

# Building bonds of friendship



It began by one neighbor welcoming a new neighbor.

Hood Theological Seminary of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church moved to a campus next to the offices of the ELCA North Carolina Synod in Salisbury.

Friendships were struck between staff members. And five years later, leaders of the ELCA and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church are charting a path for congregations to engage in ministry together.

Some congregations have already begun.

Members of St. John's Lutheran Church and Soldiers Memorial African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, both in Salisbury, hosted a children's Music and Arts Camp, a Family Music Extravaganza followed by a picnic dinner and joint Thanksgiving services.

Future ideas between the two congregations include pulpit and choir exchanges, and collaborative outreach through prison ministry, youth sports programs and more.

"Establishing relationships is pleasing in the eyes of God, where we all come

together in praise and fellowship," says Mark Lewis, a member of St. John's. "Together, we are focused on outreach ministry in our neighborhood."

To celebrate the growing relationship and explore ministry opportunities, members of both denominations held a summit in the fall of 2011.

"The summit was a time for coming together in worship, sharing with one another about who we are and being open to the Holy Spirit's guidance as we look for tangible ways to cooperate in grassroots ministries," says Don McCoid, who assists the ELCA presiding bishop in the area of ecumenical and inter-religious relations.

The relationship between both denominations may be the first time in the United States that a historically White church and a historically Black church have agreed to cooperative ministry.

"We have much to learn from our African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church colleagues," Don says. "We hope that we can learn together, share together, witness together and serve together in many ways and in many places."

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