

# ELCA Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations, Office of the Presiding Bishop Annual Staff Report to LEIRN at NWCU 2023 May 1, 2022-May 1, 2023

## Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Guest Program at 2022 CWA

We welcomed almost twenty ecumenical and inter-religious guests to CWA in August 2022. The plenary program is [online](#), starting at 2:36. Highlights included:

- Uplifting our newest full communion partnership, Churches Beyond Borders
- Celebrating 25 years of full communion through the Formula of Agreement
- Affirming our journey “on the way” through Lutheran-Catholic dialogue
- Encouraging cooperation to becoming anti-racist through the National Council of Churches
- Renewing work against anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim bigotry with the Union for Reform Judaism, the Islamic Society of North America, and together through the Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign
- Uplifting our newest resources, “ELCA Guidelines for Ministry in a Multi-Religious World” and “Preaching and Teaching with Love and Respect for the Jewish People”



## Ecumenical Relations

### Dialogues

During this period, preparations were underway for the launch of the thirteenth round of **US Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue**, co-chaired by Bishop Patricia Lull and Bishop Denis Madden, and co-staffed by the Rev. Dr. Carmelo Santos and Fr. Walter Kedjierski. The dialogue met for the first time in-person in December 2022 at St. Mary’s Seminary & University in Baltimore. Building on the past, Round XIII will be dedicated to “a mutual exploration and learning about the holy order/office of ministry as understood in the Catholic and (ELCA) Lutheran traditions, with special attention to the distinctive role of episcopé in each tradition.”

You can read the press release [here](#). The ELCA dialogue members are Rev. Dr. Katherine Shaner (Wake Forest University School of Divinity), Rev. Dr. Joy Schroeder (Trinity Lutheran Seminary), Rev. Dr. Nelson Rivera (Moravian Theological Seminary), Rev. Dr. Justin Nickel (Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary of Lenoir-Rhyne University), Rev. Dr. Derek Nelson (Wabash College), and Dr. Ian McFarland (Emory University’s Candler School of Theology).



The report of Round XII, co-chaired by Bishop Madden and Rev. Almen, will be published by Fortress Press this fall. Rev. Dr. Ashley Hall, a LEIRN rep., was a member of this round. Thank you!

Bishop Eaton published a [pastoral letter](#) on January 1 following the death of Pope Benedict XVI.

The second round of the **ELCA-Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) dialogue**, co-chaired by Bishop Bill Gafkjen and Rev. Dr. Robert Cornwall, and co-staff by Rev. Paul Tch  and Kathryn Lohre, met twice during this period. The first in-person meeting of this resumed dialogue took place in April 2022 at the Lutheran Center in Chicago and explored case studies of common mission and ministry challenges and opportunities. The second meeting took place in January 2023 at the Disciples Ministry Center in Fullerton, California, hosted by the CCDOC's



Pacific Southwest Region and Regional Minister Rev. Richie Sanchez. Bishop Emeritus Don McCoid, former ELCA executive for ecumenical and inter-religious relations, was the guest presenter. He invited the dialogue into a process of identifying common affirmations in the groundbreaking World Council of Churches' convergence text, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (1984). This generative exercise helped the dialogue to recognize the significant common ground the denominations share and provided an entry point into deeper mutual understanding of their areas of difference. The official documents of the dialogue, including the full news releases, are available [here](#).

## Full Communion Updates

The [Memorandum of Mutual Recognition](#) among the ELCA, the ELCiC, The Episcopal Church (TEC), and the Anglican Church of Canada (ACC) – which for the ELCA establishes a relationship that serves as full communion with the ACC – came into full effect following the action of the General Convention of TEC in July 2022. CBB has focused its work on our shared



commitments to repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery and confronting the legacies of slavery, including racism and white supremacy. A workshop was offered by CBB during the 11<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the World Council of Churches in September 2022, with leadership from Vance Blackfox, director, ELCA Indigenous Ministries & Tribal Relations. For resources to join this work, see [elca.org/rotdod](http://elca.org/rotdod) The annual meeting of **Churches Beyond Borders** heads of churches and staff took place in Raleigh, North Carolina in November 2022, hosted by TEC Presiding Bishop Michael Curry.



In June 2022, United Lutheran Seminary President Guy Erwin, who is a member of the **Lutheran Moravian Coordinating Committee (LMCC)**, attended the Moravian Church Southern Province Synod in Winston Salem on behalf of the Office of the Presiding Bishop. In his report, he shared about the ELCA's work related to repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery and invited the Moravians to join. In response, the Synod passed a proposal to initiate such work among themselves, with the Northern Province, and possibly together with the ELCA. Rev. Dr. Betsy Miller will complete her tenure as President of the Provincial Elders Conference of the **Moravian Church Northern Province** at their Provincial Synod in June, where her successor will be elected.

The **Lutheran Episcopal Coordinating Committee (LECC)** continues to work through small leadership teams, as we live into the next phase of reception. The teams are *Shared Ministry Agreements and Governance, Judicatory Matters for Dioceses and Synods* (Kreiss), *Liturgical Considerations* (Strickland), *Orderly Exchange of Pastors/Priests Under CCM, Diaconate* (Gafkjen), and *Campus Ministry*.

The Implementation Team for the Orderly Exchange completed its work during this period, producing a “Proposal for Exchangeability of the Diaconate,” adopted by LECC in January 2023. This proposal is not apart from, but is an interpretation of our full communion agreement, “Called to Common Mission.” Recommended by the ELCA Conference of Bishops and Church Council Executive Committee, the Church Council took action in April 2023 to “receive” the proposal. A parallel process is underway in The Episcopal Church. As we await this possible action, which would bring the proposal into full effect, work will be undertaken to update the “Orderly Exchange” document to include exchangeability of deacons.

The **UMC-ELCA Coordinating Committee** met in-person for the first time since 2019 in April 2023 in



Atlanta. The meeting centered around new realities facing our churches as we emerge from the pandemic. The committee spent time discussing ecumenical formation in seminaries and other institutions of higher education, potential joint resource development opportunities, and the ways in which the ELCA can best support the UMC as they continue their process of full inclusion of LGBTQIA+ members and leadership within the UMC and the resulting challenges that are emerging.

Rev. Dr. Carmelo Santos is serving on the Theology Commission of the **Reformed Church in America**, and will attend their General Synod this year, representing the Office of the Presiding Bishop. The denominational restructuring team issued its [latest update](#) in March 2023.

J. Herbert Nelson, Stated Clerk of the **Presbyterian Church USA** recently [announced his plans](#) to step down at the end of June 2023, by which time an interim will be appointed. Of note, under his leadership, the PCUSA led the ecumenical family as a pioneer in convening its General Assembly online (twice).

The **United Church of Christ** will also experience a leadership transition at its General Synod in July 2023 as Rev. Dr. John Dorhauer completes his tenure. The Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson, former ecumenical officer, is the [candidate presented by the UCC Board](#) for General Minister and President.

## Multi-Lateral Updates

In February 2023, the Office of the Presiding Bishop – through the joint leadership of the Rev. Dr. Carmelo Santos, and Jennifer DeLeon (director, racial justice) – convened partners to launch a conference on “Faith and Climate Justice” in Puerto Rico. The convening was a collaboration between the ELCA’s Caribbean Synod, the Diocese of Puerto Rico of The Episcopal Church, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Archdiocese of San Juan of the Catholic Church, and civil society partners. The purpose was to prayerfully discern together how the challenge of climate justice can be addressed from the perspective of faith, building on best practices. This and other related initiatives were spotlighted in the EIR blog post titled, [“A Season of Action: Ecumenical Responses to the Climate Crisis.”](#)

## Conference of National Black Churches

Presiding Bishop Eaton, Jennifer DeLeon (director, racial justice), Judith Roberts (senior director, DEI) and Kathryn Lohre attended the December 2022 National Consultation of the Conference of National Black Churches in Orlando. The theme was “Confronting the Impact of COVID-19 and the Broader Pandemic of Racism. Bishop Eaton, Jen, and Judith along with CME Bishop Teresa Jefferson Snorton (NCC chair) participated in a panel moderated by AMEZ Bishop Darin Moore on the topic of “Race and Reconciliation” sharing about the ELCA’s journey toward racial justice and healing.



**Christian Churches Together in the USA** gathered for its annual Forum in Indianapolis in October 2022



CCT FORUM 2022  
INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA  
WHO DOES JESUS CALL OUR CHRISTIAN CHURCHES TO BE  
IN A POLARIZED SOCIETY?

under the theme, “Who Does Jesus Call our Christian Churches to be in a Polarized Society?” In the context of the “crossroads of American Christianity,” participants engaged in spiritual sharing, theological reflection, and experiential learning. A [prayer](#) uplifting the spirit of the gathering was adopted by consensus and published in December. CCT is the broadest

ecumenical table in the US, including five church families: Evangelical/Pentecostal, Historic Black, Mainline Protestant, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic. Bishop Suzanne Dillahunt, Southern Ohio Synod, serves on the steering committee.

## Conciliar Ecumenism

The 2022 Christian Unity Gathering (CUG) of the **National Council of Churches** was held online in October 2022 under the theme, “The Challenge of Change: Serving a Never-Changing Christ in an Ever-Changing World.” Bishop Eaton is the Vice-Chair of the NCC Governing Board, serving alongside Chair Bishop Teresa Jefferson-Snorton of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, and Interim General Secretary Bishop Vashti Mackenzie. The Updated Edition of the NRSV, or NRSVue, which is owned by the NCC, is now available for purchase in print and digital formats. You can find more information [here](#).

## World Council of Churches

The [World Council of Churches 11<sup>th</sup> Assembly](#) took place in Karlsruhe, Germany in September 2022 with the theme, “Christ’s Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity.” The Assembly adopted a “[Unity Statement](#),” and various resolutions such as “[The Living Planet](#),” “[Seeking Justice and Peace for All in the Middle East](#),” and “[War in Ukraine](#).” The ELCA’s delegation was led by Bishop Eaton and included Vance Blackfox, Khadijah Islam (young adult), Carlos Peña, and Kathryn Lohre; Service & Justice staff were present to engage in the work of specialized ministries. Bishop Eaton moderated the ecumenical conversation on “Minding the Gaps: A Gender Justice Approach to Reconciliation and Unity” and Kathryn Lohre was rapporteur for the one on “Interreligious Solidarity.” The input from these and 21 other ecumenical conversations among delegates will inform the strategic direction and programmatic work of the Council. ELCA Vice President Imran Siddiqui and Kathryn Lohre will serve on the WCC Central Committee until the next Assembly.



## Lutheran World Federation



In February 2023, Bishop Eaton received Rev. Dr. Anne Burghardt, general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, at the Lutheran Center in Chicago. She was accompanied by Mr. Isaiah Kipyegon Toroitich, Head of Global Advocacy and Action for Justice, within the Department for Theology, Mission and Justice, and Rev. Arni Svanur Danielsson, Head of Communications, within the Department for Planning and Coordination. The day including

worship, meetings, and a luncheon hosted by Presiding Bishop Eaton. The visit to Chicago occurred at the outset of the General Secretary's advocacy delegation in New York (UN) and Washington DC (Capitol Hill), supported by ELCA staff and offices.



Preparations are underway for the 13<sup>th</sup> Assembly which will occur in September in Poland. We are proud that Kristen Opalinski was the designer for the [logos and visual identity](#) lifting up the theme, "One Body, One Spirit, One Hope. It is featured prominently in the newly published [Assembly Study Guide](#), which serves as a resource not only for Assembly delegates, but for people and congregations across the member churches to join in prayerful preparations.

In recent weeks and months, we have seen an alarming rise in hate perpetrated against Christians in the Holy Land. **Protecting Holy Land Christians** is an ecumenical [campaign](#) assembled by the Patriarch of Jerusalem, along with the Council of Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem, which is the convening body for Christian denominations in the Holy Land, including Bishop Ibrahim Sani Azar of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land.

2025 will mark the 1,700th anniversary of the **Council of Nicaea** of 325. This commemoration will be an important moment for Christians around the world as we reflect upon the history and future of our ecumenical journey together. The World Council of Churches (WCC) has launched a [webpage](#) with information and resources and the Lutheran World Federation is also working on plans, including a [common Lutheran-Orthodox statement](#), and resources for member churches. The ELCA's commemorations will focus on inviting engagement through these global efforts.

# Inter-Religious Relations

## Pastoral Guidelines

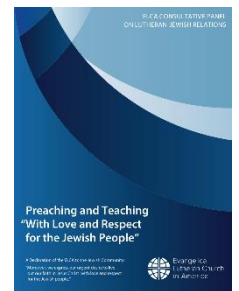
As part of the implementation of “[A Declaration of Inter-Religious Commitment](#),” adopted by the Churchwide Assembly in 2019, an ad-hoc committee was appointed by the Presiding Bishop to develop pastoral “[ELCA Guidelines for Ministry in a Multi-Religious World](#),” which were published in July 2022.



The committee consisted of teaching theologians, bishops (Kreiss and Eaton), campus ministers, synod staff, pastors, deacons, chaplains, and lay people. Two noteworthy factors in the process were the input gleaned from a survey across the church that yielded the collective wisdom of more than 2,600 respondents, and the feedback from several of our inter-religious partners provided on the penultimate draft. You can read highlights in this [blog post](#), which became the impetus for a [feature story](#) published by the Lutheran World Federation.

## “Preaching and Teaching with Love and Respect for the Jewish People”

Building on “[A Declaration of the ELCA to the Jewish Community](#),” revised last year, the ELCA Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Jewish Relations developed a guide for “[Preaching and Teaching ‘with love and respect for the Jewish people.’](#)” Reviewed and endorsed by the Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations Committee of the ELCA Conference of Bishops, the guide was published in September 2022. Members of the Consultative Panel are available to serve as resource persons for synod assemblies, theological conferences, etc.



In February 2023, in response to the alarming rise in anti-Jewish, anti-Muslim, and white supremacist hate in the US and around the world, Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton published [a pastoral message](#) in support of our Jewish neighbors, people of other faiths, and people of color.

## ELCA Declaration to the Muslim Community

In late March 2022, the ELCA Church Council adopted “[A Declaration of the Evangelical Lutheran Church to the Muslim Community](#),” uplifting our commitment to friendship and solidarity with our Muslim neighbors. Prof. Mark Swanson, chair of the ELCA Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Muslim Relations wrote a [blog post](#) introducing the document and its intended purpose. In May 2022, on the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr, Presiding Bishop Eaton wrote “[An Open Letter to the Muslim Community](#),” as a sign of our ongoing commitment to love our Muslim neighbors. This letter was shared by Muslim partners and organizations, including the Islamic Society of North America, Islamic Relief USA, the Islamic Circle of North America, and the Muslim World League, through their publications and social media channels. Over Labor Day weekend in 2022, Prof. Mark Swanson, chair of the Consultative Panel, presented the Declaration to the Islamic Society of North America at their interfaith banquet.

## Shoulder to Shoulder

In this period, Kathryn Lohre is serving her final year (of 8) as co-chair of the [Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign](#): Standing with American Muslims, Advancing American Ideals, of which the ELCA is a founding



Our Faith Over Fear Training  
Countering anti-Muslim  
Discrimination is now available on  
**Religion  
And PublicLife**  
*Sign Up TODAY*

member. After two years of successfully pivoting its signature program online, the Campaign resumed in-person [“Faith Over Fear” trainings](#); the training is also offered as a [virtual course](#) through Religion and Public Life. In June 2022, Executive Director Nina Fernando, staff, and the Executive Committee engaged in a strategic

planning retreat sponsored by the El-Hibri Foundation. This process initiated significant steps toward becoming a financially sustainable, stronger organization in the years to come. In May 2022, Kathryn Lohre joined other Shoulder to Shoulder leaders at the first-ever inter-religious conference held in Saudi Arabia hosted and sponsored by the Muslim World League, which issued a [“Declaration of Common Human Values.”](#) In March 2023, she was selected to participate in the El-Hibri Foundation’s Public Narrative Training program.



In April 2023, the annual [John Paul II lecture](#) hosted by the Milstein Center for Interreligious Dialogue at The Jewish Theological Seminary held a webinar titled Confronting Anti-Religious Bigotry. The conversation, which centered around the growing swell of anti-Jewish, anti-Muslim, anti-Christian bigotry, was moderated by Rabbi Burt Visotzky (director of the Milstein Center) and featured the co-founder of the Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign, Dr. Mohamed Elsanousi, and the campaign’s co-chairs, Rabbi Esther Lederman and Kathryn Lohre.

## Inter-Religious Dialogues

The ELCA participates in the National Council of Churches’ national inter-religious dialogues with Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs.

The [Jewish-Christian dialogue](#) met in Washington DC in May 2022 to historic and contemporary waves of anti-Semitism and to visit the US Holocaust Memorial Museum. It met again in November 2022 in Providence at the Hillel Center at Brown University to explore issues of Christian nationalism, Zionism, and Jewish nationalism. A special session was held with Jewish students at Brown to hear about their experiences of Jewish community life amid rising anti-Semitism on campus and in society. Prof. Darrell Jodock and Kathryn Lohre presented a session on the, [“Preaching and Teaching ‘With Respect for the Jewish People’”](#) guide. The dialogue met for a third time in this period in April 2023 in New York City to explore themes of reparations, remembrance, and healing. To contextualize this work, the dialogue met at multiple sites: the Jewish Theological Seminary, the National September 11<sup>th</sup> Memorial, St. Nicholas Church and National Shrine at the World Trade Center, and Trinity Wall Street. Presentations on Germany’s post-war reparations to the Jews and on the iconography at the National Shrine depicting both the remembrance of 9/11, and the church’s healing presence amid and after 9/11, led to generative dialogue.



The Christian-Muslim dialogue met online in April 2022 to explore the convergence of holy days, with Kathryn Lohre presenting on the significance of Lent. It also met in Chicago in November 2022, at the Orland Park Prayer Center in Orland Park, and at the Mosque Foundation in Bridgeview. The dialogue explored the challenges of our polarized society (in advance of the mid-term elections), and the unique opportunities faith communities have to be a uniting force. Several sensitive global issues were discussed as well, including the then-recent killing of a young Muslim woman in Iran and subsequent demonstrations, the Iran nuclear deal, the impact of the rise of Hindutva on Muslims in India and the US, and food crises related to the ongoing war in the Ukraine.

In May 2022, the Buddhist-Christian and Hindu-Christian dialogues met online. In October 2022, they both met in person in Los Angeles at St. John's Episcopal Cathedral. The Buddhist-Christian dialogue included text study, and a private tour of the "Sutra and Bible" exhibit at the Japanese American National Museum. Participants reflected on the trauma and resilience of Japanese American Buddhist and Christian communities as instructive for our times. The Hindu-Christian dialogue explored Diwali & All Saints Day and themes of friendship, understanding, dialogue, and cooperation.



The Christian-Sikh dialogue met online in July 2022 to discuss forms of evangelism. Kathryn Lohre gave a presentation on the distinction between evangelism and proselytization.

### Parliament of the World's Religions



The centennial Parliament will return to its birthplace in Chicago, August 14-18, 2023. Presiding Bishop Eaton will be a plenary speaker. We will organize a gathering of all Lutheran attendees – please consider attending this remarkable inter-religious conference and spread the word. Several workshops and programs involving ELCA folks are confirmed.

### Save the Date

- [NCC 75th Anniversary Launch & Governing Board Events](#), May 15-16 in DC
- [Powering Pluralism Summit - The Aspen Institute](#), June 22-23 in DC
- [Rostered Ministers Gathering - ELCA](#), July 17-21 in Phoenix
- [Parliament of the World's Religions](#), August 14-18 in Chicago
- [Annual Forum — Christian Churches Together](#), October 3-6 in Savannah
- [CUG 2023 \(nationalcouncilofchurches.us\)](#), October 10-12 in Nashville
- [Study-Course-October23.pdf \(ecumenical-institute.org\)](#), October 23-27 in Strasbourg
- [Ecumenism in the Borderlands: Translating Worlds — North American Academy of Ecumenists](#), November 16-17 in San Antonio



## Lutheran Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Representatives Network (LEIRN)

We are sincerely grateful for your investment in the ecumenical and inter-religious life and commitments in the ELCA. Your experience and wisdom serve to strengthen our churchwide ministries.

We continue to encourage the Conference of Bishops to appoint LEIRN representatives in order to support your work in the synod and to deepen and expand this work across the church and with our partners. This is the language we include in our biannual report to the Conference of Bishops:

*You are invited to appoint representatives to serve and support the ecumenical and inter-religious relations in the synod and in partnership with others across the ELCA. Representatives can be lay people, pastors, deacons and/or bishops. You can appoint one or more, depending on what is best for you, as the chief ecumenical and inter-religious officer of your synod. Please consider how your representatives can best reflect the diversity of your synod, including racial and ethnic diversity. We will then connect your reps with other folks across the church engaged in this work. To appoint or update your representatives send names and contact info to [Kristen.Opalinski@elca.org](mailto:Kristen.Opalinski@elca.org)*

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## Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations Staff, Office of the Presiding Bishop

Kristen Opalinski, Manager, Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations

Carmelo Santos, Director, Theological Diversity and Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations

Kathryn Lohre, Executive, Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations & Theological Discernment

[EIR Perspectives Blog](#)

[Lutheran Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Representatives Facebook Group](#)

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