



LERNing

September 2009

A newsletter of the Lutheran Ecumenical Representatives Network

WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dr. Rocky Piro

The ecumenical work of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America continues to bear witness to our common unity with other brothers and sisters in Christ. In August, the Churchwide Assembly approved the ELCA's sixth full communion relationship, this time with the United Methodist Church. More than 8 million members strong across the U.S., the United Methodist Church is larger than all our other five full communion partners combined. Collectively, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Reformed Church in America, the United Church of Christ, the Moravian Church, and the Episcopal Church number nearly 6 million.

In my home synod here in the Pacific Northwest, there has been healthy cooperation between Lutherans and Methodists over the years. We are now eager to build on past efforts and to engage in new opportunities to work together in common mission and ministry – particularly in serving growing immigrant population groups. Our local planning team has already worked out the details for a joint celebration and has agreed to donate the offering to fight malaria – a cause that both church bodies have committed to addressing.

While ecumenism, fighting disease, promoting peace, and many other issues were before the 2009 Churchwide Assembly, the actions related to human sexuality received the most attention by many within the ELCA and by the media. The streaming video from Minneapolis showed the discussions and deliberations by the voting members to be very thoughtful, respectful, sincere, and gave witness to a great deal of reflection, guidance from scripture, and prayer. The outcomes are a cause for some to rejoice, for some to be dismayed, and for some to be unsure.

In times of dissention and disagreement, we are especially called to live in the confidence that God makes us one in baptism and faith. As ecumenical representatives, this is a time for LERN members to be in conversation with their bishops for direction and counsel. It is a time for

continuing dialogue with our full communion partners, dialogue partners, and others. It is a time for those who are many to be one in the body of Christ and to do the work of Jesus where there is need, suffering, and hurt.

A question was posed by a voting member at the Assembly regarding the human sexuality recommendations and our ecumenical relationships. The ELCA's Executive of Ecumenical and Inter-religious Relations, Rev. Donald McCoid, shared that our full communion partners and many of our dialogue partners sent representatives to an ecumenical consultation hosted by the ELCA in early June. While there were a variety of positions on matters of human sexuality among these partners, they were unanimous in valuing having such a forum to talk frankly and collegially with fellow Christians.

As LERN members, we should consider the value of similar conversation and consultation at the local level.

May we rejoice in the unity we share with our full communion partners and continue to pray for the people of God to be strengthened in unity in Christ Jesus.

"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:12).



ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson greets UMC Bishop Gregory Palmer following vote to approve full communion.

NETWORK PRESIDENTS MEET IN PHOENIX

On Wednesday, April 29th, Rocky Piro met with Bob Flannery (Roman Catholic), Betty Gamble (Methodist), Paul Masquelier (Presbyterian), and David Veal (Episcopalian) to discuss ways to improve interactions among their respective ecumenical networks. The 2009 National Workshop marks the start-up of the Methodists' network, called *United Methodists Ecumenical and Interfaith Training*. The Presbyterians also met in Phoenix to work on establishing a network.

The network presidents agreed to ask the National Planning Committee that organizes the annual National Workshop for Christian Unity to find a way to add a new component to future workshops to facilitate network-to-network work on issues related to reception. It was suggested that this may be scheduled into the course of an entire day, beginning with morning session, continuing over lunch, and concluding with plenary-related work in the afternoon.

There was also agreement to further develop information-sharing and communication between networks, particularly related to examples and practices of shared ministries, as well as improving access to denominational resources for ecumenical and interfaith cooperation. The presidents also agreed to maintain two liaisons from their respective boards to serve as primary contacts to the other denominations. The network liaisons typically track the work of other networks and have helped to coordinate the annual seminary essay contest.

LUTHERAN BISHOPS AFFIRM ROMAN CATHOLIC PASTORAL LETTER ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America representing Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington have released a statement of affirmation on the eighth anniversary of the Columbia River Pastoral Letter, which addresses environmental concerns in the northwestern United States.

The Lutheran statement asserts that human beings should be "good stewards of the land" and promotes the "integration of communities within regional ecosystems." It also advocates for "economic and environmental justice" regarding the use of both renewable and nonrenewable resources.

The original Roman Catholic pastoral letter focused on ecological and resource issues in the Columbia River Watershed and is subtitled "**Caring for Creation and the Common Good.**"

The release date, the Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord, is a church festival celebrated by both Roman Catholics and Lutherans every January, to mark Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. A festival marking the cleansing power of water through the rite of baptism is an especially appropriate occasion to address environmental issues, including water quality.

RECEPTION TOOLKIT

The LERN Board has offered to work Ecumenical and Inter-religious Relations on an undertaking in 2009 and 2010 that will result in a new ecumenical resource, which is being called a "reception toolkit." This on-line resource would feature a compendium of "best practices" and examples of ecumenical projects, ministries, and events from around the ELCA. All LERN members are being asked to contribute to the development of this resource.

Please send in any write-ups, articles, news features, liturgies, or reports on ecumenical activities in your synod. Those materials should be sent to your **LERN regional coordinator/board member**. We would especially welcome any pictures or images related to these activities or events.

For this fall, we are particularly interested in cooperative ventures with United Methodists, in light of the recent full communion agreement with that church body. If you are planning joint celebrations to mark that full communion relationship - or joint celebrations around the 10th anniversary of the Joint Declaration of the Doctrine of Justification - please provide that information as soon as possible. Materials and information on other local ecumenical ventures are welcome as well.

A listing of contact information for LERN board members is provided below.

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NATIONAL CELEBRATION OF THE JOINT DECLARATION ON THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

This October, an important milestone in ecumenical relations will take place: the tenth anniversary of the signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification by the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation in Augsburg, Germany. In 2006, the World Methodist Council, comprised of a number of Methodist churches throughout the United States and the world, affirmed this Joint Declaration. A joint national celebration of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America will mark this historic anniversary in Chicago.

Recognizing the significance of this declaration, Catholic, Lutheran, and Methodist faithful will gather in Chicago for the **National 10th Anniversary Celebration of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification** on Thursday, October 1, 2009, at 6:30 p.m. at Old St. Patrick's Church, 700 W. Adams St., Chicago. It will include a service of Solemn Evening Prayer, an address by the Reverend Dr. Ishmael Noko, General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, and a reception.

NORTHEAST IOWA CATHOLICS, LUTHERANS TO CELEBRATE OCT. 25 ANNIVERSARY

Catholics and Lutherans in Northeast Iowa will join together Sunday afternoon, Oct. 25, to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification.

The event is scheduled from 3 to 5 p.m. at St. Mary Catholic Church in Waverly. It will begin with a worship service in which Archbishop Jerome Hanus, Archbishop of the Dubuque Archdiocese will preach, and Bishop Steven Ullestad of the Northeastern Iowa Synod, will serve as liturgist. St. Mary Catholic Church, host of the event, is located north of Waverly at 2700 Horton Road (1st St. NW).

During the worship service an offering will be received for support of St. Bridget's Hispanic Ministry in Postville. The gifts will be used to provide ongoing support for workers and families affected by the May 12, 2008 immigration raid – support for material witnesses who have been forced to return to Postville following the completion of their jail time; needs that include food, clothing, shelter, utilities, counseling, transportation, and paperwork costs related to returning spouses and children of

those deported to their country of origin. Following worship, Dr. H. George Anderson, former presiding bishop of the ELCA and a signer of the Joint Declaration, will make a short presentation on the agreement. Small group discussion will follow.

An historic declaration, The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, was prepared and voted on by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church in 1999. It states that the condemnations of the 16th century regarding the doctrine of justification no longer apply to our churches today. The document also outlines places of theological agreement as well as the remaining theological differences.

The Northeastern Iowa Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Archdiocese of Dubuque of the Roman Catholic Church are partnering to plan and coordinate this event. Bishop Ullestad and Archbishop Hanus invite all people of faith to participate in the event as this historic agreement is celebrated.

HAVE AN ARTICLE FOR *LERNing*? If you would like to submit an article for a future issue of *LERNing*, please contact one of the editorial team members.



ELCA Secretary David Swartling, Bishop Hanson and Dr. Michael Trice singing after the adoption of the full communion agreement with the United Methodist Church.

BARNABAS UPLIFT: A MINISTRY OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Several church bodies and service agencies, including Lutheran Services in Iowa (LSI), the Northeastern, Southeastern, and Western Iowa Synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, have partnered to form a ministry of support for low income Iowans. The name Barnabas honors a member of the second set of Apostles, Joseph, nicknamed "Barnabas," which means "son of encouragement." Barnabas encouraged many to speak about their faith. It was Barnabas who was a sponsor for Paul after Paul's conversion and encouraged the disciples to receive him. And it was Barnabas who encouraged Paul to go to Antioch and together they taught the church. Son of encouragement reflects Barnabas Uplift's emphasis on encouraging individuals, families and communities to move beyond poverty.

In a tough economy, Iowans in poverty often get hit the hardest.

- 37 million Americans live in poverty. In 2007, the poverty rate in Iowa was 11% at 316, 303 people (U.S. Census Bureau)
- 27% of U.S. families live at 200% or below the federal poverty line. (U.S. Census Bureau)
- Poverty rates for specific communities across Iowa range from 9.5% to 19.8%. (City-data.com)
- Iowa is facing a shortage of young direct care workers. (National Clearinghouse on the Direct Care Workforce)

The needs of low-income Iowans, local communities, and business' can be met by community organizing. Barnabas Uplift encourages local communities to bring people and initiatives together at a grassroots level.

BISHOP OFFERS WORKSHOP ON IMMIGRATION REFORM

United Methodist Bishop Minerva Carcaño of the United Methodist Church, Phoenix District, offered a workshop on immigration reform at last spring's National Workshop on Christian Unity. Bishop Carcaño, herself the daughter of an undocumented immigrant, wove a presentation of personal story, prophetic vision, and practical guidance. The first half of her presentation revolved around a slide show of her own experience of combing through the hills of southern Arizona with groups of church volunteers, leaving food, water, and other essentials for those making the dangerous

entry into the U.S. through the desert. She also described with word and picture the ministry of an organization that has formed relief stations on the Mexico side of the border for Mexican nationals caught by U.S. immigration officials and taken back across the international border.

Based on the premise that the U.S. needs the worker, and that there is a complicated economic interrelationship between the U.S. and Mexico, Bishop Carcaño offered the following strategies for churches wanting to address the issue of immigration:

1. Churches must do something to help the immigrant members in their midst.
2. Churches must depolarize the conversation around immigration. As she stated, there is much work of "garbage collection" around peoples' ideas of immigration.
3. Churches must be able to mobilize a response to the far right.

Bishop Carcaño closed her workshop presentation with a plea for Christians to look at the issue of immigration through the eyes of Jesus who welcomed the poor and the children.

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