

LERNing

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A newsletter of the Lutheran Ecumenical Representative Network

ELCA OFFERS ECUMENICAL FORMATION COURSE IN GENEVA

--Karen Bloomquist

"This course has significantly expanded my sense of what it means to be the church", was a comment echoed by several of the ELCA seminarians who participated in the first January term course, "***The Ecumenical Church in a Globalized World***" in 2005 in Geneva, Switzerland.

Organized and taught by Rev. Dr. Karen Bloomquist, the LWF Director for Theology and Studies, along with Rev. William Strehlow, an ELCA pastor currently serving Emmanuel Episcopal Parish in Geneva, a second year of this unique two-week intensive course in ecumenical formation is taking place in 2006, this time with 28 students, from five ELCA seminaries (including some from other denominations and countries). Accompanying the students this year are Dean Paul Rajashekar from the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, Dr. Michael Trice of ELCA Ecumenical Affairs and Rev. Scott Cady of the LERN network.

Most of the class sessions meet at the Ecumenical Centre, and involve presentations and discussions with a wide variety of staff persons of the Lutheran World Federation, the World Council of Churches, and other ecumenical and U.N.-related organizations. Subjects of the presentations include interconfessional dialogue, the centrality of diakonia, development and international advocacy, and ongoing reflections on where ecumenism is moving. Significant attention is also given to appreciating the different realities and challenges facing churches in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe, such as HIV/AIDS, interfaith and intercultural tensions, changing church/state relations, immigrants, gender and economic disparities. The class also spends a day interacting with students from throughout the world who are studying at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey.

"One important area of ecumenical collaboration is how dynamics and policies of neoliberal globalization, especially as inspired and directed in the U.S., are leaving so many behind and challenging what it means to be a global communion of churches," Bloomquist pointed out. This concern is reflected in the ecclesial-ethical framework of the LWF book, *Communion, Responsibility, Accountability*. "Through this and the other foci of the course, we hope the students' horizons will be expanded beyond familiar national or denominational boundaries to a clearer sense of being part of a global body of Christ."

Anchoring the course are Bible study reflections and participation in the creative worship life of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Geneva, an English-speaking congregation of members from throughout the world.. "Last year, this was a high point for the students, inspiring them in how to integrate these global perspectives in congregational worship life," commented Bloomquist.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH SHARED EXPERIENCES

--Jon Skogen

Over the years, outdoor ministries of the ELCA have realized the importance of working together and forging partnerships with a variety of groups. Once such developing relationship is with the Presbyterian Church Camp and Conference Association (PCCCA).

In order to look at common work, share future vision, and build partnerships, PCCCA and ELCA outdoor ministry leaders will meet in conference together in 2008. Groundwork is being laid and planning will begin soon on this event. The purpose of the event will be to share information and resources and explore ways to cooperate and work more closely in the future.

For 2005 through 2007, members of each church body's camp organization will attend the other's national conference to begin to build the relationships that will be the basis for their work together.

WCC "SHIFT YOUR SPACE EVENT GATHERS 50 YOUNG ADULTS

--Debora DeWinter

"In October, 2005, over 50 young adults gathered in Chicago to participate in a gathering sponsored by the US Conference for the World Council of Churches entitled "**Shift your Space: Transform the World.**" This event brought together young leaders from across the U.S. to discuss the importance of the ecumenical movement and its relation to the cause of peace and justice in our world. The gathering helped build an already growing network of diverse young people representing a wide spectrum of Christian churches affiliated with the World Council of Churches who share a common commitment to Christian faith and working together to build a better world. In February, 2006, many of these young adults will join hundreds of like-minded young adults from around the world in Porto Alegre, Brazil, to participate in the World Council of Churches' 9th Assembly. (For further information on the Assembly, please visit:

www.wcc-assembly.info).

Commenting on his upcoming attendance at the WCC 9th Assembly, SYS Young Adult Coordinator Michael Neuroth, notes: "Like many of these young adults, I am deeply honored to attend this gathering of ecumenical leaders, pastors, and theologians, particularly because the WCC's General Secretary, the Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia, has promised that this Assembly will pay special attention to the needs and contribution of young adults." Neuroth, who is presently serving as the Coordinator of "Ecumenical Advocacy Days"

(<http://www.advocacydays.org>) went on to say that: "The World Council of Churches has recognized what many young adults know - the interest in ecumenism of the next generation will determine the dynamism and growth of such international and ecumenical bodies in the future. Let us hope that our church leaders take seriously the need to cultivate the next generation so that the rich heritage of the ecumenical movement and the Assemblies of the World Council will continue to grow." (For more information on the *Shift Your Space* event, please visit: www.wcc-usa.org).

LERN TO MEET IN SAN JOSE

All LERN representatives as well as other interested Lutherans are urged to make plans now to participate in the annual LERN gatherings May 8-11, 2006, at the Fairmont Hotel in San Jose, CA. Register today for the National Workshop on Christian Unity on line at www.NWCU.org. Early registration saves you money!

LERN meets on-site during the NWCU. Check out the NWCU website for times of LERN meetings and special gatherings.

EDITORIAL BOARD CHANGES

--Diane Lowe

With this new year comes an all new LERning Editorial Board. We welcome Jim Lockley, Anne Edison-Swift and Rocky Piro.

This past year and a half as one of your editors has been an opportunity I treasure. It has been a great ride of laying initial groundwork, stimulating brainstorming sessions, meeting deadlines, bonding with terrific people from coast to coast, burning the midnight oil, transitioning to worldwide Internet distribution and most of all outstanding teamwork resulting in a newsletter of integrity with a growing circulation.

I'm grateful to have been part of the ongoing evolution of *LERning* and thank you for the opportunity. See you in San Jose!

THANKS AND FAREWELL

--Jerry Folk

Like Diane I will be leaving the LERning Editorial Board after this issue, so I want to say thanks and farewell. Working with my fellow editors, including Merlyn Satrom, who was one of us for the first year and from whom we learned so much, was very rewarding and gratifying. Getting to know a few of you in the LERN Network as well as other interested and interesting ecumenists was a joy. Contacts with the Department for Ecumenical Affairs and in particular, conversations with Michael Trice were stimulating and productive. I'm grateful for all of this. But I'm most grateful and hopeful because of some of the new ecumenical energy and

vision reflected in activities and events like the ones described in this issue of LERning. I'm especially encouraged by the attention that is being given to engaging young people in ecumenical work for justice, reconciliation and unity, work that is so important for the church, for the world and for Jesus, who prayed on the eve of his death that we who believe in him would all be one as he and the Father are one"

GLOBALIZATION COURSE LEADER AND PARTICIPANT SHARE IMPRESSIONS

--Scott Cady

Ecumenical formation is in progress! In damp, cloudy Geneva, at the LWF/WCC headquarters a group of about 30 seminarians from five ELCA seminaries and leaders gathered for a J term (Jan. 6-23). Our focus is to discuss the effects of Globalization on the world and to study a variety of Christian responses to the questions and challenges raised by the new economic and cultural realities that come with a shifting world economy.

There is a high level of curiosity, commitment, and honest critique of our common (and sometimes not-so-common) Christian response to the rapid changes around the globe. Our seminary students are well informed, eager to learn, and looking forward to contributing to the overall interaction between faith and life as partners in the LWF and as part of the greater body of Christ. Those of us who are here as facilitators and leaders also experience a regeneration of our sense of urgency and hope.

This program of the ELCA to involve our next generation of pastoral leaders in ecumenical dialogue may prove to be one of our most effective tools for building the future, not just of the ELCA, but of the Church in its fullness and the world we all serve.

--Nicole Diroff

My name is Nicole Diroff. I am a student at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, working towards ordination in the United Church of Christ (UCC). This January I have been blessed with the opportunity to travel to Geneva, Switzerland with 30 other students from Lutheran seminaries across the country to learn about "The Ecumenical Church in a Globalized World." Geneva is the head-quarters for the

World Council of Churches, Lutheran World Federation, and World Alliance of Reformed Churches; organizations that represent Christians from various nations, ethnicities, and faith traditions.

As a UCC student studying at a Lutheran seminary, I have grown to greatly respect and appreciate my Lutheran brothers and sisters, while at the same time growing to understand what it means to be a member of the UCC. Believing that we are all a vital part of God's beloved creation, I am passionate about working towards stronger ecumenical and interfaith relationships. I pray that these relationships of respect and mutual accountability might spread God's peace.

During this course, we will be talking about the church's response to economic globalization, challenges facing churches from different regions of the globe, international advocacy, and how to bring this important work back to our local congregations. The more I learn about these exciting and challenging discussions and programs, the more I want to be a part of them!

LIKE FLESH IN A MANGER, ECUMENICAL ENGAGEMENT IS LOCAL

--Russell Meyer

"All politics are local," a renowned Speaker of the House once said. The maxim has proven true for both red and blue parties. Yes, there are important national and international issues that deserve serious and expert consideration, but elections are always local – whether the issues are over public funding projects or cherished social values.

Ecumenical engagement also is local. Perhaps more than anything else, ecumenism is inexorably local – like flesh in the manger.

Once, families were separated by communion. A Protestant/Catholic marriage was considered the definition of mixed marriage. While the goal of full communion is still to be experienced, sanctuary doors are no longer closed to one another. Instead, there is an ongoing invitation to spiritual communion in the hope of that which is fuller and more complete. Yet spiritual communion, when dwelt within, always longs for something more.

Even when churches have been divided by confession and structure, still the voice of God has called Christians to work together to help relieve the needs of the poor and the sick. The ecumenism of goodwill is surely one of the true public hallmarks of the Christian witness that Christ was sent into the world so that it might believe God sent him.

Lately, some have suggested that ecumenism is on the wane, that perhaps the ecumenical movement has stalled. The shrill voice of division has been quieted, even silenced. The rightness of working together for the sake of peace and justice is granted. What more could there be, if full communion is not forthcoming?

Ecumenical engagement is local. A retiring Catholic ecumenist was asked at a meeting of the Society of Pentecostal Studies what could be done to increase ecumenism in the charismatic traditions. "Buy a grill and invite the neighboring clergy over for steaks some Saturday afternoon," he said. Socialize, get to know one another. Develop the trust that leads to real relationships, and the Spirit of God will bring about unexpected blessings. Local ecumenism can be just that simple.

The Florida Council of Churches, first formed in 1948 at about the same time as the World Council of Churches, has seen both the highs and lows of ecumenism. Over the years the Florida Council has helped build ecumenical facilities, engender ecumenical agencies and serviced a wide range of social needs. At other times it has spoken prophetically, advocating for the just treatment and compensation of migrant workers. Now, after having stood on mountain tops and fallen into deep valleys, it is seeing that this moment is about building the case for ecumenical engagement on its own terms. Without political, moral, or social agenda, however noble, now is the time for making the case for ecumenical engagement without any other agenda than that of coming to appreciate the faithful gifts of the other.

The Florida Council will be hopefully testing some ideas and piloting some projects over the next year or so. These will seek to build the ecumenical connections between church leaders, neighborhood congregations and judicatory staff. One of the challenges ecumenism faces in Florida is constant,

sometimes, rapid change of parish clergy. A deeply forged relationship between pastors may bring about an ecumenical flowering, yet it lasts only as long as the clergy remain in those parishes. Often, local ecumenism blossoms or wilts depending on the pastor's connections to other pastors outside a congregation's traditions. We want to look at ways to build trans-congregational ecumenism.

For this to happen, the fear of losing members to other parishes needs to be supplanted by the experience of becoming more strengthened in one's own tradition as one learns more about the traditions of other communities of faith. Sure, congregations need to find ways to worship and to minister together regularly. More important, perhaps is discovering how to appreciate that the other is there, know which of its gifts to accept, and which of one's own to offer.

After all, isn't that part of Bethlehem, that the Christ child blessed the manger even as if was gifted to him? We'll find the blessing of the Spirit of Christ in the receiving and sharing of our gifts of faith. Ecumenism is most assuredly personal and local.

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