

Interim Eucharistic Sharing *between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and The United Methodist Church*

In Round Three of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America–United Methodist Church bilateral dialogue, we have examined the basis for a relationship of full communion between our two church bodies. Our study thus far has discovered no impediment to such a relationship. We have found, however, that the extent of our existing convergence in faith has not always been recognized in our faith communities. As we continue the work of this dialogue, we believe the time has come for our churches to deepen our knowledge of one another, honor and extend our currently shared mission, and share in a new relationship of worship and ministry through an agreement of Interim Eucharistic Sharing.

Our work has built upon substantial existing relationships:

1. We rejoice in our common witness through the World Council of Churches and the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.;

2. We rejoice in the example of the close relationship that exists between the United Methodist Church in Norway (a part of the United Methodist Church) and the Church of Norway (a member of the Lutheran World Federation), described in *Fellowship of Grace* (1994, www.kirken.no/engelsk/fship_grace.html), which has served as an important resource for this dialogue;

3. We rejoice that European Lutheran, Reformed, and United Methodist churches have deepened their relationships (1997, <http://lkg.jalb.de/lkg/lkg/start.php>);

4. We rejoice in the joint statement of the World Methodist Council and the Lutheran World Federation, *The Church: Community of Grace* (1984, www.elca.org/ecumenical/Resources/lumersce.html);

5. We rejoice in the two previous rounds of dialogue in the United States between Lutherans and United Methodists on Baptism (1979) and the episcopacy (1988); and

6. We rejoice in discovering that our two distinctive worship traditions have enriched each other and are sustained by those hymns we share together; that the ELCA statement on sacramental practice, *The Use of the Means of Grace* (1997, www.elca.org/dcm/worship/worship/sacraments/umg.html), has made explicit that (as in The United Methodist Church) baptized Christians who receive Holy Communion in their own congregations are welcome to receive the sacrament in ELCA congregations; and that the United Methodist Church has articulated its understanding of the sacraments in two documents, *By Water and the Spirit: A United Methodist Understanding of Baptism* (1996, www.gbod.org/worship/articles/water_spirit/) and *This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion* (2004, www.gbod.org/worship/thm-bygc.pdf).

Drawing upon these resources and previous agreements, the work of the dialogue thus far has discovered significant areas of shared faith:

1. Both churches confess with Christians of all ages the Triune God as the one true God;

2. we confess the Bible as the Word of God and the source and norm of our proclamation, faith, and life;

3. we agree that, in accordance with the Scriptures, human beings are justified by God's grace in Christ received freely through faith alone;

4. we agree that good works are the natural and spontaneous fruit of faith;

5. we agree that in Baptism God enables the Christian to rely upon this gift, promise, and assurance throughout all of life;

6. we confess that the Lord's Supper is one of the fundamental means of grace. Like Holy Baptism, the Lord's Supper is an efficacious sign of God's grace, including and giving real participation in Christ;

7. we confess that the entire Eucharistic celebration expresses the real presence of Christ;

8. we confess that Christ is really present, shared, and received in the forms of bread and wine in the Eucharist, and that the blessings of this supper are received by faith alone;

9. we confess that in the Lord's Supper believers receive the benefits of Christ's perfect sacrifice on the cross and his victorious resurrection; and

10. we confess that the Holy Spirit uses the Supper to express and realize the communion (*koinonia*) of the people of God with Christ and with each other.

Furthermore, both churches emphasize in their liturgies the dimension of worship and thanksgiving in communion (*eucharistia*) and regard the entire worship service, centered in the proclamation of God's Word and the celebration of the Sacraments with prayer and praise, to be the central act in our common Christian life.

While in the dialogue we continue to address such topics as the work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification, perfection in love, and understandings of ministry, we believe that significant convergence exists—and there is sufficient urgency in our need for closer relations of common witness and mission—that a step toward closer relationship is both possible and timely.

On the basis of these discoveries we believe that our churches now should commit to Interim Eucharistic Sharing. This agreement, though short of full communion, makes more visible the unity we already share in Christ, and makes more credible our common witness in the world. For the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (which defines Interim Eucharistic Sharing and Full Communion in "Ecumenism: The Vision of the ELCA" [1991 www.elca.org/ecumenical/Vision.html]), this requires approval by its Churchwide Assembly. At the call of its Council of Bishops, the United Methodist Church, for whom such Eucharistic sharing already is possible, will commit to a time of intentional deepening of relations with ELCA congregations.

We continue to hope and work toward a relationship of full communion between our two church bodies. With this interim commitment, congregations and judicatories of our two churches would now be encouraged to study together *This Holy Mystery* and *The Use of the Means of Grace*, to celebrate joint services of the Lord's Supper, and to explore new opportunities for shared ministry. Guidelines for planning joint liturgies and resources for study and conversation can be found on-line (www.elca.org/ecumenical).

Each of our communions remains a broken and incomplete witness to God's mercy. Longing for that glorious day when all are one, we trust that worship and work together in relationships of mutual challenge and celebration will strengthen our proclamation of the Gospel for the enabling of faith. We prayerfully commit ourselves to this continuing journey together.