

**CHRIST THE KING  
LUTHERAN CHURCH, ELCA  
Michelle Hester**

When Christ the King's leadership approached All Saints' almost seven years ago, we came simply to inquire about renting space so that we could continue holding services after we were forced to sell our church property. Since we had a long-shared history of working with All Saints' on vacation bible school, Blessing of the Animals and cross-clergy support, it seemed like the logical place for us to turn. At best we hoped to share programming such as Sunday school, VBS, and support All Saints' outreach programs, while independently continuing to offer regular Lutheran worship services for our members. Imagine our surprise and joy when Father Paul Stephens suggested a partnership between our congregations rather than a tenant/landlord arrangement! Christ the King would worship with All Saints', but also have services each month in the chapel. We would be able to retain our status as a congregation of the ELCA and regroup with hope for the future. The Southeastern Synod of the ELCA and the Mississippi Diocese agreed to begin a dialogue to establish a formal agreement of our arrangement.

Unfortunately, just as this work began, Father Paul left All Saints' to become the Canon to the Ordinary for the Mississippi Diocese. Even worse, Father Paul's departure left many unanswered questions regarding the path forward in this partnership, which led to justified feelings of frustration, anger, and confusion for many All Saints' parishioners. No one appreciates feeling forced to accommodate a change for which they were not adequately prepared. Thankfully leaders from both congregations were able to sit down with each other, and work out an agreement that clearly defined our expectations and hopes for our call to common mission. Following those guidelines, our congregations have worked and worshipped together successfully ever since.

Christ the King's congregation recognizes and truly appreciates what it cost All Saints' to open its doors to include us as partners in your worship and faith lives. Our identities as separate denominations were important to both congregations, so partnering forced us to accept changes which were not easy - hopefully worthwhile and educational - but definitely not easy. While Christ the King was the obvious "winner" in our partnership as the recipient of All Saints' gifts of accommodation, support, sanctuary, and ultimately friendship, the members of Christ the King hope that we have repaid this kindness by sharing our time, talents and treasure, small though they may be, with All Saints'.

When Christ the King came to All Saints' in 2016, we had 25 active members. Our hope was to grow over time and evolve into a more equal partner, but with the lengthy pastoral vacancy followed by the pandemic, that was not to be. We recognize that it is neither fair nor reasonable for All Saints' to continue accommodating our few remaining members. We are no longer a viable congregation or partner to All Saints', so with great sadness we announce the closure of Christ the King as a congregation of the ELCA in early 2023.

We are grateful for your gift of grace that allowed us to continue to serve as a congregation for the last seven years. We could not have done it without your support. Thank you.