

Evangelical Anglicans Aim to Bridge Gulf Between Pentecostals and Pope

They don't necessarily envision Baptists speaking in tongues or Pentecostals setting up shrines to honor the Virgin Mary. But a network of evangelical Episcopalians is at the forefront of a movement it calls "convergence," which its leaders are careful to distinguish from another World Council of Churches-kind of organization.

The Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches (CEEC) played a lead role in prompting a meeting in late June between Pope Francis and American charismatic and evangelical leaders including James Robison, Kenneth Copeland and John Arnott. A papal audience is scheduled when the CEEC holds a synod in Rome in October.

Florida-based leaders of the Communion met last week with *Charisma* founder and publisher Steve Strang to articulate their vision for what they say is "organic unity, not corporate unity" among Christians worldwide that is based on the Nicene Creed and the Great Commission. "We want to try to emulate what Christ left the world," said the Most Rev. David Scott of Altamonte Springs, General Secretary for the CEEC International House of Bishops.

Leaders of the Communion say they are not a breakaway faction of the Anglican Church, though unlike the Episcopal Church in the United States, it is not part of the Anglican Communion that's loyal to the Archbishop of Canterbury. Rather, the CEEC represents a network of churches that embody the "convergence movement," which is a trend among some charismatic and Pentecostal churches to incorporate Episcopal or Anglican liturgy and celebration of certain sacraments, such as baptism

of believers and the Lord's Supper, into their worship.

"The word 'episcopal' describes our form of governance – not a breaking away from the Episcopal Church," said the Rev. Stephen Galloza, a Deacon at Springs of Joy Church in Lake Mary, which is part of the CEEC. "We are a communion of relationships."

Archbishop Charles Travis of Jacksonville, Presiding Bishop of the CEEC, said this movement toward unity is what Jesus intended when He spoke of future believers in John 17:21a, "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you ..." (NIV).

"We represent three currents in one river," said Travis, explaining that the three currents or essential elements of the historic church are evangelical, charismatic and sacramental/liturgical. He said the CEEC has between 2 million and 3 million adherents worldwide. Still, the Communion is "covenant-based"; it is not a denomination, Travis added.

This convergence or unity movement received a dramatic boost in January when one of its bishops, who had been friends with Pope Francis for several years since he was a cardinal in his native Argentina, asked Palmer to record a greeting to a group of American evangelical leaders with whom the Protestant bishop planned to meet soon after.

While visiting the Vatican, CEEC Bishop Tony Palmer of South Africa asked Francis to speak a message of brotherhood to the evangelicals, which Palmer recorded on his phone and presented at Copeland's annual Ministers Conference. (Palmer once served as director of Copeland's ministry operations in South Africa.)

The seven-minute video clip went viral after it was uploaded to YouTube, and Palmer "began to be inundated by requests from evangelical leaders to be part of what was happening," the *Boston Globe's* London correspondent reported. The group

accepted an invitation relayed by Palmer to meet with the pope for talks and lunch on June 24. (Palmer is pictured at the far left in the group photo that accompanies this story.)

Palmer, however, was killed in a motorcycle accident in Great Britain on July 20. While the Florida bishops could not talk about Palmer in an interview without becoming emotional, his death has served as a “catalyst” to propel the convergence movement further even more vigorously, said Travis.

“There is a demonstration of Christian unity that’s being played out,” Travis said.