



# Report of the Synodical Relations Section

## Statement of Purpose

Responsibility for synodical relations is exercised by the Office of the Presiding Bishop to coordinate the relationships between the churchwide organization and synods, to develop and implement synodical-churchwide consultations and services, to render support for synodical bishops and synodical staff, and to provide staff services for the Conference of Bishops. The guiding vision for the work of this section is to foster effective, equipped leaders in healthy, mission-driven synods. The governing description for this section is contained in continuing resolution 15.11.G05, printed in Section X of this volume.

## Report of Work for 2005-2007

### *Conference of Bishops*

Supporting the work of the Conference of Bishops and its committees is one of this section's highest priorities. Staff members work with conference committees in planning and conducting two annual meetings of the conference, the annual Academy for Bishops, formation events for newly elected bishops, and annual orientations for newly called assistants to bishops. The work of this section on behalf of the Conference of Bishops during the past biennium is reported in detail below.

### *Synodical Leadership Support*

Providing support to synodical bishops, their assistants, and synodical officers is ongoing work of the Synodical Relations section in partnership with the Bishops' Formation and Academy Committee of the Conference of Bishops as well as other units and sections of the churchwide organization. Each year, orientation and formation sessions are provided for newly elected bishops and new assistants to bishops. In addition, the section hosts biennial gatherings of bishops' assistants and associates, providing opportunity for these leaders to learn from and support one another. In February 2007, the Bishops' Assistants Gathering was held in Galveston, Texas.

### *Synodical Planning and Consultation*

This work ranges from one time visioning or planning events to multi-year consultation with synods developing long-range strategic plans or synodical restructuring efforts. Transition teams also have been created to assist synods as they face changes in staffing or leadership.

### *Synod Assembly Representation and Mission-Support Consultations*

The section's director for administration and synodical relations, in consultation with the executive of the section and the presiding bishop, carries out the annual assignment of

churchwide representatives to synod assemblies. The director for mission support, in consultation with the Synodical-Churchwide Relations Committee of the Conference of Bishops, coordinates annual mission-support consultations with each of the 65 synods of this church. In the fall of 2006 and winter of 2007 consultations were held with Regions 1, 5, and 9, and with individual synods in each of the other regions. These consultations focus on the ongoing relationship and partnership between the churchwide organization and each synod, and allow for discussion of shared challenges and opportunities as we carry out God's mission together.

### *Regional Coordination*

Churchwide budgetary support is provided for the nine regions of this church. Staff of the section assist the directors for ministry leadership in each region in planning their semiannual meetings. In addition, a staff member from this section is assigned to each region's steering committee or governing council. Staff deployed to each region play a significant role in welcoming new bishops, synod staff, and other leaders, and in providing shared learning opportunities for leaders from the synods in their respective regions.

### *Federal Chaplaincy Ministries*

As assistant to the presiding bishop for federal chaplaincy ministries, the Rev. Darrell D. Morton provides support for this church's nearly 400 active duty as well as guard and reserve military chaplains, and the nearly 130 persons in other federal chaplaincy ministries. This section's executive serves as a member of the ELCA's Federal Chaplaincy Ministries Advisory Committee and as a member of the Joint Federal Chaplaincy Ministries Advisory Committee with leaders from The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

### *Good Samaritan, Shared Risk, and Special Needs Retirement Funds*

These three funds are managed by the Synodical Relations section. Good Samaritan grants are made to rostered leaders and family members or survivors to maintain health coverage in times of financial need. The Special Needs Retirement Fund, through the Board of Pensions, subsidizes low-income pensioners who are retired from active ministry in this church. The Shared-Risk Fund is a self-insurance program in which all synods participate, reducing their financial liability for high-cost disciplinary proceedings.

## Major Directions 2007-2009

The Synodical Relations section works closely with leaders throughout this church to set priorities that will serve the

changing needs of synods and synod leaders. The following priorities are a result of this ongoing collaboration:

- strengthening the formation process for new bishops and the orientation process for new synod staff;
- providing education and training opportunities for elected synod vice presidents, secretaries and treasurers;
- coordinating the dissemination to synod assemblies of important information coming before each Churchwide Assembly;
- a thorough review of funding and support patterns in the nine regions of this church;
- the development of a more coordinated approach to the work of churchwide staff within synods and regions; and
- assisting with the implementation of the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Committee on Mission Funding.

## Conference of Bishops 2005-2007

### **Membership**

The Conference of Bishops consists of the 65 synodical bishops and the presiding bishop and secretary of this church. The members of the Conference of Bishops, as of February 1, 2007, were the following:

Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson  
Secretary Lowell G. Almen  
Bp. Jon V. Anderson, Southwestern Minnesota Synod  
Bp. Edward R. Benoway, Florida-Bahamas Synod  
Bp. Robert D. Berg, Northwest Synod of Wisconsin  
Bp. Allan C. Bjornberg, Rocky Mountain Synod  
Bp. Paul J. Blom, Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod  
Bp. William Chris Boerger, Northwest Washington Synod  
Bp. Leonard H. Bolick, North Carolina Synod  
Bp. Stephen P. Bouman, Metropolitan New York Synod  
Bp. Claire S. Burkat, Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod  
Bp. George G. Carlson, South-Central Synod of Wisconsin  
Bp. Duane C. Danielson, Western North Dakota Synod  
Bp. David L. deFreese, Nebraska Synod  
Bp. Andrea F. DeGroot-Nesdahl, South Dakota Synod  
Bp. David A. Donges, South Carolina Synod  
Bp. Ralph W. Dunkin, West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod  
Bp. Elizabeth A. Eaton, Northeastern Ohio Synod  
Bp. Murray D. Finck, Pacifica Synod  
Bp. Richard J. Foss, Eastern North Dakota Synod  
Bp. Warren D. Freiheit, Central/Southern Illinois Synod  
Bp. Gary L. Hansen, North/West Lower Michigan Synod  
Bp. Carol S. Hendrix, Lower Susquehanna Synod  
Bp. Robert D. Hofstad, Southwestern Washington Synod  
Bp. Callon W. Holloway Jr., Southern Ohio Synod  
Bp. Philip L. Hougen, Southeastern Iowa Synod  
Bp. Marie C. Jerge, Upstate New York Synod  
Bp. Craig E. Johnson, Minneapolis Area Synod  
Bp. Ralph E. Jones, Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod  
Bp. James A. Justman, East-Central Synod of Wisconsin  
Bp. Kevin S. Kanouse, Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod  
Bp. Michael F. Keys, Alaska Synod  
Bp. H. Gerard Knoche, Delaware-Maryland Synod  
Bp. Wilma S. Kucharek, Slovak Zion Synod  
Bp. Paul R. Landahl, Metropolitan Chicago Synod  
Bp. April C. Ulring Larson, LaCrosse Area Synod  
Bp. Michael A. Last, Western Iowa Synod  
Bp. Marcus C. Lohrmann, Northwestern Ohio Synod  
Bp. A. Donald Main, Upper Susquehanna Synod  
Bp. Gerald L. Mansholt, Central States Synod  
Bp. Margarita Martínez, Caribbean Synod  
Bp. James F. Mauney, Virginia Synod  
Bp. Donald J. McCoid, Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod

Bp. David G. Mullen, Sierra Pacific Synod  
Bp. Dean W. Nelson, Southwest California Synod  
Bp. Richard R. Omland, Montana Synod  
Bp. Margaret G. Payne, New England Synod  
Bp. Gregory R. Pile, Allegheny Synod  
Bp. E. Roy Riley Jr., New Jersey Synod  
Bp. Peter Rogness, Saint Paul Area Synod  
Bp. Theodore F. Schneider, Metropolitan Washington, D.C., Synod  
Bp. Floyd M. Schoenhals, Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod  
Bp. John H. K. Schreiber, Southeast Michigan Synod  
Bp. Thomas A. Skrenes, Northern Great Lakes Synod  
Bp. David R. Strobel, Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod  
Bp. E. Peter Strommen, Northeastern Minnesota Synod  
Bp. James R. Stuck, Indiana-Kentucky Synod  
Bp. Paul W. Stumme-Diers, Greater Milwaukee Synod  
Bp. Paul R. Swanson, Oregon Synod  
Bp. Stephen S. Talmage, Grand Canyon Synod  
Bp. Ray Tiemann, Southwestern Texas Synod  
Bp. Steven L. Ullestad, Northeastern Iowa Synod  
Bp. Harold L. Usgaard, Southeastern Minnesota Synod  
Bp. Rolf P. Wangberg, Northwestern Minnesota Synod  
Bp. Ronald B. Warren, Southeastern Synod  
Bp. Martin D. Wells, Eastern Washington- Idaho Synod  
Bp. Gary M. Wollersheim, Northern Illinois Synod

### **Committees**

The Conference of Bishops organizes its work according to identified needs and mandated tasks.

#### **Executive Committee**

The Executive Committee consists of the officers of the Conference of Bishops, the presiding bishop, the secretary of this church, and three at large members. The executive of the Synodical Relations section serves as staff to this committee. The committee prepares the agenda and program for the meetings of the Conference of Bishops, nominates conference members to committees, boards, and task forces, and offers guidance to the Synodical Relations section in providing budget and staff support for the Conference of Bishops. Members of the Executive Committee are:

Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson  
Bp. E. Roy Riley, *chair* (2004-2007)  
Bp. Andrea F. DeGroot-Nesdahl, *vice chair*, (2004-2007)  
Secretary Lowell G. Almen  
Bp. Paul J. Blom  
Bp. Murray D. Finck  
Bp. Carol S. Hendrix

#### **Formation and Academy Committee**

The orientation and formation of newly elected synodical bishops and an annual continuing education event for all bishops (the Academy for Bishops) are the responsibilities of this committee (ELCA 15.31.A03.f.). Bp. Dean W. Nelson is chair.

#### **Roster Committee**

Through this committee, the conference responds to applications for call to “ministry in unusual circumstances,” exceptions to the three-year parish ministry requirement, and other exceptions to normal roster management (ELCA 7.41.11. a. and b.). Bp. James R. Stuck is chair.

#### **Theological and Ethical Concerns Committee**

Assisted by this committee, the conference serves as a forum for reflections upon the theological and ethical implications of

issues that affect this church (ELCA 15.31.A03.g.). Bp. Donald J. McCoid is chair.

#### **Committee for Liaison with the Vocation and Education Program Unit**

The conference works closely with the Vocation and Education program unit in matters of roster definition, management, and supervision through this committee (ELCA 15.31.A03.b., c., and d.). Bp. Martin D. Wells is chair.

#### **Committee for Liaison with the Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations Section**

The conference works closely with the Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations Section on ecumenical documents and the promotion of the unity of the Church through this committee (ELCA 15.31.A03.h.). Bp. Philip L. Hougen is chair.

#### **Committee for Synodical-Churchwide Relations**

This committee serves to assist churchwide units and related organizations in securing review, advice, consultation, and recommendations from the Conference of Bishops on policies, programs, and major directions. Bp. Ray Tiemann is chair.

#### **Committee for Liaison to the Church Council**

One synodical bishop from each of the nine regions of this church serves as an advisor to the Church Council and provides counsel to the conference on concerns related to the Church Council. Bp. E. Roy Riley is chair.

#### **Committee on Ministry Among Persons in Poverty**

This committee works to address and implement this church's emphasis on Ministry Among Persons in Poverty. Bp. Paul W. Stumme-Diers is chair.

#### **Shared-Risk Fund Committee**

This committee oversees the synodical self-insurance program for costly disciplinary proceedings. Bp. Robert D. Berg is chair.

#### **Meetings**

At each regular semiannual meeting of the Conference of Bishops time is devoted to worship, theological reflection, consultation regarding the churchwide organization's programs and emphases, synodical bishops' concerns, and reports from the officers and committees. Since the 2005 Churchwide Assembly, the following regular meetings have been convened:

- September 29 – October 3, 2005, at Chicago, Ill.
- March 2 – 7, 2006, at Lake Geneva, Wis.
- October 5 – 10, 2006, at Chicago, Ill.
- March 1 – 6, 2007, at Galveston, Texas

#### **Academy for Bishops**

The theme for the 2006 Academy for Bishops was "Leadership for Public Life: Nurturing and Exercising Courageous Leadership." In 2007 the bishops gathered around the theme of "Leadership for Public Life: Biblical and Theological Grounding."

#### **Major Areas of Work**

Since the 2005 Churchwide Assembly, the following have been major areas of study, consultation, and pastoral concern receiving attention by the Conference of Bishops.

- Engaged in concentrated discussion with seminary presidents on leadership formation in this church, from mission context to practical needs, to varieties of formation.
- Reflected upon and studied the current, unprecedented convergence around issues of poverty and the common good in this nation and around the world.
- Gave significant attention to Lutheran Disaster Response in the Gulf Coast region.
- Participated in an introduction of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* as part of the "Renewing Worship" project.
- In response to a memorial from the North Carolina Synod on faithful conversations about Scripture, the Conference engaged in two extended Bible studies regarding the authority of Scripture and biblical interpretation.
- Discussed healthcare issues as they pertain to seminarians, military chaplains, rostered leaders and congregations, retirees, and American society in general.
- Responded to the ongoing work of the Blue Ribbon Committee on Mission Funding.
- Participated in the study, "Free in Christ to Serve the Neighbor: Lutherans Talk about Human Sexuality."
- Affirmed recommendations concerning the historic condemnation of Anabaptists and a Lutheran-Orthodox "Common Statement on Faith in the Holy Trinity."
- Engaged in rich discussion around full communion with The United Methodist Church, advising consideration no sooner than the 2009 Churchwide Assembly, and around the bilateral dialogue with the Mennonite Church USA.
- Reviewed a new primer on Christian-Jewish-Muslim relations for use throughout this church.

#### **A Concluding Word of Appreciation**

On behalf of the Conference of Bishops, we express appreciation to the Church Council for its strong partnership and openness to receive bishops' advice and counsel; to the officers and churchwide staff who participate in and provide support for meetings of the Conference of Bishops; to the staff of the Synodical Relations section; to Thrivent Financial for Lutherans for various forms of support that enhance conference meetings; and to the many persons throughout this church who offer their support and prayers.

Kathie Bender Schwich, *executive for synodical and constituent relations*

E. Roy Riley, *chair of the Conference of Bishops*