



Report of the Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations Section

Statement of Purpose

The governing description of this section of the Office of the Presiding Bishop appears in continuing resolution 15.11.B05, printed in Section X of this volume.

Report of Work 2005-2007

The over all goals of this section for the years 2003-2013 are as follows: to foster the bilateral dialogues in which this church is engaged; to participate fully in the conciliar organizations of which this church is a member (the Lutheran World Federation, the World Council of Churches, the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., Churches Uniting in Christ, and Christian Churches Together in the U.S.A.); to foster a broad and deep implementation of the relationship of full communion with five church bodies; to enhance inter-Lutheran dialogue and cooperation; and to help guide the interfaith relations in which this church is engaged.

In all its work, the Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations section of the Office of the Presiding Bishop is guided by the policy statement, "A Declaration of Ecumenical Commitment," adopted by the 1991 Churchwide Assembly. This document provides the basis and framework for the policies, aims, and goals of this section. The declaration states that the ecumenical goal of this church is a relationship of "full communion" with all churches that confess the triune God.

While much of this section's work is based on past achievements, new ecumenical opportunities continue to develop in the life of this church. The process of studying a proposal for a relationship of full communion with The United Methodist Church and the beginning of a "discourse" with the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church are examples of new horizons in the ecumenical work of this church. Channels of communication have been kept open and relations of trust cultivated with a number of churches and ecumenical organizations. The vision, encouragement, and active participation of the presiding bishop of this church as its chief ecumenical officer are indispensable.

Implementation of Full Communion Agreements

The Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations section of the Office of the Presiding Bishop coordinates the implementation of relationships of full communion adopted by this church with: The Episcopal Church through "Called to Common Mission;" the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Reformed Church in America, and the United Church of Christ through "A Formula of Agreement;" and with the Northern and Southern Provinces of the Moravian Church in America through "Following Our Shepherd to Full Communion." A report on the work of the coordinating committees which seek to deepen and clarify these relationships will be provided in Appendix A.

Bilateral Dialogues

Lutheran-Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

An initial meeting of this dialogue team was conducted in April 2004 and was devoted to a study of the respective teachings on the Lord's Supper. The dialogue was placed on hiatus late in 2005 in order to allow the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to focus its ecumenical resources on a study of ministry related to the work of Churches Uniting in Christ (see below).

Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue

The third round of the Lutheran-Orthodox dialogue was completed in November 2006 when a sub-committee of the dialogue team approved editorial changes to a number of papers presented during this round. These papers will be posted on the Web sites of the participating churches and complement the three brief statements of the dialogue issued in the course of this round of conversations. It is anticipated that a new round of the dialogue will begin in 2008.

Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue

The eleventh round of this U.S. dialogue, which has contributed so significantly to international Lutheran-Roman Catholic relations, was inaugurated in December 2005. The theme of this round is "The Hope for Eternal Life" and focuses on issues such as purgatory, indulgences, and prayers for the dead, all issues identified by the "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification" as areas of theology still in need of clarification between the two traditions.

Lutheran-United Methodist Dialogue

An agreement of "interim eucharistic sharing" was approved by the 2005 Churchwide Assembly. Some months later, the dialogue team issued a draft of a final report that proposes that a relationship of full communion be established between the two churches. A study resource, titled "Confessing Our Faith Together," was distributed by the two churches encouraging responses to the draft proposal. The agenda for future meetings of the dialogue will be determined by these responses.

Lutheran-Mennonite Liaison Committee

In April 2004, the Lutheran-Mennonite Liaison Committee issued "Right Remembering in Anabaptist-Lutheran Relations," an analysis of the history of the relationship between the two traditions. The document also contains a proposed "Declaration" to the Mennonite Church in the U.S.A., apologizing for Lutheran contributions to the 16th-century persecution of Anabaptists, of which the Mennonite community is an heir. The "Declaration" also sought to distance this church from certain statements in the Lutheran Confessions that call upon the state to persecute those who hold differing views on infant baptism. After revisions by the committee and review by the Conference

of Bishops, the ELCA Church Council adopted the “Declaration” [see Section IX, page 22], which has been well received in the ecumenical community and has served as a major contribution to the international Lutheran-Mennonite Dialogue.

Lutheran-African Methodist Episcopal Zion Discourse

The presiding bishops of this church and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, one of three historic black churches in the United States, met for the first time in February 2007 for the purpose of sharing information about the history and present ministry of the two churches. A second meeting for an informal “discourse” to consider practical issues which the two churches might address together, such as HIV-AIDS and work in anti-racism, is scheduled for September 2007.

Relationship with The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod

The Committee on Lutheran Cooperation, consisting of five representatives each from this church and from The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, has been meeting regularly since the formation of this church in 1988. Charged with the responsibility of tending to the joint efforts co-sponsored by the two church bodies and providing leaders with updates on current events in their respective churches, the Committee on Lutheran Cooperation has enhanced constructive dialogue and fostered the cooperation that is possible. The ELCA-LCMS Discussion Panel, which began conversations in 2003 to address issues that divide the two church bodies, now focuses on theological issues that the two churches have in common, also ways to foster a spirit of cooperation.

Conciliar Relations

Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations is responsible for the administration of this church’s relationship to the conciliar agencies of which this church is a member.

Lutheran World Federation

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has participated strongly in the work and leadership of the Lutheran World Federation since becoming a member church in 1989. That participation has been enhanced with the election in 2003 of Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson to serve as LWF President. A report of the North American regional office of the Lutheran World Federation follows in Appendix B.

World Council of Churches

This church has been an active participant in the work of the World Council of Churches since becoming a member in 1989. A full delegation of ELCA leaders participated in the Eighth WCC Assembly, held February 13-21, 2006, in Puerto Alegre, Brazil. At that assembly, Vice President Carlos E. Peña and Ms. Kathryn Lohre were elected members of the WCC Central Committee, the highest legislative authority between assemblies. The Eighth Assembly called for a major reorganization and streamlining of the organization, which presently is being carried out. There also is active participation from leaders of this church in U.S. Conference of the World Council of Churches. While financial support of the WCC remains low for a church body of our size, the commitment to working closely

with the organization is high, particularly in its peace and justice efforts, especially in its program, “The Decade to Overcome Violence.”

National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

The National Council of Churches draws together 35 member denominations to work together in matters of advocacy and social justice on the one hand, and on matters of theology and moral deliberation on the other. Late in 2006 NCC General Secretary, the Rev. Robert Edgar, announced that he would not be a candidate for reelection to a third term for that post, launching a nationwide search for a new general secretary. Under Pr. Edgar’s leadership, the council has achieved significant fiscal stability, and has expanded its work in anti-racism efforts, a major initiative to overcome poverty in this country, and other social justice causes. Leaders of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are involved in numerous ways in the work of the council and its relief and development partner, Church World Service.

Churches Uniting in Christ

The 2001 ELCA Churchwide Assembly voted to make this church a “Partner in Mission and Dialogue” with the denominations that comprise Churches Uniting in Christ (CUIC). The goal of the organization is to establish a relationship of full communion between those ten denominations that include several ELCA full communion and dialogue partners. While this church is not seeking a relationship of full communion with the remaining churches at this time, this church is particularly interested in participating in the anti-racism work sponsored by CUIC. Leaders of this church have been particularly involved in a sub-committee related to this work, and in a task force on issues of ministry. Currently CUIC is planning a plenary meeting, its first since 2001, to refocus its efforts in these areas.

Christian Churches Together in the U.S.A.

History was made on February 6, 2007, when Christian Churches Together in the U.S.A. formally launched its work as an expanded table for ecumenical conversation. Members of the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox churches, mainline Protestant churches, Pentecostal and Evangelical churches, and historic ethnic churches all were present at the service in Pasadena, California, where the organization formally began its work. The group has identified the elimination of poverty as the primary focus of its work, as well as continuing the process of building relationships to deepen trust and advance ecumenical conversation. The 2003 Churchwide Assembly voted to become a founding member of this newest ecumenical conversation table.

The Reception Process

A strategic plan for encouraging the reception of this church’s ecumenical initiatives was launched in 2005 and is currently embarking on its second phase. The plan includes an emphasis on ecumenical formation. The centerpiece of this formation work is a seminary January-term cosponsored by the Lutheran World Federation focusing on “Ecumenism in the Global Church.” To date, 65 seminarians have participated in this course during which they gather in Geneva, Switzerland, for

two weeks to hear from global ecumenical leaders. The plan also encourages greater young adult and gender diversity in appointments to the Lutheran Ecumenical Representatives Network (LERN). In addition, grants and opportunities to young adults and newly ordained pastors for ecumenical and inter-religious formation have been awarded. An essay contest also has been established to encourage seminarians to spend time in reflection and writing on key ecumenical issues.

The reception process includes distribution of "Ecumenical Life," a Web-based newsletter distributed broadly to leaders in this church and among this church's ecumenical partners. A series of printed resources also has been made available, including two adult study booklets under the umbrella name of "Talking Points."

Of particular importance at this time is a Web-based study document, "Confessing our Faith Together: A Study and Discussion Guide," designed to assist congregations in assessing the draft proposal from the Lutheran-United Methodist dialogue, which may lead to the establishment of a relationship of full communion between these two church bodies. Congregations are invited to study the document, complete the evaluation form, and return the form to the indicated address.

Inter-Religious Relations

The 2005 Churchwide Assembly directed that the Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations section of the Office of the Presiding Bishop should be responsible for coordinating all the inter-religious relations in which this church is engaged.

An inter-religious, Web-based primer, "Windows for Understanding: Jewish-Muslim-Lutheran Relations," was introduced in November 2006 to assist congregations, bishops, pastors, and other leaders to engage in inter-religious conversation. The resource has generated a great deal of interest from ecumenical and inter-religious partners alike.

The Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Jewish Relations continues to be an integral part of guiding this church's work with the Jewish community. Conversations initiated by Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson in May 2003 with members of the Reform Judaism community continue and have laid the groundwork for a deeper level of trust between the two traditions, particularly as the situation in the Middle East continues to be difficult.

Plans call for the creation of a Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Muslim Relations, to be launched in the fall of 2007. The panel will have a similar mandate to that given to the Lutheran-Jewish Consultative Panel and will help this section and the presiding bishop as deeper relationships are forged with members of the Muslim community, all for the purpose of deepening understanding and trust.

Relations with both of these communities of inter-faith sisters and brothers, as well as with members of other faith traditions, are enhanced through the inter-religious commission of the National Council of Churches, in which staff of the churchwide organization play a crucial role.

Randall R. Lee, *executive for ecumenical and inter-religious relations*



Appendix A

Coordinating Committees

Lutheran-Episcopal Coordinating Committee

The Lutheran-Episcopal Coordinating Committee (LECC), comprised of seven members from each communion, meets twice each year and usually includes a liaison member of the Joint Anglican-Lutheran Commission from Canada. We keep each other updated on developments within our two churches and seek to strengthen our common witness as full communion partners.

During the past two years, we have explored theological education at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific and Vancouver School of Theology, learned about and encouraged diaconal ministry at the local level, discussed issues of human sexuality, explored ministry with youth and young adults, and experienced joint mission opportunities in Nevada, Seattle, and California.

We have developed rotational “terms of service” on the Lutheran-Episcopal Coordinating Committee and will be joined by new members at our next meeting in January 2008 in Washington, D.C. As we move about the country we seek to learn from and also encourage local efforts in living out the implications of “Called to Common Mission.”

Lutheran-Moravian Coordinating Committee

The Lutheran-Moravian Coordinating Committee has undergone significant evolution in the past two years, starting with a revision of goals and outcomes for the near term.

This process introduced representation and participation on the committee by members from the Alaska Province and the East West Indies Province of the Moravian Church, and the Alaska Synod and the Caribbean Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. This participation contributed significantly to adoption by the East West Indies Province of a resolution to join the relationship of Full Communion between the ELCA and the Northern and Southern Provinces of the Moravian Church in America. The resolution has likewise been a cause of celebration in the ELCA, and a reciprocal action is before the 2007 Churchwide Assembly.

Areas of cooperation are structurally significant: Moravians and Lutherans attend new-mission-start conferences together; Moravians are joining Lutherans during the seminary “January Course of Study” on Global Ecumenism in Geneva, Switzerland; Moravians and Lutherans participate in North Carolina and Virginia in a program aptly titled “Sustaining Our Shepherds” to enhance the spiritual lives of clergy, which is likewise utilized in ELCA first-call theological education in those areas; the coordinating committee likewise includes and encourages participation of emerging young adult leaders in the biannual meetings of the committee itself.

The coordinating committee is seeking ways to encourage local and regional relationships that currently do not exist. One example is the intentional inclusion of Moravian college students at ELCA colleges and universities. The coordinating committee understands itself as a conduit within and between the full-communion partner churches, and also as a model for how ecumenical relationships can be facilitated through the years in practical, outcome-based forms.

Lutheran-Reformed Coordinating Committee

The Lutheran-Reformed Coordinating Committee, which helps to oversee the implementation of the “Formula of Agreement” in various settings of the life of the churches, has been active in the biennium 2005-2007. Below are highlights:

10th Anniversary Celebration

The 10th anniversary of the inauguration of the “Formula of Agreement” will take place October 2008 in Philadelphia, and will include both worship and a symposium highlighting various theological elements of the relationship.

Issues of Ordained Ministry and Pastoral Leadership

During this biennium the staff leadership of the “Formula” full-communion partners began to explore the positive effect that the “Formula” could have on securing trained pastoral leadership in settings where leadership is difficult to find. They convened a meeting of judicatory staff in Pennsylvania to discuss the joys and challenges facing congregations and pastoral leadership. A second gathering is planned for the fall of 2007 in the greater New York City area.

Theology Committee

The Theology Committee of the Lutheran-Reformed Coordinating Committee continues with plans for a multi-part consultation on the teaching of tradition in Lutheran and Reformed settings. It is hoped that such a consultation, held over a period of several years, will engender a stronger awareness of the various ways we honor and transmit both the tradition and our particular expressions of it.

Regular Consultation on Human Sexuality, Liturgy

The “Formula” partners continue to consult one another on matters of liturgy, ethics, and confessional work. Most notable in the 2005-2007 biennium were collaborative discussions related to the development of new liturgical resources, deliberation on issues such as human sexuality, collaborative work in the area of racial justice and reconciliation (with a joint consultation on racial justice planned for Summer 2007), and ongoing discussion on the issue and relevance of modern confessional statements.

Collaborative Conciliar Work

In 2007-2008 the Lutheran-Reformed Coordinating Committee will receive “Called to Be One Church” from the World Council of Churches and will offer a joint perspective on this ecumenical text. This will be seen to complement the separate denominational responses called for by the World Council of Churches, and will begin with the assumption that our full-communion relationship offers an additional lens through which to view all questions of ecclesial unity.



Appendix B

Lutheran World Federation

Sixty-six Million Lutherans Do Make a Difference!

On behalf of the Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko, general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), and the three other LWF-member churches in North America (the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, The Lithuanian Evangelical Lutheran Church in Diaspora, and the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church Abroad,) thank you for your strong ongoing support of the work of the LWF. Together we do make a difference.

60th Anniversary

Founded in 1947 at the end of World War II, the Lutheran World Federation is celebrating its 60th anniversary this year. We came together 60 years ago primarily to address the critical needs of the tens of thousands of Lutheran refugees in Europe. Today we remain strongly committed to the needs of the world's refugees. The LWF is the second largest partner to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees with direct care of over 400,000 refugees around the world. With 140 member churches in 78 countries representing a total membership of 66 million, our work together has grown in these 60 years of service. We make a difference as we:

- Care for those dying of AIDS
- Dig new wells in hot, dry lands
- Train lay evangelists at Bible Schools
- Reflect theologically
- Remove deadly landmines
- Enable self-sufficiency with micro-credit loans
- Advocate for human rights
- Rebuild after natural disasters

Priorities and Departments

The focus and direction of our work is shaped by decisions and commitments of the 2003 LWF Tenth Assembly in Winnipeg, Canada, which met under the theme, "For the Healing of the World." Four priorities guide the current work:

- Strengthen the Communion of Lutheran Churches in Mission;
- Deepen Ecumenical Commitments and Foster Interfaith Relations;
- Bear Witness in Church and Society to God's Healing, Reconciliation and Justice; and
- Enhance Communication, Mutual Accountability and Sharing.

The Department for World Service, the LWF international relief, rehabilitation and development agency, maintains 24 service programs and emergency operations in 31 countries with over 50 international staff and 5500 local staff. This makes you part of one of the largest humanitarian-assistance agencies in the world!

The Department for Mission and Development focuses on promoting and strengthening the life and witness of the member churches. Support is guided by three aims: 1) to build capacity and competence in the member churches; 2) to expand understandings of mission; and 3) to strengthen member churches with financial, material and human resources.

Through *The Department for Theology and Studies*, we have some of the best scholars writing on issues and concepts that confront 21st century churches. The LWF is distinctive in that it is our living faith that engages the challenges the human community faces today.

The Office for International Affairs and Human Rights advocates for justice, peace, the transformation of cultures of violence and oppression, and strengthens the advocacy capacity of member churches.

The Office for Ecumenical Affairs is the main instrument in relations with other churches and church organizations at the international level.

We were able to be in these places of need because of your gifts to the ELCA World Hunger Appeal. Thirty cents of each dollar you give to the appeal supports the work of the LWF. Thank you for your ongoing generous support!

ELCA Leadership

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and its predecessor bodies have been prominent leaders in the LWF since its inception. The following ELCA members have accepted leadership roles in the LWF during the years of 2003-2010:

- Bp. Mark S. Hanson, LWF president
- Pr. Emmanuel F. Y. Grantson, council member
- Ms. Abigail Z. Hoffman, council member
- Pr. Barbara R. Rossing, council member
- Ms. Linda J. Brown, council advisor
- Pr. Rafael Malpica, council advisor and N.A. Advisory Committee
- Ms. Kristi Bangert, council consultant
- Ms. Belletech Deressa, council consultant
- Pr. Randall R. Lee, council consultant and N.A. Advisory Committee
- Pr. Charles S. Miller, consultant
- Ms. Linda Post Bushkofsky, liaison coordinator to Women in Church and Society
- Ms. Kristin Glass, liaison to Youth Desk
- Bp. Philip L. Haugen, N.A. Advisory Committee

It is with gratitude that we acknowledge the gifts of ELCA members serving on the LWF Geneva staff. The Rev. Karen L. Bloomquist is the director of the Department for Theology and Studies, and Ms. Sarah Padre serves in the finance office of the Department for World Service.

Regional Office for North America

In 1997 the North America office was begun with funding from the LWF, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and the ELCA. A joint agreement between these three bodies

continues to provide shape, oversight and financial resources for the office. Headquartered in the Lutheran Center in Chicago, the North America Regional Officer's responsibilities include interpretation and education about the LWF, building and nurturing relationships and communication between and among the four member churches in North America for the purpose of mission, facilitating the sharing of gifts of LWF members with the North America churches where possible, and assisting in fund raising related to the LWF Endowment Fund.

The ELCA continues to make significant contributions to the mission and work of the Lutheran World Federation. These include many contributions that individuals, institutions and units of the ELCA make in leadership, study, and service within the LWF. The contribution also includes strong financial support for the LWF as we work in common witness and service. We work together in emergency humanitarian assistance, sustainable development, evangelism, communication, Christian education, theological education, ministry with women and youth, studies and theological reflection, advocacy with international affairs and human rights and with continued attention to ecumenical and inter-faith dialogue.

Resources

During this anniversary year, there are many resources available for congregations to assist in lifting up the mission and ministry of the LWF. Stories, prayers, bulletin inserts, and other materials can be found on the LWF North America Web site (www.elca.org/lwf). LWF Sunday, a focal point for our celebrations this year, is the first Sunday every October.

Conclusion

We are a complex, multi-faceted Lutheran family. We know that 66 million Lutherans do make a difference! As Lutherans, our call is for the healing of the world. May our actions and the deep vibrant faith of the people of this church help make it so!

Kathy J. Magnus, *regional officer, LWF North America*