

Ecumenical relations strengthened by Convention

By Lynette Wilson

(Episcopal News Service) The 76th General Convention took steps, big and small, to reunite Christians in opening, reaffirming and expanding ecumenical dialogues through legislation passed July 8-17 in Anaheim, California.

"The biggest step forward is the full communion step with the Moravian church," said Bishop C. Christopher Epting, deputy to the presiding bishop for ecumenical and interreligious relations, adding that it's not official until the Northern and Southern provinces of the Moravian Church vote to accept the proposed agreement when they meet in 2010.

[Resolution A073](#), approved overwhelmingly by General Convention, sets the basis for full communion to be established between The Episcopal Church and the Northern and Southern Provinces of the Moravian Church.

The agreement would allow for shared congregations, the establishment of shared churches, and for clergy and laity to move seamlessly between Moravian and Episcopal churches, in the same way the Lutherans and Episcopalians move back and forth, now, Epting said.

The full communion partnerships will be especially useful in North Carolina and Pennsylvania, where Moravians have larger populations, he added.

Another significant piece of legislation ([Resolution A074](#)) passed by General Convention endorsed a theological statement on interreligious dialogue that gives dioceses and parishes a document that supports and explains why Episcopalians enter into interreligious dialogue with Muslims and Jews and other world religions.

"It came about because we were doing interfaith dialogue but we didn't have a rationale for why we were doing it," Epting said, adding that as Christians interreligious dialogue is about deepening relationships and being open to the other, not about conversion.

[Resolution A072](#) reaffirmed the church's ongoing dialogue with the United Methodist Church, which includes interim eucharistic sharing, and expanded that dialogue to include the historically black churches, the African Methodist Church (AME), the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AMEZ) and the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME).

General Convention adopted an agreement ([A075](#)) with the Presbyterian Church USA that allows Episcopalians and Presbyterians to accept the eucharistic hospitality offered by both churches, and also to share resources. At the local levels this allows churches that might be struggling to combine efforts and work together on Christian education, youth groups, Epting said.

[Resolution A076](#) directs the Standing Commission on Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations to begin a dialogue with the Church of Sweden, with the ultimate goal of reaching full communion.

"Christ's prayer that we all be one church" forms the basis of all ecumenical relations, Epting said. "We are meant to witness as one."