

Annual report for the Companion Diocese Committee to the 184th Convention of
The Episcopal Diocese of Missouri
2022-2023
Deborah Goldfeder, Chair

The mission of the Companion Diocese program is to connect the people of dioceses across the Anglican Communion in shared missions and ministries. The Diocese of Missouri had the joy of being in relationship with the Diocese of Lui in South Sudan for more than fifteen years during which time we developed friendships with people not only in Lui but also with Blackmore Vale in the United Kingdom and Lund in Sweden as we all worked together to support the people of the Moru tribe through their difficulties during decades of war both with the north and with other tribes within South Sudan. These three dioceses (Blackmore Vale, Lund, and Missouri) reached out to people who became displaced persons in Uganda at the Kiryandongo Refugee Camp as well.

These companion relationships are not intended to extend indefinitely, so we began exploring relationships that might be in locations more accessible for missionaries to visit. Travel to Lui was long, expensive, rugged, and could be dangerous so few could physically visit there. We were unable to bring visitors from South Sudan to the Diocese of Missouri because of political issues with the US State Department. They could not secure visas to come here.

We looked at places in the Western hemisphere for more accessible dioceses that we might approach. Missouri had had a relationship with the Diocese of Puerto Rico many years ago so we hoped we might be able to establish a relationship with them again. Several things delayed us: we looked at dioceses in Central and South America, but many were in transition to new bishops, and our own Bishop Smith announced his retirement. He felt it appropriate to wait until the new bishop was elected and installed in Missouri. Nothing moves quickly, but all things happen in God's own time. The Covid Pandemic delayed us for several years. We continued to observe the difficulties that the people of Puerto Rico were enduring—Hurricane Maria killed 2,975 people in the territory in 2017—and a 6.4 magnitude earthquake caused extensive damage in January of 2020. We knew the needs were great but we were stymied by our own problems with Covid. Fortunately, we not only found we had great support from our new bishop, +Deon Johnson as well as the support of the bishop of Puerto Rico, +Rafael Morales Maldonado.

Finally, on December 11, 2022, a small delegation from the CDC were able to go to Puerto Rico for a visit to begin to assess the needs and the possibilities for mission between our two dioceses. We found a lively and thriving Episcopal Church with very few signs of the disasters that had befallen them in the previous five years because of their can-do spirit and their immediate responses to the needs of their communities. We were amazed by the programs that the Episcopal Diocese of Puerto Rico (EDPR) developed and decided that we had as much or more to learn from them as they from us! One of the most unexpected services that had been developed by the EDPR was a full-service funeral/burial program that included all the services of a funeral home with traditional casket burial, cremation and aquamation as possibilities. They were building a beautiful cemetery that included an island in the middle of a lake where beloved pets could be interred. One had to cross over a bridge to get there. It was amazing to see. The best part of this service was that it was substantially less expensive than the neighboring funeral

homes. They were able to negotiate with their neighbors by giving them a percentage of the profits that they received.

Our visit wasn't all about funerals, though. We attended the opening Novena of Our Lady of Guadalupe with the services at the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist with the bishop presiding. We visited the island of Vieques where we learned about the needs for obstetrical care on the island as well as other emergency care. We also learned of their caring and concern for our needs when missing medications were supplied at no charge to one of our visitors. This was one major accomplishment for the past year. On October 4, 2023, a delegation from Puerto Rico will be visiting the Diocese of Missouri to learn more about us and our ministries.

One of the things we have learned is that the Diocese of Puerto Rico is in relationships with both Cuba and Ecuador Literal where they are doing direct, hands-on mission with the people there. We may find that we can work with Puerto Rico to assist in these more challenging mission sites but that is only a goal at the moment. The Diocesan Bishop of Puerto Rico has also taken on the position of Provisional Bishop of Cuba, and he is open to ways we might all work together. Of course, all missions of the CDC are negotiated from bishop to bishop so that is all to be determined. Needless to say, we are excited about the possibilities we have in the near future.

A youth group will be going to the diocese in December/January to explore how they might experience mission in another culture.

A very exciting opportunity for folks from our diocese is a six-week immersion course in Liturgical Spanish at their soon-to-be-fully accredited seminary in San Juan in June, but the dates are not firmly set yet. There is newly renovated housing on-campus for students.

We are all very excited about our possibilities for relationship development between the two dioceses and ask your continued prayers for the church and people of Puerto Rico.

Members of the committee:

the Rev. Susan Naylor, Deacon, Christ Church Cathedral*

Earl Naylor, Church Musician*

the Rev. Dr. Maria Evans, Interim Priest, Trinity Episcopal in Hannibal

the Rev. Erin Pickersgill, Diocesan Ministry Developer for Children and Youth

Brother Sam Kincade (Franciscan) Christ Church Cathedral*

Mike Fowlkes, Member Trinity, CWE, Feeding Ministries

Cynthia Rapp, Retired Music Teacher, Emmanuel Episcopal Church*

the Rev. Dr. Valori Mulvey Sherer, Rector, Emmanuel Episcopal Church, Diocesan Missioner for Hispanic and Latinx Ministries

the Rev. Dr. Deborah Goldfeder, Deacon in Charge of Calvary Episcopal Church, Louisiana, and St. John's Episcopal Church, Eolia, Chair, CDC*

*Those who visited the Diocese of Puerto Rico on the inaugural trip in December, 2022.

Contact information for those wishing to know more or who'd like to support the CDC's work:

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