
Unity not Uniformity

An article for *The Cathedral Times*

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June 9, 2024

Since I joined the Cathedral, one of my roles has been to serve the wider Church by being part of various Ecumenical dialogues. What this really means is that I, alongside with members of the Episcopal Church, meet and work together with the representatives of other Christian denominations and other faith communities from across the United States and from around the world. The major purpose of this work is to build bridges in our fragmented world so Jesus' prayer from John 17 may be fulfilled: that they all may be one! By engaging with others, we can know ourselves better and follow the life-giving path of Jesus Christ whose desire and prayer is to bring all together.

You may have seen recent media reports about the ongoing conversations around establishing "full communion" partnership between the Episcopal Church and the United Methodist Church. In April of 2024 during the General Conference of the United Methodist Church, the leaders of the church voted for and expressed a heartfelt desire to establish full communion partnership with the Episcopal Church. But what does this mean? The full communion agreement states the following:

"We understand full communion to be a relation between distinct churches in which each recognizes the other as a catholic and apostolic church holding the essentials of the Christian faith. Within this new relation, churches become interdependent while remaining autonomous. Diversity is preserved, but this diversity is not static. Neither church seeks to remake the other in its own image, but each is open to the gifts of the other as it seeks to be faithful to Christ and his mission. They are together committed to a visible unity in the church's mission to proclaim the Word and administer the Sacraments."

Through this agreement, the Episcopal Church and the United Methodist Church will be able to offer the riches of their ministries to each other and to the wider world. We will be able to share our resources with each other, exchange lay and clergy leaders between our churches, and learn to walk together in various missions and ministries locally as well as globally. This is quite similar to the relationship we already have with churches such as Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Moravian Church, and Church of Sweden.¹ I should emphasize that these agreements and partnerships strive towards unity, not uniformity.

In light of this future partnership, I'd like to share a story of what it looks like when people of God come together to listen to one another and walk together in love. Last year in October I attended Christian Churches Together Forum in Savannah, Georgia. The representatives from over 30 different Christian denominations were gathered under the theme "Water that Unites and Water that Divides: Baptism and the Journey to Unity and Reconciliation." We learned about each other's histories, traditions, and worship practices, and dialogued and prayed together believing in the power of One Faith, One Lord, and One Baptism. Sharing the stories of our own baptism and traditions from our Churches deepened our knowledge of self and understanding of others. Inevitably, there were moments when we engaged in difficult conversations over baptism of children or adults, baptism by full immersion or pouring of water, yet, what held the most significance for me was the sense of community and connection and the desire to keep going, desire to listen to one another, even in the most challenging moments. Amidst these tensions I was grateful for the fellowship with our Christian brothers and sisters from across the world imagining ways we could connect and build together the future of the church rooted in Christ. This wasn't insignificant; it disrupted the routine and served as a reminder that where there is a longing and yearning for unity and harmony, there might be multiple paths leading to it.

My hope and prayer this summer is that we may come ready to listen to each other amidst conflict, disagreements and arguments, whether we are talking about church, politics, or baseball and whether those

conversations are behind closed doors, during official meetings, or on our porches over cold summer drinks. Unity does not mean uniformity. It is entirely possible and perfectly okay for two good people to have a disagreement, two good people to have two good but different ways. I believe the unity of the church Jesus prayed for signifies, a commitment and collaboration, learning from and appreciating our differences, the kind of unity which reflects the longing for harmony and cooperation to build the body of Christ.

¹ <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/ministries/ecumenical-interreligious/full-communion-partners/>