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The General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns works to exercise its ecumenical leadership role in fulfilling two major responsibilities in the search for the unity of the human community and the renewal of creation:

1. To advocate and work toward the full reception of the gift of Christian unity in every aspect of the church's life and to foster approaches to ministry and mission that more fully reflect the oneness of Christ's church in the human community.
2. To advocate and work for the establishment and strengthening of relationships with other living faith communities, and to further dialogue with persons of other faiths, cultures, and ideologies.

In the area of Christian unity, the agency has initiated debate and struggled with issues of United Methodist participation in a broader ecumenical movement. Our aim in this area is to respond to the evolving movements in ecumenical thought and relations in order to maintain vital existing commitments and investigate emerging models of faithful cooperation, providing such information to local congregations for use in communities.

One area of particular struggle has been around The United Methodist Church and its participation in Christian Churches Together. Christian Churches Together is a broad ecumenical endeavor which includes the Catholic Church, the Orthodox, Pentecostal, Evangelical, and mainline faith communions.

The absence of the historically African-American Methodist communions has been an area of concern for the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns. We have engaged in this conversation during the course of this quadrennium and it will set the context for how we make our decision as a church with respect to our future relationship to Christian Churches Together. Our goal is to help the church explore viable ways to maintain a relationship with CCT as we address the absence of the historically African-American Methodist Churches.

The existing bilateral dialogues with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, the Episcopal Church USA, and the Catholic Church continue as we respond to new opportunities for worship, mission, and ministry. A United Methodist dialogue team has completed a round of dialogues and is into a second round to develop a common ground for full Eucharistic sharing with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America and the Episcopal Church USA.

Through our bilateral conversations with the Episcopal Church USA we have entered into a relationship of interim Eucharistic sharing. In the period of interim Eucharistic sharing that is now inaugurated by both churches there is agreement as follows:

- the two churches acknowledge one another to be members of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church,

- agree that the official teachings in each church on the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist and Baptism are sufficiently compatible to enter into Interim Eucharistic Sharing, and
- enter into a second round of dialogue to focus on issues which are in need of further discussion. In the United Methodist-Episcopal Dialogue, this will include the historic episcopate and the ordering of ordained ministries within the apostolicity of the broader church.

As a way to live into deeper relationship during this period, the two churches agree intentionally to share in celebrations of the Holy Eucharist.

During this quadrennium the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns has worked to initiate dialogue about the global nature of the church. The United Methodist Church has, for four quadrennia, struggled with the concept of the global nature of the church. At the 1996 General Conference, the Council of Bishops made a report which was titled "A Report on The Global Nature of the Church." Among other statements made by the bishops was that "the Church must be free to express its life both globally and locally." The Council of Bishops affirmed that the church is both global and local.¹ The church is global in that it has significant mission and ministry in Africa, Europe, the Philippines and the United States. The church is local in that it is challenged to remain both functional and relevant in particular regional realities. The church is international in that its ministry and mission reach across Europe, Asia, North America, Latin America, the Pacific, and Africa. This is the present dynamic of United Methodism. The challenge facing the church is finding ways to promote the gospel in each unique culture and nation while living out its doctrinal core existence and remaining faithful to its polity. The quest for doctrinal integrity is also framed within an ecumenical reality which calls United Methodists to rethink our polity in the midst of ecumenical convergence and dialogue with our ecumenical partners.

The General Commission on Christian Unity has worked to initiate dialogue which breaks down barriers while creating a space for significant community building and cooperation. Our work includes both ecumenical and interfaith initiatives. Through its stewardship of the Interdenominational Cooperation Fund, in cooperation with the Council of Bishops and the General Council on Finance and Administration, the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns works through global, regional, and local entities to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

¹ The Ecumenical Implications of the Discussions of "The Global Nature of the Church," "A Report on the Global Nature of The United Methodist Church," The Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church: A Consultation on the Future Structure and Connection of The United Methodist Church, The General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns, 1999, p.89.