



## Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations

### Statement of purpose

"The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is an active participant in the ecumenical movement because of its desire for Christian unity" ("Ecumenism: The Vision of the ELCA"). Full communion agreements with partner churches have made Christian unity a closer reality, as have continued dialogues, discourses and coalitions with other Christians. Inter-religious partnerships have deepened our self-understanding as Christians in the Lutheran tradition and have created opportunities for cooperation on issues of common concern.

The ELCA seeks unity with other churches. The foundation for this is reflected in the statement "Ecumenism: The Vision of the ELCA," adopted by the 1991 Churchwide Assembly. Building upon the wisdom of the predecessor churches, this statement has served as a compass, guiding the ELCA's ecumenical relations in their various forms and stages.

Today one of our greatest challenges and opportunities is the assessment of and engagement with the rapidly changing multireligious context. "Ecumenism" anticipated this 25 years ago: "The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America does engage, in a variety of ways, in this inter-faith work and needs in the future a separate, official statement to describe its commitments and aspirations in this area." In a time marked by unprecedented religious extremism, as well as unprecedented inter-religious peace-building, exploring this church's vision for inter-religious relations is an urgent priority.

Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations in the Office of the Presiding Bishop makes every effort to ensure that this church's ecumenical and inter-religious commitments are furthering the mission and ministry of the ELCA and the whole body of Christ. This includes interpreting and communicating ecumenical advancements through the lenses of grass-roots ecumenism and broad reception. Emphasis is placed on meeting common cooperative needs with ecumenical and inter-religious partners locally, nationally and globally. This is critically important in our rapidly changing ecclesial, ecumenical and inter-religious landscape.

### Major work for 2013-2016

#### Reception of full communion agreements

The ELCA has full communion agreements with six church bodies. The 1997 Churchwide Assembly adopted the "Formula of Agreement," which established full communion between the ELCA and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Reformed Church in America and the United Church of Christ (UCC). The 1999 Churchwide Assembly approved "Called to Common Mission," a full communion agreement with The Episcopal Church, and "Following Our Shepherd to Full Communion" with certain provinces of the Moravian Church in America. In 2009 the ELCA entered into "Confessing Our Faith Together," a full communion agreement with The United Methodist Church.

Coordinating committees for each of the agreements meet regularly to look at shared ministries, address concerns, develop strategic plans and review possibilities for implementing mission priorities. Creating opportunities for ELCA staff and their full communion counterparts to meet has been important in advancing what this church can do in ministry with its partners.

In the past three years, the fruits of these agreements have continued to grow: a broadened full communion reception through mission cooperation; shared work on congregational vitality and evangelical outreach; advocacy, involving shared staffing with The Episcopal Church; and cooperation on issues of common concern, including racial and environmental justice. Staff has also explored common challenges such as seminary education and ecumenical and inter-religious formation. The Episcopal Church's concern regarding lay presidency and lay rostering was addressed within the framework of "Called to Common Mission."

The past year has been a time of leadership transitions for several of the full communion partners. The ELCA has honored outgoing heads of churches and welcomed their successors in the UCC (general minister and president), Episcopal Church (presiding bishop) and Presbyterian Church (stated clerk). Significant milestones – five years of full communion with the Methodists (2014) and 15 years with the Moravians (2015) – have been occasions for celebration and strategic planning.

## **Bilateral dialogues, discourses and cooperation**

### *Lutheran–Catholic Dialogue*

In May 2015 the Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue in the United States celebrated 50 years. A service of thanksgiving and prayer was held in the chapel at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) offices in Washington, D.C., followed by an address given by Monsignor John A. Radano and a response by Ms. Kathryn M. Lohre, executive for ELCA Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations.

The current Round XII of the dialogue on “Faithful Teaching” examines the ways in which the two traditions understand the church to be both taught and teaching. The report will identify important areas of common understanding and practice while exploring several significant differences.

Drawing on this half-century of dialogue, both internationally and in more local settings like the United States, a task force of scholars appointed by the USCCB and ELCA produced “Declaration on the Way: Church, Ministry, and Eucharist.” The task force is co-chaired by Presiding Bishop Emeritus Mark S. Hanson and Auxiliary Bishop Denis J. Madden of Baltimore. The Lutheran scholars are Dr. Kathryn L. Johnson and the Rev. Joy A. Schroeder, with the Rev. Donald J. McCoid as staff. In partnership with the USCCB, Augsburg Fortress published the text in 2016 as a resource for study, reflection and dialogue for Reformation 500 and beyond.

The heart of the document is the “Statement of Agreements,” 32 affirmations on which Lutherans and Catholics have reached agreement in their dialogues. In fall 2015 the ELCA Conference of Bishops and Church Council unanimously affirmed this statement, as did the USCCB Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs. At the 2016 Churchwide Assembly, there is a proposal to receive the “Statements of Agreement,” acknowledging that “receiving these agreements recognizes that there are no longer church dividing issues with respect to these statements.” It is hoped that this effort to claim “real but partial” agreement on these crucial issues can help Lutherans and Catholics, internationally as well as in the United States, to be inspired to continue to move forward “on the way.”

The Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Christian Unity, the international dialogue sponsored by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, produced a report titled “From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017.” By jointly telling the history of the Reformation, and reflecting together on 50 years of dialogue, this text invites Lutherans and Catholics to celebrate their common witness and to self-critically acknowledge the suffering caused by the division of the church. From Conflict to Communion and a study guide produced by the ELCA Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod and the Pittsburgh Diocese are available at [ELCA.org/ecumenical](http://ELCA.org/ecumenical).

The commission also produced a liturgy for common prayer based on “From Conflict to Communion,” available at [lutheranworld.org](http://lutheranworld.org). Adaptable for local settings, it will be used during an international ecumenical commemoration of the Reformation on Oct. 31, 2016, in Lund, Sweden, where the LWF was founded. Pope Francis, LWF President Bishop Munib Younan and General Secretary Martin Junge will provide leadership. An event following the service will focus on common diaconal work. The ELCA will be represented by a small delegation, and the events will be available for viewing through web streaming.

### *Lutheran–Mennonite Dialogue*

The Mennonite Church USA and ELCA staff have been working to live into the churches’ ongoing reconciliation in the United States and internationally. Plans include educational and interpretive efforts, supporting the international trilateral dialogue on baptism and engaging issues of peacemaking.

### *African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church discourse*

A historic ELCA-African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (A.M.E. Zion) summit took place in Salisbury, N.C., in October 2011. The summit was held at Hood Seminary to celebrate relationships, explore common mission and to present the 2010 joint “Statement of Mission.” It was the culmination of a dialogue between neighbors: the North Carolina Synod and the A.M.E. Zion seminary offices. The dialogue presents an innovative model for ecumenism that begins at the grass roots and grows to the national level. A meeting of leaders from both churches took place in April 2015 to develop the next steps in this work together, including lifting up the “Statement of Mission” and planning a grass roots engagement strategy. The ELCA is delighted to receive A.M.E. Zion Senior Bishop George E. Battle Jr. as a preacher during this assembly and to welcome several of that church’s bishops and leaders as a sign of this growing partnership.

### *Partnerships with Historic Black Churches and others to address racism*

This church's response to the high-profile occurrences of racially motivated discrimination, hatred and violence across our nation has had an important ecumenical dimension. Building upon past discourses with the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) and A.M.E. Zion churches, the ELCA has participated in several ecumenical events and coalitions seeking to confront racism. In November 2014 the ELCA joined other members of the National Council of Churches in making a public statement in Ferguson, Mo., on the eve of the grand jury's non-indictment ruling. The next month the ELCA joined the AME, A.M.E. Zion, and Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME) congregations and other ecumenical partners in Black Lives Matter Sunday.

In June 2015 the tragic shootings at Mother Emmanuel AME Church in Charleston, S.C., took place as the LWF Council was meeting. From the Ecumenical Center in Geneva, Presiding Bishop Elizabeth A. Eaton issued a statement calling for a "day of repentance and mourning" and the LWF issued a public statement on the sin of racism. After returning to the United States, Presiding Bishop Eaton was invited to be part of the funeral procession for the Rev. Clementa C. Pinckney, a powerful gesture from AME partners.

In September 2015, ELCA staff and other leaders participated in the Black Methodist Coalition events convened by the AME, A.M.E. Zion, Christian Methodist Episcopal Church and the Union American Methodist Episcopal Church in Washington, D.C. Ms. Lohre gave a statement at the National Press Club on behalf of Presiding Bishop Eaton and the ELCA. In December 2015 the ELCA co-sponsored the Conference of National Black Churches' Cross-Racial Dialogue in Charleston. These and other initiatives will continue to be an important part of this church's witness to Christian unity in the face of racism. Several heads of churches and ecumenical bodies are currently exploring the possibility of a truth and reconciliation commission to address racism in the United States.

### *Churches Uniting in Christ*

Churches Uniting in Christ (CUIC) was organized to seek unity among churches and racial justice. It is a successor of the Consultation on Church Union. The ELCA is a "partner in mission and dialogue," not a member church. An ELCA delegation participated in the 2016 ministry consultation and plenary held in St. Louis. The Rev. McCoid, former executive for ELCA Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations, served as a consultant to the consultation. CUIC churches committed to a deeper recognition of each other's ministries, but set aside the reconciliation of ministries as currently not feasible. A national worship service is being planned for 2017 to honor, celebrate and deepen the churches' recognition of ministries, and to renew commitments to work together toward racial justice and reconciliation.

## **Inter-religious relations**

### *Engaging Others, Knowing Ourselves*

Over the past few years, the ELCA consultative panels on Lutheran-Jewish and Lutheran-Muslim Relations have been exploring what it means to be Lutheran in a multireligious world. Case studies were received from diverse ministry contexts across the church and woven together with historical analysis, practical tips and theological reflection. The result is *Engaging Others, Knowing Ourselves: A Lutheran Calling in a Multi-Religious World* (Lutheran University Press, 2016), edited by Ms. Carol Schersten LaHurd, with Mr. Darrell Jodock and Ms. Lohre as consulting editors. Information and teaching materials are available at [ELCA.org/ecumenical](http://ELCA.org/ecumenical).

At this assembly, Presiding Bishop Eaton will invite the ELCA to participate in a multiyear conversation about this church's inter-religious calling and commitments, using this book as one resource. She has appointed a working group to begin drafting an inter-religious vision statement to complement the formative 1991 statement "Ecumenism: The Vision of the ELCA."

### *Jewish relations*

2014 marked the 20th anniversary of the ELCA's 1994 "Declaration to the Jewish Community," adopted by the ELCA Church Council. An article was published in *The Lutheran*.

The ELCA Consultative Panel has continued its work, notably publishing the resource originally titled "Why Follow Luther Past 2017? A Contemporary Lutheran Approach to Inter-Religious Relations," which critically examines Martin Luther's anti-Judaic legacy and lifts up four theological principles as foundational to this church's approach to inter-religious relations today. A second edition with a new title is now available at [ELCA.org/ecumenical](http://ELCA.org/ecumenical).

The ELCA has continued to participate in the national Jewish-Christian dialogue on pastoral issues, co-convened by the National Council of Churches and the National Council of Synagogues. Recent themes have included welcoming the other, engaging young adults, and the rise of anti-Semitism and the persecution of Christians.

The national Jewish-Christian dialogue on the Middle East is suspended indefinitely following the 2012 letter sent to Congress by Christian leaders regarding unconditional military aid to Israel. Presiding Bishop Eaton participated in the 2014 Summit of Jewish and Christian leaders.

#### *Muslim relations*

The ELCA Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Muslim Relations has continued its work, notably developing the resource “Understanding and Responding to Terrorism and to Related Anti-Muslim Public Speech” ([ELCA.org/ecumenical](http://ELCA.org/ecumenical)). It has also continued to share the study guide it produced in 2013 for the free DVD series *Discover Islam*. More information can be found at [ELCA.org/ecumenical](http://ELCA.org/ecumenical) and [discoverislam.com/ELCA](http://discoverislam.com/ELCA).

As a founding member, the ELCA has continued to deepen its partnership with the inter-religious Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign: Standing with American Muslims, Upholding American Values. The campaign was launched in 2010 during a spike of Islamophobia and hate crimes. This church’s engagement model through the campaign has begun to more effectively involve synod bishops, clergy and lay leaders.

At the invitation of its partners, the ELCA has had a presence at the annual convention of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA). In 2014, Presiding Bishop Eaton brought greetings on behalf of the ELCA, followed in 2015 by Bishop Wayne Miller of the Metropolitan Chicago Synod. Ms. Lohre has provided leadership in planning the annual Emerging Religious Leaders Seminar held in conjunction with the ISNA convention and financial support for the participation of Lutheran seminarians. This is an innovative inter-religious formation event involving Jewish, Christian and Muslim leaders-in-training.

In late 2015, Presiding Bishop Eaton issued an open letter to the American Muslim community following the shootings in San Bernardino, Calif. The letter expressed this church’s care and concern for Muslims who face discrimination and hate, and a desire to accompany them as beloved neighbors. Messages of appreciation were received from several local and national Muslim leaders and laypeople.

#### *Inter-religious partnership with ELCA colleges and universities*

Staff is working with leaders of ELCA colleges and universities to develop a stronger ecology of inter-religious understanding and engagement across the schools in partnership with the church and, in some cases, the Interfaith Youth Core. A conference at Augustana College, Rock Island, Ill., in 2014 served as catalyst for this work. In 2015 a small consultation of ELCA college/university faculty and chaplains was convened by Ms. Lohre, the Rev. Mark N. Wilhelm (director for ELCA schools) and Presiding Bishop Emeritus Mark S. Hanson (executive director, Christiansen Center for Vocation, Augsburg College, Minneapolis) to assess the current state of inter-religious work on campuses and identify opportunities for sharing resources and creating partnerships. In 2016 the annual Vocation of a Lutheran College Conference held at Augsburg focused on “Preparing Global Leaders for a Religiously Diverse Society.”

#### *Multireligious organizations and events*

The ELCA continues to participate in several multireligious organizations, including Religions for Peace USA and the Council for the Parliament of the World’s Religions. These are important opportunities to develop partnerships with leaders and communities beyond the Abrahamic traditions of Judaism and Islam. Leaders from several ELCA colleges, seminaries and congregations participated in the 2015 parliament in Salt Lake City, the first held in the United States in over two decades. Several of these ELCA leaders were presenters or panelists on a variety of topics. Ongoing networking among these leaders will serve to enhance this church’s inter-religious relations in different ministry contexts.

Through the National Council of Churches, the ELCA is exploring new inter-religious dialogue opportunities with other ecumenical partners. The ELCA hopes to engage in coming years in Christian-Buddhist, Christian-Hindu and Christian-Sikh dialogue and partnership.

### **Inter-Lutheran relations**

#### *Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada*

Presiding Bishop Eaton preached at the opening worship of the 15th Biennial National Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) in 2015. National Bishop Susan C. Johnson was re-elected to a third

term. A significant part of the convention was the story told by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which sought to provide reconciliation to Indian residential school survivors of trauma. Convention actions included endorsing the document “Welcoming the Stranger: Affirmations for Faith Leaders,” a pledge to welcome refugees and internally displaced people, and adopting a climate justice resolution.

#### *Four-way meeting*

Presiding Bishop Eaton and ecumenical staff meet annually with counterparts in the ELCIC, Episcopal Church and Anglican Church in Canada. In 2015 the meeting was in Washington, D.C., during Pope Francis’ visit. The churches issue joint statements on topics of common concern, such as climate change, and the church’s leaders develop Advent Devotions. This year’s devotions will focus on the LWF theme and subthemes for 2017 (below).

#### *Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land*

Presiding Bishop Eaton led a delegation on a church-to-church visit to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land in early 2015. The delegation included churchwide staff in Global Mission, Advocacy, the Office of the Presiding Bishop, the Office of the Secretary, and the then-chair of the Conference of Bishops’ Middle East Ready Bench, the Rev. Murray D. Finck, then-bishop of the Pacifica Synod.

#### *Lutheran World Federation*

The ELCA actively participates in and provides leadership to the LWF, a communion of 145 churches in 98 countries with more than 72 million members. Dr. Martin Junge is LWF general secretary and Bishop Munib Younan is president. The ELCA provides significant support through the LWF for its ministries that touch people daily throughout the world, especially in places where there are refugees and human need.

The LWF Council met in May in Wittenberg, Germany, launching its journey toward the 12th Assembly in May 2017 in Windhoek, Namibia. The theme is “Liberated by God’s Grace,” with the subthemes of “Salvation – Not for Sale,” “Human Beings – Not for Sale” and “Creation – Not for Sale.” Information and resources can be found at [lutheranworld.org/reformation-2017](http://lutheranworld.org/reformation-2017).

As the LWF approaches the Reformation anniversary it is exploring what it means to be an ecclesial communion from a Lutheran perspective. Member churches are invited into a study process on the significance of the Lutheran communion through a document titled “The Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion” ([lutheranworld.org](http://lutheranworld.org)).

In 2015 the Conference of Bishops and Church Council unanimously endorsed the final report and recommendations of the ELCA Ecclesiology of a Global Church Task Force. This includes a constitutional change coming before the 2016 Churchwide Assembly that would reflect the ELCA’s self-understanding as part of a global church.

#### *Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod*

The Committee on Lutheran Cooperation has not met since early 2012. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has indicated there won’t be additional meetings or an agreed-upon charter for communication and sharing.

#### *North American Lutheran Church*

In spring 2016 heads of churches and ecumenical staff of the ELCA, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, and the North American Lutheran Church met in Washington, D.C., for a complex and far-ranging discussion about their church’s relationships in North America and in the context of global Lutheranism.

### **Conciliar relations**

#### *World Council of Churches*

The World Council of Churches (WCC) is a fellowship of 349 churches that confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior according to the Scriptures and, therefore, seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Rev. Olav Fykse Tveit, a Lutheran from Norway, serves as the general secretary. The 10th WCC Assembly took place in Busan, Korea, in 2013 under the theme “God of Life: Lead Us to Justice and Peace,” launching a pilgrimage of justice and peace to demonstrate the churches’ commitment “to walk together.”

In 2016 a WCC delegation made a racial justice accompaniment visit to the United States, including Charleston, Ferguson and Chicago. The delegation presented its report and recommendations to the WCC Central Committee in June. Thank you to ELCA Vice President Carlos E. Peña for serving on this committee over the past decade.

### *National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA*

The National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC) is a communion of 38 member churches, representing more than 45 million Christians. In 2015, Ms. Lohre completed her service as an NCC officer, the youngest woman and first Lutheran to serve as president. During her tenure, the NCC restructured to balance its budget and align priorities with capacity. Coming out of that process, church leaders elected two priorities for their work together at this time: mass incarceration and inter-religious peace-building.

### *Christian Churches Together in the USA*

Christian Churches Together in the USA (CCT) was formed as an expanded ecumenical body in 2006. It is made up of members from the Roman Catholic Church, Orthodox churches, Pentecostal and Evangelical churches, Historic Black Churches, Peace churches and mainline Protestant churches. Bishop Suzanne D. Dillahunty of the Southern Ohio Synod serves on the CCT Steering Committee on behalf of the ELCA. Annual convocations take up a different theme: mass incarceration in 2014 and immigration in 2015. In 2016 CCT celebrated its 10th anniversary by revisiting major themes from its history, including hunger and poverty, evangelism and racism.

### **Ecumenical journey**

In early 2015, Presiding Bishop Eaton led an ecumenical journey to London to visit the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Church of England and the Anglican Communion office; to Geneva to visit the LWF and the WCC; and to Rome to visit various congregations and councils of the Vatican. Presiding Bishop Eaton and other ELCA leaders greeted Pope Francis and gave him a cross as a sign of this church's continued hoped for unity.

### **Lutheran Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Representatives Network**

The Lutheran Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Representatives Network (LEIRN) is composed of bishop-appointed representatives from ELCA synods. This active network provides support for ecumenical and inter-religious ministry within the synods, at the National Workshop on Christian Unity and in partnership with the ELCA Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations staff and ministry.

The LEIRN Executive Board meets monthly by conference call to hear updates on national and international ecumenical and inter-religious relations, to share updates from throughout the synods, to plan communications across the ELCA and to encourage network participation. The Rev. Christopher D. Olkiewicz, a pastor in the Southeastern Iowa Synod, currently leads the board.

This year the network is playing a significant role in supporting engagement with *The Declaration on the Way* (Fortress Press, 2016) and *Engaging Others, Knowing Ourselves: A Lutheran Calling in a Multi-Religious World* (Lutheran University Press, 2016).

Reports, resources and reflections are published monthly on its blog at [leirn.blogspot.com](http://leirn.blogspot.com).

### **Resources**

"Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Life," or "E-Life," is the email-based newsletter that is shared among this church's membership and with ecumenical partners. It offers an entry point into ecumenical and inter-religious activity in the ELCA and in the world. For a free subscription to this newsletter, as well as other helpful information, materials and resources, visit [ELCA.org/ecumenical](http://ELCA.org/ecumenical).

### **Gratitude**

The ELCA gives thanks for God's servant, the Rev. Donald J. McCoid, bishop emeritus of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod, who retired from service as executive for ELCA Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations in August 2015. He has continued to provide leadership to the Declaration on the Way. In June he had the esteemed honor of representing the LWF as the immediate past Lutheran co-chair of the Lutheran Orthodox Dialogue Commission at the opening session of the Orthodox Holy and Great Council in Crete.

Ms. Kathryn M. Lohre, *executive*

Dr. Kathryn L. Johnson, *director*