



Synodical Relations

Statement of purpose

Within the Office of the Presiding Bishop, Synodical Relations coordinates the relationships between the churchwide organization and synods, develops and implements support for synod bishops, officers and staff, and provides staff services for the Conference of Bishops. The vision for this work is to foster effective, well-equipped leaders in healthy mission-driven synods. The governing description for this is in ELCA continuing resolution 15.12.F13.

Report of work for 2013-2016

Conference of Bishops

Supporting the work of the Conference of Bishops and its committees is one of the highest priorities. Synodical Relations staff works with the committees to plan and conduct the conference's two semiannual meetings, the annual Bishops' Academy and the Bishops Formation event for newly elected bishops.

The 2015 Bishops' Academy was an educational pilgrimage to Germany to visit sites associated with Martin Luther's life. The 2016 academy was held in Tucson, Ariz., under the theme "The Hard and Blessed Work of Leading in a Time of Change." Presentations were led by the event's presenter, Mr. Will Williamson, and selected bishops.

As a result of retirements, termed-out calls or bishops choosing not to run for re-election, six new bishops were elected and will attend their first conference meeting in fall 2016. Prior to the assemblies, Synodical Relations and the Office of the Secretary conducted conference calls with leaders from the eight synods that held elections to review procedures and other issues. Processes that are unique to each synod were discussed and questions from leaders were answered. Synodical Relations staff obtained helpful information that benefited those who presided at the elections.

The Bishops Formation Committee spent considerable time planning for the Bishops Formation event July 10-14, 2016, which provided the new bishops orientation and formation time and the opportunity to meet with churchwide staff. As leadership changes, there will be significant transitions in those synods, as well as for the bishops who will be leaving office. The Synodical Relations staff welcomes the new bishops and looks forward to working with them.

Synod assembly representation

In collaboration with Presiding Bishop Elizabeth A. Eaton, Synodical Relations prepared for the 2016 synod assemblies. Churchwide representatives were assigned to each assembly and were equipped with resource materials to share. The assemblies began in April and ran through June.

Assistants to the bishops

The Bishops' Assistants Gathering was held in Jacksonville, Fla., at the Hyatt Regency, Feb. 26- March 1, 2015, under the theme "Walking Together ... Into a Changed and Changing World." Pre-gathering sessions were: Clergy Sexual Misconduct Prevention, led by Ms. Barbara Keller, Mr. Phillip H. Harris and Mr. Thomas A. Cuniff, and the New Assistants to Bishops Orientation.

Fund management

This team manages the Good Samaritan and Shared-Risk funds. Good Samaritan grants are made to rostered leaders and family members or survivors to maintain health coverage in times of financial need. The Shared Risk Fund is a self insurance program in which all synods participate, reducing their financial liability for high cost disciplinary proceedings.

Federal chaplaincy ministries

The Rev. F. Eric Wester has provided this narrative under separate cover in Section III of the *Pre-Assembly Report*.

Conference of Bishops 2016

The Conference of Bishops consists of the 65 synodical bishops, the presiding bishop and secretary of this church. The members as of February 2016 were:

Presiding Bishop Elizabeth A. Eaton
Secretary Wm Chris Boerger
Bishop Thomas M. Aitken, Northeastern Minnesota Synod
Bishop Abraham D. Allende, Northeastern Ohio Synod
Bishop Jon V. Anderson, Southwestern Minnesota Synod
Bishop James A. Arends, La Crosse Area Synod
Bishop Jeffrey S. Barrow, Greater Milwaukee Synod
Bishop Tracie L. Bartholomew, New Jersey Synod
Bishop Terry A. Brandt, Eastern North Dakota Synod
Bishop David H. Brauer-Rieke, Oregon Synod
Bishop Michael L. Burk, Southeastern Iowa Synod
Bishop Claire S. Burkat, Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod
Bishop Jessica R. Crist, Montana Synod
Bishop Steven H. Delzer, Southeastern Minnesota Synod
Bishop Suzanne D. Dillahun, Southern Ohio Synod
Bishop Robert L. Driesen, Upper Susquehanna Synod
Bishop James S. Dunlop, Lower Susquehanna Synod
Bishop R. Guy Erwin, Southwest California Synod
Bishop Murray D. Finck, Pacifica Synod
Bishop Mary B. Froiland, South-Central Synod of Wisconsin
Bishop William O. Gafkjen, Indiana-Kentucky Synod
Bishop Michael K. Girlinghouse, Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod
Bishop James W. Gonia, Rocky Mountain Synod
Bishop H. Julian Gordy, Southeastern Synod
Bishop Richard H. Graham, Metropolitan Washington, D.C., Synod
Bishop Roger R. Gustafson, Central States Synod
Bishop James E. Hazelwood, New England Synod
Bishop Wolfgang D. Herz-Lane, Delaware-Maryland Synod
Bishop Mark W. Holmerud, Sierra Pacific Synod
Bishop Richard N. Hoyme, Northwest Synod of Wisconsin
Bishop Richard E. Jaech, Southwestern Washington Synod
Bishop Ralph E. Jones, Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod
Bishop Kevin S. Kanouse, Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod
Bishop Donald P. Kreiss, Southeast Michigan Synod
Bishop Wilma S. Kucharek, Slovak Zion Synod
Bishop Kurt F. Kusserow, Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod
Bishop Marcus C. Lohrmann, Northwestern Ohio Synod
Bishop Felipe Lozada-Montañez, Caribbean Synod
Bishop Patricia J. Lull, Saint Paul Area Synod
Bishop Brian D. Maas, Nebraska Synod
Bishop John S. Macholz, Upstate New York Synod
Bishop Gerald L. Mansholt, East-Central Synod of Wisconsin
Bishop James F. Mauney, Virginia Synod
Bishop Wayne N. Miller, Metropolitan Chicago Synod
Bishop Mark E. Narum, Western North Dakota Synod
Bishop Rodger C. Prois, Western Iowa Synod
Bishop Michael L. Rhyne, Allegheny Synod
Bishop Matthew L. Riegel, West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod

Bishop Robert A. Rimbo, Metropolitan New York Synod
 Bishop Michael W. Rinehart, Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod
 Bishop S. John Roth, Central/Southern Illinois Synod
 Bishop Craig A. Satterlee, North/West Lower Michigan Synod
 Bishop Robert G. Schaefer, Florida-Bahamas Synod
 Bishop Thomas A. Skrenes, Northern Great Lakes Synod
 Bishop Timothy M. Smith, North Carolina Synod
 Bishop Ann M. Svenningsen, Minneapolis Area Synod
 Bishop Stephen S. Talmage, Grand Canyon Synod
 Bishop Ray Tiemann, Southwestern Texas Synod
 Bishop Steven L. Ullestad, Northeastern Iowa Synod
 Bishop B. Kirby Unti, Northwest Washington Synod
 Bishop Martin D. Wells, Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod
 Bishop Shelley R. Wickstrom, Alaska Synod
 Bishop Larry R. Wohlrabe, Northwestern Minnesota Synod
 Bishop Gary M. Wollersheim, Northern Illinois Synod
 Bishop Herman R. Yoos III, South Carolina Synod
 Bishop Samuel R. Zeiser, Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod
 Bishop David B. Zellmer, South Dakota Synod

Committees

The Conference of Bishops organizes itself according to its identified needs and mandated tasks.

- **The Executive Committee** is comprised of the chair, vice chair, three at-large members, the presiding bishop and secretary. Staff liaison is the executive for Synodical Relations. This committee makes decisions on behalf of the conference, makes recommendations of appointments to standing committees and gives oversight for conference meetings. It also, as needed, assigns work to committees and task forces; coordinates consideration of concerns, issues and requests for or between conference meetings; offers advice, counsel and support to the presiding bishop as requested; and approves agendas for conference meetings.
- **The Committee on Academy** is responsible for the annual continuing education event for the Conference of Bishops. Typically the academy is held annually during the first days of January and seeks to provide stimulating presenters on a variety of topics. One of the most important components of the academy is the opportunity for fellowship and relationship-building among colleagues.
- **The Committee on Bishop Formation** assists newly elected bishops in becoming familiar with the Office of the Presiding Bishop and helps them make connections with partners throughout the ELCA. The committee also assigns mentors (veteran bishops) who are available to each newly elected bishop for support and guidance as needed.
- **The Committee on Roster** reviews roster criteria and procedure requests from synods. It also provides recommendations for action by the Conference of Bishops relative to ELCA constitutional requirements for roster categories. The committee addresses the following specific matters:
 - o Exceptions to the three-year parish service rule
 - o Extensions of three-year on leave from call status
 - o Calls to non-congregational service
 - o Calls to non-stipendiary service
 - o Calls to serve in unusual circumstances
- **The Committee on Theological and Ethical Concerns** assists the conference in its role as a forum for reflections upon the theological and ethical implications of issues that affect this church.
- **The Committee on Synodical-Churchwide Relations** assists churchwide units and related organizations in securing review, advice, consultation and recommendations by the Conference of Bishops on policies and programs. It also fosters good communication between the churchwide staff and the conference.
- **The Committee on Ministry Among People in Poverty's** mission statement is: "Rooted in the biblical witness and shaped by the compassion of Christ, we assist the Conference of Bishops in engaging the church in ministry with and among persons in poverty." The committee's work revolves around five strategies:

- o Hold one another (i.e., ELCA bishops) accountable for living out our commitment to ministry with and among people in poverty in our synodical work.
- o Advocate for all our actions and decisions to be considered for their effect on the poor.
- o Build awareness of and support for current effective work and potential new work.
- o Serve as liaison with churchwide units and other partnerships, stimulating linkages with local ministries.
- o Encourage personal experiences and encounters, locally and globally, with people living in poverty as a way to enliven the church.
- **The Committee on Synodical and Rostered Leader Care** serves in two capacities. First, it oversees the Shared-Risk Fund, established by the conference in 1992, which permits participating synods a degree of protection against the costs of disciplinary proceedings against rostered leaders and congregations. After a deductible of \$10,000 has been satisfied, eligible expenses may be submitted for partial or full reimbursement according to fund guidelines. Synods are assessed premiums of \$2 per rostered person and \$2 per congregation. Second, it oversees the Good Samaritan Fund, which provides limited financial aid to rostered leaders/spouses. It reviews the history of usage of the funds and appropriate application forms.
- **The Committee on Ecumenical Relations** facilitates communication and coordination between the Conference of Bishops and ecumenical conversations. Individual committee members may be given ecumenical assignments by this church. The committee will:
 - o assist in interpreting ecumenical work to the other bishops, be a channel for counsel and questions, assist the conference in dealing with ecumenical matters by providing resources and resource people, framing questions and consulting on related matters;
 - o encourage conference members in carrying out their ecumenical responsibilities within their synods, including their use of the Lutheran Ecumenical Representatives Network; and
 - o encourage conference members who have accepted special assignments to dialogue teams or ecumenical governing boards.
- **The Committee on Companion Synods** seeks to enhance and strengthen relationships between ELCA bishops and their companion synods or dioceses. The committee also assists when policy questions arise or difficult situations develop in these relationships.
- **The Committee on Leadership** serves in an advisory role to the Domestic Mission unit. This committee reports to the Conference of Bishops at its meetings, receives it counsel, and then raises with Domestic Mission staff any questions. Proposals for new and revised policies are reviewed and recommendations are made to matters under consideration by the unit in the following areas:
 - o Candidacy
 - o Book of Faith
 - o Disability ministry
 - o Leadership support
 - o Lilly grants
 - o Misconduct prevention
 - o Mission schools/colleges and universities
 - o Outreach leadership
 - o Seminaries
 - o Specialized ministries
 - o Theological Education for Emerging Ministries
- **The New and Renewing Congregations Committee** serves in an advisory role to the Domestic Mission unit. Proposals for new and revised policies are reviewed and recommendations are made to matters under consideration by the unit in the following areas:
 - o New congregations
 - o Congregational renewal
 - o Campus ministry
 - o Youth ministry
 - o Youth Gathering
 - o Young adult ministry
 - o Outdoor ministry

- **The Ethnic Specific/Multicultural Ministries Committee** reports to the Conference of Bishops at its meetings, receives its counsel and then raises with the Domestic Mission staff any questions generated.

Conclusion

On behalf of the Office of the Presiding Bishop and its responsibility for Synodical Relations, this staff is pleased to provide service and assistance to the Church Council and Conference of Bishops in your ministry and work to strengthen relationships between the Church Council, synods, synodical bishops and the churchwide organization.

The Rev. Walter S. May, *assistant to the presiding bishop and executive for Synodical Relations*