

The CCM *Verax* Simple Guide to Called to Common Mission

Called to Common Mission (CCM) is an ecumenical agreement between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Episcopal Church in the USA. CCM enables full communion between these two churches by changing the ELCA's constitution, ordination structure, and liturgical rites to conform to the Episcopal Church's tradition of bishops in historic succession. Episcopalians (also called Anglicans due to their origins in the Church of England) refer to this tradition as the "historic episcopate."

CCM came into effect on the 1st of January 2001. The Episcopal Church is now in full communion with the ELCA. However, the ELCA is not in full communion with the Episcopal Church. The ELCA will only be in full communion with the Episcopal Church when the ELCA has become "episcopalian" enough for full communion to be mutual. In other words, the process in CCM will be completed when the ELCA has effectively become an episcopalian church. How has this happened?

CCM is full of ecumenical jargon and historical claims which disorient most people. This also includes many pastors, bishops, and seminary professors. This brief guide seeks to explain why CCM is wrong.

1. CCM denigrates the Lordship of Jesus Christ

CCM requires the ELCA to adopt an "historic episcopate" for full communion with the Episcopal Church. The Episcopal Church's "historic episcopate" refers to a tradition in which clergy are supposedly made true bishops only when they are ordained as bishops through a rite of laying-on-of-hands by other bishops. This tradition is also called "episcopal succession." Furthermore, only those clergy properly ordained by such bishops are considered to have the power to make a proper Holy Communion.

Lutherans believe that ordination and especially "historic episcopacy" are human traditions. Lutherans teach that Christ makes himself present in his proclaimed Word and in his Sacraments regardless of any particular kind of human ordination. By requiring the ELCA to adopt an "historic episcopate" for full communion, CCM means that Christ is not enough for unity between the ELCA and the Episcopal Church. Thus, CCM means that a human tradition becomes more definitive than Christ for unity in Christ's church. CCM is wrong firstly because it denigrates the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

2. An "historic episcopate" is not biblical

The Bible has very little to say about bishops (overseers), and it has nothing to say about an "historic episcopate" of any description. On the contrary, I Peter 2:25 says that Jesus is the "shepherd and bishop" of our souls. CCM violates the Lutheran teaching of Scripture alone.

3. CCM denigrates the Word and Sacraments

CCM understands an "historic episcopate" to be a "sign" of unity. Lutherans teach that the fellowship of believers (the church) has only three "signs." These signs are the Word, Holy Baptism, and the Lord's Supper. All these signs come from Christ, and all Christians share them. When an "historic episcopate" becomes a required "sign" of the church or its unity, this implies that God's Word, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper are not quite enough to be the signs of true church unity. CCM denigrates the living expressions of Word of God.

4. The Lutheran Reformers rejected the succession of bishops

CCM paragraph 11 states that the Lutheran Confessions written in 1530-31 refer to "historic succession" in the office of bishop. This is impossible not only because the concept of "episcopal succession" did not exist when the relevant Confessions were written but also because the Reformers rejected "episcopal succession" when the notion was "rediscovered" between 1538-1540.

Philip Melanchthon, the author of the confessional writing cited in CCM paragraph 11, stated in 1539 that **those lacking the spirit of God** “imagine the church to be a state of bishops and bind it to the orderly succession of bishops, as the empires consist of the orderly succession of princes. But the church maintains itself differently. Actually, it is a union not bound to the orderly succession but to the Word of God” (MW 1: 330, 16-23). Also, in 1541 Martin Luther wrote, “In the church, the succession of bishops does not make a bishop, but the Lord alone is our bishop” (WA 53: 74).

CCM falsifies the intentions of the Lutheran Reformers. Furthermore, at least one ELCA CCM drafter knew, when CCM was drafted, that CCM belies the Lutheran Reformers’ clear rejection of “historic episcopacy.”

5. CCM is contrary to the Lutheran Confessional Writings

Article VII of the Lutheran *Augsburg Confession* states, “Our churches also teach that one holy church is to continue forever. The church is the assembly of saints in which the Gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly. For the true unity of the church it is enough (*satis est*) to agree concerning the teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions or rites and ceremonies, instituted by men, should be alike everywhere. It is as Paul says, “One faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all,” etc (Eph. 4: 5,6).

The required adoption of an “historic episcopate” in CCM means that the Gospel in Word and Sacrament is not enough for unity between the ELCA and the Episcopal Church. CCM violates the letter and spirit of Article VII of the *Augsburg Confession*.

6. An “historic episcopate” is a “Christian fiction” which hinders mission

The distinguished New Testament scholar, Ernst Käsemann, once described the idea of bishops in succession as “one of many Christians fictions” (*Der Ruf der Freiheit*, 1972, p. 182). Even some Anglicans think strict adherence to an “historic episcopate” is “superstition.” Putting an “historic episcopate” at the center of the ELCA’s ordained ministry is like putting Santa Claus in the manger or the Easter Bunny on the cross. Fiction and superstition compromise the credibility of the Christian faith. CCM with its fictions does not advance mission in the 21st century.

7. CCM is deceptive and thus dishonest

CCM states that ELCA pastors “installed” to the office of bishop “will be understood by The Episcopal Church as having been ordained” (CCM paragraph 15). Either the Episcopal Church or the ELCA is being deceived about the future nature of ELCA bishops. Since the ELCA’s new “installation” rite for bishops takes the form of an ordination rite, one is left to conclude that the ELCA is primarily deceiving its own members. CCM is wrong because dishonesty destroys the soul.

8. The Episcopalian structure of bishops is anchored in 17th century English law

According to CCM paragraph 16, the ELCA will oblige itself to implement the principles of the Preface to the Ordination Rites of the Episcopal Church. These principles were established by the English Parliament in the 1662 Act of Uniformity. Through this Act the English government tried to eradicate all non-episcopalian forms of Christian expression in England and Wales. Many thousands were persecuted, jailed, and fined, and many hundreds died simply because they did not want to be episcopalian. Now, CCM requires the ELCA to share and to administer against its own future clergy these same principles of 17th century, English religious intolerance. Clearly, CCM is not what Jesus meant when he prayed “that they might be one” (John 17:11,22).