

# Greetings from the Blue Water Episcopal Covenant!

The **Blue Water Episcopal Covenant** is an exciting venture involving two Episcopal parishes, Holy Family Episcopal Church in St. Clair, Michigan, and Trinity Episcopal Church in Lexington, Michigan. We are located in the **Blue Water** region of Michigan's Thumb, overlooking Lake Huron and the St. Clair River.



By joining our resources in mission and ministry, our parishes are proud leaders in creating the church of the future, building God's kingdom as caring, compassionate participants in our communities while providing inspiration and direction in an ever-changing world.

This is an exceptional opportunity for you to approach ministry in a new way. As the rector serving the **Blue Water Episcopal Covenant**, you become part of a forward-looking alliance of two co-equal partners committed to building a future of relevance and innovation.



The twin Blue Water Bridges connect the U.S. and Canada.

For more information on this exciting opportunity to make a difference, contact The Rev. Canon Tracie Little, Canon to the Ordinary, Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Michigan, 877-752-6020.

## New, Different – the Blue Water Episcopal Covenant Is the Way of the Future

The **Blue Water Episcopal Covenant** is an intriguing approach to ministry. Holy Family and Trinity Episcopal Churches are coming together with a collective vision of growth and service, even as we retain individual identities and locations. Within this shared context, you can create your ideal pastorate by working with the **Blue Water Episcopal Covenant** (BWEC) council to define the role of rector within the covenant setting. This is as new for us as it is for you, so we anticipate a great deal of flexibility as BWEC comes to life. Together our mission is to be God’s messengers to our communities and to the world.



Located 34 pleasant waterfront miles apart at the base of Michigan’s Thumb region, Holy Family and Trinity remain two separate churches with distinctive memberships, vestries, budgets, services, and activities. As part of

the covenant structure, we combine energies and financial resources in support of a priest.

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including expanding the role of laity in leadership and responsibility, you will provide the nurture and spiritual guidance that direct BWEC and the larger church into a future that’s purposeful and inspirational. God is calling us to assist in translating the terms of the covenant into a vibrant partnership that benefits all concerned – including you.

### Welcome to Blue Water Michigan!

The **Blue Water** area takes its name from the deep, maritime waters of Lake Huron and the St. Clair River. The region offers more than 140 miles of Great Lakes shoreline and many more inland streams and rivers. Beautiful, sandy beaches abound on Lake Huron’s shore from Port Huron north past Lexington. The St. Clair River, which separates the U.S. from Canada, flows south through the towns of Port Huron, Marysville, St. Clair, Marine City, and Algonac before entering Lake St. Clair, which connects our waterways to the world. The small towns north of Lexington, including Port Sanilac, Harbor Beach, and Port Austin, as well as the cities along the St. Clair River, have a cottage feel with many unique small shops, restaurants, marinas, beaches, and waterside vistas. Recreational activities are endless and include live theater and music, art fairs and festivals, farmer’s markets, garden clubs, bed and breakfasts, city, county, and state parks, freighter watching, biking, and kayaking, just to name a few. During winter months the area offers hockey, ice skating, ice fishing, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing. For those interested in the amenities a big city has to offer, Detroit and its suburbs are an hour’s drive away, with abundant professional sporting events, live concerts in every genre, plenty of fine dining, lots of shopping, and more. Travel to other locales is easy from both Detroit Metropolitan Airport and Bishop International Airport in Flint. The area’s school districts are excellent, and higher education opportunities are available at a number of large universities and smaller community colleges. Local healthcare services are available through multiple hospitals and independent physicians. The **Blue Water** area is a wonderful place to live for people at all stages and interests of life.



# Introducing Holy Family and Trinity

## Two Parishes Make Up the **Blue Water Episcopal Covenant**

Holy Family Episcopal Church and Trinity Episcopal Church come to the covenant with very different histories.

But we share a strong commitment to keeping our parishes viable by crafting the **Blue Water Episcopal Covenant** and redefining the role of rector within this new entity. As spiritual places dedicated to worshipping God, we honor Jesus, engage in our communities, and welcome all who seek to know, love, and serve the good in all peoples and the world.



Holy Family Episcopal Church was formed in 2017 from three Blue Water parishes that were all struggling – All Saints in Marysville, active since 1958; St. Paul’s, active since 1885 in St. Clair; and St. Mark’s, Marine City, active since 1863. We closed those churches, joined together as Holy Family, and located in St. Clair, which is the geographic center of the area; buildings in Marysville and Marine City were sold. After the diocese assigned a pastor to help us with the transition, we embarked on a building plan to enlarge the space formerly known as St. Paul’s for our new congregation. We had just moved into the renovated sanctuary when the Covid shutdown occurred.



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holyfamilybwe.org

the community; that focus takes us forward.

With the transition to Holy Family now in place, we are looking for clergy to join with us in determining how to more fully embrace our church. Service is the centerpiece of our people and role in

Prominently located on Main Street, Trinity’s spire is a soaring symbol of faith, worship, and outreach to all who pass by. Since 1874, the parish has been offering worship and fellowship



5646 Main Street  
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trinitylexington.org

without interruption. Our stately Gothic-style church was built soon after our founding, reflecting the area’s then-booming lumbering era. The elegant, gleaming wood fixtures and furnishings that fill the sanctuary are original and a source of great pride. Over the years St. Anne’s and Shipley Halls were added, expanding our physical plant to accommodate a range of activities,

from a vibrant music ministry to busy men’s and women’s groups, a community food pantry, seasonal and Bible studies, fundraisers, and more. Marketed as The First Resort North, Lexington is the gateway to abundant recreation, vacation, and living opportunities located throughout Michigan’s Thumb. Agriculture is also a prominent and important industry. Our focus always is Lake Huron, the vast freshwater sea that defines our corner of the world.

# Envisioning Our Futures of Purpose and Growth

With the **Blue Water Episcopal Covenant**, our parishes are proudly in the vanguard; as the first such affiliation in this diocese, we are showing the way for other parishes by combining our resources in service to the Lord. As part of the covenant process, our parishes have analyzed who we are and what we want to be. We're looking to our new rector to assist us in transforming the **Blue Water Episcopal Covenant** from heartfelt words on paper to a vibrant, functioning, mission-driven alliance dedicated to making the Holy Spirit live.



The mission defined by Holy Family states:

*We are called to be on a journey together.  
To experience and explore God as revealed  
through the Spirit of Jesus Christ,  
And to model that God is present and active in  
our world, in our lives, and in our hearts.*

Holy Family has explored new ways of doing church since 2017 when we merged three area churches together. We learned that we needed to do more listening to the Holy Spirit and to each other to give each person a voice. We worked on building and strengthening relationships and trying different things to see what worked and what didn't. We had to get out of the comfort zone of *but we have always done it this way*. This has enabled us to stretch and grow. Yes, there were growing pains, but we have persevered.

We explored the role of the priest in depth and discovered that the old version, where clergy did everything for everyone, no longer works and is no longer necessary. We can name the individual gifts our members have and we support their ministries. We found that our parish is very mission-driven, coming together to support various needs within our own church and the community.

During the pandemic we learned to offer services via Facebook. We went old-school and established a phone tree to stay connected with each other. We went from two Holy Eucharist Services every Sunday, to one service online – if that didn't present some out-of-the-box thinking,

The mission of Trinity is and will continue to be:

*A Welcoming Place to Know, Love, and  
Serve God.*

Trinity Episcopal Church has been an active parish in the Lexington, Michigan, **Blue Water** area since 1874. Through the ensuing century and a half, Trinity has gone through many changes but always found a way to continue as a religious leader in our community. We are a beacon of Episcopalian light for the larger 25-mile area surrounding Lexington. In addition to waterfront villages, this area is home to several other towns and extensive agricultural operations. While Lexington itself has a sizeable resort component, we are a year-round venue, with Trinity serving both full-time and seasonal residents.

Now, we are proud to extend our leadership position to a completely new venture. Entering the **Blue Water Episcopal Covenant** is a new journey for our parish and the Diocese of Eastern Michigan. Trinity and Holy Family are bringing something to the diocese that has not happened here before. By combining our resources for ministry, we extend the Christian message and increase the power of the Holy Spirit to act in our communities and our lives.

The journey we are embarking on is totally different from anything we could have imagined five years ago. The concept of pooling our resources to share a mission and a rector within a covenant structure is truly out-of-the-box thinking for us. Having gone for two years (so far) without a resident priest, we have accepted this

we're not sure what does. We learned how to care for each other differently and keep connected with each other even when we were apart. When we came back together for in-person worship, we went to one service merging an 8am Rite I traditional, quiet, reserved group of parishioners with a 10am Rite II group that was much more contemporary, that loved to sing, had children moving about, was willing to shake things up and try new things.

Merging these into one service and changing the time and being respectful of our differences was a lot, but we came out better for it, and our relationships are stronger because of these changes. There was a lot of hard work, a lot of difficult discussions, a changing of expectations, and eventually a willingness to do things differently.

We look forward to exploring the new opportunities presented by BWEC with Trinity Episcopal in Lexington. The senior wardens have been meeting and collaborating over the past 18 months to bounce ideas off of each other, share things that are happening, and welcome and include each other to participate together in various services and activities. We have had an opportunity over the past year to get to know the Lexington area, and build relationships with Trinity in exploring each other's ministries. We look forward to working smarter together (not harder, separately) and believe we have an opportunity to build something new within the covenant while still maintaining separate identities.

We are excited to explore opportunities as revealed by the Holy Spirit, for Holy Family and for BWEC. We look forward to going on a journey with Trinity, exploring new ministries for our communities. We want our parishes to work alongside one another. We are willing to do the work. We believe we can establish a new way of doing church.

challenge, in part by growing the scope and responsibilities of our laity in preparing and presenting weekly worship services, handling funerals when the need arises, knitting prayer shawls for distribution to those in distress, leading study groups, staying connected to the prayer concerns of members, and continuing to minister to our parish in myriad other ways. We have learned how to successfully care for many functions that would have originally been taken on by a priest.

Trinity and Holy Family can learn and grow from the exciting style of partnership represented by the **Blue Water Episcopal Covenant**. This covenant gives our churches new outlooks and new options never realized before. We will continue as distinct parishes but together we can explore new paths, expand our outreach, and grow new friendships unavailable prior to now.

This 21<sup>st</sup> century has certainly presented new and unanticipated challenges to our churches: the disruption and losses of Covid, the pervasiveness of social media, the diminished influence of the church in society, the reality of online worship (with upsides and down), aging congregations, diminished financial resources, and lots more. Our goal is to listen to the Holy Spirit calling us to find new ways to spread the Christian message of love and acceptance as we explore and discover new ways to be the church.

Our community needs a new voice that offers the unchurched and churched the opportunity to learn more about God and Christ. This new approach is the **Blue Water Episcopal Covenant**. By pledging to uphold the principles of the alliance, we are forging a new way of thinking about how we expand the reach and influence of our faith. The future looks very exciting as we pursue this possibility. We anticipate that the **Blue Water Episcopal Covenant** experience of sharing ministry, treasure, clergy, responsibility, and mission will be a huge success.

# About Us

The Episcopal Church has formulated a series of narrative questions designed to provide an overview of beliefs, values, and visions of parishes seeking a priest. Holy Family and Trinity developed separate responses, then realized content was very similar. So, we consolidated information into the combined answers below. This commonality gives the [Blue Water Episcopal Covenant](#) a strong foundation with parishes that already have very similar views and approaches to mission, vision, and ministry.



*Describe your liturgical style and practice for all types of worship services provided by your community.*

- Both Holy Family and Trinity are traditional but flexible. We typically follow the Rite II liturgy but often branch out to incorporate different worship rituals and styles. Both parishes hold a single service on Sunday mornings.
- Absent a priest, both parishes usually present Morning Prayer led by lay leaders, switching to a Eucharistic service when a supply priest is available. Lay readers are always part of our services.
- From March 2020 to June 2021, worship was exclusively via Zoom and Facebook due to the pandemic. As meeting in person has become safer, we are excited to reconnect as this allows us to build relationships more easily. We continue to offer virtual church as a way to connect with parishioners who are absent for health, travel, and other reasons.
- At Trinity, a pianist or organist supplies accompaniment for hymns and responses. The choir (small but mighty) presents anthems and leads singing during services. A guitarist often participates in services as well. Holy Family invites church members to volunteer to provide music, including an 11-year-old pianist.
- Ambiance is warm and relaxed; we are comfortable with worshipping together.

*How do you practice incorporating others in ministry?*

- We identify new attendees immediately and welcome them to our fellowship. This kind of personal encouragement and interaction is central to the friendly atmosphere that surrounds everyone who enters our churches.
- Both Holy Family and Trinity use our annual stewardship drives as a survey, encouraging members to sign up to help in ways that interest them. Such opportunities are reading during the service, offering music, working the food pantry or church resale shop, making prayer shawls, participating in indoor and outdoor maintenance, inviting people to Bible study and seasonal groups, supporting the Christmas Wish program, among other activities.
- Trinity fundraising projects such as our attic sale, bi-annual quilt display, Christmas bazaar, and twice-yearly pasty-making are a great opportunity to get people hands-on and interacting together. (For those new to Michigan's food specialties, the pasty is a handheld meal of meat and vegetables, enclosed and baked in a pie crust case.)

*As a worshipping community, how do you care for your spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being?*

- Both churches have active prayer ministries that connect with members via email and phone. We also use traditional mail and personal visits to stay in touch and support those who do not have a computer.
- We have prayer shawl ministries that deliver hand-knit shawls and lap robes to those who are ill, experiencing distress, or in need of comfort.
- Our senior wardens and part-time administrators keep people connected through our websites, Sunday announcements, emails, and mailings.
- We are resuming regular Bible study and similar groups as public health and leadership conditions allow.
- We talk with one another and share information about needs and conditions.

*Describe your worshipping community's involvement beyond the immediate parishes and in the wider church and geographical region.*

- Our buildings are used for Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, AL-anon, Girl Scouts, and similar groups six days a week. At Trinity the Blue Water Folk Society presents a community-wide coffee house once a month from October through March.
- Holy Family supports an active thrift/re-sale shop that has been in business for 50 years and is widely used by the community. The shop gives away goods to people who lost possessions due to fire or other disasters, and to local schools, nursing homes, shelters, and the county jail. Eighty percent of earnings from the thrift shop are returned to the community.
- Holy Family assists the local St. Vincent de Paul Ecumenical Food Pantry by donating paper products year-round and volunteering to work the pantry. We adopt families from St. Vincent de Paul at Thanksgiving and Christmas. Kids in Distress, a local program that provides clothing, bedding, and other goods to children in need, is another active program we help.
- Trinity sponsors the Project Blessing food pantry, with parishioners donating goods. The pantry is open to all who need assistance. The Christmas Wish project provides gifts and funds to area families through an affiliation with Sanilac County.
- Our parishes work with other churches to sponsor community services and programs. For example, Trinity hosts a regional men's spirituality group, participates in interdenominational worship, and sponsors Lexington's community-wide vacation Bible school each summer. The community children's choir periodically visits congregations with an opening song for services.
- Participation in ecumenical activities with area churches of various denominations is important. Members from Holy Family and Trinity attend special services and events within our communities, including Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and others.
- Members are encouraged to support local, regional, and national/international non-profit agencies that provide assistance of various types. Members also participate in diocesan programs and training.
- The Episcopal Relief and Development Fund is a frequent recipient of contributions to address various needs throughout the country and around the world.
- We contribute to the diocese by payment of our monthly tithe.
- Trinity's summertime outdoor service at Tierney Park in Lexington's harbor serves as a beacon to the community and is open to all who wish to attend.

*How are you preparing for the church of the future?*

- Formulating the **Blue Water Episcopal Covenant** is the church of the future, as more and more modestly sized parishes combine resources to enable a range of programs that extend ministry and mission to members and communities alike. An important focus is support of a rector. The document entitled **Blue Water Episcopal Covenant and Operating Principles** is available upon request and outlines the role of the rector within the covenant structure.
- We understand that live-streaming of services, activities, and meetings is now a way of life. We acknowledge the relentless expansion of social media and are looking for ways to take advantage of platforms and communications ideas. Broadcasting services live from Trinity via YouTube and by Facebook live-stream at Holy Family is part of that effort.
- Holy Family came into existence in 2017 as a combination of three parishes; this has required that we change, grow, and be flexible and open to new possibilities. Strong, reliable, capable church members have kept us afloat and viable.
- We are exploring innovative strategies to bring non-members into the church. As congregations with older members, we are looking for ways to attract younger people and families. Finding and building youth connections throughout the community is a focus.
- Revitalizing our physical plant is important to keep us looking inviting, active, alive, and vital.

*What is your practice of stewardship and how does it shape the life of your worshipping community?*

- Both parishes hold an annual stewardship campaign to gain pledges of financial support for the upcoming year. Pledge cards also provide an opportunity for members to commit their time and talent in areas of interest to the larger good of the church.
- Entering the **Blue Water Episcopal Covenant** recognizes our financial positions and the need to be purposeful stewards of available, limited resources to accomplish desired goals. Among those goals is sharing a rector who serves both parishes.
- Our senior wardens and other lay leaders attend stewardship training and share information with other local wardens. Senior wardens plan with the vestry and treasurer and keep the congregation abreast of relevant financial information.
- We are realistic about the financial needs of our parishes and recognize that monies are finite.
- At Trinity we hold an annual attic sale, Christmas bazaar, pasty-making and sales project, Independence Day parade bake sale, and other activities to bring in additional funds. Every other year we host an area-wide quilt show with dozens of gorgeous handmade quilts on display, selling tickets to raffle an original quilt to a lucky winner.



*What is your experience leading/addressing change and conflict in the church? When has it gone well?  
When has it gone poorly? What did you learn?*

- Both Holy Family and Trinity have had our share of changes and learned to deal with conflict. Holy Family came into being when three parishes were forced to close and combine as one. A priest was assigned and as part of the transition, two buildings were sold and a third was remodeled. The churches that combined had different personalities, traditions, activities, and services. We continue to discover who Holy Family is and work on relationship building.
- For Trinity, after operation for many years with a full-time priest, the move to share resources within the **Blue Water Episcopal Covenant** in order to employ a priest responsible to the covenant is a new way of thinking, organizing and doing business.
- Both Holy Family and Trinity continue to hold weekly worship services by either bringing in supply priests or offering Morning Prayer services facilitated by lay people.
- The pandemic, which brought many restrictions and closures, taught both churches that change is constant and unpredictable and that open communication is key to figuring out what to do. We make efforts to talk to people, listen, and adjust based on what our congregations want. Because of Covid, we were forced to find new ways of keeping ourselves connected, including simulcasting services on YouTube and Facebook and holding vestry, annual, search, and other meetings via Zoom rather than in person. Keeping financial support current was another essential challenge that we both successfully met.
- We know that some people will never be satisfied and at some point, need to redirect repetitive complaints toward positive solutions. We learned that some people would rather walk away than deal with change and that it is our responsibility to focus on sustaining those who remain loyal and committed.

*Describe the gifts and skills essential to the future leaders of your worshipping community.*

- Desired pastoral skills include accepting and welcoming diversity among all ages, ethnicities, genders, religions; encouraging participation in parish life and programs; and connecting us to what's happening in the community and world beyond.
- Worship skills prioritize inspiring sermons and relating to liturgical tradition, while being open to new ideas.
- We seek a rector who is a team player, passionate and caring, a spiritual leader and good communicator.
- Flexibility and willingness to approach ministry in a new way are at the heart of BWEC. Because the covenant is new, our rector and members of Holy Family and Trinity will be inventing together how to be the church in intriguing, purposeful ways.
- We are looking for acceptance, leadership, and community involvement, as well as a leader who recognizes, supports, and encourages lay people to get involved in various roles.
- Our leader should be one who listens to the parishes and helps guide and equip us with the skills to move forward.
- We want our priest to reach out and interpret what's happening in the world beyond our doors and bring the Christian perspective to outside events.
- Personal traits we value are following through on commitments, being open-minded and receptive to new ideas, demonstrating solid organizational skills, and encouraging growth and vitality.

## Vital Statistics Define Who and What We Are

As part of the search process, both Holy Family and Trinity conducted surveys in 2021 as specified by the Episcopal Church. The results yield understanding about the sizes, composition, stewardship, activities, and finances of our parishes.



- 11 members are between the ages of 0–25.
- 10 members are between the ages of 26-62.
- 37 members are age 63 and over.
- 64% of parishioners are retired.
- Average in-person weekly attendance is 32 (does not include livestream).
- Total pledging units = 33.
- Worship style is traditional, but we are open to trying new things.
- Services alternate between Rite I and Rite II Holy Eucharist and Morning Prayer.
- Valued community outreach ministries include the ecumenical food pantry, thrift shop, and Christmas giving tree.
- These are the activities we are most passionate about: coffee hour, music, lay reading, building and grounds, altar guild, choir, prayer group, eucharistic ministry, vestry, worship leadership, visiting sick and shut-ins, greeters, education/formation, Bible study.

- 38 of regular attendees are 66+ years of age, 7 are between 46 and 65, and 7 are 25 or less.
- 73% of us are retired or semi-retired, 27% are working full-, part-time, or self-employed.
- Income in 2020, the most recent year for which figures are available, saw 61.28% of households making less than \$55,000 annually, with 38.71% earning more than \$56,000 per year.
- 71.5% of members have been active in Trinity for more than 11 years; 21.43% have been here all their lives.
- Ministries most valued are growing the church (65.85% of respondents), music (56.10%), and community outreach (also 56.10%).
- Popular activities include adult choir and altar guild, participation in fund-raisers, ecumenical vacation Bible school, and property maintenance. Beyond Trinity we commit to animal shelters, arts and musical organizations, missions, professional networking and business development groups, and more.

## The Blue Water Episcopal Covenant Wants You!

Our emerging covenant is an intriguing chance for you to participate in building the church of the future. Professionally, we offer room to grow, try new ideas, develop organizational skills, guide our worship, and deepen faith in Christ and the Christian way of life. The covenant is a different approach to the priesthood, one focused on sharing resources within a community setting as our two churches organize in a new way. Personally, the Blue Water lifestyle is fun, inviting, and worthwhile for individuals and families alike. Plus, we're great people to work with – loving, caring, committed, and involved.

This is a momentous time for our churches. Within the Blue Water Episcopal Covenant, Holy Family and Trinity are beginning a new era in our histories, with the opportunity to lead change that will resonate in our areas and throughout the larger church. For many parishes in Michigan and throughout the country, combining financial and other resources in covenant will become increasingly common as we seek new ways to minister to our members, our communities, and the world. As the first covenant parishes in our diocese, Holy Family and Trinity are proud to serve as a beacon and anticipate setting an example that will serve others.

As rector to the Blue Water Episcopal Covenant, we invite you to join us in shaping a robust future that brings blessings to us all.

