

Dear Friends,

It is with deep gratitude and much joy that I write to you today to share a historic invitation that has been extended to us to partner more closely with neighboring Episcopal churches. From its inception, The United Church of Christ has been a leader in ecumenical engagement and cooperation. The UCC is deeply committed to Jesus' prayer 'that they may all be one' and we strive to emulate and embody this in all that we do. One area that has been bearing fruit has been our growing relationship with the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts.

In May of 2017, clergy pairs from local UCC and Episcopal churches gathered in Longmeadow to explore and celebrate some of the naturally evolving community partnerships springing up between our churches. This day together was a time for shared prayer, stories, and dreaming. How might our two denominations move closer together more intentionally in shared ministry?

On October 28, 2017, at their Annual Diocesan convention, the Episcopal Diocese of Western Mass took a giant step forward by passing a "Resolution for Deeper Community, Service and Engagement between the EDWM and UCC Partners." (attached.) In this bold resolution, the EDWM urges all Western Mass Episcopal churches to deepen their relationships with neighboring UCC churches, saying, "we suggest entering into a year of engagement in prayer, conversation and action that reflects the shared gifts of our respective denominations." To my knowledge, no other diocese has done this and taken such a stance.

I share this invitation with all of our churches throughout our Conference, since I know that many are already partnering with local Episcopal churches. Some are collaborating by supporting food pantries and meal programs. Others are sharing in worship and educational programs. Some are co-hosting community vigils in times of grief. In recent years we have partnered together at the statewide level to share the ministry of The Rev. Dr. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas, the Missioner for Creation Care who works within both denominations. We see this resolution as an extension and encouragement to take our relationship further, perhaps to places of unity that celebrate both our shared gospel values and our prophetic particularities. Surely the Holy Spirit is moving deeply through our two denominations, drawing us closer together in service to the Gospel teachings of Jesus Christ.

The MACUCC Board of Directors, our Task Force on Ecumenism & Interfaith Relations and I invite all our local churches and all settings of the Massachusetts conference to seize this time of tremendous openness and welcome between our two denominations. We invite you to respond to this outstretched hand extended in Christian love and appreciation by going deeper together in ways that are most natural for you and your local community.

I feel a tremendous sense of hope that the holy work to which all are called – to heal the broken parts of our lives and the world – can be done together with our Episcopal siblings, not only throughout western Massachusetts but also across our entire state.

Wishing you Christ's Peace,

The Rev. Dr. Jim Antal

The Ecumenical and Interfaith Task Force
The MACUCC Board of Directors

Dear Friends in Christ,