

## **RESOLUTION 2022 – 08**

### **RESOLUTION to the 2022 ANNUAL CONFERENCE SESSION Relating to Discernment Process for EPA Churches**

**WHEREAS**, the Eastern PA Conference is committed to forwarding the mission of EPA to create disciples, celebrate diversity, connect communities and commit to love and justice, and,

**WHEREAS**, EPA leadership seeks to assist congregations to discern their purpose and path; and,

**WHEREAS**, current challenges, including the shifting cultural views of faith and organized religion, racism, concerns of congregations disaffiliating from The United Methodist Church, emerging from the pandemic and a host of individual congregational challenges calls the church to discern what does God have next for the congregations and mission of EPA; and,

**WHEREAS**, EPA, based in its commitment to the mission, is resourcing all EPA congregations willing and ready to deepen faith, develop leadership, grow congregational vitality, and end the sins of racism, sexism and exclusion, and,

**WHEREAS** some of these key initiatives and resources include:

- Growing a vital mission congregation – *training, planning and coaching to develop and carry out a plan to grow any one or more of the following: worship, small groups, mission engagement, new disciples and generosity.*
- Sustainability – *understanding your congregation’s sustainability and how to strengthen your congregation’s long-term sustainability.*
- A Path Towards Wholeness Training and Planning – *learning, understanding and growing to end the sin of racism.*
- Re-Envisioning Space/Property Development – *assessing your property for future mission (building expansion, turning space into community ministry, selling property).*
- Conflict Resolution – *a facilitated process for congregations experiencing conflict about direction, mission, leadership or programing.*
- Connectional Relationship – *a facilitated process for congregations discerning their connectional relationship with The United Methodist Church and Eastern Pennsylvania Conference*

And,

**WHEREAS**, this is a time of missional focus for EPA to recruit and develop transformational leaders to make disciples and grow missional vital congregations for the transformation of the world, and,

**WHEREAS**, discernment is a spiritual practice, calling us to seek God’s wisdom for our future knowing all things work together for good for those who love God and who are called for the purposes of God. - Romans 8:28; and,

**WHEREAS**, EPA proclaims as one of its core values that Christ is the source of our faith, hope and unity.

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that EPA recommits to its mission and strategic priorities, goals, and resourcing strategies to recruit and equip transformational leaders that make disciples and grow vital congregations for the transformation of the world;

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that information regarding each pathway will be shared with congregational leadership; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that EPA set the next year as a time of discernment and renewal for congregations to explore God's calling for their future ministry.

Presented by: Rev. Bumkoo Chung, Dean of the Cabinet and Ms. Lenora Thompson, Chair, Connectional Table

## Information Only:

### ***PATHWAYS FOR EPA CHURCHES***

We would like to introduce Pathways to Congregational Development. Pathways offers congregations an intentional process to prepare, assess, learn and grow in your understanding of what it means to be a healthy, fruitful congregation post-COVID-19. Pathways offers the tools to create a plan that provides clarity and focus to take the next faithful steps in ministry and mobilize leaders and disciples to world-changing discipleship and ministry. Pathways builds on the work your congregation has already done and offers new directions for being connected and engaged in mission and ministry.

EPA wants your congregation to have a great future. Pathways is a tool to discern God's calling and plan for your congregation. People in your community need to experience God's healing love. Vital congregations connected and engaged missionally with the people in the community are bearers of God's love as experienced through the life of Jesus Christ. The following resource will help you get there, and along the way will carry your congregation toward becoming more sustainable, vital and culturally competent.

Pathways is not another program, instead this is a process for a congregation. Your journey will be supported by a facilitator to have deep, meaningful conversations about their current mission and ministry. We invite each EPA congregation to discern the Pathway that is right for you in this season. We offer the following Pathways here in EPA. You will be invited to select one Pathway by July 2022 and begin your journey on that Pathway by September 2022.

#### **EPA PATHWAYS 2022-2023**

- I. **Growing a vital mission congregation** – training, planning and coaching to develop and carry out a plan to grow any one or more of the following: worship, small groups, mission engagement, new disciples and generosity.
- II. **Sustainability** – understanding your congregation's sustainability and how to strengthen your sustainability.
- III. **A Path Towards Wholeness Training and Planning** – learning, understanding and growing to end the sin of racism.
- IV. **Re-Envisioning Space/Property Development** – assessing your property for future mission (building expansion, turning space into community ministry, selling property).
- V. **Conflict Resolution** – a facilitated process for congregations experiencing conflict about direction, mission, leadership or programing.
- VI. **Connectional Relationship** – a facilitated process for congregations discerning their connectional relationship with The United Methodist Church and Eastern Pennsylvania Conference

## **PATHWAY I: Growing a Vital Mission congregation**

**I. Growing a vital mission congregation** – *training, planning and coaching to develop and carry out a plan to grow any one or more of the following: worship, small groups, mission engagement, new disciples and generosity.*

### **EPA Purpose**

Recruit and develop transformational leaders to make disciples and grow vital, missional congregations for the transformation of the world.

### **Vital Mission Congregations**

Holy Spirit-led communities of passionate disciples who are working together to grow new disciples, inspiring worship, active small groups, risk taking community mission, and generous giving to mission. (Acts 2:42-47)

### **A vital congregation has:**

- Inviting and inspiring worship
- Engaged disciples in mission and outreach
- Gifted, equipped and inspired lay leadership
- Effective, equipped and inspired clergy leadership
- Small groups and strong children's programs and youth ministry

**Vital congregations are led by and made up of vital disciples.** These are some marks of vital disciples:

- Disciples worship
- Disciples make new disciples
- Disciples engage in growing their faith
- Disciples engage in mission
- Disciples give to mission

Through the **Vital Congregation Pathway**, EPA Congregations will work with a facilitator to develop one or more of the vital congregation markers. EPA congregations will be invited to assess their current gifts and the gifts within the wider community. Congregations will develop and implement their action plan focused on one or more of the vital congregation markers.

## PATHWAY II: Sustainability

**II. Sustainability** – *understanding your congregation’s sustainability and how to strengthen your sustainability.*

A United Methodist congregation is a part of a worldwide movement, and each congregation is the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27). The congregation exists for the purposes of God by being the body of Christ, the embodiment of the teachings and life of Jesus demonstrated through disciples actively witnessing to and serving others.

The congregation is rooted in the mission field to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world through vital congregations (Acts 2:41-47) who:

- Gather disciples to **worship** God by planning and leading regular worship services that connect with people in the community and inspire people to follow Jesus Christ.
- Organize disciples into **small groups** to form, nurture and shape disciples of Jesus Christ to live and account for a Christ-like life in the world.
- Develop disciples into **witnesses** who by their life and testimony lovingly attract others to become disciples of Jesus Christ.
- Send disciples to engage in **mission** locally and globally to do justice and mercy ministries.
- Inspire disciples to **give** generously to the mission of the church.

EPA develops lay and clergy leadership to develop congregations and engage disciples in service to the world. Many of our congregations, congregational leaders and pastors have engaged in the resourcing of EPA and are growing the mission, developing skills as leaders and increasing congregational vitality. We praise God for the growth of our mission, leaders and congregations. We also recognize that current challenges impact congregational sustainability. While many congregations are thriving, other congregations are declining and struggling. There is no one reason. Congregations become at-risk because of cultural shifts, congregational crisis, internal church conflict, difficulty in adapting to new forms of not being able to connect with people in the community, or combinations of these, and many other reasons

EPA has three urgent challenges that threaten our mission and the health of all our congregations. They require immediate attention and action.

1. Financial Concerns
2. Declining Congregations
3. Liability Issues

### **Financial Concerns**

When finances become the driver of ministry, the long-term sustainability of a congregation is in question. Through the **Sustainability Pathway** congregations will look closely at future sustainability and other options to consider for increase financial sustainability.

### **Declining Congregations**

Small churches are a gift to many communities. They provide an intimate worship experience and a place where people feel at home and useful to the mission of the church. The difficulty is

when congregations become so small that they are no longer able to have a robust mission in the community, meet financial and administrative obligations and attract new people.

As congregations have become smaller, we see:

**Fewer new disciples:** 273 congregations failed to make one new disciple in the most recent statistical year and many struggle to carry out basic ministry: These congregations may not raise enough money to sustain basic levels of mission, ministry and operations.

**Deferred building maintenance:** Disrepair of church property creates greater liability for all our congregations.

**Lack of administration and accountability:** Congregations are failing to carry out in a timely manner administrative responsibility (Safe Sanctuary policy, charge conference and statistical reporting, clergy and congregational evaluations, etc.).

**Liability Issues:** The inability to administer basic ministries and operations in our churches place the entire conference at great risk of causing harm to people. As United Methodists we follow John Wesley's rule to "do no harm." Deferred maintenance and lack of administration can lead to liability concerns.

The **Sustainability Pathway** supports churches who are willing to look closely at the health and vitality of their congregation and their mission to determine an appropriate path forward for the congregation. In the Sustainability Pathway, the Sustainability Team will work with the local church on how to strengthen current sustainability. Through prayer, focus groups, community demographics assessments & congregation self-assessments, the facilitator will support the church in developing an action plan.

### **PATHWAY III: *A Path Towards Wholeness***

#### **III. A Path Towards Wholeness Training and Planning – *learning, understanding and growing to end the sin of racism.***

Eastern PA Conference has three focused goals as a conference: new disciples; transformational leaders and fruitful vital congregations that work to transform the world. We believe these goals will only happen when EPA churches engage in community ministry by developing ministries and partnering with others in action and service that transforms lives and conditions particularly in the areas of ending the sin of racism and oppression and engaging in ministry with the poor.

#### **Who are disciples of Jesus Christ working to end racism?**

A disciple is a follower of Jesus Christ who intentionally serves others and engages in life-long learning. Disciples of Jesus Christ follow Jesus' call to “make disciples of all nations” and as they engage in this multiplication effort, disciples intentionally seek to end the sin of racism in our churches and communities.

#### **Who are transformational leaders working to end the sin of racism?**

Grounded in faith, these proactive innovators leverage spiritual gifts, culture & resources to empower teams, navigate change and accelerate growth to cultivate God’s preferred future. Transformational leaders empower and equip others to end the sin of racism in our churches and communities.

#### **What is a Fruitful, vital congregation that works to end the sin of racism?**

Fruitful, vital congregations follow the Acts 2:42-27 mandate in order to 1) welcome all people as they are, 2) Engage in hands-on mission in their communities, 3) Create inspiring and uplifting worship experiences, 4) Train people to share their faith with others and invite others into the life of the church, 5) Provide small groups for learning and discipleship. Vital Wesleyan congregations are congregations that intentionally work to end the sin of racism in the life of the church and the wider community.

Through ***A Path Towards Wholeness Pathway***, 90 congregations will be invited to develop a Dismantling Racism Plan in their local context. Beginning with an anti-racism audit congregations will assess their current work and then develop a plan to build on intercultural competence for members and the wider community. Thirty (30) trained EPA facilitators will actively engaged with 90 congregations that are developing a Dismantling Racism Plan in their local context (Assigned to DCM/Commission on Religion and Race)

## **PATHWAY IV: Re-envisioning Space/Property Development**

**IV. Re-envisioning Space/Property Development** – assessing your property for future mission (building expansion, turning space into community ministry, selling property).

The United Methodist Church began as a movement, often meeting in homes and community centers. Through the years, we have been blessed with many properties, including churches, parsonages, fellowship halls, land and cemeteries. Some of these properties now house closed churches and currently sit vacant. Others are historic facilities that are in disrepair. Still others are underused and yet sit in the midst of communities in desperate need for the love of Christ. Through the **Re-envisioning Space/Property Development Pathway**, EPA wants to work with congregations that are discerning new ways to be stewards of their most valuable financial resources to expand mission and make disciples to transform the world.

Some of our churches may want to consider repurposing their underused property for expanded mission. For example, The Garden Church in Landsowne, PA discerned that the need in the community was for senior housing. Through a bold God-sized vision, the church demolished their sanctuary and worked with an anchor partner, Simpson Senior Services, to build an assisted living facility with the new sanctuary housed inside the facility.

Property repurposing for expanded mission can be simple or complex depending on the needs of the community. Other reasons for repurposing include: vacancies due to building damages in excess of the current structures' value, unoccupied buildings resulting from mergers, and buildings that would better serve mission in a changing community in different ways (including more cost effective, sustainable use)

The **Re-Envisioning Space/Property Development Pathway** is for churches considering building expansion, turning space into community ministry or selling property. Outside consultants may be used in this process.



## **PATHWAY V: Conflict Resolution**

**V. Conflict Resolution** – *a facilitated process for congregations experiencing conflict about direction, mission, leadership or programming.*

Every congregation experiences conflict as a part of normal, healthy growth and change. These periods of conflict can be difficult for individuals and congregations. The United Methodist Church of Eastern Pennsylvania recommends a process to move congregations to resolution and growth. If your church is experiencing conflict regarding direction, mission, leadership or programming, the **Conflict Resolution Pathway** will guide you through a facilitated process.

### **Biblical & Theological Foundation**

*Then Peter came and said to Him, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.”* – Matthew 18: 21-22

Both the Old and New Testaments are filled with stories about conflict between individuals, within groups, between cultures and, yes, even between God and humanity.

Conflict can be a catalyst for renewal, health and change and serve as a mechanism for growth. At other times, however, conflict can be destructive and cause serious dissension. A clear and healthy process for working through conflict empowers a congregation to move forward in the midst of the challenges and increase faithfulness and fruitfulness.

Healthy relationships include communicating honestly, reconciling willingly, and sharing and receiving forgiveness. We honor God when we work to resolve differences, offer forgiveness and reconcile differences within the congregation.

Growing our congregations beyond conflict requires intentionality, hearts for forgiveness and well-trained Staff-Parish Relations Committees (SPRC) and church leaders. We are committed to equipping leaders to lead through conflict.

### **Three Steps for Resolving Conflict**

#### **1. COMMUNICATE**

*If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one.* – Matthew 18:15

Begin with prayer for yourself and the people in conflict. Invite God to share wisdom, enable understanding and open communication that resolves differences.

If you have a concern about an action of a pastor, staff member, or parishioner, attempt to work it out directly with the person. Speak to each other face-to-face. Explain how you are affected and provide an opportunity for reconciliation. You are encouraged to start the conversation by saying – “I experienced (describe what you felt or experienced) when you (describe the action of the individual) and I would like to resolve our differences.”

## 2. COMPANIONS

*But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. – Matthew 18:16*

If your concern is not reasonably resolved by direct communication, speak to a member of the SPRC and ask for help to resolve your concern. The SPRC may take one of several actions:

- Ask a member of the committee to mediate a conversation between the people in conflict.
- Have those with concerns meet with the full SPRC and pastor so that they may hear the concerns identified.
- Connect with an outside resource person if there does not appear to be a path forward to address the concerns. If the conflict involves the pastor, contact the superintendent first.
- SPRCs are encouraged to participate in conference training on conflict resolution and to seek consultation about mediating conversations.

## 3. COUNCIL

*If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. – Matthew 18:17*

If you do not believe that the SPRC has adequately addressed the concern or believe that the SPRC has not acted objectively, you may ask the SPRC chairperson to contact the superintendent. The superintendent will further review the concerns and determine if additional steps are warranted.

When the conflict arises because of an allegation of sexual misconduct, sexual harassment or sexual abuse, the SPRC chairperson or the pastor should contact the district superintendent immediately (within eight hours) so that the Sexual Misconduct Policy is implemented.

If your church is experiencing conflict regarding direction, mission, leadership or programming, the **Conflict Resolution Pathway** will guide you through a facilitated process.

### **MISSIONAL PATHWAYS FOR EPA CHURCHES**

We invite your congregation to enter into discernment regarding the Pathway for your church to take in this season. Through an online system provided by your District Office, we will invite each EPA congregation to choose a pathway by July 1, 2022. For congregations seeking to engage more than 1 Pathway, we ask that you choose one Pathway for the first cycle. We will continue to offer cycles of each program through 2023. Congregations will be paired with facilitators through the summer, with Pathway sessions to begin in September 2022. If you have questions or need further information about the Pathway program, please reach out to the Director of Connectional Ministries, Rev. Dawn Taylor-Storm at [dtaylorstorm@epaumc.church](mailto:dtaylorstorm@epaumc.church).

## PATHWAY VI: Connectional Relationship

### **VI. Connectional Relationship** – *a facilitated process for congregations discerning their connectional relationship with The United Methodist Church and Eastern Pennsylvania Conference*

EPA will inform any congregation seeking to disaffiliate, with regards to ministry and leadership with and by LGBTQ persons in the life and ministry of the church, that it will utilize the principles, values and process set forth in paragraph 2553 of the Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church related to congregations considering a change in relationship to the UMC and EPA, and the several Judicial Council rulings including but not limited to 1379, 1420, 1421, 1422, 1423, 1424 and 1425 concerning separation from the UMC, as follows:

- I. Cabinet develop and carry out an up to 6-month discernment process with any church considering a change of relationship with The United Methodist Church (Judicial Council Ruling 1423),

The discernment process will include:

- A. Engaging in Theological and biblical study of the church as the body of Christ and how in the discernment process the congregation will be in conversation and discernment as the body of Christ.
  - B. Reviewing and discussing the history, mission and ministry of The United Methodist Church, connectionalism; Wesleyan quadrilateral.
  - C. Discerning: What are your hopes for The United Methodist Church and EPA, and what do you desire will be changed for The United Methodist Church of EPA?
  - D. Discerning: How will EPA welcome, resource and support all congregations and its people regard regardless of understandings, beliefs and theology.
  - E. Considering what are ways EPA can address your concerns?
  - F. Brainstorming and discussing: What are the pros and cons of belonging to a denomination?
  - G. Identifying and discussing the issues and concerns that have given rise to the congregation's question: should we disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church of EPA?
  - H. Identifying and discussing the pros and cons of disaffiliation from The United Methodist Church of EPA.
  - I. Discerning: What are the estimated payments required to disaffiliate? (Estimated costs will change).
- II. As part of the discernment process, a Church Conference (s) is held to vote on disaffiliation. A 2/3's approval vote of those professing members present and voting is required to disaffiliate (BOD Paragraph 2553 and Judicial Council Ruling 1379).
  - III. Connectional Covenant – if the congregation votes to disaffiliate by 2/3's or more, a connectional covenant will be created with the cabinet for the period up, to, and through disaffiliation. This connectional covenant will guide the congregation through

the covenanting process about (A) ministries that may be continued to be shared with EPA and (B) communication during the disaffiliation period.

IV. Congregation Due Diligence

If a local church votes by at least a two-thirds (2/3) of the professing members present at a church conference of Local Church to disaffiliate, then:

- A. The church conference secretary notifies the President of the Conference Board of Trustees in writing of the outcome of the church conference. The notice must include in and with it:
  1. The time, date and location of the vote;
  2. The method that notice was provided to church members;
  3. The minutes and exact motion presented and voted on recorded by the church conference secretary that satisfies the requirements as set forth in ¶2553 and authorizes the church body who has authority to approve the disaffiliation agreement (after set by the Conference Board of Trustees).
  4. The number and names of church members in attendance.
  5. How voting eligibility was verified and ballots were controlled;
  6. The number of votes in favor and opposed to disaffiliation; and abstentions, if any; and
  7. Final signed minutes of the meeting.
- B. The Conference Board of Trustees begins to gather information needed to create a Disaffiliation Agreement.
  1. The board of trustees seek the advice of annual conference:
    - a) Cabinet;
    - b) The Conference Treasurer;
    - c) The Benefits Officer;
    - d) The Director of Connectional Ministries; and
    - e) The Chancellor
  2. The Conference Board of Trustees make a formal request to local church for:
    - a) Currently operative Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws;
    - b) The names and contact information of all current trustees, officers, and other fiduciaries of the church.
    - c) For all Real Property
      - (1) Copies of deeds;
      - (2) Copies of mortgages and other liens;
      - (3) Title search; and

- (4) Appraisal performed by an appraiser certified by the Pennsylvania State Board of Certified Real Estate Appraisers
    - d) Financial information for the past 3 years, including:
      - (1) Balance sheets;
      - (2) Profit and Loss statements;
      - (3) All monthly or quarterly bank and investment account statements; (d) Statements for all mortgages and other loans;
      - (4) Audit reports;
    - e) In the event that the local church has any endowments, trusts, memorials or restricted funds, a copy of all underlying trust documents, contracts, or wills that restrict the use of such funds; and
    - f) If there is a related entity, such as a cemetery, preschool, please also provide items a) – e), above, for such entity.
    - g) Requests for additional information are made as needed.
  - C. local church provides all requested items to the Conference Board of Trustees in a timely manner.
- V. The Disaffiliation Agreement terms and conditions are set by the Conference Board of Trustees of the Annual Conference (§2553.4)
- A. A binding disaffiliation agreement is created which includes the effective date of disaffiliation and in which the terms and conditions between the annual conference and the local church trustees are established in writing.
  - B. The Standard form for Disaffiliation Agreements created by GCFA provides the foundation for the terms and conditions. NOTE: This is only a model. Additional terms may be added that are not inconsistent with the GCFA standard form. (§2553.4(a)).
- VI. The authorized local church governing body (Church Board of Trustees/Administrative Council) votes to accept the terms of the established Disaffiliation Agreement. It is then signed by the local church pastor and the chair of the local Church Board of Trustees.
- VII. Annual Conference at its regular session votes to either accept or reject the Disaffiliation Agreement as written, signed and submitted. Next step depends on outcome of annual conference vote.
- A. Less than majority approval. Process ceases.
  - B. Majority approval or greater. Process continues.
    - 1. Local church has until established disaffiliation date to meet the terms of the agreement.
    - 2. Failure to meet the terms of the agreement voids the agreement

EPA will communicate to any congregation seeking to disaffiliate that it must pay for and complete all items in the disaffiliation agreement by the effective date set in such agreement. The disaffiliation date may be not later than December 31, 2023.

#### **CONNECTIONAL PATHWAY FOR EPA CHURCHES**

Congregations that want to explore the Connectional Pathway should notify Director of Connectional Ministries, Rev. Dawn Taylor-Storm at [dtaylorstorm@epaumc.church](mailto:dtaylorstorm@epaumc.church) by July 1, 2022.