

## **THE LWF AT WORK IN INTER-FAITH RELATIONS FOR PEACE AND HEALING**

- Kathy J. Magnus, LWF Coordinator for North America

The 2003 LWF Assembly Message called for "Inter-faith relations for peace and healing to permeate most of the LWF priorities and that future work should be done in cooperation...with other ecumenical bodies and inter-faith organizations." Primary responsibility for inter-faith dialogue and relations is lodged in the LWF Department for Theology and Studies with Dr. Ingo Wulfhorst (Brazil) as the key staff person.

With this strong mandate from the Assembly, the LWF has been bold in its commitments. One of the most interesting directions has been a three-year study project (2002-2005) with a cross-cultural Lutheran-Muslim study team. They have used three studies in different conflict situations involving Lutherans and Muslims. the key question they have worked with is: "What role does religion play today in conflicts, in the overcoming of conflicts and the healing difference for the sake of a peaceful coexistence?"

The study program has been carried out in the awareness that they are groups, Lutheran and Muslim, who are not interested in dialogue. However, the World Council of Muslims for Inter-Faith Relations (founded in 2001) is solely committed to the holistic wellbeing and prosperity of all human beings through fostering friendly relations among people of diverse faiths and urges Muslims to engage in a suitable way in dialogue as urged by the Qur'an. They will publish their findings later this year.

Overall, in its work on interfaith issues, the LWF attempts to:

- clarify the interrelationship of interfaith dialogue and mission/evangelism,
- Study the spiritualistic movements and their challenges for the church,
- Intensify the interfaith dialogue with African religions, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Confucians and Jews, and to Intensify the collaboration and cooperation with centers for religious studies and universities as well as with the growing number of religious and non-religious organizations and institutions engaged in interfaith dialogue.

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## **LUTHERAN - JEWISH EXPERIENCE**

- Rev. Chip Larson, Tahoe City, CA

I write this letter with special thanks to Bishop David Mullen, Diane Lowe, and the Commission on Ecumenical Affairs of the Sierra Pacific Synod for having created for me and my church a means upon which we can all grow and ride into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Let me share a story with you.

Not long after the Evangelical Lutheran Church of American (ELCA) adopted a statement which distances the church from Martin Luther's anti-Semitic remarks, I was invited by a Hebrew Congregation to share on the panel of a conference to discuss recent events occurring in Christian and Jewish dialogue.

A Catholic priest was invited to talk about the Vatican and how it recognizes the state of Israel with diplomatic ties and I was to discuss our ELCA perspective on Martin Luther's anti-Semitic writings.

I was eager to share in this conference, not just because I am a member of our Synod's Commission for Ecumenical Affairs, but for my own interests as well. I have been to Germany several times, even led a worship service at Buchenwald, one of the Holocaust's concentration camps. The very next week after the conference I would host a "Luther Land" tour of Germany. I even made a point of viewing once again the movie, "Schindler's List" to help sharpen my focus on the upcoming dialogue.

I was ready to share our position on Luther's writings with this large gathering of Conservative and Reformed Jews.

Or, so I thought.

Most Lutherans, I've discovered, know very little of Luther's anti-Semitic diatribes, but as I stood up before this gathering I realized that each member was acutely aware of Luther's centuries-old writings.

The words of the ELCA's declaration states: "In the long history of Christianity there exists no more tragic development than the treatment accorded the Jewish people on the part of Christian believers."

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## THEME

Departing from usual ecumenical themes, the theme of this issue of *LERNing* is Interfaith.

### ELCA – UMC

-David L. Morse, Monroeville, UMC

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the United Methodist church have entered into an interim agreement for Eucharistic sharing between the two communities, an agreement that brings each community a step closer to full communion between both bodies with the larger Body of Christ.

As a United Methodist pastor I would like to take this opportunity to reflect on what I consider to be some significant implications of this agreement for our common witness for Christ in the world.

First, this agreement, building on what the two churches have in common, is a witness to the larger church of the unity that we seek. In John 17 Christ prayed that his disciples might be one. The tragic divisions of the Body of Christ serve as a continuing witness to the reality of sin not just in the world but even in the Body of Christ. Any step toward unity by any group within the church serves as a witness to the whole Church of the unity that Christ continues to seek for His Church. This agreement, though a small step when compared to some of the other issues which divide the Body of Christ is nonetheless a witness to our common desire to be one with each other in response to our confession that we have "one Lord, one faith, and one baptism."

Second, this agreement provides a witness to both Lutherans and United Methodists that we are members of one body, share in one Lord, and are nourished by his presence at the table which He has prepared for us. Lutherans and Methodists have for many years worked together in their communities and worshipped together. At the same time, lacking full communion with each other, there has been something missing. This interim agreement brings us a step closer to celebrating a genuine oneness at the very place where the Risen Christ meets us and nourishes us in a special way as He has promised in the scripture. It grounds our common work and witness in Word

and Table which are the ways in which grace nurtures the life of discipleship. With this

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### NAME CHANGES REFLECT INTERFAITH EMPHASIS

ELCA's former Department for Ecumenical Affairs is now officially a part of the Presiding Bishop's staff and named the Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs.

Episcopal Diocesan Ecumenical Officers (EDEO) organization is now officially the Episcopal Diocesan Ecumenical and Interreligious Officers Association (EDEIO).

### "Lutherans ALIVE!"

The local Lutheran television outreach ministry in the form of an every-Saturday-evening television show airing in Sacramento County, California has entered its third season and is growing in popularity.

"Lutherans ALIVE!" is produced and broadcast via the Religious Coalition of Interfaith Television (RCCTV) which is a subsidiary of Sacramento's Interfaith Service Bureau (ISB).

Sharing television program scheduling with Muslims, Hindus, Pentecostals, Scientologists, Latter Day Saints, Jews, Unitarians, Seventh Day Adventists, and others is a weekly occurrence for Sacramento Lutheran Television (SLTV). The fun-filled cable television show conceived and co-produced by *LERNing* co-editor Diane Lowe, "Lutherans ALIVE!" brings the love of Jesus and an introduction to the Lutheran church to the community at large via an interfaith television channel. See website [www.slvtv.org](http://www.slvtv.org).

Active ecumenist and ELCA pastor Lloyd Hanson is a Board of Directors member and past president of Sacramento's ISB. ELCA laywoman Diane Lowe serves on the RCCTV Advisory Board. Visit the Web site at [www.isbsacramento.org](http://www.isbsacramento.org).

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## **ELCA – UMC** (cont'd) - David L. Morse

interim agreement we can act and speak in a way that says to each other, "we truly are one in Christ."

Third, this interim agreement provides a witness to the world of our genuine efforts to become one in Christ. The divisions that exist with the Body of Christ not only have implications for the Church they also have implications for our witness in the world. Following the command of Christ to make disciples of all nations and to witness in the world, the Church calls persons to new life in Christ through the preaching of the gospel, seeks peace among persons and nations, and works for justice for all. This work is often negated by our disunity. The world points to our divisions as a way of rejecting or diminishing our message. The world often wonders how we can call others to Christ when we ourselves seem divided over our faith in Christ. Any steps that members of the Body of Christ take toward greater unity strengthen our ministry in and to the world. This interim agreement is no exception.

There is an old proverb that says, "The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step." Perhaps we could paraphrase that somewhat by saying, "The road to unity in Christ consists in many steps, each of which brings us closer to the will of God for the Church." For Lutherans and United Methodists this is one of those steps that should be received, celebrated, and practiced by congregations of each family as we journey together becoming everything that God is calling us to be.

## **SCHEDULING**

Mark your 2006 calendars now for the next gathering of LERN and the National Workshop on Christian Unity to be held on May 8-11, 2006, at the Fairmont Hotel in San Jose, CA. Extensive planning is currently underway for intriguing seminar subjects and outstanding speakers. San Jose is inland from the ocean cities of Carmel and San Francisco. Consider enhancing your trip with a visit to the Napa Valley vineyards or magnificent Lake Tahoe, as well. See website [www.nwcu.org](http://www.nwcu.org).

## **FAITH AT WORK** (cont'd) - Kathy Magnus

Published in 2002, the LWF book, Multifaith Challenges Facing the Americas...and Beyond, gives an excellent perspective to the depth of this commitment and work. The book is available for \$13. To purchase it, please make out a check to the ELCA with "LWF book" on the memo line and send it to Kathy Magnus in the LWF North American Office (8765 West Higgins Road, Chicago 60631). Please indicate the title of the book and your address for shipping. For further information about the LWF and their work check out the Web site: [www.lutheranworld.org](http://www.lutheranworld.org).

## **LUTHERAN - JEWISH** (cont'd) - Chip Larson

But those words were just that ... words, simply another declaration...and they left me. Overcome with the emotion of the moment, looking into the eyes of these Jews, so aware of their heritage: I sensed the horror of it and not just the horror of their history...but the horror of anti-Semitism still existing as a skeleton in so many Christian closets today.

I found myself desperately searching for the words to express an apology for the wrongs these people had suffered. But I couldn't speak. My eyes glazed over and for what seemed to be an eternity of seconds, no one spoke. Silently, I became the one asking for forgiveness and healing.

At that point, my tears joined the tears shed by the Jews of Martin Luther's era who felt horror over his writings; millions of anguished Jews separated from their loved ones and sent to World War II concentration camps to die; and by Jews today as they continue to face discrimination and anti-Semitism.

My speechless state was not broken by words, but by hugs as the Rabbi and several people in the audience gathered at our table, including a Holocaust survivor.

I learned that night, dialogues are great and good, but they are without meaning unless we embrace words in our hearts and soul. It is essential to share ourselves, even to the point of vulnerability.

*"I can do everything through Him who gives me strength."* Phil. 4:13.

**HEALING THE WORLD:  
Interfaith Dialogue for a Global Vision in  
the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

- Chris Warner-Carey, Ukiah, CA

The Pacific Network for Mission Education (PNME) has been holding an annual event at the Asilomar Conference Grounds on the Monterey Peninsula for more than 80 years, all the way back to when Asilomar was a Methodist campsite, and before the renowned architect Julia Morgan designed the wonderful buildings that now grace the grounds.

PNME is the primary sponsor of *Healing the World*, an interfaith conference whose purpose is to foster healthy and respectful interfaith dialogue that does not attempt to adopt a watered-down universal theology that says something like, "You know we (Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, etc.) really all believe the same things...so why can't we all just get along?"

Instead, each faith tradition is encouraged to unapologetically maintain its unique and distinctive beliefs and practices, while at the same time finding common ground on issues – issues like poverty, economics, war, environmental concerns and ethics.

This year's conference entitled *Sacred Visions for a New America* drew 160 participants from more than a dozen religious traditions to hear the keynote speaker, Dr. Robert Bellah, Emeritus professor of Sociology at University of California, Berkeley deliver a powerful address on the current state of religious and political dialogue in our nation. Bellah suggested that as a society, we are struggling with the nation's adolescence and all the typical adolescent behaviors such as self-centeredness, which in a complex and interconnected world is a potentially dangerous and damaging character trait. Bellah believes that our nation and society badly need what maturity requires—a much deeper capacity to care for others. "To me it is obvious," said Professor Bellah, "that the most urgent need for our society today is to develop the culture of care: more than anything else to try to build a global community concerned with global warming, global poverty, and the needs of the billions of people who are left out or who are barely hanging on in the whirlwind of globalization, many of whom are in our own

country." The text of Dr. Bellah's address and other information on the *Healing the World* conference can be found at [www.healingtheworld.info](http://www.healingtheworld.info).

Clearly, any organization, nation or society struggling with these complex issues and their possible solutions must take into account the vast diversity of religious and spiritual communities to be found in virtually every corner of the planet. Interfaith dialogue in many forums like the *Healing of the World* conference offers a platform for communication and opportunities to develop deeper interconnected networks of persons of faith who cherish and honor their own rich traditions, but who are also open to learn from the beliefs and practices of others.

## LERNing CHANGES

With this issue of *LERNing*, Co-editor Merlyn Satrom cycles off the newsletter's editorial board and Rocky Piro from Seattle comes on. Dedicated to the task, Satrom from St. Paul was instrumental in the first year of our LERN newsletter. Piro joins the editorial board bringing a new dimension as this newsletter changes to an on-line distribution. *LERNing's* extensive mailing list continues to grow making distribution via the Internet a cost-effective move. Read and print out the latest issue of *LERNing* via [www.elca.org](http://www.elca.org).

## APPRECIATION

Appreciation is extended to the following persons to generously contributed articles for this issue of *LERNing*:

- Kathy J. Magnus, Director, Lutheran World Federation Coordinator for North America
- The Reverend Chip Larson, Christ the King Lutheran Church, Tahoe City, California
- The Reverend David L. Morse, United Methodist Church, Monroeville

- The Reverend Chris Warner-Carey, Grace Lutheran Church, Ukiah, California

Submission of articles to our newsletter is welcomed, encouraged and subject to reasonable editing. Contributions may be made to any member of the *LERNing* editorial board via e-mail addresses noted on page 2 of this issue.