

THE  
*Episcopal*  
CHURCH



# **Holding Difference Together**

## **Episcopal Theological and Practical Guidelines for Interreligious Relations**

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Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength; and, love your neighbors as yourselves.<sup>1</sup> Episcopalians take this twofold mandate with utmost seriousness. It informs our Baptismal Covenant promise to “strive for justice and peace among all people,” and to “respect the dignity of every human being.”<sup>2</sup> Because we have so promised, it is an act of Christian faithfulness to be in openhearted relationship with people whose religions differ from ours. Indeed, most Episcopalians live in the midst of religious diversity, in relationship with people who embrace lifeways different from theirs. As individuals, the range of attitudes Episcopalians hold about this reality is broad.

The Episcopal Church’s current teaching on interreligious relations encourages openheartedness. This requires serious self-examination with respect to our history. It commits us to genuine acts of repentance and lament in places where we have failed to behave towards our neighbors in ways that are consonant with the commandment to love them. Recognition that our interreligious encounters must now also be undertaken in the spirit of humility and repentance is foundational to the theology and practical guidelines set forth here. This set of guidelines seeks to clarify the distinctive aspects and implications of the attitude toward religious diversity projected by The Episcopal Church as a multicultural, multilingual, and multinational ecclesial body headquartered in the USA and present in at least fifteen other countries. Geographic and socio-political realities of The Episcopal Church cause challenges of interreligious encounter to vary significantly from place to place. In this time of reckoning and renaming, this document provides guidance for parishes and other Episcopal communities to develop and maintain interreligious relationships.

# I. An Episcopal Theology of Interreligious Relations<sup>3</sup>

## A. Foundations

Foundational to this document is the *Theological Statement on Interreligious Relations*—which has been, since its adoption by General Convention in 2009, the canonical rationale for The Episcopal Church’s interreligious work. Grounded in a theology of companionship, it provides a framework for such engagement by Episcopalians in our many locations. In turn, the 2009 statement rests on *Interfaith Relations and the Churches: A Policy Statement of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.* (1999), in the crafting of which The Episcopal Church played a vital role—and which was, in due course, embraced by General Convention. Deeply influential as well have been interreligious relations statements developed by the interfaith office of the Church of England, former Anglican Communion Network of Inter Faith Concerns (NIFCON, 1993–2017), and the Lambeth Conference of Bishops of the Anglican Communion.

## B. Distinctive Aspects

The Episcopal Church’s approach to thinking theologically about interreligious concerns has nine distinctive aspects.

### 1. **Communio oppositorum** (a communion of opposites)

In its very essence as an expression of the Anglican tradition, a Christian *via media* (at once catholic and reformed), and a communion of opposites, The Episcopal Church brings to interreligious relations a unique charism: our commitment to hold difference together.

### 2. **Balance between scripture, reason, and tradition**

As Christians in the Anglican tradition, Episcopalians affirm that the Bible is the human record of God’s revelation, and that its authority is mediated by tradition and reason. This approach to scriptural interpretation is founded on the teaching of the sixteenth-century Anglican theologian Richard Hooker, as laid out in his *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*. Hooker taught that Scripture reveals essential truths about God and ourselves that we cannot learn by any other means; and that God expects us to use our minds in order to reason together and thus discover the right way forward. This requires respect for the opinions of other people of goodwill. Following Hooker, The Episcopal Church seeks to be a community living in obedience to the Word of God revealed through Scripture, to which are brought insights derived from tradition and reason when reflecting theologically on interreligious matters. Because Episcopalians understand holy scripture to be at once inspired by God yet the work of human authors, editors, and compilers, we embrace the notion that the Bible contains all things necessary to salvation—but that not everything contained in the Bible *is* necessary to salvation. Episcopalians believe the Holy Spirit guides us in our continually growing understanding of the Scriptures. We also affirm the teaching of the Apostle Paul that God has spoken to the human race in other ways (Romans 1:20).

Christianity’s holy scriptures reveal to us both the invitation and the direction to engage with people of other religions. In Genesis 1:26 we meet the loving God who created all people and all nations. The awesome majesty of creation bids us to acknowledge with humility that the fullness of God’s intention is beyond the scope of our limited understanding; God’s gracious love is not confined to the Christian community alone. Because of our faith in the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, we expect to meet God in our neighbor, whom God commands us to love as we love ourselves (Mark 12:29–31). Indeed, Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan makes clear that

our “neighbor” includes those of different religious commitments.

Our dynamic relationship with the Word of God and our experience of faith over time result in varying interpretations of scripture. The revelation of God in Christ calls us, therefore, to participate in our relationship with God and one another in a manner that is at once faithful, loving, lively, and reasonable. As Christians, we look to our own Scripture for insight about God. We also understand that wisdom can be found in the scriptures and teachings of other religions. We appreciate Mahatma Gandhi’s assertion that it is everyone’s duty “to read sympathetically the scriptures of the world. If we are to respect others’ religions as we would have them to respect our own, a friendly study of the world’s religions is a sacred duty.”<sup>4</sup>

### **3. The Baptismal Covenant as warrant for interreligious work**

Episcopalians are heirs to the notion that praying shapes believing. The corollary is that what is said in liturgy should be observable in a worshipping community’s behavior beyond it.

Throughout the liturgical year, Episcopalians reaffirm the Baptismal Covenant, added to the Book of Common Prayer in the 1979 revision. Catechetical in form, it is an affirmation of belief in the core Christian doctrines enshrined in the Apostles’ Creed, plus hearty commitment to faith-in-action. Through the Baptismal Covenant, Episcopalians promise to strive for peace and justice, to respect the dignity of every human being, to seek and serve Christ in all persons, and to love their neighbor as themselves.

In recent decades, Episcopal Church interreligious documents have made direct mention of the Baptismal Covenant. By doing so, the Episcopal Church has taught repeatedly that the conduct of positive interfaith relations is an action stemming from core Episcopal-Christian identity. Neighbor-love, hospitality, and reminders of the command not to bear false witness against our neighbor (Ex. 20:16) have been consistently prominent themes.<sup>5</sup> Witness, hospitality, and mutuality are Episcopal interreligious concerns, all of which arise directly from the theme of love of neighbor at the core of the Baptismal Covenant

### **4. Radically incarnational**

Since the late twentieth century, Episcopal theologizing on interreligious relations has been radically incarnational. That is, it has been informed by the notion, found in earlier Christian thought, that, as Urban Holmes puts it, “even if humanity had never sinned, God [still] would have become flesh.”<sup>6</sup> To be a church centered on an incarnational theology is to be a church radically open to the influence and ideas with which our faith comes into dialogue. It emphasizes that the Incarnation encompasses the entirety of human experience. It reminds us that Christ is the transformer, not the projection, of culture. This embodiment of the holy in the human continues in the church as the Body of the Risen Christ, called to be in the world as a self-emptying agent open to dialogue with others. As we Episcopalians strive to grow into the fullness of Christ, we endeavor to leave behind the Colonial Christ of our past. We embrace the Dialogical Christ who opens himself and gives himself for others, opening ourselves to conversation and collaboration with those whose religious commitments and convictions differ from ours.<sup>7</sup>

### **5. The doctrine of creation: humankind created in God’s image**

Episcopal theological reflection on creation emphasizes God’s will for what *is*, more so than offering an explanation of how all things came to be. Hence the Episcopal Church’s Baptismal Covenant affirms that all human beings are made in God’s image and after God’s likeness. The

implication is that diversity—including religious diversity—has potential for good and that difference can be celebrated.

## **6. The role of the Holy Spirit**

Themes of Creation bring us to pneumatology: study of God-the-Holy-Spirit. In this regard, Episcopal interreligious teachings remind us that the Holy Spirit, like the wind, “blows where it chooses” (John 3:8); others speak of God-on-the-move, or ponder “what God is up to” in the world.<sup>8</sup> Such reminders that the activity of the Holy Spirit is unhampered by religious, cultural, and geopolitical boundaries encourage breadth in Episcopal interreligious friendship and collaboration.

## **7. Reconciliation and salvation**

Our expectation that we shall discover new insights through interreligious relationships rests upon our embrace of Jesus as “the Way and the Truth and the Life,” coupled with our commitment to respect for the dignity of every human being. In mutual encounters and shared ascetic, devotional, ethical, and prophetic witness, we dare to hope that God will reveal new and enriching glimpses of a reconciled humanity, as well as new insights into how God works in the world through those who practice other traditions. The radically incarnational teaching of the Episcopal Church conveys our confidence that, in the coming of God in Christ, the transformation of all of creation has already been set in motion—and that God, who has been generous in creation, is no less generous in salvation. God’s gracious love is not limited to the Christian community.<sup>9</sup>

Episcopal interreligious theology makes broad use of the principle of reconciliation—the renewal of relationship with God accomplished for humanity in Jesus Christ; God’s gathering up of all things into a unity that honors difference. The language of salvation in and through Christ Jesus is fundamental to our understanding sin and how it may be overcome, particularly when we understand salvation as the process of reconciliation that allows difference to stand and to be honored.

However, salvation is a peculiarly Christian goal—a goal not necessarily sought by followers of other religions. Acknowledgment of differences among the ultimate goals of various spiritual paths opens up rich opportunities for learning and dialogue. In interreligious engagement, we learn from people who see the world’s problems through lenses other than “sin and salvation.” Wisdom offered by other traditions may enrich us as Christians, just as we may enrich others with our insights.

Responding to the attacks of September 11, 2001, in a sermon later that month to the House of Bishops, then-Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold declared: “God’s compassion, God’s mercy, God’s loving kindness, God’s fierce bonding love is the active principle that effects reconciliation: the gathering up of all things into a unity in which difference is both honored and reconciled in the fullness of God’s ever creative imagination.” Reconciliation grounds Episcopal understanding of salvation and eschatology (the study of the ultimate destiny of humankind).<sup>10</sup>

Eschatologically, we live in the “already but not yet.” Our efforts at reconciliation can be seen as attempts to make real in the here-and-now, the future perfection God has accomplished already through Christ. Episcopalians dare to hope that God is drawing all of creation back to Godself through Christ. Therefore, the Church’s teaching on interreligious relations encourages Episcopalians to offer their gifts for the carrying out of God’s ongoing work of reconciliation toward our mutual flourishing.

## **8. Trinitarian monotheism**

The Episcopal Church’s approach to interreligious relations is unabashedly Trinitarian. We insist that the one and only God is Triune. The very life of God is one of mutuality, interdependence, and reciprocity—a divine dance of intimacy in which unity does not require uniformity. The implication for interreligious relations is this: we manifest the reality of having been made in the image and after the likeness of the Triune God by striving for right-ordered relationship with all of creation—and that includes people whose religious convictions and commitments are different from ours.

Trinitarian imagery may not be most helpful when in direct conversation with someone of another religion; nevertheless Trinitarian theology offers abundant resources for understanding religious diversity as a good that is integral to creation, rather than as cause for concern and division. Diversity is eternal—since the very essence of God-as-Triune encompasses irreducible difference. In Christian understanding, all of humanity is made in the image and likeness of God; therefore, in its irreducible diversity, humanity as a whole models the Trinity.<sup>11</sup>

As the great Buddhist teacher-activist Thich Nhat Hanh often said, “we inter-are.”<sup>12</sup> The theological principle of participation requires that we strive “to live in deep, right-ordered relationship with God and all of creation.”<sup>13</sup> And, it bears repeating, “all of creation” includes our neighbors whose religious convictions and communities differ from ours. Friendship and collaboration are possible in and through (rather than in spite of) irreducible religious differences.

## **9. Our commitment to an ecumenical approach**

The Episcopal Church is committed to an ecumenical approach to interreligious-relations work. We are a founding member of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA and a member of the World Council of Churches. We draw upon the thinking of scholars from many streams of Christianity in crafting our own interreligious statements. The Episcopal Church’s radically incarnational and Trinitarian interreligious relations theology emphasizes mutuality, interdependence, and reciprocity—which, in turn, has implications for love of neighbor, for embassy, and for hospitality. It is to our theology in action that we now turn.

# **II. Practical Interreligious Relations Guidelines for Episcopalians**

## **A. Knowing our History**

When undertaking interreligious work at any level (church-wide, diocesan, or parish; global, national, or local), and whatever our geographical context, it is useful to understand The Episcopal Church’s history, both negative and positive, with respect to the peoples, groups, religious traditions, or worldviews with which we wish to engage.

### **1. Episcopal involvement in global and national interreligious work**

The Episcopal Church’s administrative structure has long included an office dedicated to interreligious work. In addition, interfaith efforts may be initiated by the Presiding Bishop as primate and chief pastor of the church or may be handled by a special committee—most recently, the subcommittees of the Standing Commission on Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations. Engagement in interreligious work through external structures is, as noted above, a hallmark of The Episcopal Church’s approach.

- Episcopalians were participants in the first World Parliament of Religions in 1893, and in every convening since the Parliament’s revival in 1993.

- The Episcopal Church was well-represented at the 1910 Edinburgh Missionary Conference—which is credited with birthing the modern ecumenical movement.
- Since the inception of the National Council of Churches of Christ in 1950, The Episcopal Church has provided robust support for that body’s interfaith office.
- The Episcopal Church collaborates with the World Council of Churches in its ongoing interfaith efforts.
- The Episcopal Church is a founding member of *Shoulder to Shoulder*, a coalition-based campaign that strives to end discrimination and violence against Muslims in the United States.
- The Episcopal Church is also an active member of Religions for Peace-USA.

Therefore, The Episcopal Church encourages collaborative and ecumenical work on interreligious matters at the local and diocesan levels. It is worth noting that the United Religions Initiative (URI) was founded by an Episcopal bishop.

## **2. Previous influential statements on interreligious engagement**

In considering further how best to engage with religious difference in the present, Episcopalians do well to recall groundbreaking resources developed in past decades and still of usefulness today. These include *Nostra Aetate* (In Our Time), issued by the Second Vatican Council in 1965, which helped to inaugurate a new era of interreligious engagement; and The Episcopal Church’s *Theological Statement on Interreligious Relations* (2009). Also worthy of ongoing study are the 1988 Lambeth Conference document *Christ and People of Other Faiths*, which teaches that interreligious dialogue is coherent with discipleship and mission; its Appendix, entitled *Jews, Christians, and Muslims: The Way of Dialogue*—the first Anglican Communion interfaith document to provide guidance for positive relations with Muslims; *Generous Love: the Truth of the Gospel and the Call to Dialogue—an Anglican theology of inter faith relations*, a sophisticated and useful treatise issued by the Anglican Communion Network of Inter Faith Concerns in 2008; and the *Lambeth Call on Inter Faith* (May 2023).<sup>14</sup>

## **3. Episcopal engagement with Judaism and Jewish people**

It is important for Christians in the Anglican tradition to acknowledge participation in the centuries-long persecution of the Jewish people through forced conversion to Christianity, the preaching of contempt for them, and the interpretation of many Bible passages in ways that lead to the demonization of Judaism and the denigration of it as a living religion. Since the middle of the twentieth century, The Episcopal Church has demonstrated its repentance of that behavior through actions by General Convention promoting dialogue with Jewish people. In 1988, General Convention issued *Guidelines for Christian-Jewish Relations for Use in The Episcopal Church*, thus officially endorsing a course of action for thinking theologically and behaving ethically. Subsequently, many Episcopalians have reframed their preaching and teaching to emphasize their recognition that contemporary Judaism is a living religion that took shape after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in the year 70 CE, and that has grown and thrived during the centuries since. *Christian-Jewish Relations: Theological and Practical Guidance for The Episcopal Church* (2023) is the most recent teaching on this topic.

Even though, since the end of World War II, Episcopal relationships with our Jewish neighbors have improved significantly, issues arising out of language in our Book of Common

Prayer still linger, particularly in some of the liturgies of Holy Week and Good Friday. Sensitivity to those issues is required of all who preach and teach the scriptural texts of Holy Week or who use them as part of Christian formation.

Lingering also is the question of how The Episcopal Church may best maintain its longstanding commitment to and support of the modern state of Israel, while also supporting the rights of Palestinians to their own state. The ongoing Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories continues to present significant social justice issues for Episcopalians who support the Palestinian cause. The Church continues to navigate this contentious issue with a deep commitment to the collaborative and mutually enriching relationships that we have built with Jewish people over many decades. However, neither Episcopalians nor Jewish people are of one mind with respect to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Therefore, any interreligious encounter that engages it requires diplomacy and care.

#### **4. Episcopal engagement with Islam and Muslims**

The Episcopal Church recognizes that, through the centuries, relations between Muslims and Anglican Christians have been complex and often contentious.<sup>15</sup> For guidance in respectful engagement with Muslims, The Episcopal Church has drawn on *Jews, Christians and Muslims: The Way of Dialogue* (1988), the first interreligious relations treatise from the Lambeth Conference of Bishops of the Anglican Communion to engage Islam robustly and openheartedly. With this document as a foundation, the General Convention of The Episcopal Church passed resolutions in 1997 and 2003 that formalized a commitment to dialogue with Muslims founded on affirmation of human rights and religious freedom for all people.<sup>16</sup>

In 2007, when 138 distinguished Muslim scholars issued “A Common Word Between Us and You,” a landmark open letter to Christian religious leaders around the world, Rowan Williams, then Archbishop of Canterbury, responded to it on behalf of the Anglican Communion, respectfully and positively, with “A Common Word for the Common Good.” The Episcopal Church was asked to participate in the crafting of that response. It did so by submitting “Renewing Our Pledge” (2008), a didactic document that was also made available to all dioceses. Finally, The Episcopal Church has produced *Christian-Muslim Relations: Theological and Practical Guidance for The Episcopal Church* (2021, revised 2023)—a document paralleling its guidelines for relations with Jewish people.

#### **5. Episcopal engagement with Indigenous traditions**

The Episcopal Church acknowledges that religious diversity includes the practices, beliefs, rituals, and spiritual wisdom of Indigenous peoples. We acknowledge the long-overdue need to address fully and honestly, in all countries in which The Episcopal Church resides, the history of our church’s interaction with Indigenous peoples in the many places where Anglican Christians conducted missionary work. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in North America particularly, as a consequence of missionary efforts, Christians in the Anglican tradition took part in the denigration of Indigenous Americans’ religious and cultural traditions including support for laws that made the practice of such traditions illegal. The Episcopal Church participated in the removal of Native American children to boarding schools that often abused them physically, prohibited them from speaking their native languages, forbade their engagement in their indigenous spiritual practices, and forced them to convert to Christianity. A statement in 2021, by the Presiding Bishop and the President of the House of Deputies acknowledges that history, mourns “the intergenerational trauma that cascades from it,” and

calls for “recognition of wrongdoing, genuine lamentation, authentic apology, true repentance, amendment of life and nurture of right relationships.”<sup>17</sup>

The Doctrine of Discovery—the theological notion informing The Episcopal Church’s relationship with Indigenous peoples during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries—was disavowed in 2009 by means of a General Convention resolution.<sup>18</sup> The way had been paved for such a move when, in 1997, General Convention initiated a Decade of Remembrance, Recognition and Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples—a process of repentance on the part of the church that was renewed in 2007 and 2017, with the intent to do so every ten years. The launch of this initiative was accompanied by concerted attempts to reconcile with Indigenous peoples with regard to the serious harm done to them by Christians.<sup>19</sup> Disavowal of the Doctrine of Discovery was reasserted in 2012 by General Convention, which also directed dioceses and parishes to study and reflect on the impact of that doctrine in their own locations.

The Episcopal Church now endeavors to interact with Indigenous peoples in a manner that respects the integrity of their religious practices and recognizes that some choose to maintain those practices simultaneously with our Episcopal tradition. We also strive to be sensitive to tensions that sometimes exist between Indigenous persons who have adopted the Christian religion and those who have not.

In this time of racial reckoning, it is crucial for Episcopalians to be aware of the racist and colonial history of our church’s dealings with people who are not White and not Christian. Only when our efforts are based upon a genuine desire to engage our interlocutors as teachers and partners whose wisdom and experience will ultimately benefit all of us, will our interreligious efforts further our quest to create Beloved Community.

## **B. Contextualizing Interreligious Work**

Given its institutional presence in at least sixteen countries, the contexts in which The Episcopal Church is found—thus the potential for positive interreligious engagement—vary greatly. Today’s technology enables us to see the earth from space as an orb on which borders and boundaries are fluid, easily fractured, and unstable. The trials of climate change and global pandemic heighten our awareness that the peoples of the earth will either survive together or perish together. At the same time, our entire world is housed inside the flat screens of computers that provide immediate access to almost anyone or anything at anytime, anywhere on the planet. Crises and conflicts that were once local matters and seemed to be none of our concern are now global. Social strife, political upheaval, and violence fueled predominantly by greed or religious fanaticism are never distant from us. Yet, since The Episcopal Church is headquartered in the United States, what happens socio-politically in that context has church-wide implications. Here are three examples.

### **1. Improving understanding of Islam and Muslims**

The impact of the September 2001 attacks on the USA was immediate and profound; its consequences were multinational and interreligious; its influence on interreligious relations is ongoing in all provinces of The Episcopal Church. In its immediate wake, Episcopal efforts to learn more about Islam and Christian-Muslim relations were many: dialogical initiatives, diocesan and parish workshops, seminary course-offerings. During the more than two decades since, political actions exacerbating anti-Muslim bigotry generally have been hurtful to Episcopalians’ Muslim dialogue partners. Churchwide, the need for education about Islam and opportunities for dialogue with Muslims persists.

## **2. Dismantling Racism**

The COVID-19 global pandemic of 2020–2021 underscored our common humanity to an extent rarely seen in the past, victimizing every race, creed, nationality, religion, and socio-economic level, taking a disproportionate toll on people of color and the poor. Meanwhile, in the United States, a series of highly-publicized killings of African Americans at the hands of law enforcement provoked large protests and civil unrest. It also stimulated fresh determination to expose and combat systemic racism within The Episcopal Church itself and to work toward racial justice interreligiously. As a result, The Episcopal Church’s longstanding work of dismantling racism was reaffirmed and reenergized

The process of repentance for the complicity of The Episcopal Church in American society’s systemic racism is long and complex—as is the work towards creating a church free of racism. Indeed, The Episcopal Church’s work on positive interreligious relations will fall short unless the intersection between interreligious understanding and racism is acknowledged. Commitment to eradicating racism within The Episcopal Church and in our larger society includes acknowledging the Church’s role in promoting racism. For example, many Africans and African Americans were hurt by our church’s participation in White supremacist thinking that supported the institution of slavery itself (which included the forcible baptism of some people as part of their enslavement). Additionally, the Church was complicit in the Japanese internment camps in World War II.

In the United States today, as we engage in interreligious encounter with people of the Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Sikh, Jain, Confucian, Afro-Atlantic, and American Indigenous traditions (and many others), we also recognize that the racial discrimination encountered in American culture is intricately entwined with the toxic racial bigotry that our church was complicit in establishing during the eras of slavery and Jim Crow. Structures of White supremacy and White privilege have kept African Americans and other people identified as non-White from enjoying abundance of life. They also impact the lives and experiences of many immigrant communities, both those that are Christian and those of other religious or spiritual traditions. Engagement with immigrant religious communities and interfaith groups in the USA today must be undertaken with the recognition that The Episcopal Church has been part of a system that discriminates against these communities not only because of their religious difference from the American Christian majority, but also because of the legacy of racism, in the form of anti-Blackness. It is not enough merely to engage in interreligious dialogue or encounter with these communities. Episcopalians must also be poised to work with them to overcome the racial bias to which they are subjected.

## **3. White supremacy and Christian Nationalism**

On January 6, 2021, with the COVID-19 pandemic still raging, the United States Capitol building was stormed by armed insurrectionists in an attempt to overrule the outcome of a free and fair presidential election. Some insurrectionists carried crosses; others carried flags bearing the words “Jesus 2020.” Some wore t-shirts and hoodies emblazoned with anti-Jewish slogans. In short, the action was a display of Christian Nationalism: a potent combination of political rhetoric and behavior, racism, anti-Jewish bigotry, and a distorted version of Christian theology based largely upon the foundation of White supremacy.

While, through public rhetoric and other gestures, the insurrectionists made clear their belief that their actions were condoned by God and were necessary in order to reclaim the United States as a “Christian” country, Presiding Bishop Michael Curry firmly repudiated them by

endorsing a statement put forth by the organization *Christians Against Christian Nationalism*, of which The Episcopal Church is a member, saying:

As followers of Jesus, his command to love our neighbors means neighbors of every type, of every faith, not just our own. Through our baptism and in our democracy, we are called to a way of love that creates a community in which the dignity of every human being is recognized and respected, and where all can have an equal say in the governing of our civic life. The violence, intimidation and distortion of scripture associated with “Christian nationalism” does not reflect the person and teachings of Jesus Christ, and so I stand with fellow leaders in the Christian community and call for a better way.<sup>20</sup>

Given Episcopalians’ frequently renewed Baptismal Covenant promise to “seek and serve Christ in all persons,” a “better way” begins with recognizing that bigotry is fed by systemic discrimination in which religion and race are tightly interwoven.

In September 2020, the House of Bishops Theology Committee issued *White Supremacy, Beloved Community and Learning to Listen*—a statement that makes clear the extent to which Anglo-Saxon forebears instantiated White supremacy and a posture of anti-Blackness in American culture. The work of improving interreligious understanding in the twenty-first century goes hand-in-hand with our efforts toward repudiating White supremacy and overcoming racism—including the stanching of anti-Asian, anti-Latino/Latina, and anti-Indigenous behavior. In recognizing the dignity of all people in our interreligious work, we are demonstrating yet another way to speak against racism, while also building relationships spanning both religious and racial lines.

### **C. Continuing the Effort Toward Mutual Flourishing**

Wherever in the world The Episcopal Church is present, four issues—ongoing anti-Jewish bigotry, anti-Muslim bigotry, systemic racism, and unjust treatment of indigenous peoples—inform and complicate interreligious work. Each country in which The Episcopal Church is institutionally present is home to occurrences and issues that are in urgent need of extra scrutiny. It is imperative that Episcopalians in every province name the unique ways those issues manifest in their contexts; acknowledge other factors that may be even more germane in a particular locale; and learn and tell their own stories of interreligious understanding, collaboration, and resilience.

The Baptismal Covenant promise to strive for justice and peace among all people issues to Episcopalians a warrant for the work of cultivating positive interreligious relations as part of the larger mission of creating Beloved Community wherever in the world we find ourselves. Interreligious friendships enable us to learn about and from our neighbors, to make common cause with them for the greater good, and—by experiencing practices beyond our own Christian tradition—to develop a more vibrant understanding of God. Therefore, Episcopalians are encouraged to engage in interreligious relationship-building, information-sharing, community-service, advocacy, and celebration—activities that nurture and sustain mutual understanding, respect, and trust. When adherents of disparate religions stand together in solidarity, they bear witness collectively to the dignity of every human being. Presence becomes a courageous mode of peacemaking in a violent world. The promise to strive for justice requires Episcopalians to support ecumenical and interreligious initiatives that encourage encounter, dialogue, advocacy, and community service. All are imperative for resolving tensions whose root causes may be social, environmental, economic, or political, but to which religious difference may be an exacerbating factor.

## D. Building Beloved Community

For interreligious problem-solving or cultivation of deeper understanding, The Episcopal Church commends *dialogue*—a potentially transformative, formal, structured, conversation, the method for which is dialectical, reciprocal, empathetic, and courteous. Interreligious dialogue fosters the mutuality so necessary for making common cause with regard to peace, social justice, and religious liberty.

When dioceses, congregations, and other organizations of The Episcopal Church—on their own, in partnership with other Christian Churches, or in consultation with other provinces of the Communion— enter into dialogue with people of other religious traditions, they do best when mindful of advice given by the great scholar Krister Stendahl. He taught that, in seeking to understand another religious tradition:

- Take questions about it to its adherents, not to its detractors;
- Compare the best of our own tradition’s beliefs and practices and behavior of its adherents to the *best* of another’s; resist the urge to compare the best in our tradition to the worst in the other’s;
- Leave room for “holy envy”—the possibility of being captivated by some aspect of a tradition not our own, thus delighting in its beauty or wisdom.<sup>21</sup>

Whatever our context, Episcopalians are likely to have neighbors whose backgrounds, beliefs, and practices differ from ours and from whom much can be learned. Opportunities abound for developing creative relationships with people who embrace other religions, yet are searching, as are Episcopalians, for justice, peace and sustainability. The Episcopal Church’s theological and ecclesial heritage offers resources for participating in this interreligious quest. Interreligious companionship and collaboration is integral to God’s mission. Episcopalians prepare for it by fulfilling the Baptismal Covenant promise to “continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers.”

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<sup>1</sup> See Mark 12:29–31; Book of Common Prayer (1979): Catechism, 851.

<sup>2</sup> Book of Common Prayer (1979), 305.

<sup>3</sup> This section draws upon portions of Lucinda Allen Mosher, *Toward Our Mutual Flourishing: The Episcopal Church, Interreligious Relations, and Theologies of Religious Manyness* (New York: Peter Lang, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> M. K. Gandhi, “Crime of Reading the Bible: 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1926” in *Young India 1924–1926* by Mahatma Gandhi (Madras: S. Ganesan, 1927), 1172–74 at 1173.

<sup>5</sup> “Neighbor-love” is foundational to several Episcopal Church interreligious relations documents. *Guidelines for Christian-Jewish Relations* (1988) addresses hatred and persecution of Jews. In *Principles for Interfaith Dialogue* (1994), neighbor-love informs the directive to “approach others with the same kind of respect we would wish to be accorded.” It is developed even more in *Renewing Our Pledge* (2008), which responds to a Muslim call for dialogue, and also in the *Theological Statement on Interreligious Relations* (2009). For analyses of these documents, see Mosher, *Toward Our Mutual Flourishing*. 48–55, 19–22, 79–84, 97–107; for full texts of each document, see Appendix therein.

The relation between the command not to bear false witness and interreligious matters is prominent in The Episcopal Church’s efforts to address anti-Judaism. It is latent in the fact that, in the statements most directly related to Islam and Muslims, we find no hint of the anti-Muslim rhetoric so prominent in certain streams of US and European culture during the first decades of the twenty-first century. See the *Preface to Guidelines for Christian-Jewish Relations* (1988) and *Renewing Our Pledge* (2008)—the response of the Episcopal Church to the Muslim initiative *A Common Word*.

<sup>6</sup> Urban T. Holmes, *What Is Anglicanism?* (Wilton, Connecticut: Morehouse-Barlow, 1982), 28.

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<sup>7</sup> See Paul Knitter, “What about Them? Christians and Non-Christians,” in *Essentials of Christian Theology*, ed. William C. Placher (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 317.

<sup>8</sup> See particularly, the NCCC policy statement *Interfaith Relations and the Churches* (1999), and the Episcopal Church’s mission vision statement *Companions in Transformation* (2003).  
[http://www.tituspresler.com/global\\_mission/companions/CompanionsInTransformation-Text.pdf](http://www.tituspresler.com/global_mission/companions/CompanionsInTransformation-Text.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> See the *Theological Statement* (2009), the *NCCC Policy Statement* (1999), and *On Waging Reconciliation* (2001). For analyses of these documents, see Mosher, *Toward Our Mutual Flourishing*, 97–106, 30–37, and 73–79, respectively; see also integrative analysis on p.125 therein.

<sup>10</sup> Reconciliation is a notion foundational to the *Guidelines for Christian-Jewish Relations* (1988). The *NCCC Policy Statement* (1999), which is affirmed by The Episcopal Church, devotes paragraphs 31–35 to it, asserting: “Through Jesus Christ, Christians believe God offers reconciliation to all.”

<sup>11</sup> See Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *Divinity & Diversity: A Christian Affirmation of Religious Pluralism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 69. See also Dwight J. Zscheile, *People of the Way: Renewing Episcopal Identity* (New York: Morehouse, 2012), 46.

<sup>12</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace* (Berkeley, California: Parallax Press, 1987), 87.

<sup>13</sup> Dwight J. Zscheile, “Beyond Benevolence: Toward a Reframing of Mission in the Episcopal Church,” *Journal of Anglican Studies* 8, no. 1 (2009): 100.

<sup>14</sup> The year 2008 also saw the release of two other significant interreligious relations documents: “A Common Word for the Common Good”—the official reply of Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, to “A Common Word Between Us and You,” a pan-Muslim call for dialogue with Christians promulgated in October 2007; and “Relations with Other World Religions” (Section F of the 2008 Lambeth Conference Indaba Reflections).

<sup>15</sup> See Hugh Goddard, *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations*, second edition (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020); Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain 1558–1685* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Nabil Matar, *Turks, Moors, & Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

<sup>16</sup> General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of ...the Episcopal Church, Philadelphia, 1997* (New York: General Convention, 1998), p. 769; General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of ...The Episcopal Church, Minneapolis, 2003* (New York: General Convention, 2004), p. 477f.

<sup>17</sup> Statement on Indigenous boarding schools by Presiding Bishop Michael Curry and President of the House of Deputies, Gay Clark Jennings (July 12, 2021),

<sup>18</sup> General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Anaheim, 2009* (New York: General Convention, 2009), 371–72.

<sup>19</sup> General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of ...The Episcopal Church, Philadelphia, 1997*, (New York: General Convention), 87.

<sup>20</sup> For full text, see [www.christiansagainstchristiannationalism.org](http://www.christiansagainstchristiannationalism.org).

<sup>21</sup> For an account of the origins of Krister Stendahl’s three rules, see Barbara Brown Taylor, *Holy Envy: Finding God in the Faith of Others* (New York: HarperOne, 2019), 64–66.