



LERNing

March 2008

A newsletter of the Lutheran Ecumenical Representatives Network

IN THIS ISSUE

This issue of LERNing features articles on the 2008 January term in Geneva and the Ecumenical Consultation held at the Lutheran Center in mid-February.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Reverend Scott Cady

Friends in the cause of Christian Unity, as I come to the end of my term as President of LERN, I rejoice in what I have seen.

The landscape has shifted dramatically in the last 20 years. COCU has become CUIC, the WCC and NCCC have undergone significant changes, Christian Churches Together has begun, *the Formula of Agreement, Called to Common Mission, the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, and Moravian agreements have been signed and are being implemented. The Lutheran World Federation continues to deepen its sense of itself as a Communion of Churches.

While some talk of an ecumenical winter, I see a blooming springtime! There were a few attempts at Christian unity since the Reformation, but real visible progress has reached a remarkable pace over the last century. North American Lutherans, who were once the "caboose on the ecumenical train," have become a major catalyst in bilateral and multilateral efforts.

The ELCA, a 20-year old church body, has made significant, even historic, inroads into a 500 year old set of schisms. More importantly, the ELCA and our partners are fully committed to the goal of breaking down the dividing walls that hamper Christian unity. We could not have said this even 50 years ago.

Your work toward a common Christian life continues to be a vital part of both local and national efforts to mend the rifts in Christ's Body. I am grateful for you and for your dedication to the unity of the Church.



Lutheran World Federal Ecumenical Center, Geneva

ELECTIONS FOR LERN BOARD MEMBERS & OFFICERS

At the April 2008 National Workshop for Christian Unity, elections to the LERN Executive Board will be held for those regions whose board member is completing a three-year term – or where there is currently a vacancy for that region's board position. Representatives may serve a total of two terms on the board.

Also this year, the Executive Board will be electing two new officers. Both Scott Cady and Russell Meyer are completing terms as president and vice-president respectively. Bill Sappenfield serves as Board secretary, which is the third officer position. He assumed that position in 2007 and that term continues for another year.

LERNing EDITORIAL TEAM

Dr. Rocky Piro, REPiro@aol.com
Sara Wilson, sarajwilson@hotmail.com
Positions 3 & 4 - vacant
Executive Board Liaison: Rev. Russell Meyer,
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ELCA ECUMENICAL CONSULTATION

In February, the Office of Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations held a two-day Ecumenical Consultation at Chicago's Lutheran Center. Twelve people were invited from around the U.S. to join about a half dozen staff from the various offices and divisions of the ELCA to discuss past, current and future ecumenical work of the church body.

Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson participated both days, along with Donald McCoid, the recently named Executive for the Office of Ecumenical and Inter-Religious affairs and Michael Trice, who continues as the Director for Ecumenical Formation and Inter-Religious Relations. Among those who were invited were several synodical bishops, faculty from three ELCA seminaries, and others involved in ecumenical dialogues. The Lutheran Ecumenical Representatives Network had two of its board members participate: Scott Cady and Rocky Piro.

Bishop Hanson provided the context for the Consultation by posing questions relating to ecumenical reception, sustaining the ELCA's commitment to bilateral dialogues, ecumenical formation, the Lutheran contribution to unity, and an assessment of where we are today. He challenged the participants to consider both our commitments and our capacity.

Presentations were offered by Bill Rusch, Michael Root, Michael Trice, Bishop Jessica Crist, and Donald McCoid. These stimulated discussion of successes and challenges relating to full communion partnerships, reception of recommendations from bilateral dialogues, the relationship of ecumenism to social justice concerns and inter-faith issues, the role of state and national councils of churches, and global mission efforts. Scott Cady and Rocky Piro discussed the work of the Lutheran Ecumenical Representatives Network and described how that group has evolved and continues to evolve.

The participants spent time in small groups to discuss three topics in more detail: (1) reception – specifically how can that be carried out more effectively, (2) conciliar ecumenism – focusing on its purpose and the ELCA's current and future role, and (3) the ecumenical future – in terms of considering emerging issues and how to prioritize the ELCA's efforts.

Many thoughts and ideas were shared over the two days. ELCA staff is now working with this input as the Office takes on the task of

considering possible new directions and refinement of its work program. Further recommendations and results will be presented during LERN plenary time at the National Workshop in April.



NATIONAL WORKSHOP FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 2008 – STILL TIME TO REGISTER!

You can register by mail or on-line (*see link below*). The rate is \$150 for the entire workshop. The student rate is \$50 and scholarships are available. For those only able to attend part of the workshop, the one-day registration rate is \$50.

www.nwcu.org/2008Conference/2008RegistrationStart.htm

NATIONAL WORKSHOP BROCHURE ON-LINE.

The brochure for the 2008 National Workshop on Christian Unity in Chicago is available on-line at: www.nwcu.org/events/documents/NWCU2008WebBrochure.pdf. The brochure provides information on all of the Workshop seminars, denominational meetings and plenary sessions, and other events.

ATTENTION LUTHERAN ATTENDEES AT THE NATIONAL WORKSHOP!

In making travel arrangements to attend this year's National Workshop, be sure to plan to stay one extra day for special meetings at the Lutheran Center on Friday morning, 18 April. We will have the opportunity to meet with ELCA program staff at that time.

For other LERN-related events at the National Workshop, please see the January 2008 issue of *LERNing* or contact the ELCA's Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations:

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JOIN OUR EDITORIAL TEAM! *LERNing* is currently looking for someone to fill a slot on the editorial team. If interested, please contact Rocky Piro or Russell Meyer. (See contact information on the front page of the newsletter.)

2008 JANUARY TERM IN GENEVA

by Kate Proctor, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia

In Geneva, we learned a new game called Farkel! You pick up six dice, shake 'em up, wish for luck, and roll for all you've got. The result of your roll is tallied up in a complicated scoring system, involving extra points for rolls of ones and fives, the possibility of going broke in every roll of the dice, and lots of screaming "Farkel!" until the Swiss cows come home. Essentially it's a game of luck, and like many such games, the best rounds arise when no one takes themselves (or their lucky dice) too seriously. It's also a game with a very open play roster; anyone can win at practically anytime, so there's always room for one more at the table.

Like the dice in our game, the group playing was a mixed bunch, brought together for a quick class of only two and a half weeks. The class, intended to strengthen emerging leaders to work in ecumenical formation, was titled *The Ecumenical Church in a Globalized World*. It is organized each year by the ELCA Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations Office and this year taught by a team of professors from Luther Seminary, Gettysburg Seminary, the Lutheran World Federation, the World Council of Churches and the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, Switzerland. The students flew in from Pakistan, Columbia, Costa Rica, Japan, China, Ghana, and Namibia, as well as Luther, Trinity, Chicago, Gettysburg, Southern and Philadelphia Lutheran seminaries in the U.S.

We studied the history of the ecumenical movement and the theological reasons for working towards Christian unity, generally holding the idea that ecumenism was possible, implementable, and sustainable. After a few more days, the weight of this task started to sink down on us. How can the Christian community possibly speak in one voice to matters of ultimate importance when we remain so divided?

This question became more poignant as we confronted issues of inter-religious violence, trade injustices, racism, HIV/AIDS, globalization, and poverty from an ecumenical perspective. Soon our highly-held vision of idealized Christian unity seemed impossible, like some childhood (and maybe childish) dream long forgotten. We were shaken up.

We came to realize the immense strides that had all ready been made and in fact were happening everyday in the lives of those around our very table. I heard stories of the youth in Pakistan working together as Christians to find jobs as a small religious minority. I heard stories of churches in Alaska who came together to rebuild Mormon churches destroyed multiple times by fire. I heard about the Moravian Seminary, with whom we are in full communion, just a few short miles away in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania and felt the growing excitement in my own heart as I enjoyed the traditional Love Feast of cookies and juice that they shared with us and made plans to visit.

At the World Council of Churches, we participated in worship for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Despite the language barriers, cultural barriers, and even transportation barriers that hindered this occasion, one could not ignore the strength of hundreds of Christians simply praying together, each holding a vision of one Church led by the Spirit. At the end of the service I watched each worshiper place their candle firmly in a box of sand by the door, knowing that light of Christ was not left in that safe house, but carried out into the world on the feet of each worshiper.

I feel very privileged to have been a part of this class. It is very humbling to me that the ELCA has invested these resources to instill the seeds for work towards Christian unity in emerging leaders. Often the perception is that working toward ecumenism, or even doing theology in general, is better left to the "experts"- to those who have finished their degrees or worked for many years and so speak with authority. This class made manifest for me the bold statement that we, as seminarians, are theologians and therefore already participants in ecumenical action.

Ecumenism does not just happen through formal bi-lateral and multi-lateral dialogues, but through the every day interactions of individuals and congregations across the world. We can strive toward the lofty goal of Christian unity through measures as simple as openness in our discussions around the mailboxes or inviting the congregation across the street for a potluck dinner. Just like in dice games, there's always room for one more at the table.