

REPORT OF THE ECUMENICAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS OFFICER

Like everything else in our world, there has been a great deal of change in ecumenical and interreligious work. While the conversation with traditional ecumenical partners (Mainline Protestant denominations, Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches) remains important, there is a desire to begin engaging Emerging and Ethnic Churches. Additionally, the increasingly pluralistic nature of American culture has encouraged developing dialogues with Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism as well as continuing the dialogue with Judaism. One of the most important vehicles for our diocese to engage in both ecumenical and interreligious work is the Massachusetts Council of Churches.

The Council, a partnership of seventeen Orthodox and Protestant churches/denominations representing over 1700 congregations in the Commonwealth, is also undergoing significant transition. The Rev. Jack Johnson who has served as the Mass Council's Executive Director since 2006 has retired and effective November 1, the Rev. Laura Everett will assume her duties as the new Executive Director. Laura, recently ordained in the UCC, has served as the Associate Director since 2004. She brings a great deal of skill and energy to the position.

One of the things that has changed over the past few years and which continues to evolve is the Council's desire to be more present and active in the entire Commonwealth. Additionally, the Council has recognized that the three dialogue groups (Jewish/Christian, Muslim/Christian, and Evangelical/Liberal) which it co-sponsors need to grow but cannot do so in their current form. To help begin addressing both these concerns, the Council is beginning to use the "theological café" model, to expand its presence online and in the social media, and to attempt to engage ecumenical and interreligious leaders in the various regions of the state. And the Massachusetts Council of Churches continues to work to be more responsive to the immediate needs of congregations in the state as well as to expand the ecumenical and interreligious mission in the world.

Another extremely important and encouraging vehicle for ecumenical work in the diocese is the Ecumenical Center for Pauline Studies, an initiative of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Springfield, MA in collaboration with The Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts, The New England Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, St. George's Orthodox Cathedral, Springfield, MA, The Massachusetts Bible Society. Its several programs over the past couple of years have been well attended and demonstrate what can be accomplished by our churches despite the differences that continue to divide us. However, the Lutheran, Anglican, Roman Catholic Covenant Commission, which represents the New England Synod, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Springfield and Worcester (as well as our diocese) remains in a hiatus as one of the member groups focuses its attentions to its own internal issues. The other members of the Covenant group pray for them as well as for the reanimation of that important group.

Nationally, while the Church's Office of Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations operates in a more de-centralized manner than it did in the past much work continues to

be done with national, international, and regional efforts. Fr. Frederick Moser of the Diocese of Massachusetts represents Province 1 at the national level and the Ecumenical and Interreligious Officers of the Province meet yearly, the last meeting being this past winter in Clinton.

Having said all of this, however, the most important ecumenical and interreligious work happens locally, in relationships built between neighbors and between churches and other institutions, whether they are spiritual or secular. The tornadoes at the beginning of the summer and the floods at summer's end remind us that we need each other, not only because it is a "nice" idea but because without each other we cannot survive. In these complex and confusing times, in the midst of the serious challenges that face us, Jesus' prayer that "we all might be one" must be at the heart of our mission as we seek to live out our Baptismal Covenant.

Respectfully Submitted,

The Rev William C. Bergmann

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