

**REPORT OF THE ECUMENICAL AND INTERFAITH OFFICER
for the Ecumenical and Interfaith Commission
to the
121st Annual Convention of the Diocese of West Missouri**

In April I participated in the National Workshop on Christian Unity and the annual meeting of Episcopal Diocesan Ecumenical and Interreligious Officers (EDEIO) in Tampa. The Workshop was an opportunity, as always, to pray for unity as one people of God and to learn more about how we can best live into that unity. The worship services, plenary speakers and seminars were both inspiring and educational for our ongoing ecumenical work. A highlight for me was the preacher at the opening service at Sacred Heart Catholic Church, our Presiding Bishop, the Most Reverend Katharine Jefferts Schori. Preaching on the text of Luke 24:36-53 Bishop Schori called on participants to follow where Jesus is leading us in the quest for unity, in a manner that truly makes us “witnesses of these things.”

I continue as the Chair of the Missouri Churches Uniting in Christ (MoCUIC) and a member of Missouri Christians Against Racism and Poverty (MoCARP). Together with Missouri IMPACT, People of Faith, Advocates for Justice we sponsored our third annual breakfast forum in Jefferson City as a place for dialogue with legislators and religious leaders. This forum focused on the subject “Toward Health Care for All Missourians.”

Most of my attention as Ecumenical and Interfaith Officer has centered on the ecumenical piece, i.e. our relationship with other Christian churches. Events of this year have convinced me that we must begin to be seriously concerned with the interfaith aspect. During September we were aware of the furor surrounding the proposed Islamic Center in Lower Manhattan, as well as the protests against mosques and Islamic centers in various places and the threats to burn Islam’s holy book the Qu’ran.

This is not the place to get into the many elements upon which these controversies touch: issues of freedom of religion, fear of the “other,” concerns about radical Islam, etc. But it is important to know what the Episcopal Church’s “stance” is on the issue. There are some important resources to help us as we try to engage these questions.

The Statement on Interreligious Relations, endorsed by the 2009 General Convention, is our most recent and official policy statement. This Statement defines dialogue in four points (paragraph 1):

1. dialogue begins when people meet each other
2. dialogue depends upon mutual understanding, mutual respect and mutual trust
3. dialogue makes it possible to share in service to the community
4. dialogue is a medium of authentic witness by all parties and not an opportunity for proselytizing.

Further the statement speaks of three gifts which the Episcopal Church and Anglican tradition offers to interreligious engagement (paragraph 33):

Our comprehensive way of thinking by which we balance Scripture, reason, and

tradition in relationship building;· Our belief system that centers on the incarnation of God in Christ, and on the Crucified One who leads us to self-emptying, forgiveness, and reconciliation; and· Our practice of focusing mission in terms of service, companionship, and partnership between people as demonstrative of God's embrace of human life.

In addition, the National Council of Churches Interfaith Relations Commission, where the Episcopal Church is represented, also is working to provide resources and to engage in dialogue with the Muslim community in America. There is a national Christian-Muslim dialogue sponsored by the NCC. Our church's Interfaith Relations Commission has also released a statement calling for respect for our Muslim neighbors during Ramadan, in particular calling on Christians "to promote respect and love of neighbor, and to speak and work against extremist ideas, working with Muslims as appropriate, in order to live out the commandment to love our neighbor, and to promote peace."

The full text of the NCC statement may be found on their website and the Interreligious Relations Statement from General Convention can be found on the website of the Episcopal Church. It is my hope that these resources can inform and guide our responses to our current religious climate as faithful Christians and Episcopalians.

Respectfully submitted,
Ross W. Stuckey, Ecumenical and Interfaith Officer