

Statutes of the Union of Scranton

A Union of Churches in Communion with the Polish National Catholic Church

(A) Preamble

1. The Union of Scranton is a union of Churches and their bishops governing them that is determined to maintain and pass on the Catholic faith, worship, and essential structure of the Undivided Church of the first millennium. The Union of Scranton finds its origins in the development of the Union of Utrecht on September 24, 1889, at Utrecht, Holland. There a determination was made and recorded in three documents that formed the Convention of Utrecht: the “Declaration,” the “Agreement,” and the “Regulations” (Statutes). The full communion of the Churches found its expression and was evident in the bishops uniting to form a Bishops’ Conference, which other bishops later joined. Since the Polish National Catholic Church (PNCC) continues to hold the Declaration of Utrecht as a normative document of faith, the development of the Union of Scranton follows a similar design.
2. The Union of Scranton emerged because certain member Churches of the Union of Utrecht unilaterally began to ordain women to the Priesthood and to bless same-sex unions in opposition to Holy Scripture and the Sacred Tradition of the Undivided Church. Since November 20, 2003 the PNCC is neither in communion, nor affiliated with the Churches of the Union of Utrecht.
3. The Union of Scranton confesses the Catholic faith as articulated by the first seven Ecumenical Councils and expressed throughout the Undivided Church. The Declaration of Scranton affirms the principles of the Declaration of Utrecht, which was formulated in response to the decrees of Vatican Council I. Each declaration acknowledges the historic precedence of the Bishop of Rome as *primus inter pares*, but rejects the papal dogmas of the said council and a number of other papal pronouncements that are at variance with the doctrine of the Ancient Church. Both declarations affirm faith in the essence and mystery of the Eucharist. Furthermore, the obligation of the Union of Scranton is to strive to overcome the divisions in the Church and, based on the faith of the Undivided Church, to restore unity and communion with other Churches.

(B) The Ecclesiological Foundations of the Union of Scranton

1. As has been recognized and expressed ever more clearly in the course of time, the original Union of Utrecht and the Convention of Utrecht imply a specific ecclesiology which continues to be the ecclesiology of the Union of Scranton. This ecclesiology presupposes that:
 - 1.1 each local Church is a communion of people, reconciled in Jesus Christ, and by the outpouring and the continuous work of the Holy Spirit is constituted as a unity in a given place. Each local Church is gathered around a bishop with the Eucharist as its center. Each local Church is a complete Church that carries out its tasks autonomously in that given place. Each local Church is a representation of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church as confessed by the ecumenical Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople (A.D. 381). Each local Church lives the common faith and has an indispensable synodal structure uniting the clergy and the laity, thereby expressing its communion and unity.
 - 1.2 each local Church is “Catholic,” because it participates and finds its unity in the whole reality of salvation and truth that comprises God and human beings, heaven and earth. The catholicity of each local Church is manifested in the unity and communion it shares with other local Churches perceived as being identical in their essential beliefs in the redemptive work of the Triune God. The unity and communion of local Churches is an expression of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, whether they are organized as national Churches, ecclesiastical provinces or patriarchates. This does not imply a kind of super-diocese of either supra-regional or universal dimension, but rather a communion of bishops and synodically organized local Churches. It is in this perspective that the relationship between the autonomy of the local Church and its obligation to its national Church, ecclesiastical province or patriarchate is understood.
 - 1.3 each local Church is the Body of Christ and its members are the people of God. In salvation history God began the renewal of creation through His promise to Abraham and his descendants and fulfilled that promise through the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. In Christ and through His Church God opened to all peoples the blessing promised to Abraham. Through baptism they become “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people set apart” (*see 1 Peter 2:9*). Its members are baptized and confirmed in the name of the Holy Trinity and thereby are united in Christ and through the Eucharist. They are called and commissioned by Christ and sanctified by the gifts of the Holy Spirit to live a common life in witness, worship and service. On the road to salvation all its members have to walk in repentance and hope.
 - 1.4 in continuity with its apostolic origins, Apostolic Succession is fundamental to the catholicity of the Church. Apostolic Succession is imparted when a synodically-elected candidate for bishop is validly consecrated through prayer, anointing and by the laying-on of hands of bishops who themselves possess Apostolic Succession.

Whether in Word and Sacrament, doctrine and ministry, or in Sacred Tradition whatever the Church has done and continues to do has had as its origin the mission of Jesus Christ that was given to His Apostles, enlivened by the Holy Spirit, and passed on by them and their successor bishops.

- 2 The bishops of the Union of Scranton: a) uphold the catholicity of the Church by maintaining its Apostolic Faith and Sacred Tradition; b) respond to issues and challenges as they arise; c) make decisions concerning relationships with other Churches.
- 2.1 Each bishop is responsible to his own local/national Church and has a collegial responsibility for fellowship and communion with the bishops of other local and national Churches. The unity and communion of autonomous member Catholic Churches - be they individual dioceses or Churches, ecclesiastical provinces or patriarchates - is manifested in the International Catholic Bishops Conference (ICBC).
- 2.2 Decisions of the ICBC are made in a comprehensive conciliar process. Reception of the decisions by the member Churches requires the participation and joint responsibility of the baptized (clergy and laity) in this process within each member Church (synods or other responsible bodies). Once reception is completed by all member Churches, such decisions are acknowledged to be inspired by the Holy Spirit and correspond to the will of God for the mission of His Church. Since this is a process led by the Holy Spirit, it may not always be comprehensively and conclusively put into juridical terms.
3. Whenever a member of the ICBC or a member Church of the Union of Scranton is approached by a non-member Church requesting full communion with (i.e. membership in) the Union of Scranton, the matter must be brought to the ICBC. If the request is found meritorious, then dialogue with the ICBC will follow.
4. In order to fulfill common tasks of witness, worship and service and to maintain their communion, the bishops of the Union of Scranton, in accordance with the above ecclesiology, establish the following Order (C) and, thereafter, the required Rules (D). By doing so, they presuppose that they, as well as all the faithful, will be led by that which has been expressed by Cyprian of Carthage: "Do not decide without the counsel of the presbyterium and the consent of the people." (*Epistle* 5:4); and Ignatius of Antioch: "Do nothing without the bishop." (*Philadelphians* 7:2)

(C) Order

Article 1

The International Catholic Bishops Conference (ICBC) of the Union of Scranton includes the bishops who:

- (a) together with their Churches adhere to the Declaration of Scranton of April 28, 2008;
- (b) maintain the catholicity of ministry, doctrine and worship in Apostolic Succession;
- (c) together with their Churches are in full communion with the other Churches of the Union of Scranton;
- (d) are recognized by the members of the Union of Scranton as having been elected licitly, ordained validly and exercise the Catholic episcopacy in their Churches;
- (e) have no affiliations or obligations to other Churches that would contradict the Declaration of Scranton and these Statutes;
- (f) exercise their functions as Bishops Ordinary, i.e., govern a diocese or are head of a Church.

Article 2

- (a) The bishops meet at least once a year as the ICBC to maintain their collegiality.
- (b) Section D of this document regulates the conduct of business for the conference.
- (c) The ICBC does not infringe upon the jurisdiction of its members in their local Churches.

Article 3

The ICBC:

- (a) makes necessary decisions regarding all organizational or disciplinary matters concerning the maintenance of communion;
- (b) responds to controversial matters of faith, morals and discipline;
- (c) issues declarations of faith and principles on behalf of the Union of Scranton, if required;
- (d) orders relationships to other Churches and religious bodies;
- (e) admits a Church to the Union of Scranton;
- (f) resolves jurisdictional issues between a newly-admitted Church and an existing member Church of the Union of Scranton;
- (g) may receive a validly and licitly consecrated bishop into the ICBC, aside from the procedure outlined in Article 8;
- (h) determines whether a bishop is to be deprived of membership in the ICBC, after ascertaining whether that bishop:
 - 1 has gravely harmed or acted in opposition to the Declaration of Scranton;
 - 2 has gravely harmed or acted in opposition to the catholicity of ministry, doctrine and worship;

- 3 has gravely harmed or acted in opposition to the Statutes of the Union of Scranton;
 - 4 has seriously violated the moral order.
- (i) exercises episcopal oversight over Catholic parishes and groups located in nations outside the jurisdiction of the local Church of a member of the ICBC, or of a Church in formation, by commissioning one or more bishops to fulfill this task.

Article 4

Each member of the ICBC is bound to:

- (a) take part in the meetings of the ICBC (a member may take part in the meeting in person or by teleconference or videoconference);
- (b) present, in a timely manner and with sufficient explanation, to the Executive Committee any problems, insights or developments that may affect the Union of Scranton and may require a statement or clarification issued by the ICBC;
- (c) bring matters of discussion from the ICBC to his local Church, so that knowing the conviction of his Church he can express his views at the ICBC;
- (d) make known to his local Church all statements and declarations of the ICBC in matters of faith, morals and discipline, together with the rationale provided by the ICBC;
- (e) implement the decisions of the ICBC in accordance with the provisions of his local Church;
- (f) implement in his local Church the decisions of the ICBC with regard to other Churches or religious bodies.

Article 5

Regarding voice and voting procedures for the ICBC, the following apply:

- (a) A member bishop of the ICBC is bound to vote in decisions taken concerning Article 3 (a)-(h). A member shall not vote on matters concerning his own personal conduct.
- (b) A member bishop, who does not participate in the meeting, can authorize another bishop of his own Church (i.e., auxiliary, coadjutor) to speak on his behalf, but who shall not have a vote.
- (c) In the case of a vacant see that Church may delegate the bishop-elect or diocesan administrator as an observer to the meeting of the ICBC. This person has voice during the meeting, but no vote.
- (d) Each member may have no more than two advisors attend a meeting of the ICBC who, at the discretion of the member bishop, may have voice, but shall have no vote.
- (e) Abstentions are not taken into consideration in the voting results.

Article 6

In order for the ICBC to issue a decision on doctrinal issues, the issue must be handled in the following manner:

- (a) A member bishop must present the doctrinal issue in writing to the ICBC.
- (b) Two or more member bishops must then agree to have the doctrinal issue put on the agenda for a first reading.
- (c) Thereafter, the ICBC by a simple majority vote determines whether the issue is referred to all Churches of the Union of Scranton for study, discussion and input.
- (d) Each member Church of the Union of Scranton is to submit its findings to the ICBC for its second reading.
- (e) Thereafter, a vote is taken on the issue and a 4/5 majority of all ICBC members, whether present or not, is needed for passage. If the vote fails, the issue is ended. If the vote passes, a final vote will take place at the next ICBC meeting. Abstentions count as no vote. Any response that does not reach the ICBC within the given time will be considered as an abstention.
- (f) At the next ICBC meeting a final vote is taken and a 4/5 majority of all ICBC members, whether present or not, is needed for passage. Abstentions count as no vote. Any response that does not reach the ICBC within the given time will be considered as an abstention.
- (g) All member Churches are bound by the decision of the ICBC regarding the doctrinal issue.
- (h) The decision shall be effective immediately and, whether positive or negative, shall be communicated in writing to all member Churches within a given time fixed by the ICBC.

Article 7

A decision to admit a Church to the Union of Scranton pursuant to Article 3 (e) shall be unanimous. Unless otherwise provided herein, a decision in all other matters shall be by a simple majority vote.

Article 8

Concerning the election and consecration of bishops:

- (a) In carrying out the election of bishops the respective Church must be aware of the following impediments to consecration as determined by the ICBC:
 - 1 the lack of theological formation and pastoral experience required for the episcopal ministry;
 - 2 a conduct of life incompatible with the dignity of the episcopal office.

- (b) The responsible Church authority certifies to the president of the ICBC that the candidate for bishop was duly elected according to that Church's praxis and no impediments were found.
- (c) The president of the ICBC notifies the ICBC members of the election and inquires whether there are any objections to the election or the elected person.
- (d) If within three weeks after the notification by the president of the ICBC, a member of the ICBC raises an objection against the election or the elected person, the question will be dealt with at a special session of the ICBC. After the respective Church has been given an opportunity to respond, a decision regarding the objection shall be made by simple majority of the ICBC. If the ICBC objects to the consecration, it shall not take place.
- (e) If within three weeks after the notification by the president of the ICBC, no objection to the election or to the elected person is raised, the president will send a copy of the Declaration of Scranton and of the Statutes of the International Catholic Bishops Conference to the bishop-elect requesting him to declare his assent to them by signing both documents.
- (f) After the signed copies of the Declaration of Scranton and the Statutes of the International Catholic Bishops Conference have been received, the president of the ICBC notifies the members of the ICBC that the consecration may be performed; he also communicates this fact in writing to the responsible authority of the respective Church.
- (g) A member of the ICBC who performs or participates in a consecration to which the ICBC has objected shall incur immediate suspension of his ICBC membership, pending a final decision by the ICBC at its next meeting [cf. Article 3 (h)].

Article 9

Concerning consecration of bishops:

- (a) The consecration of the bishop-elect shall be performed by bishops of the Union of Scranton.
- (b) All the bishops of the Union of Scranton are to be invited to the consecration by the respective Church.
- (c) Following Catholic praxis three bishops shall perform the rite of consecration.
- (d) Other ICBC bishops present should also lay hands on the candidate during the consecration.

Article 10

- (a) A bishop shall not enter into any agreements concerning ministry, doctrine, or sacramental worship with non-ICBC bishops or non-member Churches without prior discussion and approval of the ICBC.
- (b) A bishop must not consecrate or take part, through the laying on of hands, in the consecration of any bishop whose Church is not a member of the Union of Scranton.

Article 11

The bishops shall share among themselves the constitutions, their canonical provisions, official prayer books and hymnals, rituals, pontificals, catechisms, the annual lists of clergy, the minutes of their synods, doctrinal texts and the like.

Article 12

A deacon or priest going from one diocese of a member Church to a diocese of another member Church is normally provided faculties to function by the receiving bishop on a temporary basis, when provided with letters of recommendation from his own bishop.

Article 13

- (a) Each bishop may ordain to the diaconate and presbyterate only candidates who have completed the required training, theological studies and examinations according to the order of that bishop's Church.
- (b) A deacon or priest may be incardinated into a diocese of another Union of Scranton member Church only after the canonical release by his own bishop.
- (c) A candidate for the diaconate or priesthood from another Union of Scranton member Church may be ordained to the respective order only at the request and with the written consent of the bishop of his diocese.
- (d) Each bishop may receive from a non-member Church a deacon or priest who has met the criteria and qualifications for acceptance as a clergyman of the receiving bishop's Church. These must include, but not be limited to, a completed course of theological studies and spiritual discipline and presentation of valid documents of ordination.

(D) Rules

Article 1

- (a) The ICBC makes decisions in plenary sessions. In order to fulfill its other duties as well as to prepare its decisions, it may be assisted by its officers or special commissions established by the ICBC.
- (b) The officers are the president, vice president, secretary and treasurer. These officers function as the Executive Committee of the ICBC.

- (c) The Prime Bishop of the PNCC is the president of the ICBC.
- (d) The ICBC elects the vice president, secretary and treasurer from its members for a period of four years.

Article 2

- (a) The ICBC meets once per year for a plenary session.
- (b) The Executive Committee shall convene further plenary sessions if at least two bishops (from different member churches) request a session in writing, giving their reasons therefor.
- (c) The secretary shall take the minutes of all plenary sessions. These minutes are to be mailed to all the members within three months of the meeting.
- (d) The official language of the ICBC is English.
- (e) Each bishop, at his own expense, has the right to bring two persons as advisors or interpreters to attend plenary sessions or meetings of special commissions. In addition, the ICBC, at its expense, may call in advisors and interpreters as is deemed necessary.

Article 3

- (a) The Executive Committee does the organizational and administrative work of the ICBC, prepares the agenda for sessions of the ICBC and gives direction for the work of its special commission(s).
- (b) The Executive Committee maintains an official list of the bishops of the Churches of the Union of Scranton and a list of the parishes under their jurisdictions.
- (c) The Executive Committee establishes a list of non-member Churches to which notice is to be given in the case of a vacancy of an episcopal see within the Union of Scranton, as well as when that episcopal see is filled.

Article 4

The Executive Committee of the ICBC, after consultation with the members, determines the place and time of meetings. The secretary is responsible for sending notices of meetings, the agenda and all additional documents. All members are to be notified four months prior to the meeting. In the case of a vacant see, the notice is to be mailed to that Church's responsible body. In urgent cases the Executive Committee may waive the four-month time requirement.

Article 5

- (a) The discussions of the ICBC, its commissions and the Executive Committee are confidential unless otherwise agreed upon.
- (b) When the ICBC desires member Churches to discuss and give input on any matter, information regarding that matter, together with all supporting materials, will be forwarded to the member Churches.
- (c) ICBC decisions, together with the rationale therefor, are to be distributed to the member Churches.

Article 6

- (a) If an extraordinary circumstance warrants, the ICBC may call into being a special commission(s) to deal with that issue.
- (b) The special commission fulfills the work assigned by the ICBC and reports back only to the ICBC.

Article 7

Each member Church pays an annual contribution to cover the operating expenses of the ICBC. The treasurer prepares an estimated budget that includes the expenses for: plenary sessions; Executive Committee; special commissions; advisors, experts and interpreters called in by the ICBC; travel expenses resulting from charges of the ICBC and a reserve fund for unexpected expenses. The payment of each member Church is established by the ICBC based on the number of dioceses of that Church, with proper consideration of the financial abilities of each Church, in such a way that the expenses contained in the estimated budget can be met.

(E) Concluding Provision

With the exception of Section C (Order), Article 6 and any other articles which are consistent with said Article 6, all of which may not be amended, these Statutes can be amended in the following manner:

- (a) A proposal to amend the Statutes of the Union of Scranton must be submitted in writing to the president of the ICBC at least six (6) months prior to the start of the ICBC meeting.
- (b) The secretary shall distribute the proposal to each ICBC member at least sixty (60) days prior to the start of the ICBC meeting.
- (c) At the meeting a vote is taken on the proposed amendment and a 4/5 majority of all ICBC members, whether present or not, is needed for passage. If the vote fails, the proposed amendment is defeated. If the vote passes, a final vote will be taken at the next ICBC meeting. Abstentions count as no vote. Any response that does not reach the ICBC within the given time will be considered as an abstention.

- (d) At the next ICBC meeting the final vote is taken and a 4/5 majority of all ICBC members, whether present or not, is required for passage. Abstentions count as no vote. If passed, the Statutes as amended are effective immediately. If the vote fails, the proposed amendment is defeated.