

Called to Sacred Encounters in Communion
A Covenant
between
The Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania and Episcopal Community Services

The creation of community and the exercise of discipleship are both rooted in the conviction that everyone has his or her own gift to give. No one lives outside this grace. “Everyone needs everyone else’s gifts and anyone’s problem or pain is everyone’s problem. All deserve honor, all deserve protection; this is what it means to recognize that all are animated by the one Spirit of God.”* When this truth is acknowledged and put into action, we cease to be strangers and can more fully realize the “extraordinary affirmation of our reciprocal belonging” - which is a sacred bond.

The Gospel is God’s invitation in Jesus Christ to a new and radical freedom, which is the discipleship we show in community by loving our neighbors as ourselves - as if there were “neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for [we] are all one in Christ Jesus.” Though the work of the Church is different than the work of Episcopal Community Services, the people of the Diocese of Pennsylvania share among their responsibilities the same mission in their commitment to dignity and justice, seeking and serving “Christ in all persons,” which is to love without exception or discrimination.

Episcopal Community Services is committed to the development of social programs that will lift people out of intergenerational poverty. Its goal is to create and sustain programs that have clear *impact* in the strengthening of *community* and that recognize and promote the *dignity* we all share and the comprehensive *justice* that is our common good. These core values guide its work within the most stressed neighborhoods of the greater Philadelphia area, whose residents are often afforded negligible dignity and little justice.

The Diocese currently includes 134 congregations across five counties in southeastern Pennsylvania representing nearly 40,000 people. The vision of the Diocese is to know Jesus and change the world. Together, with their congregations, this is accomplished by proclaiming the Gospel; empowering churches; and addressing the pain and poverty of the world.

The Diocese has maintained a strong and beneficial affiliation with ECS since its inception in 1870. This Covenant and its accompanying Guiding Principles provide a basic framework outlining the ways that each may support the other, offering unique gifts that provide in each context greater opportunity for sacred encounters, where, across all the variations of our differences, we can meet one another “face to face.”

* *All non-Scriptural quotations are from Rowan Williams, Meeting God in Paul*

Guiding Principles

“Seek the shalom of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in the shalom of it shall you have shalom.” Jeremiah 29:7

Poverty is not a singular form of lack. Both its roots and its alleviation are complex. Shalom, the opposite of poverty, is the wholeness that is God’s desire and gift to us. As the intertwining of peace, welfare, and prosperity, it is similarly complex.

The intersection of the work of ECS and of the Diocese in the relationships that can be built between them provide opportunities vital to both. Poverty can be more effectively understood and addressed in its many dimensions: economic, social, and spiritual. And shalom can be more fully realized as the grace, made incarnate in Jesus, that, both demanding and freeing, changes the world and transforms our divisions into communion.

The intentional reflection added to these collaborations will further strengthen the work of each. A better understanding and closer experience of poverty should demand a more developed and shared desire for shalom. True mission is mutual mission, which can be developed through the following practices and initiatives.

Understanding:

- ECS can bring to the Diocese a broader and deeper understanding of poverty as it is actually experienced and persists within the communities it serves in the greater Philadelphia area — what drives poverty and what prevents greater wellbeing.
- The Diocese can contribute to the work of ECS its own commitment to the spread of shalom.

Education:

- ECS can educate members of the Diocese on best practices for addressing poverty, whether through direct outreach programs or through change made possible by advocacy.
- The people of the Diocese can offer a vast array of skills and experience that can enhance and expand the opportunities afforded stressed communities.

Engagement:

- ECS can provide program sites where volunteers can work with and for persons experiencing poverty.
- The Diocese can provide a wealth and diversity of resources, both material and personal, to help communities challenged by poverty.

Advise/Advocacy:

- ECS can advise congregations seeking to initiate their own outreach programs.
- The people of the Diocese can advance the work of ECS by providing broad advocacy for legislation and initiatives that promote economic and social stability and advancement.