

Hope Episcopal Church: Policy of Reconciliation

I. Introduction: Reconciliation as the Heart of Our Faith

At Hope Episcopal Church, we believe that reconciliation is not a peripheral aspect of Christian life but its very core. Rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, reconciliation encompasses the healing of broken relationships—between individuals, communities, creation, and God. It is a lifelong journey of transformation, where we continually seek to reflect the peace, justice, and unity that Jesus Christ exemplified.

Paul writes, “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18). Reconciliation is not a task for one committee or a few people, but a calling for every Christian. As such, the work of reconciliation should be central to the ministry of every member, every committee, and every leader in the church. The ministry of reconciliation is the ministry of the Church of Jesus Christ and should inform all we do as a community of faith.

This policy outlines the theological foundations, spiritual practices, and practical steps that guide us as we pursue reconciliation in all aspects of our church life. It is an invitation for each of us to engage more deeply in this holy work.

II. Theological Foundations: Reconciliation as Our Christian Vocation

Theologically, reconciliation is woven throughout the narrative of scripture. God’s desire for reconciliation is expressed from the covenant with Abraham to the prophetic calls for justice, and from the ministry of Jesus to the early church’s efforts to break down barriers between Jew and Gentile, slave and free.

Reconciliation with God, One Another, and Creation

Reconciliation begins with God. Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we have been reconciled to God. But this gift of grace compels us to extend that reconciliation to others. Jesus broke down the walls of hostility between groups, calling all people to live in peace and unity. Our calling as a church is to embody this message of reconciliation in every aspect of our lives.

Reconciliation is not just about mending individual relationships; it is about systemic restoration. As Christians, we are called to engage in the work of justice, addressing the root causes of division—whether they be racial injustice, environmental degradation, or economic inequality. Our efforts to reconcile with creation, as stewards of God’s world, are essential to our vocation as people of faith.

III. The Centrality of Reconciliation in the Life of the Church

At Hope Episcopal Church, we affirm that reconciliation is not the responsibility of a single group or committee. Rather, it is central to the life and work of every member of the church. Each of us, in our unique ministries and gifts, is called to participate in the ministry of reconciliation.

Reconciliation as an All-Encompassing Ministry

Reconciliation must be woven into the fabric of our worship, fellowship, outreach, and decision-making processes. Every ministry—whether it be the Vestry, the Altar Guild, the choir, or the outreach committee—should intentionally incorporate reconciliation as a guiding principle.

The work of reconciliation is multifaceted. It includes the healing of interpersonal relationships within our congregation, addressing historical wrongs such as racism and exclusion, and working for justice in our wider community. Every member of Hope Episcopal Church, regardless of their role, is called to engage in this work with intentionality and prayer.

IV. Truth-Telling and Confession: A Pathway to Healing

Reconciliation begins with truth-telling. In order to heal, we must first acknowledge the ways in which we have caused harm—whether through personal actions, complicity in systemic injustice, or neglect of our responsibilities as stewards of creation.

Honesty About Our History and Present

At Hope Episcopal Church, we commit to telling the truth about our history. This includes acknowledging the ways the Church has been complicit in systems of oppression, including racism, sexism, and environmental degradation. It also includes recognizing the ways we have failed to create a truly inclusive community for all people, especially those from marginalized backgrounds.

We will create opportunities for the congregation to engage in dialogue and reflection about these issues. This will include:

- **Listening Circles** where members can share their experiences of harm or exclusion.
- **Education Programs** that help us understand the historical context of the Church's role in systemic injustice and how we can actively work toward change.

Confession and Repentance

Confession is a vital part of the process of reconciliation. As a congregation, we will regularly incorporate prayers of confession into our worship that acknowledge the sins of racism,

exclusion, and environmental harm. We believe that confession is not about guilt but about taking responsibility for the ways we have caused or contributed to harm.

V. Healing and Restoration: Living Out Reconciliation

Reconciliation is not just about acknowledging past wrongs; it is about actively working toward healing and restoration in the present and future. Healing involves creating spaces where relationships can be mended, trust can be rebuilt, and communities can flourish.

Integrating Healing into Our Worship and Fellowship

Our liturgical life will reflect our commitment to reconciliation and healing. This includes:

- **Services of Healing and Reconciliation** where members can engage in prayers for forgiveness, restoration, and wholeness.
- **Communal Prayers for Justice** that call on God's grace to heal the divisions in our society, especially those related to race, class, and environmental destruction.

In addition to worship, our fellowship activities will intentionally foster reconciliation. Church leaders will prioritize creating spaces where members from different backgrounds can come together to build relationships, share stories, and work through conflicts in constructive and loving ways.

Pastoral Care and Support for Healing

The work of reconciliation requires ongoing pastoral care. Our clergy and lay leaders will provide counseling and support to those who have been affected by division, exclusion, or injustice within the church or wider society. This may include offering spiritual direction, conflict mediation, or trauma-informed pastoral care to those who have experienced racial or economic injustice.

VI. Practical Steps Toward Reconciliation in Every Ministry

As reconciliation is the ministry of the entire Church, each committee, group, and individual member will actively incorporate reconciliation into their work. Here are some practical steps every part of Hope Episcopal Church can take:

Vestry and Leadership

- Ensure that decisions are made with an awareness of their impact on marginalized communities.

- Regularly evaluate the church's policies, practices, and financial investments through the lens of justice and reconciliation.
- Support initiatives that address systemic injustice, such as racial reconciliation, economic justice, and environmental stewardship.

Outreach and Social Justice Ministry

- Advocate for local and national efforts to dismantle systemic racism and promote economic equity.
- Partner with organizations like the Union of Black Episcopalians (UBE) and the Episcopal Church's Dismantling Racism Committee to address racial disparities in our community.
- Work toward environmental justice, recognizing that environmental degradation disproportionately affects marginalized communities.

Worship and Liturgy

- Incorporate prayers, hymns, and readings that reflect the themes of reconciliation, justice, and healing.
- Include voices and cultural expressions from diverse backgrounds, ensuring that our worship reflects the breadth of God's creation.
- Offer bilingual services or provide translated materials where needed to support linguistic inclusivity.

Formation and Education

- Host workshops and classes on racial justice, environmental stewardship, and the theology of reconciliation.
- Encourage intergenerational participation in discussions about reconciliation and justice, recognizing that each generation brings unique gifts and perspectives.
- Provide resources that help congregants understand the biblical foundations of reconciliation and how they can live it out in their daily lives.

VII. Reconciliation with Creation: Environmental Justice as a Core Commitment

The work of reconciliation extends beyond human relationships to encompass our relationship with creation. As stewards of God's creation, we are called to reconcile with the natural world, especially in light of the environmental crises facing our planet.

Environmental Stewardship as Reconciliation

Hope Episcopal Church commits to adopting sustainable practices that reflect our care for creation. This includes:

- Reducing the church’s carbon footprint by conserving energy and using renewable resources.
- Encouraging members to engage in local environmental initiatives, such as community clean-ups, tree planting, and advocating for environmental policies that promote justice and sustainability.
- Partnering with environmental organizations that work for the protection and restoration of ecosystems, particularly in communities most affected by environmental degradation.

Land Acknowledgment and Indigenous Reconciliation

As part of our commitment to environmental justice, we will also engage in the process of forming a **land acknowledgment** that recognizes the Indigenous peoples who once inhabited the land on which our church stands. This is an important step in acknowledging the harm caused by colonization and working toward healing with Indigenous communities.

We will explore ways to support Indigenous-led environmental initiatives and advocate for the protection of sacred lands, understanding that reconciliation with creation is deeply connected to justice for Indigenous peoples.

VIII. Conclusion: Reconciliation as a Lifelong Journey

At Hope Episcopal Church, reconciliation is not a one-time event but a lifelong journey. We are called to live out the ministry of reconciliation in every aspect of our lives—personally, communally, and globally. As followers of Jesus, we commit to being agents of healing, justice, and peace, trusting that God’s grace will guide us on this path.

This policy serves as a framework for how we will engage in the work of reconciliation, but it is also a living document. As we continue to grow and learn, we will adjust our practices to reflect our evolving understanding of what it means to be a reconciling church. Above all, we trust in the Holy Spirit to lead us toward deeper relationships with God, one another, and creation.

May our work of reconciliation bear witness to the transformative power of God’s love, bringing healing to the broken, justice to the oppressed, and peace to all creation.

Special Thanks to Messiah University for their discernment and wisdom in creating their policy for reconciliation. It has been a helpful pattern for our own policy, and we are grateful for their witness.