

Constitution of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion

I. Mission and Creed.

1. We are People of God baptized in Christ and professing our faith in a living Catholic tradition. We are members of a communion of communities, the ecclesial body herein referred to as the “Ecumenical Catholic Communion,” or the “ECC,” or “The Communion.” We are lay and ordained, joining together in response to the messianic call of the Spirit to preach the Gospel of justice, liberation, reconciliation and peace; to offer a refuge in Christ for those who suffer prejudice, exclusion, or neglect; to be open to dialogue with others so called, and to conform our lives to the life and teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We profess our faith in Christ in the living Catholic tradition handed to us from the apostles through many generations. We welcome opportunities to dialogue with those of other religious identities and faith traditions.

We hereby affirm this Constitution as an instrument of governance and guidance for our ecclesial body and its member communities.

2. We affirm that each baptized person is an equal member of the Catholic Church and that in the Ecumenical Catholic Communion (ECC) equality will be reflected in synodal and local governance and ministry; that all are welcome regardless of race, national origin, immigration status, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, disability or age to participate fully in the sacramental life of the Church; that ordained ministry in the ECC is open to all the baptized; and that in moral and ethical decision-making the ECC supports the primacy of an individual’s fully formed conscience.

3. Christ —We affirm the faith of the ancient Christian Church that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the Christ, revealed to us as the Son of God who, through his life, death and resurrection, brings salvation to the whole world.

4. Church —We affirm that the Church of Jesus Christ embodies all who follow Jesus and are joined in an indissoluble union with Christ and one another through baptism becoming the People of God. This Body of Christ is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic and is entrusted with continuing the saving work of Christ in the world through the proclamation of the Gospel and the celebration of the Sacred Mysteries which are commonly called the Sacraments.

5. Scripture —We affirm the Sacred Scriptures that have been handed on to us through the Apostolic Tradition and are held in common with the historic Catholic Church. These Sacred Writings are truly inspired by the human encounter with the Divine in history and are both reliable and authoritative in matters of faith and practice.

6. Sacraments —We affirm that the Church in her very nature is Sacramental. Therefore, the work of the Church is essentially a Sacramental Ministry. The Sacraments are grace-filled moments of encounter with the Divine. Our Communion affirms and practices seven ecclesial Sacraments - Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, Holy

Matrimony, and Holy Orders. Through our participation in these Divine Mysteries, we are renewed by the saving presence of the Resurrected Christ. All the baptized, irrespective of gender identity, marital status, or sexual orientation or relationship, are welcome to join in celebrating the Sacraments. Eucharist is open to all who come forward to receive.

7. Creed —We affirm the Nicene Creed as the foundational profession of catholic faith as it was originally promulgated by the Ecumenical Councils of Nicea in 325 and Constantinople in 381. We realize that this profession does not preclude further development in our theological understanding and expression.

8. The Declaration of Utrecht — We affirm that the Old Catholic tradition retains the ancient Synodal polity of local churches and the collegiality among the bishops of the wider church. We affirm that the Declaration of Utrecht (September 24, 1889) is consistent with the ancient tradition of the Catholic Church including rejecting both universal papal jurisdiction and the infallibility of the papal office.

9. Our Catholic Culture—We affirm that Sections 3-8 reflect the Catholic tradition of which we are a part. Section 8 is definitive of the Old Catholic tradition which informs our Synodal polity. We also affirm that our Catholic culture, while reinforcing our unity, is diverse in its liturgical and spiritual expressions.

II. Organization and Structure.

1. The Communion is a confederation of independently incorporated faith communities (i.e., parishes, missions, religious orders, and specialized ministries) with a synodal form of governance. These are represented by clergy and laity in their respective houses of polity. They are subject to those guidelines that are expressly given to the Council of Bishops to develop and administer. Some communities are further organized into dioceses or regions with local governance structures hereafter referred to as “dioceses.” The Presiding Bishop shall be the Bishop Ordinary for all faith communities that have not been organized into dioceses.

2. The vision of the ECC polity and the covenant that members enter into is rooted in cooperative ministries with diverse voices and charisms of lay, clergy and bishops. Each ministry contributes collaboratively according to its role in the matters below and other matters which may arise.

- a. The Communion’s polity includes the Presiding Bishop, who exercises an executive function, and three branches that collaborate according to their roles.
- b. The Presiding Bishop is the central executive officer of the Communion.
- c. One branch, the Council of Bishops, is composed of the bishops of the ECC. As president of the COB, the Presiding Bishop is first among (COB) equals in the business of the COB.
- d. The House of Laity (HOL) and the House of Pastors (HOP) are the two legislative branches of the ECC. These two bodies consider and pass legislation by majority

vote as stipulated by this Constitution subject to the veto authority of the Presiding Bishop. A veto may be overridden by a two-thirds vote of the HOL and the HOP. The cumulative legislation of the ECC shall be called the Statutes of the ECC.

All legislation shall originate in the HOP or the HOL. The COB may request a reconsideration of legislation if it feels that legislation is inconsistent with the ecclesiology and mission of the ECC.

- e. The Leadership Council is chaired by the Presiding Bishop and includes the executives/vice-executives of the House of Pastors and the House of Laity and serves as a consultative and coordinating body on matters pertaining to the administration of the Communion that are not expressly reserved to the Presiding Bishop, the Council of Bishops, the House of Laity and/or the House of Pastors. In the event that a decision of the Leadership Council significantly impacts one or all of the regional churches, that decision shall require the advice and consent of the COB.

The Leadership Council receives proposed legislation and other business for synod.

3. Our faith communities are the center of the Communion's life and mission as part of the Body of Christ in the world.

- a. Faith communities must be financially self-sustaining to be admitted into the Communion. They must form a finance committee prior to admission. The Communion holds no financial responsibility for a faith community's property or operating expenses. The Communion holds no claim to the property and assets of a faith community.
- b. Faith communities shall be considered fully received and in good standing provided they are acting in accord with this Constitution and have met their financial obligation to the Communion. Faith communities that are not in good standing shall not have voting privileges in the HOP or the HOL or at a Synod unless the leadership of both HOP and HOL waive a requirement in writing for a specific period of time.
- c. A faith community is the employer of record for its clergy and staff, with the responsibility to hire and terminate all clergy and staff, practice pre-employment inquiries of sexual misconduct, and conduct criminal background checks.
- d. Pastors and other clergy staff members of faith communities must be ordained or incardinated clergy of the ECC. Ordinaries may authorize exceptions that would allow validly ordained clergy from other denominations to serve faith communities in special circumstances. Such exceptions must be approved by the COB.
- e. The Communion carries no legal responsibility or liability for the conduct of clergy or staff of independent faith communities. Each independent community is responsible for the investigation of allegations of misconduct by its clergy and/or

staff. Allegations of misconduct shall be resolved at the local level and reported to the Bishop Ordinary for information. Cases which involve the removal of faculties from clergy shall be referred to the Bishop Ordinary and the COB for decisions and actions. Misconduct that is illegal or suspected of being illegal must be reported to the proper law enforcement agency.

- f. The Bishop Ordinary accepts a faith community's request for withdrawal from the Communion

III. Presiding Bishop.

1. The Presiding Bishop shall be the central executive officer of the Communion. The Presiding Bishop shall be elected by a two-thirds majority vote of an electoral college, which is comprised of all members of the House of Laity and the House of Pastors, pursuant to the procedures in the Statutes of the ECC. Prior to a final vote under this paragraph where the candidate is not already a bishop, the elected leaders of the Houses shall seek a report from the Council of Bishops on the candidate's compliance with guidelines for consecration.

2. The Presiding Bishop may be elected for a maximum of three four-year terms and serves as the President of the COB.

3. The Presiding Bishop shall be responsible for establishing an administrative body, which shall include appointing those officers deemed necessary in order to fulfill the duties of the Office of the Presiding Bishop (OPB). The Presiding Bishop may also establish standing committees or ad hoc committees in order to fulfill the mission of the OPB.

4. [moved to II 2 e] The Presiding Bishop shall sign liturgical changes and shall sign or veto all legislation. A veto of legislation may be overridden by a two-thirds majority vote of both the House of Pastors and the House of Laity.

5. Unless in the jurisdiction of a regional diocese, the Presiding Bishop receives faith communities applying for membership in the Communion, as set forth in the *Guidelines for Formation of New Faith Communities*, with the confirmation of the COB.

6. The Presiding Bishop may issue pastoral letters with the confirmation of the COB. The Presiding Bishop negotiates and signs intercommunion agreements.

7. In the event of resignation, death or incapacitation of the Presiding Bishop, the senior elected bishop of the COB shall serve as interim Presiding Bishop until a new Presiding Bishop is chosen according to Article III, Section 1 and the *Election of Presiding Bishop*.

IV. Meetings.

Synods are intentional gatherings called at least every two years to share liturgy, pray, build relationships, learn and enact legislation. The Presiding Bishop shall convene a synod of the

House of Laity, the House of Pastors and the Council of Bishops. The Presiding Bishop shall determine the date and location of each synod in consultation with these bodies. A Synod or other meeting may be conducted electronically.

V. Council of Bishops.

1. The Council of Bishops shall be composed of all bishops in good standing with the Communion. While consensus decision-making is the norm for the COB, when voting is required, only elected bishops ordinary shall vote.

2. The COB is a court of appeals for the legislative decisions of the HOL and the HOP to determine compliance of such decisions with this Constitution and the Statutes of the ECC. The COB, with the participation of the House of Pastors and the House of Laity, shall establish an appeal process that includes the formation of an appeal panel, composed of laity, clergy, and bishops, which shall review appeals on the constitutionality of legislative decisions and submit its recommendations to the COB.

3. The COB reviews and confirms all applications for ordination.

4. The COB is a court of appeal for cases of misconduct and/or incompetence involving the removal of faculties.

5. The COB may appoint an investigating committee if deemed necessary.

6. The COB may establish standing committees or *ad hoc* committees to further the mission of the Communion.

7. The COB shall establish, administer, and amend as needed the guidelines for the ordination or incardination of deacons, priests, and bishops and the guidelines for the discipline and termination of faculties for clergy.

8. The COB shall establish, administer, and amend guidelines for religious orders, specialized ministries and for the formation of new faith communities; the acceptance of existing faith communities; and the formation of new dioceses. In addition, this Council reviews and confirms all applications for these.

9. The COB may initiate intercommunion agreements.

10. Guidelines regulating liturgical practices of the Communion shall originate and be passed in either the HOP or the COB and shall be affirmed by a majority vote of the two Houses and the COB. These statements and guidelines must be consistent with this Constitution and the Statutes of the ECC.

11. The COB develops, administers and amends guidelines affecting the whole ECC with the participation and majority vote of the HOP and/or the HOL dependent on the subject matter.

VI. House of Laity.

1. The HOL is composed of non-clergy delegates and represents the laity from participating faith communities of the Communion. The laity hold positions of leadership in the Synod and throughout the Communion and work in collaboration with the clergy and COB.
2. The number of delegates and the process for selection shall be governed by Statute, but the principle of proportionate representation shall be maintained. The HOL is part of the electoral college for the election of the Presiding Bishop and is part of the legislature of the ECC.
3. The HOL shall establish its own policies and procedures for its governance and shall convene at the national synod or at other times as needed.
4. The Office of the Presiding Bishop shall draft a proposed two-year budget for the consideration of the HOL. Once approved by a majority vote of the HOL, the House of Pastors will review and vote on the proposed budget, which if passed by a majority vote, then must be approved or vetoed by the Presiding Bishop. The HOL will review regular reports on budget activity and report on budget matters to the Communion.
5. All other financial matters other than the draft budget of the Communion shall originate in the HOL and are subject to the review and approval of the House of Pastors, and the Presiding Bishop. The HOL shall form and give oversight to a Finance Committee which shall help insure transparent and accountable management of financial resources in the ECC.
6. The HOL shall participate by majority vote in the development and approval of guidelines affecting the whole ECC.

VII. House of Pastors.

1. The HOP is composed of ordained clergy and, where warranted, lay pastoral leaders from the faith communities of the Communion. As servant leaders striving to be grounded in prayer, scripture and spirituality, pastoral leaders tend to their communities' spiritual development, community building and various ministries.

2. The number of delegates and their selection shall be determined by statute. The HOP is part of the electoral college for the election of the Presiding Bishop and is part of the legislature of the ECC.

3. No bishop shall be a member of the HOP.

4. The HOP shall establish its own policies and procedures and shall convene at the national synod and other times as needed.

5. As pastoral leaders of the ECC communities and ministries, the HOP shall:
- (a) review and confirm intercommunion agreements proposed by the Presiding Bishop or the COB;
 - (b) With the HOL and COB, review and affirm liturgical changes by a majority vote of its members; such changes may originate in either the HOP or the COB;
 - (c) Propose guidelines for (i) the reception of new faith communities to be received into the Communion; (ii) the ordination of bishops, priests or deacons of the Communion; (iii) the reception of ordained clergy from other ecclesial bodies into the Communion; and (iv) the discipline and the termination of faculties of clergy of the Communion.

VIII. Committees.

1. A nominating committee to develop a slate of candidates for a presiding bishop shall be charged by the Presiding Bishop in collaboration with the Leadership Council. The nominating committee shall include the heads of the two houses or their designees and two additional members from each house. The nominating committee must reflect the diversity of the ECC.

2. The HOL and the HOP may establish or discontinue committees within their own purview to further the business of their respective houses.

IX. Parliamentary Authority.

For procedural matters not included in this constitution and bylaws, the most recent edition of *Robert's Rules of Order*, is the authority.

X. Amendments.

1. Proposed amendments to this Constitution shall originate in the HOL or the HOP and shall be addressed at the national Synod. Such amendments require a two-thirds affirmative vote of both the HOL and the HOP. Amendments shall be signed or vetoed by the Presiding Bishop in consultation with the COB. Such a veto may be overridden by a three-fourths vote of the HOL and the HOP.

2. Proposed amendments to the Statutes of the ECC shall originate in the HOP or the HOL and shall be addressed at the national Synod. Such amendments require a majority vote of each of the HOP and HOL. Amendments shall be signed or vetoed by the Presiding Bishop. Vetoes of such amendments may be overridden by a two-thirds vote of both Houses.

3. Proposed amendments to bylaws of the Office of Presiding Bishop, the House of Laity, the Council of Bishops or the House of Pastors shall be addressed by the process described in their bylaws.