

RESOLUTION ON THE WELCOME CHURCH

RESOLVED: That the 227th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania extend greetings, prayers, and support to the Welcome Church, a street ministry sponsored by our brothers and sisters in Christ of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; and to the Rev. Violet Little, the pastor of the Welcome Church.

RESOLVED: That the Diocese encourage the publicizing of this ministry throughout the diocese with the intention of inviting parishes to support this ministry as part of their ongoing mission and outreach.

RESOLVED: That the Diocese will collaborate with the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the ELCA to replicate this ministry in other appropriate districts of the Synod and Diocese.

EXPLANATION: On January 6, 2001, The Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America entered into a relationship of full communion on the basis of the document "Called to Common Mission," culminating thirty years of dialogue with one another. Not a merger, in full communion both churches retain their autonomy and structures but agree to work together for joint mission and witness in the world. This resolution is offered in the spirit of the full communion between the two churches described in that Concordat.

The Welcome Church developed out of the non-religious (but very spiritual) non-profit ministry called The Welcome Center, a place of healing and hospitality for people experiencing homelessness, housed in the Lutheran Church of the Holy Communion in Center City Philadelphia. A worshipping community formed among the guests, which began doing Bible study, having prayer and weekly communion services. Thus grew "The Welcome Church," open to all, and recognized by the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) as a SAWC, or Synodically Authorized Worshipping Community. More can be learned about The Welcome Church through its blog (see References).

The Welcome Church is conducted on the model pioneered by Ecclesia Ministries Mission and **common cathedral** in Boston, founded by the Rev. Dr. Debbie Little Wyman, an Episcopal priest who started by sitting with homeless people in the streets of Boston and developed this into a community that meets for Sunday Eucharist in the middle of the Boston Common. As noted on the website of Ecclesia Ministries, "Street Ministry is often the way we first meet those in need. Ecclesia ministers spend hours each week sitting with and listening to people on the streets. We never know where we will end up when we set off in the morning. Shop doorways, disused wharves, benches and sidewalks are frequent locales but so are coffee shops, train stations and the back pews of churches. We are able, often, to direct people to resources that will meet most immediate needs such as food, blankets, and emergency medical referrals. We also work closely with medical, mental-health and housing outreach workers to better serve these needs in the long-term. The main thing we do during street ministry, however, is accompany those in pain. Sitting with people for hours and hours over days and days, and listening deeply to the stories they choose to tell us, births a process of deep-rooted healing that is hard to ignite any other way." Supporting the Welcome Church would be a concrete way for the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania to answer the "Call to Common Mission" through witness and service to "the least of these who are members of my family" (Matthew 25).

Suggested ways to implement this resolution: (1) Ways of implementing the second resolve might include: (a) placing a link to the Welcome Church on the diocesan website; (b) allowing information about the Welcome Church to be published in the established diocesan organs of communication; (c) allowing the Welcome Church to distribute promotional and contact information directly to parishes in the diocese. (2) Ways of implementing the third resolve would be for lay and clergy members of the Diocese to learn more about the Welcome Church and Ecclesia Ministries Mission (see Facebook page, “Ecclesia Ministries Mission to Other Cities”); for all those with a continuing interest to identify areas of need within the regions covered by the Diocese and the Southeastern Pennsylvania ELCA Synod; and for the Diocese and the Synod to collaborate in identifying potential ministers who might establish the ministry in these areas of need.

REFERENCES:

Called to Common Mission, found in Appendix C of The Episcopal Church Office of Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations (2007) *Handbook for Ecumenism*.

<http://www.episcopalchurch.org/documents/ecumenicalhandbook2007.pdf>

Ecclesia Ministries Mission, <http://www.ecclesiaministriesmission.org/>

Ecclesia Ministries Mission to Other Cities, http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#!/pages/Boston-MA/Ecclesia-Ministries-Mission-to-Other-Cities/183909958115?ref=ts&_a=13&ajaxpipe=1

The Welcome Church, <http://www.thewelcomechurch.blogspot.com/>

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