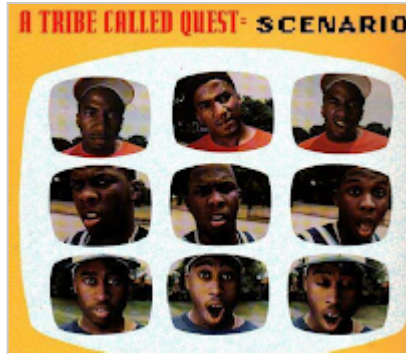


## What's the Scenario, Crusty? Breaking down United Methodist Proposal

One of the things you might not know about Crusty is that he is old school, and thinks hip hop peaked around 1982-1994, or before the West Coast sound took over -- and though Crusty has no desire to revive that beef, he is thoroughly with the East Side (miss you, Biggie). Crusty can opine on Me Phi Me, Public Enemy (Crusty saw PE live, only time he's been frisked; he once got to meet KRS-One), Melle Mel, Doug E. Fresh,



Here we go yo.

Boogie Down Productions, and so on. In fact, one of Crusty's proudest moments was when he and two friends were thrown out of a bar in New York City in the early 1990s. As we were removed against our will and escorted out a side door, while we offered an alternative narrative to the bouncer of the events which precipitated our removal, someone on the sidewalk pointed at us and said, "Hey, are those guys 3rd Bass?" So when getting ready to break down the United Methodist Church-Episcopal Church full communion proposal, COD kicked it hard, and started off the only way possible: "Scenario", by Tribe Called Quest.

So what's the scenario?

A. Excursions: a little background and two preliminary comments.

The United Methodist Church and The Episcopal Church have formally released a proposal for full communion called "A Gift to the World: Co-Laborers for the Healing of Brokenness; The Episcopal Church and The United Methodist Church – A Proposal for Full Communion." The document is now being circulated for comment, discussion, and feedback. Links to materials may be found [here](#).

A tentative timeline would have a possible, potential vote for full communion at the 2020 United Methodist General Conference (roughly = General Convention), and the 2021 General Convention of The Episcopal Church. Crusty strongly urges everyone to read [this document](#), "A Theological Foundation for Full Communion," which summarizes the first round of the dialogue, and represents



Don't you know things go in cycles?

10 years' worth of discussion, dialogue, and theological heavy lifting. The full communion proposal should be seen as the direct outgrowth and successor to "A Theological Foundation," just like Bobby Brown was ampin' like Michael, and hip hop reminded my Pops of bebop. Other materials, including collected works of the dialogue since 2002, may be found [here](#).

1) In interests of full disclosure, Crusty is not a neutral party. I have served on the bilateral dialogue since 2002, alongside nearly 30 different people on both sides over the years, including four different co-chairs and five different United Methodist ecumenical staff persons. I am the only person left from that initial group meeting in July of 2002 still serving. I am the co-lead drafter of the full communion proposal, and εγω ειμι a primary drafter and editor of "A Theological Foundation for Full Communion" which provides the background and rationale for the proposal.

To put it in perspective: when I started on this dialogue, my father was alive. He's been dead for 9 years. When I started on this dialogue, my son had not been born. He's now in sixth grade. When I started on this dialogue, Barack Obama was an Illinois state senator. Crusty has put 15 years of his life into this dialogue. I have done so because I feel it is perhaps the most important thing the Episcopal Church can consider at this time in our collective life together. Do not read this blog expecting a CNN-like equivalency. Crusty feels it is imperative that The Episcopal Church consider this proposal and approve it.

2) However, COD doesn't hold it against anyone who disagrees. Everyone is perfectly welcome to come to their own mind and decision about this proposal. Part of the problem in the church is that we seem to be unable to disagree, with many seeing anything less than acceptance and endorsement of their opinion by others as somehow a negation of them. This is not always the case; there are places where people of sincerity and good will can come to different conclusions.

Crusty has never expected anything to pass with 100% vote in General Convention and be universally adored. All that Crusty asks is you read the materials and make your decision after thoroughly engaging the process. Offhand comments that don't even engage the material run the risk of being reflections of ignorance, prejudice, projection, and uninformed blather. By all means, hate this proposal. But read the materials -- hey, it may help you hate it more efficiently and convincingly.

B. Don't Believe the Hype: what the document actually proposes.

1) The document proposes a relationship of "full communion." This relationship is defined in the proposal, and is like unto the understanding of "full communion" from Called to Common Mission, approved by General Convention in 2000. The definition is in the proposal, and is worth quoting in full:

—Full communion is understood as a relationship between two distinct ecclesiastical bodies in which each maintains its own autonomy while recognizing the catholicity and apostolicity of the other, and believing the other to hold the essentials of the Christian faith. In such a relationship, communicant members of each would be able freely to communicate at the altar of the other, and ordained ministers may officiate sacramentally in either church. Specifically, this includes transferability of members, mutual recognition and interchangeability of ministries, mutual enrichment by one another's traditions of hymnody and patterns of liturgy, freedom to participate in each other's ordinations and installations of clergy, including bishops, and structures for consultation to express, strengthen, and enable our common life, witness, and service, to the glory of God and the salvation of the world.

Let me explain. No: Let me sum up.

Full communion is:

- Not merger
- Has interchangeability of ordained ministers
- Churches remain distinct
- Commitment to common witness, mission, worship, and service
- Members may freely receive the Eucharist in one another's communions
- Pledge to mutually enriched by one another's traditions

To those who may object, "I don't want to be a Methodist!": Just step off, I'm doing the hump. You



People say Yo Crusty, you're really funny looking.

don't have to be a Methodist. Nobody is asking you to be a Methodist, just like nobody asked or forced you be a Lutheran. You can be convinced in your own rightness and completeness in a church that is just as flawed and imperfect in its own way as every other expression of Christianity and not be challenged. You're not being asked to do anything, and you don't have to do anything. But this will allow for those who do wish to engage in mutual ministry and mission to do so in a fuller way.

Full Communion is, in a sense, an eschatological vision, an already-but-not-yet hope that is at the heart of what it means to live as a Christian. We pledge to enter this relationship, acknowledging it is not merger, but hoping that as we work together in common mission and ministry, we will grow into new ways of relating to one another.

Crusty realizes that "full communion" is a term used primarily in ecumenical documents, and is reflected in the Constitution and Canons in Title I, Canon 20 (which Crusty was the primary drafter of, he would like to add). Crusty would prefer that a definition of full communion also appear in the canons, it seems odd to state which churches we are in full communion with but not explain what that relationship is.

2) What about apostolic succession?

i) Well, what about it?

Apostolic succession is not defined in any doctrinal or governance documents of the Episcopal Church. It is not mentioned in the Book of Common Prayer. The Prayer Book speaks of "bishops duly qualified to confer holy orders." It is mentioned once in the Constitution and Canons, Title I, Canon 17, Section 1 (d): "Any baptized person who received the laying on of hands at Confirmation (by any Bishop in apostolic succession) and is received into the Episcopal Church by a Bishop of this Church is to be considered, for the purpose of this and all other Canons, as both baptized and confirmed." No where in the Constitution and Canons is not defined as to what "apostolic succession" means, so this reference is virtually useless.

It is not mentioned in the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, which specifically uses the term "historic episcopate, locally adapted." Since 1886, the Quadrilateral has been the basis on which Anglicans enter into dialogue with

other churches. As modified by the Lambeth Conference of 1888, the Quadrilateral states that the following points are to be the basis of discussions with other churches:

(a) The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as "containing all things necessary to salvation," and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith.

(b) The Apostles' Creed, as the Baptismal Symbol; and the Nicene Creed, as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith.

(c) The two Sacraments ordained by Christ Himself--Baptism and the Supper of the Lord--ministered with unfailing use of Christ's words of Institution, and of the elements ordained by Him.

(d) The Historic Episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the Unity of His Church.

The Episcopal Church has never insisted or made apostolic succession a ground or basis of any ecumenical dialogue or partnership. It's hard to demand from another church as a basis for a relationship what is mentioned only once and never defined in our governing documents.

ii) The Constitution and Canons and the Quadrilateral speak of "historic episcopate" and "historic succession." While apostolic succession is not part of discussions with ecumenical partners as a basis of shared ministries, the historic episcopate most certainly is and has been addressed in full communion proposals with the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Moravian Church, the Mar Thoma Church, and The United Methodist Church.

The document proposes sharing in the historic episcopate by having three bishops already in the historic succession be present and lay on hands at all future consecrations of bishops in The United Methodist Church. This would be done by mandating at least one Episcopal bishop, one Moravian bishop (Moravian bishops share in the historic succession as part of the full communion proposal approved by General Convention in 2009 and in the reconciliation of episcopal ministries service in 2011), and one ELCA bishop (all current ELCA



There's three of us in historic succession but we're not the Beatles!

bishops have been installed according to Called to Common Mission with three bishops in historic succession participating and laying on of hands). There would be a gradual incorporation of all United Methodist bishops in sharing the historic succession. This is the same process laid out in Called to Common Mission, which passed overwhelmingly in the House of Deputies and the House of Bishops, and has been followed by the ELCA.

The proposal has sharing in the historic episcopate, since that is part of our canons and part of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral. It does not have sharing in apostolic succession because we may as well share in rainbow unicorns as share in apostolic succession since neither really exist.

iii) But, but, what about apostolic succession?

Crusty hates to break it to you, sunshine, but apostolic succession is an historical canard, and not sustainable theologically or historically. To whit:

--It simply cannot be proven.

Crusty finds it astounding the same Episcopalians who would dismiss as uncultured rubes people who believe in six days of creation nonetheless have embraced a notion of an unbroken succession of laying on of hands back to Jesus without a shred of evidence. In fact, the earliest evidence we have does speak of a succession but does not stress any kind of episcopal succession. Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, who died in 202, knew Polycarp, who knew John the Apostle, who knew Jesus. But Irenaeus as a bishop and a first-person eyewitness who knew someone who knew the Apostle John does not say, "I had hands laid on me by Polycarp, who had hands laid on him by John, who had hands laid on him by Jesus." No: he says I was taught by Polycarp, who was taught by John, who knew the Lord. Our earliest evidence places no emphasis on a tactile laying on of hands, but instead actually presents a very different understanding of succession, that of teaching the apostolic faith. While there is no evidence, none, absolutely zero, of a succession of ordinations back to Jesus, we do have very early, first-hand evidence of a different kind of succession in passing on the apostolic faith.

Apostolic succession as a succession of ordinations is not even held by a growing number of mainstream Roman Catholic and Orthodox historians and theologians; a magisterial refutation of the concept may be found in Jesuit historian Francis Sullivan's ["From Apostles to Bishops."](#) It's simply an unproveable fable, a folktale spread through the church to make ourselves feel that we are somehow magical and special. Before the Oxford Movement, the term was next to non-existent in Anglican sources. In fact, one of the things that horrified many Anglicans about the Oxford Movement was not just knee-jerk anti-Catholicism, but the fact that the Movement seemed to say that those who were not in apostolic succession were not real churches.

The only apostolic succession from Jesus that counts is being baptized into Christ, and proclaiming the faith of Christ crucified.

--Apostolic succession is sexist.

It has, and continues to be, deployed to marginalize women. Since Jesus only ordained men, so say the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, only men may be ordained. Some Anglicans have explained away this as somehow not really apostolic succession while clinging to a differing historical fabulism and saying that our interpretation is the actual apostolic succession, not the understanding that the majority of churches that talk about apostolic succession mean by the term.

--Apostolic succession is racist.

Are those African American Episcopalians in Southern dioceses at fault for not being in apostolic succession, when, after the Civil War, when they wished to remain in the Episcopal Church, and asked for clergy to be ordained for their congregations, and, when refused by the Episcopal Church, joined the Reformed Episcopal Church?

Are those African Americans who were rejected from white seminaries and told to go to their segregated African American seminaries, only permitted to serve in African American congregations, and not given voice or vote in their majority white denominations, and who left for black Methodist churches to be now be considered lacking in apostolic succession from the churches that marginalized them?

While thankful for the witness of Absalom Jones, George Freeman Bragg, Alexander Crummell, and many others who remained within the Episcopal Church, there's the hard reality that many African Americans left for other denominations because of the racism of the predominantly white Methodist and Episcopal churches. Prior to the Civil War, nearly 40% of the communicants of the diocese of South Carolina were enslaved Africans. That number collapsed in the decades that followed, in part because of the refusal of whites to ordain leaders for African American congregations.

Are we really going to hold it against African Americans that they left predominantly white churches where they were excluded and marginalized to join other churches where they were not?

Crusty had to cringe once when an Episcopal priest said to an African American Methodist bishop, who had been a stalwart in the civil rights movement, been attacked at Selma, faithfully served as a bishop and pastor for over forty years: "You must be excited about this proposal so we can normalize your irregular orders." The presumption, arrogance, racism, condescension, and historical myopia needed to produce such a statement demonstrate the corrosive aspect of holding to apostolic succession as defining element in what makes a church a church.

--Apostolic succession reflects the racial, class, and gender divisions of the church. To much of American Christianity, we look like a small, historically privileged, overwhelmingly white church saying we have something which makes us real and valid and others do not. If there's one thing Crusty learned from anti-racism training, it is the significance of intent vs. perception. While we may not intend for apostolic succession to be racist, sexist, and classist, in many ways the perception and reality from others is that it is.

--Apostolic succession properly means a succession in the apostolic faith: to preach and teach what the apostles preached and taught. The landmark ecumenical document of the World Council of Churches "Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry" was endorsed by over 300 churches, including The Episcopal Church (A061, 1985 General Convention). It states that

"The primary manifestation of apostolic succession is to be found in the apostolic tradition of the Church as a whole."

BEM also acknowledges that there is a succession of bishops from the early church in some churches, and that this succession is a "sign, but not a guarantee" of a succession in the apostolic faith. Just having bishops doesn't guarantee one's fidelity to the apostolic faith. Not having bishops does not mean one does not hold to the apostolic faith. As one Orthodox theologian once told me, "All the best heretics were ordained in historic succession, so on its own it's not worth much unless hand-in-hand with the apostolic faith."

Apostolic succession is a fairy tale. But Crusty's not anti-bishop. Crusty is firmly in favor of the historic succession in episcopal office and a threefold ministry: the threefold ministry and a succession of bishops is part of the ancient tradition of the church and followed by the majority of the world's Christians and will be a part of any realignment global Christianity.

So: either make a clearly defined understanding of apostolic succession a requirement for our ecumenical dialogues, or else acknowledge this is just an interpretation that has never been required as part of any ecumenical conversations, and let's talk about sharing in the historic episcopate, which this document does.

3) How does the document address issues of LGBTQ persons? How can we be in full communion with a church that has a prohibition against openly gay persons serving as clergy?

This is a very, very important question. COD would like to point people to the relevant sections of "A Theological Foundation for Full Communion" which address this question. Here's [another link](#) to it. Seriously. Download and read it, then get back to me. We have had LGBTQ persons serve on this dialogue over the years and have honestly and openly raised these questions around differences in human sexuality as part of the dialogue. The dialogue is suggesting the following path forward:

--Differences in understanding human sexuality are not church dividing. We in The Episcopal Church have dioceses which permit openly LGBTQ persons to serve, and some that do not, and have remained in communion with one another. The majority of the Anglican world does not permit the service of openly gay persons as clergy, and we consider ourselves to be in communion with them,



Jesus said something about this...



even though we do not have full interchangeability of ministry. We must be as attentive to struggling for full inclusion of LGBTQ persons in our own denomination and not presume that this struggle is over. If we do not see these differences as church dividing internally, how can they be inherently church dividing with another church?

--We were in full communion with the ELCA from 2001-2009 when they did not permit the service of openly gay LGBTQ persons and had a constitutional prohibition on blessing of same sex unions. Our precedent with the ELCA is that we do not consider differences in this area to be an impediment to full communion.

Also, the ELCA showed patience with the Episcopal Church. In 2009, the ELCA voted to permit blessing of same sex unions. The Episcopal Church did not do so on the same scale as the ELCA until 2015. The ELCA, graciously, did not insist on marriage equality as part of our full communion relationship from 2009-2015, but allowed us to work through our internal processes to come to a common consensus.

--Since we do not demand unanimity internally within our own church on this matter, we do not feel we can demand it from another church as part of a prerequisite for full communion.

--We continue to witness to our continued need for full inclusion in our church, and stand in solidarity with the significant minority within The UMC which is seeking a broader commitment to full inclusion.

4) What about the Eucharist?

i) We will have to use grape juice? Will United Methodists have to use wine?

The Quadrilateral states that we must have consensus on "The two Sacraments ordained by Christ Himself--Baptism and the Supper of the Lord--ministered with unfailling use of Christ's words of Institution, and of the elements ordained by Him."

While thankful, apparently, that William Reed Huntington was present at the Last Supper and knew what elements were ordained BY HIM, we should first acknowledge a little humility here: it ain't no joke, let's back up off it and set that chalice down: Jesus didn't use tawny port and wafers, so we don't use the



Port and wafers are better than tanqueray and chronic.

exact elements ordained by Him. Yes, we use bread and wine -- but even we treat this as anamnesis, and not mimesis.

OK, so back to wine and grape juice.

Both churches have in their disciplines clear identifications of the elements which must be used in Holy Communion.

For Episcopalians: the Quadrilateral has been endorsed by General Convention. We must have bread and wine in a celebration of Holy Communion.

For United Methodists: the Book of Discipline states that unfermented grape juice must be used.

The dialogue has chosen to interpret these as limited to what they actually, literally say: they only say what must be used. The Quadrilateral states that wine must be used. It does not forbid grape juice be part of the celebration of Holy Communion. The Book of Discipline states that grape juice must be used. It does not forbid wine. We have chosen an expansive, permissive interpretation of these matters of discipline. At a joint celebration by both churches, wine and grape juice must be used. At a service in one church or the other, local practice is to be followed, and both wine and grape juice may be used. In a number of Episcopal Churches, as a concession to persons in recovery or for other reasons, grape juice and de-alcoholized wine are already part of the celebration.

In 2006, the General Convention [approved a relationship](#) of Interim Eucharistic Sharing. Under certain guidelines, there may be joint celebrations of Holy Communion, with ordained clergy of both traditions standing together at the table. Our churches have issued guidelines for such celebrations, which also address the issues of Eucharistic elements. These guidelines may be found [here](#).

ii) What about real presence of Christ in the Eucharist?

The United Methodist Church has an official statement on the Holy Eucharist, "This Holy Mystery," adopted by their General Conference. It states:

"Jesus Christ, who 'is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being' (Hebrews 1:3), is truly present in Holy Communion. Through Jesus Christ and in the power of the



Let's talk about real presence, let's talk about Jesus  
and me.

Holy Spirit, God meets us at the Table. God, who has given the sacraments to the church, acts in and through Holy Communion. Christ is present through the community gathered in Jesus' name (Matthew 18:20), through the Word proclaimed and enacted, and through the elements of bread and wine shared (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). The divine presence is a living reality and can be experienced by participants; it is not a remembrance of the Last Supper and the Crucifixion only."

It is not a remembrance; Christ is present through the elements of bread and wine.

We should note here The Episcopal Church has no corresponding statement defining how we understand the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Crusty could take an afternoon, cherry pick phrases from the Book of Common Prayer and combine them with liturgical atrocities he has seen in churches, and make the argument, "Why should anyone be in communion with Episcopalians, who are memorialists, since their Prayer Book says that we should 'feed on him in our hearts by faith, with thanksgiving'? Plus I went to an Episcopal Church once where they fed the left over elements to ducks in the park afterwards, which shows they don't believe it's the body of Christ."

To be sure, there is a variety of practice within The United Methodist Church. But we have to take them by their official statements. After all, The Episcopal Church has varieties of practice but we ask that our Book of Common Prayer and Constitution and Canons be the basis of an understanding our theology and practice. One thing COD has little patience with in ecumenical conversations is one church presenting an idealized portrait of itself to be contrasted with an amalgam of anecdotal representation of another church.

5) What about elders and priests?

The proposal notes convergence in our understanding of the office of minister of word and sacrament. We have persons called to preside at the sacraments, preach the word, and participate in the councils of the church with bishops. Episcopalians call this office presbyter or priest; United Methodists call this office elder, though other members of the World Methodist Conference do use the term presbyter.

On the basis of

- A common understanding of an office of minister of word and sacrament, ordained by a bishop; and
- Sufficient agreement (not unanimity) in the first three parts of the Quadrilateral, and
- So that we can live into full communion,

Both churches agree that we will allow for interchangeability of elders and presbyters. We are, in effect, grandparenting in all elders and presbyters/priests.

What! How could we do that?

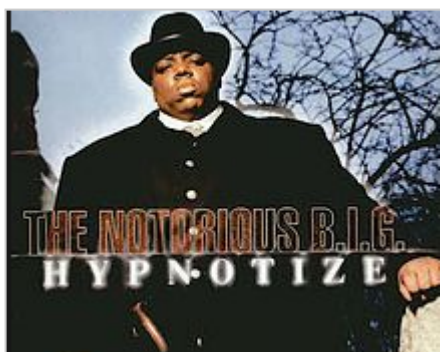
--Other Anglican churches have done so. The Church of South India, a member of the Anglican Communion, is a merger of several Protestant and Anglican churches. When the church was formed, all ordained ministers of word and sacrament were grandparented in, with the proviso that all future ordinations would be by bishops in historic succession.

--The Church of Ireland grandparented in ministers of word in sacrament in their agreement with the Methodist Church.

--We did so with the ELCA in 2001.

OK, well how, exactly, does it happen?

The proposal suggests a suspension of the provision in the Preface to the Ordinal that only those persons ordained by bishops duly qualified to confer Holy Orders, so that it does not "count" with



COD sometimes your ordinal suspensions  
hypnotize me.

regard to UMC elders as of a suggested effective date of full communion. The argument goes that it is the church that added this restriction, so the church can alter it. This provision was not in the Prayer Book until 1662, for instance.

Since this counts as changing the Prayer Book, a suspension of the preface requires readings and approvals at two consecutive General Conventions. Since it is considered changing the Prayer Book, it also requires a vote by orders in the House of Deputies. It's possible we could have a first reading, debate, and vote in 2018 on ONLY the suspension of the preface, with a second reading and vote in 2021, along with the proposal itself. To read how it sounded in 2000, click [here](#).

However: Crusty isn't married to this. He's only married to CODW (Crusty Old Dean's Wife). Crusty suggested it because there is precedent: we did this with the ELCA. Crusty suggested this because we need to find a way to allow for service of over 40,000 UMC elders. COD would be open to, say, a constitutional amendment to permit grandparenting of clergy rather than suspension of the preface.

6) What about John Wesley's ordinations?

As an emergency measure, since the bishop of London would not ordain any Methodist lay preachers in the colonies as deacons or priests, John Wesley ordained two "superintendents" for the Methodist societies in the USA. It's important to note the indeterminate, emergency situation here: both what would become the Episcopal Church and what would become the Methodist Episcopal Church were adrift in 1784-1785, trying to secure a succession in ministry in the new reality of the American context, with people wondering if it was even possible to consider oneself Methodist or somehow connected to the Church of England and not be a member of the established church. Wesley saw this as an emergency measure, and was operating from an understanding of the early church where the office of presbyter and bishop was not clearly defined. Seabury approached the

non-juring bishops in Scotland as an emergency backup plan, since he had been refused consecration by Church of England bishops.

John's brother Charles, incidentally, was adamantly opposed to this, and penned the following verse to lambast his brother:

*So easily are Bishops made  
By man's or woman's whim?  
Wesley his hands on Coke hath laid,  
But who laid hands on him?*

"A Theological Foundation for Full Communion" reframes the issue in its proper historical context. Both what would become the Methodist Episcopal Church and what would become the Protestant Episcopal Church adapted the traditions of episcopacy they received from their Anglican heritage to a new, and different, missional context. True, what Wesley did was unusual and scandalous. But what the Episcopal Church did was unusual and scandalous. There is more convergence than divergence between Samuel Seabury and John Wesley. Many doubted the validity of Seabury's non-Juror consecration, so much so that one of the acts of the 1789 General Convention was to affirm its authenticity. Things that we take for granted, and have been adopted by other provinces of the communion, like bishops being elected, and exercising oversight with lay persons and clergy, were radical innovations for their time by the Protestant Episcopal Church. Indeed, the Church of England only officially recognized that Episcopal Church clergy could serve in the Church of England in 1874, with the Colonial Clergy Act. Both churches had to make hard choices that they thought were best for their contexts.

The proposal does not need to address the question of Wesley's ordinations because the document offers a way for United Methodists and Episcopalians to share in the historic episcopate, as outlined elsewhere in this blog post.

7) What about the historically African American Episcopal churches? Why aren't they a part of this?

The proposal addresses the question directly, COD urges you to read those sections. The dialogue consulted extensively with the historically African American Methodist Episcopal churches. They declined to join this dialogue in its first round, instead choosing a pan-Methodist focus which resulted in a declaration of common full communion between historically African American Methodist traditions and The United Methodist Church in 2012. It is our fervent hope that approval of this proposal will result in formal engagement by the historically African American Methodist Churches.

Crusty wants to caution against seeking to extend this dialogue without further conversation and consultation. In 2006, when the General Convention was debating Interim Eucharistic Sharing with The United Methodist Church, a deputy rose to amend the resolution to include historically African American Methodist churches. While fervently hoping for this, we must keep in mind it is not within our purview to unilaterally extend this proposal -- to do so could exacerbate notions of power and privilege between historically caucasian and historically African American churches. While we will continue to work to extend and expand this dialogue, who are we tell historically African American Methodist Churches they are in full communion with us? It must be something we come to together, as we engage in mission, ministry, and dialogue.

C. So why should we do this?

Glad you asked!

1) Because disunity is a sin against the body of Christ. Crusty knows it's not popular to say this, but our disunity is a sin against the Gospel and hinders our mission in the world. In practical terms, our divisions are costly and inefficient. To the world, our divisions inhibits our witness.

2) Denominationalism, as we know it, is over. And thanks be to God. Our denominations are haphazard reflections of race, class, gender, and geography, and are shaped by colonialism. The Church of England, and the expansion of Anglicanism, are accidents of history. We are seeing new configurations and realignments of global Christianity in the 21st century.

We need not fear this new reality, but rather help shape it. There are ways to preserve those aspects which are special to Anglicanism and are in continuity the church catholic -- a succession in historic episcopate, the threefold ministry, the liturgy of the Western church -- and offer these in service to new ways of being Christian in the 21st century.

3) This is an opportunity to make real, tangible strides towards racial reconciliation. Absalom Jones and Richard Allen were both members of St. George's Methodist Church, and both walked out when African Americans were pulled off their knees at the altar rail and told to go sit in the gallery. They made different decisions: Jones formed a community in the Episcopal Church which treated him as a second-class priest and his parish a second-class parish, neither with voice or vote. Allen formed the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Methodist and Anglican legacies are reflected in the sin of race and racism. The United Methodist Church has significant Asian/Asian-American, Hispanic/Latino, and African American constituencies. This is an opportunity to make efforts to overcome how race has been, and continues to be, the real church-dividing issue in American Christianity.

4) This is an opportunity to heal a schism that never should have happened. With a little patience, and grace, and charity, the Anglican-Methodist division might not have happened. Every major ecumenical dialogue between Anglicans and Methodists has concluded there are no major church dividing doctrinal issues.

This is an opportunity to heal a historic divide within the Anglican family. To address race and class as church-dividing issues. To reshape a portion of North American Christianity. We should not underestimate that this relationship will be unlike any ecumenical partnership the Episcopal Church has engaged; most people simply do not encounter Moravians or Mar Thoma churches on a regular basis, to name some of our other other full communion relationships.

This is also different from the ELCA partnership, for several reasons.

--We had a different kind of history with the ELCA prior to Called to Common Mission. We came from different parts of Europe, were different ethnic groups, clustered in different parts of the country, had some interactions on the local level, but no real sustained dialogue until the one that ended up producing full communion. Some of the predecessor bodies of the ELCA were not episcopally ordered, let alone in historic succession.

--The ELCA full communion proposal has had significant impact in certain areas, and not as much in others, given the way our churches are clustered in different regions.

On the other hand,

--Episcopalians and Methodists are birthed from a common Anglican tradition. We have had numerous bouts of dialogue, in the USA, in Britain, and globally.

--The United Methodist Church has been episcopally ordered since its inception, and we do not need to convince them to adopt bishops.

--There are United Methodists everywhere. There will be no town where there is an Episcopal Church that this proposal will not have an impact.

Like Crusty said at the outset, by all means feel free to disagree. But do so by engaging the materials





No..sleep..till full communion!

the dialogue has produced. Simply saying "I don't like it" or "I don't want to be a Methodist" are cop outs, born of our own fears, anxieties, projections, or hangups.

We need to know that if we enter into this partnership, this is not something to be begrudgingly tolerated. We need to be willing to let ourselves be changed. God is calling us to consider something transformative, a once in a generation opportunity.

In the word of Charles Wesley, may Anglicans and Methodists sing together:

Come, Almighty, to deliver, let us all thy life receive;  
suddenly return, and never, nevermore thy temples leave.

Thee we would be always blessing, serve thee as thy hosts above,  
pray and praise thee without ceasing, glory in thy perfect love.

Finish, then, thy new creation; pure and spotless let us be;  
let us see thy great salvation perfectly restored in thee: