

Totally D.O.P.E.  
Michael Booker



I just returned from an amazing event. Last December I was asked by the Executive Council to serve for a three-year term on the Presbyterian Episcopal Dialogue Committee. This is a small group of Episcopalians and Presbyterians who are in official conversation about future relations between the two denominations.

I've decided to call it the Dialogue Of Presbyterians and Episcopalians. "DOPE" for short.

For a number of reasons, we weren't able to meet until this October (the 7<sup>th</sup> through the 9<sup>th</sup>). We met in an Episcopal retreat center (Transfiguration Spirituality Center) in Cincinnati. Five Presbyterians and Five Episcopalians were in attendance. The leader of our delegation is Bishop Eugene Sutton from the Diocese of Maryland. I have to say, this is an astonishing group of people, intelligent and faith-filled, and with genuine hearts for John 17:20-23:

*I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*

We started with introductions and then talked about the history of the Dialogue. It turns out that we are the most recent incarnation of a dialogue that's been going on for over a

century. I'm not sure if that increases the pressure on us for making progress or takes us completely off of the hook. By the end of the three days, I really did feel like we have every determination to accomplish what the groups before us couldn't; namely, drafting a viable resolution for Full Communion between the two denominations. That would need to be approved by the highest legislative bodies in both groups, so the challenge isn't just to obtain our own private consensus.

Tuesday morning we had Morning Prayer with a resident group of Episcopal Sisters and also celebrated Holy Eucharist with them. Through the three days we prayed in both Episcopal and Presbyterian idioms. Our conversations leapt from history to polity (organizational structure) to personal stories to conversations about other ecumenical dialogues. As we shifted from topic to topic, I became increasingly impressed with the knowledge contained in the room. I was certainly the least-informed person there, but I picked up a huge amount of information.

A big part of Tuesday was learning about a local church called Indian Hill. For reasons of local history, it was founded in the 1940's as an Episcopal-Presbyterian church. It is both a part of the Southern Ohio Diocese of the Episcopal Church and the Presbytery of Cincinnati. Even though we don't have a Full Communion agreement, Presbyterians and Episcopalians have been finding ways to work with each other.

(In the St. Louis area, we have St. Luke's Hospital, which is a joint ministry of the two denominations.)

As evening came, we said prayers and then socialized with adult beverages. Our one great failure was that we couldn't find a location for karaoke nearby. That would have been a delight.

Our next meeting is scheduled for February. I have high hopes for this group, but even if I'm being overly optimistic, this is still a thrilling opportunity.