

Frequently Asked Questions:

Episcopal Church and United Methodist Church Dialogue

November 13, 2017

Why now?

We long to be together not scattered and alone but gathered from the ends of the earth to God's table, seeking healing from our brokenness and joy in our service.

All Christians share in a ministry of reconciliation from God through Christ in which something entirely new comes into being (2 Cor 5:17-19). We see our proposal of full communion as an urgent new sign of life and hope in a torn and increasingly fragile environment.

We have recently rediscovered our family resemblances. Consultations, agreements, and concords exist between international Anglican and Methodist bodies. Living into our oneness in Christ will energize new and creative ministries in our communities, and be an impetus for God's justice in the world.

Who are the Episcopalians and the United Methodists, and why did we ever split?

In our Christian faith, Episcopalians and United Methodists are catholic, reformed, and evangelical. We are offspring of the 18th-century Church of England that responded differently to the missionary environment of the United States' early years. We share the same Scriptures, the same creeds, an episcopate, and commitments to the Christian life of holiness and *diakonia*. Episcopal Church life is expressed through four orders of ministry: laity, deacons, priests, and bishops. The United Methodist Church has three orders of ministry: laity, deacons, and elders, with Bishops as consecrated leaders.

What is Full Communion?

Both churches recognize one another as members of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church in which Baptism, membership and ordinations are recognized as complete in Christ. Both churches commit to common witness, mission, worship, and service. Members may freely receive the Eucharist in one another's communions. Members pledge to be mutually enriched by one another's traditions. Full communion means autonomy, with distinct churches, and interchangeability of ordained ministers.

One gift this Full Communion agreement offers is the flexibility to consider Episcopal priests for clergy roles and positions in United Methodist churches, and vice versa. We rejoice in the enrichment that will come in such places. In a United Methodist Church, an Episcopal priest would deploy and abide by United Methodist polity, and vice versa. For clergy disciplinary issues, however, the ordained minister is accountable to her or his home denomination.

Do Episcopalians and United Methodists worship differently? What will happen in our worship services?

We share the same Scriptures, the same creeds, and the same sacraments. We have long expressed God's praise through a common hymnody. A Full Communion agreement will give us more gifts to share. [The Book of Common Prayer](#) structures Episcopal worship. The Eucharist is the principal act of Sunday worship in the Episcopal Church. For United Methodists, the [Book of Worship](#) is an important liturgical guide, and there is much liturgical flexibility.

What about communion?

Since 2006, Episcopalians and United Methodists have enjoyed Interim Eucharistic Sharing with agreed upon guidelines. Our theologies of Holy Communion differ only in matters of emphasis. A complex set of interwoven images (remembrance, fellowship, foretaste of the heavenly banquet, the sacrifice of Christ) figure into our sense of the Body and Blood of Christ in the holy meal.

Episcopalians believe that the sacrament of Holy Communion (or the Eucharist) is the central act of worship, orienting everything around Christ's death and resurrection. Episcopalians believe that Christ is really present in the Eucharist. All baptized Christians are welcome to receive communion in Episcopal churches. Episcopalians typically have Eucharist every Sunday, some even daily.

United Methodists believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. John Wesley believed the Eucharist was a "converting ordinance." Holy Communion is a gift of God to the church and an act of the community of faith. By responding to this invitation, Methodists affirm and deepen our personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ and our commitment to membership and mission in the body of Christ. While some United Methodist churches have Communion weekly, others celebrate it less often.

What about wine and grape juice at Communion?

The Book of Common Prayer assumes the use of wine at celebrations of the Holy Eucharist. Methodists customarily use "the unfermented juice of the grape." Our proposal makes no requirements for either church to change these rubrics or their standard practice; it does indicate that in joint celebrations between United Methodists and Episcopalians, both grape juice and wine are to be used, as laid out in *Interim Eucharistic Sharing*.

What about LGBTQI persons, ordinations, and marriage?

There is, within both the Episcopal and United Methodist denominations, disagreement on these issues.

The United Methodist Book of Discipline contains prohibitive legislation regarding homosexuality and marriage between persons of people of the same sex. United Methodists are not of one mind, and are engaged in broad discussion on this matter. The Episcopal Church has authorized rites for Christian marriage between persons of the same sex at its General Convention in 2015. Most bishops have authorized its use.

This proposal is suggesting that differences in understanding human sexuality need not be church dividing. Most Episcopal dioceses permit openly LGBTQI persons to serve; whilst some do not, they have remained in communion with one another.

How do Episcopalians and United Methodists make decisions?

For both, while a congregation has considerable autonomy, it is always part of a larger *ekklesia*. For United Methodists, the local church is part of an Annual Conference, which may be part of a state or comprising several states. Similarly, for Episcopalians, the diocese is the primary body, and each parish finds its place within the diocese. Each annual conference and each diocese is led by a bishop. The highest legislative authority for United Methodists is the General Conference, with clergy and lay delegates who meet every four years. The highest legislative authority for Episcopalians is the General Convention, which meets every three years, and is composed of two houses, deputies (clergy and laity) and bishops.

In local congregations of both churches, there is a shared ministry between ordained and lay leaders. Decision-making procedures will not change when we are in full communion; however, we will benefit from collaboration, and will choose to speak in concert with and in acknowledgment of one another as often as possible.

Compiled by Dr. Deirdre Good for the Episcopal Church-United Methodist Church Dialogue, November 2017