

Methodists reach across historic racial boundaries with communion pact

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c. 2012 Religion News Service (RNS) The predominantly white United Methodist Church and five historically black denominations -- after more than a decade of discussions -- have entered a full communion agreement.

With an overwhelming vote Monday (April 30) at the UMC General Conference, the leaders of the denominations agreed to recognize each other's churches, share sacraments and affirm their clergy and ministries.

The move comes a dozen years after the UMC held a repentance ceremony and apologized to African-Americans for racist policies that led to the creation of separate African-American churches. Some historic black denominations date to the 1700s, started by founders who no longer wanted to be relegated to the balconies of Methodist congregations.

Christian Methodist Episcopal Church Senior Bishop Thomas Hoyt Jr., a longtime ecumenist, was among the leaders celebrating the agreement this week, United Methodist News Service reported.

"To be in full communion is to be related to one of the great churches of American society and the world," he said.

United Methodist Bishop Alfred Norris cautioned against considering the new relationship as his larger denomination overwhelming the smaller black church groups.

"In this case," he said, "the big fish and the little fish will be swimming together."

The other denominations, which preceded the United Methodist Church in agreeing to full communion, are the African Methodist Episcopal Church, African Methodist

Episcopal Zion Church, African Union Methodist Protestant Church, Christian Methodist Episcopal Church and Union American Methodist Episcopal Church.