

Resolution for Deeper Community, Service and Engagement between the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts and United Church of Christ Partners

Whereas the Episcopal Church is committed to establishing ecumenical relationships in order to fulfill Jesus' prayer for his disciples in John 17:21, "That they may all be one", by offering prayers for unity, participating in dialogues to nurture a spirit of understanding and respect, and collaborating actively in mission and ministry opportunities",

And **whereas** our most regular ecumenical partner in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts is the United Church of Christ (which is the largest Protestant denomination in Massachusetts),

And **whereas** our Bishop Douglas Fisher and the Rev Dr. James Antal, Conference Minister and President the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ already work together in a variety of advocacy and leadership role for the growth of ecumenical cooperation within the Commonwealth,

And **whereas** the intentional collaboration of our two denominations is already represented in the fact that one person serves as the Missioner for Creation Care for both polities,

And **whereas** Episcopalians and members of the UCC have already established cooperative working relationships in a variety of parish, community, and statewide ministries,

Be it resolved by this 116th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts:

That we affirm developing deeper, intentional and proactive partnerships with our UCC brothers and sisters in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts,

By engaging in conversations to develop cooperative ecumenical relationships that will enable us to address more effectively the local, national and global issues of the 21st century, and to explore and engage together in specific ministry opportunities within our various local contexts.

Toward that end, we suggest entering into a year of engagement in prayer, conversation and action that reflects the shared gifts of our respective denominations.

We believe that such engagement should involve prayerful conversation and study in order to learn about each other's denominational character, strengths and challenges.

We envision, for example, such engagement taking place with reflection in the context of the unfolding liturgical year, and we suggest the following as a possible way forward:

During the season of Advent, we imagine pondering such questions as : How do we anticipate the birth of Christ in our lives? How do our two denominations mark this anticipation differently? What do we do in common? In light of this conversation how is God inviting us to understand each other and our own tradition in new and broader ways?

Christmas/Epiphany – How is Christ made manifest in our traditions? And how can we celebrate the Incarnation together ? How does this conversation enlarge our vision for the ways in which we can make Christ manifest? And what are its implications for the ways in which we engage ministry within our specific contexts of ministry?

Lent – Where do we see ourselves in the wilderness? What temptations do we face? Where are we tempted by easy shallow answers? Where do we need to repent of the things that keep us from deeper fellowship in the Body of Christ?

Easter – How do we practice resurrection in a world that seems to be passing away? How do we bear witness to the Risen Christ as we head into a time when we know that what lies ahead of us does not look like what lies behind us?

Pentecost – How can diverse voices be spoken and heard? Where and how do we recognize the gifts of the Spirit in our communities? How can we support each other to follow the leading of the Spirit?

In addition, we urge the continued cooperation of our two polities in addressing concerns for social and environmental justice in our Commonwealth, the nation and the world and deepening shared commitment and in engaging in meaningful actions consistent with, and faithful to the Gospel.

Finally, we pray that every congregation and parish of this diocese will enter into this year long covenant with the corresponding United Church of Christ congregation in its community in order to deepen the fellowship with one another and move closer to that day when Jesus' prayer for his disciples will be fulfilled.

Respectfully submitted

The Rev Pamela J. Mott, Canon to the Ordinary

The Rev Dr. William C. Bergmann, Ecumenical and Interreligious Officer
for the Diocese of Western Massachusetts