

Ecumenical and Inter-Religious NEWS

MARCH 2020

Dear partners and friends,

It's a new year and, with it, a new era for our newsletter. Over the years "E-Life" has helped connect us by providing a space for updates from our ecumenical and inter-religious life together. While that won't change, we are transforming the newsletter and pairing it with a blog. In 2019 our church took bold steps forward in affirming our vital work of seeking mutual understanding and cooperation for the common good. As we continue to live into our commitments, both ecumenically and inter-religiously, we feel the time is right to expand our communication platforms as well.

You'll notice our new look, accompanied by a new name – "Ecumenical and Inter-Religious News" – that now includes the inter-religious aspect of our work in the title. In addition, we just launched a new blog, "[Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Perspectives](#)," which we invite you to subscribe to and follow. This blog will serve as a platform for sharing our Lutheran perspectives and experiences, as well as the opportunity to be enriched by the perspectives and experiences of our partners. We look forward to hearing from our staff along with guest bloggers, who will include Lutheran leaders and various ecumenical and inter-religious colleagues. Through these exchanges we will seek a new perspective together in our journey toward God's vision of unity, justice and peace.

I am delighted to offer the inaugural post at "Perspectives," titled "[Glimpses of Clarity, Not 2020 Vision](#)." In it, I invite you to join me in viewing the ever-changing ecumenical and inter-religious landscape through the lens of our church's own declarations and policy statements.

We welcome you to explore this edition of "Ecumenical and Inter-Religious News," and we look forward to hearing your feedback at ELRinfo@elca.org.

In peace,

Kathryn M. Lohre
Assistant to the Presiding Bishop
Executive, Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations and Theological Discernment

Welcome Carmelo Santos and Kristen Opalinski

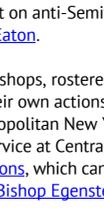
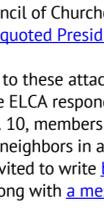
In January we welcomed the Rev. Carmelo Santos, Ph.D., to the staff of the Office of the Presiding Bishop as the director for theological diversity and ecumenical and inter-religious engagement. In this capacity, Carmelo will work to deepen relationships with ecumenical and inter-religious partners while strengthening and diversifying the theological resources for this church's witness for justice. Carmelo brings significant gifts, expertise and experience to this role, including his previous service as director for the ELCA's Theological Roundtable, which he will resume as part of his new portfolio.

Carmelo earned his Ph.D. in religion and science from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. His areas of expertise include theological anthropology, pneumatology, Latinx and Latin American theology, Lutheran theology, and theological ethics. He has significant ecumenical and inter-religious experience, particularly in areas of advocacy and public witness.

Last July, just prior to the Churchwide Assembly, we welcomed Kristen Opalinski as the manager for Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations, another new portfolio for our team. Kristen's major responsibilities include staffing various ecumenical bodies and working with the Lutheran Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Representatives Network (LEIRN); enriching our communications; and deepening opportunities for ecumenical and inter-religious formation and leadership.

Kristen also brings significant gifts, expertise and experience to her role. She served as a Young Adult in Global Mission in South Africa, worked as the regional communications officer for the Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa, and most recently was a communications manager for the ELCA. Kristen received her Master of Arts in religion from the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, with specializations in public leadership and conflict transformation.

Please join us in praying for Carmelo and Kristen in these new roles. We give thanks to God for their call to this ministry.



Inter-Religious Relations

ELCA presiding bishop and synod leaders respond in wake of anti-Semitic attacks

As our nation continues to see a rise in bigotry and violent hate crimes, our church stands with those who continue to be threatened and targeted. Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton shared words of condemnation for the anti-Semitic attacks perpetrated in New Jersey, New York and beyond, along with a call to action, in her [pastoral message of Dec. 30, 2019](#).

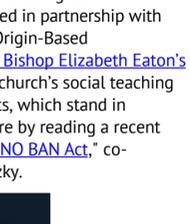
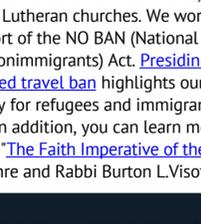
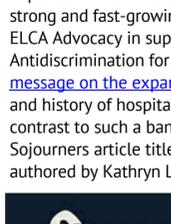
This will require more of us than repeated statements. It will require building bridges of inter-religious understanding in our communities. It will require reaching out to our Jewish neighbors to offer our care, support, love and protection. It will require our persistence in addressing the root causes of anti-Semitism and its menacing companions of white supremacy and xenophobia.

The National Council of Churches statement on anti-Semitism, issued in December 2019, [quoted Presiding Bishop Eaton](#).

Also, in response to these attacks, synod bishops, rostered ministers and lay leaders across the ELCA responded with their own actions of love and solidarity. On Jan. 10, members of the Metropolitan New York Synod joined with their Jewish neighbors in a Shabbat service at Central Synagogue. Staff members were invited to write [brief reflections](#), which can be found on the [MNYS website](#) along with [a message from Bishop Egensteiner](#).

In the New Jersey town of New Providence, [Faith Lutheran Church](#) continued its 13-year tradition of erecting a large menorah at the church's front lawn during Hanukkah as an act of hospitality, because there is no synagogue in town. The congregation invites the local Jewish community and rabbis from a neighboring town for the first night's lighting. The candles are lit each night thereafter as an act of public witness.

We'll share more about these and other acts of inter-religious solidarity in an upcoming edition of our new blog "[Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Perspectives](#)."



Spanish translation of ELCA inter-religious policy statement is now available

["Declaración de Compromiso Interreligioso: Una Declaración de Política de la Iglesia Evangélica Luterana en América,"](#) a Spanish translation of the inter-religious policy statement adopted by our church at the 2019 Churchwide Assembly, is now available for download. You can also download the English-language document, "[A Declaration of Inter-Religious Commitment: A Policy Statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America](#)."



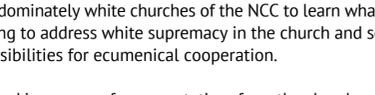
Continuing the work to end anti-Muslim discrimination and violence

The ELCA is a founding member of the [Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign](#): Standing with American Muslims, Advancing American Ideals, an inter-religious campaign to end anti-Muslim discrimination and violence. The campaign is continuing its [Faith Over Fear trainings](#) in 2020, with upcoming events slated for Escondido, Calif. (March 28), Sioux Falls, S.D. (April 17-18) and Los Angeles, Calif. (summer 2020, TBA). [Registration for the Escondido training is now open](#).

Each training has three core components:

- understanding and contextualizing Islamophobia and anti-Muslim bigotry (the complexity of the issue, facts and figures)
- messaging and communicating for change (reviewing underlying dynamics of why negative speech resonates, top-testing messaging recommendations, communications tips)
- strategies for engagement and change (concrete ideas and tactics for moving people on the issue)

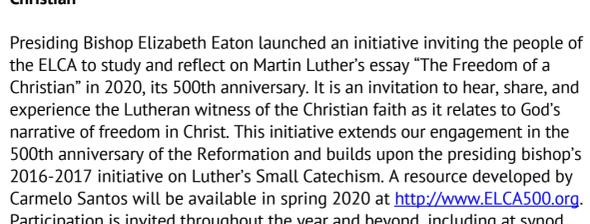
In recent weeks the ELCA has been working to respond to the recent expansion of the travel ban to additional countries, including some with strong and fast-growing Lutheran churches. We worked in partnership with ELCA Advocacy in support of the NO BAN (National Origin-Based Antidiscrimination for Nonimmigrants) Act. [Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton's message on the expanded travel ban](#) highlights our church's social teaching and history of hospitality for refugees and immigrants, which stand in contrast to such a ban. In addition, you can learn more by reading a recent Sojourners article titled "[The Faith Imperative of the NO BAN Act](#)," co-authored by Kathryn Lohre and Rabbi Burton L. Visotzky.



Ecumenical Relations

2020 National Workshop on Christian Unity to lift up Christ's message of welcome

[Registration is open](#) for this year's [National Workshop on Christian Unity](#), taking place March 23-26 at the Whitehall Hotel in Houston. The theme for this year's workshop, "Welcoming All as Christ," centers on how we as Christians are called to be welcoming ambassadors of Christ in our communities and throughout the world. ELCA speakers include [Rev. Michael Rinehart](#), bishop of the Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod, and [Christopher Vergara](#), who played a role in organizing the memorial that declared the ELCA a sanctuary denomination and was adopted at the 2019 Churchwide Assembly in Milwaukee.



ELCA walks with the United Methodist Church as they discern their future

Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton has issued [a pastoral message](#) regarding our continued accompaniment of and full-communion partnership with the United Methodist Church following the announcement of a proposed agreement. Developed by an ideologically diverse group, the agreement outlines a plan for separation of the denomination in light of differences on issues of human sexuality. It is likely to be considered at the General Conference of the United Methodist Church in May. We join in praying for our Methodist siblings as they continue their discernment in the months ahead.

Commemorating 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's "The Freedom of a Christian"

Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton launched an initiative inviting the people of the ELCA to study and reflect on Martin Luther's essay "The Freedom of a Christian" in 2020, its 500th anniversary. It is an invitation to hear, share, and experience the Lutheran witness of the Christian faith as it relates to God's narrative of freedom in Christ. This initiative extends our engagement in the 500th anniversary of the Reformation and builds upon the presiding bishop's 2016-2017 initiative on Luther's Small Catechism. A resource developed by Carmelo Santos will be available in spring 2020 at <http://www.ELCA500.org>. Participation is invited throughout the year and beyond, including at synod assemblies and theological conferences. You can view the [presiding bishop's invitation here](#).

Historical Black Church relations and white supremacy work

At the Conference of the National Black Churches, held last December in Atlanta, Bishop Elizabeth Eaton shared "[Declaration of the ELCA to People of African Descent](#)" and participated on a panel with John Dorhauer, General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ. As we continue to work on strengthening our relations with the Historic Black Churches, please be reminded of the congregational resource we co-published as part of the AME-ELCA dialogue in 1996: "[Understanding One Another](#)."

Following up on the actions of the 2019 Churchwide Assembly, the presiding bishop convened a consultation via video conference regarding the "Resolution Establishing June 17th as Emanuel 9 Commemoration and Day of Repentance." We anticipate an initial set of resources to be available for congregations and synods in spring 2020.

In light of the Churchwide Assembly resolution condemning white supremacy and racist rhetoric, and the National Council of Churches initiative A.C.T. Now to End Racism, the presiding bishop convened her counterparts of the predominately white churches of the NCC to learn what other churches are doing to address white supremacy in the church and society, and to explore possibilities for ecumenical cooperation.

A working group of representatives from the churches is carrying this work forward.

Report on Lutheran-Catholic Relations

The current round of the U.S. Lutheran-Catholic dialogue on "teaching authority" is nearly concluded. The dialogue report is in the final stages of editing and will be co-published this year.

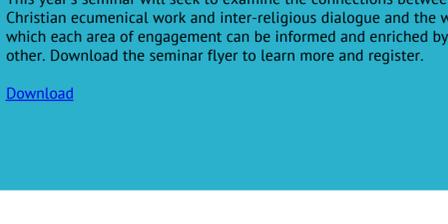
Lutherans and Episcopalians/Anglicans in the United States and Canada

The "four-way" relations among the ELCA and The Episcopal Church in the United States and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, The Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church in Canada have moved more closely toward "mutual recognition." Recommended by the 2018 joint meeting of the US Lutheran-Episcopal Coordinating Committee and its Canadian counterpart, the Joint Anglican-Lutheran Commission, the "[Memorandum of Mutual Recognition](#)" (MMR), brings into mutual relation the two churches of Called to Common Mission in the U.S. and those of the Waterloo Declaration in Canada. This agreement is notable for citing the experience of indigenous people "not divided by national borders established by colonialist power" as grounds for expanding shared life among the churches.

The MMR was enthusiastically approved by both Canadian churches in June 2019. In November, the ELCA Church Council acted in support of the constitutional changes made by the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in August, "recognizing that the relations of this church with the Anglican Church of Canada serve as full communion as established in bylaw 8.19.02." Once The Episcopal Church acts, the mutual recognition of the four churches will be complete.

UPCOMING

Ecumenical Advocacy Days



The next session of Ecumenical Advocacy Days will take place April 24-27 in Washington, D.C., on the theme "Imagine! God's Earth and People Restored." EIR will collaborate with ELCA Advocacy in supporting our church's presence.

[Learn more](#)

54th International Ecumenical Seminar

The Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg, France, is hosting the 54th International Ecumenical Seminar, "Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue: Similarities and Differences," July 6-13, 2020. This year's seminar will seek to examine the connections between Christian ecumenical work and inter-religious dialogue and the ways in which each area of engagement can be informed and enriched by the other. Download the seminar flyer to learn more and register.

[Download](#)

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