Memorandum of Mutual Recognition
of Relations of Full Communion
Between the Churches of Called to Common Mission
(The Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America)
And
The Churches of Called to Full Communion: The Waterloo Declaration
(The Anglican Church of Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada)

Background

In 1987, building on ecumenical agreements both local and global, the Anglican-Lutheran International Continuation Committee met in Niagara Falls, Canada, for a consultation on episcopate.\(^1\) Consideration of recommendations to churches from the Niagara Report helped result in The Porvoo Common Statement (1992), the basis for the Porvoo Communion now including churches from Great Britain and Ireland, the Nordic region, the Baltic countries and Iberia.

A few years later, continuing theological discussions led first in the United States to Called to Common Mission (CCM), adopted by the 1999 Churchwide Assembly of the Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the 2000 General Convention of the Episcopal Church (TEC), and then in Canada to Called to Full Communion: the Waterloo Declaration, approved by the National Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) and the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada (ACC) in 2001. These agreements establish what are the three principal full communion relationships between member churches of the Anglican Communion and of The Lutheran World Federation: A Communion of Churches.

The third Anglican Lutheran International Commission (ALIC III), recognizing the contextual specificity of each agreement, acknowledged that it is “difficult to envisage at this stage” how to move toward “a relationship of (full) communion at the global level.” Yet the Commission identified steps forward which could be taken at once; for example, “on the basis of an agreement entered into by a sister church, and reviewed by international bodies, those who come from a church of that region might be considered in communion with all other churches that have the same kind of agreement.”\(^2\)

Commending ALIC’s guidelines, the Anglican Consultative Council 16, meeting in Zambia in 2016, encouraged “steps in North American, British and Irish Anglican churches to bring the three regional agreements of Communion into relationship with each other.”\(^3\)

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\(^1\)Essential texts are collected in Sven Oppegaard and Gregory Cameron, eds., Anglican-Lutheran Agreements: Regional and International Agreements 1972-2002, LWF Documentation 49 (2004) and on multiple sites online.


Rationale

Taking next steps forward seems particularly achievable and important in the North American context.

• Almost twenty years of experience living into full communion has enriched the lives of the four churches in ways from which there is no turning back. While there are of course challenges from sharing geographical territory, the churches of Waterloo and of CCM face together many common cultural realities. Despite their different histories, they increasingly have in common the roles of “minority churches” in their contexts.

As full communion partners, Lutherans and Episcopalians/Anglicans in each country have walked with one another in times of joy and celebration and in times of sorrow and trial. They have collaborated in a wide range of ministries, been enriched when consulting one another’s wisdom, joined together in worship and advocacy, exchanged ordained leadership and established friendships at all levels. There is strong affirmation for the already existing relationships across national borders between TEC and ACC and between ELCIC and ELCA, including the exchange of clergy, and the equally strong relationship between ELCA/TEC and ELCIC/ACC with the sharing of ordained/rostered clergy between Episcopalians and Lutherans in the USA and between Lutherans and Anglicans in Canada.

Furthermore, these four churches are increasingly mindful of the wisdom of Indigenous Peoples who have continually inhabited the land that many call Turtle Island, also now known as North America. These First Peoples are not and have not been divided by national borders established by colonialist power; many hold to the Indigenous principle that “on this land we are all related” – an invitation for all to work toward more responsible, reciprocal, and loving relationships.

While the shape of shared life is distinctive in each country and embraces great local diversity, both CCM and Waterloo extended invitations to common mission which have borne significant fruits, both expected and unanticipated. As the times of Interim Eucharistic Sharing, practiced in both countries, helped strengthen the hope for full communion, so also the experiences of full communion have strengthened the desire not to remain fixed in what has already been realized. Even more than when full communion relations were established, “We are ready to be co-workers with God in whatever tasks of mission serve the Gospel.”

• Already the deepening relations between the Waterloo churches and between the CCM churches have reached across the national boundary to create relationships and structures among all four churches.

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4Conclusion, The Waterloo Declaration. Cf. CCM 98: “Entering full communion … will bring new opportunities and levels of shared evangelism, witness, and service.”
The four heads of churches have established the practice of regular meetings, and annually they cooperate on a seasonal devotional series. The coordinating committees in each country exchange representatives and meet together on a regular basis every few years. In these contexts, it is easy to forget that there is no formal link between the two agreements of full communion.

At the same time, changes brought with easier international communication and travel also push against the limits of the existing agreements. A notable example concerns “orderly exchange” of ministry. Increasingly, each church encounters ministry situations which would welcome procedures for orderly exchange with persons not only from the bilateral partner but from the church of that communion in the other agreement.

Currently, among the four Waterloo and CCM churches, each church is in full communion with two of the others - but not with the third (not with the church from the other tradition and in the other country). Increasingly, this is experienced as theologically unnecessary, missionally costly, and jarring. It is time for these churches explicitly to recognize one another’s full communion agreements, and on that basis to extend to one another the implications of being in communion.

Actions

In order to strengthen shared life and mission and to deepen visible unity between the signatory churches of CCM and of Waterloo, and

In order to offer witness and invitation to other churches of our world communions in many local settings, as appropriate in their contexts, to move toward such sharing of (full) communion,

These four churches commit themselves to

- Give thanks for and affirm the theological basis for full communion established by theological dialogue between members of the Lutheran and Anglican traditions around the world;

- Rejoice in the gifts given to the churches by their bilateral full communion relations;

- Treat the churches of the other agreement as also churches with which a relationship of full communion exists on the basis of these agreements and this experience;

- Establish policies and procedures to facilitate exchange of ministry between The Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, and between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Anglican Church of Canada. This will be informed by the experience and resources of the existing full communion agreements, including mandating complete continuing exchange of
information about ministerial conduct, duly honoring that such exchanges are subject in each case to approval by sending and receiving bishops.

- Continue to seek conversations with other members of the Anglican Communion and The Lutheran World Federation that would commend further mutual recognition of (full) communion agreements, where they exist, and encourage churches without such agreements to move toward living into such relationships.

Jointly prepared and commended by the members of the Joint Anglican-Lutheran Commission in Canada and the Lutheran-Episcopal Coordinating Committee in the United States.

Niagara Falls, Ontario
September 26, 2018