

ARE WE THERE YET? THE TASK AND FUNCTION OF FULL-COMMUNION COORDINATING COMMITTEES

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PRECIS

Most of the bilateral full-communion accords between Protestant denominations in the United States have established a bilateral national coordinating committee to encourage and oversee reception of the agreement. This essay explores the role of these coordinating committees in the implementation of these full-communion agreements throughout the churches. It surveys current bilateral full-communion agreements and explores how the various coordinating committees are chartered, commissioned, and staffed. The characteristics of full-communion coordinating committees are described as consultative, collaborative, corroborative, canonical, encouraging, strategic, creative, communicative, generative, and missional. Finally, the essay assesses the challenges and opportunities inherent in implementing these ecumenical agreements in the life of the churches.

Introduction

Over the past twenty years, bilateral full-communion agreements have proliferated on the ecumenical scene in the United States. Some of the specific agreements that are currently in play include (in chronological order):

- The Episcopal Church-the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht (1934)
- The Episcopal Church-The Philippine Independent Church (1961)
- The Episcopal Church-the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar, India (1979)¹
- The United Church of Christ-Christian Church/Disciples of Christ Ecumenical Partnership (1989)²
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America-Presbyterian Church (USA), the Reformed Church in America, and the United Church of Christ (1997)³
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America-the Moravian Church of America, Northern & Southern Provinces (1999)⁴

¹The Episcopal Church, Full Communion Partners; available at <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/page/mar-thoma-church-episcopal-church-agreement>.

²See <http://www.ucc.org/ecumenical/ucc-disciples-ecumenical.html>.

³*A Formula of Agreement*; available at <http://www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Office-of-the-Presiding-Bishop/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Full-Communion-Partners/Presbyterian-Church-USA/A-Formula-of-Agreement.aspx>. In this instance, although four national church bodies are involved, the PCUSA, RCA and UCC acted as one party to the bilateral agreement.

⁴*Following Our Shepherd to Full Communion*; available at <http://www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Office-of-the-Presiding-Bishop/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Full-Communion-Partners/The-Moravian-Church/Following-Our-Shepherd.aspx>.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America-the Episcopal Church (2001)⁵
 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America-United Methodist Church (2009)⁶
 The Episcopal Church-the Moravian Church of America, Northern & Southern Provinces (2010)⁷

The ecumenical dialogues culminating in these full-communion agreements are tremendous achievements for the churches. However, they remain merely printed documents until the churches implement these accords. Finding ways in which these agreements can live is the responsibility of full-communion coordinating committees. It is both a duty and a joy to make unity visible by the grace of God in order to make a stronger, more united witness to the world, in obedience to Jesus' call.

This essay will explore the role that the national full-communion coordinating committees play in implementing bilateral full-communion agreements, describe the functions and characteristics of these coordinating committees in action, and assess the challenges and opportunities inherent in implementing these ecumenical agreements in the life of the churches. Because the present author has served as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America co-chair of the Lutheran-Episcopal Coordinating Committee since 2008, many examples used here will derive from the full-communion agreements of those two churches.

Definition and Characteristics of Full Communion

Soon after the formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (hereafter, ELCA), the church crafted a policy statement to define and guide its ecumenical work: *Ecumenism: The Vision of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, which was adopted in 1991. The vision statement states the church's ecumenical commitment: to be "bold to reach out in several directions simultaneously to all those with whom it may find agreement in the Gospel" and to "[give] priority to no Christian denomination or group."⁸ The vision statement defines the stages of the ELCA's dialogue process with ecumenical partners. The first stage is ecumenical cooperation with other denominational expressions and ecumenical organizations, such as councils of churches. Ecumenical dialogue in both bilateral and multilateral forms is the second stage. The third

⁵*Called to Common Mission*; available at <http://www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Office-of-the-Presiding-Bishop/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Full-Communion-Partners/The-Episcopal-Church/Called-to-Common-Mission/Official-Text.aspx>.

⁶*Confessing Our Faith Together* (available at http://www.elca.org/~media/Files/Who We Are/Ecumenical and Inter Religious Relations/Confessing_Faith_Together.ashx) and "Recommendations: Full Communion with the United Methodist Church" (available at <http://www.elca.org/~media/Files/Who We Are/Office of the Secretary/Assembly/2009/PAR 2009 Recommendations UMC.pdf>).

⁷*Finding Our Delight in the Lord: A Proposal for Full Communion between The Episcopal Church, the Moravian Church-Northern Province, and the Moravian Church-Southern Province*; available at http://www.episcopalchurch.org/sites/default/files/finding_our_delight_official_text.pdf.

⁸Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Ecumenism: The Vision of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* (Chicago: ELCA, 1991), p. 11.

stage, preliminary recognition, involves church agreements on eucharistic sharing and at least partial doctrinal agreement and some recognition of ministry, though without the expectation of exchangeability of clergy.

The fourth stage, full communion, is described in the vision statement as the ELCA's realization of the goal of the ecumenical movement.⁹ Building upon the work of the 1983 international Anglican-Lutheran dialogue, published as "The Cold Ash Report," the ELCA vision statement defines full communion in this way:

Full communion, a gift from God, is founded on faith in Jesus Christ. It is a commitment to truth in love and a witness to God's liberation and reconciliation. Full communion is visible and sacramental. . . . Full communion . . . points to the complete communion and unity of all Christians that will come with the arrival of the kingdom of God at the parousia of Christ, the Lord. It is also a goal in need of continuing definition. It is rooted in agreement on essentials and allows diversity in nonessentials.¹⁰

Establishing this stage of dialogue as the goal of the ELCA's bilateral conversations defines the nature of the unity that the church seeks. Although the ELCA has fully engaged in multilateral dialogues (including National Council of Churches of Christ Faith and Order and Christian Churches Together), its primary focus has been on bilateral dialogues ever since. Even the bilateral dialogues that are still some distance from reaching this stage keep this goal in view. For example, the latest statement of U.S. Lutheran-Catholic dialogue, "The Hope of Eternal Life," specifies that the two parties continue to identify full communion as the goal of the dialogue, despite differing views on what agreements will be necessary in order to achieve it.¹¹

The Episcopal Church, which is party to five full-communion agreements, uses the definition of full communion given in No. 2 of *Called to Common Mission*, the church's full-communion agreement with the ELCA, in its *EIR [Ecumenical and Inter-religious Relations] Handbook*:

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.¹²

⁹There has been much ecumenical debate over whether the ultimate goal is "full communion" or extends to "full visible unity" or "unity in reconciled diversity." See Mitzi J. Budde, "The Goal of the ELCA Full Communion Agreements," *Ecumenical Trends* 32 (March, 2003): 33-40.

¹⁰ELCA, *Ecumenism: The Vision*, p. 13.

¹¹See Jeffrey Gros, "Hope for Eternal Life: The Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue," *J.E.S.* 46 (Spring, 2011): 267.

¹²The Episcopal Church, *Full Communion Partners*; available at <http://archive.episcopalchurch>

The ELCA's full-communion agreements with the Episcopal Church, the Moravian Church, and the United Methodist Church each respectively identify six characteristics of full communion: common confession of faith; mutual recognition of baptism and eucharist, enabling joint worship and membership exchange; mutual recognition of clergy, subject to the regulations of mutual polity; shared evangelism, witness, and service; common decision-making on critical common issues of faith and life; and mutual lifting of any condemnations that exist between the churches. *A Formula of Agreement* between the ELCA and the Reformed family of churches adds a seventh characteristic of full communion, as the parties "pledge themselves to living together under the Gospel in such a way that the principle of mutual affirmation and admonition becomes the basis of a trusting relationship in which respect and love for the other will have a chance to grow."¹³

In order to explore whether this bilateral concept of full communion might offer a way forward for multilateral dialogue, the National Council of Churches of Christ Faith and Order Commission held two successive quadrennial studies on the topic of full communion. A 2000–03 study "identified the *intrachurch* understandings of unity/full communion," followed by a 2004–07 study on *interchurch* understandings of unity/full communion, utilizing the relationships of churches in the U.S. that are in stages of living into communion to investigate questions of reception and significance for other churches.¹⁴ This double quadrennial study ultimately concluded that "full communion" as a stage of unity is not transferable as a multilateral ecumenical concept. The paper, "Meanings of Full Communion: The Essence of Life in the Body," written by co-chair O. C. Edwards and published in the NCCC online journal *Speaking of Unity*, explicated various ways in which different denominations have used the term "full communion" and then analyzed, one by one, how each denomination has defined its basis for unity. The results were ecumenically disheartening, as Edwards could ultimately identify no common agreement on the essential marks of unity and could only recommend that the churches learn from the range of diversity that persists on this question.¹⁵

The Task of Full-Communion Coordinating Committees

Full communion is a formal agreement of permanent change in the life of each church that seeks to establish new bonds of communion and to share in common faith and common mission. Some of these agreements were readily adopted with little or no debate; others engendered significant controversy in one or both churches along the journey to ratification. Those disputes have been

.org/eir/110055_42094_ENG_HTM.htm.

¹³*A Formula of Agreement*, Preface.

¹⁴National Council of Churches of Christ, Faith and Order Commission 2004–2007 Study Groups"; available at <http://www.nccusa.org/faithandorder/sg2004.html>.

¹⁵O. C. Edwards, Jr., "Meanings of Full Communion: The Essence of Life in the Body," *Speaking of Unity*, vol. 1, nos. 1/2/3 (2005), pp. 9–35; available at <http://www.nccusa.org/faithandorder/journals/speakingofunity/010103.pdf>.

well documented in the literature and will not be revisited here. The churches that are party to the agreements become interdependent by virtue of ratification, yet they remain fully autonomous—distinct in polity, theology, liturgical practice, and constitutional structure—and have committed themselves to manifesting visible unity together in shared mission.

Most of the full-communion agreements establish some form of a national coordinating committee to oversee the implementation of the agreement. For example, the joint commission established in the Episcopal-Moravian full-communion agreement, *To Delight in the Lord* (inaugurated in February, 2011), is defined thus:

To assist in joint planning for mission, both churches authorize the establishment of a joint commission, fully accountable to the decision-making bodies of the two churches. Its purpose will be consultative, to facilitate mutual support and advice as well as common decision making through appropriate channels in fundamental matters that the churches may face together in the future. The joint commission will work with the appropriate boards, committees, commissions, and staff of the two churches concerning such ecumenical, doctrinal, pastoral, and liturgical matters as may arise, always subject to approval by the appropriate decision-making bodies of the two churches.¹⁶

Following our Shepherd to Full Communion, the agreement between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Moravian Church in America, authorizes the establishment of a joint commission with these responsibilities: “to coordinate the implementation of these resolutions, to assist joint planning for mission, to facilitate consultation and common decision-making through appropriate channels in fundamental matters that the churches may face together in the future, and to report regularly and appropriately to each church.”¹⁷

Coordinating Committee members are usually appointed by the national church for a specified term of service (for example: three years, renewable, in the ELCA). The number of members on the various coordinating committees may vary, but the churches try to maintain a lay/clergy balance, or a lay/clergy/bishop balance for those churches with bishops. Generally, a conscious effort is also given to establishing a geographic distribution of appointees. In the ELCA and the Episcopal Church, the respective presiding bishops appoint the members. The Presiding Bishop of the ELCA, as the chief ecumenical officer of the church, appoints members and consults with the Executive Committee of the Conference of Bishops in selecting the bishops for the coordinating committees. In other churches, the national staff ecumenical officer makes the coordinating committee appointments.

Each coordinating committee is chaired by a pair of co-chairs representing the two parties to the bilateral agreement. Members who are appointed are generally those who have some knowledge of ministry policies and practices and some experience with implementation of ecumenical accords. The coordinating

¹⁶*Finding Our Delight in the Lord*, no. 38.

¹⁷*Following Our Shepherd to Full Communion*, no. 5.

committees usually reflect a mix of bishops, clergy, laity, theologians, and others who are responsible for church-wide, synodical, and congregational ministries. The churches often choose to appoint representatives who were not involved in the dialogues that led to the full-communion agreement, in order to bring in a new slate to coordinate reception of the agreement. Ecumenical representatives from the national churches usually attend the meetings of each coordinating committee and serve *ex officio*.

A charter for each coordinating committee provides guidance for understanding its role and directive. The charter of the Lutheran-Episcopal Coordinating Committee specifies its task in detail:

- To encourage the development of new levels of trust, cooperation, and mission between our two churches,
- To encourage and assist in the planning of new cooperative mission and ministry work,
- To encourage and assist in supporting ongoing cooperative ministries between our two churches,
- To encourage communication of common mission work between our two churches to our churches,
- To encourage prayer in support of living into full communion by our two churches and for the work of this committee; and will work with appropriate boards, committees, commissions, and staff of the two churches concerning ecumenical, doctrinal, education, pastoral, social, ethical, and liturgical matters as may arise,
- To encourage and assist faithful and open communication of the work of this committee to and from the appropriate decision-making bodies, boards, committees, commissions, staff, and members of our two churches,
- To encourage and assist processes of decision-making on fundamental matters through appropriate channels in a spirit of mutual affirmation and admonition.¹⁸

Additionally, one of the churches sometimes assigns specific tasks to a coordinating committee. For example, the 2012 Episcopal Church General Convention gave thanks for the full-communion agreement and the work of the Lutheran-Episcopal Coordinating Committee, encouraged the committee to continue to seek opportunities for new mission and ministry, and directed the coordinating committee to “address the areas of our common life where our ecclesiological practices differ, especially lay presidency and our understandings of the role of deacons,” for reporting back to the Standing Commission on Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations for its report to the next General Convention, in 2015.¹⁹

Local coordinating committees have also been formed in various locales. For example, the Lutheran-Episcopal Coordinating Committee for the ELCA

¹⁸Charter of the Lutheran-Episcopal Coordinating Committee; available at http://www.elca.org/~media/Files/Who%20We%20Are/Ecumenical%20and%20Inter%20Religious%20Relations/Charter_Lutheran%20Episcopal%20Coordinating%20Committee.pdf.

¹⁹See The Episcopal Church General Convention 2012, Resolution A036, adopted July 6, 2012; available at <http://www.generalconvention.org/resolutions/download/102-1342119802>.

Metropolitan Washington, DC, Synod and the Episcopal Dioceses of Virginia and Washington has met bimonthly since 1996, working to bring the full-communion agreement to life on the local level.

Full-communion agreements commit the church to making unity manifest at every level of church life and to a reception process that will take ecumenism “into the blood stream of the church’s life.”²⁰ Full-communion coordinating committees are to be creative agents and advocates of this transfusion.

Characteristics of Full-Communion Coordinating Committees in Action

Since full-communion coordinating committees are a new entity for the churches, they have had to identify their niche in the churches’ structures and define their responsibilities while they function. As they explore their distinctive vocation in the life of the church, these characteristics have emerged. Full-communion coordinating committees may be described as consultative, collaborative, corroborative, canonical, encouraging, strategic, creative, communicative, generative, and missional.

Consultative: The October, 2011, meeting of the Lutheran-Episcopal Coordinating Committee, held in Marina, California, focused on the ministries of joint, federated, and union parishes,²¹ seeing Epiphany Lutheran and Episcopal Church in Marina in action,²² and talking with clergy from four other joint parishes about the successes and challenges of these ministries. Several local bishops and the local Episcopal chancellor attended the meeting as well, and the committee also heard about joint campus ministries at Stanford²³ and the University of California-Davis.²⁴ This kind of consultation gives those doing local joint ministry the opportunity to show national church representatives the excitement and opportunities of these ministries, as well as alerting the churches to the complexities involved in implementing the constitutional and canonical legal structures for federation.

Collaborative: The coordinating committees seek to plant seeds and to spread ideas for implementation throughout the church. The ELCA and the Moravian Church are training missionaries together and collaborating on disaster relief and recovery efforts in places such as Haiti. The Lutheran-Episcopal Coordinating Committee has advocated for coordinated military chaplain assignments in order

²⁰Emmanuel Sullivan, “Reception of Ecumenism: A Theological Rationale,” in John T. Ford and Darlis J. Swan, eds., *Twelve Tales Untold: A Study Guide for Ecumenical Reception* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993), p. 139.

²¹ELCA, “Documents of Governance and Policy Related to Federated and Union Congregations,” November 14, 1999; available at <http://www.elca.org/~media/Files/Who%20We%20Are/Ecumenical%20and%20Inter%20Religious%20Relations/Policy%20on%20Union%20and%20Federated%20Congregations.pdf>.

²²Epiphany Lutheran and Episcopal Church, Marina, CA; see <http://www.epiphanymarina.org/>.

²³Episcopal Lutheran Campus Ministry at Stanford; see <http://elcm.stanford.edu/>.

²⁴The Belfry: Lutheran-Episcopalian Campus Ministry at UC Davis; see <http://thebelfry.org/>.

to provide eucharistic worship for service members. A new committee has been formed for the ELCA-Reformed Church in America/Presbyterian Church (USA)/United Church of Christ full-communion agreement, which is planning a series of meetings among the four churches on the topic of “how we use scripture in making decisions in the church.”

Corroborative: By meeting at various locations around the church and inviting local clergy and laity to meet with them, full-communion coordinating committees have the opportunity to embody the communion that they represent. At every meeting, the committees worship together, frequently modeling the worship guidelines of the full-communion agreement.²⁵ Coordinating committees also develop prayer resources for full-communion anniversary observances, such as the Lutheran-Episcopal Coordinating Committee’s “(National) Suggestions for Local Observances of the 10th Anniversary of [*Called to Common Mission*].”²⁶ Local bishops or clergy of the two traditions often lead these worship services, and local people often attend them. Coordinating committee members frequently preach. Shared prayer for each other, both at the meetings and between meetings, provide expressions of spiritual ecumenism.

Canonical: Full-communion coordinating committees generally have no juridical power but are advisory only. They must be careful not to stray beyond the bounds of the respective churches’ canons/bylaws. They can and do recommend to the churches that structures be put into place to implement the ecumenical accord and may suggest ways in which that might happen, but they may not mandate any action. See, for example, the guideline document created by the Lutheran-Episcopal Coordinating Committee on voice and vote at diocesan conventions/synod assemblies for those serving in full-communion agreements.²⁷ Under the United Church of Christ-Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) ecumenical partnership, CC/DOC ministers may serve UCC congregations, and UCC ministers may be called by Disciples congregations.²⁸ Most of the other full-communion agreements have created implementation documents for the orderly exchange²⁹ of clergy. These regulatory documents define and guide the

²⁵See, e.g., “Guidelines and Worship Resources for the Celebration of Full Communion”; see <http://www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Office-of-the-Presiding-Bishop/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Full-Communion-Partners/The-Episcopal-Church/Guidelines-and-Worship-Resources.aspx>.

²⁶At <http://www.elca.org/~media/Files/Who%20We%20Are/Ecumenical%20and%20Inter%20Religious%20Relations/10th%20Anniversary%20Ways%20to%20Observe.pdf>.

²⁷“Concerning Voice and Vote for Ordained Ministers of Word and Sacrament Serving under Exchangeability Provisions of Full-Communion Relationships”; available at <http://www.elca.org/~media/Files/Who%20We%20Are/Ecumenical%20and%20Inter%20Religious%20Relations/ECUMENICAL%20VOICE%20AND%20VOTE1.pdf>.

²⁸United Church of Christ, “Ecumenical Partnerships and Relationships of Full Communion”; available at <http://www.ucc.org/ecumenical/ecumenical-partnerships-and.html>.

²⁹Episcopal Church and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *The Orderly Exchange of Pastors and Priests under Called to Common Mission: Principles and Guidelines* (available at <http://archive.episcopalchurch.org/documents/oepp.pdf>); Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Reformed Church in America, United Church of Christ, *A Formula of Agreement: The Orderly Exchange of Ordained Ministers of Word and Sacrament: Principles, Poli-*

provisions and procedures for the interchangeability of clergy at three levels: occasional service, extended service, and transfer-of-roster status to the other church body. The coordinating committees have the task in their initial work to recommend the *Orderly Exchange* document. At the time of writing, forty-seven clergy from the various full-communication partner churches were serving ELCA congregations and ministries. There are more than thirty federated UCC-Disciples parishes.

Encouraging: Following our Shepherd to Full Communion, the agreement between the ELCA and the Moravian Church in America, states that the joint commission should “encourage the development of worship materials to celebrate the churches’ full communion, encourage on-going theological discussion, encourage joint formulation of educational materials, and encourage continuing education for church professionals regarding the churches’ full communion.”³⁰ The Lutheran-Episcopal Coordinating Committee’s charter states that the committee should encourage trust, cooperation, and mission; new and ongoing cooperative ministry work; communication of common mission work; prayer in support of full communion; communication of the work of this committee; and processes of decision-making.³¹ The absence of juridical role makes the ministry of encouragement all the more vital.

Strategic: Each coordinating committee of the ELCA partnerships has been asked by the respective national church offices to develop a three-year plan of their work and to envision what outcomes the churches might expect from the coordinating committee’s work. The Lutheran-Episcopal Coordinating Committee developed a five-year plan for 2008–12 to track outcomes from each meeting, identify requests for joint mission and ministry from the committee to the churches arising out of each meeting, and specify locations and topics for upcoming meetings.³²

Creative: Full-communication coordinating committees are new entities in the churches, tasked with dreaming up creative new ways for the national churches to implement their full-communication agreements. Coordinating Committees have no official place in the governance structures of the respective churches that are party to the full-communication agreement, so they work mostly by persuasion, suggestion, and example, seeking to set up conversations in the church, rather

cies, and Procedures (available at <http://www.elca.org/~media/Files/Who We Are/Ecumenical and Inter Religious Relations/formula.ashx>); and Evangelical Lutheran Church in American, Moravian Church in American Northern and Southern Provinces, *Principles for the Orderly Exchange of Ordained Ministers of Word and Sacrament* (available at <http://www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Office-of-the-Presiding-Bishop/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Full-Communion-Partners/The-Moravian-Church/Principles-for-Orderly-Exchange.aspx>).

³⁰*Following our Shepherd to Full Communion*, no. 6.

³¹See note 18, above.

³²Lutheran-Episcopal Coordinating Committee, *Five Year Plan, 2008–2012*; available at <http://www.elca.org/~media/Files/Who We Are/Ecumenical and Inter Religious Relations/LECC 2009 2012 Plan Updated 12 13 11.pdf>. A Four-Year Plan for 2013–16 is in process.

than by legislative process.

Communicative: Coordinating Committees are expected to inspire local reception of the full-communion agreement by helping to publicize to the whole church the ways that the committee finds the full-communion agreement being lived out in various parts of the church. It is difficult to spread the news effectively, especially with a committee that meets only once or twice a year. The diffuse media outlets today are an additional challenge, especially for clergy and professional ecumenists whose specialties are not communications and marketing. For example, for 2011, the tenth anniversary year of *Called to Common Mission*, several members of the Lutheran-Episcopal Coordinating Committee designed a one-year monthly calendar of full-communion implementation throughout the church.³³ This was creative work, with photos of ecumenism in action on every page; however, distribution became a problem. The committee had hoped for electronic distribution throughout the church, but that turned out not to be possible. Ultimately, fifty copies were printed and distributed, quite an accomplishment, but not the mass marketing throughout the two churches that was desired. At its October, 2011, meeting, the Lutheran-Episcopal Coordinating Committee adopted a four-part publicity strategy, seeking to publicize its work through church press releases, updates posted on the coordinating committee's website,³⁴ an article on coordinating committees for professional ecumenists, and a newly established Facebook presence for the coordinating committee. A Communications Task Group was subsequently established at the 2012 meeting in order to implement this publicity strategy.

Generative: Seminaries are going to be key determiners of whether these full-communion ecumenical commitments will flourish or languish. How seminarians are taught about these ecumenical accords and whether seminaries foster a sense of yearning for Christian unity will determine whether these ecumenical commitments are integrated into the life of the local church both in the near future and in the next generation.³⁵ Several coordinating committees have held conversations and hearings on theological education, both traditional seminary-based models, as well as new alternative and locally adapted avenues of formation.

Missional: Ultimately, all ecumenical work is for the sake of mission and outreach to the world in unity in accord with Jesus' prayer that his followers would all be one. Full-communion coordinating committees seek to be missional together in various ways. The ELCA and the Episcopal Church recently estab-

³³See Lutheran-Episcopal Coordinating Committee, *Called to Common Mission: Celebrating Ten Years of Mission Together* ([Redwood City, CA]: Shutterfly, 2011).

³⁴See <http://www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Office-of-the-Presidenting-Bishop/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Full-Communion-Partners/The-Episcopal-Church/Lutheran-Episcopal-Coordinating-Committee.aspx>.

³⁵See Mitzi J. Budde, "The Vocation for Unity in Theological Education," in J. Barney Hawkins IV and Richard J. Jones, eds., *Staying One, Remaining Open* (New York: Church Publishing, 2010), pp. 89–108.

lished a shared staff position, the first: a Legislative Representative for International Policy to work on advocacy issues around global poverty and injustice for the two churches. The most fully integrated example is the United Church of Christ and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), which merged their international mission work in the year 2000, establishing a joint Global Ministries Board, co-executives, and shared staff, “common decision-making for mission program which will visibly witness to the oneness of mission in and through the Church of Jesus Christ,”³⁶ and a Global Ministries Strategic Plan.

Challenges and Opportunities

There are ongoing challenges and opportunities inherent in establishing multiple bilateral full-communion relationships. Full-communion coordinating committees must deal with some of these larger questions on behalf of the church.

Addressing the implementation issues involved in establishing a joint ministry, particularly a joint parish, can be quite challenging for local judicatories. The constitutional and legal work necessary to address complex issues of property, finances, employment, and accountability can be complex, expensive, and time-consuming. Partner churches sometimes find it difficult to translate the guidelines for federated and union congregations developed by the ELCA³⁷ into the polity language and regulations of their own tradition. Empowering both groups to be equal partners can be complicated, especially if the number of people involved or the financial contributions or the property ownership are not equally represented on both sides. Full-communion coordinating committees can monitor what issues are arising and advocate with national church offices to get them addressed effectively.

A challenge for every church involved in ecumenical dialogue, particularly churches that have established multiple full-communion relationships, is to monitor the consistency of its various dialogues and the resulting agreements. Do our full-communion partners recognize us in our other full-communion agreements? Ecumenical agreements evolve and develop from decades of dialogue that seek to address the shared history of the two churches’ relationship, along with the cultural, spiritual, and theological distinctives that have arisen between the dialogue partners. Thus, the resulting agreements often take divergent forms and content and sometimes use differing methodologies.

Some of the difference in dialogues arises from important contextual matters that are important to the dialogue partner and to the church in the context of that dialogue: “[T]he extent of actual interfacing has varied from one bilateral to the next; the specific contextualization of different bilaterals depends on the ethos and emphases of the participating denominations.”³⁸ The danger is for a

³⁶“What Is Global Ministries?” (available at <http://globalministries.org/about-us/>) and “History” (available at <http://globalministries.org/about-us/history.html>).

³⁷See note 21, above.

³⁸John T. Ford, “Bilateral Conversations and Denominational Horizons,” *J.E.S.* 23 (Summer,

church to take its denominational counterparts one at a time, without relating the dialogues to one another closely enough. The Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue document, "Facing Unity," asserts "that each individual step towards unity must be understood as a step taken towards the unity of all churches."³⁹ The task of coordinating and overseeing consistency among the various full-communion coordinating committees is a significant one for national church and world communion ecumenical offices.

The ELCA-Episcopal agreement, Called to Common Mission (CCM), was the first ecumenical agreement in the U.S. successfully to bridge a church that had retained the historic episcopate with a church that had not. However, a 2006 attempt to solve the ecumenical issues around ministry within Churches United in Christ (CUIC) through an agreement modeled on CCM failed.⁴⁰ A subsequent Episcopal-Presbyterian bilateral dialogue was also unsuccessful in addressing ministry issues. In this case, the bilateral accomplishment turned out not to be repeatable. Although one might expect and hope that those churches' efforts toward an agreement would usefully be informed by and encouraged through their respective accords with the ELCA, nevertheless those churches will need to work out their own approach to ecumenical rapprochement apart from their separate full-communion agreements with the ELCA.

The principle of ecumenical intransitivity is another challenge for the church as the number of these ecumenical accords increase. CCM explicates both the principle of intransitivity and a respectful commitment to mutual consultation:

. . . This Concordat does not imply or inaugurate any automatic communion between The Episcopal Church and those churches with whom the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is in full communion. . . . This Concordat does not imply or inaugurate any automatic communion between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and those churches with whom The Episcopal Church is in full communion. (no. 25)

. . . Both churches agree to take each other and this Concordat into account at every stage in their dialogues with other churches and traditions. Where appropriate, both churches will seek to engage in joint dialogues. On the basis of this Concordat, both churches pledge that they will not enter into formal agreements with other churches and traditions without prior consultation with each other. At the same time both churches pledge that they will not impede the development of relationships and agreements with other churches and traditions with whom they have been in dialogue. (no. 26)⁴¹

Intransitivity between national and international dialogues is another reality

1986): 521.

³⁹Joint Lutheran/Roman Catholic Study Commission, "Facing Unity: Models, Forms, and Phases of Catholic-Lutheran Church Fellowship" (March 3, 1984), in William G. Rusch and Jeffrey Gros, eds., *Deepening Communion: International Ecumenical Documents with Roman Catholic Participation* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1998), p. 59.

⁴⁰The proposed but ultimately rejected 2006 CUIC agreement was titled "Mutual Recognition and Mutual Reconciliation of Ministries."

⁴¹See note 5, above.

of the current ecumenical scene. Anglican-Lutheran rapprochement is an international phenomenon with different expressions and levels of accord; besides the American agreement *CCM*, there are the *Waterloo Agreement* (Canada), the *Porvoo Agreement* (Nordic-Baltic/United Kingdom), the *Meissen Agreement* (German/English), the *Reuilly Common Statement* (French/English-Irish), *Common Ground: Covenanting for Mutual Recognition and Reconciliation* (Australian), the Brazilian Anglican-Lutheran dialogue, and the work of the All Africa Anglican-Lutheran Commission.⁴² These accords necessarily differ based on their political, geographic, and ecclesial contexts. The first Anglican-Lutheran International Working Group report (2002) assessed the various international agreements, recognizing that some are at the stage of interim eucharistic sharing (Meissen, Reuilly, and *Common Ground*), while others are at the stage of full communion (*CCM*, *Waterloo*, and *Porvoo*).

There are also divergent views as to what the ultimate goal of these ecumenical relationships should be. Despite contextual diversities and some anomalies, the study found significant consistency among them on their concepts of unity and their understanding of apostolicity and episcopal ministry.⁴³ The forthcoming 2011 Anglican-Lutheran International Commission report, “To Love and Serve the Lord,” will focus on *diakonia*—joint service and witness to the world—and will address questions of international transitivity. The Episcopal Church (U.S.A.) and the (Lutheran) Church of Sweden are exploring the possibility of establishing a full-communication relationship, building upon the theological work of *CCM* and the *Porvoo Agreement*, which would create a new transitivity (that is, creating a new bond across regional relationships of full communion between two churches each in a different region) where none has existed heretofore.

The U.S. Lutheran-Episcopal Coordinating Committee and the Canadian Joint Anglican-Lutheran Commission send representatives to each other’s meetings in order to exchange information about how the respective national full-communication agreements are being implemented in each place. The Canadian Anglicans and Lutherans have explored the possibility of relocating their national offices into a shared building in Ottawa and are planning for their 2013 national convention/assembly to be held jointly. The four presiding bishops (Anglican Church in Canada, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, ELCA, and the Episcopal Church) held simultaneous tenth-anniversary celebrations of the eucharist in Buffalo, New York, and Fort Erie, Ontario, on May 1, 2011, celebrating the *Waterloo Agreement* and *CCM*. The four bishops also issued a joint pastoral letter addressing their shared commitment to unity and mission, concern for the protection of creation, and advocacy for immigration work.

Effective reception and implementation of an achieved agreement is probably the most significant and persistent challenge of any ecumenical work. Translating the work of the full-communication coordinating committees from that body

⁴²The texts of these ecumenical accords can be found in the Lutheran World Federation and the Anglican Consultative Council, *Anglican-Lutheran Agreements: Regional and International Agreements, 1972–2002* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 2004).

⁴³*Ibid.*, pp. 275–337.

of dedicated ecumenists into the everyday life of the church at all levels can be particularly elusive. For each meeting, a coordinating committee travels to a particular locale where some aspect of the full-communion agreement is being lived out effectively. The committee normally spends two days studying the implementation, talking with people on the ground in the local area, often observing the work in action. The local people generally find this national church attention to be encouraging, and almost invariably the members of the committee find these local examples inspiring. But, then, there is the inevitable challenge: how to make the wider church aware of those success stories and how to encourage others to translate these models of success into other venues throughout the churches.

Next Steps

At the first meeting of the United Methodist Church-Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Joint Commission, the UMC General Secretary, Stephen Sidorak, said: "Full communion will necessitate a top to bottom change of heart . . . We have not even begun to imagine the possibilities being opened to us through the power of the Holy Spirit."⁴⁴ The ecumenical vision of the ELCA and partner churches is being realized in many ways, but what comes next? Do the churches continue to enter into an ever-increasing number of full-communion agreements *seriatim*, or do they try to turn bilateral agreements into trilaterals or even quadrilaterals? Lutherans, Methodists, and Episcopalians are exploring the possibility of establishing a three-denomination joint parish in Kern County, California,⁴⁵ for example, even though the Episcopalians and United Methodists have not yet finalized a relationship of full communion.

The Lutheran-Moravian Coordinating Committee extended a formal invitation to the Lutheran-Episcopal Coordinating Committee and the nascent Episcopal-Moravian Joint Commission to meet collaboratively in 2012, to exchange ideas and coordinate the work of these three coordinating committees. The Moravians have appointed the same representatives to serve on both the Lutheran-Moravian Coordinating Committee and the Episcopal-Moravian Joint Commission in order to keep consistency in the two full-communion partnerships.

Many of the full-communion coordinating committees have adopted three- to five-year plans of action, many of which are moving into second phases. The Lutheran-Episcopal Coordinating Committee used its 2012 meeting as an Appreciative Inquiry/Asset-Based Planning Process on the theme, "Imagining Our Future Together," in which it identified the assets, gifts, and strengths of the committee; appointed four task groups to carry the committee's work forward; and committed to a three-year meeting pattern. The committee seeks to identify

⁴⁴"UMC and ELCA Joint Commission Meets," July 15, 2010; available at http://www.gccuic-umc.org/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=275.

⁴⁵Christine Buma, "Three-Denomination Worshipping Community Forming," in *EpiscopalLife SanJoaquin* (October, 2010); available at http://s3.amazonaws.com/dfc_attachments/public/documents/661/SJWrapOct10.pdf.

ways to encourage reception of the full-communion agreement focused on middle judicatories and congregations and to identify the long-term vision for this full-communion relationship: Where do we want to be five and ten years from now as churches in full communion?⁴⁶

Another question on the horizon is whether full communion is the ultimate goal, as the ELCA's vision statement would indicate, or merely a step—albeit a giant step—along a pathway toward a greater ecumenical goal. Can we envision a step beyond full communion that does not look like a corporate buy-out or an institutional bureaucratic merger?⁴⁷ What does visible unity look like anyway? Are we there yet?

The churches that have committed themselves to full-communion agreements have had a vision for the unity that we seek to make visible and have put much time, money, and effort into implementing that vision through the dedicated work of the full-communion coordinating committees. The particular gifts of coordinating committees are to convene and connect the churches by focusing on a common mission involving witness and service and on planning ministry collaboratively. This rich network of ecumenical accords enables these churches to worship, pray, study, share, and serve together in faithful response to Christ's prayer that his followers might bear witness to the world united in his name empowered by the Spirit.

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⁴⁶See note 32, above.

⁴⁷See Michael Root, "Consistency and Difference in Anglican-Lutheran Relations: *Porvoo*, *Waterloo*, and *Called to Common Mission*," in Marsha L. Dutton and Patrick Terrell Gray, eds., *One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism: Studies in Christian Ecclesiality and Ecumenism in Honor of J. Robert Wright* (Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), pp. 302–306; and Budde, "Goal of the ELCA Full Communion Agreements" (see note 9, above).