

**ELCA Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations, Office of the Presiding Bishop
Annual Staff Report, Spring 2021-Spring 2022**

Ecumenical Relations

DIALOGUES

In June 2021, a delegation of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) [was received by the Vatican](#). The visit looked ahead to the 500th Anniversary of the Augsburg Confession in 2030. During the trip, the delegation had conversations with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU), consolidated and strengthened an agreement between *Caritas Internationalis* and the LWF World Service, and met with Pope Francis in a private audience. You can read more in [Dirk Lange's blog](#), or [the Living Lutheran](#).



We are getting ready for the new round of **Lutheran-Catholic dialogue** in the US. The report of the previous round is being finalized for publication. The next round of the dialogue will be co-chaired by Bishop Patricia Lull and Bishop Denis Madden, and staffed by the Rev. Dr. Carmelo Santos (ELCA) and the Rev. Dr. Walter Kedjierski (USCCB). Preparatory meetings have led to agreement that the focus of the dialogue will be on ministry, and the role of the bishops in our respective churches. We are in the initial stages of identifying members of the dialogue and fine tuning the topic.



The second session of our resumed bilateral dialogue with the **Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)** took place online in October 2021 online. The meeting included presentations from each church on the historic roots, current expressions, and key challenges for each tradition, and sharing personal stories. The third session took place in late April 2022, and explored case studies of common mission and ministry challenges and opportunities. The official documents of the dialogue are available [here](#). Bishop Bill Gakfjen serves as dialogue co-chair.

On February 1, 2022 Bishop Eaton, Bishop Susan Johnson and ecumenical staff met online with the Bishop Selbo, General Secretary Amy Little, and Asst. to the Bishop David Wendel of the **North American Lutheran Church** to build relations and discuss ongoing relational matters.

FULL COMMUNION PARTNERSHIPS

The four Lutheran and Anglican/Episcopal Churches in North America known as **Churches Beyond Borders** are building relationships through focused work together on repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery, and confronting the legacies of slavery. In 2021, the four heads of church issued a [joint statement](#) on March 21, on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Then the churches engaged in a series of consultations including staff and BIPOC leaders of various church groups and ministries. On September 23, the four heads of church issued another [joint statement](#) on the importance of education as it relates to repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery. The [2021 annual CBB devotion series](#) focused on the [16 Days of Activism](#) Against Gender-Based Violence, November 25-December.



Accordingly, there were sixteen contributors, reflecting on the Magnificat and the season of Advent. An online event to uplift this work was co-sponsored by Churches Beyond Borders and Episcopal Relief and Development. CBB staff are currently coordinating plans for a workshop at the World Council of Churches Assembly this September to uplift this ecumenical model and witness.



The **Reformed Church in America (RCA)** General Synod took place in Tucson, Arizona, October 14-19. The final [Vision 2020 Report](#), which offered recommendations for the future of the denomination with regard to staying together, radical restructure, and grace-filled separation, was presented, debated, and acted upon. The synod took action to affirm the principal place of global mission in the RCA, authorized the formation of a denominational restructuring team, and adopted regulations to provide an unobstructed pathway for those local churches that will depart the denomination. You can read Bishop Eaton's pastoral message [here](#). Kathryn Lohre represented the ELCA and continues to serve as an advisory delegate to the General Synod Council. In the months since, dozens of congregations have petitioned to depart the denomination, though new mission partners are also emerging. The restructuring team has also been formed. The annual General Synod of the RCA will meet in Pella, Iowa, this June. We to be in full communion with the RCA.

In the fall of 2021, the **Lutheran Episcopal Coordinating Committee (LECC)** identified areas of focus for a new collaborative strategy, marking the next phase of growth in our Called to Common Mission agreement. The areas of focus include *Shared Ministry Agreements and Governance, Judicatory Matters for Dioceses and Synods, Liturgical Considerations, Orderly Exchange of Pastors/Priests Under CCM, Diaconate, and Campus Ministry*. Implementation teams are being formed for each focus area. Bishop Donald Kreiss, who serves as co-chair of LECC, will be part of the *Judicatory Matters for Dioceses and Synods* implementation team. Additionally, Bishop William Gafkjen will be part of the *Diaconate* implementation team and Bishop Kevin Strickland will be part of the *Liturgical Considerations* implementation team. LECC also met digitally with their Canadian counterparts, the Joint-Anglican Lutheran Commission (JALC), in February of this year to continue learning from each other and living more fully into our Churches Beyond Borders model.

In November, the **Lutheran Moravian Coordinating Committee (LMCC)** met for the first time in two years. The meeting served as an opportunity to welcome new members, including Rev. Dr. Guy Erwin. The LMCC will meet again this spring to continue developing plans for the next phase of the committee's collaboration in 2022 and beyond, with hopes to gather in-person in late 2022 or early 2023. At the Moravian Synod, Southern Province in June a new president will be elected, succeeding Rev. Dr. David Guthrie who resigned last fall, and Rev. Chris Throe who has been serving as interim.

The United Methodist Church (UMC) has [postponed its General Conference](#) for the third time to 2024, due to the challenges of convening a global church in the ongoing pandemic. It is [reported](#) that some UMC churches will leave pre-emptively as early as May 1, 2022, to form the [Global Methodist Church](#). Two of the key proposals under consideration are [The Protocol \[of Grace Through Separation\]](#) and ["The Christmas Covenant."](#) We continue to accompany the UMC.



Originally endorsed by the Lutheran-Methodist Coordinating Committee, an update to the **ecumenical guidelines for returning to worship** was released in June 2021. English and Spanish language texts of ["Care-Filled Worship and Sacramental Life in a Lingering Pandemic"](#) are at [ELCA.org/public health](https://elca.org/public-health)

CONCILIAR AND MULTI-LATERAL ECUMENISM

The **World Council of Churches** Central Committee met online February 9-16 to continue planning for the Assembly set to take place in Germany this September on the theme, “Christ’s Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity.” The Central Committee will meet in person in June in Geneva to finalize preparations and to elect a new General Secretary. The ELCA is represented by Mr. Carlos Peña, and advised by Kathryn Lohre. Action items and videos of various addresses can be found [here](#). The ELCA’s engagement in the World Council of Churches’ #ThursdaysinBlack Campaign continues to grow. For resources, including digital backgrounds for online meetings, visit [here](#).



The 2021 Christian Unity Gathering (CUG) of the **National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA** was held online in October under the theme, “In New Wineskins: From Pandemics to Possibilities to Promises.” You can view all of the sessions [online](#). Bishop Eaton is the Vice-Chair of the NCC Governing Board, serving alongside Chair Bishop Teresa Jefferson-Snorton of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. The NCC recently appointed Bishop Vashti Mackenzie, retired bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, as its Interim General Secretary.

The Updated Edition of the NRSV, or Revue, which is owned by the NCC, is now available for purchase in print and digital formats. This is “the most meticulously researched, rigorously reviewed, and faithfully accurate English-language Bible translation” to date. This is not a fully new translation of the Bible, but an updated edition of the trusted NRSV translation, used widely across ELCA worship and study settings. You can find more information [here](#).



On October 26, the NCC hosted the **Apostolic Visit of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew** to the United States in Washington, DC. Bishop Eaton presented an ecumenical cross. You can read more and watch the full reception [here](#).

In the fall of 2021, Dr. Monica Schaap-Pierce was appointed interim Executive Director of **Christian Churches Together in the USA**. A search for a permanent ED is currently in process.

The **Conference of National Black Churches** held its annual consultation on “The Consequences of Racism: Impact and Revelations of COVID-19,” December 14-16, 2021. Bishop Eaton spoke on a panel with Jim Wallis and John Dorhauer (UCC) titled: “Before Confession: The Road to Repentance.”

The **Strasbourg Institute for Ecumenical Research** in France is offering its 51st International [Annual Seminar](#) online under the theme, “Separately United: Ecumenism in the Digital Space,” from July 4-8.

Inter-Religious Relations

ELCA DOCUMENTS & RESOURCES

In April 2022, the ELCA Church Council unanimously adopted “[A Declaration of the ELCA to the Muslim Community](#),” affirming our friendship and solidarity with Muslims, nurtured over time through meaningful cooperation, dialogue, and common action. The declaration was developed by the ELCA Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Muslim Relations. Panel Chair Mark Swanson wrote a [blog post](#) introducing the document. Bishop Eaton published an open letter to the Muslim community on May 2, on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr, lifting up the declaration. Our Muslim partners have shared their plans to distribute this letter and the declaration through their networks, platforms, and publications.

In November 2021, the ELCA Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Jewish Relations recommended revisions to “[A Declaration of the ELCA to the Jewish Community](#)” to reaffirm the ELCA’s commitments to Jewish relations, especially in a time of rising anti-Semitism, and to reflect the church’s repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery. Kathryn Lohre wrote a [blog post](#) to assist with interpreting these revisions. After a fifteen year tenure, Darrell Jodock concluded his service as chair of the Panel in early 2022; LSTC Dean Esther Menn succeeds him in this role.

As part of the implementation of “[A Declaration of Inter-Religious Commitment](#),” an ad-hoc committee has developed a set of “**Pastoral Guidelines for Ministry in a Multi-Religious World.**” The first draft of the guidelines is currently out for review with various ELCA stakeholders, including the LEIRN Board, and select ecumenical and inter-religious partners. The guidelines will be published online by early June.

Building on the Declaration, the ELCA Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Jewish Relations has developed a guide for “**Preaching and Teaching with love and respect for the Jewish people.**” The preaching guide is currently under review and will be published online before summer.

JEWISH RELATIONS

In January 2022, Bishop Eaton, Kathryn Lohre, Amy Reumann, and Dennis Frado met with colleagues from the **Union for Reform Judaism** on the topic of rising anti-Semitism. The conversation was a preliminary exploration of areas of cooperation. The following week, in the aftermath of the hostage incident at Congregation Beth Israel, a URJ congregation in Colleyville, Texas, Bishop Eaton offered a [video message](#) upholding the ELCA’s commitments to combating anti-Semitism.

We participate in the NCC’s national inter-religious dialogues with Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs (see below). In this period, the **national Jewish-Christian dialogue** met twice online. In October 2021, the topic was how to minister in congregations with congregants across the conservative-liberal spectrum, during times of division in our society. In January 2022, the dialogue explored the question: “Will they come back? What can (liberal) religion offer our divided, post-covid world?” You can view the [video](#) of presentations from Convergence and The Riverside Church. In May 2022, the dialogue will meet in DC on anti-Semitism, and visit the US Holocaust Memorial Museum.

MUSLIM RELATIONS



On October 27, the Secretary General of the **Muslim World League** His Excellency Dr. Al-Issa convened a multi-faith event in DC to explore the recently approved [Charter of Makkah](#) and opportunities for cooperation in its implementation. The charter presents a set of Islamic principles that promote anti-extremism, religious and cultural diversity, human rights and dignity, and care for creation. His Excellency is encouraging multi-faith cooperation in implementing the Charter by aligning its principles with the UN Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)). Kathryn Lohre spoke on a panel on the significance of this with Rabbi David Saperstein, Imam Talib Shareef, Rev. Adam Taylor, and Katherine Marshall. She will continue this work at a conference in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia convened by the Secretary General in May 2022.

In April 2022, the **national Christian-Muslim dialogue** met online, exploring the significance of Lent and Ramadan during the confluence of holy days. Kathryn Lohre gave the presentation on Lent, inviting input from her ecumenical colleagues.

Dr. David Grafton published a book, ***More Than a Cup of Coffee and Tea: A Generation of Lutheran-Muslim Relationships*** with forewords by Bishop Eaton and Dr. Syeed. Kathryn contributed a chapter.



SHOULDER TO SHOULDER CAMPAIGN

The Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign held in-person “[Faith Over Fear](#)” trainings this spring in Grand Rapids, Michigan and Orange City, Iowa, following a second year of online events in 2021. These trainings equip participants to disrupt anti-Muslim bigotry. Campaign co-chairs Kathryn Lohre and Rabbi Esther Lederman (Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism) published a [message](#) on the hostage incident at Congregation Beth Israel in Texas. Kathryn Lohre secured the membership of the Conference of National Black Churches and the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, announced in Black History Month, providing a new avenue for strengthening our relations with Historic Black Churches. In 2021, [Nina Fernando](#) was promoted to serve as the new Executive Director. The organization launched a [Consultative Circle](#) of Muslim, Arab, Sikh, and South Asian organizations and individual to advise the campaign on programmatic and policy decisions.

NCC INTER-RELIGIOUS RELATIONS

As noted above, we participate in the NCC’s national inter-religious dialogues with Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs, which have met online during this period. With Kathryn Lohre’s leadership, the NCC’s Inter-Religious Convening Table **partnered with The Pluralism Project (PP)** at Harvard University on utilizing their [Case Initiative](#) in 2021. The methodology is affirmed as a way to move toward more transformative dialogue.

In June 2021, women leaders across faith and non-faith traditions in North America gathered to build stronger bonds across lines of difference, forge new opportunities for collaboration, and build a new



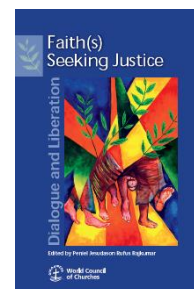
network of women to continue this work of solidarity and bridge building. The ELCA was a partner organization for the [Kindle and Connect event](#), with a strong turnout from across the church, including many WELCA leaders. Kathryn Lohre was on the planning committee. The genesis for the event was conversation amongst the Jewish and

Christian women participants in the national dialogue about what they see as the lack of transformative connections in dialogical spaces. Networking is continuing online.

The theology sub-group of the NCC's Inter-Religious Convening Table developed a [policy statement](#) on "The Dangers of Christian Nationalism," which was approved by the Governing Board in 2021. Darrell Jodock was the primary author.

WCC INTER-RELIGIOUS RELATIONS

The World Council of Churches convened an online conference on "Common Formation and the Future of Interreligious Dialogue" in December 2021. Kathryn Lohre served as facilitator, in her capacity as a member of the General Secretary's Reference Group. Presenters shared about organizations, initiatives, and models of interreligious formation. A booklet of ten principles based on the best-practices shared will be developed in advance of the WCC's Assembly later this year. This will be a contribution to the 50th anniversary commemoration of the WCC's Interreligious Programme, which occurred in 2021. During that time, the WCC published a volume, [Faith\(s\) Seeking Justice: Dialogue and Liberation](#). Additionally, an intergenerational conversation on "Reminiscing the Past, Rethinking the Future," was held by webinar featuring former Programme staff and the winners of a young adult essay competition on "The Future of Interreligious Dialogue."



PARLIAMENT OF THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS

The Eighth Parliament of the World's Religions was held online October 17-18, 2021. Dozens of ELCA folks participated. Kathryn Lohre was part of a panel discussion on the Christian-Sikh national dialogue. The centennial Parliament will return to its birthplace in Chicago, August 14-18, 2023.



FAITHS4VACCINES

We continue to participate in the multifaith campaign, [Faiths4Vaccines](#). This is an interfaith coalition of national religious leaders, organizations, and medical professionals that work to promote the role of faith communities in supporting equitable vaccine distribution in the US and globally and to address vaccine hesitancy, particularly among minoritized communities.

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

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