On the Election of the Presiding Bishop of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion

Dear Sisters and Brothers of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion,

After meeting with our beloved sisters and brothers of the Presiding Bishop Nomination Committee (PBNC) I was able to gain a greater understanding of the task and process in which they have been engaged in the past several months. I found the conversation to be quite helpful for me and what I have learned I wish to pass on to the entire body of our beloved Communion.

To begin with I wish to make the observation that our constitution provides for two paths in which one of our own may be elected to this very sacred office of the Presiding Bishop. First is the path of discernment which has been created by our Presiding Bishop Nomination Committee (PBNC) as mandated by Canon 68 of our constitution. Second is the path of the floor nomination which gives us a wider possibility as to who we may elect to serve us as our next Presiding Bishop. (See Canon 68.3).

Though the two paths make partial use of democratic processes in the election we are not a pure democracy. The purpose of a democracy is to determine the will of the people. But in the life of the Church we determine the election of our leaders through a process of discernment. Discernment differs from pure democracy in that the purpose of discernment is to determine not the will of the people but the will of the Holy Spirit.

The discernment created by the PBNC is a multilayer process that ultimately involves the entire Communion. For those candidates that participate in this process of discernment there will be multiple phases creating an environment where everyone can discover and obey the leading of the Spirit.

Phase one is the formation of the PBNC itself which is made up of the two duly elected officers of each House of our legislative branch of ecclesial government: the House of Laity (HOL) and the House of Pastors (HOP). These are the Chair and Co-chair of the HOL and the president and vice president of the HOP. Added to these four elected officers are four more delegates, two from each House, who
are selected by the respective steering committees of each house. Canon 68 specifies that these appointed members of the PBNC should reflect the rich diversity of the membership of our beloved Communion. This brings the number of committee members to eight.

**Phase two:** The first task of the PBNC is to survey the entire body of the Communion to determine the sense of the faithful as to what qualities and priorities they are looking for in the person who would become our next presiding bishop. I appreciate the work that PBNC has done to develop, collect and distribute the information from our Communion.

**Phase three:** The PBNC then surveys The Episcopal Council which is made up of all the bishops of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion (ECC) who are in good standing. The bishops are called to express what they, in their collective wisdom, would see as the desirable and necessary qualities in a person to be able to effectively and faithfully execute the office of the Presiding Bishop.

**Phase four:** The current Presiding Bishop is asked to provide a reflective description based on his/her present experience of all the tasks and responsibilities that have been required and have grown during his tenure in office.

**Phase five:** The entire membership of the Communion is then invited to submit names of possible candidates for the Office of the Presiding Bishop to the PBNC by a certain date in advance of the beginning of the discernment process that begins three months prior to the beginning of the year in which the election will take place. In this election cycle that would have been by the end of September of 2013 as the election of the new Presiding Bishop is to take place at the gathering of the ECC International Holy Synod in October of 2014 in Colorado, USA.

**Phase six:** Our constitution specifies that any baptized and confirmed person can be named to become a candidate to the Office of the Presiding Bishop, be that a lay or ordained person. Then the PBNC contacts each of the named persons to see if each one so named is willing to become a candidate and enter into the discernment process for the nomination to the Office of the Presiding Bishop.
Note that not all named persons may be willing for reasons all their own to become a candidate for this office.

**Phase seven:** Each of the remaining named candidates who are willing to participate in the nominating process are reviewed by PBNC in order to determine their eligibility according to the guidelines for ordained office as provided by our constitution (see sub canon 2). Those named candidates who do not meet the basic criteria set by the guidelines of the constitution as implemented by the bishops of the Episcopal Council are then eliminated by the PBNC.

**Phase eight:** Then each of the remaining named candidates are individually contacted by the PBNC and our invited to participate in a discernment process that is based in large part upon the processes used by many Catholic religious orders and congregations throughout the centuries. This necessarily involves much prayer and reflection on the part of the candidates. The entire Communion is also called to participate through their own prayers on behalf of the candidates as they enter into this deeper process of discernment.

**Phase nine:** Making use of the information gleaned from the survey of the faithful (see phase two) and the consultation with the Episcopal Council (see phase three), the PBNC then creates a questionnaire to be given to each candidate to respond to in writing and returned for review by the PBNC. The purpose of this exercise is to enable each candidate to think more deeply and prayerfully about their possible call to serve as the next Presiding Bishop of the ECC. At the same time, each candidate is given the job description provided by the current Presiding Bishop to review and are invited to contact the current Presiding Bishop in order to better understand the nature and experience of the work of this office. Some may even decide to self eliminate at this point or at any point in this entire process of discernment. This is why the names of the participating candidates are held in confidence so that each candidate has the time and opportunity to discern for themselves without undue pressure from others whether or not they are called to proceed in the election process.

**Phase ten:** All eight members of the PBNC conduct an interview with each of the remaining candidates using the questions and job description provided in order to
assist each candidate in their own discernment by inviting each candidate to think more deeply and prayerfully about their own sense of call from the Holy Spirit to be of service to our Communion as the next Presiding Bishop. Candidate’s and/or PBNC discernment can result in a candidate not moving forward as one of the three proposed nominees for the communion via the PBNC process.

Phase eleven: At this point in the process it is our hope that at least three candidates remain in the running. In the unlikely case that there are more than the three candidates, specified by canon 68, there would be an additional multi layered approach:

- First the PBNC would reach out to the candidates and discern with them collectively to see if we can determine the three candidates reminding them that the floor nomination process is an additional option (Canon 68.3)
- If need be a special final discernment group is formed made up of members of the PBNC and up to two bishops appointed by The Episcopal Council. Members of this discernment group will not include any candidates. The members of this discernment group would then prayerfully and thoughtfully determine the final three for nomination.

In this way we make use of the three distinct voices of our conciliar polity: the voice of the laity, the voice of the clergy, and the voice of the bishops, thus implementing the so called three legged stool of our synodal ecclesial government.

Phase twelve: The PBNC then publishes the names of the three nominees and may provide a packet of information on each candidate to all the faithful in January of the year of the election. The PBNC calls upon all the voting delegates of the two houses of the Synod to prayerfully consult with their respective faith communities in order to determine what nominee they would vote for in the final phase of the election process

The final phase: The election for the Office of the Presiding Bishop takes place at the gathering of the ECC International Holy Synod in October of 2014 in Colorado, USA. In order for a nominee to be elected to the Office of the Presiding Bishop she/he must be elected by a two third (2/3) majority vote of an
electoral college, which is comprised of all voting members of the two (2) houses of governance.

Once this is achieved we will now have a Presiding Bishop Elect who would then assume office on January 1, 2016 fourteen months after the election. This is to give the Presiding Bishop elect a full year to be mentored by the current Presiding Bishop and adequate time to make an orderly transition into the next administration.

My dear sisters and brothers of our beloved Communion, it is my hope that this brief description of our election process for the Office of the Presiding Bishop as it has been developed by means of the hard work of your sisters and brothers of the PBNC will be useful to you in bringing clarity and understanding to what has been confusing at times for many, myself included, and charity and peace to what has been a most difficult process among us. I now ask that you pray with me that we may come to know the will of the Holy Spirit as to who will lead us into the next level of our development as an international ecclesial organization known as the Ecumenical Catholic Communion.

In the bond of Christ’s love,

Bishop Peter Elder Hickman