

## **COMMON MISSION TASK FORCE**

### **Les Alvis**

After the sale of its building in Tupelo in the summer of 2016, the members of Christ the King Evangelical Lutheran Church approached All Saints' concerning how the survival of Christ the King might be facilitated at All Saints'. After some experimentation with sharing a common budget and utilizing the liturgy from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* once or twice, it was realized by both All Saints' and Christ the King that the relationship between the two needed clarification and further definition.

To respond to that need, the Vestry of All Saints' and the Council of Christ the King created the Common Mission Task Force to study the relationship and to make recommendations to the Vestry and the Council concerning a path forward. The Task Force took its name from a document authored in 2001 by the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCA) and The Episcopal Church entitled *Called to Common Mission*, by which the two denominations entered into a relationship of full communion, with each recognizing the membership, sacraments and clergy of the other as an expression of visible unity for the sake of living and sharing the gospel. The principles of *Called to Common Mission*, together with consideration of other Episcopal-Lutheran relationships in other parts of the country, guided the work of the Task Force.

In May 2017 the Task Force made a comprehensive set of recommendations to the All Saints' Vestry and to the Christ the King Council as to how the relationship between the two might be clarified and improved. The Task Force's recommendations were approved by the Vestry and the Council. The recommendations covered six main concepts:

1. All Saints' serves as host for Christ the King in worship, in programs, and in outreach, but All Saints' and Christ the King remain separate church entities, with All Saints' governed by its Vestry and Christ the King governed by its Council. Members of Christ the King do not have vote at any All Saints' parish meetings, and members of All Saints' do not have vote at any Christ the King congregational meetings.
2. Notwithstanding this separate church structure, some functions between the two churches are shared. A member of Christ the King (Michelle Hester) has been appointed to have voice, but not vote, at All Saints' Vestry meetings, and a member of All Saints' (Rufus Van Horn) has been appointed to have voice, but not vote, at Christ the King Council meetings. With a few exceptions, members of All Saints' and Christ the King are eligible for membership on each other's committees.
3. Communications such as the newsletter, Sunday service bulletins, email and the web site continue principally in All Saints' name but are now accompanied by recognition of All Saints' common mission with Christ the King. Christ the King continues to have space in each monthly newsletter, and it is anticipated that Christ the King web pages will be hosted on All Saints' web site.

4. All Saints' and Christ the King worship together at All Saints' on Sunday mornings and on other occasions. This worship is generally according to All Saints' usual custom and liturgy from *The Book of Common Prayer* and the Episcopal hymnal. But once a month, alternating between the 10:45 and 8:30 services, All Saints' and Christ the King's mutual worship is according to the liturgy from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. Presently *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* is used for Sunday worship at All Saints' once every two months at the 10:45 service with music, and once every two months at the 8:30 service without music.

5. It is anticipated that when he or she arrives, All Saints' new rector will serve simultaneously as rector of All Saints' and as pastor of Christ the King under the shared clergy arrangements adopted by The Episcopal Church and the ELCA under *Called to Common Mission*.

6. Because All Saints' and Christ the King remain separate church entities, their respective property remains separate as well. But All Saints' and Christ the King continue to share a joint operating budget, and Christ the King members continue to pledge and give to the joint operating budget as they did in 2017. Because the operating budget is shared, a member of Christ the King serves on the All Saints' budget committee. All Saints' administers the budget and All Saints' employees serve both congregations.

The parish survey undertaken by the All Saints' Search Committee indicated good support for these recommendations. Of those responding, 72% supported further development of the relationship between All Saints' and Christ the King, and 85% indicated openness to use of the Lutheran liturgy on some periodic basis. However, the work done by the Task Force remains only recommendations. Implementation of the recommendations is a work in process, and they will be adjusted as needed as All Saints' and Christ the King gain experience with and learn from them. It is also anticipated that after the new rector arrives, the recommendations, as adjusted, will be expressed in a more formal document subject to the approval of the Episcopal and ELCA bishops.

The full text of the recommendations, including a summary, questions and answers, and links to materials on which the Task Force relied, are posted on the home page of All Saints' web site. While there are other examples of such relationships elsewhere in the United States, the recommendations and their implementation by All Saints' and Christ the King represent something innovative and unique in Mississippi.

Members of the Task Force from All Saints' were Les Alvis, Ken Murphree, Cathy Sparks and Rufus Van Horn. Members from Christ the King were Michelle Hester, Toni Hill, Corey Jackson and Flo Poplin.