

**A Covenant  
for the Shared Constellation Ministry of  
Calvary Episcopal Church, Underhill, VT  
and**

**St. James Episcopal Church, Essex Junction, VT**

Seeking to build up one another in Christ and move forward in mission together in a constellation ministry St. James Episcopal Church, Essex Junction, VT and Calvary Episcopal Church, Underhill, VT covenant to engage in shared ministry together in the following ways. We can do more as church together.

**1. Continuity of Identity**

Although we are joined together as one in the Body of Christ, this ministry respects the distinct identities of each congregation. This shared ministry partnership is not a merger, consolidation, nor a dissolution of either congregation. Each parish will maintain its own constitution, budget, Vestry, and team structure.

**2. Term of Shared Ministry Partnership**

Following approval of both parish Vestries on behalf of their respective congregations, this ministry partnership officially will begin June 1, 2024. Following approval of this shared ministry partnership by both parish Vestries on behalf of their respective congregations, the Wardens will present this agreement to the Diocese for review and approval. With approval from the Bishop, the agreement will become effective on that date. Both congregations agree to continue to engage in this shared ministry partnership through December 31, 2025, after which the shared ministry will continue as mutually agreed upon. Dissolution of the shared ministry partnership requires consultation with and approval of the Bishop.

**3. Sharing a Lead Priest**

Calvary and St. James agree to share priestly leadership. The lead priest will serve the two congregations based on a percentage of time in a work week as outlined in separate letters of agreement: 50% time to St. James (average of 20 hours/week) and 15% time at Calvary (average of 6 hours/week), respectively. This time is to include duties devoted to developing and maintaining the constellation as well as to the Diocese and greater church. Both congregations covenant to be understanding and flexible toward this percentage of time functioning as a *guideline* due to the nature of the office and duties of a priest. As part of this time, the Lead Priest will agree to be present for Vestry meetings and annual meetings at each parish.

**4. Financially Supporting a Priest**

Each parish agrees to adhere to its negotiated Letter of Agreement with the Lead Priest. The Vestries will decide the extent to which each parish supports the coverage of the Lead Priest's benefits, using Vermont law and other applicable laws to determine minimum thresholds for benefit support. Health insurance and pension payments based on respective compensation levels are required by the Episcopal Church.

**5. Worship**

Worship of God is at the center of congregational ministry. Each parish will maintain its own service schedule, and may choose to conduct joint worship services from time to time, especially those involving dates listed in the Seasons and Major Holy Days portion of the Calendar in the Book of Common Prayer. The Vestries of each parish (informed by recommendations of a Joint Vision Team) and the Lead Priest will approve the joint service schedule as far in advance as possible. Other than for Christmas or Christmas Eve and Easter, the priest will not be expected to lead services on the same day at both parishes.

## **6. Parishes Discernments**

During the time of this agreement each parish will have a defined process for discerning individual parish goals in the context of the joint relationship and common goals for the constellation.

## **7 Joint Vision Council Meetings**

Joint meetings will take place at least four times a year (quarterly). The agenda for these meetings will include a time of devotion/spiritual growth, a time of deepening our relationships with one another, review of the progress of our shared ministry, discussion of ways to expand our shared ministry, and any additional items proposed by members of either parish Vestry or the Lead Priest. Location of these meetings can alternate between each parish. Minutes of these meetings will be taken by the secretary of the Vestry who is “hosting” that particular meeting at their parish.

## **8. Communication and Conflict Resolution**

The Vision Council and Vestries covenant to practice healthy communication and conflict resolution with one another and the Lead Priest. As Christians, we understand this to take the form of Matthew 18 when we are in community with one another. Matthew 18 outlines the importance of addressing issues directly and compassionately, while uplifting the values of transparency, truth-telling in love, integrity, forgiveness, reconciliation, and prayer.

## **9. Shared Ministry**

Both congregations will continue to explore ways to expand their shared ministry and mission together for the sake of God’s world, as well as ways to deepen relationships with one another in both communities. This may take the form of youth activities, children’s offerings, Christian formation, worship, newsletters, outreach activities, etc.

## **10. Review of Shared Ministry**

The parishes agree to conduct a joint Vestry meeting each year to evaluate the effectiveness of this shared ministry partnership. The Vestries will also assess this agreement and emend it, as need and mutually agreed upon.