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Bishops Gather to Mark Shared Interim Communion

The three Iowa Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the state's United Methodist Bishop gathered on May 11 to spend time dialoguing about the Shared Interim Communion agreement of the denominations. Joined by 50 United Methodist clergy and laity and nearly as many Lutherans, the Bishops shared in a joint worship service that included a baptismal reminder as well as Holy Communion.

Bishop Michael Last of the Western Iowa Synod (ELCA) welcomed the gathering into a day of conversation and celebration. In his opening worship message Bishop Last declared that "we are called to be God's change agents...agents of transformation, healing, hope, and salvation." He said that each "Communion Table is one of thanksgiving, remembrance, representation in the here and now, and invitation to 'call upon the name of the Lord.'"

Bishop Gregory Palmer introduced Dr. Douglas Mills, Associate General Secretary for Dialogue and Interfaith Relations of the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns. Mills was joined by Bishop Allan Bjornberg of the Rocky Mountain Synod (ELCA) in describing the history of the UMC/ELCA dialogue, a conversation that has continued for over 20 years. Landmark documents, Bjornberg noted that "By Water and the Spirit and This Holy Mystery have shaped emerging understandings," viewpoints also informed by "ecumenical cooperation, bi- and multi-lateral dialogue, preliminary recognition, and finally full communion, which includes a common confessing faith and mutual recognition of clergy availability, as governed by the disciplines of our churches." The next step, Bjornberg added, is to "take the conversation more public." Mills noted that there is an "imperative to be ecumenical. The Constitution compels us to be in a search for unity through dialogue."

Bishop Gregory Palmer, who, just the day before, was installed as President Designate of the Council of Bishops, preached at the afternoon worship celebration. He focused attention on a section of John 17, during which "Jesus makes it clear that he was praying that his disciples and others might be one, something that Jesus is praying for us, today." Jesus wants, Bishop Palmer added, "for us to be in reconciling relationships – in the church, among denominations, and even beyond Christendom." He concluded, "Jesus' yearning is that we will be turning toward each other in all that we say and do...doing God's will by caring for the needs of other people."

The three Iowa Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are: Bishop Michael Last, Western Iowa Synod; Bishop Steven Ullestad of the Northeastern Iowa Synod, and Bishop Philip Hougen Southeastern Iowa Synod. Bishop Gregory Palmer, Des Moines, represented The United Methodist Church.

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[The joint UMC/ELCA document on Shared Interim Communion, [Confessing Our Faith Together](http://www.gccuic-umc.org/web/webpdf/confessing-faith-f_color_2.pdf), is available through the General Commission at: http://www.gccuic-umc.org/web/webpdf/confessing-faith-f_color_2.pdf]