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## THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH OFFICE OF ECUMENICAL AND INTERFAITH RELATIONS

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### Guidelines for Reception and Confirmation for Persons Joining the Episcopal Church

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#### I. Background

The 2003 General Convention sought to clarify the processes for incorporating members of other churches who seek to join the Episcopal Church. The Convention passed the following resolution:

*Resolved*, That the rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer and the Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church allow reception of members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

This resolution was submitted to Convention by the Standing Commission on Ecumenical Relations, at the suggestion of the Lutheran-Episcopal Coordinating Committee, the body which monitors and further promotes our full communion relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The resolution from the 2003 General Convention is itself a clarification of a resolution passed by the 1997 General Convention:

*Resolved*, That Canon I.17.1(c) is hereby amended to read as follows:

It is expected that all adult members of this Church, after appropriate instruction, will have made a mature public affirmation of their faith and commitment to the responsibilities of their Baptism and will have been confirmed or received by a Bishop of this Church or by a Bishop of a Church in communion with this Church. *Those who have previously made a mature public commitment in another Church may be received, not confirmed.*

The Resolution from 2003 was intended to clarify that confirmed members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America may be received, not confirmed, under the existing Canons and rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer.

It is important to note that the 2003 General Convention did not see itself as changing this church's understandings of membership or teaching on Confirmation, only providing clarification to existing canons and rubrics.

Given the full communion that is the result of *Called to Common Mission*, it is this church's expectation that members of the ELCA who have previously made adult affirmations of faith in their own church be *received, not confirmed*.

At its February, 2004 meeting, the Standing Commission on Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations asked the staff of the Office of Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations to prepare a brief set of guidelines outlining the process for receiving and confirming members of other Christian churches who seek to join the Episcopal Church.

## II. Reception and Confirmation

The Episcopal Church recognizes all baptized with water and in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as members of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Those whose baptisms have been registered in the Episcopal Church are considered *baptized members*. Upon reaching 16 years of age, *baptized members* are considered *adult members*.

❖ A person seeking to join the Episcopal Church from another Christian church, if that person has been baptized with water and in the name of the Trinity, may become a *baptized member* of the Episcopal Church by having their baptism duly recorded in this church.

It is expected that all *adult members* of the Episcopal Church will be *confirmed* or *received* at some point.

❖ Baptized persons who have received the laying-on of hands at Confirmation by a Bishop in apostolic succession should be *considered baptized and confirmed* and may therefore be *received* by a Bishop in this church [Title I, Canon 17, Section 1(d)]. "Bishops in apostolic succession" includes the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox (although in the Eastern Orthodox Church lay persons do not receive the laying-on of hands by a bishop, they are anointed at baptism by a presbyter using oil consecrated by the bishop), and Polish National Catholic Church (a church formerly in full communion).

❖ Baptized persons who have been confirmed or received by Bishops in communion with this church should be *received, not confirmed* [Title I, Canon 17, Section 1(c)]. Bishops in communion with this church include other Bishops of the Anglican Communion, Bishops of churches resulting from the union of Anglicans with other churches (the Church of Bangladesh, the Church of North India, the Church of South India, and the Church of Pakistan), Bishops of the Old Catholic Union of Utrecht, the Philippine Independent Church, and the Mar Thoma Church of Malabar.

❖ Baptized persons may also be *received* by laying-on of hands of a Bishop rather than being confirmed, if such persons have previously made adult affirmations of faith in their own traditions [Title I, Canon 17, Section 1(c)]. Baptized persons who have not made such adult affirmations in their own traditions may be *confirmed* in this church. The decision for confirmation or reception is a pastoral one, to be made by the Bishop in consultation with the person's priest.

## III. Transfer

The Office of Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations has been asked how parochial clergy should register persons from the ELCA seeking to join the Episcopal Church. Title I, Canon 17, Section 4 details the process by which communicants may be transferred into the Episcopal Church. Section 4(d) of this Canon permits "any communicant of any church in Communion with this church" be entitled to the benefits of this Canon. Therefore members of the ELCA, a church in communion with this church, may be transferred into Episcopal congregations as detailed in Section 4(c) of that canon.