



# CONSTITUTION

of the Old Catholic Communion

*“This means that you are stranger and aliens no longer. No, you are included in God’s holy people and are members of the household of God, which is built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, with Christ Jesus as the capstone. In Christ the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in our God; in Christ you are being built into this temple, to become a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” Ephesians 2:19-22*

*To Be Ratified by the Holy Synod of 2023*

# Constitution of the Old Catholic Communion

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# CONSTITUTION of the OLD CATHOLIC COMMUNION

**In the Names of the Most Holy and Blessed Trinity:**

## **Preamble**

The Old Catholic Communion, also referred to as “Communion” or “We,” is a religious association duly incorporated. The Communion is organized exclusively for charitable, religious, and educational purposes under section 501(c)(3) of the United States Internal Revenue Code, or corresponding section of any future federal tax code. It is comprised of members and member local churches (dioceses) from all peoples as part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church freely embracing this Constitution.

As members of the Old Catholic Communion, we are people of God and hold that because all people are created in God's image and likeness and because the same divine teaching on how they should live is written in every human heart, all persons are to be treated with dignity and justice, each person having the same fundamental rights and responsibilities. In Christ, “there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female<sup>1</sup>”, and therefore, all persons, regardless of race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, culture, or other demographic or class label, are to be treated with dignity and justice. Therefore, we are committed to welcoming all to the eucharistic table, particularly the poor, the disenfranchised, the marginalized, the displaced, and those that find themselves spiritually homeless.

We hold that by our faith in God through Jesus and our baptism with water and in the name of the most holy Trinity, all Christians become members of the body of Christ<sup>2</sup>, and of one another, and are committed to living out the Gospel proclaimed and lived by Jesus, we further hold that all Christians who ascribe to the catholic ministry of unity as historically exercised in union with the bishop are members of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

We profess our faith in the Christ through the ancient, yet living Tradition handed to us from the Apostles through many generations and hold that the Church's mission, grounded in the Gospel, is to proclaim and show forth Jesus' Good News of how to live a fully human life as images of God in individual and communal justice and love. We hold that the Church is to proclaim and make known through word and action the Good News of Jesus Christ to all people.

We hereby avow the holy Gospel, the apostolic Tradition, the guiding documents of the Old Catholic Union of Utrecht, and this Constitution as the instruments of our governance and guidance for our ecclesial Communion and its member local churches in our expression of Church.

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<sup>1</sup> Galatians 3:28

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:13

## Article I: Belief Statements and Affirmations of Old Catholic Faith

- 1.1. We establish these belief statements and affirmations of Old Catholic faith which express the revealed truth entrusted to the Church by Christ and which are freely embraced by the member local churches of the Communion.
- 1.2. Christ - We believe in and affirm the faith of the ancient Christian Church: that the person of Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the Christ, who has been revealed to us as the Son of God and who through his life, death, and resurrection brings salvation to the whole world, and whose second coming is the blessed hope of the Church and the grand climax of the Gospel.
- 1.3. Apostolic Succession - We hold that both apostolicity and apostolic succession are characteristics of the Church as a whole, the whole people of God. We have preserved our catholic identity and apostolic succession through the historic fourfold ministry of laity, deacon, presbyter, and bishop, and hold that such apostolic succession is one essential aspect for the authentic transmittal of catholic faith and its sacramental integrity.
- 1.4. Church - We believe and 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 as the people of God, the body of Christ. 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 the sacraments.

We hold that the local church (diocese) is constituted as a unity of the entire people of God in a given place around a bishop with the eucharist as its center, is a complete church that carries out its tasks autonomously in that given place. Each local church living the common faith and having its indispensable synodal structures, uniting the ordained ministry and the laity, which bring to bear her communion and unity, is a representation of the “one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church”, as confessed by the ancient ecumenical creeds of the Church. The catholicity of each local church becomes manifest in the unity and communion with other local churches perceived in faith as being identical in their foundation in the redemptive work of the Triune God.

- 1.5. Apostolic Tradition - The apostolic Tradition is the deposit of Christian faith, celebration, and spiritual practice that comes from the apostles of Jesus as articulated in the epistle of St. Jude: “the faith that was once and for all handed down and delivered to the people of God”<sup>3</sup>. The apostolic Tradition is understood as the foundation of Christian faith and sacramental life, which is then developed through each generation by the work of the Holy Spirit as the Church builds upon what has come before in the life of the universal Church.

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<sup>3</sup> Jude 1:3

We believe that the apostolic Tradition, the unbroken transmission, both oral and in writing, of the teachings of Christ and the apostles, are the authoritative sources for educating all successive generations of Christians. Apostolic Tradition is to be applied, contextually to the historic time, using reason and pastoral application of the Gospel message of Christ's love, justice, and peace.

- 1.6. Scripture – We believe and affirm the canon of Sacred Scriptures that has been handed on to us through the apostolic Tradition and are held in common with the historic catholic Church, including the deuterocanonical books of the Hebrew Scriptures. We affirm that these Sacred Scriptures are truly inspired by the human encounter with the Divine in history and are both reliable and authoritative in matters of faith and practice.
- 1.7. Sacraments – We believe and affirm that the Church in her very nature is sacramental. Therefore, the work of the Church is essentially understood as a sacramental ministry. We believe, affirm, and acknowledge that the sacraments of the Church are baptism, eucharist, confirmation, reconciliation, anointing of the sick, marriage, and tri-part holy orders. The sacraments are grace-filled encounters with the Divine and are available to all people without distinction or discrimination. Through our participation in the celebration of these sacraments we are renewed by the saving presence of the resurrected Christ. Therefore, we believe and affirm that the sacraments of the Church are requisite for an authentic and essential Catholic faith and practice.
- 1.8. Creeds – We believe and affirm the ancient ecumenical creeds of the Church as true and faith-filled foundation statements of the catholic faith. These contain basic Trinitarian and Christological teachings to which these creeds testify, and we accept. That is, we believe that Jesus of Nazareth is true God and true human, and that God is authentically identified in the Trinitarian designation. Nevertheless, these credal statements are to be understood and taught in the expression of each age, in order that each generation may understand and fully trust their truth.
- 1.9. Teachings of the Old Catholic Union of Utrecht - We affirm and embrace the Old Catholic *Declaration of Utrecht*, its amendments and its additions over time, including the *Preamble to the Statute of the Old Catholic International Bishops Conference*, and the *Order* document which govern the life of the Old Catholics of the Union of Utrecht. These documents empower the life, ministry and the episcopal-synodal structure of this Communion thus contributing to its identity.
- 1.10. Synodality - We affirm the Catholic tradition of synodal governance as expressed in the Trinitarian relational ecclesiology and polity of the Communion. Synodal governance includes the participation of all three voices of laity, clergy, and bishops in the governance of the Communion in accordance with their respective roles as delineated herein. We adhere to the principle “in essentials unity, in non-essentials diversity, and in all things charity.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ascribed to Rupertus Meldenius, 17<sup>th</sup> c. Lutheran theologian.

We believe that the Holy Spirit speaks through all the voices of the Church: laity, clergy, and bishops, in their separate yet interdependent roles as delineated herein. These voices all come together to speak as one voice at the Holy Synod as the *sensus fidelium*, which is essential to the synodal process. As in the early Church, we believe that all three voices of laity, clergy, and bishops must be involved in the election of our pastors and bishops and continue to maintain this ancient practice in the Communion and its member local churches. We affirm that the essentials of our Old Catholic faith are defined under this Constitution as essential to our unity.

- 1.11. Ecumenism - Consistent with Tradition, we affirm the bishop of Rome as "first among equals" without the later innovations of both universal jurisdiction and the infallibility of the office of the See of Peter. We respect our sisters and brothers of other catholic faith denominations: the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht, Orthodox Churches, the Anglican Communion, and the Roman Catholic Communion; and pledge to work to bring ourselves closer to each other in the love of Christ through ecumenical work. We stand open, with love and respect, to dialogue with those of other religious identities and faith traditions to promote individual and communal justice and love and to bring the peace of Christ to the world.
- 1.12. The Holy Spirit – She continues to work and speak to the Church. As such, and for the advancement of good order, the Church, over time has been organized and changed in areas of discipline to meet the needs of the people of God to advance their betterment in living a life in Christ. Because context and socio-historic changes take place, various changes, deletions, and additions to traditions have occurred throughout time to meet such needs. These changes, deletions and additions must be consistent with the Gospel mandate and the ancient ecumenical creeds; all of which cannot be changed.
- 1.13. The Communion may effect changes to this Constitution as set forth herein. We accept the teachings of the official councils of the catholic Church only as far as they are in harmony with the Gospel and the teaching of the ancient Church, Old Catholic theology, and this Constitution.

## Article II: Organization and Structure

- 2.1. The Communion is a confederation of independently incorporated dioceses of self-understood Old Catholic identity and life with an episcopal-synodal form of governance. These are represented by elected laity, clergy and bishops in their respective houses of polity. These dioceses are regional local churches with faith communities gathered around a bishop and centered in the eucharist.
- 2.2. The vision of Old Catholic episcopal-synodal governance and the covenant that members enter into is rooted in interdependent and cooperative ministries with uniquely diverse voices and charisms of laity, clergy and bishops. Each ministry contributes collaboratively according to its role in the matters herein and other matters which may arise.
- 2.3. The Communion's polity includes the Bishop-Chair, who exercises an executive function, and three branches that collaborate according to their separate but interdependent roles.
  - a. The Bishop-Chair fulfills the role of the central executive officer of the Communion.
- 2.4. One branch, the House of Bishops, is composed of the bishops-ordinary of the member dioceses. As the Chair of the House of Bishops, the Bishop-Chair is seated among equals in the ministry and business of the House of Bishops.
- 2.5. The House of Laity and the House of Clergy are the two legislative branches of the Communion. These two bodies consider and pass legislation by consensus as stipulated by this Constitution subject to the veto authority of House of Bishops. A veto may be overridden by a two-thirds majority vote of each the House of Laity and the House of Clergy.
- 2.6. All legislation shall originate in the House of Laity or the House of Clergy. The House of Bishops may request a reconsideration of legislation if it feels that legislation is inconsistent with Old Catholic ecclesiology and the mission of the Communion.
- 2.7. The member local churches (dioceses) are the center of the Communion's life and mission as part of the body of Christ in the world.
  - a. This Communion, as a communion of local churches, understands each diocese to be the local church, comprised of bishop, laity, and clergy within a specific geographical region, in accord with the ancient Catholic Tradition. The local church is constituted as whole, full and complete with these three elements – yet remains part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.<sup>1</sup>
  - b. Member local churches are the founding dioceses, as well as all subsequent dioceses and communities that apply, agree to be governed by this Constitution, and that have been accepted into the Communion.



- c. Whenever the number of member faith communities within a specific geographic region which is not already under the jurisdiction of an established diocese has reached three or more, and these communities begin to discern the need for the spiritual leadership of their own bishop, that assembly of communities is encouraged to come together to elect a person under this Constitution to be their diocesan bishop, thereby becoming a diocese. The faith communities shall create a plan delineating the timing and process of forming the new diocese within their own geographic region in accordance with the process set forth herein.
- d. The faith communities will notify the leadership of the House of Laity, the leadership of the House of Clergy, and the House of Bishops that they intend to form a diocese and will be holding an election for bishop. The leadership of the House of Clergy, House of Laity and the House of Bishops shall counsel and assist the petitioning assembly with the process.
- e. The communities seeking a new bishop, whether as a newly formed diocese or as an existing member diocese, will carefully and prayerfully nominate, screen, interview, and elect the person they choose to serve them as their bishop. The election must afford every individual of the faith communities the opportunity to cast a conscientious vote in the election.
- f. Candidates for the episcopal office must be ordained and incardinated presbyters of the affected assembly and in good standing with the Communion.
- g. Affirmation by the House of Bishops and the leadership of both the House of Laity and the House of Clergy is necessary for final affirmation of the bishop elected by this newly formed diocese. Affirmation shall not be withheld, unless just cause can be presented to the House of Bishops and the leadership of both the House of Clergy and the House of Laity that the candidate is unfit by faith or morals. A reasonable, modest, and efficient period of time should be allowed for this, but under no circumstance longer than three months.
- h. Upon affirmation of the bishop-elect, the faith communities that have formed the new diocese shall establish a form of governance that gives evidence of synodal polity that includes the three separate but interdependent voices of the bishop, laity, and clergy. The governance structure established shall be representative of the diversity of the faith communities in that diocese.
- i. The exercise of administrative authority, derived from the whole of the faithful of the local church, shall pass into the hands of the elected bishop immediately after the election.
- j. The ordination and consecration of the bishop-elect is performed by the Bishop-Chair with the member bishops of the House of Bishops.

- k. While the ordination and consecration of a bishop is permanent in sacramental character, the administrative term of office for a diocesan bishop is established in the norms of the diocese.
- l. The diocese is responsible for the financial expenses of the diocesan bishop related to diocesan duties and responsibilities in accordance with their local diocesan norms.
- m. Each diocese shall uphold its financial obligations to the Communion by regular and appropriate contributions as established by the Holy Synod.
- n. In the event of an episcopal vacancy arising from death, resignation, retirement or removal from office of a diocesan bishop, the same selection process and guidelines set forth herein shall be used to select a successor to the diocesan bishop's office. However, in such a case, provisions should be made for continuing the regular affairs of the diocese. Local diocesan norms shall provide for this event.
- o. Any norms of the diocese must subordinate and accede to the Constitution of the Communion and under no circumstances may a diocese, a bishop, or a faith community exempt themselves from any of the provisions of the Constitution of the Communion.
- p. Every diocesan bishop in good standing and who holds an elected episcopal office within the Communion shall be a member of the House of Bishops.
- q. A diocese must be financially self-sustaining and by right self-governing so long as it is in conformity with this Constitution. The Communion holds no claim to the property and assets of the diocese. The diocese shall assume all liabilities and expenses related, directly or indirectly, to its ministerial works. It shall be the employer of record for any clergy or staff it employs as well as liable for any independent contractors or volunteers that perform services on behalf of the diocese. The Communion holds no legal responsibility or liability for the conduct of the members, employees, staff, or volunteers of the diocese.

2.8. One of the goals of the Communion is to maintain unity or create unity wherever possible. The Communion realizes schisms and breaks have taken place across the history of the Christian Church. As such, the potential exists of having an entire Catholic jurisdiction apply for entry into the Communion. The following minimum guidelines are to be followed:

- a. The bishop and clergy of an independent jurisdiction must apply separately but concurrently with the faith communities under their jurisdiction.
- b. All bishops, clergy, and lay leaders of each separate faith community seeking entry into the Communion must assent to an integration plan created for it in conjunction with the House of Bishops. Acceptance of the integration plan does not guarantee membership in the Communion, but merely sets a path for the process of entry into the Communion. The integration plan must address any issues of overlapping

jurisdictions, geographic or otherwise, of member bishops already in the Communion. In many cases the integration plan will include a transitional plan for those faith communities that are in areas currently under the jurisdiction of a member bishop. Those affected faith communities will be transferred to the jurisdiction of the existing local member bishop. The transfer must address the time period of adjustment for any communities that will be moved in order for pastoral assent and rapport to develop.

- c. A bishop from the independent jurisdiction seeking entry into the Communion does not gain automatic entry into the House of Bishops until they have been reviewed, approved, and affirmed by the House of Bishops. If they are not admitted into the House, for good cause, including but not limited to non-compliance with the guidelines of selection of bishops and/or the guidelines for ordination set forth herein, a compliance plan may be created. They may continue to serve as a member of the clergy until such time as they are affirmed by the House of Bishops. If a bishop is unable to fulfill the requirements of the compliance plan, a notice must be given to those communities making the concurrent application so that they may choose whether to continue with the application.
- d. Upon approval by the House of Bishops and the Synodal Council and after completing the terms of the integration and/or compliance plan, the Bishop-Chair shall then present the applicants entering under this paragraph to the Holy Synod for affirmation.

### Article III: House of Laity

3.1 The House of Laity is formally comprised of delegates elected from their member parishes and communities. Lay delegates are elected every four years in staggered terms in accordance with the Constitution and the respective diocesan norms and the particular parish or community of the diocese. All laity, in good standing of member parishes and communities as defined by their particular diocese, are encouraged to attend House of Laity meetings.

- a. All lay delegates must be at least eighteen years of age and cannot be clergy.
- b. Each recognized parish and community shall have the right to send up to two lay delegates to the House of Laity and Holy Synod.
- c. The House of Laity may establish its own policies and procedures for House governance in accordance with this Constitution. The House shall convene no less than every two years in preparation the Holy Synod and in between, at least semi-annually, or more often as deemed necessary
- d. Fundamental to the purpose of House of Laity and upon which its policies and procedures are built are:
  - i. To provide for communication between members of the laity of the Communion.
  - ii. To provide a means of determining what spiritual needs of the laity are and how the clergy can respond to these needs.
- e. An elected delegate of the House of Laity may be removed from the House for misconduct, malfeasance, any egregious act, gross negligence, incompetence, lack of participation, or lack of unity with other delegates of the House.
- f. The following may be standing ministry teams comprised of delegates elected from the House of Laity, except that no delegate of any standing ministry team may simultaneously hold another ministry team position within the House of Laity. These ministry teams shall be chaired by a delegate of the House of Laity:
  - i. stewardship;
  - ii. communications and information;
  - iii. finance and development;
  - iv. social justice, health, and public policy.

Other ministry teams may from time to time be appropriately established.

## Article IV: House of Clergy

4.1. The House of Clergy is formally comprised of deacon and/or priest delegates of member parishes and communities in good standing with their diocese. One clergy, (the pastor or primary clergy leader), and one clergy representative from each community, for a total of up to two clergy representatives from each community, will be elected in accordance with the Constitution and the respective diocesan norms and the particular parish or community of the diocese. The good standing of these particular clergy is determined by the particular diocesan norms and the diocesan bishop.

- a. Community pastors shall be voting members of the House of Clergy. Diocesan bishops are not permitted to serve in the House of Clergy, however, may be invited by the House to participate as need arises. In communities whose pastor is a bishop, a designated clergy vicar shall serve in lieu of the bishop as the voting clergy delegate of that community. Such a designated vicar shall be selected according to the norms of the diocese. In addition to the pastor, each community may select one additional clergy delegate, deacon or presbyter of that community, to serve as a voting delegate of the House of Clergy. The term of office shall be determined by each diocese.
- b. The House of Clergy may establish its own policies and procedures of its governance in conformity with this Constitution and shall convene no less than every two years in preparation for the Holy Synod and in between, at least semi-annually, or more often as deemed necessary.
- c. Fundamental to the purpose of House of Clergy and upon which its policies and procedures are built are:
  - i. To provide communication between members of the clergy of the Communion.
  - ii. To provide a means of determining what spiritual and ministerial needs of the clergy are and how the clergy can respond to these needs.
- d. An elected delegate of the House of Clergy may be removed from the House for misconduct, malfeasance, any egregious act, gross negligence, incompetence, lack of participation, or lack of unity with the other clergy delegates of the House.
- e. The House of Clergy may propose to the House of Bishops for consideration the following:
  - i. Liturgical changes of the Communion;
  - ii. Standards for new communities to be received into the Communion;
  - iii. Standards for the ordination within the Communion;
  - iv. Standards for the reception of ordained clergy from other ecclesial bodies into the Communion.

- f. The following may be standing ministry teams comprised of delegates elected from the House, except that no delegate of any ministry team may simultaneously hold another ministry team position within the House of Clergy, and shall be chaired by a delegate of the House of Clergy:
- i. mission and evangelism;
  - ii. vocational promotion and permanent formation;
  - iii. catechesis and religious formation.
- Other ministry teams may from time to time be appropriately established.

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## Article V: House of Bishops

5.1. The House of Bishops is comprised of all elected diocesan bishops, ordinaries, in good standing who shall have voting privileges.

- a. The House of Bishops consists of bishops who, charged with the ministry of apostolicity, receive the fullness of the teaching authority of the Church and therefore it remains in the sole purview of the House to define matters of faith for the Communion and to oversee the sacraments. The role of a bishop is to provide pastoral governance for a diocese. Bishops who fulfill this function are known as diocesan bishops or local ordinaries, because they have ordinary authority for a diocese.
  - i. The House of Bishops may invite bishops in good standing of the Communion, who have retired from formal episcopal ministry and diocesan responsibility, to participate fully in the life and work of the House. A retired bishop may not be nominated as a candidate for Bishop-Chair.
- b. The House of Bishops is responsible for a number of tasks which also include:
  - i. Taking the necessary decisions in all organizational and disciplinary matters concerning the maintenance of communion and the implementation of joint projects.
  - ii. Taking a stand in controversial questions of faith and related ethical behaviors as well as in the order of the Communion.
  - iii. Making statements and pastoral letters on faith and principles of Old Catholicism and of the Communion, if required.
  - iv. Providing episcopal oversight and guidance for the Institute of Old Catholic Studies (IOCS), an educational outreach ministry of the Communion.
  - v. Nurturing and ordering relationships with other churches and religious bodies.
  - vi. Accepting a local church into the Communion and thus a bishop into the House of Bishops.
- c. In order to accomplish its task, a two-way process of discernment between the House of Bishops and the member dioceses is necessary in order to safeguard the Communion and its common witness and mission, which is a primary responsibility of each individual bishop as representatives of the local churches in the Communion, and as representatives of the House in the local churches.
- d. The House of Bishops shall review all applications for ordination, vocations, communities and formation of new communities that are geographically outside of an established diocese of the Communion. The Bishop-Chair designee shall be the ordinary for these until they are constituted as a diocese with the election of their diocesan bishop.

- e. The House of Bishops receives and accepts a diocese's notice of withdrawal from the Communion.
- f. The House of Bishops shall create an integration plan where the relationship of the Communion with other jurisdictions include:
  - i. The integration of a jurisdiction into the Communion;
  - ii. Shared ministry or involvement in the governance of the other jurisdiction;
  - iii. The integration plan shall be in harmony with this Constitution, any guidelines for receiving new communities, and the minimum standards for ordination. The integration plan once created and approved by the House, shall then be sent to the House of Clergy for affirmation.
- g. The House of Bishops may initiate liturgical changes for the Communion and full communion agreements and has oversight over these, working in collaboration with the House of Clergy.
- h. The House of Bishops is the forum of appeals for the decisions made in the Houses of Laity and Clergy or any of their delegates and/or committees.
  - i. The House of Bishops shall establish an appeal process which includes the formation of an appeals commission that is comprised of theologically educated laity, clergy and bishops, and shall review all appeals and submit their recommendations to the House of Bishops.
  - ii. The members of the appeals commission shall be selected according to guidelines established by the House of Bishops.
- i. The House of Bishops is the forum of review and due process for cases of misconduct and/or incompetence and may appoint an investigating committee if deemed necessary.
- j. The following may be ministry teams of the House of Bishops:
  - i. mission of the Old Catholic Communion;
  - ii. liturgy and sacraments;
  - iii. ecumenism and world mission.
 Other ministry teams may from time to time be appropriately established.

5.2. The Bishop-Chair shall become the president of the House of Bishops. The Bishop-Chair shall serve for a period of four years, beginning the first day following their election. A bishop may serve a total of no more than three terms consecutively in the position of Bishop-Chair. The Bishop-Chair shall be regarded "as among equals" in the House of Bishops.

- a. During their term, the Bishop-Chair shall be the public persona of the Communion, representing the Communion in liturgical and ecumenical functions, articulating the vision and mission of the Communion, and in proclaiming the Gospel of Christ.



- b. The Bishop-Chair shall represent the consensus of the House of Bishops as chief articulator of the mission and vision of the Communion.
- c. The Bishop-Chair shall be charged with fostering and strengthening the unity of the bishops of the House of Bishops in their relationship with one another and consequently their relationship in the Communion.
- d. The Bishop-Chair shall convene and preside at the Holy Synod, all Holy Synod liturgical functions, episcopal ordinations where the Communion is gathered as ecclesia and at all meetings of the House of Bishops unless otherwise designated by the Bishop-Chair to another bishop of the Communion.
- e. The Bishop-Chair shall have an active voice and vote in the House of Bishops.
- f. The Bishop-Chair must act in accordance with the consensus of the House of Bishops regarding the veto of any legislation, liturgical changes or full communion agreements. A veto of any legislation may be overridden by a two-thirds majority vote of each the House of Laity and the House of Clergy.
- g. The Bishop-Chair shall sign any finalized legislation, liturgical changes, and full communion agreements.
- h. The Bishop-Chair may issue a pastoral letter to the Communion with the advice, counsel and consent of the House of Bishops.
- i. The Bishop-Chair shall present a pastoral plan for the Communion every two years. This plan shall be developed together with the House of Clergy, the House of Laity, and the House of Bishops.
- j. The Bishop-Chair shall sign all contracts and documents as representative of the Communion, with the prior and explicit approval of the Synodal Council.
- k. In the event of resignation, death, incapacitation, or ongoing or permanent indisposition of the Bishop-Chair, the senior voting member bishop (by consecration date) of the House of Bishops shall serve as interim Bishop-Chair until a new Bishop-Chair is elected in accordance with procedures of this Constitution.
- l. The Bishop-Chair may be removed from their position for misconduct, malfeasance, any egregious act, gross negligence, lack of unity with the bishops of the House or incompetence, only after due process has been afforded to them under the jurisdiction of the House of Bishops.
  - i. The same is applicable to each bishop of the House.
  - ii. In the event of removal of a bishop from the House, after due process, the action must be affirmed by the Synodal Council, thus removing

both the bishop and, in consequence, their local church from the Communion, unless otherwise determined by the affected diocese. In this particular case, the House of Bishops, with the affirmation of the Synodal Council, may provide episcopal oversight until the affected diocese elects a new bishop.

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## Article VI: The Holy Synod, Our Way Together<sup>5</sup>

6.1. The Communion shall convene in Holy Synod, as our way together, no less than once every two years.

- a. Understanding that we are called first to be church, and that the blessing of God is paramount to all we accomplish, every Holy Synod shall begin and end with the celebration of the holy eucharist, from which the Communion lives its life of community and self-giving for others.
- b. The Holy Synod should not just be a legislative gathering, but rather a gathering of the body of Christ. Ample time should be allocated to building up the body of Christ with collegial, educational, relational, spiritual, and ministerial opportunities.
- c. Proposed legislation and an agenda item may originate by consensus of the House of Laity, the House of Clergy or the House of Bishops, a diocese, an individual parish or community.
- d. Unless otherwise designated in this Constitution.

6.2. The Synodal Council shall:

- a. Establish a timely and orderly process for the receiving of proposals for legislation or other actions to be taken up by the Holy Synod.
- b. Will determine the format for voting for all items that require a vote (e.g. legal and financial concerns), including voting by secret ballot. Voting and election processes shall be transparent while respecting individual conscience with regard to any secret ballot taken.
- c. The Chair of the House of Laity shall ensure that the process and procedures proposed by the Synodal Council remain in conformity with this Constitution.
- d. The order of business shall be published for comment and consideration at least sixty (60) days prior to the celebration of the Holy Synod. Legislation or another action may not be introduced after the publication of the order of business. This is also applicable to any opportunity for self-nomination within the Holy Synod.
- e. The order of business shall include, at minimum, the following:
  - i. Affirmation of elected bishop(s) and the Bishop-Chair;
  - ii. Legislation on the action proposed by the Houses of Laity and of Clergy;
  - iii. Legislation or other action proposed by the House of Bishops;

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<sup>5</sup> From the Greek, σύνοδος [sinodos], way or path together.

- iv. Legislation or other action proposed by a diocese;
  - v. Legislation or other action proposed by an individual parish or community.
- f. The optimal experience of the Holy Synod is achieved by the physical presence and full participation in synod activities. We recognize that there may be hardships which preclude such participation. The Synodal Council shall assist those for whom attendance is a hardship by making appropriate arrangements, including but not limited to virtual participation, validated electronic voting procedures, and the opportunity to solicit the Communion for economic assistance.
- g. The Synodal Council shall select a recorder for all sessions of the synod. Further, the Council shall make arrangements that proper equipment is available to record and store the minutes as a permanent record of the synod of the Communion.
- h. The Synodal Council shall solicit suggestions from the Communion for educational workshop topics to be presented during the synod.
- i. The Synodal Council shall provide the opportunity for daily prayer and liturgy during the synod.
- j. The Synodal Council shall use an appropriate rule of order that includes the requirement that discussions at the synod must be exercised with Christian care, charity and professional tone.
- i. The chaplain of the synod, selected by the House of Clergy and approved of by the House of Bishops and the House of Laity, will call for prayer if discussions fall out of Christian care and charity.
  - ii. The Bishop-Chair will call the synod into order when professional tones and the rules of order are not being followed.
  - iii. A parliamentarian will be selected by the Synodal Council to assist in keeping track of the process.

## Article VII: Synodal Council

7.1 The Synodal Council is the central executive body of the Communion outside of the celebration of the Holy Synod.

- a. It works to implement the mandates and directives of the Holy Synod and to prepare for the celebration of the Holy Synod.
- b. The Synodal Council is co-chaired by the Bishop-Chair and the Chair of the House of Laity and includes membership of one delegate each from the House of Laity and the House of Clergy, both elected and sent by their respective diocese.
- c. Membership on the Synodal Council also includes a Secretary and a Treasurer, who have a voice in all discussions and who are selected by the Synodal Council and affirmed by the House of Bishops.
- d. The Synodal Council serves as a consultative and coordinating body on matters pertaining to the administration of the Communion that are not expressly reserved to the Bishop-Chair, the House of Laity Chair, the House of Bishops, the House of Laity and/or the House of Clergy.
- e. The Synodal Council works together using consensus for its decision-making. If consensus cannot be attained among the diocesan elected delegates of the Synodal Council, then the item being considered is tabled.
- f. If a decision of the Synodal Council significantly impacts one or all of the member dioceses, that decision shall require the advice and consent of the House of Bishops.

## Article VIII: Liturgy and the Sacraments

8.1 The liturgy is the act of corporate prayer of the Church. Liturgical actions are, therefore, public in their nature and requires the presence and active participation of the people of God in the celebration of the liturgical rites of the Church. At the very minimum, all communities shall celebrate and keep the Lord's Day (Saturday vigil and/or Sunday) as a regular day of public worship utilizing the approved liturgies set forth by their diocesan bishop.

- a. In the future, the Communion may develop its own rites. The rites and ordo employed should bear in mind the needs of the local faith community. The rites and ordo are at the discretion and approval of the bishop, as the diocesan bishop for the local church.
- b. Liturgies and rites should be celebrated in the vernacular language of the community in whose presence the liturgy is celebrated so that they become the genuine prayer of the community. At the discretion and approval of the diocesan bishop, a liturgy and rite in another language may be celebrated if it meets the needs of the local faith community.
- c. All books, vessels, and any other items used for liturgical celebrations, particularly that of the holy eucharist, including the lectionary and altar books, shall be attractive and seemly in appearance, out of respect and mindful of the holy purpose for which these items are used.
- d. Except in emergencies or when dispensed by the diocesan bishop, ministers shall wear vestments appropriate to their holy order during the celebration of each sacrament according to the norms of the rite employed. At a minimum, all clergy shall utilize the alb and the appropriate stole pertaining to their respective holy order unless otherwise approved by the diocesan bishop.
- e. Gender inclusive language shall be used in caring for the people of God, as well as expansive imagery in reference to the Divine, to bring them closer in their relationship with God. Gender inclusive and expansive language are vital expressions of our commitment to the welcome and inclusion of all.
- f. The right for presbyters or deacons to celebrate the liturgy and sacraments in circumstances which are not emergencies is granted only by faculty from the diocesan bishop having jurisdiction over the place of celebration and in conformity with this Constitution.

8.2 The sacraments are outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace, given by Christ to the Church. We recognize the following sacraments: baptism, eucharist, confirmation, reconciliation, marriage, holy orders, and anointing of the sick. Sacraments are not restricted to any individual or group, by gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital state, or other socio-economic or demographic labels, so long as the candidate has availed themselves to the preparation and requirements set forth in this Constitution and at the discretion of the diocesan bishop.

- a. Communities will maintain registers or records for the following sacraments: baptism, first eucharist, confirmation, marriage, and holy orders, as well as Christian funerals and memorials.
  - b. The restored order of the sacraments of initiation: baptism, eucharist and confirmation may be administered to anyone, regardless of age, including infants, if so approved of by the diocesan bishop. In the case of a minor, the consent of at least one parent or legal guardian is necessary.
- 8.3. Baptism is the sacrament by which we die with Christ and rise again in Christ as a renewed people of God. In this sacrament we are united with all other members of the body of Christ, the Church and heirs of the reign of God.
- a. The sacrament of baptism is open to all who desire to follow Christ and affirm the profession of faith, as is formulated in the ancient ecumenical creeds.
  - b. We believe and affirm that baptism with water in the name of the Triune God unites the one baptized with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, initiates that person into the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, and confers the gracious gift of a new life in Christ. This traditional formula is expressed by the words, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” and shall be used for all baptisms to recognize them as faithful to apostolic Tradition and to be ecumenically accepted.
  - c. The ordinary minister of the sacrament of baptism is a bishop, presbyter, or deacon. However, in an emergency where there is a danger of death, any person may baptize.
  - d. Each adult candidate for baptism shall evidence to the pastor an understanding and acceptance of the belief statements and affirmations of the catholic faith of this Communion as is appropriate for their level of education, and maturity.
  - e. In infant/child baptisms the sponsors and/or parents of the child shall profess and accept the belief statements and affirmations of the catholic faith of this Communion in the name of the child. If the child has reached an age of reason as determined by the pastor, the child shall evidence to the pastor an understanding and acceptance of these, appropriate to their age, level of education, and maturity.
  - f. In the administration of the sacrament of baptism, the sponsor(s) must have been themselves baptized and be communicants. If the restored order of Christian initiation is used, the sponsor must be a fully initiated communicant.
- 8.4. The sacrament of the holy eucharist is the sacrament, which under the appearances of bread and wine, the Lord Christ is contained, offered, and received.
- a. The holy eucharist is the efficacious sign and sublime cause of that communion in the divine life and that unity of the people of God by which the Church is kept in being. It is the culmination both of God’s action sanctifying the world in Christ and of the worship offered to Christ and through Christ to the Father in the Holy Spirit.
  - b. We believe and affirm that the body and blood of Christ are truly present, distributed, and received under the forms of bread and wine in the holy eucharist as an encounter

with the risen Christ. The holy eucharist is open to all. No test of faith or moral standard shall be required for any person to approach and receive the holy eucharist.

- c. Local custom and pastoral need shall determine the administration of the sacrament of the holy eucharist, including first communion and viaticum for the dying.
- d. In every community, the holy eucharist shall be celebrated at minimum on every Lord's Day, on principal feasts and appropriate provisions shall be made for public worship during holy week.
- f. In all cases, the holy body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, present in the holy eucharist, shall be treated with the utmost reverence, with due diligence to Tradition and custom.
- g. The ordinary minister of the holy eucharist is the local bishop, who in turn, deposes the presbyters to celebrate the eucharist as representative of the bishop. The ordinary minister for distribution of holy eucharist is a deacon, presbyter, or bishop. Extraordinary ministers for distribution of holy eucharist are permitted at the discretion of the diocesan bishop, in pastoral recognition of the needs of the individual community.
- h. The pastor shall see to the correct training of persons selected for the sacred task as extraordinary ministers of the holy eucharist, imparting to them the highest possible respect and reverence for this ministry and instructing them in their duties and in the limitations of their office.
- i. Bread for the holy eucharist must be made of wheat and not corrupt. Wine must be made from the juice of grapes only and not corrupt. The use of gluten-free hosts and/or non-alcoholic wine is permitted out of pastoral necessity and sensitivity, and at the discretion of the pastor.

8.5. The sacrament of confirmation is the path by which the baptized receives the seal and gifts of the Holy Spirit.

- a. The ordinary minister of the sacrament of confirmation is the local bishop. The diocesan bishop may grant faculties for confirmation to presbyters for pastoral reasons.
- b. Each candidate for confirmation shall evidence to the pastor an understanding of the belief statements and affirmations of the catholic faith of this Communion appropriate for their age, level of education and maturity, according to local custom and pastoral need.
- c. Each candidate for confirmation shall be accompanied by a sponsor(s) who must be a fully initiated Christian, who will continue to support the candidate in living the Christian life.
- d. If an individual was previously confirmed in another Christian community, the sacrament of confirmation is not to be repeated in respect for belief of that church concerning confirmation.



- i. A rite of welcome is instead celebrated for such candidates, embracing them in their newfound understanding and decision to live their faith as an Old Catholic.

8.6. Through the sacrament of reconciliation Christians are reconciled with God, the community, each other, and themselves.

- a. Only a bishop or presbyter may administer the sacrament of reconciliation.
- b. The sacrament of reconciliation is open to all who request it. Individual auricular reconciliation is to be available to those who request this form.
- c. The primary sacrament of reconciliation is the holy eucharist, however, sacramental absolution is not imparted as a regular element of the liturgy. General absolution may be given as part of an occasional or seasonal celebration of reconciliation within the context of the eucharist.
- d. A clear delineation is made between external and internal forum. A presbyter may not divulge anything that has been revealed in the sacrament of reconciliation, nor refer subsequently to such matter. The seal of the confessional is absolute and is not abrogated on the death of the penitent.
  - i. Private matters elicited in ordinary counseling which is not sacramental are to be held confidential to the extent that the civil law requires and enjoins. Clergy are cautioned that they may be required to report certain matters to appropriate civil law enforcement authorities if such matters come to their attention outside the sacrament of reconciliation.
  - ii. In circumstances which may be unclear as to whether they fall under the area of counseling or the sacrament of reconciliation the determining factor shall be whether sacramental absolution, regardless of formula, was granted. If sacramental absolution was granted at any point by the minister, the entire conversation shall be deemed to be within the sacrament of reconciliation and inviolable.

8.7. The sacrament of anointing of the sick conveys several graces and imparts gifts of strengthening in the Holy Spirit against anxiety, discouragement, and temptation, and conveys peace and fortitude. These graces flow from the atoning death of Jesus Christ, for "this was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, 'He took our infirmities and bore our diseases'"<sup>6</sup>.

- a. The sacrament of anointing of the sick is open to all who request it.
- b. The ordinary minister of the sacrament of anointing of the sick is a bishop or a presbyter when reconciliation is celebrated. Otherwise, a deacon may also be the ordinary minister outside of reconciliation.

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew 8:17

8.8. The sacrament of marriage is intended by God to be a creative relationship - God's blessing enables spouses to love and support each other in good times and bad. For Christians, marriage is also an invitation to share life together in the spirit of Jesus Christ. It is based upon a solemn, public, and life-long covenant between two people, made and celebrated in the presence of God and before an ordained minister and the community.

- a. The sacrament of marriage is affirmed for all couples who seek recognition and blessing of their union.
- b. Only a deacon, presbyter, or bishop with faculties may officiate at the sacrament of marriage in this Communion. Where required by civil law, each person intending to officiate at the sacrament of marriage shall obtain whatever licensing or certification the civil authority may require of marriage officiants prior to officiating at any marriage.
- c. Persons seeking to be married must have attained legal age as defined by the civil jurisdiction in which the sacrament will be celebrated. Where no minimum age is defined in civil law the minimum age for marriage shall be 18 years.
- d. The sacrament of marriage must be freely affirmed by the two (2) parties.
- e. If the marriage is also to be legally recognized by the secular authorities, the marriage must conform to the laws of that secular civil jurisdiction.
- f. Clergy shall witness and bless the sacrament of marriage between partners of the same gender in accordance with this Constitution. Where in civil law members of the same gender are not recognized or permitted to enter civil marriage, this does not prevent the sacrament of marriage to be recognized by this Communion and is of equal standing sacramentally as those of opposite genders.
- g. All couples must conform to the catechetical requirements and pastoral direction of the officiant.
- h. The sacrament of marriage may not be administered to someone with an existing marriage in place. Simultaneous marriage to more than one concurrent partner is prohibited.

8.9. The sacrament of holy orders is the sacrament through which the mission entrusted by Christ to the apostles continues to be exercised in the Church until the end of time; thus, it is the sacrament of apostolic ministry. It includes three orders: bishop, presbyter, and deacon. The sacrament of holy orders is open to all of those who are qualified and abide by the standards set forth herein for each respective order.

- a. The deacon is the minister of service and of charity. The deacon is ordained and commissioned by Christ and the bishop to minister to the spiritual and material needs of the people of God and to be a minister of the Word of God and an example of service in the world. Working closely with the pastor, the deacon is an official

witness of service to others. Deacons may be given faculties by their ordinary to all or some of the following: baptize, act as deacon at the eucharistic liturgy, preach with permission of the pastor of the community, distribute the holy eucharist and bring the holy eucharist to the sick, and anoint the sick without reconciliation and absolution. If no priest is available, the deacon may take the holy eucharist to the dying, bless and marry with the delegation of the local pastor of the community, and lead prayers at wakes and officiate at burial services. Further, the traditional role of the deacon during pastoral visits of the ordinary is to minister to the ordinary during their visit to the community. Candidates for the diaconate typically have exercised the ministries of lector and acolyte prior to ordination to the diaconate. Those who are ordained for full service as deacons shall be known as permanent deacons, a historic and traditional role in the Church. Those who are in preparation for the order of presbyter shall be known as transitional deacons.

- b. The ministry of presbyter is to build up the body of Christ in the world through the ministry of word and sacrament, pastoral care, and teaching. The presbyter is ordained and commissioned by Christ and the diocesan bishop to minister to the spiritual and sacramental needs of the people of God. The presbyter is the extension and representative of the presence of the diocesan bishop within the parish or community. Presbyters may be given faculties by their bishop for the following: baptize, confirm with the delegation of the bishop, celebrate and preside at the eucharistic liturgy, preach, and teach the word of God, hear confession and absolve sins, provide anointing of the sick with reconciliation and absolution, bring holy viaticum to the dying, bless and marry, and officiate at wakes, funeral liturgies, and burial services. Candidates for the presbyterate shall be ordained first to the transitional diaconate prior to ordination to the presbyterate, and if approved by the diocesan bishop, shall then be ordained to the presbyterate. All priests contain both the role of deacon and presbyter once ordained to the presbyterate.
- c. The ministry of each bishop is the pastoral care of Church, in particular the local church, diocese, entrusted to them and at the same time, to maintain collegiality within the House of Bishops. The diocese, as a particular local church, is an embodiment of the whole church, and is not merely an administrative subdivision of something larger. The bishop is elected by the members of the local church to be its head. The bishop has primary teaching, leading, and sanctifying responsibility for the diocese, in conformity with the unifying essentials found within this Constitution. Further, the bishop is entrusted to maintain, protect, and safeguard the continuity of the Gospel and apostolic Tradition and to foster the unity of the body of Christ. This ministry is built upon the three charisms of: teaching, leading, and sanctifying. Therefore, the role of the bishop is exercised in personal, collegial, and communal ways to witness to and safeguard the unity and apostolicity of the Church. Candidates for bishop are to have been ordained to and exercised the diaconate and presbyterate prior to their ordination as a bishop, as all bishops contain the threefold ministry of deacon, presbyter, and bishop.

## Article IX: Selection of a Bishop in the Local Church

9.1. Guidelines for selection of a bishop for a local church shall be developed by the House of Bishops and adopted as appropriate under the norms of the local church. The administration of the process for diocesan bishop elections shall be managed by the diocese, with the counsel and assistance of the leadership of Houses of the Communion and include the following tri-part election process handed down to us from the ancient Church:<sup>7</sup>

- a. Testimony: Listening to the testimony of the clergy and laity and neighboring bishops of the candidate within the diocese.
- b. Voting: The conscientious vote of all the members within the local church including the retiring bishop.
- c. Affirmation: Confirmation of all the members assembled, laity, clergy and bishops, at the diocesan synod. This shall be followed by the ordination and/or installation by the bishops of the Communion.

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<sup>7</sup> *Testimonium, suffragium, and iudicium*: St. Cyprian of Carthage, 210-258 C.E.

## Article X: Election of the Bishop-Chair

10.1. Guidelines for the election of the Bishop-Chair shall be developed by the House of Bishops and shall ensure the following minimum standards:

- a. A nomination and election process shall be undertaken that is respectful of all three voices of the Communion; bishops, clergy, and laity.
  - i. The Synodal Council, in conjunction with the House of Bishops, shall organize and execute the process of the nomination and election of the Bishop-Chair in accordance with this Constitution.
  - ii. Both the House of Bishops and the Synodal Council will ensure that the vetting process is completed in a fair, transparent, and impartial manner.
  - iii. They will schedule the testimonial and nomination processes to take place prior to the Holy Synod.
  - iv. They will schedule the affirmation process to take place as part of the order of business at the Holy Synod.

10.2. The vetting and elections process shall include, at minimum, the following:

- a. Testimony: Listening to the testimony of the clergy and laity and member bishops of the candidate.
  - i. As part of the process the bishops shall have the opportunity to propose a current member bishop in good standing, except those retired, for consideration as a potential candidate for Bishop-Chair. The bishops shall forward their nominated candidate to the Synodal Council which will, in turn, discern affirmation of the nominated candidate.
  - ii. The Synodal Council may evaluate the potential candidates to make sure they are in conformity with the requirements of this Constitution, including but not limited to, background and psychological evaluations. Such information will be held confidential and shall solely be used for the vetting process. With regard to a psychological evaluation, the Synodal Council will be limited to knowing only if one has already been completed as part of the ordination process and if the candidates have been cleared by a psychological professional. If such evaluation has not been conducted, one shall be requested of the potential candidate in order to complete a psychological evaluation.
  - iii. The potential candidates shall be contacted and asked to submit their current curriculum vitae, references for background checks, biography, and other required documents, such as proof of education, mental health report, letters of recommendations, and responses to questions posed by the Synodal Council.

- b. Voting: The election of the Synodal Council and the House of Bishops of the Communion.
- i. Prior to the election, the Synodal Council shall notify the names of the candidates to the Communion. The election shall be conducted in both the Synodal Council and the House of Bishops. The results of the election shall be promptly communicated to the Communion in preparation for the affirmation process at the Holy Synod.
  - ii. Questions that may be asked of the candidate for publication and dissemination to the Communion may include the following: leadership attributes that the candidate will bring to the office of the Bishop-Chair, how the candidate perceives the role and ministry of the Bishop-Chair, the candidate's vision regarding the mission and ministries of the Communion, how the candidate's vision for the Communion makes the Gospel relevant in the lives of people in light of current world events, the role of spirituality and prayerfulness in the candidate's life, diplomatic capabilities in growing the Communion and nurturing ecumenical relations.  
  
No more than six questions will be submitted to the candidate.
  - iii. After the candidate has responded, the Synodal Council shall assemble a digital election booklet to be given to all delegates and leadership, the House of Bishops, and the current Bishop-Chair. The election booklet, which may be delivered electronically, posted on the Communion website, or by other means approved of by the Synodal Council, shall contain the picture, the Curriculum vitae, the biography, and responses to the questions of each of the candidate and shall then be made available to all members of the Communion.
  - iv. The Synodal Council shall create an opportunity for the members to meet with the candidate, each with their own respective diocesan town hall meeting where, in a structured and orderly fashion, the delegates may ask questions of the candidate. These town hall meetings shall take place prior to the election of the Synodal Council and the House of Bishops.
  - v. The Synodal Council shall administer the election process for the candidate in collaboration with the House of Bishops, striving for consensus, with a two-thirds majority minimum.
  - vi. Any conflict of interest between a Synodal Council member and a nominee shall disqualify the Synodal Council member from participating in the consensus process.
- c. Affirmation: Affirmation by all the delegates and bishops during the Holy Synod, followed by the installation of the Bishop-Chair.
- i. For the purposes of the affirmation of the Bishop-Chair, each House delegate will accurately and faithfully convey the consensus of the parish or community that they represent.

## **Article XI: Amendments of the Constitution**

11.1. Amendments to this Constitution may originate in either the House of Laity, the House of Clergy, or the House of Bishops, or may be brought up for consideration by a member parish or community. These will be addressed at the Holy Synod or in extraordinary circumstances, as determined by the House of Bishops, in consultation with the leaders of the House of Laity and the House of Clergy, at an extraordinary synod.

- a. Proposed legislation to amend the Constitution must pass by a majority vote at the Holy Synod.
- b. All proposed amendments will be reviewed for wording, fidelity to Old Catholic tradition and constitutionality by the House of Bishops, within sixty calendar days after the conclusion of the Holy Synod. At the conclusion of the review, the amendment shall be signed by the Bishop-Chair and become part of the Constitution, unless the review has found errors. Should the review determine that an error(s) exists, the entire Communion will be notified and informed of the reasons that the proposed amendment will be vetoed. Any motion to amend shall not be considered.

## **Article XII: Dissolution of the Communion**

12.1 Upon the dissolution of this Communion, assets shall be distributed for one or more exempt purposes within the meaning of section 501(c)(3) of the United States Internal Revenue Code, or corresponding section of any future federal tax code, or shall be distributed to the federal government, or to a state or local government, for a public charitable purpose.

## Appendix A: Declaration of Utrecht, September 24, 1889

In the name of the Most Holy Trinity.

John Heykamp, Archbishop of Utrecht.  
Caspar John Rinkel, Bishop of Haarlem,  
Cornelius Diependaal, Bishop of Deventer,  
Joseph Hubert Reinkens, Bishop of the Old Catholic Church of Germany,  
Edward Herzog, Bishop of the Christian-Catholic Church of Switzerland,

assembled in the arch-episcopal residence at Utrecht on the twenty-fourth day of September 1889, after invocation of the Holy Spirit, address the following Declaration to the Catholic Church.

Being assembled for a conference in response to an invitation from the undersigned Archbishop of Utrecht, we have resolved henceforth to meet from time to time for consultations on subjects of common interest, in conjunction with our assistants, councilors, and theologians.

We deem it appropriate at this our first meeting to summarize in a common declaration the ecclesiastical principles on which we have hitherto exercised and will continue to exercise our episcopal ministry, and which we have repeatedly had occasion to state in individual declarations.

(1) We adhere to the principle of the ancient Church laid down by St Vincent of Lérins in these terms: *'Id teneamus, quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est; hoc est etenim vere proprieque catholicum'* [Let us hold fast to what has been believed everywhere, always and by all; for this is truly and properly Catholic]. Therefore, we abide by the faith of the ancient Church as it is formulated in the ecumenical symbols and in the universally accepted dogmatic decisions of the ecumenical synods held in the undivided Church of the first millennium.

(2) We therefore reject as contradicting the faith of the ancient Church and destroying her constitution, the Vatican decrees, promulgated July 18, 1870, concerning the infallibility and the universal episcopate or ecclesiastical plenitude of power of the Roman Pope. This, however, does not prevent us from acknowledging the historic primacy which several ecumenical councils and the Fathers of the ancient Church with the assent of the whole Church have attributed to the Bishop of Rome by recognizing him as the *primus inter pares* [first among equals].

(3) We also reject the dogma of the Immaculate Conception promulgated by Pope Pius IX in 1854 as being without foundation in Holy Scriptures and the tradition of the first centuries.

(4) As for the other dogmatic decrees issued by the Bishops of Rome in the last centuries, the bulls *Unigenitus* and *Auctorem fidei*, the Syllabus of 1864 etc., we reject them on all such points as are in contradiction with the doctrine of the ancient Church, and do not recognize them as binding. Moreover, we renew all those protests which the ancient Catholic Church of Holland has made against Rome in the past.



(5) We refuse to accept the decisions of the Council of Trent in matters of discipline, and we accept its dogmatic decisions only insofar as they agree with the teaching of the ancient Church.

(6) Considering that the Holy Eucharist has always been the true focal point of worship in the Catholic Church, we consider it our duty to declare that we maintain in all faithfulness and without deviation the ancient Catholic doctrine concerning the Holy Sacrament of the Altar, by believing that we receive the Body and the Blood of our Savior Jesus Christ Himself under the species of bread and wine.

The Eucharistic celebration in the Church is neither a continual repetition nor a renewal of the expiatory sacrifice which Christ offered once and for all on the Cross; the sacrificial character of the Eucharist, however, consists in its being the perpetual commemoration of that sacrifice and a real representation, being enacted on earth, of the one offering which Christ according to Hebrews 9:11-12 continuously makes in heaven for the salvation of redeemed humanity, by appearing now for us in the presence of God (*Heb. 9:24*).

This being the character of the Eucharist in relation to Christ's sacrifice, it is at the same time a sacrificial meal, by means of which the faithful, in receiving the Body and Blood of the Lord, have communion with one another (*1 Cor. 10:17*).

(7) We hope that the theologians, while maintaining the faith of the undivided Church, will succeed in their efforts to establish an agreement on the differences that have arisen since the divisions of the Church. We urge the priests under our jurisdiction in the first place to stress, both by preaching and by religious instruction, the essential Christian truths professed in common by all the divided confessions, carefully to avoid, in discussing still existing differences, any violation of truth or charity, and, in word and deed, to set an example to the members of our parishes of how to act towards people of a different belief in a way that is in accordance with the spirit of Jesus Christ, who is the Savior of us all.

(8) We believe that it is in faithfully maintaining the teaching of Jesus Christ, while rejecting all the errors that have been added to it through human sin, as well as rejecting all the abuses in ecclesiastical matters and hierarchical tendencies, that we shall best counteract unbelief and that religious indifference which is the worst evil of our day.

Given at Utrecht, the 24th September 1889.

*Note. – This is a fresh translation made from the German original (cf. IKZ 84, 1994, p. 40-42). The first English translation of the Declaration of Utrecht was published in The Foreign Church Chronicle and Review 13 (1889) pp. 225-227. The most widely circulated translation is to be found in C.B. Moss, The Old Catholic Movement, London, 21964, 281f. Moss claims his somewhat paraphrasing translation to have been accepted by the Old Catholic bishops as correct. It was already published in the Report of the Lambeth Conference of 1930, p. 142 (with minor orthographical and other variations). It should be noted that his quasi-official English version reproduces an abbreviated text without the introductory section, as it was in use in Old Catholic circles around 1930.*

**Appendix B: Preamble of the Statutes of the International Bishops Conference,  
Union of Utrecht, May 25, 2000**

1. The “Union of Utrecht” is a union of churches and their bishops governing them who are determined to maintain and pass on the faith, worship, and essential structure of the undivided Church of the first millennium. On September 24, 1889, at Utrecht this determination was recorded in three documents that form the “Convention of Utrecht”: the “Declaration”, the “Agreement”, and the “Regulations”. By their uniting to form a Bishops' Conference, which other bishops joined later, the full communion of the Churches represented by them found its expression.

2. In the “Declaration of Utrecht”, fundamental for Old Catholic doctrine, the communion of the Union of Utrecht which came into existence in the context of the First Vatican Council confesses the catholic faith as expressed in the Church in the east and west by the seven Ecumenical Councils. It approves of the historic precedence of the Bishop of Rome as *primus inter pares* but rejects the papal dogmas of the said council and several other papal pronouncements as far as they are at variance with the doctrine of the Ancient Church. It affirms its faith in the essence and mystery of the Eucharist. Furthermore, the Union of Utrecht shows its awareness of its obligation to do everything that will help to overcome the divisions in the Church, and based on the faith of the undivided Church, to seek and declare unity and communion with other Churches.

3. As has been recognized and expressed ever more clearly in the course of time, the Union of Utrecht and the Convention of Utrecht (*whose parts “Agreement” and “Regulations” were revised twice in 1952 and 1974*) imply a specific ecclesiology.

3.1 It presupposes that each fellowship and communion of people, which by the reconciliation in Jesus Christ and by the outpouring and the continuous work of the Holy Spirit is constituted as a unity in a given place around a bishop with the Eucharist as its center, is a complete church that carries out its tasks autonomously in that given place. Each local church living the common faith and having its indispensable synodal structures, uniting the ordained ministry and the laity, which bring to bear her communion and unity, is a representation of the “one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church”, as confessed by the ecumenical creed of Nicaea-Constantinople (381).

3.2 Each of them is “catholic” because on the one hand, it participates in the whole reality of salvation and truth that comprises God and humans, heaven and earth and finds therein its unity, and because on the other hand, it is linked in unity and communion with other local churches, in which it recognizes its own essence. Thus, the catholicity of each local church becomes manifest in the unity and communion with other local churches perceived in faith as being identical in their foundation in the redemptive work of the Triune God. The unity and communion of local churches in their supra-diocesan link - i.e., usually in national churches, ecclesiastical provinces, patriarchates - is a representation of the “one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church” as well - however, not as a kind of super-diocese of supra-regional or even universal dimensions, but as a communion of episcopally and synodally organized local churches. It is in this perspective that the relationship between autonomy of the local church (as to the self-government in the broadest

sense) and supra-local obligation of each local church (as to the communion of local churches) should be viewed. That this unity and communion has for a long time has not existed universally among all the churches, is a consequence of human shortcomings and sin, which eclipses the fact that in Jesus Christ God has reconciled and called to partnership all humans who hear his call. This entails the obligation for each church, in obedience to the will of God and in faithfulness to the common tradition, to investigate whether existing separations must continue to be regarded as unavoidable or whether, on the contrary, its own catholicity should be recognized in a hitherto separated church.

3.3 Each local church is the Body of Christ in which the members, baptized and confirmed in the name of the Holy Trinity and united in the Eucharist, are called, authorized, and sanctified by the various gifts of the Holy Spirit to live a multifaceted common life in *martyria*, *leitourgia*, and *diakonia*. In communion with the other local churches, they are the people of that God who has elected Israel to be a sign of salvation and has opened the blessing promised to Abraham to all peoples in the power of the Gospel. Being the manifestation of the renewal of creation that has its origin in Jesus Christ, it is on the way to its fulfillment which all its members must go in repentance and hope.

3.4 In continuity with its soteriological-trinitarian foundation, the catholicity of the Church is expressed by those elements and processes which are signified by the comprehensive term “apostolic succession”. This means that whatever the Church is doing in word and sacrament, doctrine and ministry, has and must have its origin, in space and time, in the mission of Jesus Christ and the apostles, operated by the Spirit. This includes preeminently the passing on of the ordained ministry by prayer and the laying-on of hands. The apostolic succession of the Church requires the full communion of the catholic churches that are headed by the bishops in unison with the college of presbyters and exhibit a synodal structure. It finds its particularly clear expression in the ordination of a locally elected bishop by the other bishops.

4.1 Regarding the Union of Utrecht all this means that it is primarily the task and service of the bishops to maintain the catholicity of the church in the unity of the tradition of faith, to respond to arising new problems and to take decisions concerning the relationships to other churches. For they are at the intersection of primarily belonging, as individuals, to their local or national church on the one hand, and of taking, as a college, primary responsibility for the fellowship and communion of the local and national churches on the other hand. The conciliar unity and committed communion of autonomous catholic churches - be they individual dioceses or national unions of dioceses - is expressed in the bishops’ synodal assemblies, i.e., the IBC meetings.

4.2 The reception by the church is a manifestation that the decisions of the bishops, prepared and taken in a comprehensive conciliar process, have been initiated by the Spirit of God and correspond to the will of God for the mission of his Church. Reception therefore includes the participation and joint responsibility of the baptized (clergy and laity) in this process both within each local or national church (synods or other responsible organs) and within the Union of Utrecht as a whole. But being a process led by the Spirit of God, it cannot comprehensively, let alone conclusively, be put into juridical terms or mechanical finalization.

5. Wherever, congruent with the ecumenical self-obligation of the Union of Utrecht, communion with churches outside the Union of Utrecht does exist or seems possible and necessary on account of theological clarifications, the bishops of the Union must take care, in consequence of the explications above, that mutual consultations be initiated and maintained with these churches.

6. To maintain their communion and to fulfill common tasks, the bishops of the Union of Utrecht establish, in accordance with the foundations above, the following Order and thereafter the required Rules. By doing so they presuppose that they as well as all the faithful be led by that mind that has been expressed in the words of the holy bishops Cyprian of Carthage and Ignatius of Antioch: Do not decide without the counsel of the presbyterium and the consent of the people (*Ep. 14:4*); do nothing without the bishop (*Phld. 7:2*).

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## Appendix C: Consensus Decision Making

The following is proposed, when possible, as a model from among many for decision-making in the Communion. It is also highly encouraged for practice on both the level of the Diocese as well as its individual communities of faith, i.e., the parish and religious community. Consensus decision making refers to the process among a gathered group by which decisions are made by **seeking the mind of Christ**, not by “voting their own mind.” The mind of Christ will be revealed by an uncoerced unanimity among the participants, reached after thorough faith-filled discussion and prayer. Decisions so made are reflective of the diversity of the Church and are a better way of reflecting the nature of the Church.

1. The group assembles. Each participant must come with the intention of working together to resolve a common question that is being considered. Each agrees to the discussion with a willingness to honestly say what she or he wants and believes, and to compromise and modify without violating her or his values. All participants must be active. Passive participants will be challenged by the process itself.
2. The process begins with someone making a proposal. This challenges everyone to think in very practical terms and avoid too much impractical “idea talk.” The process will go more smoothly if a facilitator is chosen to guide the group, calling the proposal from time to time and acting as timekeeper to ensure the process proceeds in a timely manner.
3. One participant states a proposal on the matter. The process of reaching consensus now gets underway. The proposal is passed to the next person, either to the left or right, as the proposer chooses. The next person may either:
  - a. *Agree*. The person says so and passes the proposal to the next person.
  - b. *Disagree*. If you disagree, you state your reasons and must propose something new. It is never fair to disagree without offering an alternative proposal.
  - c. *Pass*. This should only be a last resort, but it is necessary sometimes if you really cannot form an opinion and want to hear more discussion.
  - d. *Time Out*. This is an opportunity to open discussion to the whole group for purposes of clarification of the proposal or of a related idea. During this time the person calling for the “time out” chairs that discussion and may bring it to a close whenever she/he is ready.

For instance, if the second person disagreed and changed the proposal, the third person is then asked to respond to the new proposal. The original proposal is now lost unless someone in the group re-proposes it. The third person may want to clarify something or ask the whole group a question, or simply make an editorial statement. Once that person takes whatever action they desire, they then pass it on to the right or left.

4. The process continues in this fashion with each participant having an opportunity (-ies) to speak. It is very important to the process for each participant to wait for her/his turn to speak, overcoming the temptation to rebut statements made by another. Sometimes dozens of proposals will be offered, each with a slight nuance of difference from the one before it until the group agrees they can support the final proposal. If the proposal is complex, it may help to write it down as you proceed, changing and modifying it as it changes.
5. Finally, when it appears consensus is within reach, go around the circle once more in order to permit each participant give their view in the negative or positive. At this point, no one may pass, and the group may not stop until everyone agrees.
6. Sometimes it will help for a participant to propose that the discussion be postponed to another time, in order to clear heads and hearts.
7. It is in listening to each other and responding to each other in a spirit of open listening that we build a common mind.

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## Appendix D: Due Process for Grievance, Misconduct, or Incompetence

1. This appendix provides a framework by which to resolve complaints or grievances, misconduct or incompetence affecting the Old Catholic Communion. This policy allows for *voluntary* cooperation on the part of those parties most directly involved. It is not meant to be an overriding mechanism on the part of anyone at the level of the Communion. It is a tool of *justice, peace, and reconciliation*. It is based on common scriptural principles (cf. in-text citations).
2. The Old Catholic Communion is an episcopal-synodal Communion of local Churches in full communion with each other. By design and theology, we hold that synodality is to be honorably practiced at all levels of the Communion. Parishes and communities, dioceses and their synods are all meant to function synodally. When grievance or misconduct occur, these should be resolved by a process of *mutual discernment* between the parties most affected (*Matthew 18:15-17*).
3. Each diocese should have its proper standard operating procedure for handling disagreements or grievances at parish and diocesan levels. The diocesan bishop and diocesan synod are normally the final arbiters of diocesan issues. There may be times when the diocesan bishop alone must act for the good of the diocese, especially concerning matters of the clergy (*2 Timothy 4:2*).
4. If a disagreement involves the diocesan bishop and their administration of the diocese, the diocesan synodal council is the appropriate place to attempt a resolution. Failing that, the diocese would normally be called into a special session of synod for discernment and resolution.
5. The Communion respects the autonomy and the jurisdiction of each diocese and its bishop.
6. When all known options are exhausted, the House of Bishops in its role as the forum for review (*Article 5.1.j*) will seek out and appoint a reconciliation team. The reconciliation team will consist of both clergy and laity. Persons appointed should have training or experience in mediation. The reconciliation team is available *only* upon request of a bishop of a diocese or its synodal council (*1 Corinthians 1:10*).
7. The reconciliation team will attempt to resolve the issue under question in a diocese or between dioceses. The reconciliation team has the option to (1) mediate the issue, (2) return the issue to the diocese without involvement by the reconciliation team, or (3) make recommendations to the House of Bishops (*1 Thessalonians 5:14-22*).
8. The reconciliation team will only recommend examination by the House of Bishops if the primary concern involves the bishop of the diocese and compliance with the Constitution of the Communion.

9. It shall not be the intention of the reconciliation team to force itself upon a diocese and its bishop (*Proverbs 26:17*). The reconciliation team is not the final arbiter of issues under question unless *all* parties involved request such and do so in writing. It is a tool offered to member dioceses for conflict or misconduct resolution. If the parties involved ask for arbitration by the reconciliation team, the findings and decision of the reconciliation team will be issued in writing.
10. The House of Bishops is the normative place of advice, counsel, and leadership for all bishops of the Communion.

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## Appendix E: Glossary of Terms

- o Apostolicity – Having the authority and sanction of the apostles. It is often used as a mark of the church (*Eph. 2:19ff*) to indicate the essential continuity of the church with apostolic teaching.
- o Apostolic Succession – The belief that there is an episcopal succession of events and persons going back to the twelve apostles of Jesus. Properly ordained bishops convey God’s grace through the succession by laying on of hands.
- o Auricular – (From Latin: *auricular*, “the ear”) A private confession of sins to a priest, it refers to the sacrament of reconciliation.
- o Catechetical – Adj. referring to the teachings of the catechism.
- o Communion – A designation for those united in a common church fellowship, tradition, or set of beliefs. (Not to be confused with Eucharistic Communion)
- o Community (Parish/Communities) – A group with common interests, often used to describe a particular faith group.
- o Delegate - An individual elected by their local community to formally represent it with voice at the local diocesan synod as well as the Holy Synod.
- o Diocese – (From Gr. *diokēsis*, “housekeeping,” “province,” “administrative unit”) A geographic unit under the oversight of a particular bishop.
- o Diocesan Representative – Member of a diocese who has a voice at Holy Synod.
- o Diocesan Synod – A formal meeting of the bishop, presbyters and laity of a diocese to discuss ecclesial matters.
- o Holy Synod – A formal gathering of those member dioceses of Old Catholic Communion consisting of all bishops, presbyters, and laity to discuss ecclesial matters.
- o Ordinary – The elected bishop of a diocese.
- o Ordo – A fixed liturgical text, such as that used in the Eucharist. Also, a liturgical calendar of a diocese with particular liturgical days celebrated, remembrances, and lectionary texts for particular days.
- o Polity – (From Gr. *Politeia*, Lat. *Politia*, “administration of a commonwealth”) A form of church government adopted by an ecclesiastical body.
- o Presbyters – (From Gr. *Presbyteratus*, “elder”) Ordained priests.

o Synod – (From Gr. *Synodos*, “a meeting”) A formal meeting of bishop, clergy and laity to discuss ecclesiastical matters.

o Synodal – Referring to the principle and process of gathering via (by way of) a synod rather than a pure hierarchical structure in order to reach decisions which affect the whole body.

o Synodal Governance – Referring to the pattern of polity/governance based on representation of all voices-laity, clergy and bishop, and with a desire to reach consensus decision making whenever possible.

o Triune God – (From Lat. *tri*, “three,” and *unus*, “one”) Christian view of God existing as three in one -often referred to the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; one God in three Persons. We recognize the historical patriarchal wording and communities often use other appropriate variations thereof.

o Viaticum – (From Gr. *ephodion*, Lat. “food for the journey”) Term used for the Eucharist when administered, after reconciliation and the sacrament of the sick, to those near death to strengthen them with grace in preparation for the journey into eternal life.

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