called to be elders as deacons.  
255

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<sup>5</sup> BCP, p. 855.

<sup>6</sup> BCP, p. 308.

256 7. *The Ministry of Presbyters/Elders*

257  
258 Both of our churches ordain persons to the office of presbyter to exercise a ministry of Word and  
259 Sacrament. In The Episcopal Church, the terms presbyter and priest are most commonly used. In  
260 The United Methodist Church, the term elder, which is the English translation of presbyter, is  
261 used (though presbyter is used by some member churches of the World Methodist Council). The  
262 Episcopal Church speaks of clergy “in good standing,” either canonically resident in a diocese or  
263 licensed to preside in a particular diocese. The United Methodist Church speaks of elders “in full  
264 connection.” We affirm the mutual interchangeability of priests/presbyters in good standing and  
265 elders in full connection, always according to the standards and polity of each church.<sup>7</sup>

266  
267 8. *The Ministry of Bishops*

268  
269 We acknowledge and recognize that both churches have adapted the episcopacy to particular  
270 circumstances of mission, ministry, and witness. Following the American Revolution, The  
271 Episcopal Church adapted the office of bishop to its new missional context: bishops were elected  
272 by representative bodies (Diocesan Conventions) and exercised oversight in conjunction with  
273 clergy and laypersons. After the American Revolution, Methodists also adapted the episcopal  
274 office to the missional needs of their ministerial circumstances and settings. Early Methodism  
275 adapted the office of bishop as an itinerant general superintendency, and the name of the largest  
276 Methodist body incorporated the word: Methodist Episcopal Church, reflecting this choice of  
277 episcopal governance.<sup>8</sup> The United Methodist Church includes among its antecedent  
278 denominations the Methodist Protestant Church resulting from a merger in 1939. The Methodist  
279 Protestant Church incorporated the Methodist episcopacy at that time as it did not have the office  
280 of bishop in its structure. In 1968, The United Methodist Church was created through the merger  
281 of the Methodist Church with the Evangelical United Brethren Church, which also had bishops,  
282 at which time the churches’ episcopacies were brought together into a unified whole.

283  
284 In The Episcopal Church and The United Methodist Church, bishops are consecrated by other  
285 bishops and ordain presbyters/elders and deacons. They exercise oversight in a specific  
286 geographic area—the diocese or annual conference—and in conjunction with clergy and lay  
287 persons.

288  
289 We affirm the ministry of bishops in The United Methodist Church and The Episcopal Church to  
290 be adaptations of the episcopate to the needs and concerns of the post-Revolutionary missional  
291 context. We recognize the ministries of our bishops as fully valid and authentic.

292  
293 We lament any ways, whether intentionally or unintentionally, explicitly or implicitly, that  
294 Episcopalians may have considered the ministerial orders of the United Methodist Church or its  
295 predecessor bodies to be lacking God’s grace.

296

297 It is our hope and prayer that in this full communion proposal we may heal these divisions, right  
298 the sin of separation from the 1780s, and share in these mutual adaptations of the episcopate for  
299 the greater unity of the church in mission and ministry.

300

301 9. *Actions of Both Churches*

302

303 *Action concerning elders and deacons in full connection of The United Methodist Church*

304

305 Having affirmed in this proposal the full authenticity of existing ordained ministries in The  
306 United Methodist Church, having reached sufficient agreement in faith with the same Church,  
307 having declared one another to be members of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church (A055,  
308 2006 General Convention), and having agreed that the threefold ministry of Bishops, Presbyters,  
309 and Deacons in historic succession will be the future pattern of the one ordained ministry shared  
310 corporately within the two Churches in full communion, The Episcopal Church authorizes  
311 service of United Methodist deacons and elders as permitted under Article VIII of the  
312 Constitution, which permits the service of clergy not ordained by bishops authorized to confer  
313 holy orders that are “designated as part of the Covenant or Instrument by which full communion  
314 was established, shall be eligible to officiate under this Article.” By sharing in the historic  
315 episcopate, we will have fulfilled all four elements of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral. The  
316 purpose of this action will be to recognize the authenticity of elders and deacons in The United  
317 Methodist Church and to permit the full interchangeability and reciprocity of all United  
318 Methodist elders in full connection as priests and all United Methodist deacons in full connection  
319 as deacons in the Episcopal Church without any further ordination or re-ordination or  
320 supplemental ordination whatsoever, subject always to canonically or constitutionally approved  
321 invitation.

322

323 *Action concerning priests and deacons of the Episcopal Church*

324

325 Upon adoption of this agreement by the General Convention of the Episcopal Church and the  
326 General Conference of The United Methodist Church, all priests and deacons of the Episcopal  
327 Church are granted full interchangeability and reciprocity as elders and deacons, respectively, in  
328 The United Methodist Church without any further action, subject always to canonically or  
329 constitutionally approved invitation. There are no restrictions requiring a temporary suspension.

330

331 The two churches pledge to draw closer together by mutually honoring their respective  
332 adaptations of the episcopate according to the following pattern:

333

334 *Actions concerning bishops of both churches.*

335

336 To share in our mutual adaptations of the episcopate, to embody our conviction that our  
337 ministries of bishops are fully valid and authentic, and to broaden and deepen our ecumenical  
338 partnerships, both churches commit to the following actions:

339



340 The United Methodist Church pledges that, effective January 1, 2022<sup>9</sup>, consecrations of United  
341 Methodist bishops will include at least three bishops drawn from common full communion  
342 partners with The Episcopal Church (the Moravian Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church  
343 in America). One of these three shall be a bishop in the Episcopal Church. These bishops will be  
344 present and participate in the laying on of hands.  
345

346 The Episcopal Church pledges that, effective January 1, 2022, ordinations and consecrations of  
347 Episcopal bishops will include at least three bishops drawn from common full communion  
348 partners with The United Methodist Church (the Moravian Church and the Evangelical Lutheran  
349 Church in America) and with at least one United Methodist bishop present. These bishops will be  
350 present and participate in the laying on of hands.  
351

#### 352 10. *Joint Commission* 353

354 To assist in joint planning for mission, both churches will authorize the establishment of a joint  
355 commission, fully accountable to the decision-making bodies of the two churches.  
356

357 This Commission will be charged with planning an appropriate liturgy to celebrate the full  
358 communion inaugurated by this agreement. This liturgy will acknowledge the pain of division,  
359 call for reconciliation and forgiveness for any sins of the past, and look with hope to celebrate  
360 the common mission and witness to which we commit ourselves.  
361

362 Its purpose will also be consultative, to facilitate mutual support and advice as well as common  
363 decision making through appropriate channels in fundamental matters that the churches may face  
364 together in the future. The joint commission will work with the appropriate boards, committees,  
365 commissions, and staff of the two churches concerning such ecumenical, doctrinal, pastoral, and  
366 liturgical matters as may arise, always subject to approval by the appropriate decision-making  
367 bodies of the two churches.  
368

#### 369 11. *Other Relationships* 370

371 The United Methodist Church and The Episcopal Church agree to cultivate and maintain active  
372 partnership and consultation with one another in the promotion of unity with other churches and  
373 religions. Ecumenical and interreligious agreements entered into by one church represented in  
374 this agreement with another church or religious group shall not be understood to impose or imply  
375 any formal relationship with the other.  
376

#### 377 12. *Conclusion* 378

379 We give thanks for the gift of unity that is given us through the love of Christ Jesus. We rejoice  
380 that this relationship will empower us to more authentically witness to the gospel.  
381

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<sup>9</sup> This date assumes an affirmative vote at the 2021 General Convention of The Episcopal Church and 2020 General Conference of The United Methodist Church. It may need to be adjusted to reflect the year of the actual endorsement and acceptance of this proposal by General Convention and General Conference.

382 Charles Wesley, a priest in the Church of England and co-leader with his brother, John, in the  
383 Methodist movement in 18<sup>th</sup> century England, wrote:

384  
385       Blest be the dear uniting love  
386       that will not let us part;  
387       our bodies may far off remove,  
388       we still are one in heart.

389  
390       We all are one who him receive,  
391       and each with each agree,  
392       in him the One, the Truth we live,  
393       blest point of unity!

394  
395       Partakers of the Savior's grace,  
396       the same in mind and heart,  
397       nor joy, nor grief, nor time, nor place,  
398       nor life, nor death can part.