

## ECUMENICAL & INTERFAITH REPORT

This is a diaconal ministry *to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world* (Book of Common Prayer, page 543). This ministry requires having our eyes open to what is happening outside our own neighborhoods, parish, diocese and denomination: listening and engaging our head and our hearts to move our feet in building trusting ecumenical and interreligious relationships; networking together when it comes to identifying the needs of our most vulnerable neighbors; and resourcefully working to see how the whole community can address these needs. As a diaconal networking ministry, the aspirational goal is to meet and know our ecumenical and interreligious neighbors so that when something happens where we really need one another, be it a hurricane, flood or some sort of violence, we are connected as faith-based leaders: bearing witness to a deeper, more expansive meaning of John's Gospel, "that all may be one" (17:11) – sisters and brothers of a God in whose image we are all created - striving "for justice and peace among all people," respecting "the dignity of every human being."

As the Episcopal Diocesan Ecumenical Interreligious Officer (EDEIO), I represent the diocese by participating in an EDEIO Meeting during the yearly National Christian Unity Workshop. After 55 successive years, the 2020 National Christian Unity gathering set to happen this past March in Houston, Texas, was cancelled. Prior to the arrival of COVID-19, I had been in conversation with The Rev. Margaret Rose, the National Ecumenical Officer for our Episcopal Church. We explored the possibility of her offering a 'teachable moment' at a future date to members of our diocese: a much-needed step toward a more formal network in eastern N.C - connecting members of our diocese with our larger Episcopal denominational network and the many possibilities this may open for us in the 33 counties which comprise our diocese.

In the midst of COVID-19 – and the racial reckoning sparked in May with the death of George Floyd, there are two noteworthy regional events to report. The first was the creation of the Faith and Racial Justice network in June, a division of Interfaith Clergy Standing for the Community in Pitt and Martin Counties. More than 60 ecumenical and interfaith leaders gathered on the steps of the Pitt County Courthouse to affirm and recommit ourselves in our various faith traditions to collaboratively pledge to be part of the ongoing anti-racism work in our community. A series of *Critical Conversations* with representative city and county leaders helped establish four task forces all of which are bringing faith-based and civic leaders together around 1) Criminal Justice Reform. 2) Police Reform. 3) Education – and, 4) Business and Economic Opportunities toward racial equity.

The second regional event took place with the grand opening of the Pitt County Community Resource Center in October – the fruit of seven years of a growing ecumenical and interfaith ministry. This is a collaborative initiative established with the City of Greenville, Pitt County, United Way of Pitt County, Vidant Health Foundation, the North Carolina Council of Churches and Lutheran Services of the Carolinas. An 8,100 square foot warehouse in Greenville is now a hub for an expanding network. Some 75 congregations in Bertie, Martin, Beaufort and Pitt are now connected as our Community Unity Resource Center is equipped to store and make available in this pandemic such items as sanitizers, face shields and masks; baby and adult diapers (attends); blankets; hygiene cleaning kits – and supplies of non-perishable food. Learning about some of the history and current life of the counties in our diocese during our current Journey Through East Carolina, this Community Unity Resource Center is available to help serve the needs of our sisters and brothers beyond our regional area.

Bob Hudak  
Ecumenical & Interfaith Officer