



# LERNing

May 2009

A newsletter of the Lutheran Ecumenical Representatives Network

In cooperation with the Office for Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

[www.elca.org/ecumenical](http://www.elca.org/ecumenical) 8765 W. Higgins Road Chicago, IL 60631 800.638.3522 X 2610

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## 2009 NATIONAL WORKSHOP FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY –



*Tim Philabaum greets friends and LERN Board members as they register at the LERN table at NWCU*

As registration began on Monday April 27<sup>th</sup> nearly 300 persons began gathering for the events that are to follow the next four days.

Among those attending, the largest number of attendees were from the following five denominations (listed in order of number of attendees). Catholic, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodists and Presbyterians. Also attending were persons from the Armenian Orthodox, Disciples of Christ, Greek Orthodox, LDS, Reformed Church of America, and the United Church of Christ.

## WORSHIP at the Workshop

*Worship is a foundational part of the NWCU. The festival service of Monday evening called the gathered attendees and guests to the task of ecumenical work. In the theme of Desert Pilgrimage, we named the challenges of our differences and prayed for the unity of God to be present in the workshop and in the work of our Christian community.*

*This year the service was held at St. Mary's Basilica in downtown Phoenix. The service was a joyous celebration of the unity of the people of God in Jesus Christ. At the same time it celebrated the creative diversity of the Christian community of Phoenix. As the worship notes explained, "we are introduced to a diversity of music and worship expressions employed by the churches of our country—a Native American flute, an Orthodox chant, the sound of a Mariachi ensemble, a county-western singer, a Gospel choir and the joy of a Sudanese dance group." These parts of worship reminded us that we are often in a desert pilgrimage of faith and yet we are surrounded by the work of the Spirit in many ways.*

## Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, Tuesday

*Tuesday evening offered the opportunity for LERN members to worship with local leaders of denominations, which are full communion partners. Following worship, members of the Noon-Spanish speaking service at Trinity*

Episcopal cathedral hosted a delightful family meal complete with mariachi music.



*The Moravian Lovefeast* on Wednesday night led a full church through a hymn-sing, reflective readings from the Moravian Daily Texts and sharing of coffee and Lovefeast rolls. As worshipers learned the tradition of the Moravian Lovefeast is over 280 years old. As described to the community gathered, "The Lovefeast is a customary way for Moravians to celebrate special events in their congregations and to express their continuing love and commitment." While it is not sacramental in nature, it does represent the church family sharing table fellowship.

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**LERN reflections:**  
**Bible Study during the week**  
Tim Philabaum

The morning Bible Study at this National Workshop was handled with inspiration by Dr. Margaret Mitchell, the Professor of New Testament and Early



Christian Literature at the University of Chicago Divinity School. She spoke both Wednesday and Thursday, using St. Paul's 1<sup>st</sup> Letter to the Corinthians to explore Paul's argument for unity in the Church.

Corinth, situated between two harbors, one facing east and the other west, had a reputation for being a "sin city", much like we might view Las Vegas. In this town, about 75-100 people gathered as Church in the home of Gaius (see Romans 16:23). Dr. Mitchell quoted from non-Jewish and non-Christian sources, such as Strabo and Cicero; showed pictures of the city, one with a stone dedicated to *homonoia* and *concordia*, the Greek and Latin words for "being-of-the-same-mind/heart"; and drew from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1:10 the understanding that Paul's use of "be reconciled" is meant to evoke the same concept as when a doctor resets a joint, making it whole again.

She explored 7 points in Paul's understanding of unity in the Church:

The "ones": There are 31 times "one" is used, emphasizing unity.

The image of the Body: the Church is complete with different, interdependent parts, all working for the common health.

The image of the Building: the Church is an, interconnected building, and God is building up the Church.

Love: the key, binding, and essence of unity.

Paul appeals for us to seek the common advantage of the Body, not our own advantage.

Paul develops the distinction between insiders (believers) and outsiders. In Chapter 1:22-23 he posits that we (believers) are a third race, the third after Jews and Gentiles. This distinction calls us to live at unity within The Body, and to maintain a higher standard.

Paul called the Church to maintain the Status Quo, both because God has placed us where we are, and has gifted us there, and because Christ will soon return.

Dr. Mitchell opened to the Workshop the mind and heart of St. Paul, calling the Church today to unity, to interconnectedness, to love for the whole body, and to the building up of the Body of Christ.

## Seminar 8: Can Mormons Be Part of the Ecumenical Process?

Pamela Keane

Robert Millet (LDS) of Brigham Young University (left), and Dr. Richard Mouw (PCUSA) of Fuller Seminary(right)

have been working together for many years to try to understand the other's faith and to bridge the gap between them.



Clearly they have become friends in the process. Dr. Mouw said, "We disagree about a lot of things...but we learn a lot from each other."

Although Dr. Mouw stated that he does not believe in the foundational visions ascribed to by the Latter-Day Saints, he is sympathetic to their being included in ecumenical discussions. He pointed out that prior to the 1970s, there was a "live and let live" feeling towards Mormons. Only after being labeled a cult, did the divide between Mormons and non-Mormons become seemingly insurmountable.

Both men describe the LDS church as still being in its infancy; "pre-Nicean" in terms years since first established, and perhaps also in terms of its doctrine. Dr. Mouw realizes that some mainline churches question the validity of Mormon traditions as not being biblical, and express concern that Mormons consider their leader to be a prophet. However, Dr. Mouw was quick to point out that other Christians, for example Roman Catholic and Pentecost, could be said to do the same.

Robert Millet, for his part, described the LDS as a church growing in maturity. He said that over the years there has been a shift in emphasis within the established doctrine. Emphasis is now being placed more on learning scripture (both Biblical and the Mormon canon), and more on atonement. Mr. Millet was able to talk a little about the Mormon understanding of the Trinity as being three separate persons (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) in one Godhead, not three in one being. He also described the Mormon doctrine of Grace as coming only from God, not based upon any deed one could do. They have a strong work ethic, he affirmed, but he said that when he comes before God to

explain his life, you had better believe he will not be counting off his accomplishments. "I know what side my bread is buttered," he said with a laugh.

At the end of the discussion, a member of the audience asked the leading question, "So, can Mormons be Part of the Ecumenical Process? Do they want to?" Mr. Millet said that they no longer feel the need to isolate and protect themselves from the rest of the world. For their part, they are now ready and interested in taking part in religious conversations.

## Seminar 5: "Living the Lund Principle"

Rev. Paul Schreck, ELCA offered an affirming and challenging place for ecumenical action to begin. Rev Schreck explained that the Lund Principle was established at the Faith and Order Conference in Lund, Sweden in 1952. It states that "Churches should act together in ALL matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately."



Rev. Schreck engaged those attending in a time of exciting conversation. Participants were invited to creatively identify those actions common and often individual within congregations that can and should be the basis for actions of Christian unity within communities. Look for the text version of Paul's seminar at the LERN page at [www.elca.org/ecumenical/lern](http://www.elca.org/ecumenical/lern).

## Lutherans offered a pre-Eucharist Seminar

The Evangelical Lutheran Worship resource is not only new to ELCA members it is new to our ecumenical partners. The LERN board decided that it would be helpful, in particular to our full communion partners to offer a seminar that described the history, process and content of the ELW. Bishop Michael Burke, SE Iowa was the presenter. Bishop Burke described the process of creation and then offered information about the content and function of the ELW. The

seminar helped to pave the way for worship on Tuesday evening. While the service was held at in Episcopal congregation the ELW was the source for the order of worship and hymns for the service. Jan Flaaten (ELCA) worked with the local planning team to create a service that was both welcoming to all and representative of worship practices as offered through the ELW.

### **NWCU Seminars available online:**

This year NWCU is piloting a new way of distributing recordings of the NWCU Seminars and other events. In the past recorded sessions were purchased from the NWCU. In order to lower the cost and make the recordings available to more people, we are recording those sessions and persons can download those recordings (mp3 files) from this web site. Go to our [Download Center](#). We ask your patience, because there have been some breakdowns in the recording processes. In a few cases, speakers forgot to turn on the recording devices as requested, and the process by which the recorded files has been made available to the site has been slow. We hope that we can learn much from our mistakes this time, and have the process perfected for Tampa.



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## **Lutheran Ecumenical Representative Network Report**

### **FROM THE PRESIDENT**

*Dr. Rocky Piro*

Early Christians gathered for agape meals, which provided opportunities for fellowship and sharing. Our full communion partners in the Moravian Church regard their Lovefeast as a similar gathering – and we were fortunate during the 2009 National Workshop for Christian Unity

to have Moravian colleagues invite us one evening to share in this custom. However, one could easily make the case that the Moravian Lovefeast marked only one of many opportunities to gather for fellowship and sharing with fellow Christians at this annual gathering of ecumenical partners and colleagues.

Nearly one third of the Lutherans attending the 2009 Workshop were first-timers – they offered new perspectives and insights into the ecumenical work and ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. We are thankful for their participation and very much welcome their contributions and fellowship for years to come.

We also very much appreciate the time we were able to spend with the ELCA staff from Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations. They talked about efforts to deepen our relationships with existing full communion partners, while continuing dialogues and conversations with Roman Catholics, Mennonites, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. We heard reports on the ELCA's work through conciliar bodies, including the World Council of Churches, the National Council of Churches in Christ, and Christian Churches Together. Experiences shared from the Bishops' Academy in the Holy Land earlier this year also highlighted the ongoing importance of our reaching out to other faith communities. We also took time to talk about the ecumenical issues related to human sexuality recommendations before the 2009 Churchwide Assembly. It was a pleasure to meet and get to know Erin Menet, Assistant to the Director at Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations.

This summer, the ELCA will be considering a recommendation to establish full communion with the United Methodist Church. We were fortunate in Phoenix to have two ecumenical leaders from that church, Steven Sidorak and Betty Gamble, join us for a plenary session. There are more than 8 million United Methodists in the United States – all our other existing full communion partners, including Episcopalians, Moravians, and Reformed, collectively number more than 7 million. It was noted that there are already many areas of cooperative ministry between Lutherans and United Methodists across the country. In 2006 the World Methodist Council took action to affirm the Joint

Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. Also of note is the work by United Methodists at the 2009 Workshop to establish their own network of ecumenical representatives – under the name “United Methodist Ecumenical and Interfaith Training.”

A major work item at the LERN plenary sessions this year resulted in the endorsement of set of strategic guidelines related to reception and communication. These guidelines are an outgrowth of a commitment by the Network to grow its capacity to achieve all that we can from our full communion relationships and to continue to nurture ecumenical possibilities with other partners with whom we are in dialogue. As part of the action to endorse the guidelines, LERN members expressed their gratitude to those who had been involved in the process.

The Episcopal and Roman Catholic ecumenical networks have been interested in and supportive of the efforts of LERN to further advance work on reception. To that end, planning for the 2010 National Workshop in Tampa will consider more opportunities for face-to-face work on ecumenical reception.

There were several transitions that we marked at the 2009 Workshop. Scott Cady, Richard Jeske, Russell Meyer, Bill Sappenfield have completed service on the LERN Executive Board – we are very grateful for their leadership and tireless work to manifest the oneness that Lutherans share with all Christians. And we welcome to the Board three new members: Nathan Allen (Oklahoma), Mary Finklea (South Carolina), and John Longworth (Massachusetts).

Finally, thanks are in order for our colleague, Jan Flaaten, and his outstanding work as local chair for the 2009 National Workshop in Phoenix. The countless hours of planning and preparation helped to make the event smooth and meaningful for all who participated. As a result, our experience in the Arizona desert was very fulfilling.

## **LERNing EDITORIAL TEAM for 2009-2010**

Rev Jim Honig, [pastorjkh@faithonline.org](mailto:pastorjkh@faithonline.org)  
Rev. Kenny Bowen, [resgreeter@yahoo.com](mailto:resgreeter@yahoo.com)  
Rev. John Petty, [johnpetty2000@hotmail.com](mailto:johnpetty2000@hotmail.com)  
Rev. Kim Rapczak [pastorkimrapczak@gmail.com](mailto:pastorkimrapczak@gmail.com)  
Executive Board Liaison: Rev. Dr. Elaine Siemsen, [egsiemsen1@aim.com](mailto:egsiemsen1@aim.com)

The appeal went out and there were several who accepted the challenge to serve as editors for LERNing for the coming year. Each editor will be responsible for one issue of LERNing. In addition each issue will offer the opportunity to focus on the ecumenical activities in one region of the ELCA.

The September issue will be edited by Jim Honig and will highlight ecumenical work in Region 5. Kim Rapczak will lead the way on the November issue which will invite articles from Region 6. January will be edited by John Petty and have an early glimpse of the 2010 meeting in Tampa. Kenny Bown has agreed to edit the March issue of LERNing. The March issue has as its dominant theme the NWCU meeting in Tampa with information about speakers, seminars and registration. The May issue of LERNing will be edited by Elaine Siemsen with reflections on the NWCU and Network actions.

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## **ELECTIONS FOR BOARD MEMBERS & OFFICERS**

At the April 2009 National Workshop for Christian Unity in Phoenix, Region 4 elected Rev. Nathan Allen, Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod, to serve as its regional coordinator on the LERN Executive Board. Region 7 elected John Longworth, New England Synod, as its regional coordinator. Region 9 elected Mary Finklea, South Carolina Synod. Note: Region 8 will also hold an election later this spring and the result will be reported in the next issue of LERNing.

The Executive Board elected Tim Philabaum to serve a two-year term as secretary.

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## LERN MEMBERS ENDORSE GUIDELINES

Work by the Lutheran Ecumenical Representatives Network to create a common strategic resource for carrying out its mission, goals, and objectives resulted in the endorsement of a set of strategic guidelines at the 2009 National Workshop in Phoenix. The guidelines now become an additional tool, along with the LERN Governing Document and LERN Manual, to provide direction for LERN members in their ecumenical work and ministry.

The following 13 guidelines were endorsed, addressing areas of reception and communication:

- Work to develop a relationship with the synod bishop to foster Lutheran identity in ecumenical and interreligious work
- Embrace and encourage grassroots ecumenism throughout the synod by (1) seeking to identify those currently involved in ecumenical efforts, and (2) nurturing new opportunities for ecumenical ministry, through the provision of information, resources, and other appropriate forms of support.
- Identify opportunities locally, regionally, and through the Network for broad dissemination of information on ELCA full communion relationships – provide models, examples, and best practices.
- Establish at least one ecumenical commission in each synod to assist the bishop, the ecumenical representative, the synod council, and congregations with ecumenical ministry and projects.
- Building on the churchwide Strategic Plan for ecumenism, and the LERN guidelines, explore with the synod bishop the development of a reception strategy or plan for the synod.
- Promote opportunities for joint worship and cooperative service. Joint worship should consider opportunities throughout the liturgical year that are sometimes challenging to observe at the congregational level on Sundays, such as Epiphany, Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Annunciation, Ascension, Holy Cross, St. Francis, and All Saints Day. Cooperative service may focus on issues of concern in the community, including economic, social justice, or environmental issues – such as, immigration, clean water, environmental damage, education, population growth, or natural resources.
- Pursue establishing covenants or other similar statements of agreement and cooperation with full communion partners (and other interested partners in ministry) to embrace formal relationships and reception.
- LERN members should be active in communicating ecumenical and interreligious work through synodical publications and websites, local and statewide ecumenical newsletters and webpages, and through work with synod assembly planning teams.
- LERN members should commit to communication with ER and LERN – including regular access to websites and workspace and by providing articles and information to assist with the development of a compendium of best practices.
- The LERN Board will continue to work with ER on Network website and workspace development and maintenance.
- The LERN Board will continue to work with LERNing Editorial Team to ensure regular production and transmittal of newsletter to the Network.
- The LERN Board will continue to identify opportunities to improve communications and information sharing among Network members – including providing summary notes from annual network meetings and plenary sessions, regularly transmitting Board meeting minutes, and sharing other information of interest to the Network electronically.
- The LERN Board will work with the Section of Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations and with the membership to develop a database of parish-level and synod-level ecumenical programs and practices.

Additional work is taking place on formatting the guidelines and a final version will be put on the LERN website later this year.

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## NWCU Planning for 2010 in Tampa

Now is the time to begin the conversation with synodical bishops for funding to attend the 2010 NWCU meeting to be held **April 19-22**, in Tampa, Florida.

The Rev Russell Meyer, recently retired from the LERN board, is serving on the Local planning committee. Russell along with current LERN Board member Diane Lowe who is on the National Planning board, has shared that the national planning board has made a commitment that a primary focus of the 2010 NWCU will be on *Reception*.

To encourage intentional conversation between dialogue- partners the 2010 Workshop will have major program schedule changes from previous years. There will be a re-design of the time designated for conversation and networking between those in attendance. The LERN Board affirmed that these changes would encourage conversation between denominational representatives and possibly offer the opportunity to work with others from the same geographic locations.

The National planning team for NWCU will meet again in the fall to continue the work for the Tampa meeting.

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## 2008 Year End Synodical Reports

In January 2009 each LERN member was requested to return to Tim Philabaum a completed 2008 Synodical report. These reports were collated and presented in booklet form to those registered for the LERN plenary session. Additional copies are available from the office of Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations, please call 773-380-2610. If you were unable to attend the meeting at Phoenix, please contact ER for a copy of this report.

## LERN EXECUTIVE BOARD (by region)

- 1 - Rocky Piro (president), [REPiro@aol.com](mailto:REPiro@aol.com)
- 2 – Diane Lowe (vice-president), [dianelowe@sbcglobal.net](mailto:dianelowe@sbcglobal.net)
- 3 – Elaine Siemsen, [egsiemsen1@aim.com](mailto:egsiemsen1@aim.com)
- 4 – Nathan Allen, [PrNathan@sbcglobal.net](mailto:PrNathan@sbcglobal.net)
- 5 – Chris Olkeiwicz, [revcdo@standrewsames.org](mailto:revcdo@standrewsames.org)
- 6 – Tim Philabaum (secretary), [tphilabaum@hotmail.com](mailto:tphilabaum@hotmail.com)
- 7 – John Longworth, [jmlongworth@trinityworc.org](mailto:jmlongworth@trinityworc.org)
- 8 – Larry Kemp, [pastor125kemp2@verizon.net](mailto:pastor125kemp2@verizon.net)
- 9 – Mary Finklea, [pastorfinklea@bellsouth.net](mailto:pastorfinklea@bellsouth.net)