

ELCA Ecumenical & Inter-Religious Relations
Office of the Presiding Bishop
May 2020 – March 2021

EIR Blog & EIR News

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ELCA Future Church

In 2020 the ELCA Churchwide organization underwent a redesign. In "Future Church" the Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations & Theological Discernment Team remains in the Office of the Presiding Bishop. This team was combined in February 2017, predating Future Church, in order to engage a more intersectional approach to the work of theological ethics, theological diversity, justice for women, racial justice, and ecumenical and inter-religious relations. The ecumenical and inter-religious part of the staff team consists of Kristen Opalinski, Manager for Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations, Rev. Dr. Carmelo Santos, Director for Theological Diversity & Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Engagement, and Kathryn Lohre, Executive for Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations & Theological Discernment.

Ecumenical Relations

Full Communion Partners

Reformed Church in America (RCA)

After two years of work the Reformed Church in America released their [Vision 2020 Report](#) in June 2020. The report outlines possibilities for the future of the RCA, around three recommendations: 1) Restructuring 2) A New Mission Agency 3) Mutually Generous Separation. The 2020 General Synod of the RCA was to have received and considered this report and its recommendations. This was postponed to the 2021 General Synod, and likely to be postponed to 2022. The ecumenical associate's position was eliminated in fall 2020; these duties are now being carried directly by General Secretary Eddy Alemán.

Presbyterian Church USA

After serving as interim for nearly two years, [Dianna Wright](#) has been named director of ecumenical and interreligious relations, filling a vacancy left after Rev. Robina Winbush passed away in 2019. The 224th General Assembly met online in June 2020. J. Herbert Nelson was re-elected as Stated Clerk. Other significant actions are available [online](#). The Committee on the Office of the General Assembly is planning a hybrid model for the 225th General Assembly in July 2022. The rationale is in this [report](#).



United Church of Christ

The [33rd General Synod](#) of the United Church of Christ will take place online in June 2021.

Formula of Agreement

Ecumenical officers of the Formula of Agreement churches have resumed regular meetings following staffing transitions. The focus is how we accompany one another, especially in a challenging time for the RCA anticipating action on the Vision 2020 Report.

The Moravian Church

The Moravian Church has introduced a [new catechism](#), developed by the Interprovincial Faith & Order commission. It is organized around essentials, ministerials, and incidentals.



The Episcopal Church

January 6, 2021 marked the 20th anniversary of full communion partnership between the ELCA and The Episcopal Church. The ecumenical agreement [Called to Common Mission](#) was the culmination of over three decades of ecumenical dialogue. In a contribution to the [EIR Perspectives blog](#), Deacon Mitzi Budde reflected on this milestone and the myriad ways our relationships have unfolded over the years.

On January 27, 2021, Presiding Bishops Curry and Eaton were co-presenters for a webinar on [“Democracy and Faith Under Siege: Responding to Christian Nationalism”](#) organized by [Christians Against Christian Nationalism](#). These and other efforts are intended to further the work of implementation detailed in the 2019 sign-on [statement](#) endorsed by both bishops.

The [80th General Convention](#), scheduled for 2021, has been postponed to July 2022 in Baltimore.

The United Methodist Church

The May 2020 General Conference was postponed to 2021 and then again to [late summer 2022](#). This has meant that possible action on proposals to divide and restructure are postponed, including [“The Protocol for Reconciliation and Grace through Separation”](#) announced in early 2020. (This protocol was developed by an ideologically diverse and self-appointed group of people.) If this or similar proposals are adopted by the General Conference, the result will be the separation of the denomination, with the traditionalists departing the UMC. Anticipating this there is a website for the possible formation of [“The Global Methodist Church”](#) with an extensive FAQ. With regard to this possible outcome, the ELCA would remain in full communion with the UMC. In November 2020, Bishop Sally Dyck (retired) assumed duties as the ecumenical bishop (officer) for the denomination.



In 2020, the ELCA-UMC coordinating committee endorsed [“Resuming Care-filled Worship and Sacramental Life During a Pandemic,”](#) an ecumenical consultation on protocols for worship, fellowship, and sacraments during this time of COVID-19. The document is also available in Spanish [“Reanudando El Culto Cristiano y La Vida Sacramental con Medidas Preventivas Durante una Pandemia.”](#) Both can be found along with other COVID-19 response resources at [ELCA.org/PublicHealth](#)

Churches Beyond Borders

The four Lutheran and Episcopal/Anglican churches of North America have continued to grow in partnership, adopting the name Churches Beyond Borders. [The Memorandum of Mutual Recognition](#), which will complete the square of relationships that serve as full communion, will be in full effect when The Episcopal Church takes its action at General Convention.

In December 2020 the four heads of churches issued [an Advent message](#) proclaiming a baptism of repentance (Mark 1:4). The leaders united in naming the sins of racism and white supremacy and committed to work together to combat them in their churches and communities. In March 2021, they issued a [“Statement for the International Day for the Elimination of Racism.”](#)



A two-part consultation of staff and church leaders on the ongoing work of the repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery and the legacies of slavery (i.e., racism, white supremacy) is planned for April. The intention is to deepen relationships as the foundation for learning and planning strategic work together.

The heads of communion wrote [weekly devotions](#) for the [Season of Creation 2020](#). The 2021 devotions will be developed for the international campaign of 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence in November and made available in early fall.

Bilateral Dialogue Partners

Catholic Relations

The latest round of US Lutheran-Catholic dialogue on “teaching authority” has concluded. The publication of the dialogue report has been delayed due to COVID-19, to late 2021. The next round of the US dialogue will not launch until meeting in person is possible. Staff counterparts meet regularly.

In October 2020, Pope Francis released his third encyclical titled [Fratelli tutti: On fraternity and social friendship](#). In the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic, Pope Francis implores humanity to recognize our interconnectedness as a propelling force for good, and our calling to accompany the most vulnerable. In the spirit of the new encyclical, an [interfaith peace prayer](#) service was held in Rome on October 20, 2020, organized by the Sant’Egidio Community, accompanied by a joint inter-religious appeal entitled “No One Is Saved Alone – Peace and Fraternity.” You can view the prayer service and find the appeal at

<https://preghieraperlapace.santegidio.org/pageID/31256/langID/en/Rome-2020.html>



In early December, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity published "[The Bishop and Christian Unity: An Ecumenical Vademecum](#)." This new document offers theological grounding and practical recommendations for how Catholic bishops can promote participation in the ecumenical movement as a central part of the episcopal ministry.



The United States Council of Catholic Bishops has developed a [video series](#) entitled "Catechesis in Dialogue With the Wider World," on the [Directory for Catechesis \(New Edition\)](#), published by the Vatican in 2020. Denis J. Madden, auxiliary bishop of Baltimore, shares his insights and reflections in one of the presentations highlighting sections in Chapter 10 of the directory that focus on catechesis in the context of ecumenism and

religious pluralism. You will enjoy his reflections on dialogue and engagement with Lutherans!

In his [World Day of Peace message](#) on January 1, 2021, titled "A Culture of Care As a Path to Peace," Pope Francis invites all people to reflect upon the Catholic Church's social teachings as a guide to care for one another. Pope Francis reflects upon these teachings as "criteria and proposals that can serve as a 'grammar' of care: commitment to promoting the dignity of each human person, solidarity with the poor and vulnerable, the pursuit of the common good and concern for protection of creation."

At the end of January, Christians around the world joined together for the [2021 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity](#), prepared by the Monastic Community of Grandchamp and centered on the theme "Abide in My Love and You Shall Bear Much Fruit," from John 15:1-17. The ELCA weekly online [Service of the Word](#) for churchwide staff on Jan. 27 was part of our observance. Father Walter Kedjierski, executive director of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, preached the homily. Rev. Margaret Rose, ecumenical and interreligious deputy to the presiding bishop of The Episcopal Church, and Dr. Jeanette Bouknight, executive secretary (retired) of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, served as assisting ministers.

In February 2021, the Graymoor Ecumenical & Interreligious Institute (GEII), in collaboration with The Interfaith Center of New York, the Milstein Center for Interreligious Dialogue, Religions for Peace USA, and The Thich Nhat Hanh Program for Engaged Buddhism, hosted "[Paths of Peace to Heal Open Wounds: Interreligious Encounters with Fratelli Tutti](#)," a webinar convening scholars and faith leaders in the US for an inter-religious dialogue inspired by the encyclical.

In March 2021, Bishop Eaton participated with other ecumenical partners in a [webinar](#) hosted by the USCCB SEIA on the [Ecumenical and Interreligious Guidebook: Care for Our Common Home](#). The guidebook was jointly published by the USCCB, CADEIO, and Catholic Climate Covenant.

Bilateral Dialogue with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the [Christian Church \(Disciples of Christ\)](#) resumed bilateral dialogue on Wednesday in March 2021. The dialogue session focused on building relationships and naming the questions each church brings into the dialogue. This included theological and sacramental differences, each church's posture toward the ancient ecumenical creeds, and understandings of ministry. The initial round, launched in 2004, met on the topic of "the role, place, and power of the sacraments and the Confessions in



shaping our identities as church.” Subsequent rounds were delayed due to staffing transitions and changes in leadership. A pre-dialogue meeting in September 2020 explored our shared history and theological differences, including each tradition’s relationship to the ancient historical creeds and understanding of ministry. The decision was made to resume the dialogue by picking up the original topic. The ELCA dialogue team includes Bishop Bill Gafkjen, who will serve as co-chair, Pastor Bridget Piggue (Southeastern Synod), Prof. Carl Hughes (Southwestern Texas Synod), and Prof. Kris Kvam (Central States Synod). Bishop Don Kreiss (chair, EIR Committee) and Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton will serve ex-officio. <https://www.disciplescuim.org/elca-disciples-bilateral-dialogue/>

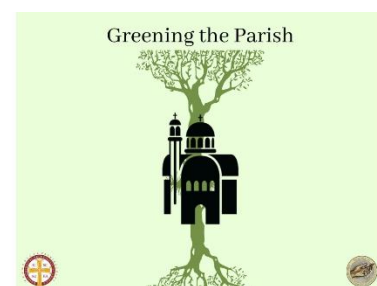
Orthodox Relations

In a July 2020 [statement](#), the ELCA joined with ecumenical and interreligious partners in calling on the Turkish government to keep Hagia Sophia, a Byzantine structure that had stood as museum since 1935, a unifying heritage site. The statement denounced President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s decision to convert the site back into a mosque, joining the voices of religious groups worldwide including the [World Council of Churches](#), the [Middle East Council of Churches](#), the [Vatican](#), the [Lutheran World Federation](#) and the [National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA](#). As the Byzantine structure was originally the pre-eminent basilica of the Christian world for nearly one thousand years, its announced change of purpose has also a source of significant pain for the Orthodox Christian family. Bishop Eaton also called upon the church to join with the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America and faith communities around the world for [a day of mourning](#) on Friday, July 24. On September 29, at the request of His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America, Bishop Eaton joined other faith leaders in signing a [petition to UN experts](#) to hold Turkey accountable from violating cultural and religious rights.

In October 2020 Bishop Eaton shared [a message of support for the people of Armenia and Artsakh](#) in the midst of rising hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan. This was a response to the requests for prayers and support from His Grace Bishop Daniel Findikyan, primate of the [Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church](#).

That same month, the National Council of Churches USA and the Orthodox Christian Studies Center of Fordham University hosted a webinar on [“COVID-19 and Ongoing Challenges in the Ecumenical Community.”](#) Kathryn Lohre was among the speakers, focusing on the many pandemics facing society, exacerbated by the pandemic of COVID-19.

In January 2021, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America Department of Inter-Orthodox, Ecumenical and Interfaith relations hosted a webinar series, [“Greening the Parish.”](#) The Rev. Dr. Leah Schade (ELCA) was one of the presenters. You can find the recordings here: [GreekOrthodoxChurch - YouTube](#) The GOA launched a resource page: [Greening the Parish - Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America \(goarch.org\)](#)



African Methodist Episcopal Church Relations

June 17 marked the fifth anniversary of the martyrdom of the Emanuel Nine. In response to the 2019 resolution establishing June 17 as an annual commemoration of the martyrdom of the Emanuel Nine, a consultation was convened by ELCA Worship, and a [resource page](#) developed. A national [virtual service](#)

was streamed online. Bishop Eaton delivered the sermon and the service included leaders from around the ELCA and ecumenical partners, including senior episcopal leadership from the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and executive leadership from the National Council of Churches and the Conference of National Black Churches. The 2021 Day of Repentance will be an opportunity for churchwide to spotlight what is happening locally and through synods, and in partnership with the AME.

Conversations with AME Church leaders about how we can deepen our partnership in this commemoration service have been ongoing. In recent weeks, additional worship resources have been shared by the AME, and we are discussing the possibility of a joint liturgy, likely for 2022.

Conciliar and Multilateral Ecumenism

Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Conversations on Reparations

In September 2020, the World Council of Churches, World Communion of Reformed Churches, Council of World Mission, and the Lutheran World Federation hosted a webinar titled, "[Interfaith Perspectives on Just Finance and Reparations](#)." The webinar explored various faith perspectives on the issue of debt, how to align financial structures with religious values, and the role of debt cancellation and reparations.

In February 2021, the United Church of Christ hosted a webinar on "[Church Based Reparations](#)." Leaders from the United Church of Christ, Presbyterian Church (USA), and The Episcopal Church shared their experiences, highlighting best practices, challenges, and mistakes that others can learn from.

World Council of Churches

In April 2020, the World Council of Churches hosted a [webinar](#) on "Church Apologies for Racist Past: Moving from Statements to Prophetic Action," and the realities of racist rhetoric and violence in light of COVID-19, and the response of the churches. Kathryn Lohre was a panelist.

In 2020, the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) released a joint document, "[Serving a Wounded World in Interreligious Solidarity: A Christian Call to Reflection and Action During COVID-19](#)." Its purpose is to encourage churches and Christian organization to reflect on the importance of interreligious solidarity in a world wounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. The document offers a Christian basis for interreligious solidarity that can inspire and confirm the impulse to serve a world wounded not only by COVID-19 but also by many other wounds.

The World Council of Churches Central Committee will convene digitally in June 2021, after the June 2020 meeting was postponed. However, another central committee meeting will be planned in person in early 2022, at which time the election of the new general secretary will take place. The contract of Rev. Dr. Prof. Ioan Saucă as acting general secretary has been extended to the end of 2022 to ensure continuity of leadership to the assembly.

Postponed from 2021, the [11th Assembly](#) will take place in Karlsruhe, Germany, August 31 – September 8, 2022 under the theme, "Christ's Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity." The ELCA delegation includes Presiding Bishop Eaton, Vice President Horne, and Claire Embil (young adult, Metro Chicago Synod) will constitute the delegation. Carlos Peña will complete his second term on the World Council of Churches Central Committee in 2022.

Appointed by the WCC General Secretary, Kathryn Lohre serves on the WCC Interreligious Reference Group, advising the staff and strategic planning. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the WCC's Interreligious Programme. Lohre also participates in the network of WCC interreligious advisors (which includes staff officers, and others who serve their churches in this area of work). In February 2021, Kathryn Lohre and Margaret Rose, Ecumenical and Interreligious Deputy to the Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church, led a webinar entitled, "[Reflections on recent developments in the USA and their significance for interreligious relations.](#)"

As domestic and gender-based violence continue to spike during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Thursdays in Black campaign of the World Council of Churches has ramped up its efforts. In October 2020, Bishop Eaton joined other Thursdays in Black Ambassadors from across the world in [recommitting to the campaign](#) to end gender-based violence and map its future work. Presiding Bishop Eaton and National Bishop Susan Johnson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada joined together with a [video message](#) for Domestic Violence Awareness month – October in the US, and November in Canada. In February 2021, a [Valentine's Day campaign](#) was launched. Prayer and Bible study resources will be released in late spring 2021.



National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA

In March 2020, the World Council of Churches, Regional Ecumenical Organizations, and the National Council of the Churches in Christ in the USA (NCC) issued a [historic joint pastoral statement](#), affirming the urgency of unity in protecting life in the midst of the COVID-19 global pandemic.

The [National Council of Churches](#) hosted its annual Christian Unity Gathering under the theme "[Breathing New Life Into Our Nation: Repentance, Re-Formation, Reparation.](#)" The online conference centered on the simultaneous crises gripping our nation – racial injustices, economic strife, poverty, and division – all exacerbated and amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic. Approximately 50 ELCA people participated. The closing worship was a memorial service for the lives lost to COVID-19. Bishop Eaton offered the committal.

The NCC hosts an [online series](#) of "Faith & Fire Conversations" on the "twin pandemics" of racism and COVID-19, and the country's tumultuous political landscape. The conversation topics for the series have been derived from MLK's "Where do we go from here: Chaos or Community?" book chapters.

Churches Uniting in Christ

Though we stepped away from being a "partner in mission and dialogue" with Churches Uniting in Christ in 2019, we continue to support and share their work.

In 2020, [The National Council of the Churches in Christ in the USA](#), [Christian Churches Together in the USA](#), and [Churches United in Christ](#) collaborated in an unprecedented Easter [statement](#) and witness.

CUIC published ecumenical resources for congregations to explore racial equity throughout the [2020 holiday season](#) from Thanksgiving to New Year's Eve. Resources for [Lent and Easter](#) 2021 were also prepared, including Bible studies and sermons.

Inter-Religious Relations



ELCA Pastoral Guidelines for Ministry in a Multi-Religious World

[“A Declaration of Inter-Religious Commitment: A policy statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America \(2019\),”](#) acknowledged that “there are many pastoral considerations beyond the scope of this declaration, for example, the common reality of multi-religious family life. Therefore, the church recognizes the need for the ongoing development of appropriate pastoral aids, including guidelines for inter-religious marriages, pastoral counseling, religious education, and joint prayer services.” In 2020, the presiding bishop appointed an ad-hoc committee to undertake the development of such guidelines, as a step toward implementing the policy statement.

Thank you to all who participated and encouraged others to participate in the online survey. The two versions of the survey – for rostered ministers and for everyone else – were open from September 12 through October 12. Over 2,600 responses were collected, resulting in an excellent response rate of 27%. The ad-hoc committee is actively working with the results. The first set of guidelines to be developed will focus on prayer services, as that was the primary area of need according to the survey.

ELCA Consultative Panels on Jewish and Muslim Relations

The ELCA Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Jewish relations plans to present revisions to the 1994 Declaration to the ELCA Church Council to revise the language that refers to the Holocaust as the most tragic development in the history of Christian believers. The consensus among the panelists is that this language needs to be changed in order to reflect our repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery. The intention is to bring these revisions at the same time the Council considers a “Declaration to the Muslim Community.” Drafting of this declaration is underway by the Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Muslim Relations, but no concrete timeline is yet in place.

In April 2020, a [Letter of Solidarity with Jewish Partners and the Asian American Community](#) was sent by the ELCA Presiding Bishop and Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Jewish Relations to Jewish signatories of a solidarity letter addressed to Asian American and Chinese communities.

ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton invited [Union for Reform Judaism](#) President Rabbi Rick Jacobs, and [Islamic Society of North America](#) President Dr. Sayyid Syeed to cooperate on a [video message](#), “Interfaith Solidarity in the Midst of a Global Pandemic,” posted on the eve of Passover, Holy Week, and Ramadan in 2020.

Accompanying the ELCJHL and Tending to Jewish Relations

The government of Israel declared its plans to annex West Bank settlements and parts of the Jordan Valley beginning on July 1, 2020. Kathryn Lohre published a blot post, [“Amplifying the Message in Word and Deed: Liberation not Annexation,”](#) that sought to lift up the voices of leaders of the churches on the ground, including Bishop Azar of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land. This post, coupled with the Living Lutheran article, [“ELCA Presiding Bishop Responds to Annexation Statement,”](#) caused tensions in Jewish relations, particularly on the matter of racism. Inaccurate media attention made matters more difficult. Several dialogues and conversations have resulted in healthy relations.

Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign 10th Anniversary



The ELCA is a founding member of the Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign, an interfaith campaign to address anti-Muslim bigotry, and to stand with American Muslims. The 2020 [10th Anniversary Report](#) details the milestones and ongoing work of advocacy and training. Presiding Bishop Eaton issued a [video](#) inviting ELCA folks to sign the [Shoulder to Shoulder 2020 Statement of Renewed Commitment](#).

Shoulder to Shoulder continues to provide regular training opportunities. While typically in person and partnering with the local inter-religious communities and leaders, the current format is online. Several are planned for May and June 2021: [Trainings — The Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign](#)

On his first day in office, President Biden signed an executive order striking down the “Muslim and African ban.” [The ELCA is working](#) with Muslim Advocates and a coalition of partners in calling on members of Congress to immediately pass the NO BAN Act in the Senate to prevent future anti-Muslim or other discriminatory legislation. The act passed the House in a bipartisan vote this past summer. The House reintroduced the Act in late February 2021. The #NOBANAct is the first Muslim civil rights bill in American history, but it addresses the broader history of the use of immigration laws to target Jews, Catholics, and Mormons, among others. If passed it would prevent any president from banning people because of their faith or nationality. [No Ban Act Action Center - Muslim Advocates](#)

In 2020 the campaign launched a “[Welcome to My Table](#)” initiative during Ramadan, coordinating virtual interfaith gatherings that connected households to households, Muslim and non-Muslim, to share an iftar meal. This will continue during Ramadan in 2021 as “[Virtual Iftar Opportunities](#).”

Muslim World League

Kathryn Lohre was invited by Dr. Mohammad Alissa, the Secretary General of the Muslim World League, to be a respondent to the 2019 “[Charter of Makkah](#)” during an online symposium in February 2021. The other respondents included Rabbi David Saperstein, former US Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, Adam Taylor, president of Sojourners, and Ramah Abdulaleem, executive director of KARAMAH: Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights. The Charter was endorsed by a number of prominent Muslim scholars who gathered in their holy city in 2019 to discuss, discern, and declare the voice of moderate Islam.

National Council of Churches Inter-Religious Dialogues and Work

The National Council of Churches co-convenes five national inter-religious dialogues in which we participate: Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, and Sikh. Together with the co-conveners of its inter-religious dialogues with Jews, Muslims, Buddhist, Hindus, and Sikhs, the National Council of Churches compiled a joint statement “[One in Spirit, One in Mind, One in Heart](#)” in April 2020.

Jewish-Christian Dialogue

The national Jewish-Christian dialogue on pastoral issues is co-convened by the National Council of Churches and the National Council of Synagogues. The April 2020 meeting was postponed to September and met online. The topic was “the continuing impact of COVID-19 on our local churches and synagogues, and what will likely be different in our congregations once the pandemic is behind us. The dialogue met again in December 2020 for a post-election conversation, and again in February. In

addition to scriptural study and reflection, Dr. Julian Zelizer, Professor of History and Public Affairs at Princeton University gave a presentation reflecting on the political and humanitarian challenges before us that require the attention and advocacy of faith communities.

Christian-Muslim Dialogue

The national Christian-Muslim dialogue is co-convened by the National Council of Churches and the Islamic Circle of North America. The dialogue met in February 2021 with presentations on the imperative to provide humanitarian aid in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Dialogue participants were invited to share their own organization's responses, as well. A second session took place in March 2021 exploring the theology and ethics underlying the relief efforts of our respective communities.

Buddhist-Christian Dialogue

The national Buddhist-Christian dialogue is co-convened by the National Council of Churches, the Guibord Center – Religion Inside Out, and the Hsi Lai Temple. The April 2020 dialogue met online to discuss anti-Asian racism, in the broader surge of COVID-revealed racism. The dialogue met again online in December 2020 to share the joys and challenges of the year. While reflecting on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, political division and racism, participants shared hopeful and healing responses of their respective religious communities. Concern was shared about [recent attacks on Buddhist temples](#) in the United States.

Hindu-Christian Dialogue

The national Hindu-Christian dialogue is co-convened by the National Council of Churches, the Guibord Center – Religion Inside Out, and the Vedanta Society of Southern California. The April 2020 dialogue, planned for Claremont, met online to reflect on the emerging realities of COVID-19.

Christian-Sikh Dialogue

The national Christian-Sikh dialogue is co-convened by the National Council of Churches and the World Sikh Council – America Region. The December 2020 dialogue has been postponed to June 2021. The topic is yet to be announced.

Pluralism Project at Harvard Collaboration

Kathryn Lohre is leading a new collaboration between the NCC Interreligious Relations and Collaboration Convening Table and the [Pluralism Project at Harvard University](#) exploring the potential of the case study methodology for enriching ecumenical inter-religious dialogue and relations. This was launched with an online session in January during which Pluralism Project Senior Advisor Dr. Jennifer Howe Peace taught the case "[Showing Up for Shabbat](#)," written by Research Director Elinor J. Pierce. Pluralism Project Director Dr. Diana Eck offered wisdom about the potential of the [Case Initiative](#) for exploring difficult dilemmas and controversial issues in the context of the NCC's five dialogue tables with Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists. Eck used to chair the NCC's Interfaith Relations Commission. The collaboration will continue throughout 2021.



Religions for Peace USA

On May 7, 2020, the National Day of Prayer in the United States. [Religions for Peace USA](#) convened a national online interfaith prayer service with its partners for healing and hope. This event likely represented the broadest inter-religious convening of US-based partners in the history of the inter-religious movement. For several weeks after the event, RFPUSA hosted weekly online programming, alternating between prayer services and dialogues on racism and white supremacy.

Since that day, RFPUSA has used Facebook live to launch weekly programming, alternating between prayer services and dialogues on racism and white supremacy. [Religions for Peace International](#) launched a [the Multi-Religious Humanitarian Fund](#) to support multi-Religious collaborative efforts around COVID-19. The fund is providing seed grants to inter-religious councils and multi-religious networks through a program aimed at enhancing awareness about the virus, combating discrimination, and serving the needs of the most vulnerable.

Religions for Peace USA hosted a [National Gathering of Religious Leaders 2020](#) October 19-23 under the theme “Uplifting the Moral Voices for Immigration and Refugees – Faiths in Action.” [A joint statement](#) regarding U.S. immigration and refugee policies and practices was released as part of the event. ELCA Migration Policy Director Giovana Oaxaca shared her story as a DACA recipient on [Day 2](#) (28:20) and Presiding Bishop Eaton offered reflections based on the Lutheran World Federation’s [“Welcoming the Stranger: Affirmations for Faith Leaders”](#) on [Day 4](#) (45:00).

Interfaith Consultation on Vaccine Distribution

Presiding Bishop Eaton is part of a high-level interfaith consultation, “Faiths4Vaccines,” that is working in partnership with the Biden administration to provide wrap-around support from faith communities with regard to the distribution of the COVID-19 vaccines. The goals of this consultation are to make houses of worship available as vaccine sites when possible, to build trust wherever needed, but especially amongst communities of color where vaccine hesitancy is high due to historical injustices, to encourage and ensure equitable distribution in the US and globally, and to amplify inter-religious service for the common good. Bishop Eaton has been a frequent contributor during the three consultation sessions that have occurred, providing input from conversations she and ELCA Metro Chicago Synod Bishop Yehiel Curry have had with Advocate Aurora Health System, an ELCA and UCC affiliated system serving Illinois and Wisconsin.

Religious Leaders Call for Extension of New START Treaty

In a January 2021 [sign-on letter](#) to the Biden transition team, Bishop Eaton led a coalition of ecumenical and inter-religious leaders to urge the Biden administration to commit to an immediate five-year extension of the New START Treaty, a nuclear arms reduction treaty jointly agreed to by the United States and the Russian Federation ten years ago. Without joint action by the United States and Russia, the agreement was set to expire on February 5. The Biden administration acted swiftly, exchanging diplomatic notes on January 26 with Russia to extend the treaty by five years.

Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Responses to January 6

In the wake of the seditious assault on the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021 religious leaders and organizations responded with calls to action, prayer and vigilance. Below are links to various statements and actions from the ELCA and many of our domestic and global partners:

- [Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton's Call to Prayer.](#)
- [Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton's Video Message.](#)
- [NCC Letter to Former Vice President Pence, Congressional Leaders and the Cabinet.](#)
- [Religions for Peace USA Statement.](#)
- [Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign Statement.](#)
- [Lutheran World Federation Statement.](#)
- [World Council of Churches Response.](#)
- [National Council of Churches Interfaith Prayer Service of Reflection, Lament, and Hope](#)

Inter-Religious Presentations

- In April 2020, EIR staff joined with students and chaplains of the Lutheran Student Movement in offering an offering an [online primer](#) on ELCA inter-religious relations.
- In July 2020, Kathryn Lohre presented a keynote to the [NECU 2020 Online Interfaith Conference](#). The previous day, Dr. Najeeba Syeed had presented on the topic of “religious fluidity.”
- In July 2020, [Holden Village](#) and [Paths to Understanding](#) held [a week of interfaith engagement and learning](#). Kathryn Lohre joined with Moses Penumaka, Th.D., director of Theological Education for Emerging Ministries at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, and Rabbi Alana Suskin, co-director of the Pomegranate Initiative, in a session titled “[The How and Why of Interfaith](#).” The 2021 week of interfaith engagement program is in planning.