

*In John 17:20 Jesus prays: "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one."*

## Christian Unity and ecumenism are key to being United Methodist in Indiana

In The United Methodist Church episcopal leaders are called to lead the denomination in ecumenical and interreligious ministry. Paragraph 403.1e of The United Methodist Book of Discipline states that bishops lead through several important disciplines, one of which is "a passion for the unity of the church." The paragraph clarifies: "The role of the bishop is to be the shepherd of the whole flock and thereby provide leadership toward the goal of understanding, reconciliation and unity within the Church – The United Methodist Church and the church universal."

It is not exclusively the role of the bishop, however, to lead in ecumenical and interreligious witness. In our denomination it is the responsibility of every lay person, every clergy person, every group and agency to be in ministry, and one of the foundations of our ministerial witness is that of ecumenical and interreligious relationships.

### **Local Ecumenical and Interreligious Involvement**

There are many different ways for leaders in The United Methodist Church to encourage ecumenical and Interreligious engagement. Locally, there are often several options. If none of the following exists, however, United Methodist clergy and laity are encouraged to start unity movements. Some ideas to consider include the following:

**Church to Church Connection:** Both laity and clergy can be intentionally involved in Christian unity and interreligious relationships in their contexts and neighborhoods. United Methodists can be catalysts for community mercy and justice ministries; shared worship services; joint Bible studies; visits to each other's houses of worship; and disaster response ministries. A local pastor or lay leader can get started by simply reaching out to someone in another faith community and asking if they might study together or be in ministry together in some way needed in the area.

**Local Conciliar Bodies:** The United Methodist Church participates fully in several councils and relationship-building organizations. Many of these groups find expression within the areas of our annual conferences and districts. Pastors and lay people can look in their area for ministerial associations, ecumenical or interfaith covenant groups, study groups, councils of churches, and interfaith communities.

In the Indiana Conference, we have a Christian Unity Team comprised of a Conference Coordinator of Christian Unity as well as ten District Coordinators of Christian Unity. They work with Bishop Trimble and the Conference Superintendents to assist districts and local churches in their ecumenical outreach to the communities in which they are present. The resources presented here hopefully will assist our pastors and congregations in reaching out in ecumenical ways in their communities.

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