



ECUMENICAL BULLETIN

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GUIDELINES FOR EVALUATION AND RESPONSE TO
BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL DIALOGUES

These guidelines are proposed to aid ecumenical consensus building and to help the local church to see its part in the process.

A. Dialogue

1. Ecumenical dialogues and relationships are furthered when the entire Church becomes involved: local, national, and universal. The influence of such dialogues among laity and clergy, both within this church and upon other churches, should be borne in mind. Dialogues may originate locally, nationally, or internationally.
2. Dialogue should go hand in hand with practical collaboration and common prayer to further the community relationships between churches which dialogue is meant to promote. Similarly, activities in common may inspire theological dialogue.
3. Fruitful dialogue will require recognition and consideration of specific obstacles to understanding on both sides, as well as a genuine attempt to appreciate the positive contributions which the other tradition has made to Christendom as a whole.
4. Bishops, and collectively the House of Bishops, should be involved at all stages of ecumenical dialogue. The bishops as chief pastors and teachers are responsible for the faith and unity of the whole Church as well as in the local diocesan church (The Book of Common Prayer, p. 855).
5. The task of the Standing Commission on Ecumenical Relations to coordinate ecumenical dialogues and relationships is aided when the work of one dialogue is shared with the others and, where appropriate, there is consultation with the Anglican Consultative Council, meetings of the primates, and the Lambeth Conference. Regular consultation between the dialogues and the Standing Commission at intermediate steps is necessary to avoid confusion and misunderstanding. Coordination is also sometimes aided when dialogues are broadened, for example, from bilateral to trilateral.
6. Persons selected to represent the Episcopal Church on dialogues should be prepared for their task. This should include a knowledge of positions taken in other dialogues and the historic statements of The Episcopal Church, most recently the declaration of the 1979 General Convention on "The Nature of the Unity We Seek." The General Convention of 1961 stipulated that such persons:

be reminded of the various historic statements defining this Church's stand in the field of Christian reunion beginning with the Chicago version of the Quadrilateral in 1886 and including several statements by successive Lambeth Conferences, particularly the Faith and Order Statement prepared by the Commission itself for the Lambeth Conference of 1948 and the General

Convention of 1949; and...be...instructed to make the historic position of this Church as defined in these several statements the framework for all Church unity conversations in which it shall be engaged.

B. Evaluation and Response

1. Agreed statements and other documents have only the authority of their own contents and the group or process which produced them until acceptance or implementation is recommended by the Standing Commission on Ecumenical Relations and acted upon by the General Convention. Such decisions of General Convention possess authority as defined by the General Convention of 1974:

The Protestant Episcopal Church accepts as its authority the Holy Scriptures, the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds, and speaks through the Book of Common Prayer and the Constitution and Canons of the Church. The Protestant Episcopal Church speaks also through the Resolutions, Statements, and actions of the General Convention. In these ways the Church speaks at the highest level of responsibility for the Church, to the Church and to the world.
(Journal, p. 313)

2. Even during evaluation and before formal acceptance of agreed statements, the Church should be free to take initiatives locally, nationally, and internationally, or to modify relationships, when this is consistent with and authorized by Anglican formularies. If some proposed action appears to be inconsistent with the tradition and teaching of the Anglican Communion, however, initiatives should only be taken after consultation with the rest of the Anglican Communion.
3. The process of reception of agreed statements is aided when implications, goals, and intermediate steps are clearly articulated.
4. The participation of local dioceses with their congregations through study and response is necessary for genuine reception of agreed statements by the people of God. This should include a response from lay men and women whose judgment has an authenticity of its own.
5. As part of a total reception process, groups designated to consider agreed statements should share their opinions in meetings with cognate groups of the other church.
6. The participation of seminary faculties in the study and analysis of agreed statements enhances the whole church's evaluation and should be a regular part of every such process. Student participation should also be encouraged.

C. Acceptance

1. It is desirable that churches in a given dialogue affirm agreed statements by the same verbal formula in both churches so that the resulting

positions are consistent with one another. Explanations or qualifications may sometimes be added.

2. It is important that the formula of acceptance state clearly the nature of the particular acceptance that is being proposed. The following formulae have been used by General Convention so far, listed here in increasing degrees of authority.
 - a. receive with gratitude the statement welcoming the substantial agreement it expresses (1976, Ministry and Ordination, ARCIC)
 - b. endorse...as consonant with Anglican formularies and a legitimate interpretation of the faith of the church as held by the Anglican Communion (1969, Report of Bucharest Conference, Anglican-Orthodox)
 - c. welcoming the agreement as representing the traditional Anglican teaching that....We, the Episcopal Church in the United States of America, confess....as an expression of the historic position of this Church (1976, Recognition of Members, COCU)
 - d. affirm that the documents...provide a statement of the faith of this Church in the matters concerned and form a basis upon which to proceed (1979, Eucharistic Doctrine, Ministry and Ordination, ARCIC)
 - e. The terms of Intercommunion...we hereby accept and ratify (1934, Bonn Agreement, Old Catholic)

D. Implementation

1. After formal acceptance of agreed statements by General Convention, implementation in the local church is advanced by appropriately worded resolutions in Provincial Synods and Diocesan Conventions, continued dialogue, covenants, and other means of interaction. This continuing process also builds real consensus and acceptance in the local church.
2. The Standing Commission on Ecumenical Relations reports and makes recommendations to the General Convention regarding procedures for implementation of accepted agreed statements in the life of this church. Such implementation may be recommended to the Executive Council, the Standing Commission itself, Episcopal Diocesan Ecumenical Officers, the local dioceses and regional groupings, and other appropriate places.
3. Necessary funding and administrative accountability should be assured for implementation and application of agreed statements which have been accepted.
4. Agreed statements that have been accepted may be used to overcome condemnations and prejudices of the past, to create a climate of mutual trust, to inform catechetical instruction and adult education, to serve as resources for future theological questions, and to provide statements of the faith of this church in the matters concerned, but they are not themselves creeds or formal confessions of faith.