

Ecumenical Officer's Report – the Rev. Erik Karas
September 15, 2022

The ecumenical work of our diocese continues primarily in local settings where individual congregations work with others toward accomplishing shared mission. This includes congregations making use of Called to Common Mission, the Full Communion Agreement between The Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, in a variety of ways. In our Diocese we have thriving congregations that are a single, legal organizations, and also fully members of both denominations. We also have congregations of these two denominations who share a single clergy person. Our Diocesan staff continues to support these collaborations enthusiastically.

While this local collaboration is incredible and life giving to the congregations and the communities they serve, we still have so many incredible opportunities to work together with our ecumenical and interfaith partners that are routinely left unexplored. The denominationalism of the past has conditioned us so that as we begin new ministries and projects, the idea of inviting and including ecumenical partners does not even come to mind. We are not alone with this unconscious blind spot. Our ecumenical partners have the same challenge. My hope is that together we might grow to the point where each new ministry or project is planned with the question, “who can we do this with” and that would become the new normal.

On the church wide level, work continues to help every level of our church to become aware of the options available to us through our Full Communion agreements. Too many in our church still have no idea that these agreements even exist or can be used in practical ways to advance the Gospel in our world. Beyond simple awareness, work is ongoing to bring a more uniform structure to the process of congregations coming together in either Union or Federated forms. Templates, brochures, and recommendations to church wide bodies to streamline these collaborations are in the works through the Lutheran Episcopal Coordinating Committee and working groups organized by that committee.

Lastly, the lingering effects of COVID and the continued focus of broader ecumenical work leaning heavily toward the Eastern part of our state present an ongoing challenge, but one that is far from insurmountable. However, moving forward with ecumenism in our Diocese will require us to understand that we can not wait for it to be done for us. Instead, we must begin on our own with small steps. Simply by reaching out and inviting a neighboring church to join you for something like laundry love, a youth group activity, or a retiree's field trip will help us all live into Jesus' prayer that we would all be one.