

COVENANT AGREEMENT AMONG  
THE EPISCOPALIAN, LUTHERAN AND PRESBYTERIAN MEMBERS OF  
TRINITY ECUMENICAL PARISH AND THEIR RESPECTIVE DENOMINATIONS

PREAMBLE.

We, the people of this parish, commit ourselves to continuing communion with the Episcopal Diocese of Southwestern Virginia, the Virginia Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Presbytery of the Peaks of the Presbyterian Church USA. In turn, we seek recognition from those judicatories and a commitment on their part to support our ecumenical venture as the sole expression of each denomination in the Smith Mountain Lake area for the immediate future.

I. OUR IDENTITY

As a portion of God's people in the community of Smith Mountain Lake, we have been gathering, worshiping and studying for more than three years. Initially, we began to worship together because none of our three denominations was represented in this area, and none of the three denominational groups seemed large enough to begin a solo mission congregation. Our numbers have increased, and likewise our conviction that we are enriched by our ecumenical style and that this is our calling by the Holy Spirit, to be a vital, functioning embodiment of our Lord's calling "that they may be one". We continue to celebrate the many gifts each of our religious backgrounds brings to this ministry and rejoice in the strength thus derived. Therefore, we covenant together to be one congregation in every way possible, at the same time in union with the Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church USA and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and faithful to their respective beliefs and practices.

II. OUR LIFE

We commit ourselves to the full life of a local congregation within a denominational structure(s), engaging in common worship, sacraments, and the preaching of the Word: cooperating ecumenically with other local congregations wherever practicable; offering Bible study and educational programs for the parish and the community; providing pastoral care for parishioners and all others in need of God's loving care; engaging in Christian mission through evangelism, outreach service to the community and world, and stewardship.

- A. We wish to continue the alternating succession of Sunday worship faithful to our three denominational traditions, at the same time recognizing that adjustments may be needed when a full-time pastor is called.
- B. Provision shall be made for the regular celebration of the Eucharist according to the rites of the three denominations.
- C. We regard Holy Baptism as the sacrament established by our Lord whereby one is incorporated into the Body of Christ, the Church. Holy Baptism will be offered to all who desire it, with appropriate instruction. This sacrament will be administered in a manner consistent with the practices of the denomination into which the person is being baptized, and the person baptized will be entered on the rolls of that congregation; there will be no baptisms at large.

- D. Educational programs are developed to equip the saints of God for life in Christ and for service to His world. We will include at every opportunity those which help us understand one another's denominational traditions. We will also seek to provide the appropriate denominational instruction as preparation for baptism/confirmation/reception of infants, children and adults into our congregation.
- E. "The priesthood of all believers" is especially meaningful to this congregation, and we commit ourselves to an active and vital lay ministry, consistent with our respective denominational perspectives. We anticipate sharing with an ordained leader the roles of caring for souls, teaching, administering and evangelizing the community.
- F. Christians from a variety of denominational backgrounds may be attracted to the life of Trinity Ecumenical Parish, because of its history and the place it occupies in the community. Even though they do not immediately desire formal affiliation with one of the congregations and thus with the parish (see Section III), their participation in the worship and other life of the parish will be welcomed.

### III. MEMBERSHIP

The Church consists of God and his people; and the people of Trinity Ecumenical Parish are the members of the three constituent congregations, the "affiliate" or "associate" members of those congregations, and such other baptized persons who attend and contribute, but have not become full members of one of the congregations.

- A. Each congregation will receive members by baptism, confirmation, reception, letter of transfer, in whatever is the practice of that denomination. Members fulfilling the denominational requirements for voting membership will be authorized to vote on all matters of business and representation in their respective congregations and in the parish as a whole.
- B. In addition, each denominational congregation may have affiliate or associate members, those whose principal membership is another congregation of the same denomination and who are not ready to transfer to this congregation. Their privileges and the right to hold office and vote in congregational meetings are defined in the constitution/canons of the denominations.

### IV. STRUCTURE OF THE PARISH

- A. Within Trinity Ecumenical Parish will be three congregations: Episcopal, Lutheran and Presbyterian.
  - 1. Each congregation will organize in the same manner as any local congregation of the denomination; with a Vestry (Episcopal), a Council (Lutheran), and a Session (Presbyterian), electing from its voting members, persons to serve on those governing bodies.
  - 2. Those persons qualified as voting members of any of the three congregations will constitute the voting membership of Trinity Ecumenical Parish.

3. The authority, responsibilities, and manner of election of the Vestry, Council, and Session derive from the appropriate constitution/canons of their respective denominations. They will be the official link with the local judicatory and will ensure that the requirements and guidelines of each denomination are satisfied: e.g., reports, elections, representation at judicatory assemblies, etc.
  4. The three congregations will gather from time to time separately, in accordance with denominational constitution/canons, to conduct denominational business, elect officers, etc.
- B. In general, the central life of Trinity Ecumenical Parish will be that of one congregation, worshipping together, studying, evangelizing and gathering from time to time to conduct parish business.
1. The parish will have an annual business meeting on a date established by the Parish Council; other meetings of the parish may be called by the Parish Council at the request of any of the three governing bodies, the pastor or any three parishioners.
  2. Official meetings of the parish have the authority to:
    - a. Approve the call of a pastor and associate pastor(s), and terminate such calls, in accordance with the Pastor's denominational membership.
    - b. Approve the annual budget.
    - c. Approve the acquisition of real and personal property by gift, devise, purchase or other lawful means except as limited by judicatory constitution/canons. (See V.)
    - d. Approve the sale, mortgage, lease, transfer, or other disposition of such property in a manner consistent with judicatory constitution/canons.
    - e. Elect members of the Parish Council for the conduct of the day-to-day functioning of the parish, as set forth in IV.C.4.
    - f. Additional denominations may be added with the consent of two-thirds vote of a duly called parish meeting and the approval of the three judicatories.
- C. The Parish Council will be the governing body of Trinity Ecumenical Parish in its day-to-day affairs, responsible to the congregation as a whole and to the governing bodies of the three judicatories.
1. The present Council of Trinity Ecumenical Parish consists of six members elected at large. Three additional members will be elected to the Council, one from each of the congregations, and that government will prevail UNTIL the three congregations are recognized by their judicatories.

2. When all three congregations have been so recognized and have elected their respective Vestry, Council and Session (in accordance with denominational constitution/canons), each of these denominational governing bodies will nominate three or more members to serve staggered three-year terms on the Parish Council.
3. At the organizing meeting of the parish, and at subsequent annual meetings of the parish, members will elect, from those nominated, members of the Parish Council, so that the Parish Council will always consist of equal numbers of members of the Vestry, the Lutheran Council and the Session.
4. The responsibilities of the Parish Council include the following:
  - a. Setting up a search committee and seeking the services of a pastor(s), in accordance with rules for such in each constituent denomination. The search committee will consist of equal numbers from each denomination, appointed by their respective governing bodies.
  - b. Evaluating the ministry as undertaken by the Pastor and congregation.
  - c. Canvassing the congregation for their annual gifts of money and time, preparing an annual budget for parish approval, and making authorized expenditures from parish funds.
  - d. Recommending the acquisition of real and personal property and the disposition of such property.
  - e. Setting up commissions and committees to assist the parish in its corporate life and mission.
  - f. In concert with the Pastor, overseeing all other aspects of the parish's life.
5. The judicatories authorize the Vestry, the Lutheran Council and the Session to function in those areas of congregational life which pertain uniquely to the three congregations. And in like fashion, the judicatories authorize the Parish Council to govern all other aspects of the parish's life.
6. A congregation may withdraw from Trinity Ecumenical Parish and is to give advance notice of one year before such withdrawal.

#### V. CONTROL OF REAL PROPERTY

Real property of Trinity Ecumenical Parish will be held by and administered by three Trustees, one elected by each congregation, serving staggered six year terms of office. The acquisition, utilization and disposal of real property shall be in accordance with the constitution/canons of the judicatories and as directed by the congregation.

## VI. PASTOR

We commit ourselves to the calling of one pastor to serve Trinity Ecumenical Parish. We expect him/her to be recognized and authorized to function sacramentally and pastorally by the three judicatories.

- A. The parish will prepare to call a pastor under the direction and guidelines of the three judicatories. It is assumed that he/she will be a recognized and ordained member of one of our three denominations and will serve in accordance with the canons and rules of order of that denomination.
- B. The pastor who is called will be paid a salary and the same ancillary benefits that he/she would receive if serving a congregation of his/her own denomination; e.g., specified contributions will be made to the retirement fund of that denomination.

## VII. STEWARDSHIP

The same ecumenicity and sense of unity practiced elsewhere in the life of Trinity Ecumenical Parish will be observed in the practice of stewardship as well. Basically, all contributions will be received and disbursed from one, central fund.

- A. In so far as possible, the contributions of the Parish Council to local judicatory support, outreach programs, etc., will be equal irrespective of the size of the three congregations within the parish or the amount they contribute. We will be open to special appeals from the denominations and will contribute to outreach programs at all levels.
- B. We commit ourselves to a deepening sense of Christian stewardship and will utilize the insights, programs, and literature of the stewardship task forces of the three denominations. We recognize the call of our respective national churches for tithing, proportionate/sacrificial giving as the goal toward which we move.

## VIII. A SERVANT CHURCH

We are convinced that the Church does not exist for itself; that we are called to be a servant Church. Already we care for one another in a way which transcends all denominational boundaries. We will devote ourselves to sharing that love of the Risen Christ throughout our community, evangelizing the unchurched, serving those in need, praying for all sorts and conditions of God's children, practicing and upholding love, justice, and mercy.

## IX. ADDENDUM.

This Covenant will serve both as an initial contract as Trinity Ecumenical Parish comes into being and as one of the bases for the parish's Constitution and By Laws or Rules of Order. This Covenant may be amended by the congregation of Trinity Ecumenical Parish, or by the judicatories, subject to the approval of all parties to the Covenant. The release of any of the instituted congregations from the Covenant Agreement must be with the approval of and in accordance with the participating judicatories.

RATIFICATION OF THE COVENANT

On this Twenty-third day of June in the year of Our Lord, One Thousand, Nine Hundred and Ninety-one, we the undersigned ratify this Covenant in behalf of our respective constituencies.

A. Heath Light, Bishop  
Diocese of Southwestern  
Virginia, The Episcopal  
Church

Richard F. Bansemer, Bishop  
The Virginia Synod, The  
Evangelical Lutheran Church  
In America

George P. Magnuson  
General Presbyter  
Presbytery of the  
Peaks-Presbyterian  
Church USA

(signed by)

Nelson Edgerton  
Thomas E. Reeves  
Beth Hoover

Lois Garlough  
Bruce H. Cook  
Wheat Wallenborn  
Pastor and Council

Mary H. Epting  
Anne Cosby

AMENDMENT TO THE  
COVENANT AGREEMENT AMONG THE  
EPISCOPALIAN, LUTHERAN, PRESBYTERIAN  
MEMBERS OF TRINITY ECUMENICAL PARISH AND  
THEIR RESPECTIVE DENOMINATIONS

Control of Real Property, of the Covenant Agreement is amended by substituting the following:

V. OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL OF REAL PROPERTY

Real property of Trinity Ecumenical Parish will be held by and administered by three Trustees, one elected by each congregation, serving staggered six year terms of office. The Parish Trustees shall jointly hold title to the real property in accordance with constitution/canons of the judicatories, insofar as is possible in the context of the Covenant Agreement.

Recognizing the unity of the Parish, each congregation and each judicatory subordinates its beneficial interest in the real property of the parish to the common interest and benefit of the Parish.

Recognizing the uniqueness of this Parish and the presently unknown facts and circumstances that would attend such events as the dissolution of a constituent congregation, the withdrawal of a congregation from the Parish, the withdrawal of support by a judicatory or other events which would substantially affect the Covenant relationship, no provision is made for such events or occurrences. The parties to this Covenant Agreement pledge their intent to negotiate in good faith, based on the circumstances then existing, to reach a result that is equitable and acceptable to all parties in the event some such development occurs.

The following provisions are made a part of the Covenant Agreement by Addendum.

X. FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

Construction of capital improvements for the Parish may require the borrowing of funds from institutional lenders and/or the judicatories or related organizations of the three congregations. The parties acknowledge that the requirements of the judicatories for church construction loans may differ and may conflict. Regardless, it is the intent of all parties to this Covenant Agreement to recognize the uniqueness of this Parish and to resolve such differences in manner that will be equitable to all parties and will accomplish the purpose of the various requirements.

- A. In the event the Parish borrows from a lender which requires a guarantee or similar credit facility from the judicatories, and, if the judicatories determine at such time to provide such guarantee or similar credit facility, any liability involved will be shared equally among the judicatories.
- B. If a judicatory is required to pay the obligation so secured or guaranteed by it, the judicatory shall automatically succeed to its congregation's beneficial interest in the property securing the loan, unless the judicatory advises the Parish Council to the contrary.

- C. If a judicatory pays more than its proportionate share of such obligations as it may have determined to provide, it shall be entitled to contribution from, or indemnification by, the other judicatories, in proportion to their interests; provided, however, that no judicatory shall have any obligation hereunder unless and until it has determined explicitly to provide its guarantee or similar credit facility.
- D. If the Parish Council deems it advisable to borrow funds for capital improvements from the judicatories (including any church development agencies or organizations affiliated with the judicatories), no judicatory will be given preferential treatment in the repayment of such loans.
- E. If funds for capital improvements are borrowed from one or more judicatories, the security interests in the real property of the Parish securing the loans will be proportional to the funds borrowed from each judicatory.

XI. LOANS FOR OPERATING EXPENSES

While it is anticipated that the Parish will pay its operating expenses without borrowing, it is possible that such loans may be necessary from time to time. The real property of the Parish will not be used to secure loans for operating expenses.

2004 AMENDMENT TO THE COVENANT AGREEMENT  
AMONG THE EPISCOPAL, LUTHERAN, AND PRESBYTERIAN MEMBERS OF  
TRINITY ECUMENICAL PARISH AND THEIR RESPECTIVE DENOMINATIONS

The following provision is made part of the Covenant Agreement by addendum, adding the following language to paragraph IV. C., STRUCTURE OF THE PARISH:

**The Parish Council shall also serve as the Board of Directors of Trinity Ecumenical Parish, a nonstock corporation incorporated under the laws of the Commonwealth of Virginia on December 31, 2003.**

Control of Real Property of the Covenant Agreement is amended by substituting the following for the first full paragraph of paragraph V:

**V. OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL OF REAL PROPERTY**

**Real property of Trinity Ecumenical Parish will be held by the nonstock corporation, known as Trinity Ecumenical Parish, and will be administered by the Board of Directors, also known as the Parish Council of Trinity Ecumenical Parish. The corporation shall hold title to the real property in accordance with the constitutions/canons of the judicatories, insofar as is possible in the context of the Covenant Agreement.**

Adopted by a vote of the members of Trinity Ecumenical Parish at a duly called and constituted meeting of the congregation held on December 5, 2004.

Ratified by the Episcopal Diocese of Southwestern Virginia by letters from Chancellor Harwell M. Darby, dated November 15, 2004 and December 24, 2004.

Ratified by the Virginia Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, by letter from The Reverend James F. Mauney, Bishop, dated September 23, 2004

Ratified by the Presbytery of the Peaks, by letter from James E. Cushman, Interim General Presbytery, dated January 19, 2005.