



Observance of the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation

Strategy for Observance of the 500th Anniversary of the Evangelical (Lutheran) Reformation in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)

November 10, 2012

1. Purpose

As it observes the 500th anniversary of the evangelical (Lutheran) Reformation of Christian teaching and practice in 16th-century Europe, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) will initiate and participate in activities that serve the ELCA's evangelical vocation—that is, both its mission and its identity—in all its relationships.

Relationships

North American. The religious and cultural experience of North America is the primary context for the ELCA's vocation. It will be the primary point of reference for thinking and planning the ELCA's observance of the 500th anniversary. The manifold relationships within the ELCA as well as relationships with other Lutherans, ecumenical partners, other religious communities, and the larger American public provide abundant opportunities to make an evangelical witness that draws on the heritage and continuing vitality of the evangelical Lutheran reformation.

Global. At the same time, the ELCA has important and rich relationships with communities around the globe: The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), its member churches and other Lutheran communities; other Christian churches and communities through the World Council of Churches, in international dialogues, including those with the Catholic and Orthodox churches, and other alliances; other religious communities and their representatives; and institutions and alliances with whom the ELCA collaborates in activities that “promote justice, relieve misery, and reconcile the estranged . . . further human dignity, freedom, justice, and peace in the world . . . and minister to people in spiritual and temporal needs” (ELCA constitutional provision 4.03.g, l, m). All these relationships provide opportunities to join others in observing the continuing significance of the evangelical Reformation for our shared work.

2. Goals

In all these relationships activities will be “an occasion for the joyful celebration of the power of the Lutheran witness to the gospel and at the same time a space for the self-critical acknowledgment of failures in faithfulness and of the continuing pain of division among Christians” (LWF Strategic Plan).

Within the ELCA, but also in activities with others, the ELCA will honor its stated principles of being an inclusive and interdependent church (ELCA constitutional provision 5.01.b–c).

Specifically, the ELCA will:

- a. continue to encourage and support participation in the observances planned by the LWF for 2015–2017 and the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) Luther Decade (2008–2017);
- b. encourage and support initiatives by congregations, synods, and other institutional expressions of the ELCA that observe this anniversary;
- c. collaborate with ecumenical partners and others, where and when appropriate, in activities that promote a witness of the Gospel that is both repentant and evangelical;
- d. initiate and support activities throughout the entire ELCA ecology that serve the ELCA's evangelical vocation without dictating a uniform plan or assuming responsibility for planning or approving all local, regional, or other collaborative initiatives that begin in 2013 and continue beyond 2017; and

- e. plan and implement a schedule of featured events from the 2016 Churchwide Assembly to October 31, 2017, that allow ELCA members to participate in observance of the 500th anniversary through worship, learning, and service.

3. Activities

Although the ELCA churchwide organization will not have responsibility for planning and dictating the observances of every ELCA congregation, synod, and associated institution, it will accept responsibility for the following activities:

- a. Receiving and distributing information about activities and initiatives planned throughout the ELCA and in its relationships with others, and inviting participation and support of these activities (including the Luther Decade and LWF observance).
- b. Planning and implementing a schedule of featured events from the 2016 Churchwide Assembly to October 31, 2017, that allow ELCA members to participate in observance of the 500th anniversary through worship, learning, and service.
- c. Convening and supporting initiatives and convening teams to lead the work for these initiatives.