

# **DIOCESE OF CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA**

## **ANNUAL ECUMENICAL REPORT**

**Lutheran, Anglican, and Roman Catholic (LARC)**

**A COVENANT**

AMONG

**THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA**  
**THE LOWER SUSQUEHANNA SYNOD**  
**OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA**  
**THE ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF HARRISBURG**  
**THE UPPER SUSQUEHANNA SYNOD**  
**OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA**

Our Lord Jesus Christ wills the unity of his Church. On the night of his Last Supper, our Lord prayed: *that they may all be one, Father! May they be in us, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they be one, so that the world may believe that you sent me. I gave them the same glory you gave me, so that they may be one, just as you and I are one; I in them and you in me, so that they may be completely one, in order that the world may know that you sent me and that you love them as you love me. (John 17:21-23)*

Together all Christians are to *make every effort to preserve the unity which has the Spirit as its origin and peace as its binding force because: there is but one Body and one Spirit...just as there is one Lord, one faith, one Baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all, and works through all, and is in all. (Ephesians 4:4-6)*

We affirm that the Holy Spirit bestows unity and opens us to new possibilities to provide an effective expression of God's love in Christ. The same Spirit call us to accept the convergences already achieved among us and work toward the goal of unity willed by Christ, while acknowledging and respecting the doctrinal differences among us.

Impelled by the Spirit, the bishops of our three traditions have convened annual days of dialogue among our clergy and laity and have encouraged our parishes to work together in the cause of Christian unity. Indeed, a long history of cooperation exists among us.

We believe that the same Spirit calls us now to enter into this formal covenant as a sign of our increased commitment to the unity of the whole Christian Church. This covenant is a witness to

the one Spirit who will lead all Christians to the fulfillment of Our Lord's high priestly prayer and is not a declaration of an exclusive relationship among our three traditions.

#### THEREFORE

relying on the faithful love of the Triune God, we commit ourselves to celebrate the unity already achieved through years of Lutheran-Anglican-Roman Catholic conversations and to strengthen the visible unity of the Body of Christ in Central Pennsylvania.

We hereby call into covenant our respective Synods and Dioceses, committing ourselves to leading the Church to greater unity and by urging our clergy and parishes to

- Pray for each other and the unity of the Church, particularly at the Sunday Liturgy
- Sponsor seasonal prayer services, especially during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity
- Engage in shared Lectionary studies
- Promote pulpit exchanges in non-Eucharistic liturgies and extend other invitations in accord with respective guidelines of each tradition
- Cooperate in the provision of pre-marital preparation for marriages in accordance with the Guidelines for Mixed Marriage celebration and preparation between Episcopalians, Lutherans, and Roman Catholics in Central Pennsylvania issued in 1987
- Promote covenants among congregations, institutions, and chaplaincies
- Study the traditions of our churches, emphasizing the common witness increasingly made possible as the result of our theological dialogues
- Sponsor shared retreats and formational events for clergy and parish leadership
- Collaborate at both the local and judicatory levels on issues of evangelization, justice, and social concerns
- Work whenever possible to support and facilitate future ecumenical efforts among all Christians

To further the goals of this covenant, we will establish a Covenant Committee to lead in actualizing this covenant, annually review it; and annually report to our respective dioceses and synods; and provide for an annual celebration of this covenant with a liturgy of renewal presided over by the bishops.

May the Holy Spirit, who has brought us to this moment of covenanting, bring us to ever deepening levels of unity. To this end we affix our names in behalf of our respective judicatories on this twenty third day of May in the year of Our Lord, Nineteen Hundred Ninety Three

+ Charlie F. McNutt  
The Episcopal Diocese of Central Pennsylvania

Guy S. Edmiston, Jr.  
The Lower Susquehanna Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

+ Nicholas C. Dattilo  
The Roman Catholic Diocese of Harrisburg

A. Donald Main  
The Upper Susquehanna, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

## **LARC Day of Dialogue - 2015**

Lutheran, Anglican and Roman Catholic (LARC) Day of Dialogue was held on Monday, November 2 from 8:30 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. at the Cardinal Keeler Center just east of Harrisburg.

Every autumn, local clergy and faithful of the Lutheran, Anglican and Roman Catholic communities gather at the Cardinal Keeler Center in Harrisburg for the annual LARC Day of Dialogue, hosted by the **Diocesan Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs**. The daylong conference is open to all people, and is one of a number of programs and activities hosted by the office.

In 1993, the bishops of the Episcopal Diocese of Central Pennsylvania, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Harrisburg, the Lower Susquehanna Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the Upper Susquehanna Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America signed the LARC Covenant as a means of providing occasions of joint prayer and greater cooperation between the Churches.

This year's LARC Day of Dialogue featured discussion on "The Mission of God in an Intercultural and Interreligious World." Participants examined Christians' call to witness to the Gospel in a religiously and ethnically diverse world, and crossing interreligious and intercultural borders in order to do so.

Keynote speaker Rev. Dr. Robert S. Heaney, Assistant Professor of Christian Mission at the Virginia Theological Seminary and Director of the Center for Anglican Communion Studies, offered presentations on how Lutheran, Episcopalians and Roman Catholic clergy and laity can nourish conversation.

“We need to recognize that God is at work in God’s world, that God is the primary agent of mission, and that our role in discernment and in prayer is to seek after where God is at work in God’s world,” Rev. Dr. Heaney told *The Catholic Witness*. “In doing that, what’s important is that we, as Christian believers, nourish conversation across cultures and across traditions that honors our own place and our own calling,” he said. “It’s a conversation that’s not about denying who we are, the message of Jesus, or the vision we have of who God is revealed in Christ, revealed in Scripture and revealed in Tradition. We stay true to who we are, while being open and willing to have conversation with others.” This conversation toward mutual understanding involves evangelization, and a confidence that God is at work, he pointed out. Why the need to witness to our Christian faith? It’s a Gospel mandate, Rev. Dr. Heaney said. “The Gospel requires us to be good neighbors, to be good witnesses, and to seek to follow and testify to who Jesus is. It’s also about efforts for social cohesion, he said. We have to examine the misunderstandings that exist between the faith traditions, and find ways of building community locally, nationally and internationally. “The big challenge for us all is: How do we live out the Gospel? How do we be good neighbors? How we put it into practice locally?” An event like the LARC Day of Dialogue is an opportune place to start, Rev. Dr. Heaney remarked. “Local events, grassroots events, are at the heart of what it means to live our faith. It’s vital that we go back to the call we have in our lives,” he said. “Get people together – just ordinary Christians in their everyday work coming together to hear and to witness and to listen with other people across differences. It’s about how we make faith speak to the ordinary reality that we all live in. We all are born into family. We all are born into neighborhoods. The ordinary is where we’re always trying to engage faith and witness.”

## **LARC Vespers - 2016**

The LARC Vespers were scheduled to be held on Sunday, January 24 at Prince of Peace Episcopal Church and was to have been attended by the current bishops of the LARC Covenant. It was cancelled due to inclement weather.

## **LARC Day of Dialogue – 2016**

The next LARC Day of Dialogue is scheduled for Monday, November 7, 2016 from 8:30 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. at the Cardinal Keeler Center. The topic this year is “The Year of Mercy.” Information and registration will be available in September.

## **PA Council of Churches**

Attended a PA Council of Churches meeting on Thursday, April 21 at the United Church Center. They are undergoing some reorganization and working on a Mission and Ministry Plan. They

continue to sponsor workshops and seminars on a variety of topics. We are hoping to add this schedule to our website by the end of 2016 so the information can be more widely disseminated.

## **Other Activities**

I attended 5 of the 7 spring Convocation Meetings to introduce myself and outline a one year set of goals. Goal 1 was to survey all 66 parishes and gather information about their ecumenical activities – both over the last year and those scheduled for the coming year. I received 31 responses. There is much more ecumenical activity in the diocese than one would imagine in the areas of prayer and worship, education, and outreach ministry. Goal 2 was to create a page on the diocesan website to share the information gathered from the parishes and to provide links to ecumenical resources that would aid parishes – especially in the area of education. We are working (as of this report – August 1) on this goal. We have the outline of the ecumenical page and are working through how to input the data and keep it current.