

General Synod passed a resolution July 15 to recognize full communion among the Anglican Church of Canada (ACC), the U.S.-based Episcopal Church (TEC), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

Dean Peter Wall, co-chair of the Joint Anglican Lutheran Commission, introduced the resolution by reading excerpts from the [Memorandum of Mutual Recognition of Relations of Full Communion](#), which was drafted at a meeting of the Joint Anglican Lutheran Commission and the Lutheran Episcopal Coordinating Committee in September 2018.

Among the four churches, “each church is in full communion with two of the others—but not with the third (not with the church from the other tradition and in the other country),” the memorandum notes. “Increasingly, this is experienced as theologically unnecessary, missionally costly, and jarring. It is time for these churches explicitly to recognize one another’s full communion agreements, and on that basis to extend to one another the implications of being in communion.”

“This is a historic thing we’re doing,” said Wall.

This full communion relationship was approved at the recent convention of the ELCIC, and will be discussed by the ELCA at its meeting in August and by TEC at its general convention in 2021.

Preceding the vote on the two resolutions, each of the four heads of churches spoke to General Synod.

Archbishop Fred Hiltz, then-primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, reflected on the importance of Anglican-Lutheran dialogue and relations to his ministry, both during his time as primate and long before, as bishop of the diocese of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island and as a rector in that diocese. “It’s part of my DNA, it’s part of my heartbeat that we should be in conversation and in a good, productive, ... full-communion relationship with one another,” he said.

Hiltz also said he was “very grateful that we’ve arrived at this moment in our journey together.”

National Bishop Susan Johnson of the ELCIC reflected on “the ways that our full communion relationship” between the ACC and ELCIC “has deepened since 2001,” including joint staff meetings, joint meetings of the Council of General Synod and the National Church Council, and the joint assembly of the two churches in 2013.

The full communion relationship also opens up the “possibility that the work we do separately is work done on the behalf of the other,” Johnson said, citing cases in which one church does not have the capacity or resources.

“Perhaps the most exciting thing is the over 80 expressions of full communion relationships that are taking place across the country,” she said.

“I hope this is just a foretaste of our increased relationship and even deeper fellowship,” said Presiding Bishop of the ELCA Elizabeth Eaton.

This kind of agreement will be “a witness to the rest of the world,” said Eaton.

She also noted that the U.S.-based churches “have so much to learn” from the ACC’s Indigenous ministries and the emerging self-determining Indigenous church.

Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church Michael Curry agreed, adding that these inter-church relationships reflect that “God’s love does not know borders.”

“The ties that bind us are deep and real, and we thank God for that,” Curry said.

Both resolutions were on the no-debate list. Both were carried with 99.1% of the vote—220 “Yes” votes and two “No” votes, with no abstentions.

Members of General Synod stood and applauded when the motions were passed. The mood in the room was celebratory, and a video that featured photos of the four leaders’ faces pasted over cowboy-hat wearing line dancers played to much applause and laughter.

General Synod also passed a resolution affirming the ongoing work of the Joint Anglican Lutheran Commission for the 2019-2022 triennium.

The primate and General Secretary of General Synod will consult on the membership of the Joint Anglican Lutheran Committee through the nominating committee.