

**A Brief Introduction to the  
Affirmations of Faith, Principle, Belief and Polity  
Concerning the Episcopacy**

**The Commission for the Study of the Episcopacy (CFSE) was formed by a joint session of the House of Laity (HOL) and the House of Pastors (HOP) which was convened at the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion in October of 2005 at Las Cruces, New Mexico. In the first year the CFSE produced its first document, the Affirmations of Faith, Principle, Belief, and Polity Concerning the Episcopacy.**

**This joint Commission comprised both members of the HOL and the HOP. The Reverend Don Ricard served as the chair person of CFSE for the first year and oversaw the creation of this first of two documents. Other members included, but were not limited, to the following: Reverend Dolores Kropf of Saint Michael Ecumenical Catholic Community, Tucson, AZ; Sheila Gilmore of Sophia Spirit Ecumenical Catholic Community of Santa Ana, CA; Reverend Mary Ramerman of Spiritus**

**Christi, Rochester, NY; and Reverend David Kenny of Saint Augustine Ecumenical Catholic Church, Denver, CO.**

**The CFSE distributed and presented this document, simply referred to from this point as the “Affirmations,” for review at a special joint session of the HOL and the HOP held at Spiritus Christi Church in Rochester, NY in October of 2006. This document is an important study document in that it provides the foundation upon which the second document produced by the CFSE the following year. CFSE continues to be a valuable study resource that informs the ongoing development of the polity of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion. It is material that all Synodal delegates are encouraged to be familiar with and to frequently consult as part of their work within their respective legislative bodies. The Synod formally received the “Affirmations” as a study document from the CFSE at this same joint session of the HOL and HOP in October of 2006 at Spiritus Chrsiti Church of Rochester, NY.**

**The Most Reverend Peter Elder Hickman  
Presiding Bishop of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion  
November 1, 2006**

**Affirmations of Faith, Principle, Belief and Polity**

**Concerning the Episcopacy**

Recommended for

Discussion by

The 2007 Synod

of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion

Submitted by

The Commission on the Episcopacy II

Summer, 2007

## *Part I Preamble*

1. We, the members and communities of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion, gathered in Synod in October, 2007, formally announce our reception, acceptance, and endorsement of the historic document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, (*BEM*) in this 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of its promulgation by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches. Over these past twenty-five years, hundreds of Christian Churches and Communion have embraced this “Lima Document,” and now we are pleased to join with these many faith communities in celebrating the document’s profoundly significant contribution toward the indispensable goal of Christian unity.

2. We do recognize in this text the faith of the Church through the ages, albeit some vital theological and ecclesial distinctions among the churches are not thoroughly treated within the text. We believe it was neither the goal nor practical potential of such a document to mediate or resolve such differences. The primary consequence we foresee from the document is the bolstering of the imperative of ecumenical endeavor. Our Communion’s very name proclaims our commitment to dialogue and unity, and *BEM* is a most apt expression of the very spirit which has informed our establishment and early growth.

3. Close reading of *BEM* is itself the first goal we have set for our member communities, with a particular view to the guidance we might take for our worship, moral life, communal education, and spiritual life and witness. The Lima document provides us with a lens and structure through which to discern and develop our own further elaborations of the faith, principle, beliefs and polity of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion.

4. We note with respect, understanding and admiration that the many responding churches have, to be sure, varied individually in the measure of their enthusiasm for

Lima's formulations, and have openly and honestly offered their own critical commentaries upon it; some have proposed far-reaching textual amendments; and nearly all have asked important questions about the intended meanings and proper interpretation of *BEM*.

5. Our Communion deeply appreciates the official responses of so many churches to *BEM*. We have been enlightened, affirmed and encouraged by their statements, including their respective critical commentaries. As we continue to compose our own more detailed commentary, we will draw liberally from this deep well of ecumenical wisdom.

6. For now we note with great joy the overarching theme of profound appreciation spoken by the many churches. We agree, for example, with the Roman Catholic Church that *BEM* is a very significant ecumenical document, and indeed "if it were accepted by the various churches and ecclesial communities, it would bring the churches to an important step forward in the ecumenical movement, although still only one stage along the way in the ecumenical process of working towards visible unity of divided Christians." We are encouraged to note the similarity of the response of the Episcopal Church, USA: "We rejoice in the convergence of belief which this document represents ... we accept with joy the challenges this text addresses to us and to other churches."

7. We believe that *BEM* is living testimony, given the often severe divisions among Christians, to the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit among us. A number of churches have noted that the document falls short of full consensus in many aspects, and yet it has enunciated, more clearly than ever previously was done, the vital convergences which are indispensable stages along the way toward unity. In this light we commend the Church of the Brethren (USA), who receive *BEM* saying "The Brethren experience of ecumenical life . . . is that convergence statements arise from experiencing together that we are made one in Jesus Christ by God's Holy Spirit. We therefore trust even the existential dissonance inherent to our particular historical realities . . . as we express our

faith. Our cultural and ecclesial vision, therefore, is more heterogeneous than homogeneous; we receive the diversity that threatens to divide us as different gifts given by God for the upbringing of a common life.” This last sentence could well have been composed within our own Ecumenical Catholic Communion.

8. Moreover, with our sisters and brothers in the Old Catholic Church of Switzerland, we are pleased to concur that the statements contained in *BEM*, “do not contain anything that would contradict the faith of the church through the ages;” and, “we are happy about the high level of ecumenical agreement which is expressed . . .”

9. We have learned and are edified by the varieties of Christian faith and practice evinced by the responses to *BEM*, and have been enriched by listening, for example, to the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Great Britain, who remind us that sacraments and sacramentality do not, for some, comprise the essence of Christian faith and practice: “However valid outward sacraments are for others, they are not, in our experience, necessary for the operation of God’s grace. We believe we hold this witness in trust for the whole church.” As a Communion standing within the Catholic sacramental tradition in our celebration of the Risen Christ, we are called to a new contemplation by such utterances from Christian sisters churches.

10. It is to this end that we in the ECC also are continuing in critical reflection upon *BEM* in view of the Christian beliefs and practice of our own faith Communion. As noted, we are a Catholic, sacramental church, and thus our lens for viewing the document focuses quite keenly on the sacramental dimensions of its portrayal of Christian faith and practice. Like other sacramental communions, we note the relative ambiguity of the document’s explication of the sacramental character of Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry. This has drawn our close attention and further reflection. Similarly, we note that, when *BEM* was published in 1982, there was little understanding of the hurt caused by language which is gender exclusive. While adopting the essence of *BEM* we wish to affirm language that includes, affirms and respects all people.

11. We are, however, resolutely mindful that our own preferred interpretations, theological inclinations and faith understandings ought not to diminish our profound joy and satisfaction with the singular accomplishment achieved in *BEM*. Surely, if we approach the document only with a view to its consonance with our particular expression of Christian faith, it will be found wanting in some respects. Our ancestors in faith knew and celebrated the wisdom freely given through Sophia Spirit. We, too must accept this grace, so that mere human aspirations are never confused with God's will. Only by openness to God's grace and the Spirit's wisdom are we able to approach the document with a view to its significance for Christian progress toward reunion. When we do so, then we can truly applaud its contribution, and give thanks and glory to God.

12. In time, the ECC may wish to add further commentary on both the theological and foundations, the practical implications for faith and practice, and the further evolution of ecumenical dialogue engendered by *BEM*. We hope to address in particular detail our own vital understandings of the sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, building on the foundation of our communal understandings of sacrament and sacramentality.

13. Twenty-five years of study, reflection and dialogue have followed on the publication of *BEM*. It is noteworthy that the document has not been supplanted, and retains a prominent currency in ecumenical discussions among the churches. This exceptional vitality and resiliency commend the Lima Document to all Christian persons and churches, and ought now to prompt us, as we look forward, to a next generation of prayerful reflection, deliberation and expression in fulfillment of Christ's hope: "That they all may be one."

## *Part II Affirmations*

### *A. The Apostolic Tradition*

14. We accept the following statement of *BEM* as a satisfactory expression of our understanding of the Apostolic Tradition:

*“Apostolic Tradition in the Church means continuity in the permanent characteristics of the church of the apostles: witness to the apostolic faith, proclamation and fresh interpretation of the Gospel, celebration of baptism and the eucharist, the transmission of ministerial responsibilities, communion in prayer, love, joy and suffering, service to the sick and the needy, unity among the local churches and sharing the gifts which the Lord has given to each.”* *BEM, Ministry, IV, A, 34*

### *B. Apostolic Succession*

15. We accept the following statements of *BEM* as a satisfactory, introductory expression of our understanding of Apostolic Succession:

*“The primary manifestation of apostolic succession is to be found in the apostolic tradition of the Church as a whole. The succession is an expression of the permanence and, therefore, of the continuity of Christ’s own mission in which the Church participates. Within the Church the ordained ministry has a particular task of preserving and actualizing the apostolic faith. The orderly transmission of the ordained ministry is therefore a powerful expression of the continuity of the Church throughout history; it also underlines the calling of the ordained minister as a guardian of the faith.”* *BEM, Ministry, IV, 35.*



*“Under the particular historical circumstances of the growing Church in the early centuries, the succession of bishops became one of the ways, together with the transmission of the Gospel and the life of the community, in which the apostolic tradition of the Church was expressed. This succession was understood as serving, symbolizing and guarding the continuity of the apostolic faith and communion”*  
*BEM, Ministry, IV, B, 36.*

*“In churches which practice the succession through the episcopate, it is increasingly recognized that a continuity in apostolic faith, worship and mission has been preserved [also in those] churches which have not retained the form of historic episcopate. This recognition finds additional support in the fact that the reality and function of the Episcopal ministry have been preserved in many of these churches, with or without the title, ‘bishop’. Ordination, for example, is always done in them by persons in whom the Church recognizes the authority to transmit the ministerial commission.*  
*BEM, Ministry, IV, 37.*

*“These considerations do not diminish the importance of the Episcopal ministry. On the contrary they enable churches which have not retained the episcopate to appreciate the Episcopal succession as a sign, though not a guarantee, of the continuity and unity of the Church.”*  
*BEM, Ministry, IV, 38*

16. In agreement with BEM, the members of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion understand “Apostolic Succession” to refer to the Christian churches’ historic, faithful transmission of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, including his known teachings and the example of his life and ministry, received by his closest friends and disciples and handed down by them to their successors from age to age, imbuing and inspiring the fulsome life and ministry of the church.

17. We do not necessarily believe that Jesus intended, or that the Apostles understood, that the faith could only be authentically handed down by bishops, themselves consecrated by other bishops who stand in the lineal Succession instituted by the church. We believe the Apostolic Succession does not depend upon a strict lineage or traceable transmission from one bishop to the next. Rather, it denotes the faithful transmission of the authentic Gospel of Jesus Christ. He gave this to his disciples and their co-workers, and through them, to their successors through the ages. We believe the People of God choose and gather around their Bishops as preeminent stewards and teachers of this Tradition. But, the disciples of Christ in any age are not exclusively bishops nor clergy;

rather they are the whole People of God. Here, paramount in our understanding is the distinction between the reality of God's relationship with created humankind, and the relationship of bishops and church leaders to the people gathered in the church. The latter must not ever be presumed to replicate, in a real way, the former. Even metaphorically, the People of God are best served by language, images, reflections and celebrations that humbly invoke an aspiration for all to be Christ-like without the presumption that any particular Order or office is automatically imbued with that quality.

18. We believe that a correct understanding of the Apostolic Succession places the greatest value upon what is transmitted, rather than upon the ecclesial, hierarchical office or position of those who transmit it. We believe the primary spiritual value of the Apostolic Succession is its function as sign and symbol of the faith of the church passing down from one age to the next. In this sense, the transmission is of a sacramental nature.

19. We believe that the ancient practice of consecrating a bishop by the laying on of hands is itself a vital sign and symbol of Jesus' own original handing down of his Gospel, his teachings, and his ministry.

20. We stand in the Apostolic Succession along with many other Christian churches, even as our beliefs about its essential nature and implications differ from those of some of these sister churches. We recognize that among the churches there exist widely differing interpretations of the nature of the Apostolic Succession, and, of the necessary criteria for establishing its authenticity.

21. In our belief, the authenticity and integrity of the Apostolic Succession is not diminished by the fact that the actual historical line of succession of bishops may have been "broken," nor because rival lines of succession have claimed validity, nor because certain bishops have not acted faithfully or honorably in their episcopal capacity.

22. Thus we do not accept the view of some of our sister churches that a disruption of the unbroken line of succession would mean that Jesus' intentions had been violated. Indeed, as we view the history of the Catholic churches through the ages, we realize there have frequently been such historical disruptions, with rival bishops and even rival popes

contesting for recognition, each purporting to represent the authentic Apostolic Succession. The churches have often strayed from the Gospel in dramatic, indefensible, discriminatory and even violent ways, even while they have maintained the “safeguard” of the lineal succession. We regret that this historical reality seems to represent a turning away from the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And nonetheless, we believe Jesus will indeed be with the People of God until the end of the age, regardless of the forms or structures of their communities of faith, regardless of their failures, regardless of their sin.

23. We hold there is no spiritual, sacramental, ontological, automatic, mechanical, or magical guarantee that a bishop, once consecrated, will by virtue of consecration or by the Apostolic Succession, reliably, faithfully interpret and pass on the authentic teaching of the church. It is the prayer of the people that a bishop will in fact do so, but our bishops are fallible human beings, and from time to time they will fall short of the needs of the people for the authentic Word handed down.

24. We do not hold the doctrine of papal infallibility, nor any claim of infallible teaching asserted by any follower of Christ, whether clergy or layperson. We reject the concept of the infallibility of an Ecumenical Council of all the Christian Churches, though we regard these teaches as the most authentic and worthy within Christianity. No individual nor any church nor communion has sole purchase on truth for any matter in any age. We believe that a claim of infallibility effectively impedes a church from honestly re-examining teachings of an earlier period which under present analysis might be shown to be lacking, or erroneous, or unpastoral, or unnecessary.

25. We are a pilgrim church. In summoning this seminal metaphor from Vatican II, we acknowledge our historicity, our lived journey on the way to God’s own future. On our pilgrimage we are guided by the light of the Gospel, and we seek to grasp it as we attempt to live up to the truth that shines in it. We are mindful that not only we as individual Christians but the Church too is always struggling to be faithful to the Truth and to embody it, even when it exceeds our grasp. This sense of being a Pilgrim Church informs our understanding of the Episcopacy. We are humbly mindful that the Ecumenical Catholic Communion is imperfect, temporary, and provisional. We do not presume to

have received a surpassing understanding of God's self-revelation to Creation. We confess we have not yet learned to fully, authentically embody the Gospel in our everyday lives. We realize that our every interpretation of the will of God is at best our own imperfect and incomplete interpretation. We know there are always further questions. We are careful and prudent in the claims we make about our understanding of God's truth.

26. We believe the Ecumenical Catholic Communion, in a real and mystical way, is a vital part of the one, true, catholic and apostolic church that is the Body of Christ. But we will never claim to be the only path, the only means of expressing discipleship or of being church. Our Communion is no guarantor of salvation; surely the way to salvation may be found outside and apart from us. Our reason for being is that our Communion aspires to be church; that is, it hopes to offer an authentic Catholic way of life and worship that is faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and pleasing to God.

27. We do strongly believe that the Holy Spirit will constantly invite and guide us toward God's truth and right action, and we trust that we are most likely to attain a high and secure realization of that Sophia wisdom – the truth revealed by the Spirit – when we gather, pray and deliberate as the People of God in our Synod.

28. The teachings of the church are changeable, dynamic, and evolving. Indeed, it is the essential task of every church, and certainly of our Communion, to continually, prayerfully discern anew the meaning of all the elements of Tradition (i.e., of the authentic teachings of the church handed down) in the light of the Holy Spirit's continually revealed wisdom.

29. We believe the churches must always be engaged in dynamically, studiously, diligently reexamining their beliefs and doctrines, trusting that more will be revealed, that further questions will always arise, and that the Holy Spirit will be present to guide us in the midst of our doubt and insecurity. We believe Spirit-led reason will enable the church to prayerfully, reasonably perceive that some doctrines will require revision and new understandings in the light of historical, cultural, scientific or other new insights and

learning. We need not fear this. Knowing ourselves to be provisional – as churches, as human beings – we should eschew notions of permanence or immutability in our reasonings, constructs and propositions about our faith and beliefs.

30. In all these considerations, we are most concerned with the reliable handing down of the essential faith of the ages, from the church of one generation to the church of the next, and we believe it is proper to uphold the historical sign and symbol not only of the bishop, but more profoundly, of the bishop gathered together with all her people, accepting and passing on the spiritual faith and the Tradition of the church. It is in this light that we hold that our Communion stands in the Apostolic Succession.

### C. *The Historic Episcopacy*

*“The bishop was the leader of the community. The bishop was ordained and installed to proclaim the Word and preside over the celebration of the eucharist. The bishop was surrounded by a college of presbyters and by deacons who assisted in the bishop’s tasks. In this context the bishop’s ministry was a focus of unity within the whole community.”* BEM, Ministry, III, 20.

31. The Ecumenical Catholic Communion recognizes, embraces and upholds the Historic Episcopacy. This means that, like each and all of the Catholic churches, and many other Christian churches through the ages, our own communities are gathered around bishops whose role it is to provide visible spiritual leadership and shared ecclesial leadership for the People of God.

32. We understand that many churches have upheld the historic episcopacy as essential for the whole Church notwithstanding their differing interpretations of and beliefs about the sacramental nature of Holy Orders, about the nature and extent of

episcopal authority and jurisdiction, and about the special contexts, exercise of and limitations upon the powers granted to bishops.

33. We believe, as Scripture and the long Tradition of the church attest, that Jesus Christ did intend to appoint leaders for the communities of faith which would share and spread and live out his Gospel. The church, like every social group or community, must have leaders, lest it disintegrate. But, leadership does not consist in unilaterally imposing decisions taken at a distance from those affected by them. Though he never mentioned “bishops” or “presbyters” or “deacons”, still Jesus surely realized that his people would require priestly, prophetic, and leading figures around whom to gather, and that such leaders would, were they holy and worthy of their office, invite the People of God to their own lay roles of priesthood, prophecy and leadership. That this has not always been realized historically does not detract from the teachings of Jesus Christ.

34. We are mindful of the church both as Body of Christ and as an historical, human institution. We recognize that historically, the primary spiritual leaders of the Catholic and many other Christian churches have been their bishops, each consecrated by bishops preceding them as a sign of the Apostolic Succession. We acknowledge that in many churches, the bishops have been granted not only spiritual oversight of communities of faith, but also institutional and administrative powers of governance over the affairs of the churches. We are concerned that this has not always resulted in a right relationship between the bishop and the People of God, and thus we in the ECC have adopted a polity of shared leadership. We do believe that the bishop’s most important role is in providing spiritual leadership, and when faithfully borne, this has wonderful potential for upholding and passing on the authentic scriptural witness and all that is venerable in the Tradition of the church.

35. We note with great concern and caution that the hierarchy of Orders (lay faithful, deacons, priests, bishops) has historically been inverted in a manner contrary to the life, ministry and Gospel of Jesus Christ. The evolved hierarchical structures of the churches have too often discarded the notion of servant leadership, and have departed

from the model of collegiality and collaboration presented in the Acts of the Apostles and in St. Paul's acclaimed insight that "there are many gifts, and one Spirit."

36. Similarly, we acknowledge that our Communion is the spiritual home of many who have suffered immeasurably through exclusion from the life of the Church, or from the sacraments, or from the sometimes unjust, unhealthy, unholy administration of the necessary offices of the churches by some bishops, clergy and even lay stewards who have sought their own good or advance over that of the people. Our Communion was begun, and has endured, and will thrive, as a refuge, a safe harbor and steadfast advocate for all those who seek the leadership of spiritual shepherds on whom Jesus Christ would smile.

37. The continuing reform of the church must begin with its spiritual and temporal leadership. We believe our communities and our Communion should be gathered around the pastoral leadership of our bishops, who themselves, together with all our members, respect the primary pastoral leadership of our Presiding Bishop. By "pastoral leadership" we mean to describe our bishops' authentic, historical three-fold role of teaching, governing and sanctifying. In keeping with our particular understanding of the episcopacy we believe this role of the bishop is to be continually reclaimed, re-told, re-formed, reinvigorated and renewed in every age, according to the leadings of the Holy Spirit.

38. Thus, within our Communion, the historic episcopacy may be lived out in a manner different from the accustomed practice of some other Christian churches. Discerning the *Sensus Fidelium*, our Communion has from its inception been dedicated to an inclusive, egalitarian, democratic model of shared servant-leadership, and this extends to our vision of the episcopacy. We reject all extravagant and unwarranted claims to power, to sole purchase on truth, to authority so broad it does not answer to the People of God.

39. Our polity does not permit any bishop to claim any absolute authority. Rather, the highest authority in our Communion is the Synod of the Communion. Moreover, we reject the belief that only the bishops themselves can decide whether to share any degree

of their jurisdictional or sacramental powers with the People of God. We reject the belief that only bishops may determine the process for selecting and appointing other or successor bishops, or that only bishops may censor or discipline other bishops. We proclaim the sense of Catholic Christian community – the notion of church as Body of Christ – in which our members have vested their faith, hope and love and thereby share in the governance of their church.

40. We humbly propose to reclaim a model of the episcopacy grounded in the Christ-like pastoral qualities of holy personhood, humble acceptance of sacred ministry, wise and loving shepherding, and deep commitment to servant leadership – all of these embodied in imperfect human persons - which typified so many holy women and men since the earliest days of the church. We have many such persons in our midst at every time, who are so imbued with the Spirit and with the highest moral and spiritual qualities that we naturally envision them being called to leadership in our churches. We describe the particular qualities to be sought in following sections of these Affirmations.

41. We embrace a new, collegial and collaborative understanding of how the original three-fold commission given by Jesus Christ (to teach, govern and sanctify) may be shared among the bishop, the clergy and the laity alike, recognizing the needs of the People of God and the gifts of all. Historically this mandate and the power it implies has been understood by the Catholic churches to be granted by God solely to the bishops, only then to be delegated, at the bishops' sole prerogative, to the clergy (and, rarely, the laity). But we hold to the true equality of all within the church. But it is our belief that no bishop is the entitled, sole possessor of this charge, but rather is its trusted steward, and the bishop's highest obligation and privilege is in fact to assure that the whole church is called and empowered to share in the faithful, shared undertaking of this mission and power. The Bishop must respect, teach, and uphold the *Sensus Fidelium*.

42. If the bishop is to share her or his mission and ministry with the People of God, a reformed understanding not only of the episcopate, but of ministry itself will be required. We reject any theological or ecclesiological understanding of ministry that



distinguishes ordained ministry from lay ministry in a manner that suggests a greater worthiness or holiness or divine preference for either. This moral equality does not diminish the respective, distinctive, indispensable ecclesial roles of each.

43. We believe in the Traditional understanding of *vocation* as a direct calling by God, placed in one's heart and mind by the Holy Spirit, leading one to recognize, discern, and accept a role in the ministry of the church. We believe that not only bishops and clergy, but indeed every member of the church is in fact called to ministry by the Holy Spirit. At any point in time, many will not yet be aware of this vocational beckoning by the Spirit, or will be actively discerning it, or may even have turned away from it. And so a grace-filled, powerful movement of the Holy Spirit is always underway among the People of God, calling them each to take their right place in the service of one another and all God's creation.

44. We proclaim an episcopacy to which the People of God may appoint any qualified woman or man who sincerely intends to faithfully respond to the leadings of the Holy Spirit and to diligently discern the *Sensus Fidelium*. We uphold an episcopacy fashioned for humble, holy servant leadership for God's people. "But we hold this treasure in earthen vessels, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us." (2 Corinthians 4:7)

#### D. *Sensus Fidelium*

*“In a broken world God calls the whole of humanity to become God’s people . . . The Holy Spirit unites in a single body those who follow Jesus Christ and sends them as witnesses into the world. Belonging to the Church means living in communion with God through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit . . . Living in this communion with God, all members of the Church are called to confess their faith and to give account of their hope . . . Though the churches are agreed in their general understanding of the calling of the people of God, they differ in their understanding of how the life of the Church is to be ordered . . . as they engage in the effort to overcome these differences, the churches need to work from the perspective of the calling of the whole people of God. A common answer needs to be found to the question: How, according to the will of God and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is the life of the Church to be understood and ordered, so that the Gospel may be spread and the community built up in love?”*  
*BEM, Ministry, I, 1 4,6*

45. We recognize that from the earliest days of the Christian community in the Apostolic era, and consistently through the ages, the churches have, in varying degrees and terms, come to recognize a spiritual reality involving the reception and consent of the people to the teachings of the church. We believe in the indispensability of this process of *assent* of the People of God to the teachings commended to them by the spiritual teachers and leaders of the Church. Such assent is a spiritual phenomenon, belonging more to the mystical realm than the practical or political.

46. We accept and believe the Word of Christ that the Holy Spirit will lead us to the truth. We understand that this is a path of spiritual discernment, and that it is often bewildering and difficult to follow. But every member of the church is called to follow the path, because neither holiness nor wisdom is the sole preserve of the clergy leaders of any church; these reside among all the People of God. The people will ultimately, by their assent or rejection, assure the authenticity and reliability of any teaching proposed by the church.

47. This process of reflecting on experience, achieving understandings, arriving at prudent judgments and ultimately making decisions about whether to accept or reject a proposition or teaching, is a vital dynamic operation of human consciousness, and by faith we recognize it as the Spirit-led *Sensus Fidei* (the sense of the faith), expressed collectively as the *Sensus Fidelium* (*sense of the faithful*). It is a collaboration among faith, reason and hope, in goodwill and openness to the leadings of the Spirit, among all God's people, those who teach and those who are asked to submit received teachings to spiritual discernment in search of assent.

48. While it has always been the proper role for the spiritual leaders of the church to uphold venerable teachings or to propose new teachings in furtherance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, our belief is that their voice is not definitive or final. We believe it is always subject to, and confirmed only by the gradual understanding and acceptance over time by the whole People of God, whose assent or rejection will ultimately be known, indeed manifest by grace to those who spiritually discerned it.

49. Those to whom a teaching is offered in turn offer their own attitude of respect, amiable receptiveness and openness to learning, including a deferential presumption of the wisdom of the teachers, who, after all, the people have elected in consideration of the teachers' demonstrated wisdom. In turn, the People of God are not merely recipients of teachings, required to conform and comply. We believe that without the eventual, ultimate assent of the People of God – the expression of the *Sensus Fidelium* – a teaching will be deprived of compelling moral force.

50. The people are aided in their assessment of church teachings above all by the clear expression, inspiration and exhortation offered by their chief teachers, the bishops. And these bishops, in preparing their teachings, are aided by the contributions of theologians and philosophers, as well as experts in other fields, including the physical and social sciences. No good bishop teaches in a vacuum, and ideally the primary teacher

empowers many qualified others to share in this foundational ministry of the church. The bishop is not only the chief teacher; she or he is the chief recruiter and commissioner of those other teachers who collaborate in this ministry. The greater the sharing of ministry, flowing from the bishop's own reception of and appreciation of the Tradition, the greater the assurance of the ultimate assent of the People of God.

51. We believe the assessment and appreciation of the people's acceptance and assent is not to be undertaken scientifically or after the manner of public opinion polling. Rather, it must be discerned over periods of time substantial enough to allow the prudent maturing of impressions, the seasoning of thoughtful theological reflection, and the movement of the Spirit sought in prayer. There is no formula for calculating the *Sensus Fidelium*; it manifests itself by the Spirit and will be known to those who discern it. The authentic *Sensus Fidelium* is to be found only through prayer and spiritual discernment. It requires great patience and a timeless sense of assurance that the Holy Spirit will guide us into such moral and creedal certitude as we can have in this life. Such processes as consensus decision-making, consultation of communities, and shared leadership will contribute substantially to the likelihood that the *Sensus Fidelium* is always honored – indeed, that it is treasured among us.

52. By upholding the *Sensus Fidelium* we recognize the vital importance of the laity in the life of the church and in the formation of our Christian beliefs. We discover in sister churches such as the Anglican Communion a venerable practice in which a statement of faith or practice is only affirmed via the judgment of all the Church. Although the process by which the doctrine or practice is lifted up for assent may involve specialized groups such as theologians and bishops, it is the whole church which is called to judge the results of their work. “The Church in all its members is involved in such a definition which clarifies and enriches their grasp of the truth. Their active reflection upon the definition in its turn clarifies the significance. Moreover, although it is not through reception by the people of God that a definition first acquires authority, the assent of the faithful is the ultimate indication that Church's authoritative decision in a matter of faith has been truly preserved from error by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit who

maintains the Church in the truth will bring its members to receive the definition as true and to assimilate it if what has been declared genuinely expounds the revelation.” We uphold the value of this insight from “The Final Report” of the September, 1981, Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission.

53. Neither the bishops, the laity, nor the clergy have a singularly decisive role in the ultimate reception and assent to any proposition proposed for belief. Such belongs to the whole People of God. Each group within the church serves to constructively critique and balance the others. Thus, if over time the laity have not received a teaching and incorporated it into their faith and practice, that teaching may be moribund. We strive to create processes whereby, led by the Holy Spirit, the whole People of God are the effective check and balance on authority within the church, whether it be the authority exercised by a bishop, a Synod, a pastor or any other leader within our Communion.

54. We seek to nurture a profound respect for such norms of the early church as having no false separation between ordained ministry and laity; of welcoming women and married persons as presiders at Eucharistic liturgies; of priests and bishops being chosen by the people. We admire a time when there was no artificial divide between the life experiences of the leaders of the church and the people, such that the issues the laity faced were issues that the leaders also faced. The acceptance or rejection of such practices expresses either an implicit appreciation or a disregard for the *Sensus Fidelium*. Accordingly, our polity emphasizes that bishops share their authority with the entire Communion. The highest authority in our Communion is the ECC Synod, comprised of laity, clergy and bishops, discerning and acting together.

55. Thus the authority of our bishops is organically integrated with and subject to the assent of the whole People of God. Even jurisdictional and sacramental authority can only be understood or exercised in communion with the People of God, and with their consent. For this reason the selection, consecration and empowerment of bishops, is only possible within the context of the whole Christian community represented by the Synod of our Communion. In this way, the *Sensus Fidelium* is most likely to be most faithfully attended to.

*E. The Evolution of Christian Belief and Practice*

*“It is important to be ware of the changes the three-fold ministry has undergone in the history of the Church.”*  
*BEM, Ministry, III, 20*

56. As we envision in Christian hope the role of bishops in our Communion, our status as pilgrims on the way to the truth teaches us to respect the variations and distinctions reflecting the differing times and cultures in which the church thrives. The long history of the Christian Church provides many examples of doctrines and practices that look very different now than they did a few hundred years ago. Some of these are matters of doctrinal evolution owing to advancement in the means of learning, or of socio/cultural evolution, or of a greatly expanded knowledge base.

57. Recognition that the Church has changed in the past, and that it has been slow to follow the teachings of Jesus or to recognize God at work among us reminds us that we must always be mindful of our human limitations. It is our pilgrimage to re-discover the teachings of Jesus and the authentic activity of God among us and to actualize them in our teachings, governance, liturgy, practices and polity. It should not surprise us that the teachings of the church would be changeable, dynamic, and evolving. Indeed, it is the very task of every church, and certainly of our Communion, continually and prayerfully to discern anew the meaning of all the elements of Tradition (i.e., of the authentic teachings of the church handed down) in the light of the Holy Spirit’s continually revealed wisdom. It is not the human contribution to the Church that is beyond change, but the God who “makes all things new,” (Revelation 21) and leads us into the future.

58. The churches must always be engaged in dynamically, studiously and diligently reexamining their beliefs and doctrines, trusting that more will be revealed, that further questions will always arise, and that the Holy Spirit will be present to guide us in

the midst of our doubt and insecurity. We believe Spirit-led discernment will enable the church to prayerfully, reasonably perceive that some doctrines will require revision and new understandings in the light of historical, cultural, scientific or other new insights and learning. We need not fear this. Knowing ourselves to be provisional – as churches, as human beings – we should eschew notions of permanence or immutability in our reasoning, constructs and propositions about our faith and beliefs.

#### *F. The Mission and Ministry of a Bishop in the ECC*

*“The Church has never been without persons holding specific authority and responsibility. Jesus chose and sent the disciples to be witnesses of the Kingdom (Matthew 10:1-8). A particular role is attributed to the Twelve within the communities of the first generation . . . They lead the community in prayer, teaching, the breaking of bread, proclamation and service. The very existence of the Twelve and other apostles show that, from the beginning, there were differentiated roles in the community.”*  
*BEM, Ministry, II, 9*

59. The bishop is the spiritual shepherd and servant leader of the People of God in a particular place. The people are gathered around their bishop. This means that, having themselves selected the bishop to be the foremost spiritual shepherd, public leader and voice of their churches, the people naturally look to their bishop for spiritual inspiration, ecclesial leadership, guidance, wisdom, authentic teaching of the faith and effective proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the bishop’s responsibility to watch over the well-being, in every aspect, of the churches committed to his or her care.

60. Historically, the churches have understood the mission and ministry of the bishop thus: to teach, govern, and sanctify the People of God. These aspects of episcopal service may be described as follows:

##### *The Bishop’s Teaching Role*

61. The bishop teaches preeminently by personal action and example when he or she lives out the Gospel in the course of daily life and ministry. And the bishop proclaims the Gospel, preaching the Word in the midst of the Eucharistic celebration.

62. The bishop continues the ancient proclamation of faith. But he or she should strive to do this in ever new ways, with eloquence and imagination; with the force of exhortation and admonition when appropriate; with sensitivity to new questions in the changing circumstances of the church; with enthusiasm and courage.

63. The bishop can uniquely, with courage and wisdom, teach by proclaiming new perspectives on the Gospel, opening the door anew to wonderment and mystery, and thereby inviting and empowering others to carry the reflection forward without feeling alienated or separated from the Body of Christ. A bishop who fully appreciates the ministry of teaching can uniquely energize a ministry of excitement, discovery, and exhilaration. He or she can enkindle a love for God.

64. The bishop teaches by the thoughtful composition and presentation of pastoral letters to the whole diocese or the Communion in his or her care. By consulting with others, especially learned women and men competent in the fields the bishop wishes to explore, he or she is the more assured of sending forth a stimulating message that inspires, provokes, and engenders deep reflection, right action and perhaps conversion of the heart. When the community is in the midst of difficulty, fear, grief, uncertainty – or when it is celebrating success, accomplishment, new beginnings or promise – the bishop is in a marvelous position to offer insightful perspectives and helpful suggestions, especially by drawing on the life and Gospel of Jesus Christ.

65. The bishop teaches the clergy who work with him or her, offering counsel and thoughtful reflection on the challenges of contemporary ministry, and the particular obstacles or opportunities they may face.

66. The bishop nurtures the development of excellent programs of religious education, sacramental preparation and continuing education in the churches, encouraging good teacher training and the efficient sharing of educational materials and resources.



67. The bishop's actual power in a given situation may be rather more a matter of persuasion than of action or decision. The bishop's vigilance for the good of the church must be highly attuned at all times. The pulpit is always open to the bishop, irrespective of the practical authority he or she may have available in the circumstance. From the pulpit, the bishop teaches.

### *The Bishop's Governing Role*

68. The bishop governs collegially and collaboratively, and not unilaterally. Our Constitution and Canons, and the Synod of the Communion, both grant and limit episcopal powers. The interlocking authorities of bishops, priests, synods, congregations and of the individual members of the faithful should supplement and balance one another as well as limit and check one another. Powers granted to the bishop should always be approached by him or her with an expectation of sharing them to the greatest extent reasonable and practicable. Consultation is the most effective means of assuring that this is faithfully undertaken.

69. Among the principal expressions of the role of governance for the bishop, outside of those specific tasks uniquely reserved to the episcopacy, is the responsibility for convening the People of God, for example, in Synod (whether for the local jurisdiction or the Communion). The bishop calls the people together for moments and matters of deep import to the life of the church.

70. The bishop takes a rightful seat in the House of Bishops and from there participates fully in the deliberations of the Synod. The bishop addresses the Synod (of the Communion or other jurisdiction) as the spiritual and ecclesial leader of the church in that jurisdiction.

71. The bishop must be capable of recognizing her or his own strengths and limitations, able to identify and appoint persons qualified in specific ways to aid in

governance and willing to delegate to such people a share in governance of the community. In this way matters outside the bishop's competence (e.g. financial, legal and administrative matters) will be handled with the highest available skills and will ensure the needs of the bishop's community are well met. The bishop uses the power of appointment to assure the timely, efficient, lawful operation of the diocese, Communion or other jurisdiction entrusted to her or him.

72. The power of appointment is among the most important, sensitive, and effective tools available to a bishop for the furtherance of the Reign of God. The more the bishop shares his or her authority with qualified others, the more likely she or he is to effectively listen to and genuinely serve the needs of the People of God. And this applies not only to the temporal affairs of the jurisdiction or Communion, but to the spiritual nourishment of the people.

73. The bishop is free to make appointments to short term, ad hoc assignments on behalf of the Communion or local jurisdiction. However, appointments to positions created by our Constitution or Canons should always, in every instance, be made only with the express advice and consent of the Synod (of the jurisdiction or Communion) or the Synodal Council. A bishop may not create a substantial, permanent position or office without the express consent of the appropriate Synod or Synodal Council.

74. In decisions about the day-to-day operations of the bishop's jurisdiction, the bishop is mindful of the principles of episcopal power enumerated in Section G below. In particular, the bishop observes the principles of shared leadership and subsidiarity, thus not needlessly interfering in the affairs of a particular congregation or ministry but nonetheless reserving the right to provide needful assessment and oversight.

75. The bishop enjoys the power of appointment for special needs of the jurisdiction not already provided for in its Constitution or Canons. These appointments are at the pleasure of the bishop, and terminate when the bishop's term concludes. The bishop

must have the advice and consent of the Synod or Synodal Council in her or his jurisdiction before confirming significant appointments.

76. The bishop provides pastoral and professional supervision of the clergy within the jurisdiction. This includes providing pastoral care, counsel, and mediation whenever necessary, and assuring that the provisions of the Constitution and Canons in regard to clergy wellness, support, performance and discipline are observed.

77. When a canonical process for the correction, or possible suspension or removal of faculties from a clergy member has been conducted, and disciplinary action is recommended by the responsible bodies, the bishop must offer his or her own consultation and wisdom in regard to the recommendation. Unless extraordinary reasons of conscience prevent it, the bishop would be expected to uphold the finding of the Synod or Synodal Council. In case of the bishop's conscientious objection to the proposed remedy, the bishop and the Synodal Council should undertake a process of further discernment and dialogue until consensus resolution is achieved.

### *The Bishop's Sanctifying Role*

78. The bishop exercises the ministry of sanctification in various ways. First, the bishop takes part as a member of his or her own home congregation, where she or he may often preside at Eucharist but also may participate as a member of the Assembly. The importance of belonging to one's own faith community cannot be overstated. This may balance the normative expectation that the bishop will be the presider at celebrations of the Eucharist when the bishop visits other parishes. The bishop also is the proper presider and celebrant for the Sacraments of Confirmation and Holy Orders. Practical considerations may encourage the bishop to delegate the role of officiant at Confirmation to Episcopal Vicars or Pastors. The episcopal role in Holy Orders, however, may not be delegated, as it is exclusively proper to the bishop. The bishop may participate in the consecration of another bishop thereby confirming the Historic Episcopate in the

Apostolic Succession, provided the bishop to be consecrated has been duly elected by the people of a given jurisdiction and that election has been confirmed by the Synod.

79. The bishop is the chief preacher of the jurisdiction or Communion, and blesses the people with his or her proclamation of the Word.

80. The bishop consults with the proper leadership group, such as the Communion's Commission on Ministry, which under guidelines established by the Synod of the Communion, presides over the Holy Orders process. It is expected that the bishop will meet with and offer spiritual counsel and encouragement to candidates for ordination. While the bishop officially calls candidates to ordination in the name of the Communion, this call is only given with the express approval of such a Commission on Ministry or other body created by the Synod of the Communion.

81. The bishop of the jurisdiction is the sole proper minister of Holy Orders, calling and ordaining deacons and priests according to the ancient rites of the church.

82. As a symbol of the unity of the church, the bishop may be invited to personally preside if possible and practical – or may delegate an episcopal representative to be present – at celebrations of installation into new ministry for lay faithful taking on new roles of service to the church.

83. In the role of primary minister of sanctification, the bishop calls every member of the church, and every congregation, to personal and corporate holiness. The bishop advocates for taking up works of compassion, mercy and social justice. The bishop encourages the spiritual nurture of the People of God by sponsoring and encouraging retreats, spiritual direction, contemplative prayer and meditation, and above all, love for the Eucharist.

84. The historic mission of the successors to the Apostles – to teach, govern and sanctify – is not to be construed as belonging to the bishop alone, but rather as having been delegated to the bishop for his or her own delegation in turn to others. The mission is

given by Christ, and is shared by his chief servants with everyone else, each according to their gifts.

### G. *The Selection of Our Bishops*

*“The intimate relationship between the ordained ministry and the community should find expression in a communal dimension where the exercise of the ordained ministry is rooted in the life of the community and requires the community’s effective participation in the discovery of God’s will and the guidance of the Spirit . . . Strong emphasis should be placed on the active participation of all members in the life and the decision-making of the community.”* BEM, Ministry, III, B, 26, 27

85. Our bishops are women and men selected by the very People of God they will serve, and confirmed by the Holy Synod of the whole Communion, to serve the communities of faith within a given jurisdiction, or to serve the Communion in a capacity determined jointly by the Presiding Bishop and the Synod (if in session) or the Synodal Council.

86. Our Communion will be most faithfully served by bishops whose life and ministry demonstrates these qualities: A candidates for the episcopacy must be a validly ordained priest (an exception is made for the election of Presiding Bishop). They should be persons of personal holiness and humility, attracted foremost by a deep, natural and genuine desire to serve God and all God’s people and all God’s creation. They will be well-known and respected in their communities as loving, wise and beloved, deeply convicted in Christian faith, and having compassionate concern for others. They should be persons of demonstrated maturity and well-integrated, healthy personality. They should be of good health, prepared for the challenging rigors of episcopal office.

87. We desire that our bishops be learned and well-trained in religious studies, philosophy and theology. A candidate for episcopal office must be a validly ordained

priest, and shall have attained at least one graduate degree from a fully accredited university or school of theology, such as the Master of Divinity, Master of Theology, Master of Pastoral Ministry, or a genuinely equivalent degree.

88. In addition, a bishop should possess demonstrated skills in leadership, including such as these:

- a. *The gift of truly loving, being open to, and welcoming all persons, of all abilities and talents to the full life of the community of faith.*
- b. *The gift of wise teaching and inspiring preaching.*
- c. *The gift of calling people together in common purpose and mission.*
- d. *The gift of ability to encourage and galvanize the people's common efforts.*
- e. *The gift of mediation and just dispute resolution.*
- f. *The gift of organizational leadership and administration.*
- g. *The gift of delegation, of confidently sharing leadership and responsibility.*
- h. *The gift of inspirational speaking and exhortatory skills.*
- i. *The gift of decisiveness.*
- j. *The gift of simplicity and avoidance of an extravagant lifestyle.*
- k. *The gift of advocating for justice and priority for the poor.*

89. Above all we desire in our bishops the qualities of personal holiness, love of God, love of God's people and creation, and commitment to Jesus Christ and his Gospel. We ask for bishops who believe in and earnestly practice spiritual discernment, seeking to follow the leadings of the Holy Spirit.

90. It belongs to the ECC Synod, or if the Synod is not in session, to the ECC Synodal Council, or at any time to the local church – that is, a number of faith communities of the ECC in a particular geographic region, whether comprising a Regional Synod or otherwise – to discern and give voice to the need for the closer, more immediate and intimate spiritual leadership of a local bishop. The process of such discernment and possible selection of a bishop are governed by the Canons of the Communion. The overarching principle to be observed in such a process is that the people of the jurisdiction or area to be served by the proposed new episcopacy have the right of presiding over their own process of selection, though in unity with the other congregations of the Communion, they do observe the protocols set forth by the Constitution, the Canons, and the ECC Synod.

91. The further provisions for the process of selection of a bishop are as set forth in the pertinent ECC canons.

## H. *Episcopal Authority and Jurisdiction*

*“Bishops began increasingly to exercise episcopate over sever local communities at the same time. In the first generation, apostles had exercised episcopate in the wider Church . . . Later again this apostolic task is carried out in a new way by the bishops. They provide a focus for unity in life and witness within areas comprising several Eucharistic communities.”*  
*BEM, Ministry, III, 21*

92. We recognize the natural human tendency to seek control and power over one’s circumstances and prospects. This is true of institutions as well as of persons, and we continually reflect on the lived experience of the churches, in which, too often, excesses and abuses have been committed by some of those entrusted with leadership. Thus our Communion approaches the question of authority in the church with wary caution. We are humbly respectful of all that is good and worthy and holy in our received Tradition, including those healthy and holy models of church structure and leadership which have evolved and endured. We are necessarily mindful of other models which have also endured, but which have hampered the freedom, rightful self-determination and holy flourishing of the People of God. These we must reject.

93. We realize that leadership entails the exercise of power, and that power can be abused just as it may be used wisely and well. It must be repeated that the sacramental and spiritual authority of a bishop does not automatically confer, nor is it synonymous with jurisdictional office or political authority. Especially for the latter the authority of the bishop does not exist apart from the will of the People of God. The immediate source of authority within our church is the Synod of the Communion. This is not merely a reality of the protocols of appointment; it concerns the individual’s personal awareness and acceptance of whence their power is derived.



94. Neither bishops nor any other members of the clergy or laity enjoys any special gift that sets them apart as worthier, or holier, or more entitled to approach God and God's works than any other member of the People of God. No one among us, whether bishop or catechist, priest or lay leader, should ever presume that they enjoy God's singular deputation to their office, nor any ontological prequalification for it.

95. In adopting an episcopal model of spiritual leadership and a synodal model of church governance, we believe we follow both the will of Jesus Christ who instructed his Apostles to fulfill the primary roles of spiritual shepherding and servant leadership for the people, and the vision of Church as the People of God.

96. Our structures of leadership are intended to provide for the organizational, social, practical and above all the pastoral needs of our people, and to allow our Communion to stand in relationship and in dialogue – and, wherever possible, in full communion – with other Catholic and Christian churches. These structures are provided for in our Constitution and Canons. We must continually evaluate and seek to build upon and improve these means of governance. Such ongoing review must include continuous study and reflection on not only the organizational premises of our approach to leadership, but also the philosophical and theological norms which commend the forms we have adopted.

97. We cannot accept any claim to authority in the church grounded in historical or theological assertions that the ultimate decision-makers of the church at any level must necessarily be bishops or other clergy leaders. Our understanding of the office of bishops emphasizes their place within the community, not above it.

98. We uphold the following fundamental principles which guide and safeguard our grant of authority to leaders in our churches and in our Communion:

*The Principle of Shared Leadership.* We believe no human power of jurisdiction over others should be absolute. We believe it must be delegated and shared, to the greatest reasonable degree possible, with those affected by its exercise and consequences and those responsible for the implementation of

its judgments. Within our Communion, an Episcopal/Synodal polity ensures that all leaders of our communities and our Communion, beginning with our bishops, are to share the powers granted them, whenever possible and to a reasonable degree as determined by the Synod's tripartite leadership bodies (House of Laity; House of Pastors; House of Bishops) under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

*The Principle of Subsidiarity.* Closely related to the foregoing is the principle of subsidiarity, which directs that whenever possible, decisions should be taken at the lowest level competent to address them. This tends to favor the right of the local churches to deliberate and reach decisions most directly affecting them, within the provisions of the Constitution and Canons of the Communion, where to do so would not detract from unity within the Communion or between the Communion and other Catholic churches. We believe the principle of subsidiarity constitutes a morally preferable alternative, wherever it may be appropriately observed, to centralized decision-making from above.

*The Principle of Limited Terms of Office.* All leaders of our communities and our Communion, whether bishops, presbyters, deacons, lay ministers or others, are to be appointed for specific terms of office. Even if these terms, by consent of the people, are renewed, still there must be formal limits established for the term of office. No leadership appointment should be indefinite.

*The Principle of Universal Invitation to Servant Leadership.* All members of our Communion are to be invited to discern ways in which they might serve the People of God. All are invited to seek roles of leadership. With the exception of appointments provided by the Constitution (e.g., those reserved to the bishop or to other leaders), the selection of persons for leadership roles is undertaken by the people of a local jurisdiction or of the whole Communion, directly or through their representative bodies (the Synod or Synodal Council).

99. Among the necessary implications of these principles is our recognition that some decisions and some exercises of jurisdictional authority must be reserved to a particular office, and by their very nature cannot ultimately be shared. An example is the final acceptance of candidates for ordination, a power universally and throughout history reserved to the bishop of the jurisdiction. Even in such instances, however, though such a reservation of authority may be wholly proper, we believe the value and virtue of effective, collegial consultation must not be overlooked. Thus the ordaining bishop should have the benefit of consultation from an appropriate group, e.g., a Commission on Ministry, to advise her or him about the worthiness of candidates. A leader at any level to whom final decision-making is granted should seek the fullest possible genuine consultation – meaning learned commentary and wise counsel as well as prayerful support – from appropriate leaders or bodies before proceeding.

100. And even the power to ordain is not to be exercised indiscriminately however the bishop pleases, but is granted to the bishop by the consent of the People of God acting through their Synod. According to our belief and polity, a bishop does not exercise authority in the church by virtue of her or his ordination or consecration alone. Rather, episcopal authority is derived of the office held, i.e., the position to which the bishop has been elected or appointed – for example, the office of bishop of a particular jurisdiction, or a bishop overseeing a particular mission or ministry of the local church or of the Communion. The source of such authority is the ECC itself, mediated by the Synod of the Communion.

101. We distinguish between Holy Orders per se and the grant of ecclesial office; between episcopacy as the highest of the sacramental ordained ministries, and official Episcopal jurisdiction as a context and setting for the appointed exercise of ecclesial power.

102. By episcopal consecration a person enters into the highest sacred Order of ministry, and thereby is granted by the Synod in accordance with Tradition the episcopal “faculties” – sacramental powers and privileges proper to a bishop, e.g., the custom of presidential preference at the liturgies of the church within her jurisdiction; or being the

customary celebrant of the Sacrament of Confirmation; or being the sole authorized celebrant of Holy Orders with the jurisdiction; or by participating in the consecration of another bishop, in accordance with the Canons of the Communion.

103. These are exercises of sacramental power, proper to Orders, and not expressions of jurisdictional power, proper to office. And even these may be limited. For example, a bishop, whether holding a particular jurisdiction or not, may not properly ordain any person to priesthood or diaconate within the jurisdiction of another bishop without that bishop's consent. Nor may a bishop properly participate in the consecration of another bishop within the jurisdiction of a bishop of her or his own Communion, without the prior consent of the bishop having jurisdiction.

104. Our Communion looks to the future hoping that we have enough resources to create and sustain the servant leadership we need. This statement and our Constitution and Canons have emphasized that it is the whole Church, the entire People of God, who are the bearers of holy authority in this Communion. We strive to create a balanced polity providing the necessary counterpoises to provide God's people with good leadership to foster strong Christian communities.

105. Ultimately it is continual spiritual discernment and vital commitment that are the hope of our Communion. The constant devoted attention of the people; the deep good will of those granted authority; the wisdom and courage of those whose discernment comprises the *Sensus Fidelium*; the continual striving to hear the voice of God speaking to all of us – these things provide our hope for the future. These things indicate the presence of God and God's grace in our midst, and prompt our response to it. They are for us what the Psalmist intended in urging, "Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it."