

Conference of North American Old Catholic Bishops



Unity Statement

Preface: The Conference of North American Old Catholic Bishops developed from a meeting organized by the office of the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, in consultation with, and representation from, the Union of Utrecht, as a preliminary inquiry to the state of affairs of the various independent Old Catholic jurisdictions in the United States. The record of that meeting held at Bethsaida Spirituality Center in Queens, New York, on May 22-24, 2006, highlight the discussions that took place among the participants of the consultation, including the ecclesiological understandings of the Union of Utrecht as outlined in the Preamble to the Statute of the International Bishops Conference of the Union of Utrecht. At the end of that consultation, the Conference of North American Old Catholic Bishops was organized to be a vehicle of unity and communion formation among the invited bishops who attended and remained engaged to the foundational process.

Assembled at St. Paul's Cathedral Center in Los Angeles, California, on the seventh day of November, 2006, **we commit ourselves to these goals:**

1. To confess Jesus Christ as the head of the Church and center of this Conference of Bishops.
2. To conform to the gospel of Jesus and his call to serve God and to serve our neighbor.
3. To call upon the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, to bless, sanctify and guide this Conference of Bishops.
4. To form this Conference of Bishops as a voice and a center of Old Catholicism in the United States.
5. To model this Conference of Bishops on the International Bishops Conference (IBC) of the Union of Utrecht, as outlined in the Preamble to the Statute of the International Bishops Conference of the Union of Utrecht
6. To work collegially and cooperatively to form one Old Catholic Church in the United States.

7. To study and discuss Old Catholic theology and history, in order to determine how to promote the work toward unity.
8. To indicate those elements which identify our churches as Old Catholic.
9. To pray and to work for unity among the bishops and the churches they represent.
10. To convene at least two face-to-face meetings each year for consultations on subjects of common interest.

We commit ourselves to these understandings:

1. In order to begin, nurture and perfect a more complete and satisfactory union, we have formed the Conference of North America Old Catholic Bishops, basing our cooperation upon the spirit inspired by the tenets of the Bonn Accord of 1931.
2. We acknowledge and accept the Union of Utrecht's Four Ecclesiological Points, namely,
 - A. Ecclesiology of the Local Church: The fullness of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church resides in the local church (diocese).
 - B. The Role of the Bishop and Apostolic Succession: Apostolic succession belongs to the church. Bishops are servants of the church, elected by the church, for ordained office in the church. Apostolic succession refers to the passing on of the faith of the apostles in and through the church under the leadership and oversight of the bishop of the local church, ordained for his or her office through the laying on of hands and prayer. Apostolic succession is not the personal possession of a bishop that can be passed on to others in separation from the office of bishop in the local church. There cannot be a church without a bishop; conversely there cannot be a bishop without church. Here the expression "local church" refers to a community of faith that can best be described as a diocese, which in turn consists of a communion of parishes and missions. Bishops without churches are *outside of the apostolic succession*, even though they may have been ordained with the proper ritual and the proper intention.
 - C. The Theology of Communion: Even though the fullness of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church resides in the local church, the local church cannot remain alone. The church's catholicity must express itself, which it does through communion with other local churches. The bishop of a local church stands at the intersection of where the local church meets with the other churches in communion. The bishop represents the local church to the other churches in

communion, and represents the churches in communion to the local church. The bishop brings concerns of importance for the local church that may have consequences for the entire communion to the attention of the other bishops of the communion, and brings the concerns of the bishops of the communion to the attention of the local church.

- D. Synodality: Synodality permeates all levels of the church. Members of the local congregation meet and make joint decisions about how to implement the mission, pastoral care and finances of the parish. It elects the pastor from qualified candidates. It elects a parish committee of lay people to govern the temporal affairs of the parish, and ministers side by side with the pastor. It elects representatives to the Diocesan Synod. Old Catholic dioceses are governed synodically by a synod of elected lay people and clergy. The Diocesan Synod elects the bishop. An elected Synodical Council assists the bishop in the governance of the diocese between diocesan synods.
3. We accept the Declaration of Utrecht (1889), and support the visions of the Munich Declaration (1871), and the Fourteen Theses of the Old Catholic Union Conference at Bonn (1874).
 4. The clergy candidates are to be educated as professionals at the university level, or, at the discretion of the local bishop, candidates with sufficient pastoral experience may also be ordained. Whenever possible, candidates will normally attain a Master's Degree or its equivalent in theology or ministry.
 5. The church is open to all. All baptized members are called to be ministers of the church, and those who are qualified may be elected to and called to holy orders with the laying on of hands for service in the church.

Given at Los Angeles, California, 7th of November, 2006

Notes: The Bonn Agreement of 1931, signed by the Union of Utrecht and the Anglican Communion, states:

- A. Each Communion recognizes the Catholicity and independence of the other, and maintains its own.
- B. Each Communion agrees to admit members of the other Communion to participate in the Sacraments.

C. Full Communion does not require from either communion the acceptance of all doctrinal opinion, sacramental devotion or liturgical practice characteristic of the other, but implies that each believes the other to hold all the essentials of the Christian faith.